

Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union

Volume 2012 2012

Article 3

April 2013

The EU as a Democracy Promoter: Can the EU Use Albania's Ambitions for Membership to Strengthen Democracy in the Balkans?

Joana Allamani

Oakland University, jallaman@oakland.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu>



Part of the [Eastern European Studies Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Allamani, Joana (2012) "The EU as a Democracy Promoter: Can the EU Use Albania's Ambitions for Membership to Strengthen Democracy in the Balkans?," *Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union*: Vol. 2012, Article 3. DOI: 10.5642/urceu.201201.03

Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/urceu/vol2012/iss1/3>

This Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Claremont-UC Undergraduate Research Conference on the European Union by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

1

The EU as a Democracy Promoter: Can the EU Use Albania's Ambitions for Membership to Strengthen Democracy in the Balkans?

Joana Allamani

Oakland University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to assess the nature and effectiveness of the European Union's democracy promotion policy in Albania. Although the Balkan region was home to wars, ethnic tension, and political instability in the recent past, all western Balkan countries have expressed interest in gaining membership in the EU. The Albanian question is particularly important because of the regression of democratic conditions in the country due to an 18 month-long political gridlock that ended in violent and deadly protests in January 2011. This happened only two months after the EU voted unanimously for visa liberalization of Albanian citizens in the Schengen Area, and the EU has pressured the Albanian government to hold officials accountable for the deaths in 2011. This paper analyzes the "leverage and linkage" of the EU on Albanian domestic politics and whether the EU can offer sufficient incentives to facilitate democratic consolidation.

KEYWORDS

conditionality, enlargement, Western Balkans, Albania, stability and association

INTRODUCTION

The fall of communism throughout Eastern Europe from 1989-1992 has been regarded as a very significant moment for the triumph of democratic ideals. Considered by Samuel P. Huntington to be part of the Third Wave of Democratization, the echo of this critical change was heard from East Berlin to Leningrad. Citizens of brutal regimes decided that being fed Communist sensationalisms from the Politburo was not enough anymore, and they were ready to be part of a new free world. The mere toppling of an autocratic regime, however, was not enough for the establishment of strong foundations that would facilitate democratic consolidation. Inexperienced with freedom and almost completely unfamiliar with the notion of democracy, most Eastern European countries entered a transition period that has turned into their normalcy.

This is the case of the southwestern Balkan country of Albania – it never fully consolidated as a democracy, existing in the political limbo status of a hybrid regime, and also experienced regression in democratic values in the late 1990s. The Balkan Peninsula has been home to the worst conflicts in recent European history. Ethnic tensions, culminating in the Bosnian War and Kosovo intervention, made the European Union reconsider its previous passive policy it had for its problematic kin.

Democratization in the Balkans then, as stated by the EU and other multilateral organizations, became a necessity for stability in the region and overall European peace. The proximity of volatility to EU member states (Albania borders Greece and is less than 45 miles away from Italy) made the Balkan problem a priority in EU agenda. In 1997, The EU General Affairs Council introduced a regional approach for southeastern European countries, and included components for conditionality – at this time, contractual relations was the best ‘carrot’ the EU could offer. Relations became stronger after the 1999 Stability Pact (SP), the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), the latter Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs), for which the stakes have gotten higher since EU membership is the incentive for democratic consolidation and satisfaction of the Copenhagen criteria¹. Hopeful that the Balkans will not discredit the democratic peace theory, the EU has had an opportunity to help stabilize and democratize a historically problematic area through the power of their linkage, leverage, and conditionality. However, how successful has the EU been so far in using the Albanian ambition for the improvement of democracy in the country? Is the EU able to strengthen democracy in the region by continuing with their past strategies? In addition to analyzing EU democratization policy efficacy, this paper also seeks to explore whether there is potential for ameliorating these strategies.

