

# **Under the Gaze of the West: Reading Albanian Foreign Policy in the Post-Communist Era**

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## Introduction

Albania's transition from the communist isolation to a state aspiring EU and NATO membership has generated the reconstitution of the national modernizing platforms of the beginning of the twentieth century. The official discourse hails integration project as continuation of the National Renaissance project which led to the creation of the independent Albanian state in 1912. The West is equally central to this project and to its post-Cold War integrationist variants; as a subject it denotes a triggering agent of change and modernization, as well as the objective moderator of domestic politics and of inter-state relations in its periphery. In the actual integrationist projects the Western Community is translated into the 'Euro-Atlantic Community' and the efforts of the nationalist ideologues of the early twentieth century for survival and westernization of the Albanian state are translated into the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' of Albania.

The aim of this paper is neither to reconstruct nor to deconstruct linearity from the texts of the National Renaissance to the present official discourse of 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation'. Such an endeavor would be implausible not only because the body of texts of what is often quoted as the National Renaissance Ideology is vast, porous and heterogeneous but also because the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' discourse is a recent product of the post-Kosovo conflict era and which is further stabilized in the aftermath of September 11.

Instead, the question which informs this discussion is what conceptions of the West and of state agency does the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' comprises and strives to reconcile. I should seek to understand and explain how the discourse of the 'national question' in the Balkans has been made compatible with the European discourse of democratic governance particularly in the post-1997 and post-Kosovo conflict era. To the end of answering this question, the paper undertakes the task of extricating the ideational and cultural sources of the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' discourse and then of questioning its internal coherence and thus its function as the official discourse of the Albanian state.

I suggest that we read the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' discourse as a response of national political elites both to the weakness of the Albanian state and also its need to distance itself from the Balkan of the nineties but also in the post September 11 global discourse of irreconcilable differences.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding its modesty, this suggestion brings to our attention two intertwined aspects of the process of state identity formation of post-communist countries: on the one hand domestic and external legitimacy of domestic elites and on the other hand the process of state identity formation, which is acquisition of external recognition by the international community.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie Ortman "Russian Collective Identity Formation and the Problem of Identity in IR Theory", *Paper Presented at the Fifth Pan-European International Relations Conference*, The Hague, 9-11 September 2004, p.3  
Available at: <http://www.sgir.org/conference2004/papers/Ortmann%20-%20Russian%20collective%20identity%20formation%20and%20the%20problem%20of%20identity%20in%20IR%20theory.pdf> 3.

It is my initial assumption that the continuity and coherence of the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' builds upon the process of neutralizing three main tensions: first, the tension between the quest for domestic and external legitimacy of the political elites on one hand and the external recognition of the Albanian state on the other; second, between the state representation and national identity constructed through and within the post-communist foreign policy discourse and third, the tension between different understandings of the West. As the last tension is inevitably interpreted by the Albanian political elite through the lenses of certain conceptualizations of the EU and of the USA on one side and of the relation between economy, politics and culture on the other, then the officials' attempts to neutralize the tension between Europeanism and pro-Americanism may be read only in the context of reconciling the post-communist understanding of Albanianism in terms of alignment with the West with the National Renaissance's understanding of Albanianism in terms of pursuit of national aggrandizement and of national unification.

### **Foreign Policy as Text and Practice**

I will start the analysis with a discussion of the relation between foreign policy formulation and the process of state identity construction. The specificity of state identity production as opposed to national identity production is of crucial importance and of considerable difficulty to grasp insofar as loyalty to the state is not identical to loyalty to the national community. This is typically the case for the Balkan states, whose process of nation-state building entailed processes of territorial partition and accommodation of inter-societal/ethnic differences, parallel to the process of modernization and of strengthening of state institutions.

The on-going process of integration in NATO and the EU has been conventionally defined in the official discourse as a process of building a democratic and Western identity for the Albanian state. Reversibly, for a democratic state to be built and this acquire recognition by the 'Euro-Atlantic Community' as such, it must enjoy some degree of internal legitimacy. This leads us to inquire as to how the authority of the West is constructed as well as what serves as legitimating criteria of foreign policy in the domestic political debate and in the official foreign policy discourse.

### ***Internal/External Legitimacy***

The centrality of the notion of "identity" in social constructivist IR literature in the last two decades has often led to the conventional usage of the state and its institutions as subjects carrying identities and thus impregnated with the potential for social action.<sup>2</sup> Starting from the

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Wendt, (1999) *Social Theory of International Politics*, CUP: Cambridge. For a critique of Wendt's conceptualization of the notion of state subjectivity see among many others Maja Zehfuss. (2001) "Constructivism and Identity: A Dangerous Liaison", *European Journal of International Relations*, 7(3), 315-343.

Copenhagen School security premises but reaching out for a more radical conceptualization of the identity/difference nexus, authors such as Ole Wæver and Lene Hansen have drawn the model of a discursive tree wherein the domestic understanding of the 'state', 'nation' and 'Europe' constitute foreign policy and shape the cooperation patterns of the states in question.<sup>3</sup> Hence the domestic state identity is prioritized over the external one. Yet, the choice on the part of the state of its policy options and of its foreign policy course builds on the external state identity, although the latter is not quite seriously tackled in similar constructivist accounts; despite their theorization of identities as ontologically linked to policy and as both being discursively constructed, the external legitimacy of the state (in this case the Nordic states) is uncritically accepted as given. Furthermore, the account runs the risk of reifying those basic notions of the political debate which it takes as explanatory variables. Even among basic concepts such as 'nation', 'state' and 'Europe' some are more stable and legitimate than the others. The narratives of state and national identity may be continuously reconstructed and modified to respond to or resist what is perceived as Europe's gaze. Hence the construction of external state identity from the internal dynamic may be reversed. In the case of the Balkan states in particular, the West' gaze has not lost its *actuality*<sup>4</sup> despite the tangibility of these states' prospect of EU integration.

The West' Gaze as is central to the Balkanist debate of the nineties which was initiated by Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* and enlivened by a rich home-grown literature along the poststructuralist lines of identity/radical difference.<sup>5</sup> Misrecognition on the part of the West of the contextual specificity of the post-communist state-building and democratizing experience of the Balkan states and societies lies at the heart of the Balkanist literature. Therein, the articulation and reproduction of identity narratives of the nation and representations of the state in the Balkans is an expression of power relations between a so-called center may that be Brussels or Washington and the periphery. In this context, the Balkans is simply one of many of Europe's *others*: the Mediterranean region<sup>6</sup>, Central Europe, Russia and Turkey among others has been candidates to fill that position in different moments of history<sup>7</sup>. However this power relation is not static and objective; I note that it is constantly reproduced by domestic elites in Albania and in turn it reproduces both "center" and "periphery". However, what tends to be brushed away in these accounts of discursive and ideational colonization is the returning of the West's gaze on the part of the political elites in the periphery.

