

## International Norms and Albania after Communism System

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**Abstract:** *This article seeks to uncover the impact of the EU in the Albanian political transformations. Approaching the EU impact on Albanian political reforms as a process of country's socialization to the norms institutionalised in the European environment, this study dwells on both the external and domestic factors that determine the mechanisms of norm assertion in the domestic area. The first part specifies the set of external conditions and the intervening domestic variables that induce a logic of consequentiality or appropriateness in domestic change. The article proceeds to discuss the phenomena of European nannies to European neo-democracies. Finally, the study of the process of democratization in Albania illustrates the extreme case of a wider post-communist phenomenon: the Impact of EU is translated into a consequential logic of using the democratic rhetoric and adopting democratic institutions, which are used and abused by political actors loaded with the legacies bequeathed to them by the ancient regime. This article suggests that Albanian democratisation could have a different trajectory without the presence of the EU pushing for and directing reforms. Messages in the form of the EU reports, evaluations and critiques, which determine the progress in the contractual relations between EU and Albania, have become the signposts of change to the extent that they are the epicentre around which achievements and future challenges are debated and decided upon.*

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### Introduction

A substantial literature has recently developed around the external dimension of regime change, challenging the previous conclusion that the external actors tended to play a marginal role in transitions from the authoritarian rule. The EU is assigned a leading role among the international actors interested in democratisation. In addition to developing an extensive portfolio of support mechanisms for the new democracies to the East, EU membership is dangled as a carrot to encourage political reforms, empowering EU conditionality. Thus, prospective EU membership has arguably re-enforced domestic political and economic reforms. The problem with this literature is that the EU's role has been more assumed than proven. It is debatable to what extent one can treat the EU as independent factor given that the precise role of external factors cannot be studied in isolation from home-grown phenomena. Thus, the discussion of the EU's role is inevitably interspersed with a discussion of domestic politics, an arena that is made complex by a host of country-specific variables. This article seeks to uncover the impact of the EU on the Albanian political transformation, which illustrates the extreme case of a post-communist country in transition. Being among the least likely cases to democratize because of the lack of domestic 'preconditions' conducive to democratisation,

Albania serves as a crucial case study for theories on the external factors of democratisation and specifically the EU. The first part of the article specifies the external and the intervening domestic variables that determine mechanisms of domestic change according to the logic of consequentiality encompassing the political discourse and/or the institutional templates; or the logic of appropriateness which wraps both discursive, formal and behavioural parameters of international norms. The article proceeds to uncover the phenomena of European nannies to neo-democracies of the East. The high normative power of democracy in the institutionalised European environment, coupled with the capacity to distribute material benefits and the social consent it holds creates an environment conducive to democracy. EU political conditionality, based on specific criteria and operating through a system of monitoring related to the highly appreciated award of membership has a distinguished leverage compared to other European protagonists. The degree to which democracy is internalised, however, depends on the domestic factors within a country that shape, circumscribe and/or instrumentalise democratic norms. The third part analyses the utilisation of democratic rhetoric and adoption of democratic institutions in the process of democratisation in Albania. The impact of EU in advancing democratic change, however, is put forward comparing the period of transition when the democratic deficit mounted to "the impossibility of escape" with the post-EU conditionality when the EU appears as an agent controlling reform and setting the priorities. This article suggests that Albanian democratisation could have a very different trajectory without the presence of the EU pushing for and directing reforms. Messages in the form of the EU reports, evaluations and critiques, which determine the progress in the contractual relations between EU and Albania, have become the signposts of change to the extent that they are the epicentre around which achievements and future challenges are debated and decided upon.

## **The Influence of the International Context Upon Neo-democracies Categorising the International Factors that May Impinge Upon Democratisation**

