

POLICY PAPER

SERBIA AND ALBANIA

PREPARING FOR A NEW START

Belgrade 2011

PUBLISHER

ISAC Fond
International and Security Affairs Centre
Kapetan Mišina 5
11000 Belgrade
www.isac-fund.org

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PRINT

Printing House Grafolik
Vojvode Stepe 375
11 000 Belgrade

Press run: 500 pcs

ISBN

Belgrade 2011.

PROJECT WAS KINDLY SUPPORTED BY

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT** 
STIFTUNG

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PREFACE

Serbs and Albanians are the two most numerous ethnic groups in the Western Balkans. The history of bad relations between these two nations and a number of unresolved issues aggravate the bilateral relations. Kosovo is obviously the most contentious issue on the agenda. Yet, the stability in southeast Europe and the European perspective of the whole region would benefit significantly from improved relations between Serbia and Albania.

The historical legacy and the mutual prejudices plague relations between the two nations. In the 19th century, Serb and Albanian nationalism clashed over territories envisioned as the integral parts of their respective states, creating issues that are still relevant today. Relations between Albania and Yugoslavia/Serbia were mostly hostile during the 20th century. In the same vein, relations between the Serbs and Albanians in former Yugoslavia were marked by difficult balance between the communist ideals and hidden nationalisms. The conflicts culminated with the armed uprising of a number of Albanians in Kosovo in 1998/1999 and the NATO attack on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 with the declared aim to protect civilians.

After the devastating period of the 1990s, the countries of the region managed, to a certain degree, to revive mutual political and economic co-operation. Although there is an officially proclaimed will on both sides to advance on the path of European integration, in reality this strategic orientation is marked with stop-and-go acts. Serbia only recently launched a more proactive regional policy aiming to prove its EU credentials through the increased regional cooperation. Albania was doing better in regional political co-operation, but internal political problems hamper further steps forward.

At present, both countries face crises that could significantly delay their EU accession. Political elites of both countries seem to ignore the dangers of stalled EU integration prospects.

The current scope of co-operation between Serbia and Albania is insufficient if measured against the common goal of both countries to join the European Union (EU). Moreover, improved cooperation between Belgrade and Tirana would certainly contribute to the easing of the current tensions in the WB, especially regarding the Kosovo issue. Mistrust and the lack of open-minded cooperation is affecting progress on various levels - from the life of ordinary citizens, who until recently were not able to travel and communicate freely, to the level of relations between two states where the presidents still cannot find a mutually acceptable date to meet and a common agenda to discuss.

Having all of this on mind, the International and Security Affairs Centre (ISAC Fund) from Belgrade decided to open a debate on the state of the relations between Serbia and Albania. The importance of the issue for regional security and for the completion of the European Union (EU) membership bids by all countries of the Western Balkans is manifest.

ISAC Fund aims to bring closer to readers in both countries issues and topics on the agenda, without particular attention to the Kosovo status issue. The aim of such approach is to indicate that there is much more the two countries can focus on than the Kosovo status issue. The region of Western Balkans has been divided and intersected for centuries and, in the 21st century, for the first time in history, it has an opportunity to be genuinely united.

This policy paper presents the views and analysis of prominent authors, scholars and practitioners from both countries that have participated at two workshops in Belgrade and Tirana organised by

the ISAC Fund. This whole project is kindly supported by the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation (www.fes.de), offices in Belgrade and Tirana (<http://www.fes.rs> and <http://www.fes.org.al>).

The information and policy recommendations that this document contains are based on the discussion and conclusions from two workshops. Yet, they reflect only the opinion of the rapporteur and the editorial consultants of this report and cannot be attributed to any participating individual or organisation.

The first workshop took place in Belgrade on September 30th 2010 and the second in Tirana on December 20th 2010. More than 30 prominent politicians, civil servants, members of the civil society, journalists and international relations experts from both countries took part in the two events.

That was the first time ever that Albanian and Serbian experts have participated in a project that is devoted exclusively to the state of relations between their two countries.

Responding to the most pressing needs and adapting to the time and resources available, the participants discussed: *EU Enlargement in the Western Balkans; Security Challenges; Bilateral Political Co-operation; Bilateral and Regional Economic Co-operation; Culture and Education; Media and Civil Sector; The Position of National Minorities.*

Both workshops were held under the Chatham House Rule, which is why the Paper does not mention any names. Also, this Paper should be read in conjunction with the previous Food for Thought Paper “Serbian – Albanian Relations: State and Perspectives”, which was published by ISAC Fund in September 2010.¹

The aim of the project was to produce a comprehensive study of the Albanian-Serb relations which would serve as starting point to formulate a set of practical recommendations for better policies.

The intention was to direct recommendations towards all stakeholders which could contribute to the improvement of the relations between Serbia and Albania, such as the parliaments, public authorities, domestic and international civil society organisations (CSO) and external actors, starting with the EU.

ISAC Fund’s policy study **Serbia and Albania – Preparing for a New Start** is the first attempt to produce a set of practical policy proposals on this topic. Our firm belief is that by building bridges through constant steps, no matter how incremental, towards improved co-operation and understanding, Albania and Serbia can gradually improve and normalize their relations.

Another key purpose of this project is to show to the EU and the international community that the countries of the region, and in particular civil society organisations such as ISAC Fund and its partners in Serbia and Albania, are themselves capable of creating and exporting stability and thus qualify for equal participation in international affairs.

¹ <http://www.isac-fund.org/download/S-A-relations.pdf>

1. THE EU ENLARGEMENT AND ACCESSION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRIES

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) had already in 1981 an advanced political and economic co-operation with the European Community (EC). However, this initial status was undermined by the series of wars that redrew the political map of the region. Since the regime change in Serbia in 2000, all successive Serbian governments have insisted that the EU membership is their overarching foreign policy goal. Their pace in fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria, however, was uneven. The stop-and-go policy of Serbia towards the EU since 2000 is mainly a result of political problems such as deficiencies in the co-operation with the UN Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. However, Serbia has worked strenuously on preparing its public service and administration in dealing with the process of accession, hence it now has a good basis for the efficient implementation of the reforms. In January 2011, after applying for EU membership on December 22nd 2010, Serbia submitted answers to the EU Questionnaire for potential candidates.

Yugoslavia had advanced political and economic co-operation with the European Community already in 1981. Since Albania signed its first agreement with the EU in 1992, there has been a lot of progress.

On the other hand, Albania was the most isolated country in Europe during the Cold War. After the fall of communism, this country signed the first agreement with the EU in 1992. Since then, Albania has had a more or less steady progress, which culminated in 2009, when Tirana was invited to submit the required answers to the EU Questionnaire. However, Albania's candidacy, in place since 28 April 2009, has been

put on hold by the EU, mostly because of the inner political disputes which obstruct the normal functioning of the political system. Since the most recent domestic crisis in Albania which erupted in January 2011, EU officials (in particular, the office of the High Representative of Foreign Affairs) have worked with the confronted sides to ensure stability.