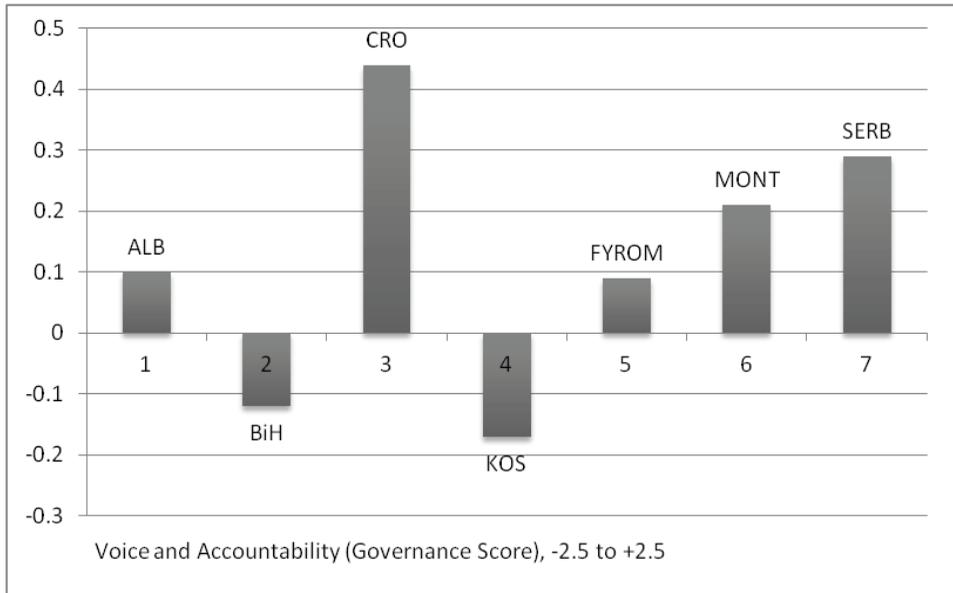
ALBANIA’S DEMOCRATIC RECORD

Albania was a relative latecomer to the “democratic wave” that encompassed Eastern Europe in 1989-1991 (Huntington, 1991, pp.12-13). The absence of political ties with virtually any other country in the world had negative impacts not only for the Albanian economy, but it was also an obstacle for the creation a strong civil society. While Tito’s Yugoslavia was the exception for being more open than other communist countries, Enver Hoxha’s Albania was the exception for being more isolated. Although Albania’s Communist Party was defeated in elections in 1992, allowing the country to meet requirements to be an “electoral

1 The Copenhagen criteria is the membership criteria that every aspiring EU member has to meet. The official EC website states that it includes: “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, human rights, minority issues; a free market economy; and the ability to adhere to political, economic, and monetary aims of the union”.

democracy,” throughout the 1990s, Albania had a difficult time in fully consolidating democratic gains (Huntington, 1991, p.22). Its troubles in building well-functioning democratic institutions were caused by various factors, including: poor economic development (Albania ranked as the poorest of the communist states in Eastern Europe); legacies of a harsh communist regime that subjected citizens to propaganda and prevented emergence of civil society as seen in East-Central Europe and kept Albanians isolated from the wider world; pervasive corruption; and political polarization between former communists and various post-communist “democratic” parties.

Table 1. Governance Scores of SAP Countries



Source: World Bank, 2010

In addition to structural and historical problems, the failure of leadership agency, has been one of the primary reasons for the slowed democratization process within Albania. According to the Corruption Index organized by Transparency International in 2011, Albania was ranked 95th in the world, a worsening from the 81st rank in 2002. Although an electoral democracy has been implemented since 1992, the Democratic Party has enjoyed extensive power over time and elections have often produced results in support of this party.

The overall culture of political submission and low economic development had negative effects in the beginning for the adoption of democracy, but they were ironically helpful once protests started. After living in an un-free society for a long period of time, protesters saw no way back and demanded the implementation of a multi-party system, and thus electoral democracy was at last adopted in 1992. Geographic location was also very important in helping dissenters in Albania follow through with democratization. Having its location in between Western and Eastern Europe was instrumental in helping with the influence of democracy progress and regress. Progress because the democratic movement around them, the spirit of the times - *Zeitgeist*, helped with the initial road to democratization, and regress

because of the fragmentation of opinion within domestic society because of seeing themselves as being located between antagonist countries.

Economic problems in the early 1990s added to the country's troubles. This culminated in the collapse of a pyramid scheme in 1997² that wiped out the savings and investments of thousands of citizens. Dissatisfaction with the political and economic system produced civil violence—which had both political-ideological and regional-clan elements—and led to the installation of international peacekeepers to stabilize the situation. By the end of the 1990s, when many other post-communist states had consolidated democracy and were moving ahead with EU membership negotiations, Albania was far behind both in terms of political and economic reform.

It was at this point that EU involvement became more pronounced in Albania, a phenomenon that will be discussed more below. However, the main point to be made about the 2000s is that the country did begin to see discernible democratic and economic progress. For example, its “democracy” score in the Polity dataset, which was a five in 1992, jumped to nine in year 2005 and has been a nine ever since. In addition, looking at the Voice and Accountability scores from the World Bank, there has been a steady increase in governance scores. In fact, Albania scores slightly more than Macedonia in this regard, which is an official candidate for membership, whereas Albania is still a potential candidate.

