



Shqipëria dhe Kosova – Në kërkim të një të ardhmeje të përbashkët

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO
In quest of a Common Future

Dritan Sulçebe



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Aiis Albanian Institute
for International Studies

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Executive Summary

This Policy Paper was prepared in the context of the joint Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) project: “Albania and Kosovo - In quest of a Common Future”. Its first chapter deals with the historical dimension of the relations between Albania and Kosovo. During their history Kosovo and Albania have been isolated for more than four decades and this has caused deep divisions in economic, political and societal terms, which still persist today. During WWII, both countries experienced a short term unification (1941-1944), which resulted very successful in strengthening their economic ties. However, during the communist regimes in Albania and Yugoslavia, cooperation was limited only to sporadic academic and cultural interaction. After the fall of the Iron curtain, deep isolation continued to mark the relations between the two countries. The situation changed only after the outbreak of the Kosovo War and the establishment of the UNMIK administration in 1999, with the signing of a series of economic and free trade agreements. After the independence of Kosovo in 2008, one can speak for the first time in history of relations between two separate and sovereign Albanian dominated states. As such, these relations are experiencing a new evolving economic and political dimension.

The official political vision expressed by the governments and the mainstream politicians in both Albania and Kosovo is closely linked to the global and regional political and geostrategic developments. Currently, the most relevant political actors in both countries have expressed their willingness to respect

the international recognized borders. Although, according to different polls, a substantial part of the population in Kosovo and Albania is in favor of the unification, this issue is and will likely remain limited to the patriotic rhetoric, since both countries are heavily dependent on international actors, which are strongly against any reshaping of the borders in the region. On the other hand, the integration in the European Union continues to be for both countries the best perspective for the prosperity of their economies and societies. In this respect, both governments have aligned all their domestic and foreign policies according to the EU political framework. The pace of the EU integration process, especially in the case of Kosovo will be decisive for the further consolidation of the democracies of both countries and for the improvement of their mutual relations.

Political and diplomatic cooperation has been at large limited to lobbying activities for the international recognition of Kosovo's independence. Since the declaration of Kosovo's independence, Albania has been very active in this process by invoking this issue in different high level meetings. European integration is another area, where both countries are cooperating. Albania, which has more experience and expertise in this area, especially with regard to the translation and approximation of the *acquis communautaire*, is offering its assistance to the European integration institutions of Kosovo. There are also some steps forward in terms of diplomatic cooperation, whereas both countries have agreed to joint consular services in a number of cases.

Economic relations between the two countries have been strengthened as a result of more than eight economic agreements. The strategic partnership agreement signed on January 2014 emphasis on the need for an "integrated" market. Both governments have expressed their will to strengthen their economic ties.

However, legal barriers and the slow implementation of the signed agreements continue to hamper economic relations. Economic cooperation might be boosted only through common policies that will promote sustainable economic growth in both sides of the border. In this respect, energy is a crucial area for the further enhancement of trade volume and interaction between the economies of Kosovo and Albania. Common projects in energy infrastructure would contribute to the establishment of a common energy market as a promoter to economic cooperation in both sides of the border.

Albania and Kosovo, as official statistics suggest, have become important trade partners. However, the overall trade volume of about 160 million euros (2013) indicates that both countries need to make more efforts to strengthen their commercial ties. Further, free trade has been inhibited due to a series of frictions of technical nature that have seriously challenged the good relations between the two countries. Albanian authorities have been blocking pharmaceutical products and wheat flour from Kosovo since these products didn't comply with the Albanian food and pharmaceutical standards. High customs tariffs were another reason why exports of potatoes from Kosovo were often blocked in the border. On the other hand, due to the same grounds Kosovar authorities imposed their own restrictions to imports from Albania such as: Milk, Cement, etc.

Trade frictions were the subject of many meetings between high authorities from both countries and there is some progress especially in terms of aligning standards concerning food and agricultural products. However, differences in administrative, fiscal and trade legislation continue to cause various obstacles to the mutual trade relations.

Culture is the area where cooperation is still in its initial stages.

The Agreement for Strategic Partnership between Albania and Kosovo, in its fourth pillar determines the main important areas of cultural cooperation and in this regard both countries have agreed to common cultural calendars for 2014 and 2015. Furthermore, cultural institutions in Albania and Kosovo have established long-standing ties with each other contributing thus to the creation of a common cultural dimension. In this respect, private actors have resulted to be far more successful than state institutions. Albanian and Kosovar artists, singers, writers have found their own ways to access a unified cultural market. However, both cultures are still isolated and both governments face the difficult challenge to create a common cultural “Albanosphere”, between Kosovo and Albania.

In the media sector, cooperation has been reached between public media outlets (RTK-Kosovo and RTSH-Albania) and audiovisual media regulators. As in the case of culture, communication between the most relevant media actors, especially with regard to printed media, is insufficient, although cooperation between private TV stations has signed some encouraging steps forward. In general, media platforms are separate and concentrated to the singular markets of Kosovo and Albania. A common action plan and strategy for the establishment of a new Albania-Kosovo media partnership could help to change the situation.

In respect to education, Kosovo and Albania have been mainly focused on common school curricula and the standardization of school textbooks. Especially during the last common joint meeting between the governments of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo, held on 23rd of March 2015, cooperation has been expanded to Higher Education and scientific research, joint teaching of Albanian language in the Diaspora and joint professional training of Teachers. Educational systems in both Albania and Kosovo suffer from similar problems, but until now

few common efforts have been undertaken to address these issues. The constitution of a unified Science Academy would facilitate the establishment of a common educational system and would further enable a common normative evolution of the Albanian language in both sides of the border.

Introduction

The declaration of independence of Kosovo in 2008 marks the beginning of a new era in the geopolitical developments in the Western Balkans region. In this regard, the dynamics of the Kosovo-Albania relationship are instrumental for defining the future orientation and objectives of these two countries in the European and Regional context.

There are many discussions about the relations between the two states. Should they unite or should they continue on separate paths as two different sovereign countries? These are some of the most widespread questions posed in this context. In this paper, for reasons explained further in detail during the study, it is principally assumed that the relations between Kosovo and Albania should be regarded as the relations between two separate independent states, which strive to be united under the EU umbrella. Under this theoretical framework, this paper will analyze the most important aspects that shape the relationship between the two countries, such as: history, politics, economy, culture, media and education. This Policy Paper aims to provide with insights on the most relevant challenges that Albania-Kosovo relations are currently facing, the most recent developments and finally with a set of recommendations for the improvement of the relations in the areas with the greatest impact, by contributing thus to the further enhancement of cooperation between Kosovo and Albania.

Since the independence of Kosovo in 2008, but also in the previous years while Kosovo was still an international protectorate, both countries have expressed their willingness to establish solid and bilateral relations in many areas. However, so far these relations

have been to a large extent disappointing, since they have failed to reach new economic and social standards that would generate wealth and more intensive cultural ties. The past, marked by a long isolation and lack of communication between the two societies is still casting its shadow on the new emerging relations between Albania and Kosovo, making them somehow difficult. Despite the support of the public in Albania and Kosovo for stronger relations, societies, markets, economies and political elites of both countries have developed into different directions. Nevertheless, there are a lot of common issues that cooperation between both countries should address. Albania and Kosovo are both experiencing a deep social and economic crisis affecting all strata of their societies. Massive migration, corruption, deindustrialization, fragile state structures, devastated or underdeveloped infrastructure and long standing environmental issues are all problems that both countries are coping with¹. Hereof, cooperation is not just a matter related to EU policies in terms of cross-border cooperation, but a vital interest with huge benefits for both Kosovo and Albania.

Officially Kosovo and Albania aim to become members of the European family. The most influential political parties in both countries have put aside the aspiration of unification for the sake of a prosperous European future. On the political level cooperation and stronger economic ties are advocated by all political forces. Albanian foreign policy has been very active in promoting the international recognition of Kosovo's independence and the accession of the young state into the major international organizations.