The political mood in most of the old member states regarding further EU enlargement is unfavourable. Among the population, negative attitude towards the WB countries prevail. Western Europe now sees more risks (for instance, because of the potential spill-over of organised crime and corruption) attached to further EU enlargement than gains. The increase in the flow of asylum seekers in the EU from Serbia has become the most recent problem which adds to the perception that WB countries are more of a burden than a gain for the EU. Instead of security interests and even geopolitical reasoning, which was one of the key reasons for the support of the eastern enlargement in 2004, there is now restraint. First of all, there is a perception of economic risks connected to this enlargement due to the poverty of some of the would-be members. Secondly, there are no obvious political or economic benefits as it was the case with the CEE countries. Thirdly, there is a raise of xenophobia and nationalistic populism in some of the old member countries which makes it risky for governments to support too overtly further EU enlargement. Fourthly, the pace of reforms in the majority of West Balkan aspirant countries has not been satisfactory.

Participants of both work-shops shared the impression that EU policy makers have become more hesitant in their attitude towards Southeast Europe than they were during previous round of EU enlargement. There is an obvious discrepancy between the views of the Brussels administration and those of politicians in some member states. Except for the Greek Government, with some support from Austria and Italy, none of the EU members came out with any new proposal regarding the EU enlargement towards the WB. To the contrary, the perceived interests in a number of

Western Balkan leaders often speak about potential accession dates in order to appeal to the public opinion and mobilize support, while, at the same time, they neglect the need to provide information to the public about the challenges of the accession process. This exhausts societies which start perceiving conditionality as a never-ending process and reduces the ability of political elites to risk difficult choices

old member states is how to slow down the accession process. The German Government, one of the most influential in the EU, has been insisting on further enlargement “with moderation”. The justification given for this is that faults that appeared during the Romanian and Bulgarian accession should be avoided in the case of the Western Balkans so that new perspective members must be “100% ready”.

Border issues, minority rights, corruption, and open bilateral issues continue to present a challenge for the WB countries’ EU path. Furthermore, the diversity, multi-ethnic composition, and the history of conflicts in the region are of concern to some Western diplomats. This, according to the same participant, poses a question as to whether the EU is risking “imperial overstretch” with the accession of these states? As one other participant underlined, the integration of the countries of the WB cannot be based on the standpoint *It is better to have them inside than on the outside*. This kind of thinking cannot help accumulate support in the old EU member states for further enlargement. The EU accession was previously perceived as a response to security challenges. Nowadays, WB does not any longer appear to be a real security challenge; therefore, the strategic thinking in the EU has changed. Now Brussels is much more inclined to look at the preparedness of a country to join. For this reason, countries such as Germany and the Netherlands imposed an obligatory debate on the EU membership application of any potential candidate prior to forwarding it to the European Commission, which used to be done automatically. This new hurdle was introduced when Montenegro applied for membership in April 2009. One participant at the workshop stated that the most optimistic predictions mention 2018 as the earliest possible year for the EU accession of the Western Balkan countries. Indeed, WB countries now face stricter conditionality due to some problematical experiences from previous enlargements. This is not necessarily a bad situation, because countries will be more prepared to face the coming challenges. *“It is about how fast you change, and not how fast you become a member”* – that should be the motto of all politicians in the WB. And for this reason, politicians need to think strategically. Challenges of EU accession will be even greater if politicians do not stop thinking in four-year election periods and stop trying to extract benefits from certain steps on the integration path, while neglecting the accession itself. Western Balkan leaders often speak about potential accession dates in order to appeal to the public opinion and mobilize support, while, at the same time, they neglect the need to provide information to the public about the challenges of the accession process. This exhausts societies which start perceiving conditionality as a never-ending process and reduces the ability of political elites to risk difficult choices.

The EU political leaders should support the proposal of the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitris Droutsas from November 2010, in which he outlined a plan for a Second Summit of Thessaloniki.

The real question which is on the table is the *speed of reforms*, as one of the participants outlined. Fast reforms are almost inevitably in collision with the above-mentioned behaviour of the political elites. Recent surveys show the Albanian citizens as the biggest optimists in the region regarding the date of accession. One can assume that this kind of optimism is positive, but the expectations can also be

dangerous. Because of the lack of proper information and because of the technocratic nature of the process, there is no real effort to build up internal pressure on politicians.

The proper lessons for informing and building-up domestic awareness about the process of European integration could be drawn from the successful example of the visa liberalisation process. The EU political leaders should support the proposal of the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Dimitris Droutsas from November 2010, in which he outlined a plan for a Second Summit of Thessaloniki². This proposal brings up two suggestions. The first point is the forming of strategic alliances of the WB candidate countries in order to advance jointly their membership bid. Secondly, Droutsas recommended that the candidates should be offered a clear date for accession if all of the necessary conditions are fulfilled. The precise agenda would be important because it would shift the focus to the reform process itself, and away from the possible date naming. Finally, the most important aspect of this proposal is its emphasis on the importance of the existing regional initiatives and their better and more unified coordination.

There is an impression that the Western Balkan leaders prefer to communicate with the EU officials than between themselves of the common challenges they are facing. For instance, Albanian and Serbian politicians often meet on the fringes of multilateral forums, but seldom bilaterally. This raises a question in Brussels: *“What are these countries doing to improve themselves?”* The apparent lack of good-neighbourly communication provides arguments to those who oppose faster schemes for the inclusion of WB states into the EU.

Experience has shown that the WB governments are much more proactive and efficient when faced with a concrete agenda (like it was the case in visa liberalisation process). For this reason, the EU should also think about a much more exact task list and concrete methodology for measuring performance of the candidate countries and its verification.

As one of the participants noted, the EU ran out of ideas regarding future enlargement. Hence, good regional cooperation would be an excellent signal which should be sent to the EU. Cooperation could be improved in such areas as economy, security, and technical cooperation in the EU enlargement process. Indeed, experience has shown that the WB governments are much more proactive and efficient when faced with a concrete agenda (like it was the case in visa liberalisation process). For this reason, the EU should also think about a much more exact task list and concrete methodology for measuring performance and its verification.

The upcoming EU budget projections for the period 2013-2020 via the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) indicate that there seem to be smaller funds planned for the Balkan states. In addition, IPA funds appear to favour the EU priorities, such as those of Justice and Home

² **Summary excerpt from Droutsas speech on 22 November 2010 at the European Policy Centre – EPC**

Greece will hold the EU Presidency in 2014. Our goal is to convene an EU-Western Balkans Summit Meeting – “Thessaloniki II” – where we can adopt a political declaration that sets a specific, ambitious-and-yet-realistic target for completing the accession process of Western Balkan countries. We are setting three basic goals for “Thessaloniki II”.

- First, the creation of “Group 2014”, which will consist of member states who will form “preparation alliances” with candidate countries and participate actively in the process, for they, too, will be assessed on the effectiveness of the assistance they provide.
- Second, the development of close ties of cooperation amongst candidate countries on a regional level, strengthening existing cooperation platforms and putting greater emphasis on interaction between these platforms. We should not let the cooperation that has already accrued through the SEECP and RCC go to waste. And we also need to capitalize on sectoral cooperation networks like the Energy Community of Southeast Europe.
- Third, agreement on a date. A date that will be our target for full accession. This will be the new catalyst for change and progress. It will be the incentive for reforms and a basis for assessing governments in the region. It will be a vital commitment from Europe, saying that the Western Balkans are part of the family and that Europe will never again let the crimes of the past be repeated. Complete speech at http://www.mfa.gr/www.mfa.gr/Articles/en-US/22112010_ALK1312.htm2

Affairs. In most cases the population does not recognize these as priority issues in any of the WB countries. Making areas like fostering employment or revitalising industrial production eligible for IPA funding – or mobilise capital from other EU sources - would help bring the EU perspective closer to the population of the WB countries.