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<sup>3</sup> Ole Wæver (2001) Identity, communities and foreign policy.-In: Hansen L. and O. Wæver (ed) *European Integration and National Identity: The challenge of the Nordic States*, London: Routledge, 20-50.

<sup>4</sup> Herein the term *actual/actuality* does not denote *reality*, *authenticity* or *veracity* as in the English language, but rather its usage in the Albanian and Slavic languages, which is both *happening now*, i.e. current, as well as *real*. Hence this usage prioritizes contemporariness over authenticity.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of this literature emerging particularly in the states of former-Yugoslavia see Dusan i. Bjelic and Obrad Savic (2002)eds. *Balkan as a Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentization*. Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT

<sup>6</sup> See Michelle Pace (2006) *The Politics of Regional Identity: Meddling with the Mediterranean*. Routledge: London.

<sup>7</sup> See Iver B. Neumann (1999) *Uses of the Other. The "East" in European Identity Formation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Despite, or indeed because of institutional weakness, economic backwardness and inter-societal conflict that the concept of the Balkans signifies in both domestic and international community's discourse, the 'Balkans' has been deployed by all post-communist political elites to the end of constructing a Western and democratic state identity for Albania on one hand and of de-legitimizing the political opponent both domestically and to the West's eyes on the other.

This brings us to the relationship between external and internal legitimacy of the Albanian state. While the role of the state externally seems to also determine the liability of governments domestically, the contrary holds also true although it is more difficult to grasp it empirically: weak internal legitimacy undermines the state identity externally. As Milada Bukovansky argues:

Insofar as one of the requirements of domestic legitimacy is maintenance of the security and identity of the state in a world of other states, domestic and international legitimacy are intertwined. While international legitimacy is one condition for sustaining domestic legitimacy, the reverse is also true; without domestic legitimacy a government will have difficulty mustering the resources to act as a state in the international stage. (...)<sup>8</sup>

As the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' discourse blurs the boundaries between domestic politics and foreign policy then the domestic sphere should be the adequate location wherein the legitimizing principles of foreign policy lie. Indeed, as the discourse of the market economy and liberal democracy has become the final form in which aspirations common to both Western Europe and its remaining periphery can be shared<sup>9</sup> these aspirations have become the main legitimacy source of foreign policy. But as in official discourse the state is framed in monist terms, its continuity and distinctiveness<sup>10</sup> cannot be instantiated in a discourse of the same universal values shared by all democratic states. The democratization and foreign policy debates of the post-communist era are all concerned with the possibility of relapse not as a reality of either isolation or one-party system but as a perceived reality in the eyes of the West-in other words, with being perceived as simulators of cooperation and of Western norms and values: Being democratic at the present cannot exclude the possibility of relapse or deviation in the eyes of the West.

Therefore the formation of a stable democratic state identity needs to draw on stabilized national identity narratives; hence the attempts of the post-communist elites to reconstitute the

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<sup>8</sup>Milada Bukovansky (2002) *Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Order*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 212.

<sup>9</sup> This point was made by Alex Callinos with regard to Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*. Alex Callinicos, (1995) *Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 16.

<sup>10</sup> Jen Bartelson (1998) "Second Natures: Is the State Identical with Itself", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 4(3), 1998, pp. 295-326.

legacy of the National Renaissance and re-write the national history. In contrast to what is routinely argued in the constructivist accounts of foreign policy formulation and similarly in studies of nationalism, that there are basic narratives of national identity which are mobilized by the elites to respond to their own needs for domestic legitimacy, I would like to suggest that the re-constitution of National Renaissance identity narratives does not only serve to the political class' needs for domestic legitimacy but also as a domestically-legitimate strategy to obtain recognition by the West. Hence I suggest reading National Renaissance not as a coherent ideology but rather as a cultural structure which serves to legitimize the repertoire of national political debate. The identity narratives which are allegedly borrowed from the National Renaissance serve thus as the building blocks<sup>11</sup> of foreign policy discourse and political debate on the West.

Yet, these building blocks are continuously reconstructed and modified to respond to the domestic elites' needs for external legitimacy and to their interpretation of the West and of Euro-Atlantic Community's messages. In the same fashion as the national programs of the late nineteenth century and late twentieth century of the Balkan intellectuals elites reflected their ideologues' concern with understanding and engaging in the Western discourse of nation and state,<sup>12</sup> the national discourses on integration in the Euro-Atlantic community reflect the same concern for external recognition on the part of the West. This inversion of the categories of the West's discourse on the Balkans by the Balkan elites themselves repudiates the rather crude classification between European/civil type and the ethnic/ Balkan type of nationalism.

### ***The Nation, the State and the Political Class***

A writer who was not included in the history textbooks during communism because of his vocation-as Catholic priest- and resistance to the Communist regime and ideology, Anton Harapi would confess at the beginning of the twentieth century that "(...) what distinguishes Albanians from others is their intolerance among each other and their obedience to the foreigner".<sup>13</sup>

The foreigner herein was the Western foreigner, as the Balkan foreigner was categorized either in terms of friend or foe. Instead, the West is this seen either as the spectator or the protagonist of the process of nation-state formation as well as of the process of modernization of the Balkan states, Albania included. The concern with the obedience to the foreigner more than to one's own was clearly caused by distrust towards the (Western) foreigner but also by the lack of internal cohesion. Indeed, the tension between the political elite' needs of survival and external legitimacy and the survival and external legitimacy of the weak Albanian state is a defining theme

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<sup>11</sup> I use the term in the same sense that Lene Hansen uses it. See Lene Hansen (2006) *Security as Practice. Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War*. Routledge: London, 52.

<sup>12</sup> Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, Power Politics and nationalist discourse in the struggle for Northern Epirus, 1919-1921, *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, Volume 2, Issue 2, November 2000 , pages 149 - 162

<sup>13</sup> Anton Harapi, "Per pshtim T'onin", in Ndririm Kulla (2003) ed. *Antologji e Mendimit Shqiptar 1870-1945*. Plejad: Tirana, 459.

of the various texts of the national renaissance of 189-1939. The present official discourse is underpinned by the same normative quest for the unity of all the political parties when it comes to the national priorities such as the 'national question' and the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country. The unity of the political parties is also articulated as the safest guarantee for the congruence of the national question and the 'national interest' with the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' of the Albanian state.

The congruence of the three subjects of the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' discourse- the political class, the nation and the state- is called for throughout the post-communist era in the official discourse and political debate. To exemplify the attempts to achieve the unity of all three subjects of foreign policy orientation into one, I will draw on three texts delivered by three high officials.