EU POLICIES IN ALBANIA

The European Union's policy was largely inactive during the first years of the existence of electoral democracy in Albania. As Milada Anna Vachudova (2005) states in *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, & Integration After Communism*, the EU followed passive leverage after the fall of communism in Albania as opposed to actively pressuring domestic leaders to push for democratic consolidation. The first EU (European Community – EC at the time) program that Albania became eligible for was the Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies (PHARE) program that was created in 1989. This was created by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in order to come to aid to the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. As Mayhew has pointed out, however, the problem with PHARE was that the aid was not based on conditionality. This explains why EU leverage had practically no effect on the trajectory of democracy in Albania. There was an opportunity to strengthen democracy there early on; the timing was right for Albanians who initially were zealous about political change, but it was not the right timing for the EU. It was only after the Dayton Accords of 1995 that the possibility of contractual relations with the Balkans was discussed. Conditionality, however, was introduced to the Western Balkans (WB) through the April 1997 regional approach, which required bilateral relations to the democratic conditions as explained in the Copenhagen criteria in return for financial assistance, cooperation agreements and unilateral trade preferences (Elbasani, 2008). Also, somewhat strong EU-Albania relations were not established until at least the year 2000, with the extension of duty-free access to EU market for products from Albania.

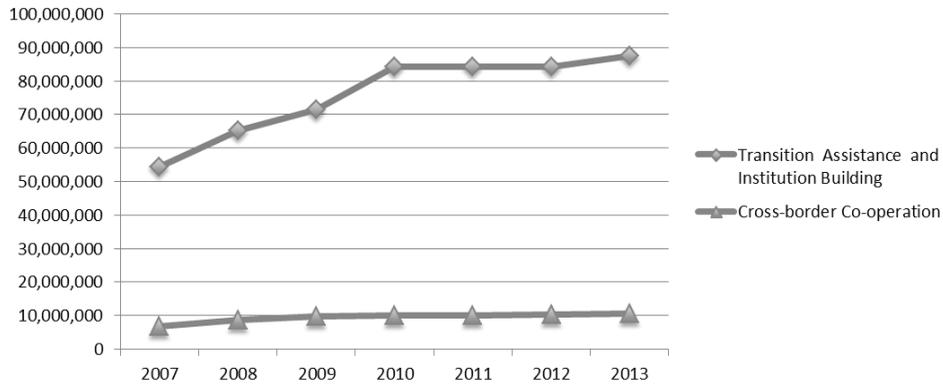
The strategy that started accelerating the acceptance of the idea of WB as potential candidates was the Stability Pact of 1999 that was in reality a multilateral conflict prevention policy initiated by the EU but backed by NATO, UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, IMF, etc. Balkan democratization was the consensus among them, because “the prospect of EU

2 The Rise and Fall of Albania's Pyramid Schemes <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/1999/wp9998.pdf>

membership is widely considered to be the cornerstone of any successful strategy to bring democracy and revitalization in the Balkan region” (Emerson & Gross, 1999). However, with SP the EU complicated conditionality for WB because it introduced both the regional component and the individual country component. Nevertheless, what followed the Stability Pact, the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP) was very important because it provided a clear framework tailored to the WB, including Albania, which first opened up the prospect of EU enlargement in the region. This was instrumental because the incentive became much stronger and EU leverage and conditionality turned into useful diplomatic tools once membership was mentioned as an option. After SAP, the EU had clear requirements that Balkan countries needed to meet before being considered as a candidate for membership. The SAP included incentives to develop bilateral political relationships in the region, increased direct assistance for democratization, and while SAP was the regional strategy, Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) was country specific (Elbasani, 2008).

Although SAP was introduced in 2000 and other Balkan countries had managed to negotiate SAAs as early as 2001, it was not until 2006 that Albania was able to negotiate SAA and become an official potential candidate for membership. Due to leverage power of the European Union, however, Albania has made steps toward progress from the beginning of the 2000s. Entering a SAA in 2006 and having enjoyed liberalized trade with EU member countries for more than a decade has produced high linkage with the West as opposed to looking at the post-communist countries of the East, which has helped with the continued successes of the transition. It has also enjoyed financial assistance through the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS) program, which in turn increased leverage of the EU in Albania. As British historian Timothy Garton Ash stated, “The EU’s leverage on aspiring member states appears to be the single best tool for promoting stability and democracy. Enlargement through democratization has been part of EU foreign policy ever since the Copenhagen criteria for membership” (Vachudova, 2005, p.247).

