



supported by



Stabilitätspakt für Südosteuropa
Gefördert durch Deutschland
Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
Sponsored by Germany

Report - Workshop Shaping the Future in Albania Civil society's questions and answers to current issues Munich, 04 / 05 December 2014

Conference report by: **Petra Bläss-Rafajlovski, Andreas Ernst, Tobias Flessenkemper, Joanna Hanson and Adelheid Wölfl**



Summary

Organized by the Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft) civil society activists from Albania – journalists, academics, young generation politicians and officials from administration - as well as German and international stakeholders – met in Munich. They held a dialogue on Albania and its future under Chatham House Rules, looking for answers to the current issues surrounding Albania's civil society and defining additional questions.

The problems that persistently came up in the workshop, whatever the context, were those of EU-membership perspectives, of pervasive corruption, of the lack of the rule of law, the need for

reform, the question of Albanian nationalism and of economic development.



The discussions repeatedly led to questions about the language and narrative used by civil society, how the latter adopts narratives and does not change them. The clichéd phrase ‘painful reforms’ was often expressed in relation to the reforms required for EU accession. This expression, however, was contested because these reforms are not unique requirements for an EU accession country - in fact they are for Albania’s good and they go in line with the experience to draw on and adapt of the thirteen other EU

member states since recent enlargements. Thus, one might ask whether this ‘pain’ is more related to the domestic adjustment of the political elites, some of whom do not want to embrace a rule of law structure, which will impact on their alleged unacceptable practices? Using negative descriptions only serves to alienate rather than to encourage support for a profound democratization in Albania, whose current state of democracy more than once during the discussions was described as an “autocratic liberal democracy”. The EU’s concept of accountability of the elites, that for too long has prioritized stability over democracy disenfranchised the developing civil society and arguably restricts the space and time needed for its evolution. Reforms may be complex and difficult at times, but they should be explained and sold to the public as transforming their lives for the better. Problems should rather be seen as transitory.



Moreover, there was continual reference to the concept of critical thinking and the need to think “outside the box”, making use of creative language. This is where civil society has a specific role and needs not only to think about how these conversations should be held, but to take a provocative lead. It was agreed that civil society’s role was about opening difficult issues, facilitating awareness, providing relevant information and asking challenging questions and thus changing the narrative. Civil society, albeit non-existent in Albania before 1991, since then has gone through a process of changing perceptions of its own role. Like in other transition countries, the donor factor has generated deep levels of mistrust vis-à-vis civil society as an independent actor. In addition, today it is seen very much as a Tirana creation and hence a problem of centrality and the elites who function

within that centre. As a consequence, discussants argued for a de-centralization of civil society and for a move towards greater local action across the country. A better understanding and feeling of citizenship in the sense of rights and duties of the citizens needs to be developed. Civil society could play a role in promoting and developing such a concept of citizenship.

A deep level of mistrust at political level as well as within the society itself was defined as one of the core-problems of Albania these days. The country's political sphere remains characterized by a dominating bi-polar split between two main political parties, and civil society was seen and described as being divided along these political lines. Unfortunately, the EU has been more interested in stability than in real democratization and has favored strong leaders to the detriment of reforms, as one discussant argued. As a consequence the EU was seen as not having done much to enhance public's trust in state institutions so far. To that point it was recommended that civil society should overcome mistrust within and between itself as well as to build trust within and vis-à-vis public institutions. Generally, the EU candidate status is not a guarantee for democracy and rule of law. It was underlined that reforms and development are mainly pushed through the EU accession agenda. Yet, it is also a matter of ownership of the EU process. Not only domestic reforms happened but also Albania's role in the region has mostly changed because of pressure from outside rather from inside.



The problem of the two levels of discourse, one for the domestic audience and one for the externals, was seen as an important issue. Contrary to previous practices on the governmental level, the current government's approach was described as having an open-door policy, which also meant greater inclusiveness of civil society into policy planning and discourse. This was argued despite the also cited and continuous practice of closed-door policy making and lack of formal channels. It was positively mentioned

that the incumbent cabinet had consulted trade unions and employers' associations, the church, and that so arguably civil society had been expanded beyond think tanks. Despite the more open-door policy of the current government, concern was expressed about the still general unproductive relationship between the government, local and central, and civil society. This is also due to the fact that professional groups, for example, remain politically influenced and often affiliated. The business community, for example, is not playing its civil society role.

