



Research Article

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Albania, a Stabilizing Factor in the Western Balkans Region Favored by Its Geostrategic Position

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Abstract

Albania, a stabilizing factor in the region favored by its geostrategic position. Albania, being a small country in the world geography, but also in the regional one, has played a determining role in several historical moments after '90 for its membership in the NATO, and after the membership in this organization it has played a role in guaranteeing stability and peace in the Western Balkans, and therefore in the international arena. It is a known fact that Western Balkans had and still has many ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts and has experienced various challenges which provoked the stability of the countries which, after a difficult time after the dissolution of former Yugoslavia, have been able to be independent and internationally recognized countries, aiming to become members of the NATO and EU, and for this reason they have been little prone to develop conflicts between them. Albania has proved to be always in favor of dialogue and stability in the relations between the states, with the main purpose of achieving the major aim for the Western Balkans to become a complete member in European and international organizations, as this would influence the vital and political improvement not only in some countries of the Balkans, but in the Balkans as a whole, especially in the economic aspect. What is the role of the geostrategic position of Albania in the region and elsewhere from the stability viewpoint?

Keywords: Geostrategy, Albania, Western Balkans, NATO, EU, Pace

1. Introduction

The aim of this research is to conclude some favorable points in relation to the important role that the geostrategic position of Albania plays in the region and elsewhere, based on both Albanian and international literature. Albania is a stabilizing and peace-lover factor towards neighboring countries and further, and this fact is favored mainly by the geographic position in the regional map, a route connecting the west and the east. Despite being a small and poor country, Albania has always shown willingness to contribute to its international partners for peacekeeping and stability in the Western Balkans, and since its membership in 2009 in the international organization of NATO, Albania participates even in peacekeeping operations and where necessary in the world.

Geopolitics and geostrategy are, in fact, worldly concepts and are not considered local concepts. Geopolitics is a political theatre which mainly develops between great powers; those determine the agenda of world geopolitics and part of geopolitics are not only those countries which have a territorial structure, but also other actors such as international organizations which have gained more and more action power both locally and internationally. Nevertheless, the great powers are those which historically have played and still play a primary role, crucial to the development of geopolitics. Geopolitics means political interests in a geographical region: the way how a given region is approached by politics based on its interests. From this point of view, I think that the

Balkans is very interesting and this is because from the geopolitical viewpoint two opposing forces in this region have been in focus, which is like a battlefield between Russia on one hand and western countries on the other hand. The point where great forces clash is even more interesting the geopolitical concept and geopolitical strategy, which means a strategy of influence and control on a certain territory. Control is exercised through invasion; it's classical but not primary, now it is exercised through governing in favor of X or Y, through the influence on the public opinion, through the media influence, hence, various forms; it is enough to be present and dictate your political strategies in a certain region.

2. Methodology

Regarding the methodology in this research I have used a qualitative approach consulting literature from authors who deal with an analyze geopolitical and geostrategic concept of a small country like Albania; contemporary authors such as Saul Bernard Cohen, Dominique Moisi, Yves Lacoste, and also consulting publications in the library of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Albania, books of Albanian authors such as Elmaz Leci, Shpetim Cami, Pajtim Ribajeti, ect, and scientific military publications which deal with key moments of regional and international events such as the Adriatic Charter, Integration in NATO and Our National Interests, which show exactly this fact. Albania, a stabilizing and peace-loving factor in the region and further.

3. From the Warsaw Treaty to the International Organization of NATO

Dating back to history, we can say that involvement initially in the Warsaw Treaty was merely a continuation to policymaking, which is widely known to have been part of socialist block, and since all the countries of the socialist block signed the treaty, Albania could not go without being part of it. Then, from the Treaty of Warsaw.