The public opinion in a number of “old” EU states is not inclined towards the new candidates. Negative images prevail, the “invention of the Balkans” (M. Todorova) is still taking place. The absence of a drive for mutual cooperation is not helping the accession process nor improving the image of the WB countries in the EU. All countries of the region need to co-ordinate their lobbying strategies for the whole region and not just for themselves. This would improve the image of WB countries among the EU citizens for whom this region is often something distant, unknown and scary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The WB countries should make a joint appeal to the EU for the adoption of an enhanced EU accession strategy for the Western Balkans. This strategy should be formulated along the lines of the White Schengen Road Map, e.g. with the public specification of the benchmarks to be dealt with. Such a procedure would also enable the citizens to be better informed about the state of the accession process of their country and the achievements of their leaders.
2. There is an urgent need for the WB countries to begin joint lobbying in the EU for their common goals (Baltic States and Visegrád countries did so successfully in the past). The countries of the WB and the EU should re-assess the elements of the proposal for the Second Thessaloniki summit in 2014 of the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs from the 22nd November 2010. This initiative is a sound basis for initiating the discussion on the reforms process and the European perspective of the region, as well as domestic and international supervision of the process as a whole.
3. Potential Candidate countries should have a greater say when choosing projects to be financed by the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Also, more funding should be directed towards sectors in which the region's population can easily recognize the benefits of European integration.
4. Albania and Serbia, as well as other WB countries, should focus on cooperation in issues that are of common concern in the process of European integration. For instance, closer cooperation in the suppression of organized crime could contribute to confidence building between the two nations and with the EU countries.
5. There are other possibilities for practical co-operation between Serbia and Albania in regard to European integration (for instance through the exchange of experiences in the EU accession process) – especially in the field of jointly strengthening their respective public administrations with the goal of enhancing good governance.
6. The WB countries need to communicate better to their own public what the EU accession process means. Accurate informing of the public about the accession process is essential from the side of the media and the members of the civil society.

2. SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE REGION

During the past two decades, the WB was generally perceived as one of the main security threats in Europe. Previously, former Yugoslavia was one of the main contributors to international security during the Cold War and until the collapse of the Soviet Union. This tradition was reversed after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, when the region became one of the main security importers in the world.

In the 1990s Serbia under the rule of Slobodan Milošević was not interested in becoming a part of the Euro-Atlantic integration. It saw itself in conflict with most of the previous members of the Yugoslav federation and a number of states in the close neighbourhood. This hostility culminated during the NATO intervention in 1999. After the democratic changes in 2000, Serbia moved closer towards the Euro-Atlantic institutions. In 2006, it became a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme. In 2007, the Parliament of Serbia adopted the **Resolution on Protection of Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity and Constitutional Order**. Article 6 of the Resolution proclaims Serbia's military neutrality³. This move has to be seen in the context of the attempts of Serbia's government to ensure Russia's support and to distance itself from the West and thus avert the independence declaration of Kosovo's Albanians.

Albania was a different example. It eagerly participated in all of the security initiatives and proposals which came from the West. Albania was the first SEE country that participated in the *North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC)*. Also, this country entered the PfP as soon as it was formed. Finally, this country has stepped into the full NATO membership together with Croatia in 2009. Albania is contributing to several international peacekeeping missions in various frameworks such as the NATO ISAF mission in Afghanistan, the mission *Active Endeavour* in the Mediterranean, the EU mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the UN mission in Chad as part of the UN forces. Albania has as well participated in the so-called *Coalition of the Willing* and its mission *Iraqi Freedom*.

The biggest security threats in the WB region, according to several participants, remain the issues of the status of Kosovo and the internal situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

While Albania is a NATO member, Serbia is a participant in the NATO Partnership for Peace programme. Since mid-2008, Serbia managed to improve defence and security relations with almost all of the neighbouring countries. Yet, Serbia has not advanced much with the implementation of its PfP goals. This is partly a result of the fact that only a handful of Serbian political

parties advocate NATO membership, whereas the majority of the public opinion strongly rejects the potential accession. However, almost all of Serbia's neighbours are either NATO members, or have clearly expressed their intention to join. Therefore, overall cooperation of Serbia with NATO is necessary for the improvement of its security and its position in international affairs.

One participant mentioned that according to sources close to the Government, Serbia has supported NATO expansion into the Balkans i.e. the accession of Croatia and Albania to NATO and the awarding of Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina with the Membership Action Plan. Also, one should note that the reduction of NATO KFOR troops in Kosovo was always met with unease in Belgrade. The general standpoint of the government is that the more integrated the region is into transatlantic fora, the more secure Serbia feels. In this moment the goal of Serbia in the Euro Atlantic integration is to reach the level of the advanced partner in the PfP (like

³ http://www.mfa.gov.rs/Srpski/spopol/Prioriteti/KIM/kim_rezolucija_07_1_s.html

the current status of Austria and Sweden). Also, the same participant outlined Serbia's will for increased participation in the peacekeeping operations under the UN flag.

The security situation in the region is marked by the continuous tensions related, according to several participants, to the status of Kosovo and the internal situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The capacity of both countries to influence the situation in Kosovo is enormous, but with regards to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the picture is different. While Serbia has a large stake and influence over Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania's role is most visible through its membership in NATO.

Other threats in the region include organized crime and drug trafficking. Albanian and Serbian criminal groups, be it from Kosovo, Albania or Serbia, is operating in many parts of Europe. Exchange of information, genuine cooperation in tackling this challenge, would prevent organized crime groups from acquiring political power in both Albania and Serbia, as well as in Kosovo, and prevent them from exercising such influence which could hinder the fulfilment of the accession conditions. Foiling organized crime would be conducive to curbing high-level corruption and stop creating alternative sources of power.

Serbia has signed agreements for cooperation in fight against organized crime, terrorism and international illegal drug trafficking with some of the neighbouring countries, including with the Republic of Albania (in April 2001). Recently, Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina negotiated potential strengthening the police collaboration and establishing the Regional Centre for Combating Organized Crime based in Belgrade. In the case of founding of such a Centre, all of the countries of the region should be also included. A quality, comprehensive, transparent, and open cooperation has to be developed. However, we believe that the scope of this Centre has to include a join fight against terrorism.

One important issue causes mistrust in Serbia: the more and more uninhibited public debate and popular support (according to several opinion polls) for the concept of "Greater Albania", which includes all areas where ethnic Albanians live into one state. One participant noted that reporting on the topic of creation of the Greater Albania usually attracts much attention in Serbia. On the other hand, major Albanian political actors consider such assertions

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as speculations, outlining their impression that in Albania the majority of the public is against the unification of Kosovo and Albania. For them, the only acceptable "unification" should happen via Brussels. Another participant from Albania mentioned that parties which are supporting the Greater Albania project do not have any support in this state. Regular opinion polls conducted by Gallup Europe's Balkan Monitor and some others show a steady increase in support for the unification of Albanian populated territories in Kosovo and Northwest Macedonia, yet a decrease in Albania. These results proved to be grounded judging by the most recent parliamentary elections in Kosovo when the movement *Self-determination* led by Albin Kurti won 11% of the votes. This list is the main proponent of Greater Albania in Kosovo and often employs an anti-western discourse. The reasons for this increase could be found in the uncertainty of Kosovo's current path (partially recognized independence), and mixed feelings about identity (state versus ethnicity). On the other hand, creating a greater Albanian state might have a stabilizing influence in the region. Such issues, no matter how sensitive, need to be discussed. It is necessary to validate the wide-spread assumption that the perspective of EU membership is restraining

⁴ <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>

people from nationalistic concepts and to test the notion that only ethnically homogenous states provide long-term stability.