Economics is the area which mostly reveals the difficulties that the relations between the two countries are encountering. Kosovo and Albania are the poorest countries in the Western Balkans region.

1. Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Die Albaner: Eine Geschichte zwischen Orient und Okzident", Verlag C.H Beck. pg. 162

Albania has a GDP per capita of 4,659.3 USD, while the GDP of Kosovo is estimated at 3,877.2 USD². The economies of both countries are import oriented and dominated by the tertiary sector. As Dr. Albert Rakipi points out in his article, "The Centrality of Economics": *During the past century, the markets and the economies of the two countries have operated in isolation, separately from each other. The trade links of the beginning of the twentieth century, as affected by long Ottoman rule, were disrupted for decades. Kosovo became part of the wider Yugoslav market and Albania progressively closed in on itself. The precarious years of the nineties, as communist regimes fell, and as Yugoslavia reluctantly disintegrated, were certainly not good years for legal business. Second, for many decades, both economies have been mainly agrarian, and very often so at a subsistence level. Similarly to all other countries in the Balkans, in fact, the degree of industrialization in both Albania and Kosovo remains low to date, hampering integration in the lucrative sectors of the world today. Third, the markets and economies of Balkan countries are generally steered towards EU member states, starting with the frontline ones such as Italy and Greece. Market exchange among non-EU Balkan countries is still far from meeting its potential as they remain poorly functional.*³

The social and cultural realm plays also an important role in the relations between the two countries. Societies of Kosovo and Albania share different characteristics in terms of the role of religion and family play in society, while at the same time both societies reflect common traits with respect to law enforcement, community organization, etc. The connection between both societies continues to remain scarce, although the improvement of road infrastructure through some major infrastructure projects such as the Durres-

2. World Bank Data: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

3. Dr. Albert Rakipi, "Albania- Kosova, The Centrality of Economics", Tirana Times, 2010.

Kukes highway, have brought some positive changes in this regard. There is little cooperation between think tanks or organizations of civil society and in most cases cooperation is regional rather than bilateral.

This study will address the main questions on the main dynamics of the political, economic and cultural dimension of the mutual relations between the two countries, namely: How did the Albania-Kosovo relations evolve in the past? What is the political vision in both countries on the future of their relations? What are the most relevant economic prospects? What are the most relevant frictions in trade relations and how can they be solved? Are culture and media bringing both countries together? What is the state of cooperation in terms of education?

The research methods applied in this policy paper consist of the following components: round tables, conferences, media monitoring, desk research and literature review.

1. Historical Background

The London conference of 1912-13, established Albania's current borders by leaving out vast areas inhabited by Albanians, including present day Kosovo. This had dire social and economic consequences for the young Albanian state, since it lost more than half of the Albanian population and the most prosperous regions to its northern and southern neighbors. The issue of the loss of Kosovo and other Albanian inhabited areas had a considerable impact to the Albanian domestic and foreign policies until 1925⁴, with the ascension to power of Ahmet Zogu, first president (1925-1928) and later (1928-1939) king of Albania. During Zog's rule, Kosovo ceased to play a considerable role in the Albanian foreign policy for the sake of the consolidation of Albania's sovereignty and its relations with Yugoslavia.⁵

During WWII, Albania and Kosovo experienced a brief period of unification (1941-1944). Although the union was a product of the geopolitical dynamics of the Axis powers in Europe, it is still to be regarded by many as the only time, when both countries were unified under a centralized Albanian state. During 1941-43 the Albanian puppet government, opened 173⁶ primary and secondary schools in present day Kosovo with the aim of increasing the level of literacy and national consciousness among the local Albanian population. In terms of economic benefits, during 1942 twenty thousand tons of grain and thirty thousand tons of corn were shipped to Albania⁷

4. Elez Biberaj, "Çështja Kombëtare Shqiptare", AHS 2014, pg.17.

5. Idem, pg.18

6. Bernd J. Fischer, "Albania at War: 1939-1945", Hurst&Co, London, 1999, pg. 87

7. Idem

from Kosovo, providing thus a substantial surplus of agricultural products and in the same time improving the economic perspectives of both countries.

After the Second World War, communist Albania first (1945-1948) maintained brotherly relations with Titoist Yugoslavia and in this context the relations with Kosovo were regarded as part of the larger cooperation in all areas between Albania and Yugoslavia.

Albania was in this period driven so near to Yugoslavia that unification between both countries seemed as unavoidable. However, during the Tito-Stalin split, Albania's communist leader Enver Hoxha took sides with the Soviets, causing a strain to the relations with Yugoslavia, which lasted until the dissolution of the one party state in Albania in 1990.

In this regard, Kosovo remained to a large extent part of Hoxha's nationalist rhetoric throughout his rule in Albania.⁸ Nevertheless, during 1971 with the improvement of the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, direct contacts between Kosovo and Albania were established. The University of Pristina signed several agreements with University of Tirana with the aim of establishing ties that would enable pedagogical staff exchange, exchange of textbooks, cooperation in relation to common projects in archeology etc.⁹ The contacts between Albania and Kosovo during this period contributed furthermore to the strengthening of the national consciousness among the Albanians of Kosovo, which resulted to be an important factor for the outbreak of the Kosovo student protests of 1981 that demanded more autonomy of the province within the Yugoslav Federation.

8. Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Die Albaner: Eine Geschichte zwischen Orient und Okzident", Verlag C.H Beck, pg. 162

9. Elez Biberaj, "Çështja Kombëtare Shqiptare", AIIS 2014, pg. 31.

After the establishment of political pluralism in 1991, Albania was the only country to recognize the "Republic of Kosovo" (in 1992), while playing in the same time an active role in the international promotion of the Kosovo issue. The Democratic Party led governments in Albania during 1992-1997, while supporting Kosovo's aspiration for self-determination, tried in the same time to contribute to the stability of the region by not advocating violence and border changes. A similar policy was also pursued by the Socialist led governments (1997-2005), although Prime Minister Fatos Nano further endorsed the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia by declaring in 1998 that Kosovo was an internal affair of Yugoslavia.¹⁰

However, with the escalation of Kosovo's war during 1998-1999, Albania's foreign policy began to shift in favor of the KLA and its struggle for independence.¹¹ During 1998 and throughout NATO's military campaign in Yugoslavia (March-June 1999), Albania allowed in its territory, undisturbed activity of KLA and put into disposal of NATO its entire military and civil infrastructure. It is important to highlight that during the Kosovo War out of 848,100 refugees¹² who left the country, 444,600 went to Albania staying there until the NATO military intervention ended in June 1999. Albania carried the major burden of the Kosovo refugee crisis and in the same time it gave an important contribution to the freedom of Kosovo. The war of Kosovo also marked the beginning of a new era, where both countries were drawn nearer to each other, after almost half a century of complete isolation. After the war, the relations between both countries signaled important achievements in every area. However, only after Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the relations between both countries experienced a new dimension by evolving into interstate relations. As two independent

10. Elez Biberaj, "Çështja Kombëtare Shqiptare", AIIS-2014, pg. 68

11. Idem, pg. 91

12. Tim Judah, "Kosovo: War and Revenge", Yale Nota Bene-2002, pg.250

sovereign states, Kosovo and Albania now have the opportunity to further advance their cooperation into many areas, by bringing economic and cultural benefits to the people of both countries.

1.1 Political Vision and EU integration Process

After Kosovo's proclamation of independence in 2008, we can speak for the first time in history, about two separate independent Albanian states in the region. Taking into account this new reality there are a set of questions that should be answered. Are two Albanian separate states a feasible solution that will last in time? Does this new reality reflect the political will of the Albanians living in both sides of the border? And last but not least: What is the dominant political vision in Kosovo and Albania on the relations between both countries?

Beginning with the last question, Albania and Kosovo, as two of the poorest countries in Europe, with major problems concerning rule of law, are both heavily dependent from foreign aid both in economic and political terms. In the case of Kosovo, the U.S intervention in the war of Kosovo and later on, in the declaration of independence in 2008, was instrumental for the survival of the country and for the international recognition of independence. The same thing applies for the Western European powers, which through their economic and political support have played a crucial role in the consolidation of Kosovo's state structures and the country's political stability.