The first statement was made by the actual Prime Minister in Gjakova, Kosovo; the Albanian Prime Minister claimed that the entire history of struggles of the Albanian people to further their national aspirations can be captured by their only and main struggle to preserve their Western identity.<sup>14</sup> The second statement dates back to the democrats' electoral victory over the socialists in 2005. At the beginning of his mandate in July 2005 the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs appraised the foreign policy line pursued by the socialist predecessors which he summarized as the "course of approaching Albania to the West, or as the "Euro-Atlantic orientation" of Albanians"<sup>15</sup> The foreign policy line in the course of eight years, i.e. since the leftist "Alliance for the State" came to power in June 1997 until the electoral victory of the Democratic Party in July 2005 was interpreted by the Minister as an uninterrupted sequence of moments which had sustained the Western vocation of Albania and Albanians. The third statement was delivered by the Former Prime Minister in the event of the first anniversary of September 11: "The Progressive National and International anti-Terror Coalitions are speedily approaching Albania to the Euro-Atlantic Community, enabling us as a political class, as a state, as a nation to take upon ourselves more responsibility in common engagements for a just, safer, and more integrated world".<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the political class, the state and the nation are both the subject and the beneficiaries of the state's engagement in the anti-Terror Coalition.

We could map these positions according to the concerns they seem to articulate: The first concern is guarding of the purity of the Western Albanian identity. The second is the sustaining of the Western vocation of the Albanian state and society. Hence, the preservation of the "Euro-Atlantic Orientation" of the Albanian nation and state becomes the priority of any government's foreign policy. To this end, national conciliation and unification above all ideological, cultural and political divisions is framed as necessity since the 1990-s onwards not only for the

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<sup>14</sup> Berisha "Qytetar Nderi" i Gjakoves: "Ne nuk i kemi Borxhe askuj"t". *Koha Jone*, 18 June 2006

<sup>15</sup> Presentation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Besnik Mustafaj at the roundtable *Foreign Policy Vision of the New Albanian Government*, organized by the Albanian Institute of International Studies (AIIS), Tirana, 10 October 2005, Tirana.

<sup>16</sup> "Nano: Nuk u Globalizua Terrorizmi, por Lufta kunder tij", *Shekulli*, 12 September 2002.

democratization and economic prosperity of the country but also for the very survival of the Albanian nation and state. The criterion through which foreign policy is judged is the National Renaissance principle according to which national salvation and survival passes through the West. The formation of a distinct identity for the Albanian state is then not only expressed through but first and foremost constituted by foreign policy. While the former statement suggests that the foreign policy of the Albanian state expresses the struggles of the Albanian nation for the preservation of the Western identity, the latter confirms that despite the deeply antagonistic relations between the main political camps in the country, the democrats and the socialists, they are yet united in their 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation'.

These attempts of the Albanian officials to convey unity of the political class, nation and state cannot be understood outside the discourse of the international community on Albania and on the Balkans. Albania's inclusion in the "Western Balkans" category in 1998, was informed on the characterization of the country through the lenses of the Balkan *problematique*: weak institutions and divided society. The latter does not convey societal divisions along ethnic or religious lines but along the lines of party loyalty: thus it denotes deep antagonistic relationship between ruling party and opposition and hence the difficulty of consensual politics. Therefore collaboration and dialogue among the political parties at home has been articulated on the part of the international community as prerequisite for the stability and democratization of Albania<sup>17</sup> as well as for its external recognition.

Above all, dialogue and collaboration are interpreted in the official discourse as the guarantees against deviations from the path of Euro-Atlanticism. Considering the rhetoric of the representatives of international organization in the country but also the broader discourses of "ethnic hatreds"<sup>18</sup> of the Balkans in the nineties and of the war on Terror in the aftermath of September 11, and their domestication in the national political discourse in Albania, two options seem to have been possible ruptures from the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation': nationalist politics and the politicization and radicalization of religious identities. Both options have been deployed in the party rhetoric and official discourse alike as possibilities that the politician opponent engendered and could pursue if in power. Thus, membership in the Islamic Conference Organization in 1992 was met with the fierce reaction of the opposition which would accuse the party in power for Islamic fundamentalism. Similarly, the socialists have been accused by their democrat opponents for choosing to support anti-nationalist causes and ally with Serbia and Russia to the expense of the Western vocation of Albania.<sup>19</sup> At some point both opposition and the party in power was accused by their opponents for following Milosevic's example. The common feature of these

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<sup>17</sup> Although there isn't yet any systematic study of the discourse of the international community in Albania, the speeches of the OSCE representatives and of the EU Commission Delegation in the country may serve as the basic texts of the international community's discourse on Albania's democratization.

<sup>18</sup> For a discursive analysis of the Western Discourse on the Balkans during the Bosnian War, see Hansen (2006).

<sup>19</sup> See for example Sali Berisha, "Te mos lejojme te zevendesohet ideologjia totalitare me nje tjeter ideologji totalitare, ate te nacionalizmit agresiv" ("Let us not allow the totalitarianism ideology be substituted with another totalitarian ideology, that of aggressive nationalism"), *Rilindja Demokratike*, 13 December 1994, 1-2.

accusations for deviation of the opponent from the Westernism of the Albanian state is that both sides would frame the continuity of the Western orientation of the Albanian nation and state within certain key identity narratives from National Renaissance. These identity narratives would then serve as the legitimizing criteria of foreign policy and of domestic politics.

Yet, in my reading, propensity of falling back into these non-routes has been constantly simulated throughout the rhetoric of main Albanian political parties and actors in the post-communist period to the end of obtaining external legitimacy for themselves to the detriment of the democratic state identity. It is precisely its continuity that their language of 'deviations' from the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' strives to secure. Hence the contradiction between the political class' and the state's need for external legitimacy. For this contradiction to be surmountable, and thus not to jeopardize the promise of continuity of the democrat state to the West, not only do domestic politics and foreign policy need be aligned with the norms of the EU and of the international community but also the state representation has to be propped up by a coherent story of national identity or of Albanianism.

## **Reconstitution of the National Renaissance**

I will start this part by yet another statement of the actual Albanian Prime Minister which was aired on the advent of an initiative of the Minister of Education to reform the present Academy of Science; the reform entailed the shutting down of various research departments and their merging in one institution, which is the Centre for Albanology Studies.<sup>20</sup> Expressing his support for the creation of the Centre, the Prime Minister stated that: "As to this day, history is a taboo theme for the Albanians. (...)It is necessary that the Institute (of Albanology) be asked to make history (which is) out of any ideological tendencies, as we might be the only nation which yet does not know its own history".<sup>21</sup> Reportedly, the explanation that the specialists of the departments who had become redundant such as those dealing for example with ethnography, was that "patriotic sciences are dead and there is no more need for studies on identity, at a time when the country is heading towards Europeanization".<sup>22</sup>

The question one is left with after reading this statement is as to what is the function of national history if not to know one's national identity. If read in the context of the previously quoted statement of the Prime Minister that the entire history of the Albanian nation has been a long struggle to preserve its Western identity, then the latter statement suggests something along the lines that national history should be re-written in order to confirm the Western belonging of the Albanian nation. The analysis of the first section is limited to the delineation of what is interpreted

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<sup>20</sup> See " Si do te shkrihen Institutet e Akademise se Shkencave", *Tirana Observer*, 20 August 2007. Also "Histori e Rishikuar Pa Drita", *Panorama*, 25 August 2007, "Politikanet larg Duart nga Politika", *Shqip*, 25 August 2007.