The participants agreed, that although the Kosovo issue cannot be avoided in bilateral relations between Serbia and Albania, it should not be a dominant issue and continue narrowing the space for cooperation. Even though the Balkan countries are well integrated in the active security structures of the region, there is enough space for the increased cooperation, both among the states of the region and with the international organisations. Still, the issue of Kosovo remains active, and it continues to hamper the relations in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Serbia and Albania should sign a bilateral security agreement. This would significantly improve the mutual relations and ease the current tensions in the region. The preparations for the adoption of the agreement should include public conferences, involving the civil society, on bilateral and regional security issues.
2. Almost all of Serbia's neighbours are either NATO members (including Albania) or well advancing towards the full membership. Serbia needs open social dialogue about the potential merits or disadvantages of its accession into NATO- and how this membership would affect regional stability and Serbia's relations with its neighbours.
3. Serbia and Albania should use all of the opportunities coming from the existing regional bodies and initiatives, in order to improve dialogue and cooperation. Furthermore, governments of Serbia and Albania together with CSOs from both countries should make a programme of regular visits with an aim of overcoming prejudices and the lack of knowledge that exists.
4. Serbia and Albania have recently signed the bilateral agreement on cooperation in the fight against organized crime, international drug trafficking and international terrorism. Therefore, Albania (as well as the other countries of the region) should also be included into an ongoing initiative between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for developing a Regional Centre for Combating Organized Crime. Further, the planned scope of this Centre should be broaden and it should include a joint fight against terrorism.
5. Serbia should adopt an action plan for fulfilling the goals outlined by its Partnership for Peace Presentation document, in order to achieve advanced partnership status. This would also improve the level of cooperation of Serbia with NATO, thus contributing to improvement of the security situation in the region.

3. BILATERAL POLITICAL CO-OPERATION

Serbs and Albanians are the two most numerous ethnic groups in the WB. Therefore, good relations between Serbia and Albania are important for the stability of the region. Their mutual cooperation is significant for the successful completion of their European accession process. However, the prospects of improving these relations are burdened with mutual misconceptions which stem from history and from the Kosovo conflict. Certainly, the issue of Kosovo is the biggest problem in mutual relations. In Serbia, the Republic of Albania is perceived as one of the main proponents of the independence of Kosovo. The issue of Kosovo, however, represents one of the acute problems in the region and Europe in general, and surpasses the bilateral level of relations between Serbia and Albania. Poor communication between the two countries still prevails and this is only in part compensated by the various regional activities.

Since the founding of Albania as an independent state, bilateral relations with Yugoslavia were rarely good. Only in the period from 1945 to 1948, there was a period of proximity, partly based on the common struggle against Nazi occupation and partly a product of the initial mutual closeness of the new communist governments. Nonetheless, already in 1948, after Tito's conflict with Stalin, a local "iron curtain" fell between the two countries which was only slightly lifted after the fall of communism.

After more than eight years of steady progress in mutual relations, the declaration of independence of Kosovo on 17th February 2008 hampered it again. Albania was perceived in Belgrade as one of the prime promoters of Kosovo independence.

Throughout the 1990s, the relations between Serbia and Albania have been poor mostly because of the situation regarding Kosovo. Albania was the only state that has recognized the independence of Kosovo proclaimed by the Assembly of Kosovo Albanians in Kačanik in 1991. Mutual diplomatic relations were cut off on 17th April 1999 during the NATO bombing and the escalation of the Kosovo crisis. However, following the regime change in Belgrade in October 2000, the two countries resumed diplomatic relations on 17th

January 2001, and a series of meetings between high officials took place. In December 2004, Vuk Drašković, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, paid the first official visit to Albania since the year 1948. In return, Kastriot Islami, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, visited Belgrade in May 2005. A series of meetings between the ministers of foreign affairs of the two countries followed, both at bilateral and multilateral level. However, after the declaration of independence of Kosovo on 17th February 2008, the relations were frozen again. Albania was perceived in Belgrade as one of the prime promoters of Kosovo independence.

Recently, a positive change became evident. Former Albanian chief diplomat Ilir Meta met with Serbian President Boris Tadić on 11th March 2010 in Belgrade. He also visited the Albanian populated parts of Southern Serbia. In the Fall of 2010, there were discussions about a possible trip of President Tadić to Albania. In December 2010, Ilir Meta was once again in Belgrade, as a guest at the ruling Democratic Party congress, as the only foreign representative present. Yet, reports about alleged crimes committed against Serbian civilians on the territory of Albania during the Kosovo conflict in 1999 and the recent political upheaval in Tirana seemed to have put Tadić's plans on halt again.

At the end of 2010 Serbia had finally abolished the visa regime for Albanian citizens. In April 2011, the vice president of the Serbian government and the minister of interior, Ivica Dačić visited

Albania and signed a Readmission Treaty with his Albanian counterpart. Dačić and Ilir Meta also signed an agreement on cooperation in the fight against organized crime, international drug trafficking and international terrorism.

Even when there are open chances for dialogue, it still seems that the politicians from these two countries do not use it, primarily because of the fear of the consequences at the elections. The chance for overcoming this is the establishment of the institutional framework of cooperation which would oblige politicians to cooperate in the best interest of the both countries. However, in addition to the official institutional cooperation, politicians from Serbia and Albania should be more proactive and use every opportunity to continue the dialogue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Serbia and Albania need to continue and intensify an open discussion about the mutual perceptions of their peoples. This discussion should be used to tackle all sensitive issues, such as Kosovo status, or the Greater Albania project, in order to build up a foundation for understanding.
2. Both countries should develop a roadmap for the improvement of their normative base for bilateral political cooperation. Cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs seems particularly important in light of the EU accession criteria.
3. There is a need for direct and regular contacts between Serbian and Albanian politicians, foreign policy experts, and all other interested parties. An institutionalized inter-state framework for contacts and cooperation should be initiated.
4. Political parties should contribute to the development of joint cooperation. Most of Serbian and Albanian parties are associated to some level with the European party families. They should use this framework to establish better communication, primarily based on their programmatic affiliations. Cooperation and contacts at this level would certainly have a positive spill-over effect if these parties enter the government.
5. It is necessary to improve people-to-people contacts through youth exchanges and all other forms of personal communication. Providing young generation with an opportunity to establish direct contacts would result in new and fresh ideas to serve as a basis for the future.

4. BILATERAL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION

Economic ties between SFR Yugoslavia and Albania were cut after Tito's break with Stalin in 1948. At the beginning of the 1980s, some trade was gradually re-established and short before the downfall of communism Yugoslavia became the most important foreign trade partner for Albania with annual trade balance ranging from 148 million US dollars in 1982 to 87 million USD in 1987⁵. The violent break up of Yugoslavia, the ensuing economic sanctions, and the fall of communism in Albania again contributed to a new decline of the economic co-operation.

In late 1980s, former Yugoslavia was the most important foreign trade partner for Albania. In 2000, the trade exchange between Serbia and Albania was estimated to be just 233.000 US dollars.