Foreign economic and political support was also a determining factor in Albania's long way towards consolidation of democracy and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Albania became a full NATO member in April 2009 and in June 2014 it was granted EU candidate status. These important achievements could have never been realized without the assistance of international actors such as: US, NATO or EU.

Both countries owe much of their current political and economic developments to foreign international actors and as such foreign policy will eventually be influenced by these in the future. In this regard, EU plays a fundamental role as both countries are pursuing full EU integration. During 2007-2012, Kosovo received financial aid under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) in the amount of 565,1 million of Euros¹³. On the other hand Albania has benefited from IPA assistance (2007-2013) around 515 million Euros.¹⁴

Furthermore, the EU accession process requires both countries to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, which determine three main components: political (stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, economic (existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union) and the acceptance of the Community *acquis* (ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union)¹⁵.

In this context, there is small room for both countries to maneuver outside the general political and economic EU framework, since the foreign and domestic policies of Kosovo and Albania are closely related to those of the European Union.

So far, the EU has pursued a regional agenda, whereas all countries of the region are set to cross border cooperation and naturally to

13. EU Office in Kosovo, Technical and Financial cooperation http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/kosovo/eu_kosovo/tech_financial_cooperation/index_en.htm

14. Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The EU Financial Assistance to Albania, http://arkiva.mfa.gov.al/index.php?option=com_multicategories&view=article&id=5597:ndihma-finaciare-e-be-se-per-shqiperine&Itemid=65&lang=en.

15. Official Website of the European Union, Summaries of EU legislation, Accession Criteria http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm

the recognition of each other's borders. In the case of Kosovo, EU has pushed the country to series of talks regarding issues of common interest with Belgrade, which have resulted to the Brussels Agreement of 2013 between Kosovo and Serbia. Although Serbia still does not formally recognize the independence of Kosovo, it is committed by the Brussels agreement to acknowledge the administrative authority of Pristina inside Kosovo's internationally recognized borders.

Through the Brussels Agreement of 2013 the EU has managed to end any gateway that might lead to the redrawing of borders in the Western Balkans.

In this regard, the major political parties of Albania and Kosovo and their political leaders, fully aware of their countries' political and economic potential, are committed to the perseverance of the current borders and to the full implementation of all EU recommendations concerning foreign policy. Hence, the governments and most relevant political forces in both sides of the border have adopted political stances like: "Unification under the EU umbrella", "One nation and two states", "Union between Albania and Kosovo will happen in a European way"¹⁶ etc.

The question on the political will of the Albanians in Kosovo and Albania concerning the unification issue is closely related to the political and economic developments in both countries.

Various polls conducted in Albania and Kosovo show that a considerable part of the population in both countries is on favor to the unification. According to the findings of the Gallup Balkan Monitor survey of 2010, 63% of the people in Albania and 81% of

16. Newspaper: Gazeta Tema, Bujar Nishani: Bashkimi Shqiperi Kosove do te ndodhe, 13th of January 2015, <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2015/01/13/bujar-nishani-bashkimi-shqiperi-kosove-do-te-ndodhe/>

the people in Kosovo supported the idea of a greater Albania.¹⁷

On the other hand, the findings of the survey conducted by the Albanian Institute of International Studies in 2013, suggest that 49 % of the Albanians in Albania consider that the unification with Kosovo is a positive thing (29% Neither positive, nor negative, 12% Don't Know, 10% negative)¹⁸. This survey further indicates that 63% of the Albanian citizens believe that the Albanian government should pay more attention to strengthening of cooperation with Kosovo.¹⁹

In relation to the above, we can conclude that the unification issue continues to have a considerable impact in both countries, although in a larger scale in Kosovo than in Albania. At the political level, the unification issue is in the case of Kosovo articulated by the "Vetevendosje" (Self-Determination) political movement, which in the last Kosovo national parliamentary elections of 2014, got 13,59 %²⁰ of the votes. On the other hand the political movement in Albania which openly advocates for the unification between Albania and Kosovo, namely Aleanca Kuq e Zi (the Red and Black Alliance), got only 0.61 %²¹ of the votes in the Albanian parliamentary elections of 2013. As we can see, at political level the supporters of the unification issue are still a minority in both countries. However, as various surveys indicate, this matter has a lot of potential to be

17. Gallup Balkan Survey, conducted in June-July 2010. http://www.esiweb.org/enlargement/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/2010_Summary_of_Findings.pdf

18. The state of Albanian Democracy at the eve of 2013 General Elections, AIIS, Tirana 2013, pg.41

19. Idem, pg.40

20. Republic of Kosovo, Central Election Commission: Zgjedhjet per Kuvendin e Kosoves 2014: http://www.kqz-ks.org/Uploads/Documents/Rezu%20-%20Nivel%20Vendi%20-%20sipas%20subjekteve_peufawqvmc.pdf

21. Republic of Albania , Central Election Commission: Rezultatet: http://www2.cec.org.al/Portals/0/Documents/CEC%202013/zgjedhje-per-kuvend/2013/zgjedhje_2013_web/lidhja1.pdf

further politically exploited in the future. In this respect, the political and economic dynamics of the EU integration in both countries will play a crucial role. If Albania and Kosovo will fail to address the EU accession criteria by further delaying the integration process, then nationalism will gain ground and the Kosovo-Albania Union supporters will increase in numbers. In this context, the first question (Are two Albanian separate states a feasible solution that will last in time?) raised at the beginning of this chapter should be addressed.

Since its proclamation of independence in 2008, Kosovo underwent a series of EU sponsored talks with Serbia, with the aim of establishing peaceful and normal relations with its northern neighbor. The talks continue to this day and in many cases they have been painful for the Kosovar side, since the country was forced to accept a series of concessions that could potentially undermine many aspects of Kosovo's sovereignty. For instance, according to the March 2012 Kosovo-Serbia agreement dealing with Kosovo's designation at all international documents and meetings, the country will be referred as Kosovo*, with the asterisk indicating that: "This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence."²² Thus, from 2012 onwards in the global international environment, Kosovo has renounced from its constitutional designation of "Republic of Kosovo". It is true that this agreement has facilitated the representation of Kosovo in various regional and international bodies and it has furthermore paved the way to the country's EU integration process. However the asterisk and the footnote are strong reminders that Kosovo's independence is fragile and not an irreversible process. Furthermore, the Brussels agreement of 2013, which determines the recognition of the Association of Serb majority municipalities

22. European Union Delegation to the United Nations, EU facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia: Agreement on Regional Cooperation and IBM technical protocol, http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_11884_en.htm

in Kosovo and de facto establishes regional autonomy for Serb-dominated areas in Northern Kosovo. Although this was an important step towards the normalization of Kosovo's relations to Serbia, it was in the same time a setback for Kosovo's efforts to stretch its sovereignty all over its territory.

Moreover, Kosovo's independence is still not recognized by five EU members (Spain, Slovakia, Greece, Cyprus and Romania) and this constitutes a major obstacle for the upcoming steps of the country's EU integration process, namely the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the Visa Liberalization Agreement with EU. The failure of European Union's foreign policy to address Kosovo through a single voice will likely hamper the whole integration efforts of the country, thus threatening its European aspirations. In relation to the above, Kosovo's future looks rather uncertain and the recent exodus, which is driving tens of thousand of Kosovars away from their homes to find a better future in Western Europe, shows the lack of hope the citizens of Kosovo have for the future of their own country.

The uncertainty of Kosovo's future will raise many questions on whether the proclamation of the independence and its recognition by the international community was the right thing to do, or if Kosovo's international status will be subject to further new discussions with Serbia and other international actors. In this regard, the issue of Kosovo's partition or its unification with Albania as part of the solution to the Albanian Question will be inevitably put on the table.