<sup>21</sup>"Berisha: Te Rishkruhet Historia", *Albania*, 24.08.2007.

<sup>22</sup>" Si do te shkrihen Institutet e Akademise se Shkencave", *Tirana Observer*, 20 August 2007

in the official discourse as the constitutive features of the democratic identity of the Albanian state and the Westernism of the Albanian national identity, which is *tolerance* and *pragmatism*.

### ***Securing the State Identity Borders***

Following the collapse of 1997, upon their coming to power the socialists framed their foreign policy primarily in terms of recovery of external legitimacy of the Albanian state:

The main element of our Foreign Policy is the Euro-Atlantic integration, which would give to the Albanian state and society the place it deserves as well play its role in the European and global politics, which is characterized by multi-dimensional nationalism and interdependency...Our aim is to turn Albania (...) from a source of instability of the European Community into its loyal partner.<sup>23</sup>

Within this discourse of partnership and normalcy, European integration was framed in terms of the market, of economic cooperation and development of the Balkans countries. The socialist government's objective of creating a "Balkans Schengen" and of making the policy of *good neighborhood* the main component of foreign policy was premised upon this conceptualization of the European Union as an economic association. *Pragmatism* was juxtaposed to *nationalism* and economic interests were given priority over traditional conceptions of "friends" and "enemy" in external relations.

In relation to the "national question", the leftist coalition predicated the strengthening of the Albanian state as a pre-requisite to having a right in claiming an active role vis-à-vis the Kosovo issue in the international plane. Hence the search for domestic stability was framed as paramount not only for the economic recovery of the country but also for its credibility in relation to foreign policy in the region. In the context of pragmatism being articulated as the main tenet of Albanian foreign policy, it was only not pragmatist that Albania held a more nationalist stance in relation to the Kosovo issue and press stronger for its solution; indeed a truly nationalist stance would be to urge for the democratization of the entire Balkans and the neutralization of radical nationalism. Hence, Albania was constructed as the illuminating pole of Europeanization and stabilization of the region.<sup>24</sup> In the plenary parliamentary session following the Crans Montana Summit in June 1998 where he stated that Albania did not express support for an independent Kosovo but only for the inclusion of Kosovo as a republic within the existing Yugoslav Federation, the Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano clarified that the position of Albania vis-à-vis Kosovo would be in alignment with those options presented by the international community which would

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<sup>23</sup> Foreign Minister Paskal Milo, Plenary Session, *Punimet e Kuvendit Popullor, Legjislatura e 15-te*, 1997: 247

<sup>24</sup> Fatos Nano quoted in Paulin Kola (2003), *The Search for Greater Albania*, Hurst Publishing, London, 332.

also be congruent with the “progression and affirmation of the national question and the European orientation of this nation”<sup>25</sup> In the words of the Albanian president:

The measure of success of our foreign policy, from which its advantages would follow, must be the volume of exchange, investment and mutual benefits of our country with the international partners. This would be the starting point of a genuinely open, *national* and *pragmatist* policy which has one priority only: partnership.<sup>26</sup>

The pragmatism of the Albanian foreign policy is interpreted in the official discourse as deriving directly from pragmatism as the constitutional feature of the Albanian nation. This interpretation requires some re-writing and re-reading of the national history: For example, the moment of conversion of the Albanians into Islam in the fifteenth century is re-read not only through the lenses of communist historiography but rather through the lenses of the aspirations of the Albanian nation to survive and prosper. The most epitomic example of this interpretation is the speech delivered by the Albanian President at the Oxford Symposium “Religions in the post-September 11 Context”. Therein President Moisiu articulated the thesis that the not only was religious tolerance the characterizing and distinct feature of Albanians, but also that Islam was an endogenous layer imposed by the quest for survival of the nation.<sup>27</sup>

This leads us to tolerance towards the other as the other pillar of Albanianism in the official discourse. I would like to suggest that tolerance towards the other plays a simultaneous role as a metaphor of the state and the nation: First, religious tolerance is framed as the main contribution that Albanians would offer to the European culture and normative stock. In this sense, it also confirms the potential of the Albanian state to become a partner with the Euro-Atlantic community. In the post September 11 the narrative of religious tolerance has become the constitutional story of the nation-state. At the same time, the thesis of tolerance as a constitutive element of the Albanian nation is a guarantee for the unity of the state, the political class and the nation.

The thesis of pragmatism and religious tolerance of the Albanian nation are both comprised in the speech of President Berisha in the parliamentary session concerning Albania’s membership in the ICO. President Berisha called for putting the religious affiliation of Albanians in service of the “national interest”, as this would continue the tradition of religious tolerance of the nation:

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<sup>25</sup> Prime Minister Fatos Nano, Plenary Parliamentary Session, *Punimet e Kuvendit Popullor*, Legjislatura e 15-te, July 6, 1998: 1323

<sup>26</sup> President Rexhep Meidani, “Ballkani do te evropianizohet dhe Europa duhet t’ia laje kete borxh rajoni” Interview to *Bujku*, Prishtine, 8 September, 1997. Italics mine.

<sup>27</sup> Alfred Moisiu “dialogu I Besimeve, nje Rruge Besimi”, *Korrieri*, 09 November 2005.

We are a profoundly European country and Albania will soon become part of the political and military organisms of Europe. However, in Albania, in a European country, the Muslim percentage is very important amid the population. It (Albania; OB) must put this reality in the service of its people and of its region. (...)If there are people who find the word "Islamic" shocking, I would not do more than remind them that this is incompatible with the great tradition of religious tolerance of our country.<sup>28</sup>

While the thesis of pragmatism has served as the basis for the construction of a democratic state identity during the Kosovo conflict and its aftermath, tolerance has served as the explanatory narrative for the continuation of the role of the bridge for Albania also in the aftermath of September 11 and following Albania's engagement in the Anti-Terror Coalition. Both episodes, the moderating role of Albania with regard to the Kosovo question and to the overall national question in the Balkans and Albania' engagement in the anti-terror coalition have been framed as episodes in which the Western state identity of Albania has been guarded by the Albanian political class and has been thus recognized by the international community.