Since the regime change in Serbia in the year 2000, economic ties between the two countries were again established, yet to a small degree. The EU, determined to foster regional cooperation as a part of the EU accession strategy for the Western Balkans countries, envisaged several tools for that purpose. One of them was the creation of the regional free trade area. In order to prepare countries for it, the EU pushed for creation and implementation of the bilateral free trade agreements between the countries of the Western Balkans.

The bilateral free trade agreement between Serbia and Albania came into force on August 1st 2004. It was a first significant step in improving of bilateral relations after a long period of entropy. However, the real boom in mutual trade happened in 2007, when the regional free trade area, CEFTA 2006, was established. In that first year trade exchange almost doubled, from around 40 million US dollars in 2006 to more than 90 million US dollars in 2007. After the small decline in 2008 and 2010 due to the global economic crisis, the trade exchange between Serbia and Albania reached record 139 million US dollars in 2010. However, the trade between these two countries is not balanced since more than 90% of it represents Serbian export to Albania.

After CEFTA was established in 2006, the trade exchange between Serbia and Albania boomed. From less than 40 million US dollars in 2006, it has tripled by 2010 to 139 million US dollars.

The above mentioned actions on the level of governments were followed by the institutions and companies. Since 2005, the Serbian Chamber of Commerce (SCC) has increased its activities towards the Albanian market. In February 2005, the SCC signed a Cooperation agreement with the Albanian Union of Chambers, and later that year it formed its Section for Albania, composed of more than 50 Serbian companies. Its main aim is to spread the information about the business climate in Albania. The positive movement is taking place,

and one of the most recent examples were organizing of the Serbian days at Tirana International Trade Fair in Tirana and the joint visit of businessmen from Southern Serbia to Albania that took place at the end of March 2011, organized by the Regional Chamber of Commerce from Southern Serbia and the TCCI – Tirana Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI).

The main Serbian products that are being exported to Albania are: Iron products and Iron sewage, electric energy, containers for liquids, non-alcoholic drinks, grain and grain products, medicines, ceramic roof tiles, detergents etc. In the structure of the modest Albanian export to Serbia almost one third represents export of iron and steel and products, while the rest goes to furniture, shoes, raw leather and furs, fruits and vegetables.

⁵ <http://countrystudies.us/albania/Appendix.htm#table11>

In recent years some prominent Serbian companies invested in Albania, such as: Galeb Group, Comtrade computers, Delta Maxi (acquisition of the Euromax chain of supermarkets), Hemofarm (Pharmaceuticals), etc. Still, the overall Serbian investments in Albania are still modest – just around 3 million Euro. On the other hand, Albanian investments in Serbia are insignificant.

The trade relations are currently not balanced: Serbia has a greater trade surplus, and the Albanian companies are not sufficiently present on the Serbian market. In order to ensure steady and prospering trade relations, it is necessary to facilitate mutual trade, so that the investors and businessmen in both countries can have equal opportunities. Balanced trade would also give rise in the long run for better political cooperation. The best European experience testifies that intermingled economic interest fosters the cooperation between the partners and usually induces the so-called spill-over effect to the other areas of cooperation.

One of the main aims of CEFTA 2006 was to motivate countries of the WB for deeper regional integration, what would help them prepare for their EU accession.

CEFTA is important not only from the aspect of bilateral trade. Being one of the tools of the EU that is being used to improve readiness for EU membership of the WB countries, CEFTA 2006 has an increasingly important political dimension. One of the aims of this project was to motivate countries for deeper regional integration, CEFTA goes beyond being just a regional

free trade agreement, with a sole purpose of abolishment of tariffs in mutual trade. It also foresees the liberalisation of the market of services promotes better conditions for the foreign investments, introduces the competition rules and protection of the intellectual property in accordance with the EU standards etc. One of the most interesting aspects of this agreement is the diagonal cumulation of origin, which allows export to whole CEFTA market of final goods produced from inputs coming from all of the CEFTA parties. In addition, if countries that are participating in production have a functional Stabilisation and Association Treaty (SAA), these goods could be also exported to the EU market. Although Serbia and Albania have all the necessary preconditions to use the diagonal cumulation of origin, yet this is still not the case.

It should be mentioned that both Serbia and Albania have free trade agreements also with the European Free Trade Area (EFTA) member states (Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Iceland), EU member states and Turkey. Furthermore, Serbia has free trade agreements with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, thus opening the opportunities for potential mutual investments in joint production of goods and their export to third markets.

One additional quality that CEFTA offers to the countries of the region is the real-time simulation of the competition at the EU market. Therefore, the companies of the member states through competition on the regional market prepare themselves for the EU market and increase their competitiveness. Regional interconnectivity attracts foreign investors to invest into development of industry that could satisfy the regional needs.

For Serbia, CEFTA represents a sort of a *light at the end of a tunnel*, when it comes to foreign trade. This country has a large surplus in trade with the CEFTA 2 (more the 1.2 billion Euro), while with the other countries and free trade areas it mostly has deficits.

Albania encounters deficits in foreign trade with almost all partners in foreign trade. Yet, 80% of the Albanian trade exchange is with EU countries, thus making its share in the regional trade almost insignificant.

There are still numerous obstacles for the complete implementation of CEFTA which are hampering the trade between the two countries, and the region as a whole. These obstacles are common

for all the CEFTA countries – namely technical and non – tariff barriers for trade (complicated procedures at border crossing points, non-recognition of certificates of quality, non-conformity of the domestic standards and technical regulations with the international standards, the shortage of institutionalized accreditation bodies)⁶. These obstacles are being solved through the CEFTA framework, however some of them could be also eliminated bilaterally (like the high fees on the border crossings, which could be eliminated through agreement on road transportation).

Governments of both Serbia and Albania should be aware that if the level of the domestic production remains at the present level, and without a strong effort to prepare for competition on the EU market, states are risking losing the domestic production.

One potential non-tariff obstacle for the improved trade relations of Serbia and Albania represent the different level of adjustment with the EU regulations. Albania has accepted more than 14 thousand EU standards, while Serbia has less than 3 thousands.

if the level of the domestic production remains at the present level, and without a strong effort to prepare for competition on the EU market, the two states are risking losing the domestic production. Serbs and Albanians (not just within borders of Serbia and Albania) together form a market of nearly 15 million potential consumers; hence their respective governments should think what they could do together in the future.

The most valuable asset of both countries is their geographical position; however the benefits of this could not be properly exploited without good transport and energy infrastructure. In this moment, transport routes between Serbia and Albania are in poor condition. With progress on the two Pan-European corridors in the region – Corridor X and Corridor VIII – both countries would establish transport connections as never before in history. Of particular relevance are the construction of the Belgrade – South Adriatic Highway (Belgrade-Bar), rehabilitation of the Belgrade – Bar railway, connection Bar-Shkodër, and finishing of Durres – Kukes motorway and its connections (via Pristina) to the other important roads (Belgrade-South Adriatic, Corridors X (Niš) and VIII (Skopje)). Presently, the main ports for export of goods produced in Serbia are Rijeka, Constance, Thessaloniki, Bar and Koper. The construction and rehabilitation of the previously mentioned corridors would also increase the attractiveness of the port of Durres for the Serbian companies.