Citizen-state-relations, attitudes towards the Albanian state and how they impacted on civil society

were mentioned several times. The public generally regards the state as weak, because it cannot deliver, but also as omnipotent because of alleged abuse of power. The recent demolition of 'informal construction sites', however, was mentioned as being the first time that people saw their state being effective and hence attitudes might be changing. This was seen in a specific context in Albania where civil society's ability to find its own space becomes more complicated.

A valuable discussion took place in one of the sessions, devoted specifically to the economy, environment and education. It was the environment which claimed most of the time both as an economic as well as a "green issue". There was surprise shown that Albania, together with the rest of the region, did not put more investment into developing renewable energy sources both as a sustainable and competitive product, as well as a job-generating one. This was seen as an area where civil society, think tanks, could do analysis to provide arguments and data, discussing available options. Wildlife conservation was seen not only as an end in itself, but also as feeding into tourism and hence revenue creation.

Panel I: Being an EU candidate – problems, perspectives and the regional context



Albania was regarded as the most-pro-European country in the region. Since visa liberalization with the EU took place in late 2010, domestic support for EU integration has dropped a bit, but the public remains enthusiastic about Albania's European integration. Yet, the self-perception of Albanians as being still not Europeans has to be taken into account. The participants were clear that there is no "Plan B" – no alternative to EU integration. Next steps are the negotiations with Brussels, which means a gradual

approach and the need for a clear road map. There are high expectations and hopes among the people since the granting of the EU candidate status. And even if Albania's integration into the EU could be faster than of some neighboring countries – fulfilling of EU-conditionality and of benchmarks, chapter by chapter, was defined as a long-term process which has to be better communicated to the public.

Europeanization affects politicians, administration, civil society as well as media. Necessary reforms can be experienced as painful. The workshop reflected how to change the discourse / narrative on the complex reforms, i.e. to frame them as necessary by simultaneously emphasizing their possible long-term positive effects. The finally good experiences in Poland with – through "painful reforms" – lining up its agriculture policy with EU standards and norms were specifically mentioned in this respect. Communicating the overall process to the public is the key. It has to be clearly

communicated what EU membership means for the daily life of the people. Specific attention has to focus on the rule of law and on strengthening of institutions.



National objectives will be more and more developed through the EU agenda. The process of European integration will have to be more inclusive; paramount in this respect is the creation of the National Council for European Integration. The positive experience with visa liberalization – a technical process with clear benchmarks – has to be taken into account. The European Union has done a lot in capacity building, but there is still a need to develop administrative and absorption capacity in the use of IPA funds. It was critically mentioned that the EU integration process is often elite driven and technical in its

substance. Up to now Brussels concentrates its communication on technocrats and the political elite of the EU accession country, which causes frustration vis-à-vis the EU among civil society.

Progress and deficits

The removal of the country from the US-list of states, which are mostly affected by trafficking in human beings, was regarded as an important step forward. Further positive developments with trust building effects vis-à-vis the state were the demolition of illegal constructions as well as the cut of illegal connections to energy grids. And, the November 2013 protests against dismantling of Syria's chemical weapons in Albania were estimated as a signal of increased impact of civil society.

According to the latest Transparency International Corruption Index, corruption in Albania is one of the persisting key problems. There is still a lack in functioning of state / public institutions and subsequently a big mistrust in institutions by the citizens. It was doubted that there is a clear readiness to change existing structures and remove obstacles. Distrust in political actors is widespread and communication by the latter with civil society and academia is not working properly and efficiently, even though former NGO-activists are now members of the government and working in ministries. Moreover, Albanian politicians seem to speak with two different voices and pursue two discourses depending on the audience – the one addressing internationals and the other their own people.

The lack of both, political dialogue and of consensus, and the polarized debate - along political fronts - are among the biggest challenges. On a more positive note it was also stated that public awareness is on the rise and pressure from the public to seek influence and to change the status quo has increased. Participants at the workshop underlined that civil society has a huge responsibility to push for a constructive political dialogue and to overcome the mistrust at political



level. The EU candidate status is no guarantee for democracy and the rule of law – and thus civil society is needed. Finally, the image of Albania – which is often connected with organized crime and corruption - has to be improved. It is not helpful feeding the pool of negativity, but required to communicate good developments and achievements in domestic and foreign policy.