The European Union has provided aid to Albania for the strengthening of political institutions, the creation of a strong justice system, and the support of education (European Commission 2012). Although failures of agency in the 1990s have produced undesirable economic results, the Bertelsmann Management Index ranks the country 38 out of 128. Political participation has greatly increased over the years and the emergence of a middle class after the change into a market economy has helped with the creation of a civil society that demands more from political leadership. In fact, one of the latest EU projects is the launch of ten contracts worth €1.2 million with civil society organizations to strengthen democracy and human rights (European Commission 2012). These were launched through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). In addition, Albania received financial assistance from the EU through the CARDS program from 2001–2006, and through the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) from 2007 until now. Finally, perhaps the most positive changes that the country has experienced recently have been the 2009 accession into NATO and the December 2010 visa liberalization for the Schengen area.

Figure 1. Albania IPA Financial Assistance

Source: European Commission, 2012

In *Europe Undivided*, Vachudova (2005) writes in favor of intermediary rewards for countries that are engaging in these reforms like access to the EU market, development aid, and visa-free travel to the EU countries. The EU has recognized the importance of offering these intermediary rewards in order to create the positive image in these societies and take their achievements seriously. The visa liberalization was a very good intermediary reward and showed the trust of the EU towards the future of Albanian democracy, but the highly domestic polarized politics had the country in a political deadlock for over a year, which ended with dangerous protests and the death of four protesters in the streets of Tirana, the capital of Albania just one month after. Although the Albanian Republican Guard was responsible for the shooting of the protesters, no one was arrested for about a year.

As Kubicek (2005) stated in *The European Union and Democratization*, reluctant democratizers like Albania test EU's commitment to enlargement through democracy promotion. This instance did indeed test their commitment, and the EU was adamant in pressuring the Albanian government to arrest whomever was responsible from the Republican Guard. The country was also visited by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture regarding the violent protests of January 21st, 2011. The strength of EU leverage was evident here because, although a year later, the Albanian government gave in and they issued the arrest of a high-ranking Guard commander.

Although the EU has a lot of leverage in Albanian domestic politics they are more concerned with stability than democracy. Due to the recent economic crises, attention has diverted from enlargement policy in the Balkans and there has been a rise in EU skepticism about their capacity as a strong regional organization. It has been suggested that they are presently suffering not only from the economic aftershocks but also from an "enlargement fatigue (Vachudova, p.44)." With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2005, two relatively weak economies compared to the Western Europeans, the EU's approach to enlargement is a more sobering one. As previously stated, the EU values stability over democracy, and thus values regional cooperation more. With the recent acceptance of Serbia's application for candidate status mainly due to improved talks with Kosovo suggests that enlargement fatigue, like the economy, perhaps occurs in cycles.

THE IMPACT OF THE EU – THE VIEW FROM THE EU

The EU offers two main reports on the advancement of Albanian governance based on EU accession criteria: the yearly Albania progress report (2011), and the Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union (2010) that was a response to Albania's application for membership on April 28, 2009. Both of these reports assess the areas where Albania has progressed and which areas it needs to work on. Overall, they are constructive recommendations and the Albanian government has decided to embrace them as a legal framework in order to get out of political transition. In fact, the Commission Opinion, the EU recognizes the effort of including them in Albania's *National Strategy for Development and Integration*.

The yearly progress report assesses meeting of EU criteria in an indirect way, because they report on progress however small or far away from European expectations it might be. On the other hand, the Commission's Opinion on Albania's application for membership is more important because it is a more direct assessment of Albanian democracy based on the Copenhagen criteria, and conditionality of SAP. In the Opinion (2010), it is stated "Albania has, overall, smoothly implemented obligations under the Stabilization and Association Agreement." Even though there has been overall progress and Albanian democracy was heading in the right direction, according to the Opinion, the country is still weak to be given candidate status. The Copenhagen criteria are especially problematic for the following reasons: institutional effectiveness and stability are still lacking; there are improper parliamentary procedures; parliament also has no effective oversight; and, legislative inspection is still weak. Although there has been progress in the rule of law, especially with the fight against organized crime, reforms are still not up to par with EU standards.