The improvement of regional transport could be expected in case of new agreements: on Cooperation in the area of Air Traffic and International Road Transport of Passengers and Goods. In addition, the whole region would also benefit from gas and oil pipeline routes passing through it that were announced – South Stream pipeline, Nabucco pipeline and Trans-Adriatic oil pipeline.

With construction and rehabilitation of the transport network and with potential construction of the gas and oil pipeline Serbia and Albania (and the rest of the countries of the region) would strengthen advantages of their geographical position. The world economic crisis has weakened the investment prospects for the region. The current climate calls for a more proactive and comprehensive approach, a need to link the improvements in infrastructure with the investments in order to create opportunities. By using this approach, WB countries could address broader investment issues and promote economic activity, such as special productions and trade zones. Since labour on both markets is not expensive, it is most likely that the area of industrial production would be a potential field for the future strategic cooperation.

⁶ REPORT - From the session of the Working Group on Technical Barriers to Trade and Non-Tariff Barriers of the CEFTA 2006 Forum of Chambers, held on 9 November 2010, in Belgrade. www.pks.rs/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vjpxQ5nCJKk%3D&tabi

Economic and trade cooperation of Albania and Serbia could be considered as being in an opening phase. Indeed, recent developments on the path towards the EU should push the politicians to foster bilateral economic cooperation, in terms of complete liberalization of trade, implementation of the joint investments projects, and the intensification of other forms of co-operation that may contribute to the economic and political stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for better presentation of Albanian firms and products on the Serbian market in order to achieve better trade balance. One of the tools would be organizing Days of Albania on the main fairs in the country, similarly to the event Serbian day at the Tirana International Trade Fair which helped boost of Serbian export to Albania in 2010.
2. On the Serbian side, there is a need to ensure the constant presence of Serbian companies in Albania, for instance through a warehouse/showroom for Serbian products. This could also be applied for the Albanian companies in Serbia.
3. Serbia and Albania should push for the elimination of all of the technical and non-tariff barriers that hamper the between them.
4. Serbia should push for faster acceptance and implementation of the EU standards, that represent one of the important non-tariff barriers for the trade with the other CEFTA 2006 states (especially with Albania).
5. The countries of the region should establish a joint business council with the task to promote direct investments, joint ventures and other forms of economic co-operation to improve their international competitiveness. For instance, through joint projects, Albania could make use of the free trade agreements that Serbia has with Russia and some other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent Nations (CIS).
6. There is ample space for the broadening of Central Europe Free Trade Area's (CEFTA) activities: The countries of the region could, for instance, work together in the following areas: strengthening service markets, cooperation with the investment agencies, and coherence of competition rules. They should also begin preparing the terrain for the protection of the intellectual property at the level of the region.
7. Serbia could consider its involvement in a project to assist Albania and Montenegro to rehabilitate the railway between the Shkodër and Podgorica. This would directly link Albania to the railway route Beograd-Bar thus helping the diversification of the trade routes between Serbia and Albania.
8. Serbia should provide conditions to link the Corridor X to the motorway Durres – Kukes – Priština, presently under development. This move would open better communication of Albania with the hinterland of the Balkan Peninsula, thus contributing to the diversification of offer/demand in various sectors of regional cooperation.
9. One of the most important advantages of the region is its geographical position as the nexus between Central/Western Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean area. A joint strategy for the development of the transport and energy networks is needed in order to exploit fully the geographical position of the region.

5. CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Despite living next to each other for centuries, Albanians and Serbs know little about each other. Co-operation in the field of culture was almost non-existent until the year 2000. During the years of the Hoxha regime in Albania, the border between the two states was almost impregnable even for cultural contents. However, with the spreading of the modern mass media, television in particular, former Yugoslavia became a sort of the “window to the West” for the average Albanian. Yugoslav television was being watched almost everywhere, even though it was not officially allowed. Its films and music made a significant impact, so there are people who understand Serbian language in Albania having picked it up on TV.

Serbian culture products are received with interest in Albania. Books from authors such as Dragan Velikić, Svetislav Basara, Vladimir Arsenijević and others are on the market.. Goran Bregović's music is popular, while the movies of the prominent director Kusturica can often be seen on TV.

Official channels of cooperation were established after the 2000, yet initiatives remain largely dependant on individuals and CSOs. Nonetheless a number of cultural institutions, artistic groups, amateur theatres and others have established direct ties.

Culture is one of the most important channels for the establishment of better mutual understanding and perceptions. At present, cultural cooperation is mostly dependent on individual initiatives. There is need to have public institutions involved to ensure a stable cooperation platform. An effective way to do so is to organize a direct dialogue between experts in various fields.

Serbian culture products are received with interest in Albania. Books from authors such as Dragan Velikić, Svetislav Basara, Vladimir Arsenijević and others are on the market. Even the books of Vuk Drašković, writer and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, are now being published have been published in Albania. Goran Bregović's music is very popular, while the movies of the director Kusturica can often be seen on TV. Recently, Goran Paskaljević's movie directed together with Genc Permeti “*Honeymoons*” received good reviews and gained popularity in Albania. However, only few Albanian writers and other artists are present in the Serbian cultural field.

Serbs and Albanians need to make greater efforts in discovering common grounds. Centuries of common history remain obscure or blurred. Citizens and elites know more about what divides the two nations than what connects them. One participant in the work-shops pointed out that Serbian medieval history is important for Albanian historiography, yet there are no Albanian scholars who know medieval Serbian. These issues could be dealt with at the bilateral level, through a possible educational-scientific cooperation agreement. It should be noted that also, there is a lack of research and documentation on Serbian-Albanian relations dating back to the Tito-Hoxha period.

Until recently, the cooperation in the field of education was also almost non-existent. Yet, the Department of Albanology (Albanian Studies) at the Faculty of Philology of the University of Belgrade (www.fil.bg.ac.rs/eng) has a long tradition in educating teachers of the Albanian language, literature and culture. Presently, 19 new students are being admitted annually. At the moment, this Faculty has cooperation agreements with the Universities in Shkodër and Tirana, as well as the Agriculture University of Tirana. According to these agreements, visiting professors from Albania come to teach at Belgrade University.

Serbian-Montenegrin and Albanian minority have problems in exercising their cultural rights in Albania and Serbia, respectively. The Albanian minority in Serbia has a wide set of legally enshrined rights regarding the education on their mother tongue. However the number of textbooks in Albanian language is insufficient. In addition, Albanian minority representatives consider most of the textbooks as inappropriate.

On the other hand, the Serbian-Montenegrin minority is not recognized by the Albanian state, so they cannot exercise the right of education in their mother tongues in the state schools.

In addition, the regular school textbooks in both states are bursting with incorrect assertions and nationalism, especially textbooks for history classes. Therefore, there is a need for improved joint academic effort to promote a more tolerant approach. A good example of how independent scholars can deal with different interpretations of history while adhering to academic standards is the Joint History Textbooks Project run by the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast European in Thessaloniki (www.cdsee.org).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Public authorities and civil society organisations should work together to broaden the scope of bilateral cultural exchange. The respective Ministries of Culture should develop together a bilateral agreement on cultural exchange. This would create a legal framework as the basis for long-term public funding of exchange programmes.
2. Mainstream institutions should be more active in the exchange of cultural contents. For instance, through the translations of contemporary literature, visits of artists, etc.
3. Official representatives of Serbia and Albania should initiate a direct exchange on the content of history school textbooks with the purpose of avoiding the repetition of stereotypes. This exchange could take place in a new phase of the regional Joint History Textbooks Project by the Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Thessaloniki (CDSEE).
4. Respective governments should push for the improved cooperation of universities, both on the scientific, teaching and the level of students, preferably through one comprehensive educational-scientific cooperation agreement. The ultimate goal should be the establishment of an exchange programme on different levels, from students to academic staff. This would also help solving of the existing problems with education in their mother tongue of the Serbian-Montenegrin and Albanian minorities in Albania and Serbia, respectively.