Although they are interpreted as constitutional features of the Albanian national identity, tolerance and pragmatism also serve as boundaries of the Albanian state identity. Although religious tolerance is "the greatest contribution that we can give to the contemporary European civilization"-claimed the Albanian Prime Minister<sup>29</sup>, there is an identity marker/boundary between Albania and Kosovo- but also between the Albanian community in Macedonia and Montenegro- which the Tirana politicians seem to be continuously guarding: On the one hand, the Tirana politicians continuously express concern that if the political class in Tirana cannot prove to the West that it can build a democratic state, then that will influence the West's decision upon Kosovo's independence. The underlying argument is that if Albanians in Albania proper seem to be unfit for building a democratic state, what guarantee is there that Albanians of Kosovo will be able to do so? On the other hand, the Albanian communities' political and cultural make-up lies beyond the reach of official Tirana. While Tirana politicians may still speak enthusiastically of a future when the Prishtina leaders should come for close consultations at their Tirana homologues<sup>30</sup>, the Prishtina politicians have made it clear since before the conflict of 1998 that they need neither patronization nor mediation on the part of Tirana.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Tirana elites feel

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<sup>28</sup> Sali Berisha quoted in Artan Fuga, (2003) *Mots dans la communication politique en Albanie*. L'harmattanç Paris. 117.

<sup>29</sup> Berisha 'Qytetar Nderi' i Gjakoves: "Ne nuk i kemi Borxhe askujt!". *Koha Jone*, 18.06.2006

<sup>30</sup> Interview of the author with Kastriot Islami, Tirana, 16 March 2006.

<sup>31</sup> See also declaration of the Former Prime Minister (of the Shadow Cabinet) of Kosovo, Bujar Bukoshi in 1998. "Nuk Presim nga Tirana", *Klan*, Nr. 62(2), 05.07.1998.

more at unease with what is beyond their reach in terms of cultural and societal processes in Kosovo. This is to say that a radicalization of the religious identities in Kosovo or elsewhere in the Balkans would be sufficient to shake the legitimacy foundations of a democratic Albanian state identity which are both tolerance and pragmatism.<sup>32</sup>

In this context, the persistence of Tirana in the repudiation of “Greater Albania” as a political or even cultural project aims exactly at putting through the message that the alignment of the Albanian state with the international community is genuine and not simulated. In addition, it helps to guard the distance from the Kosovo Albanian and other Albanian communities in the Balkans as the following quote of the Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs illustrates:

The platform of Greater Albania is not popular in Albania. This does not mean that Albanians of Albania are less nationalistic than others or that they do not want close relations with their compatriots. But Albanians of Albania have cultivated a higher developed political culture and education than Albanians in Kosovo or Macedonia. Living in the mother country, they have conceptualized their future in the development of Albania and its orientation towards Euro-Atlantic structures<sup>33</sup>.

What the Minister is then communicating to a Western audience-as the book is written in English- is that it is due to their education and political culture that Albanians have made the right choice, the “European choice”, indeed as if a choice existed in 1991 or a decade after for Albania. Conveying thus the image of a “choice made” rather than imposed on the Albanians of Albania, the Minister suggests the distinctness of the Albanian state identity not only vis-à-vis the Balkans but also vis-à-vis the other Albanian communities in the region. Hence the incongruence between state representation and the national identity.

### ***What Identity has to do with Foreign Policy? Securing Albanianism***

The construction of a democratic state identity in the post-communist era and particularly in the aftermath of Kosovo conflict and September 11 has been accompanied by an increasing resistance on the part of policy-makers and politicians to credit debates on Albanianess with any relevance for foreign policy and particularly for the EU accession process. For the Albanian policy-makers and politicians alike any talk on identity may blur the Western image of Albania in the world and thus might risk jeopardizing the Euro-Atlantic perspective of the country. This approach of “what identity has to do with policy” can be understood only as a

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<sup>32</sup> “Berisha Reports at the European Commission;” Islami shqiptar, european”, *Korrieri*, 23 June 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Paskal Milo, (2003) *Greater Albania. Between Myth and Reality*, Tirane. 4.

reaction towards first the emerging intellectual debates over Albanians' cultural heritage and intellectual history and second, to the broader "clash of civilizations" discourse as imported from outside. The Albanian political elites seem to think they have to choose between two options: either a unitary and liberal discourse of Euro-Atlantic orientation which comprises both processes of integration, that of integration into NATO and the one of integration into the EU, or of opening gates to the invasion of a cultural discourse from the intellectual field which would jeopardize the integrations prospects of the country.

A commonplace illustration of this understanding is the disclaimer on the part of the officials that "We are not Turkey"<sup>34</sup>. The thesis of incomparability of Albania with Turkey builds on what is perceived as incommensurability between the EU's and Turkey's both conceptions of the content of democratic norms. In addition, the persistence in "not being Turkey" points at the limits of the bridge-builder role that the Albanian elites are willing to undertake: As the first part suggested, the role of the bridge-builder between Balkan and Europe, between East and West and thus as the best exemplification of a weak state which is yet democratic and Westerner has functioned as a basic pattern of building a post-communist state identity. This role comprises best both the national identity narrative of tolerance and pragmatism and the West's recognition of the instantiation of this national identity through the state representation of Albania, as the role is perceived to be allocated by the West and particularly by the USA to play a moderate and mediating role in the Balkans.<sup>35</sup>

At the heart of this resistance to articulate matters of cultural identity lies the conception of national identity debate as entrenched in rigid dichotomist positions of Orientalists versus Occidentalists. This debate which has taken place in the first years of independence from the Ottoman Empire and subsequently during the Monarchy years<sup>36</sup> is taken on the part of elites and often of public intellectuals as the interpretive framework of the entire modern history of the Albanian nation. The most remarkable variant of such interpretation of Albanian history through the lenses of Occidentalists being confronted with, fought and corrupted by the Orientalists is the recent public rhetoric of the influential writer Ismail Kadare. In what became a famous public correspondence between Kadare and the most prominent Albanian Kosovar public intellectual, Rexhep Qosja Kadare repudiated Qosje's claim for the recognition of the cultural legacy of Islam, with the argument that this is the best alibi we could give to Europe for not opening its gates to us.<sup>37</sup> This exchange between Tirana and Prishtina was concluded not in the pages of the media

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<sup>34</sup> In most of interviews of the author with officials from both sides of the political spectrum the thesis of incomparability of Albania with Turkey emerged.

<sup>35</sup> Interview of the author with Kastriot Islami, Tirane, 17 February 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Enis Sulstarova, (2006) "Arratisje nga liria: Orientalizmi Shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja", *Perpjekja-Feja dhe Shqiptaret*, Nr. 20, 2005. 47. What is meant by Orientalists is those who opposed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the modernizing reforms taken by King Zog. Therefore, the meaning is distinct if not contrary to Orientalism as introduced by Edward Said.