The identification of waves of democratisation, especially the factual development of the third wave (Huntington 1991), points to an external, common element, which pushes regime change in individual countries. The development of global communications transmitting news from one country to the others accounts for the trans-national influences spreading between proximate countries. The term contagion is used to suggest a process of snowballing of the democratic inclinations across neighbouring countries. It refers to unintentional forms of international influences, whose only mechanism is proximity (Whitehead 1996: 5). Contagion as an analytical category of international factors lacks an account of foreign actors' intentions, their channels of transmission and their interaction with the domestic factors. It departs from the wave's syndrome, however, because it is analysed as one of the alternative modes of international influence. Control and conditionality are alternative forms that involve intentional action. They both take into account external actors' motivations and instruments of action on the assumption that it is not merely contiguity, but the policy of external actors that explains the spread of democracy from one country to another (Whitehead 1996: 9). Control and conditionality, however, differ in other respects. While control is closely associated with the pressure and power realities of external actors, consisting in a one-way effect, the hallmark of conditionality is "attaching specific conditions to the distribution of benefits to recipient countries on the part of multilateral institutions" (Schmitter 1996: 30). Conditionality, thus, trades more on persuasion and temptation rather than coercion (Pridham 2000: 298). Moreover, conditionality refers mainly to multilaterally organised action, whether control is mainly exerted on the basis of unilateral dealings running the risk of developing patron-client relations that may distort the dynamics of regime change (Schmitter 1996: 29). Conditionality, thus, works through the attraction of benefits for the democratising polity dwelling on the interaction between the external and domestic factors. It also highlights the need to focus on the regional context, which is now recognised as the most effective context in which external impact and influences may be identified and measured (Schmitter 1996). Conditionality may lead to some kind of convergence or a "gradual movement in system conformity" if a grouping of democratic states has enough power and institutional mechanisms to attract transiting regimes (Pridham 2000: 296). Convergence postulates a process of achieving democratic standards set by an external actor, who gives it a direction and purpose. It has its gradual pressures, slightly different from conditionality, which works in a more immediate way and adds sharpness to prospects of convergence. Consent is an alternative mode of influence accounting for the international support towards a wide range of social and political groupings, thus generating democratic norms and expectations from below (Schmitter 1996: 30; Whitehead 1996: 15). It works on the assumption that democracy is a complex social process, which requires supporting the transformation of governing institutions as well as social and cultural changes.

## **European Nannies and European Novices to Democracy Normative Power of Democracy in the European Context**

Liberal principles are among the constitutive norms of Western Europe post-nationalist collective identity at least in two respects. First, in the domestic realm liberal principles of social and political order, societal pluralism, the rule of law, democracy and market economy have historically paralleled and fostered the development of Western Europe commonness versus the other, establishing the main criteria of a community insider. Moreover, these liberal principles are awarded legitimate statehood and rightful state action (Reus-Smit 1997: 558). Second, over time the European system has become increasingly institutionalised in a network of international organisations that embody its shared liberal political culture. The three major organisations CoE, NATO, EU, have developed specific norms reflecting their area of specialisation, but they have all committed themselves first and foremost to the constitutive norms of the community. All three define the promotion of liberal democracy as their basic purpose. According to the preamble of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the members of NATO are distinguished by "the determination to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law". In the statute of CoE, member states similarly reaffirm their commitment to "the moral values, which are the common heritage of their peoples and the true source of their individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law". Article 6 of the EU also stresses its foundation on "liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, principles which are common to all the member states". The European organisations represent the community to the extent the community membership has increasingly come to be defined as membership in these organisations. They lay down specific conditions the aspiring states must fulfil before the accession, and have established different grades of association, ranging from simple consultation procedures to full membership. In this sense, international organisations

also serve as community building agencies by running activities like supporting, monitoring and sanctioning or rewarding the domestic assertion of democratic principles (Finnemore 1996). Before a country passes a grade the organisations assess its achievements and sets new targets before it grants full membership. The European community can also be attributed a powerful social attraction, related to its holding of the criteria for community inclusion and a series of material resources that may determine people's life fortunes. In a wider sense, the European community, animated in European organizations distributes "Europeaness" perceived as economically, politically and normatively superior across social forces. Consequently, governments and elites are voted in and out, and are given credit for according to their contribution in approaching the European community.