6. MEDIA AND CIVIL SECTOR

Direct media coverage and exchange between the mass media was suppressed for more than 50 years until the collapse of the Hohxa regime. Some Albanian journalists were often accused and processed for alleged collaboration with the Yugoslav media⁷. First visits of journalist occurred in the early 1990s, on the brink of dissolution of Yugoslavia. During the isolation of Serbia and Montenegro there were contacts but on a low level. Also at this time, first contacts between Serbian and Albanian civil society organisations were established.

After October 2000, the situation had radically changed. The first Serbian citizens to visit Albania were journalists from independent media and activists of various CSOs. The first newspaper articles about each other were published and they mostly shed a positive light on the neighbour. However, the progress in this filed still remains to a large extent dependant on individual initiatives.

One participant pointed that there has been more exchange of journalists in the first six months of 2001 than during the previous 60 years. This marked a new beginning, a true “reset” of relations. This has resulted with a changed approach by Albanian media towards issues related to Serbia. Yet, stereotypes are still widely present, both in the official political discourse and in the media. They are mainly connected to the Kosovo issue.

However, Serbian mainstream media remains rather uninterested in Albanian culture, life-style, sports or other soft topics related to Albania. Albanians are still being viewed almost exclusively through the Kosovo lens, and the domestic political scene is scarcely touched upon. To illustrate, during the 1997 crisis, only one Serbian journalist is known to have visited Albania. Before and after that, the average Serbian reader viewed Albania as sort of an exotic, mysterious country. As one of the participants noted, Serbian citizens know little about how Albanians live. Her impression is that many of them are surprised when they find out that the every – day problems of Albanian families are quite similar to the Serbian ones.⁸ Although the number of journalists coming to that country has increased, and despite the fact that there is now some empathy in the Serbian public for the neighbour’s problems, there is still little information about Albania in the mass media. Therefore, the next step in cooperation should be inclined towards the editors, who are responsible for allowing access to certain contents to be recognized as important.

The expansion of the use of internet has brought new challenges, and media experts and governments should be entitled to deal with them. Discourses that are now being banned from the mainstream media and sanctioned by the law found the new breeding ground on the internet,

Direct media coverage and exchange between the mass media was suppressed for more than half a century until the collapse of the Enver Hohxa regime. Some Albanian journalists were accused and processed for alleged collaboration with the Yugoslav media. After the regime change in Serbia, there has been more exchange of journalists in the first six months of 2001 than during the previous 60 years.

The next step in cooperation should be inclined towards the editors, who are responsible for allowing access to certain contents to be recognized as important.

Yugoslav wars had maybe stopped on the ground, but they have continued in the virtual sphere. Discourses that are banned from the official media and sanctioned by the law found the new breeding ground on the internet.

⁷ See Collection of Interviews Srpsko-albanski odnosi – Pogled iz Albanije, ISAC fund, Interview with Frok Cupi http://www.isac-fund.org/download/Srpsko-albanski_odnosi_-_Pogled_iz_Albanije.pdf

⁸ Media Centar, Dokumentarici o Albaniji, Kultura, Ubaci

especially in comments on articles published on various sites and also in blogs. As one of the participants noted, Yugoslav wars had maybe stopped on the ground, but they have continued in the virtual sphere. It is the question of time when it will have a real impact on everyday politics. Hence, it is the right time for the media experts to start with the comprehensive analysis of the blogosphere, and to undertake appropriate measures how to deal with this peril.

Cooperation between the Civil Sectors of Serbia and Albania is on the relatively high level; however most of the population of both countries remains uninformed about the results of their work and cooperation.

The cooperation of the civil society has been fruitful, but the outreach such organisations towards the rest of the societies has been limited. Thus, it is necessary to expand and involve more people.

There are many among the young generation which are not aware of the work of the cooperation of the civil sector. Young Albanians and Serbs in general are not interested in knowing more about each other. In fact, the civil society has generally the problem of accessing the mainstream media with the results of their activities. Also, many projects are being carried solely for the purpose of being done, and there is no long term strategy on how to endure the results of the project.

The biggest NGOs from the both countries have established long term cooperation, mostly when dealing with the projects that have regional component within itself. Some of these organisations are: Citizen Initiatives from Belgrade, Albanian Institute of Dialogue and Communication, Forum for Ethnic Relations, Belgrade Centre for Civil Military Relation, Institute for Democracy and Mediation from Tirana and others. This project by the ISAC Fund offers new dimensions as it is based on analytical methods, involves a number of participants at workshops, is presented in various publications and on the internet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Channels of communication need to be broadened in order to establish a network of Serbian and Albanian media. This network should contribute to a better visibility of both cultures and broadened cultural transfers; it should be jointly financed within the framework of the future bilateral agreement on cultural exchange. Direct communication between the societies in the two countries could be enhanced through targeted public grants to civil society organisations and the mass media.
2. Civil society representatives should work together to promote awareness about the results of their activities in order to influence and, if necessary, counter-balance the official discourse
3. Possibly in the form of public-private partnerships, involving civil society activists, there should be a joint outreach strategy directed towards the EU with the aim to change the image of the region.
4. Particular attention should be given to the exchange of visits by editors of the mass media in order to have the realistic picture about the relations between the two nations. They determine editorial policy so that media content mostly depends on their views.
5. The blogosphere and Web 2.0 becomes rapidly more influential than ever before. In respect to Albanian-Serb relations, it contains a fair amount of stereo-types and even hates speech. It would be necessary for the media experts, editors and journalists in both countries to analyse this content and inform the public both in Serbia and Albania about the findings and the possible counter-strategies.

7. POSITION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

Both Serbian and Albanian national minorities point to a history of negligence and discrimination by their states and insist that their status should be improved. During the time of the Yugoslav federation, the Albanian ethnic community exercised all of the rights provided by the legal order at least since the change of the Yugoslav Constitution in 1963. Minority legislation in former Yugoslavia was considered to be one of the most advanced on international scale. In present-day Serbia, in spite of minority legislation, which is commended by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), there is still mutual mistrust and frequent disagreements between the state and some of the representatives of the Albanian minority.

The Law on National Minorities offers a holistic approach to the political rights of the national minorities in Serbia. It allows self-governance to the national minorities through the national minorities councils, elected for the first time at direct elections. The councils have strong powers in the areas of education, culture, information, and the free usage of language and script. Their functioning is funded by the state, but it is autonomous. The national minorities now have the right to establish educational institutions at all levels, from schools to universities. Furthermore, each council is entitled to name one member of the National Educational Council. Minority political parties are interested at these elections, but their particular interests could possibly have a priority over long-term interest of these communities.

According to the 2002 census, 61,647 members of the Albanian community lived in South Serbia. They have guaranteed usage of their mother tongue on the local level, education, usage of the national symbols, representation in the Coordinating Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, right to establish of an Albanian National Council and ability to have representatives in the National Parliament of Serbia.