<sup>37</sup> See Kadare, I. (2006a). "Ballkani në kërkim të Evropës". *Shqip*. Tiranë, 13.08.2006. Kadare, I. (2006b). *Identiteti evropian i shqiptarëve*. Tiranë: Onufri. Kadare, I. (2006c). "E keqja prapa një abuzimi të madh". *Shekulli*. Tiranë, 23.06.2006.

where it started, but in the political site proper whence the Head of the Parliament expressed her support for Kadare's thesis by confirming that "Albanians have a European identity".<sup>38</sup> The media hastened to claim that Topalli supports Kadare, simulating thus a "clash of civilizations" at the border between Albania and Kosovo, with Tirana officials giving the final state verdict on what constitutes Albanianess.

### **The Unity of the West and the Authority of the Foreigner**

The intellectual and political debates of the early years of state independence till the Second World War are underpinned by the concerns with regard to the capability of the newly-formed state to survive and to follow in the footsteps of other Western European states in the path of modernization without the patronage of any specific Great Power. The question whether it was due to the Albanians' national struggle or due to the interplay of the interests- both material and immaterial- of the Great Powers that the Albanian state was created in the first place and survived emerges recurrently in the public and academic debates. In this sense, the actual process of integration of Albania in the Euro-Atlantic Community is interpreted in historicist terms by those engaged in the debates on Europe and the USA and the relationship of Albania with both. Having discussed insofar the construction of the Orientation of the Albanian nation and state in and through the official discourse, this part turns to a brief discussion of the meaning of the "Euro-Atlantic" community.

### ***Speaking 'sovereignty' in the early nineties***

As most governments of the Central and Eastern Europe in the early nineties, the first Albanian Democrat government built on the pursuit of the 'national interest' and the aspiration of opening to the West as its two main programmatic pillars. While the national interest was framed in terms of the solution of the national question in the Balkans and the fulfillment of the national aspirations of the Albanian population in Kosovo and elsewhere in the region, yet it was interpreted as compatible with the alignment of the Albanian state with the West's position on the national matter and with the westernization of the Albanian state.

When politicians of all political parties and intellectuals were speaking in the early nineties of national unification not strictly in legal terms of state borders between Albania and Kosovo but rather in terms of the creation of a common cultural pan-Albanian space, they were reflecting on their own demands as contemporary and as inspired by the European developments. The argument went that everywhere in Europe, the time of the nations had come; the fall of Berlin Wall had brought about the moment of "spiritual unification", as Kadare would write in 1991 and other Kosovo intellectuals such as Rexhep Qosje would revoke in similar

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<sup>38</sup> "Topalli mbeshtet Kadarene: Kemi Identitet Evropian", *Shekulli*, 31.05.2006.

terms.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the project of “return to Europe” conveyed compatibility of the national unification with the process of joining the European Community and of Europeanization in the broad sense of the term.<sup>40</sup> National unification was included in the electoral program of the Democratic Party in 1992 and the proclamation of independence on the part of the Kosovo Parliament was recognized by the Albanian Parliament in 1991.

The initial framing of the national question in terms of national unification drew on the articulation of the Albanian state and the Albanian people as solely dependent on their abilities and individuality. The narrative of the “Albanians as masters of their own fates” of the communist official discourse resurfaces in the speeches of the Democrat leaders throughout the second half of 1996 and the first half of 1997.<sup>41</sup> In this context, the reports and recommendations of specifically the USA were interpreted as interference in domestic politics and hence as an attack to the well-guarded separation between the domestic and international. To the suggestion of the US State Department in 1996 to the Albanian government to repeat the elections in those zones where they were reportedly manipulated to the benefit of the party in power, the Albanian President responded by criticizing the interference of the USA in domestic affairs of other states, by seeking to impose one universal model of democracy which cannot be emulated in a country like Albania.<sup>42</sup> In the Parliamentary debates of 1991, the Democratic representations insisted that if the case rose that ‘national interest’ would clash with the principle of ‘good neighborhood’ the former would by all means take precedence. In the words of a DP parliamentarian:

Among the objectives of foreign policy we put first the national interests. There is no reason that this objective of the Albanian foreign policy, i.e. national interests, be conditioned by something else, which may be “good neighborhood” policy or let’s say the relations with Western Europe or with Southern America. (...) This does not mean that we are against “good neighborhood” but not to the degree of inserting it as the constitutional principle of foreign policy of the Albanian policy.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Shqiptaret dhe Evropa Dje dhe Sot”, *Rilindja Demokratike*, 4 June 1991, 5 June 1991, 12 June 1991,. Also “Fati i nje Populli eshte ne duart e tij”, *Rilindja Demokratike*, 1 June 1991.

<sup>40</sup> Here ‘Europeanization’ does not suggest its theoretical usage from authors such as Claudio Radaelli, Tanja Borzel or Thomas Risse but rather its loose usage in the political discourse conveying the conflation of European values, norms and cultural structures.

<sup>41</sup> For the study of this period I have extensively analyzed the texts of *Koha Jone* which was very antagonistic at the time with the Democratic Party government and particularly with President Berisha. Despite the tone of the newspaper, most citations and quotations of the President and of the Prime Minister point at the intervention from US in our affairs and autonomy of the Albanian state. See for example, “Shehu: I zgjidhim vete hallet tona” *Koha Jone*, 9 July 1996

<sup>42</sup> “Berisha: Replika me Serreqin dhe Shehun”, *Rilindja Demokratike*, 15 March 1993.

<sup>43</sup> Arben Imami, *Punimet e Kuvendit Popullor*, I, Legjislatura e 12-te, 25 April 1991, 128.

Domestic politics was thus conceptualized as sharply distinct from foreign policy and the interference of other states and international organizations, despite their recognition as being Western, was articulated as violation of the state's domestic legitimacy.

While in the case of the US, interference in domestic politics was perceived as a direct attack to the domestic legitimacy of political actors and of the governing party, when the theme of 'non-interference' emerged with regard to the EU's involvement in the Albanian affairs, the debate would evolve along the identity/national unity nexus. Soon after the opening up of Albania in 1991-1992, Greece brought into question the issue of Orthodox people in Southern Albania. The issue of the Greek minority was from the beginning of 90-s loosely defined on the part of Greece in terms of religious affiliation.<sup>44</sup> This interpretation of the 'minority issue' on the part of Greece was interpreted by the democrat government as being irreconcilable with the strongest pillar of Albanian national narrative: that religious identities were no cause for conflict among Albanians, unless when conflict was forged from *outside*, i.e. from external enemies of the nation or from their supporters *inside* the Albanian polity. The rift became official and internationalized when the Albanian government expelled a Greek cleric under the accusation of disseminating anti-Albanian propaganda and advocating secession for the Southern part of Albania.