On the other hand a successful and fast European integration process for Albania and Kosovo, followed by economic prosperity and high democratic standards in both countries, would generate the adequate conditions for the sustainability of two different Albanian states in an EU integrated Western Balkans region.

2. Political and diplomatic cooperation

Since Kosovo's proclamation of independence in 2008, Albanian diplomacy has been very active in securing international recognitions for the young state. Albanian key diplomats and high ranking officials during their official visits in different parts of the world have in many cases lobbied for Kosovo's international recognition.^{23 24} In a meeting of November 2012 between Kosovo's foreign minister Enver Hoxhaj and his Albanian counterpart Edmond Panariti, the latter expressed the firm commitment of the Albanian government to "Albania's strong lobbying for the international recognition of Kosovo".²⁵

Lobbying activities have been carried out by Albanian officials in different international meetings, such as in the case of the adoption by the Organization of Islamic Conference in 2009 (40th Summit of the Council of Foreign Minister of OIC) of the resolution proposed by Albania in December 2013, whereas OIC member countries were urged to recognize the independence of Kosovo.²⁶

One of the core priorities of the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

23. See- Berisha asking the president of Mozambique Armando Guebuza for Kosovo's recognition, Telegrafi.com, "Berisha, lobim per njohjen e Kosoves: <http://www.telegrafi.com/lajme/berisha-lobim-per-njohjen-e-kosoves-78-5759.html>

24. See-Rama in Romania seeks the recognition of Kosovo- Gazeta Tema, <http://www.gazetatema.net/web/2015/02/27/rame-ne-rumani-kerkon-njohjen-e-kosoves/>

25. Kosova Online, "Shqipëria lobim të fuqishëm për njohjen e Kosovës", <http://kosovaonline.info/?page=1,3,20505>

26. Kosova Press, "OIC adopts resolution on Kosovo", <http://www.kosovapress.com/en/politics/oic-adopts-resolution-on-kosovo-7307/>

is the strategic cooperation with Kosovo, upon which: "*The strategic cooperation with Kosovo will be in function of the economic growth, quality of life and the acceleration of the Euro-Atlantic integration process. The presence of two states, Albania and Kosovo, constitutes a large governing and administrative capacity for the creation of a common Euro-Atlantic future. We will continue to undertake steps, which will assist the process of further recognitions of Kosovo in the international arena.*"²⁷

Further, both countries have signed an agreement (Signed in Pristina on 13th of January 2012) to merge consular services in some of their representations abroad. So far this agreement has been implemented through the establishment of a joint Albanian-Kosovar consulate in Milan, Italy on September 2014. Eventually, another joint consulate will be opened in the near future in Canberra, Australia.²⁸

With respect to EU integration, Albania has expressed its commitment to assist Kosovo with its relevant expertise. Most recently the Ministry of European Integration of Albania has shared the translated *Acquis communautaire* with its counterpart from Kosovo and is further cooperating with the latter in the framework of the Technical Commission of the translation and approximation of the EU acquis.²⁹

Furthermore, Albania's Kosovo policy outside the patriotic rhetoric has been at large in line with the EU initiatives and the U.S & Western European States policy towards Kosovo. So, Albania has been a

27. Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Misioni, Prioritetet, <http://www.punetijashtme.gov.al/al/misioni/perparesite/prioritetet>

28. Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Albania and Kosovo inaugurate first joint consulate in Milan", <http://www.punetijashtme.gov.al/en/press-office/news/albania-and-kosovo-inaugurate-first-joint-consulate-in-milan>

29. Newspaper: Gazeta Shqip, Ministrja e Integritimit Evropian, Klajda Gjoshja vizitë zyrtare në Kosovë, <http://gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/2014/03/25/ministrja-e-integritimit-evropian-klajda-gjoshja-vizite-zyrtare-ne-kosove/>

supporter to Pristina-Belgrade Talks and to the Brussels Agreement, which was considered by the Albanian Ministry of foreign Affairs as: *“The historical Agreement of April 19th is expected to normalize relations between Kosovo and Serbia, starting a new era between them, with an impact on the entire region. We expect this agreement to give a new impetus to new recognitions of Kosovo and its membership into regional fora, the EU and the UN.”*³⁰

During his recent visit to Belgrade (November 2014), Albania’s Prime Minister Edi Rama stated that: “Independent Kosovo is an undeniable regional and European reality, and as such it must be respected”³¹, thus expressing the continuous commitment of the Albanian government to promote Kosovo’s independence even in front of its staunchest contesters such as the case of Serbia.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement between Albania and Kosovo signed on 11th of January in Prizren, Kosovo, marks an important milestone in the relations between both countries. In the chapter on Foreign Policy and Security of the agreement both governments express their joint will to cooperation for deepening their relation with the U.S and E.U members. Furthermore, Albania is committed to continue its support with respect to Kosovo’s international recognition and its adherence to EU, Council of Europe and NATO.³² As the head of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs of Kosovo, Enver Hoxhaj points out³³: “The Strategic Partnership Agreement puts the relationship between the two countries into a

30. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Albania in the Region: <http://www.punetejashtme.gov.al/en/mission/albania-in-the-region>

31. BBC News, Serbia-Albania row over Kosovo mars historic Rama visit: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29985048>

32. Newspaper: Shqiptarja.com, Deklarata per Bashkepunimin strategjik Shqiperi-Kosove: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/199103574/Deklarata-per-bashkepunim-dhe-partneritet-strategjik-Shqiperi-Kosove>

33. Conference: “Albania and Kosovo in the quest of a common future”, AIIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana 28.04.2015.

new legal and institutional framework, since it constitutes is the most sustainable scenario in the development of the relations between the two countries in the future.”

However, from time to time strategic partnership has been used as a propaganda tool to gather support among nationalists in both countries. For instance, the second joint Council of Ministers’ meeting in Tirana (22nd of March 2015) brought little substance to the enhancement and implementation of the existing agreements and it was largely used mainly by the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama to promote his own vision of the Albanian “European Nationalism”, expressed boldly through the motto of the meeting: “One land, one nation, one Dream”³⁴ and by the Albanian and EU flags decorating the roundtable where both governments were gathered.

34. Newspaper: Gazeta Panorama, “Mbledhja e dy qeverive, Rama: Te hiqen vizat per Kosoven, turp per Europen”, <http://www.panorama.com.al/mbledhja-e-perbashket-e-qeverive-shqiperi-kosove-neser-ne-1100-ne-pallatin-e-kongreseve-ja-axhenda/>

3. Economic relations

In relation to economy, both countries have signed a series of economic agreements with the aim of further consolidating their economic bonds, by creating the necessary requirements for the creation of a future common market. In the regional context, Kosovo has signed 30 economic agreements and memoranda of understanding with the Western Balkans Countries. In this regard Albania has the larger share (8) of agreements³⁵. Here are some of the most relevant economic cooperation agreements signed by both countries:

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Albanian Office of Investments and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), signed in Tirana on 09.09.2002.
- Free Trade agreement between Albania and UNMIK, 07.07.2003.
- Agreement between Albania and UNMIK for the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments, signed on 19.02.2004, entered into force on 7 February 2005.
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and UNMIK for the avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and the prevention of fiscal evasion signed on 28.09.2004 and entered into force on 31.3.2005.

35. KIPRED, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, “Kosova ne Kontekst Rajonal: Marredheniet Ekonomike dhe Tregtare”, Pg.9.

- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo for mutual assistance in customs matters, signed on 10.06.2009, entered into force on 01.03.2010
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo on International Road Transport of Passengers and Goods, signed on 22.07.2011, entered into force on 21.11.2011.³⁶
- Agreement for Strategic Partnership between Albania and Kosovo, signed on 11.01. 2014.
- The Framework Agreement between Albania and Kosovo on Cooperation in Trade Promotion and Facilitation signed on 11.01.2014.