Starting from an earlier point in time in this short analysis, we can say that leaving the Warsaw Treaty was a courageous act, a welcomed act, an act that disconnected Albania in the military aspect or structural aspect from the East, but not in the ideological aspect, it was disconnected in the political aspect because the system was like that. Approaching to China was a beneficiary solution but again the isolation even in the relationship with China brought about the failure and bankruptcy of the state, economy and finances in all aspects. After '91 - '92, we have a change of politics: Albania is the first country in the ex-communist Eastern Europe which claimed membership in the NATO, it is the first country looking toward the west. The request for membership of Albania was for various reasons, among which there is the Albanian mentality, which has always suffered national insecurity and this fact has been exploited by governments, especially in the communist regime to frighten and secondly, realities have been such that Albanians have always considered their territory under threat, especially by the East. Because of this the orientation toward NATO was a change that would lead the country to another destination, to western values of democratic countries which guaranteed wellbeing and stability for their nation to live free. This was a solution which coincided above all with the volition of citizens, vocation of Albanians and political changes which in my vision were not dramatic but violent. Stability in the Balkans, is it accomplished? Stability in the Balkans means not having troubles, no conflicts, stable regimes and consequently this means, firstly, stable regimes within the country, no conflicts which could cause unsafe situations like in 1997 in Albania, since the year 1997 in Albania or in other countries is a threat. International community in that case was seriously concerned. Why? Because what happened in Albania could affect other countries in the region, with weapons widespread, criminality, etc. So, the inner stability comes first; secondly, no conflicts with the neighboring countries and I think that in the aftermath of the Kosovo war, and exactly the conflict in Macedonia in 2011, the Balkans has reached peace and stability, which is perceived long-term, but not everlasting, as nothing is everlasting, but it is thought that all the countries in the region, apart from the neutrality of Serbia, have similar purposes, democratic standards; human rights are respected despite the major problems of each country, but such problems do not threat each other's security. From this point of view, we can say that both internally and in the Western Balkans region a long-term and stable

stability has been accomplished. After the regime change, Albania also had a change of its geopolitical-geostrategic position.

4. Political Changes after the Communist Regime would be Accompanied by Changes of Geostrategic Aspect of Albania in the Region

Albania could not be neutral anymore, neither isolated nor part of the Eastern camp, which fortunately or not was demolished, so the link of Albania to the West was obligatory for it belongs to the West regarding vocation, formulation of nationalist theses by founders of nationalism; it belongs to the West regarding even the historical viewpoint in several aspects, even though most of the time it was under the empires of the East as Bizant. The Ottoman Empire, however, was a fact that in Albania the influence of catholic faith existed and it was a clear fact that the influence of Italy, Austro-Hungary like culture and religion from the viewpoint of church fractions was present. It is not that Albanians in WWII were not fascists in their concept and ideology; from the national point of view they saw a savage, but the difference in that time was that while Germans were oppressors, Americans are today allies who help, influence, promise and give hope, and again, despite being oppressors, they were seen hopefully in relation to the biggest harm from the Serbian chauvinism, but not less Greek chauvinism. All these difficulties experienced by Albanians made the historic change of what I would say their vocation from the East to the West necessary, and it was merely natural that political leaders had to adapt to the vocation of their citizens and nations, as in democracy this is a fundamental rule for development. The majority, not all but the majority, see the West as the future, hope, opportunity and as a model from all points of view. The NATO is seen as a security shield and it has resulted so; intervention of NATO in Kosovo is maybe the historic pinnacle of developments, not only for Albania and Albanian people in the region, but also for the NATO itself and Europe. This is because it showed its determination and power, by being able to undertake the security and stability for Albania and Albanian people. Albania is the first among the Eastern countries to claim membership in the NATO, and for this reason it is the first to have gained partnership for peace in '93. Stopping the membership in the NATO and EU was due to the crisis in Kosovo and due to what happened in 1997 in Albania. For the sake of the truth, Albania has an influence in relation to its power more than it produces economic or political power, and, moreover, it influences and affects the developments of events in the region. Basically, Albania, from the time of its state creation to date, has been considered as an unimportant and even experimental country, while Serbia has been seen as a leader in the region. Albania has been considered unimportant for several reasons; firstly, because it is a small country; secondly, a weak and undeveloped country as a consequence of London Conference decisions, which halved Albanian territory and population. Division of its territory and its population would cause weaknesses and inability for economic, military development and so on. From this perspective, Albania could not be a country with a powerful geopolitical position, in addition to the fact that after WWII it was an isolated country and as such, even if it had had military demographic power, it would have had no influence on the developments in the region and further, as an isolated country always remains isolated. After the communist regime, Albania began to take a new position; its positions after '92 are carefully selected and generally balanced positions regarding its attitudes to the developments in the region. Taking a balanced attitude in harmony with European and American policies which fortunately coincided with interests of Albania and Albanian people; in this way, Albania began to be considered as a country which produced security, stability, and peace and in this respect it contributes to a united Europe for the new policies in the time of globalization and so on. Kosovo independence gave a new dimension to the presence of Albanian state itself, Kosovo war first, and then its independence. Albania was the best ally of the NATO and being a safe, necessary and best ally helped not only itself, but also the NATO forces in various operations by using geostrategic position in the function of peacekeeping operations and not only the NATO. The NATO warplanes were stationed in Albania before they flew to the Serbian skies; all Albanian infrastructures were available for the NATO and this unconditional and limitless help gave an undisputed dimension and values to Albania and Albanians. Even after the Kosovo war, Albania has proved an extreme constructivism regarding its relations with Kosovo, never trying to break the internal balances nor regional, European or world balances, since an irresponsible government could lead to consecutive conflicts. Nowadays, conflicts