Domestic Conditions and Political Change in Eastern Europe given the normative power of democracy as one of the constitutive values it is associated with, the high degree of institutionalisation, the superior material bargaining power it possess representing a wealthy group of countries and its social attractiveness the European community has favourable credentials to impact the outsiders. The post-communist countries, on the other hand, need the material aid, the knowledge about functioning democracy and market economy, the security and the legitimacy of "being European" that the community holds. Thus, they have the incentives to become good students that demonstrate to at least acquiesce to community norms. Eastern and Central European countries, however, differ with regard to the extent their political culture resonates with the European liberal norms and the extent to which state elites are responsive to their societies. Low internalisation prospects exist in countries where liberal values are not rooted in political culture. In the structural level, post-communist countries exhibit weak societies and strong states. Parties are organised top down, are little rooted in society and tend to capture government institutions. It reduces socialisation into an elitist program, involving state agents and intergovernmental channels of influence (Schimmelfennig 2002: 17). The internalisation to these influences will follow a sequence starting with discursive and then formal to be followed by behavioural effects. Thus, rhetoric like returning to Europe, belonging to west, and following its models and norms, drove the early policy strategies of most post-communist transitions. The intensification of ties with Western institutions led to a transfer of their models to domestic institutions (Malova and Haughton 2001). However, depending to domestic conditions the discursive and formal adaptation may subsist with norm violating factual behaviours, which undermines the formal transpositions.

### **Albania in Transition –Domestication of 'Europe'? Transition from Authoritarianism: Stuck Between the Past and Present**

On the eve of the transition from communism, Albania was in many ways unique in Europe. After being a part of the Ottoman Empire until early 20th century, it became an authoritarian monarchy until it came under the influence of Mussolini's Italy in the late 1920s. Consequently, Albania, unlike most post-communist countries, knew little of liberal democracy when communists took over power at the end of World War II. The Communist Party (CP) adopted a dictatorship that resembled a rigid Stalinist version of communist regimes. First, the communist leadership insisted in society's total obedience to its rule and extended control over all aspects of social political and economic life (Goldman 2000: 53). Any form of organisation out of the party-state control was violently condemned as reactionary and it was destined to at least political prisons. Second, the international isolation and self-reliance reached paranoiac levels after the deterioration of relations with Soviet Union following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies in the late 1950s and the break with China after it rejected loyalty to its own model of totalitarianism following Mao's death in 1975 (Wallden 1993: 78). Third, although Enver Hoxha, the communist leader that ruled until his death in 1985, undertook some modernization reforms in education and social policy, strengthened the state against lawlessness and blood feuds found in many parts of the country (Brown 2001: 135), Albania remained the least economically developed country in Europe. The low GDP per capita put it firmly in the African category of low income countries (Fowkes 1999: 72). When the wind of change was blowing all across Eastern Europe, Albania embarked on nothing less than a metamorphosis away from communist dictatorship. There was little dissent within the country and no inclination on the part of communist rulers to follow Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet union. The communists under the leadership of Ramiz Alia, who had succeeded Hoxha, resisted change and continued to punish dissidence. The Communist Party maintained its strong grip over the country at least until the revolution in Romania made it aware of the popular ferment that was toppling communist regimes elsewhere. On the other hand, the youth had already started to behave in 'aberrant' ways showing disinterest in the study of Marxism, displaying anger towards the regime, engaging in willful destruction of common property and demonstrating special interest to news broadcasted by foreign radio and television (Goldman 2000: 58). To avoid the fate of communism in other Eastern European countries, in February 1990, Alia pushed for some degree of economic liberalisation, while refusing to compromise the party's monopoly of power. To conciliate the frustrated public at home and seeking to secure some Western economic assistance he only conceded to allow primary party organisations have a

greater role in the selection of the officials. The softening of the restricting policies extended to formally allow people to travel abroad, abolition of death penalty for illegal emigration and lift of the restrictions on religion practice (in Goldman 2000). These tangents to reforms opened the door to change they had tried to avoid. The image of 4,000 young people climbing the sides of overcrowded vessels headed for Italy was the first clear evidence of social protest and disintegration in summer 1990. Alia responded with promises for free parliamentary elections and the separation of the party from the state (Biberaj 1999). These concessions were not sufficient to prevent the escalation of popular demonstrations asking for more political change. The mass protests reached a climax with the formation of the first opposition party, the Democratic Party (DP) around a small group of intellectuals and students. The opposition's program consisted in Albania's "return to Europe". It committed itself to a multiparty system, human rights and the introduction of a free market (Biberaj 1999: 85). Alia conceded to protesters' demands for a multiparty system and early elections to be held in March 1991. Despite the poor organisation and the short period of four months to prepare for elections, DP won a respectable 38% of votes confirming the steady movement away from communism (Goldman 2000: 66). The Communist Party, however, had enough votes to hold on power. What followed was an attempt to correct the verdict of the ballot box by street protests. Three governments were changed until the continuous strikes and demonstrations that brought Albania to the verge of anarchy forced the communist leaders to give up to demands for new elections within one year. In the new elections, the DP won an overwhelming majority of the votes and its leader Sali Berisha became the first non-communist president in 45 years. The success of the DP occurred amidst a wave of popular democracy, which seemed to sweep away the memories of communist repression and command economy (Duffy 2000: 74). Although analysts expected that after the first excitement of democratic transition the postelection country would have to face a series of problems and overcome a difficult legacy (Agh 1998: 180), few could foresee the trajectory of its adventure in realising democracy.