The third pillar of the Strategic Partnership agreement between Albania and Kosovo determines: *“The will of both countries to create favorable business conditions for an integrated market, which will enable the development of complementary economies through a long term strategy. Both sides are committed to work intensively with the relevant stakeholders for enabling TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) in Kosovo and the development of a domestic and regional liquid gas market. Parties are committed to the construction of a cross-border high voltage transmission network. Both governments will be engaged in close cooperation on transport, tourism and the development of a joint agreement for water management”*³⁷

36. Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Bilateral Agreements: http://www.punetjashtme.gov.al/files/userfiles/Marrevshjet_Dypaleshe_me_te_gjitha_vendet.pdf

37. Newspaper: Shqiptarja.com, Deklarata per Bashkepunimin strategjik Shqiperi-Kosove: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/199103574/Deklarata-per-bashkepunim-dhe-partneritet-strategjik-Shqiperi-Kosove>

On the other hand, the Framework Agreement between Albania and Kosovo on Cooperation in Trade Promotion and Facilitation goes into more detail by defining many areas that might contribute to the facilitation and promotion of free trade between both countries such as:

- The gradual approximation of legislation and standards in the areas of food safety.
- Approximation of legislation on import protective measures and to anti dumping
- Approximation of Legislation in intellectual property
- Acceleration of the measures undertaken by accreditation bodies of the two countries on the signing of the Multilateral Agreement with the European Accreditation Organization initially in Testing Laboratories and in all other areas;
- Information exchange between customs offices
- Approximation and simplification of transit procedures

Further, article 6 of the agreement stipulates that both parties will establish joint working groups on the gradual elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade in different areas such as:

- Technical barriers in trade
- Sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary measures
- Administrative barriers, especially those concerning customs offices.³⁸

38. <http://www.ligjet.org/>, “Për miratimin e marrëveshjes kuadër, ndërmjet Këshillit të Ministrave të Republikës së Shqipërisë dhe qeverisë së Republikës së Kosovës, për bashkëpunimin në nxitjen dhe lehtësimin e tregtisë”.

Although the abovementioned agreements haven't managed to put an end to all trade frictions between the two countries, still they constitute an important milestone for the further consolidation of commercial ties along both sides of the border. Needless to say that these economic agreements should be fully implemented, in order to eliminate all trade barriers, and in this regard both countries have a lot of work ahead. Bilateral agreements sign a major step forward in the relations between the two countries. However, economic and trade relations risk stumbling into the legal barriers as provided by the legislations of both countries. Hereof, Albania and Kosovo should take further steps into the approximation and harmonization of their commercial, labor and banking legislation.

In February 2015 the “Joint Transit Corridor Albania-Kosovo” was inaugurated by the Prime Ministers of both countries. This project aims to shorten the procedures concerning the transit of goods from one country to another from several days to only five minutes. From now on, all customs procedures for the transit goods which will circulate between both countries will be performed only by the relevant office of the country of destination.³⁹ This is an important step for the implementation of all signed economic agreements and a clear sign that there is a strong will by both governments to further enhance economic cooperation between Kosovo and Albania.

Nevertheless, agreements that will enhance the volume of trade should be regarded as only one part of a long term strategy, which will have the aim to establish a common economic zone between Kosovo and Albania, fully compatible with EU standards and regional economic policies. In this context, the strategic partnership should be extended to a series of political, legal social

39. Republic of Albania- Ministry of Finances, Dogana, “Korridor i Përbashkët Shqipëri-Kosovë”: <http://www.dogana.gov.al/sq/node/94>

and cultural dimensions, such as: Migration and Labor Market, Water, Energy and Environment, Harmonization of Legislation, Security of Borders, Investment Climate and Financial Sector, Public Administration, Education, Culture and Language.⁴⁰

The objective for the creation of a unique economic area between Kosovo and Albania should be regarded as a priority in terms of the economic orientation of both countries. Economies from Albania and Kosovo would benefit from the joint exploitation of the most important economic assets lying in both sides of the border. In this regard, agriculture, fishery, minerals could play a crucial role.

For achieving a sustainable economic growth, which would lead to the creation of new employment opportunities, the economies of Kosovo and Albania should become more manufacture-based. In the last 25 years both countries have experienced a devastation of their most important economic assets and in this regard heavy industry suffered the most important damages. Both states should promote manufacturing industries⁴¹ through common policies that would revitalize production, by jointly exploiting their most significant natural resources.

In this context, the establishment of a common energy policy and market is instrumental. Currently the Energy System of Albania is mainly based on energy generated by Albania's Hydro-Plants in the North of the country, while in the case of Kosovo electric energy is produced by coal-fired power plants. In both countries the electricity sector relies exclusively on the exploit of natural recourses. Hydropower resources in Albania and lignite coal

40. Dr. Selami Xhepa, "From "shallow" to "deep": Towards a unique economic area Kosovo- Albania.", pg.2.

41. INDEP Institute Kosovo, "Marredheniet Tregtare Kosove-Shqiperi: Ku jemi dhe si do vazhdojme me tutje", INDPEP Pristina, 2015, pg.33.

reserves⁴² in Kosovo. In Albania, production of electricity is closely dependent on the amount of precipitations falling each year in the Drin River Cascade and in dire seasons shortages in electricity supply have been very common in the past. In this regard, electrical energy sectors of Albania and Kosovo could become complementary to each other. Kosovo power plants might supply Albania during summer and the other way around with Albanian Hydro Power Plants supplying Kosovo's power grid during Autumn and Winter.

Both countries have expressed their commitment to cooperate in the energy sector through a series of meetings, declarations and agreements, but until now few concrete steps have been taken. The construction of the interconnection high-voltage (400kv) electricity line between Albania and Kosovo (also called as the "electrical Highway"), a vital project for the energy sector cooperation between the two countries, which was financed by a loan of the German development Bank KfW, was delayed for several years until construction works started during 2014⁴³. Further, there have been many discussions related to the joint Albania-Kosovo investment on the new Thermal Power Plant "Kosova e Re", which is planed to be built in the years to come. However, high pollution levels and high investment costs make this project very difficult to be accomplished in the future.

42. Institute "GAP" Kosovo, Bashkimi ben Energjine: Analize e tregut te perbashket energjistik: http://www.institutigap.org/documents/27075_Energjia.pdf, pg.12

43. Reporter.al, Autostrata e vonuar energjetike Shqipëri-Kosovë shton shpejtësinë: <http://www.reporter.al/autostrata-e-vonuar-energjetike-shqiperi-kosove-shton-shpejtesine/>

3.1 Trade Cooperation & Frictions

Commercial relations between the two countries are a key factor in the intensification of the relations between Albania and Kosovo. Both countries are signatories of CEFTA (Central European Free Trade Agreement), which aims to facilitate and expand trade and economic cooperation between its member states, namely: Albania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Moldova. One of the requirements to join the agreement is that every signatory should have Free Trade Agreements with all CEFTA member states and so far Albania and Kosovo have built their trade relations under the auspices of a regional free trade market.

Due to historical and geographical reasons, Albania and Kosovo have pursued different commercial orientations. Kosovo for instance has closer commercial ties with former Yugoslav and Central European Countries. On the other hand, Albania, due to its geographical context, has intensive commercial bonds with Greece and Italy.

In 2014 Albania's exports to Kosovo reached the amount of 18,774,000,000 ALL or 134,100,000 Euros, making Kosovo the leading export partner in the region. Imports from Kosovo during 2014 have resulted to 5,976,000,000 ALL or 42,685,714 Euros, 1% of the total Albanian Imports.⁴⁴ Kosovo is the second (ranked after Italy,) export partner of Albania, sharing 7,3 % of the Albanian exports.⁴⁵

On the other hand, exports from Kosovo to Albania reached 43,7

44. Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/tregtia-e-jashtme.aspx>

45. Idem

million Euros during 2013 making Albania the most important export partner in the region⁴⁶, with 14,9 % of the share of Kosovo's total exports. However with regard to imports, Albania lags far behind Serbia, which remains Kosovo's most important regional import partner with imports reaching the value of a 285 million Euros in 2013 in stark contrast to Albania with imports worth approximately 110 million of Euros during the same year⁴⁷.