are still present; if there was irresponsible governance either in Serbia, Albania or Kosovo, of course, the conflict would be inevitable or Albania has never crossed the border of irresponsibility, despite the tactical mistakes usually occurring in the Albanian diplomacy for very close interests of special politicians, but these are moments and not national strategies. Also, regarding Albanian population living in the Balkans region, Albania has played a constructive and stabilizing role in the relations of Albanians to the country where they live. For instance, we can mention Macedonia; Albania's strategic interest is for Macedonia to exist if we refer to the existence principle, which means that Albanian living in Macedonia must be constructive in relation to the country; the number of Albanians in Macedonia is considerable, and they are still discriminated there, while Albania has adopted an way of solving problems step by step with dialogue and collaboration and not with conflict.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Albania is a member of NATO and a candidate country for EU. Negotiations can be open this year or next year, this is a process and not an act. It is a process which one day will be accomplished and it is not a tragedy if it is not accomplished today, as it will be accomplished tomorrow.

Implementing a mere democracy for a fair country, human rights, fundamental rights, applying standards in obeying the law and economic progress and wellbeing are two factors that will help the process of creating a balance between regional countries and Albania has demonstrated the willingness for cooperation.

Minorities and ethnic groups in the neighboring countries are a positive indicator of Albania regarding peacekeeping and stability in the region. Minorities and ethnic groups in the neighboring countries affect both internal and external policymaking of Albania. Albania takes care of Albanian citizens in compliance with what is included in international charters for the protection of ethnic groups' rights. Albania has influenced the solution of various problems that affect Albanian minorities or ethnic groups in neighboring countries, but this has been done without crossing the borders of the internal affairs of the analogue country, by always supporting the solution of the conflicts through the meetings with different representatives and also through numerous conferences initiated by Albania to keep peace and stability in the region of the Western Balkans. As for the geostrategy of Albania in the Balkans and further we can say that strategy is an element of human policies, i. e. it is subjective. Strategy is part of politics. What is known is that Albania is in a very interesting position between the east and the west in the political aspect. The East, which of course has been late with communist authoritarian regimes, once an empire, and the West where freedom, democracy and human rights dominated, in this respect, Albania being between is an interesting connecting point. Secondly, it is a route, a point which serves as a route for many lines, e.g. gas lines, electricity lines, road lines, etc. It is a point near the Middle East and Africa, so the proximity from the physical geological aspect is an element which serves us when we analyze the military aspect, since for logistics of the military equipment the territory is needed, like the industry on land and the military one.

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