This heated political climate led to the revival of the narrative of religious affiliation of Albanians as having always been instrumentalized by the others at the expense of the Albanian national identity and thus in expense of the Western laic orientation of the Albanian state. The deterioration of relations between Albania and Greece, which is in the first half of 1994, corresponded with the Greek Presidency of the European Union. In a press statement following the accusations of the Greek state that the Albanian government had ordered the arrest of 34 Greek minority citizens, the Albanian of Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced the blockage of European Union of economic aid to Albania as a Greek strategy which "aims at imposing upon Albania aberration from its course of European integration. (...) It also demonstrates its wish to penalize Albania for its regional policy, which contributes to peace and stability"<sup>45</sup>. Hence Greece's foreign policy was considered not only as interference in the society-state relationship of Albania, but also as a deliberate attack on the Albanian state's Western orientation.

### ***The decadence of Europe and the rightfulness of the USA in the post-Kosovo Conflict era***

Although Greece is perceived in Albania as a doubtful representative of Europe yet distrust to the roles allocated even by representatives of EU institution persists to this day and illustrates the weak authority of the EU in constructing a state identity for Albania. As a matter of example, the Albanian leadership was found utterly unprepared to the suggestion of the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs in March 2006 that as a member of the Islamic Conference

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<sup>44</sup> Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer, (2006) *The Albanian Question in the Balkans*. I.B Taurus:London. 101-105, 116-117.

<sup>45</sup> Press Statement of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Archival Fund Nr. 251: 10 April 1994

Organization Albania join the Alliance of Civilizations and be engaged in the process of promoting dialogue between Islam and Western civilization<sup>46</sup>. The proposal was first met with frustration on the part of foreign policy officials and politicians with what was seen as Europe's crude understanding of Albanian historical legacies and its misrecognition of the decidedly Western identity of the Albanian nation. These reactions gave way to the affirmation on the part of the officials that "Our role is confined in the Balkans".<sup>47</sup>

In contrast to the perceived misrecognition on the part of Europe, the US' recognition of Albania as a trusted partner has become a matter of 'national pride'. In one interview given in the aftermath of the US President Bush in Albania, a prominent novelist whom politicians regularly quote in their political speeches, Ismail Kadare stated that:

It is interesting to note that Albania lost Europe at the same time that Europe was delivering America (...). The relationship of Albania with America is a deep and not simply a political, conjectural relationship. For Albania, the United States are not only the most powerful democratic state of the world, whose army led the NATO intervention in Kosovo for the freedom of the Albanian people. USA is for the Albanian nation the main fortress of Western civilization, I would add of the Western civilization in danger. Therefore, by way of expressing friendship to the American state, Albania proclaims its belonging in this civilization...With no concern for implicit ironies and with no complexes, Albania is aligned in this front (anti-Terror, OB), because this Western alliance, this Western civilization is the natural home of Albanians and through this act they defend their home, notwithstanding their smallness.<sup>48</sup>

The Prime Minister Berisha echoed Kadare's words in his address to the American President, during the visit of the latter in Albania in June 2007:

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<sup>46</sup> Interview of the author with Besnik Mustafaj, Tirane 16 March 2006. Also interview of the author with Albert Rakipi, Tirane, 15 February 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Another example which goes in the same vein, is the informal suggestion that the former Albanian Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs had been reportedly offered by a Member of the Bundestag that as a small state with the majority of population Muslim, Albania would be the ideal trade-off with Turkey: its membership would indeed do much good to the EU for its image in the world and would yet be not as problematic as Turkey's membership in terms of internal economic costs for the EU. -"To which I responded negatively and said that if we are to be accepted in as Muslim, we do not wish to be accepted at all"-Interview of the author with Kastriot Islami, Tirana, 17 February 2007.

<sup>48</sup> Interviste me Ismail Kadare, Zeri I Amerikes, 1 June 2007. Available at: <http://www.studentet.info/modules/ipboard/index.php?showtopic=1637>

No other nation in the region and in Europe has experienced suffering, ethnic cleansing, racism, partition, invasions, fierce dictatorships worse than us, Albanians (...). And yet, we have been blessed. Throughout all our efforts to defend our national and western identity and vocation, to the aim of coming out from times of oppression into times of dignity, from times of darkness into times of freedom, we have won as our just cause has ever had the strong support of USA, the greatest and most precious friend of the Albanian nation (...) The friendly feelings towards your nation and country and the pro-Americanism of Albanians are in truth matters related to their national pride<sup>49</sup>

While the first statement comes from a novelist and the second from the prime minister, they both suggest that a. the Albanian state's external recognition depends solely upon its Western orientation as both a foreign policy path and as national identity and b. that the USA represents the purest embodiment of the West and c. that agency of the Albanian state in the international stage depends on the purity and the symbolic strength of the West. What we find in both statements is the repetition of the thesis of the limited power and of the decadence of moral values of Europe but also of the USA as the embodiment of European norms and values which are (yet) uncorrupted by power politics on one hand and by globalization on the other. What these positions reveal is a specific understanding of power of the West in relation to both the democratization of the Albanian state and to the national question in the Balkans.

As it was suggested above the official discourse of the early nineties did not differentiate between the two. Indeed both the early democrat governments from 1992 to 1997 and the socialist governments from 1997 to 2005 framed the national question with the alignment with the West and with the creation of a democratic space in the Balkans.<sup>50</sup> Yet, the interpretation of the West's authority<sup>51</sup> has been inextricably linked to the interpretation of the agency of the Albanian state and its role in the regional context and beyond. As I showed above, the first democrat administration found it difficult to reconcile the reading of the history of the Albanian nation-state in terms of Wilsonian doctrine with the 'national sovereignty' and independence of the Albanian state to formulate and pursue its distinct foreign policy course. Yet, despite resistance to what was framed as attempts of the US to establish its hegemonic status in the new post-communist states, the Democrat government rendered the US's role as vital for the solution of the 'national question' in the Balkans.

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<sup>49</sup>"Vizite Historike e Presidentit Amerikan ne Tirane", *Rilindja Demokratike*, 12 June 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Paulin Kola (2003) *The Search for Greater Albania*, Hurst Publishing, London. 309

<sup>51</sup> I use the term 'authority' here in the Weberian sense, as wedding power and legitimacy. See Ian Hurd, (1999) "Legitimacy and Authority in International Relations", *International Organization*, 53, 1, Spring. 401

The interpretation of the role of the USA as vital for the survival and prosperity of the Albanian state was resuscitated with the advent of the Kosovo conflict. Parliamentary debates of Spring-Autumn 1998 demonstrate the entrenchment of the following variant of reading the history of the Albanian: while Europe was not to be trusted as a powerful actor which could and would engage in the Balkans, the USA was seen as a partner of small states which not only had the capacity of a Great Power but also the moral values to justify it. Hence this normative power of the USA which was most visible in the first part of the twentieth century and which built on Wilson's Fourteen Points<sup>52</sup> was renewed and reconstructed every time the history of the survival of the Albanian state was repeated by Albanian officials and politicians: its military power is wedded with moralistic and universalistic values of justice among nations.