There is a mix of positive and negative changes cited in the Opinion, but most important is that the Commission sees potential and recognizes efforts to change. Albania generally satisfies SAP, has low inflation and has had positive growth rates despite the global economic crisis, and has reduced market entry barriers for new firms. However, it is seriously deficient in intellectual property rights, financial control, free movement of capital, agricultural and rural development and so on. These deficiencies, for O'Brennan and Gassie (2009, p. 2), are an indication that Albania is a "janus-faced applicant state." By this they mean that although Albanian leaders have embraced EU instructions and paid lip service to EU ideals, their implementation has left much to be desired, and that is mainly due to the political polarization between the Democratic Party (DP) and the Socialist Party (SP).

The progress report from the EU for Albania also mentions the problem of political polarization and the stalemate that escalated into violent protests in early 2011. Although there is recognition that progress has been made, it is very limited due to the political deadlock that not only politically paralyzed the cabinet, but also diverted attention away from the importance of EU policy reforms. Lastly, according to the EU, Albanian accession should take place in about three years if this rate of progress is kept up. Higher linkage to EU institutions can be a facilitator of the process; Albania presently participates in three EU programmes that contribute to linkage, but twinning projects have helped with building more cooperation between Albania and EU member states, while getting help to develop its own institutions.

PART IV THE IMPACT OF THE EU—THE VIEW FROM ALBANIA

After the fall of the totalitarian regime in Albania, common people would chant in the

streets “we want Albania to be part of Europe.”³ The aspiration to be part of the European community was present early on and it was so strong that the aspiration became synonymous with successful democratic change. About twenty years later though, there is still popular support for EU accession according to data from the Albanian Institute of International Studies (AIIS), but the percentage of supporters is not as high as in the very beginnings of democracy. Their credibility is questioned due to the recent shocks that the EU has experienced from the faltering economies of Greece, Portugal, and Spain, but also because of the controversial presence of European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). Although Kosovo is a separate state, the linguistic and cultural ties of the Kosovar Albanians (98% of the population) have made the citizens of Albania skeptical about EU democracy promotion while witnessing EULEX conflict management in Kosovo.

The Albanian government has shown commitment to the idea of being part of the EU, if not fully then at least nominally. Out of all SAP countries, Albania is one of two countries that has a Ministry of EU Integration solely dedicated to the road to accession. Kosovo is the other one, while Montenegro and Croatia have included EU integration to their Foreign Affairs Ministries. The Ministry of EU Integration was created in 2003 and its existence is a testament of Albania’s strong ambition to be part of the European family. It creates reports, publishes strategies, and even administers even EU-funded projects that are intended to strengthen Albanian democratic institutions. Overall, the EU is generally seen as a positive force whose eventual acceptance of Albanian candidacy will be the indicator of the abandonment of the transitional regime.