In light to the above, we can see that Albania and Kosovo have established strong commercial ties, thus becoming relevant export partners in the context of regional trade relations. However, their economies remain deeply import oriented with entirely different important partners. Albania's leading import partner is Italy (164 million Euros as per 2014) followed by Greece (52 million Euros as per 2014)⁴⁸, whilst in the case of Kosovo it is Serbia (285 million euros in 2011)⁴⁹ and Germany (253 million Euros in 2013).

Albania's most important exports to Kosovo are: Minerals, Fuels (mostly crude oil), electricity and above all construction materials and metals.⁵⁰ On the other hand Kosovo's most relevant exports to Albania are: Raw Minerals, Agricultural and food products such as wheat flour, potatoes and beverages.⁵¹

46. Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Foreign Commerce, <https://ask.rks-gov.net/tregtia-e-jashtme/tabelat>

47. Open.data.al, Eksportet dhe Importet sipas shteteve 2005-2013 <http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/sq/id/1142/Deficiti-Tregtar-Republika-e-Kosoves-dhe-Shqiperia-Eksportet-dhe-Importet-sipas-shteteve-2005-2013>

48. Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/tregtia-e-jashtme.aspx>

49. Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Foreign Commerce, <https://ask.rks-gov.net/tregtia-e-jashtme/tabelat>

50. Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), foreign trade, <http://www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/tregtia-e-jashtme.aspx>

51. Opendata.al, Niveli i Importit dhe Eksportit të Vendeve të Evropës Juglindore -

Trade volume between the two countries reached approximately 160 million euros in 2013, which is very low if we compare it with the trade volume between Kosovo and Serbia that amounted to around 300 million euros⁵² during the same year. This clearly implies that both economies are underdeveloped with low manufacturing capabilities and highly dependent on imports from other countries. Trade between Albania and Kosovo has still not met its full potential and there are many issues that both countries should resolve in order to further enhance trade cooperation. Furthermore, it is estimated that trade volume between the two countries might reach the amount of 500 million Euros⁵³.

Trade relations have been hampered by a series of problems that continue to undermine the economic relations between both countries. The most important factor which has largely contributed to several trade frictions are the non-tariff trade barriers⁵⁴, such as: different regulatory standards for certain products, lengthy customs procedures, different legal standards or different trade documents like certificate of origin, certificate of authenticity and also different standards on food safety. As provided by the Agreement on Cooperation in Trade Promotion and Facilitation, both countries should establish joint working

<http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/en/id/276/Niveli-i-Importit-dhe-Eksportit-te-Vendeve-te-Evropes-Juglindore>

52. Open.data.al, Eksportet dhe Importet sipas shteteve, 2005-2013, <http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/sq/id/1142/Deficiti-Tregtar-Republika-e-Kosoves-dhe-Shqiperia-Eksportet-dhe-Importet-sipas-shteteve-2005-2013>

<http://open.data.al/sq/lajme/lajm/lang/sq/id/1142/Deficiti-Tregtar-Republika-e-Kosoves-dhe-Shqiperia-Eksportet-dhe-Importet-sipas-shteteve-2005-2013>

53. Arben Ahmetaj, Minister of Economic Development, Tourism, Commerce and Entrepreneurship of Albania, Conference: “Albania and Kosovo in the quest of a common future”, AIIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana 28.04.2015.

54. Dr. Selami Xhepa, Roundtable: Challenges and the potential of economic relations between Kosovo and Albania, AIIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana, 29.10.2014

groups on the gradual elimination of non-tariff barriers. Until now these process have been slow and not fully efficient.

Here is a short summary of the most relevant trade frictions between Kosovo and Albania during the last years:

- The export of potatoes from Kosovo to Albania was in many cases during 2009-2012 hampered by the high customs duties levied for this product by the Albanian authorities.⁵⁵ The Potato Growers Association of Kosovo has accused the Albanian authorities for not respecting CEFTA and Free Trade Agreement between the two countries, by imposing very high custom tariffs.

- During 2012, Kosovar authorities imposed high taxes for Albanian Cement Exports (35% of the value) to Kosovo, in order to protect their own cement industry. It is believed that this was a response to Albania’s previous measures with regard to Kosovar potato exports.⁵⁶ There are also speculations on the interference of local cement producers to the Ministry of Trade and Economy of Kosovo. The Albanian authorities were forced to protest to their counterparts from Kosovo and the tax was subsequently lifted.

- It is reported that from 2010 onwards pharmaceutical products from a Kosovar pharmaceutical companies (“Trepharm”) have been blocked by Albanian authorities in the border between the two countries, for the reason that the products from Kosovo didn’t comply with the Albanian pharmaceutical standards. The Kosovo Chamber of Commerce pretended that the Albanian authorities didn’t act in accordance with CEFTA free trade requirements

55. Kosova Sot, Shqiperia bllokoi patatet Kosovare: <http://www.kosova-sot.info/ekonomi/shqiperia-bllokoi-patatet-kosovare>

56. KohaNet, Kosova bllokoi cimenton e Shqiperise: <http://koha.net/?id=8&arkiva=1&l=103130>

and there were no objective reasons for the ban on Kosovar pharmaceutical products, since the “Trepharm” products fully complied with the relevant EU standards. In August 2014, the Albanian and Kosovar ministers of health reached an agreement to solve the issue.⁵⁷ However, the pharmaceutical products from Kosovo continued to be blocked and the issue has continued to generate heated debates by all sides involved to this day.⁵⁸

- In February 2013 the Agency of Food and Veterinary of Kosovo recalled for safety reasons a considerable amount of milk imported from Albania. The milk was said to contain high amounts of Aflatoxins, toxic substances that in high amounts might seriously endanger human health.⁵⁹

- In March of 2013 (as a countermeasure to the above) the Albanian National Food Authority (AKU) seized at the Kosovo border more than 74 tons of wheat flour, due to the fact that the flour shipment was not accompanied with the due certificate indicating Aflatoxins levels. Flour from Kosovo was seized for a second time in October 2014 in the border between the two countries, because this time it didn't have the required amount of proteins (12,5%)⁶⁰, as determined by an order of the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration.

57. Newspaper: Gazeta Dita, Zgjidhet ngerci i tregtimit te ilaceve mes Kosoves dhe Shqiperise: <http://www.gazetadita.al/zgjidhet-nger-ci-i-tregtimit-te-ilaceve-mes-kosoves-dhe-shqiperise/>

58. Newspaper: Gazeta Blic, Edi Rama nuk e mban fjalën: vazhdon bllokimi i barnave nga Kosova në Shqipëri!: <http://gazetablic.com/rama-nuk-mbane-fjal-en-shqiperia-bllokon-4-vjet-barnat-kosovare/>

59. Newspaper: Gazeta Shekulli, Qumësht me Aflatoksin nga Shqipëria, Kosova e heq nga tregu: <http://www.shekulli.com.al/p.php?id=17360>

60. Institute GAP Pristina, “Harmonizimi i Standardeve te Sigurise dhe cilesise se Produkteve ushqimore ne mes Kosoves dhe Shqiperise”: http://www.institutigap.org/documents/11395_TregtiaMiellit.pdf, pg.4

All these frictions show that trade relations between the two countries are far from being easy. Officials in both sides of the border claim that obstacles in trade have occurred due to mere bureaucratic procedures and to the different standards applied with respect to customs tariffs and food safety. Although this is true to certain extent, experience shows that interests of private companies with considerable shares in different branches of Albania's or Kosovo's economy also play a major role behind the scenes. In many cases companies with large monopolies in food, agriculture or building industry sector, are not interested in having free and fair trade relations, since this might threaten their economic influence in Albania or Kosovo. In this context, officials in both countries have often taken sides to protect certain private business interests by seriously damaging the mutual Kosovo- Albania commercial ties.