### **Conclusions: The Logic of Consequentially in Political Change**

The attraction of Europe has given a new direction to the rhetoric of political actors seeking electorate's support and the benefits the European community distributes. The Albanian politicians started preaching 'return to Europe' as an effective tool against the shaking communist regime since early 1990s. The opposition emerged and campaigned around the promise of European integration and it started talking the language of democratization and market economy their regime had deprived them from. First, Berisha called himself a liberal and pledged to "further Albanian democracy", although critics insisted that he acted differently and was no longer the democrat he proclaimed himself to be (Goldman 2000: 70). At the aftermath of seriously marred elections of 1996, Berisha continued to loud pluralism and during the opening of new parliament he called for "co-operation with all who want the country to become part of the West, a truly democratic Albania (Nazi 1996: 41). Even when the country was about to collapse he ironically praised the Albanian people, and of course himself, for "walking the path to freedom and democracy". On the other hand, the former communists quickly acquiesced to the language of liberties, democracy, rule of law and European integration although these have hardly been values that defined their political status until the popular upheaval of 1990s. Both new and old members among the SP knew they had no way but to fight the political struggle in the name of democracy and Europe. They soon accused Berisha for betraying the democratic ideals the people, and of course them, had fought for. The much debated seventh Nano cabinet that was voted by the parliament in the midst of opposition accusations for its members corruption and connections with organised crime, also identified by the EU reports as the main obstacle to the country's SAP (European Commission 2003) was again demonstratively named 'the government of integration'. The Albanian elite has similarly being relatively fast in adopting formal democratic institution. The new law on the main constitutional provisions approved in 1992 and 1993, created a new system with checks and balances, safeguards for fundamental rights and freedoms and judicial review, which compared favourably with the constitutional changes adopted in other former communist countries and advocated a parliamentary system (Biberaj 1999). After rejecting the draft constitution that intended to increase presidential powers in 1994, Albanians adopted a new constitution in 1998 by referendum. The new constitution was broadly praised for being in conformity with international democratic standards (European Commission 2003). It guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms, reinforces the separation of powers, opting for a parliamentary system and embraces a mixed electoral law (Freedom House Report 2003: 68). For the time being there is no opposition to the minimal democratic procedures and their institutional counterparts. The problem, however, is that the democratic institutions have often become instruments of political struggle, and forced to take sides with the party in power. At the end of Berisha self-proclaimed democratic leadership, students of democratisation almost agreed that the political changes in Albania had produced "the reincarnation of the totalitarian mind in a new form" (Agh 1998: 186). The following SP governments were similarly attacked for personalising power, using and abusing the democratic institutions and enforcing the gap with the opposition. The political dynamics, by and large show that there is a huge gap between the

ratification of a muddle of democratic codes and their implementation in practice. The question still remains whether the political class will find the will to more than decorative changes (ICG 2003: 1). One can hardly argue that the consequential logic of internalising democratic norms has gone beyond a rhetoric commitment of elites to democratic rules. The EU reports, evaluations and critiques, which determine the progress in the contractual relations between the EU and Albania, have become the epicentre around which achievements and future challenges are debated and decided upon. EU has, thus, become an agent of differentiating, reform and agenda setting (Anastasakis and Bechev 2003: 9). It deserves credit for fostering a momentum for reform by inducing an intense public debate on behaviours that counter democratic practices, corruption, the abuse of public office for personal interest and inefficiency in the public administration, as well as the conflictual political struggle that prevents elites to look into the future. The genuine positive attitude towards Europe of the new generation of the political class has been coupled with a commitment to law enforcement, fight against corruption and the push for stability plagued by internal discord. One of the main differences between them and their older colleagues is they are unencumbered by the hatreds and injustices they think to have suffered in the past, the perceived need to use their new power not for the good of the country, but for their own revenge and proprietorial attitude to state organs.

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