Despite the fact that Serbia has introduced many positive changes in recent years, the Albanian national minority still says that it is left on the margin. On the other hand, many do not speak the Serbian language, and they do not recognize Serbia as their country. Representatives of the Albanian minority in the three municipalities often complain about what they perceive to be discrimination and systematic deprivation of economic opportunities.

According to the 2002 census, 61,647 members of the Albanian community lived in South Serbia, with the highest concentration in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa municipalities. They are guaranteed all of the rights listed above. This also includes representation in the Coordinating Body for the Municipalities of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa established after some violent incidents involving members of the local Albanian communities in 2001. In the National Parliament of Serbia, one delegate is a member of Albanian community from the south of Serbia and he represents the alliance of Albanian parties. The electoral system in Serbia allows for positive discrimination for the parties of national minorities. The electoral law stipulates since 2005 a “natural” threshold for them instead of the regular 5% threshold. This means that candidates of the minority parties are elected to the Parliament if they gain at least that number of votes which equals the total turnout divided by the number of seats in the parliament. On the last parliamentary elections, the turnout was 60.7% or 4,099,372 voters. That would mean that the parties of national minorities would need around 16,000 votes to have one representative in the parliament.

Despite the fact that Serbia has introduced many positive changes in recent years, the Albanian

national minority representative still say that they are still being left on the margin. Many Albanians do not speak the Serbian language, are not integrated, and do not recognize Serbia as their country.

Their position is connected to the fact that most members of Albanian national minority in Southern Serbia has much closer relation with Kosovo Albanians, than with those of Albania.

One of the most frequently cited problems concerns textbooks in the Albanian language. Even when they do exist at all, they tend to be linguistically not up to the required standards so that sometimes textbooks from Kosovo and Albania are used in teaching although this is not legal. In addition, the position of Albanian minority in Southern Serbia, however, is strongly influenced by the Kosovo status issue. Representatives of the Albanian minority in the three municipalities often complain about what they perceive to be discrimination and systematic deprivation of economic opportunities.

The Serbian – Montenegrin minority is concentrated in the northern region around town of Shkodër and the Vrakë valley, although they can also be found throughout Albania. Their number is not precisely known, but estimates range between 2,000 and 8,000 Serbs – Montenegrins, although some estimates, related to Serbian-Montenegrin minority, refer to up to 30,000. However, they are still not officially recognized as a national minority.

The current situation in Albania is rather ambiguous when it comes to the political rights of the national minorities. Except for the Greek community, all other minorities do not have any functional political rights. Members of the Serbian - Montenegrin ethnic minority in Albania say that they had been under constant discrimination for almost the whole of the 20th century as almost all the other national minorities in Albania. The politics of suppression of national minorities was initiated in the early 30s and it continued during the Hoxha regime. Classes in mother tongue were not allowed, the ethnic communities were wiped out from the textbooks, typical names and surnames were removed and replaced with Albanian ones. Political rights were non-existent. Gradual changes were introduced after the fall of Hoxha regime, but at a slow pace. The Serbian–Montenegrin minority is concentrated in the northern region around town of Shkodër and the Vrakë valley, although they can also be found throughout Albania. Their number is not precisely known, but estimates range between 2,000 and 8,000 Serbs-Montenegrins, although some estimates, close to Serbian-Montenegrin minority, refer to up to 30,000. The Serb-Montenegrin Minority Organisation *Morača-Rozafa* is campaigning for their integration into the political, public and cultural life, the protection and promotion of their national identity, education and studying in their mother tongue and representation in the media supported by the state programmes, all according to the rights foreseen by the Albanian Constitution and Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.

When it comes to the political rights of minorities, Albania has formed a National Council of the National Minorities, but it is a consultative body to the Albanian Government without any real influence. Still, there is one representative of the Serbian-Montenegrin national minority in the Council, what represents indeed a semi-official recognition of the existence of this minority in Albania. The Serbian-Montenegrin minority demands the adoption of the comprehensive Law on National Minorities which would establish a proper framework for the improvement of the situation of minorities. They also promote creation of a bilateral agreement between Serbia and Albania on the protection of national minorities, which would serve as a bridging tool between the two countries.

Serbian ministries (Ministry of Diaspora, Ministry of Culture, etc.) financially support some projects of the *Morača-Rozafa* organization, but a permanent, contractual framework support does not exist.

One participant stressed that most of Albanians are confused about which groups constitute the Slavic minorities in Albania, as they conflate the Gorans, the Macedonians, Serbs and Montenegrins. Article 20 of the Albanian Constitution guarantees all rights to ethnic minorities of Albania (religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity). However, these provisions are not easily transferred on terrain, mainly because of the lack of proactive minority policies by the Albanian Government. It should be noted that the passing of the Anti-Discrimination law in Albania was a positive development, since now there is the legal basis for the fight against the discrimination in sectors such as education.

The 2011 population census in Albania provides an opportunity to obtain, finally, reliable data about the size of the ethnic communities in the country and their dispersion. Indeed, a population census represents a *condition sine qua non* for the improvement of the status on minorities. Only with the new, reliable data about the Albania's population structure, a debate about proper minority legislation and policies could be initiated. However, nationalists in Albania strongly oppose the census that would include questions about ethnic and religious identity, primarily because they fear that number of ethnic Greeks in Albania would prove to be much larger than presently acknowledged. One of the reasons for this is the fear that some Albanian nationals will register as ethnic Greeks in order to gain better living conditions in Greece or benefits in Albania. The fear of a large Greek minority also comes because of some old claims that areas in Southern Albania with Greek minority population (Northern Epirus) should become at least an autonomous region, if not a part of Greece proper. At the end of February 2011, a group of 52 intellectuals (among which were the former presidents Alfred Moisiu and Rexhep Meidani) sent an open letter to president Bamir Topi, asking for the removal of these two, above mentioned, questions from the census questionnaire. After long public debate, in April 2011 the census was postponed for November.

There has been a lot of talk on national minorities being a bridge between the states, but in this case the bridge indeed does not exist due to the lack of integration of the minority populations. In Serbia, in the municipalities with Albanian communities, the populations is often divided (for instance, one shop sells newspapers exclusively in Albanian, and the other in Serbian; children frequently do not have contact with each other in schools etc). Thus, it is a difficult task to build trust in such environment, which is why it is important to strengthen the existing framework in order to create appropriate basis for proactive policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Serbia should work towards the integration of Albanian national minority into the Serbian society. Its education and language rights must be respected and efforts to ensure its proportional representation in government bodies should continue.
2. Albania should pass all of the necessary legislation on minorities according to best European practices. The Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities of the Council of Europe sets a good basis for that. However, it could prove useful to consult the legal solutions in this area in other countries. Serbian legal solutions could be a good example for this reform such as the establishment of councils of national minorities and other forms of cultural and political autonomy, introduction of the so-called natural threshold for the political parties of national minorities to enter the Parliament.

3. Albanian authorities should enable the Serbian Montenegrin national minority to have education and public information in their language, according to the best European practices.
4. The two states should sign an agreement on the accreditation of university diplomas and other educational certificate for the benefit and convenience of the members of Serbian and Albania minority communities in Albania and Serbia, respectively.
5. Public authorities in both countries should work together with the elected representatives of the national minorities to establish a clear legal and institutional framework for the production of school text-book in the respective languages.