4. Culture, Media and Education

Culture and language are the most important factors that bring Kosovo and Albania together. Cooperation in the realm of culture between the two states is until speaking still in the initial phase. The private sector, especially the media has been in this context far more successful than state actors. Albanian media outlets like Digitalb, Supersport, Klan etc⁶¹, have already established consolidated ties with their counterparts in Kosovo, thus creating the premises of a cultural “Albanosphere” in the Balkans. Sports are also another example, where both countries have excellent relations. Today Albania’s National Football Team comprises among its ranks several players originating from Kosovo and the same applies to the Albanian National Basketball Team. In several occasions, artists from Kosovo have represented Albania, as it was the case during the Eurovision Song Contest which took place in Baku Azerbaijan in 2012. Furthermore, artists have managed to organize cultural events, such as concerts, expositions, film festivals etc in both countries on their own initiative or sponsored by private actors, without any state support.

On the other hand, the Agreement for Strategic Partnership between Albania and Kosovo, signed on 11.01. 2014 sets forth in its fourth pillar on Culture, Education and Science, the main directions for cooperation in these realms, namely:

- Drafting of action plans and common development strategies for the pre-tertiary education in Albania.

61. Lutfi Dervishi, Roundtable: “Challenges in the Relations on culture, arts and media between Kosovo and Albania”, AIIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana 14.11 2014.

- Coordination of common education policies, in accordance with European standards.
- Drafting of a platform with the aim of promoting common initiatives of cooperation on the protection and promotion of cultural heritage.
- Coordination of policies in the areas of sport, in compliance with European Standards, including the common organization of various sporting events.
- Strengthening of cooperation between the national libraries and archives of the two countries.⁶²

Shortly after the signing of the Strategic Partnership Agreement, the Ministries of Culture of both countries held various meetings, which were concluded into a cooperation protocol signed in February 2014.⁶³ According to the protocol both sides are committed to the drafting of a common cultural agenda. During 2014, various cultural activities were organized by both countries in the framework of this agreement and thereafter a renewed calendar of cultural activities was established for 2015. Ministries of Culture of both Countries have expressed their willingness to a common platform on cultural patrimony and the harmonization of legislation in the area of culture and the due approximation of EU cultural policies, for eliminating all trade barriers that hamper the free circulation of art, artists and culture between both sides of the border. In this context, both governments signed an agreement for lifting the Value-added tax for all books, newspapers, magazines and journals that circulate

62. Newspaper: Shqiptarja.com, Deklarata per Bashkepunimin strategjik Shqiperi-Kosove: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/199103574/Deklarata-per-bashkepunim-dhe-partneritet-strategjik-Shqiperi-Kosove>.

63. Ministry of Culture-Albania, Kosova dhe Shqiperia me Kalendar te Perbashket Kulturor: <http://www.kultura.gov.al/al/newsroom/deklarata-per-shtyp/kosova-dhe-shqiperia-me-kalendar-te-perbashket-kulturor&page=2>

between the two countries.⁶⁴

Additionally, Cultural Institutions from Albania and Kosovo have signed a series of cooperation agreements that have further intensified cultural interaction between the two states. Hereunder, a short list of some of the most important agreements in this area.

- Twinning agreement between the National Museums of Kosovo and Albania. Hereof, both national Museums are engaged to undertake common projects for various topics related to the Albanian National Culture.⁶⁵
- The agreement to establish the Albania-Kosovo Albanology portal, signed by the Director of the National Library of Albania and the Director of National and University Library of Kosovo in Tirana on March 5th, 2011. This agreement aims the coordination of the two institutions to facilitate exchange of information on articles, books and various publications related to Albanology studies.⁶⁶
- Agreement between the Theatre of Opera and Ballet of Albania and Ballet Theatre of Kosovo for a joint calendar of activities, signed on March 2014.⁶⁷

64. Ministry of Finances-Albania, Marrëveshje me Kosovën për heqjen e TVSH-së për librat, revistat, etj:

<http://www.financa.gov.al/al/njoftime/fjalime/marreveshje-me-kosoven-per-heqjen-e-tvsh-se-per-librat-revistat-etj&page=1>

65. Koha.net: Binjakëzohen muzetë historikë të Kosovës e Shqipërisë, <http://koha.net/?id=4&l=28798>

66. National Kosovo Library, Portali Albanologjik Shqipëri – Kosovë: <http://www.biblioteka-ks.org/Arkivi.php>

67. Ora News, TOB i Shqipërisë dhe Kosovës axhendë të opërbashkët për aktivitetet kulturore: <http://www.oranews.tv/vendi/tob-i-shqiperise-dhe-kosoves-axhende-te-operbashket-per-aktivitetet-kulturore/>

In light of the above, it is not difficult to assess that all these cooperation agreements are very broad with little reference to the way they will be implemented in the future. The relevant culture ministries and state institutions dealing with culture should elaborate more detailed cooperation programs, in order to further advance these relations in the future. The organization of common cultural calendars is an important step forward, but cooperation shouldn't just be limited into a series of cultural events taking place in both countries. The most important challenge of the cultural cooperation between Kosovo and Albania is the low degree of cultural communication and interaction. So Albanians have very little information on the literature in Kosovo, its most renowned writers, its most distinguished movies and actors. The same applies, although to a lesser degree in the case of the knowledge people from Kosovo have about the culture of Albania. Furthermore, cultural agreements have resulted to be largely symbolic in nature without real impact to the strengthening of cultural cooperation. For instance, the agreement on reciprocal lifting of VAT for all books, journals and magazines didn't increase the free circulation of books between the two countries and nowadays books are still being taxed in both Albania and Kosovo, since the necessary law provisions for the due implementation of the agreement haven't been adopted.⁶⁸

In relation to media, the relations have been mainly put forward by the private sector and cooperation between state institutions is still in its initial phase. In January 2014, a cooperation protocol between the public Televisions of both countries was signed. Both sides were committed to mutual exchange of TV programs, trainings and technical support.⁶⁹ Further, on March

68. Ben Andoni, Roundtable: "Challenges in the Relations on culture, arts and media between Kosovo and Albania", AIIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Tirana 14.11 2014.

69. RTK, Kosovo Radio-Television: <http://www.rtklive.com/?id=2&r=12054>

2015 the Authority of Audiovisual Media of Albania (AMA) signed a cooperation agreement with the Independent Media Commission of Kosovo on the promotion and mutual cooperation in audiovisual regulation issues.⁷⁰

These are very limited steps in a field, which has a lot of potential to contribute to the further amelioration of the relations between the two countries. Media has the power to inform people along both sides of the border on the most important political, economic and cultural developments in both countries, but this has occurred only to a limited extent. In most TV stations of Kosovo and Albania, whether public or private, the news sections broadcast information coming from the other side of the border only in the regional context. Additionally, electronic media platforms remain separated with very limited interaction. Further, printed media, especially journals and magazines whether from Kosovo or Albania very rarely circulate in the other side of the border. There is no single daily newspaper in Albanian language, which is set to be distributed in both countries. As in the case of culture, this is a clear sign that communication between both countries in the media area is insufficient and that further efforts are needed to improve the situation. In this respect, a permanent media forum with the participation of media actors and representatives of relevant state institutions, need to be established with the aim of setting forth a common action plan and strategy for the establishment of a new Albania-Kosovo media partnership.

70. Top-Channel, Shqipëri-Kosovë, marrëveshje për mediat audiovizive: <http://www.top-channel.tv/lajme/artikull.php?id=294477>

4.1. Education

In light of the common issues concerning education, the most important cooperation area is the drafting of common school curricula and standardization of textbooks. The Agreement for Strategic Partnership between Albania and Kosovo provides that both countries are committed to coordination of common education policies, in accordance with European standards⁷¹. In June 2014, the Education Ministries of both countries signed an agreement on “Cooperation for the Unification between the Pre-Tertiary Education Curriculum Systems of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo”. According to the agreement, all obstacles that prevent students from Albania to continue their studies in Kosovo and vice-versa will be lifted. Further, education systems will have a unified curriculum, which will be in compliance with EU standards.⁷²

In a conference organized in early July 2014 on the reforms on the pre-tertiary education in Albania, Minister of Education and Science, Ms. Lindita Nikolla, stated that: “The harmonization of the Albanian pre-tertiary education system with that of Kosovo and other European education systems will further develop the capacities of the Albanian education system for a more qualitative learning process”.⁷³

71. Newspaper: Shqiptarja.com, Deklarata per Bashkepunimin strategjik Shqiperi-Kosove: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/199103574/Deklarata-per-bashkepunim-dhe-partneritet-strategjik-Shqiperi-Kosove>.