This is tied to a specific interpretation of the history of the Albanian state and of its agency: its survival was guaranteed by a Great Power which was yet not directly involved in European politics. Hence its involvement is interpreted as basically in terms of ideas and principles, rather than an expression of material and strategic interests. The persistence in framing USA's power as legitimate is tied to the perceived external legitimacy and recognition of the Albanian state: More than once the role of the Albanian state in the Balkans as a bridge and as an illuminating pole of democratization and Europeanization is alleged to be given by the USA.<sup>53</sup> The role is assumingly given to Albania in recognition on the part of the USA of Albania's continuation in the path towards integration in the Euro-Atlantic community. It is not only the Westernism of the Albanian nation but also the democratic identity of the Albanian state which are recognized by the USA as opposed to Europe. Hence the relationship with the USA is framed in terms of partnership, albeit asymmetrical. The gratitude that U.S President George W. Bush expressed in his meetings with the highest Albanian officials with regard to Albania's contribution in both the war on terror and with its moderating stance and example of religious tolerance in the Balkans and beyond<sup>54</sup> has confirmed the authority of the US domestically. Furthermore, it has contributed to sediment not only the state identity as democratic but has also legitimated the reconstruction of national identity narratives of tolerance and pragmatism on the part of the domestic elites.

In contrast, the relationship with the EU is framed primarily in terms of hierarchy and of power relations between a center and a periphery. The language in which reports of the EU Commission and of the European Parliament are commented by the high officials and politicians is permeated by the power metaphors of the teacher and the student and the process of European integration is framed in terms of learning and of following instructions and of being continuously monitored. The compatibility between the interpretation of the national question and

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Diez, (2005) "Constructing Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe', *Millennium*, Vol 33, No. 3, 2005. 621.

<sup>53</sup> Interview of the author with Kastriot Islami, Tirana, 16 March 2007

<sup>54</sup> "Bush Ben Vizite Historike ne Shqiperi", *BBC Albanian*, 10 June 2007. Available at: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/albanian/news/2007/06/070610\\_alb\\_tirana.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/albanian/news/2007/06/070610_alb_tirana.shtml)

state agency in terms of Pan-Americanism and the interpretation of Euro-Atlantic integration processes in terms of domestic democratization and economic prosperity underpins the discourse of 'Euro-Atlantic orientation'.

However, the opposition and those political forces which do not frame foreign policy in terms of trade relations and the EU not solely as an economic association found in the "European Borders for the Balkans" thesis the expression of what they would deplore as national betrayal. Apart from the blurring of the domestic and the foreign policy, the language of democratic governance of the EU is for them simply an alibi for the traditional power politics of European states: Hence the need for a clear orientation of foreign policy of the Albanian state and for a clear hierarchy of relations of partnership.<sup>55</sup> In this hierarchy the relationship with the USA is of vital importance for the continuation of the modernization and westernization project of the Albanian state. It might be the case that the special partnership with the USA is also used by the domestic elites as a leverage strategy vis-à-vis the EU.<sup>56</sup> Be that as it may, the pro-Americanism of Albanians is interpreted as constitutive part of the national identity and thus as the basis for the struggle of the Albanian state to find a place in the international stage. The actual alignment of Tirana with the USA's position with regard to the unilateral recognition of Kosovo as an independent state is only an episode of this special relationship with the USA and of the struggle of the Albanian state to find a place for itself in the international stage.

## Conclusions

In 1998 Christopher Coker would suggest that the strengthening of the European project had made the idea of the 'Western community' archaic; the latter had been "only a temporary exigency intended to combat communism and the Soviet Union"<sup>57</sup>. The case of domestic political debate in Albania demonstrates that the West's Gaze is still constitutive to domestic political debate and thus to processes of construction of the internal and external identity of the Albanian state. Indeed, the notion of the Western Community has been replaced with the notion of the 'Euro-Atlantic Community' and this shift demonstrates the tangibility of the processes of integration in the EU and NATO. Westernism of the early nineties differs from the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation' of the post-Kosovo conflict in the conceptualization of the 'national question' and of state agency in the official discourse.

The main feature of the official discourse of the democratic governance, 1992-1997 was the prioritization of the notion of 'national sovereignty' which, albeit its inconsistencies and contradictory usages could produce a position of resistance to processes of globalization and

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<sup>55</sup> Interview of the author with Sabri Godo, Tirana, 22 December 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Interview of the author with Fatos Lubonja, 3 February 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Christopher Coker quoted in Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (1999) "Review of Christopher Coker 'Twilight of the West', David Cress 'From Plato to Nato: The idea of the West and its Opponents, Samuel Huntington 'The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of the World Order' and Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen 'The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography'", *Millennium*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 149.

Westernization without risking to undermine the notion of Albanianess as equated with Westernism. However, traces of the same resistance to the 'misrecognition' of the Albanian Western identity and of the democratic elements of a pre-Euro-Atlantic integration Albanian identity emerge particularly in relation to the EU or rather Europe's attempts to impose its norms and rules of conduct among states. The persistence in the official discourse of both the governance of the democrats of 1992-1997 and the socialists' governance of 1997-2005 of the resistance to what is perceived as the projection of Europe's identity anxieties onto its periphery defy the simplistic analysis of the Balkan states in terms of nationalism versus Europeanization/democratization. Yet, these categories of the Western/Liberal discourse on Self and others have been extensively projected at some point by all political parties onto their domestic opponents at the end of jeopardizing the democratic identity of the Albanian state that they strove to construct. Furthermore, the guarding of the border between national identity and state identity in the official discourse stands in contradiction with the attempts of the Tirana elites to construct the nation, the state and the political class as unified and interchangeable as subjects of the 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation.' In the end, the different interpretations of the *genuine* West articulate different understanding of the relation between state and nation and the political class. The reconstitution of identity narratives of tolerance and pragmatism as the two pillars of Albanianism aims not only at the construction of compatibility between the 'national question' and the European discourse of democratic governance but also at the construction of the unity of the West.

Yet, the attempts to reconstitute the National Renaissance Ideology and Albanianism as the foundation of a Western state identity does not address the question of legitimacy limits of both the political class and of the Albanian state externally. The Albanian high officials seem to be standing between two choices: the one of formulating and preserving a *clear* orientation of foreign policy which builds on an Westphalian understanding of the Western/world order on one hand and the other of orchestrating the process of national and state identity construction in an attempt to build a secure position from where the West's and particularly Europe's misrecognizing gaze can be confronted and resisted. However, as both options are inherent in the discourse of 'Euro-Atlantic Orientation', the choice might not be as difficult and even important for the Albanian state identity and agency as it seems. What is archaic is not strictly the idea of the 'Western community' but rather its interpretation through national identity narratives of the communist historiography which at best may have no relevance at all on the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of Albania and which at worst may serve as alibi for the lack of political alternatives of the political actors engaged in debates on the West.