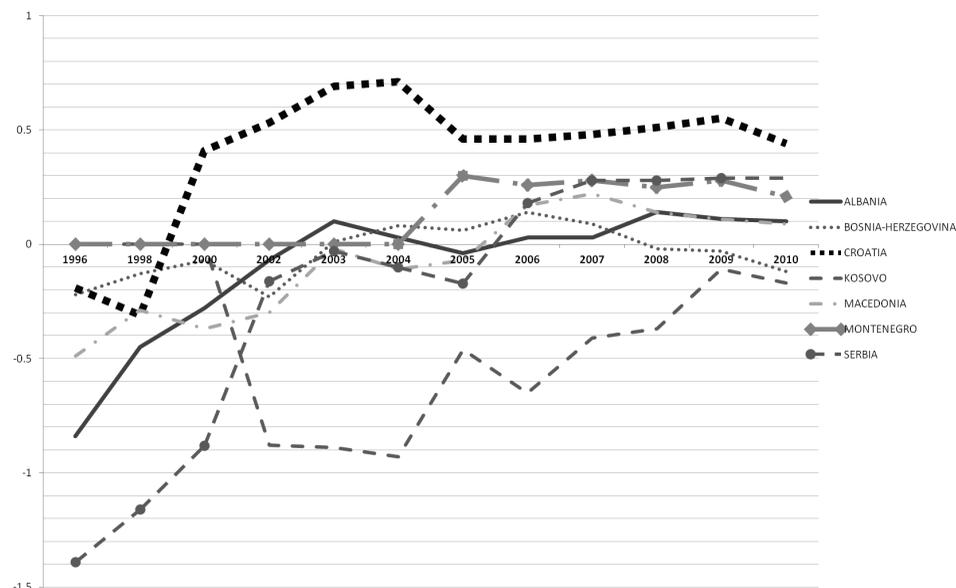
CONCLUSION

The European Union has established itself as a strong democratizing power for Eastern European countries, especially after the successes of CEECs (Central and Eastern European Countries) and their EU membership. The power of conditionality can play a transformative role in hybrid regimes like Albania or the rest of the WBs and be a great contributor in a country’s democratic consolidation, but it has to be coupled with high linkage and leverage. In order for these strategies to work, however, there needs to be a strong incentive for change – in this case, EU membership is the ultimate goal, but the credibility of the institution should not be challenged either. If it is, then the institution’s transformative power is not as strong as previously thought. Lastly, because democratization can be a long process, the institution should offer intermediary rewards in order to strengthen relationships between the beneficiary country and member states.

As attested by data from the World Bank, and from reports from the EU, Albania has overall made positive progress in its path to democratization. EU conditionality, linkage and leverage, aid through either helping with governance or with free market enterprises, have all contributed to the positive changes Albania has experienced in the 2000s. The EU could ameliorate its strategy for Albania and the rest of the WBs by changing SAP and their double conditionality of bilateral regional cooperation and domestic progress. This double conditionality makes the process simultaneously more vague and complex.

3 E duam Shqipërinë si gjithë Europa – Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) Publication, 2004

Figure 2. VA Democracy Change of SAP Countries, 1996–2010



Source: World Bank, 2012

Overall, if there is still a will in the EU to encourage democratization of Albania and cooperation with regional actors, this will play an important role in stabilizing the region. The most important reason is the fact that Albania is bordered by only other Albanian communities that are officially part of countries like Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo. There have been recent cases of minority rights issues in these countries and if the populations are discriminated against there will be turmoil (i.e., Macedonia in 2001). If Albania itself is not a consolidated democracy then the government will not even have the capacity to address the issue of attempts to secede. However, if the EU is aggressive about democratization and eventual membership of the WBs then the border claims will almost be irrelevant since they will all be part of the same Union.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Paul Kubicek of Oakland University for all of his help and advice regarding the development of this paper.

REFERENCES

Albania issues arrest warrants for republican guards. (2011, January 22). *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12260659>

Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2011). Sustainable Governance Indicators 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.sgi-network.org/index.php?page=index>

Elbasani, A. (2008). *The stabilisation and association process in the Balkans: Overloaded agenda and weak incentives?* (Working Papers, SPS 2008/03). European University Institute. Retrieved from http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/8447/SPS_2008_03.PDF?sequence=1

- EU leaders grant Serbia candidate status. (2012, March 01). *BBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17225415>
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2012). Albania [EBRD - Countries]. Retrieved from <http://www.ebrd.com/pages/country/albania.shtml>
- European Commission. (2010). *Commission Opinion on Albania's application for membership of the European Union*. (SEC(2010) 1335). Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/al_opinion_2010_en.pdf
- European Commission. (2011). *Albania 2011 Progress Report*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2011/package/al_rapport_2011_en.pdf
- European Commission. (2011). Criteria- Enlargement. Retrieved March 05, 2012 from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/criteria/index_en.htm
- European Commission (n.d.). Albania - EU Relations. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidate-countries/albania/eu_albania_relations_en.htm
- European Commission. (n.d.). Albania - Financial Assistance. Retrieved March 02, 2012 from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidates/albania/financial_en.htm
- Huntington, Samuel P. (1991) Democracy's Third Wave. *Journal of Democracy*, 2(2). Print.
- Jarvis, C. (1999). The Rise and fall of the pyramid schemes in Albania. *International Monetary Fund*. Retrieved March 21, 2012 from <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/1999/wp9998.pdf%20>
- Marshall, M. G., & Jagers, K. (2011). *Polity IV Country Reports 2010*. Center for Systemic Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity06.htm>
- O' Brennan, J., & Gassie, E. (2009). From stabilization to consolidation: Albanian state capacity and adaptation to European Union rules. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11(1), 61-82.
- Shqipëria dhe Bashkimi Europian. (2004). Albanian Institute for International Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.aiis-albania.org/BE.pdf>
- The World Bank Group. (2011). Governance & Anti-Corruption WGI 1996-2011 Interactive Several Countries Countries Selection. Retrieved from http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/mc_countries.asp
- Transparency International. (n.d.). Policy Research/Surveys Indices/cpi. Retrieved from http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi
- Vachudová, M. A. (2005). *Europe undivided: Democracy, leverage, and integration after communism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.