72. Republic of Albania-Ministry of Education, Shqipëri-Kosovë: Nënshkruhet marrëveshja e unifikimit të sistemit arsimor parauniversitar: <http://www.arsimi.gov.al/al/newsroom/lajme/shqiperi-kosove-nenshkruset-marreshja-e-unifikimit-te-sistemit-arsimor-pauniversitar>

73. Kosova Press, Reforma e Arsimit, Nikolla: Bashkëpunim Kosovë-Shqipëri: <http://www.kosovapress.com/sq/rajoni/reforma-e-arsimit-nikolla-bashkepunim-kosove-shqiperi-20846/>

In regard to Higher Education, the education ministries of both countries have principally agreed to the standardization of curricula, mutual recognition of degrees and to the facilitation of mobility of the University students between the Universities of Albania and Kosovo⁷⁴.

In the second joint meeting between the Governments of the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo, held on 23rd of March 2015 in Tirana, three agreements on Education were signed:

- Cooperation Agreement in the field of Higher Education and Scientific Research
- Agreement on the joint organization of teaching of Albanian language and culture in the Diaspora; (In cooperation with the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Kosovo)
- Agreement for institutional coordination on the professional advancement of teachers in the pre-tertiary Education sector.⁷⁵

Education is a key area to the social and economic progress of the two countries in the future. Currently, the education system in Albania and Kosovo suffers from lack of funding, inappropriate textbooks, corruption, degrading infrastructure and underqualified pedagogical staff. Furthermore, liberal policies in terms of uncontrolled spread of private educational institutions have caused the deterioration of the quality of education in all levels. In light of the common problems, both countries might establish a common platform to address the

74. Newspaper: MAPO, Kosovë-Shqipëri, unifikim i arsimit të lartë:

<http://www.mapo.al/2015/03/kosove-shqiperi-unifikim-i-arsimit-te-larte>

75. Republic of Albania-Ministry of Education, Shqipëri-Kosovë, tre marrëveshje për arsimin e dy vendeve:

<http://www.arsimi.gov.al/al/newsroom/lajme/shqiperi-kosove-tre-marreveshje-per-arsimin-e-dy-vendeve>

most relevant challenges faced by education system in both sides of the border. The platform could serve as a useful orientation for the preparation of new common policies that will aim to the setting of a unified education system for both Albania and Kosovo.

The Science Academies in Kosovo and Albania have played in the past an important role in the shaping of national identity and to the establishment of solid cultural and linguistic standards that still persist in the present. The merger of the two academies into a single one⁷⁶ could give a new impetus to education, science and culture; all areas that have suffered considerable damages over the last three decades. A single Science Academy could gain a crucial role in the process of standardization of textbooks for pre-tertiary and Higher Education. Additionally, a unified Academy of Science would give a valuable contribution to the further development of Albanian Standard Literary Language in both sides of the border.

76. Alma Lama, Roundtable: “Challenges in the Relations on culture, arts and media between Kosovo and Albania”, Tirana 14 November 2014, AIIS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

5. Conclusion

The relations between Kosovo and Albania might be further improved in many areas. The Agreement for Strategic Partnership between the two countries constitutes an important milestone for the consolidation of their mutual economic ties and further provides the Kosovo-Albania relations with a consolidated legal and institutional framework. Economy remains the most important driving force and in this regard the agreements on trade facilitation and promotion will undoubtedly have their positive impact on the strengthening of the mutual economic ties. However, more substantial steps with respect to the implementation of the agreements should be taken. Common policies for the approximation of administrative and commercial legislation and most importantly a new strategy for the orientation towards common sustainable development for the economies of both countries are imperative issues that need to be addressed in the future. A common agenda for the revitalization of manufacturing industry or common policies with regard to energy and the exploitation of natural resources, are all areas that might bring benefits to both economies. Furthermore, the future joint meetings between both governments should have a detailed and concrete agenda in all areas affecting the mutual relations and they should not be used for mere nationalist or populist reasons.

On the other hand, cooperation in terms of Culture and Education is still in its initial phase and in this context there is an enormous potential that both countries might exploit. Mutual efforts on these areas will lead to a more intensive mutual interaction and to the gradual disappearance of all misunderstandings and divisions inherited by the past. This is an important aspect that will undoubtedly

have a positive impact to the general Albania-Kosovo relations and should be therefore taken into consideration by both governments.

The common future of Albania and Kosovo remains closely linked to the global and European agenda. If Kosovo will achieve full sovereignty by gaining full membership to the United Nations and other international organizations, its economic prospects will improve and the relations with Albania will experience a new momentum. However, a merger between the two countries will continue to remain implausible, since this would constitute a precedent that other countries in the region might follow (e.g. Unification of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina with Serbia, Western Macedonia with Albania and so forth). Borders are unlikely to change, but the further consolidation of the relations between the two countries, as the recent developments show, will continue in the future. It remains an open question whether these relations will result into a unified economic area, a regional customs union or just intensified inter-state relations. This will largely depend on the willingness and the abilities of both governments to move forward these relations in the future. In this regard, accession to the EU, will be of crucial importance. Due its different historical and political background, Albania is much likely to join the EU before Kosovo does. However, Albania's accession is closely related on how this country will cope with high levels of corruption, deficient justice system and its stagnant political scene. In the case of Kosovo, its independence is still not recognized by five EU countries (Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus Greece and Romania) and this constitutes a huge impediment to the progress of the EU accession process.

Furthermore, Serbia has already opened accession negotiations with the EU and is currently in a more advanced status in terms of EU integration than Kosovo and Albania. If Serbia will join the EU before Kosovo, than it is likely that it will impose a series of conditions with respect to the latter's sovereignty, borders or

economy. Hereof, the EU Commission should pursue a more active policy for the recognition of Kosovo's independence by all its member countries. If all countries of the Western Balkans region would join the EU simultaneously, than the prospect that they will block each other's integration process would no longer be possible.

Accession into the European Union is for the moment the best alternative for the prosperity of Kosovo and Albania and in this respect both countries should concentrate all their efforts in building a viable relationship, fully compatible with the objectives of the EU such as: solidarity and mutual respect, economic and social cohesion, sustainable development, free competition and lifting of internal borders.

5.1 Recommendations

With the aim of contributing to the further strengthening of the relations between Albania and Kosovo, the Albanian Institute of International Studies recommends the following:

- Lifting of all of non-tariff barriers that hamper trade relations between both countries.
- Due implementation of all signed Economic Agreements.
- Further steps into the approximation and harmonization of commercial, labor and banking legislation between Kosovo and Albania.
- Long term strategy for establishing a common economic zone fully compatible with EU standards and regional economic

policies.

- Common Policies on the promotion of manufacturing industries with the aim of revitalizing industrial production, by jointly exploiting the most significant natural resources of Kosovo and Albania.
- Establishment of a common long-term energy strategy that would lead to a common energy market.
- Joint investments on common infrastructure projects. E.g. Railway connecting Durrës to Pristina, modernization of custom offices along the common border etc.
- Common strategy for sustainable tourism. Relevant line ministries in cooperation with tourism agencies should offer joint Albania-Kosovo tourism packages, whereas the most important touristic assets of both countries will be included.
- Establishment of a permanent media forum with the participation of media actors and representatives of relevant state institutions with the aim of setting forth a common action plan and strategy for a new Albania-Kosovo media partnership
- Common policies that will aim to the setting of a unified education system for both countries.
- The merger of the academies of Sciences of Albania and Kosovo into a unified Academy for the further elaboration of common educational standards and the continuous joint development of the Albanian standard literary language.

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