Albania's role in the region

Albania was characterized as a constructive actor in the region as well as a model in particular with regards of the peaceful coexistence and freedom of various religious communities. The country is considered to be a factor of stabilization in the region with good neighborly relations. Yet, one speaker warned that regional identity and regional cooperation are often condoned and encouraged from outside due to common security challenges. The interplay between the dynamic of domestic reforms and Albania's standing in the region shouldn't be underestimated.

The improvement of the Kosovo-Serbia relations is crucial for Albania. Yet it was underlined that Kosovo is just a neighbor and a strategic partner, but not in the center of neither the Albanian civil society, nor academia or economy and politics. The enhancement of Albanian-Serbian relations and the bilateral diplomatic progress after Rama's visit in Serbia in November 2014 was highlighted. The bilateral agreement on mobility and exchange of students as well as on the recognition of diplomas is a significant step to enable favorable mutual exchanges in the academic, cultural and economic spheres. The violent incidents around the Albania-Serbia football match in Belgrade in October 2014 have had an impact on the relations between Tirana and Belgrade and were followed by nationalistic hate speech reports in respective national media outlets. Regrettably, the incident has shown that nationalism prevails on both sides and that civil society has to play an important role in reconciliation and in cooperation across the region. Regional cooperation always needed impulse from outside, especially from the EU. Bilateral and regional agreements remain insufficiently implemented.

"Greater Albania" was identified as a myth and not an issue for Albania's politics. However, again a sort of a double speech can be identified – the one for the international and the other for the domestic audience. For the latter, the Greater Albania narrative is embedded in a sort of "national pride discourse", but without any readiness to change the structure of the state. It's not translated into political decision-making and never was state policy since 1990. All political forces dealing with Greater Albania have been punished. But it is advisable to be careful concerning the possible potential of this nationalistic approach for instability. The national Albanian pride and the popular feeling of unjust treatment of Albanians shouldn't be ignored. The perspective of a common future

of Albanians in the different countries in the frame of their EU membership has to be communicated much more offensively.

Trend of “illiberal democracy”

EU candidate status does not automatically lead to sound democracy and rule of law. As one speaker pointed out, in particular neighboring Macedonia, but also Montenegro and Serbia show tendencies of authoritarianism with a powerful charismatic leader on top, a highly politicized judiciary and a political elite which doesn't take EU integration seriously but wants to keep control and power. Checks and balances do not really work, opposition in parliament is either boycotting the Assembly or neglected. The role of parliaments is diminished to pass laws without discussion and to act as voting machines. Governments have a big influence on the media and the economic space is weakly regulated. Thus, it might be tempting for the ruling elite not to follow European standards but to seek investments from countries like Turkey, Russia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, which are (semi-)authoritarian states with economically and financially less selective potentials.

Panel II: Public Oversight, Accountability, the Role of Civil Society and the Media

The discussion of the panel focused on what many (not all) discussants see as a positive development of civil society in Albania. It was warned of the dangers of “culturalism” as easy explanation for structural conditions and the panel asked for more accountability of the stakeholders in the political process (politicians, NGOs, foreign diplomats, media).

A representative of the government in Tirana made a very upbeat description of the relation between the new government and the civil sector. Never, he said, civil society in Albania had been stronger and its influence on politics more important. As a recent example he pointed to the public protests against Washington's plans to destroy chemical weapons retrieved from Syria on Albanian soil. The huge protest against the risks of such an enterprise forced the Albanian government to re-think its position. It gave in finally to the demands of many citizens and denied Washington to send dangerous Syrian weaponry to Albania for destruction. This required courage, as the US is in Albanian lands widely seen as an important ally.

The new openness of the government towards civil society, so the member of the government, had to do with the fact, that a number of high-ranking figures in the new administration have themselves passed through an NGO-career. This government's concept of civil society is much wider than the usual definition which equals civil society with the NGO scene, mostly located in the capital. Civil society encompasses also trade unions, and different kinds of citizens' groups gathering around specific interests. Furthermore Tirana tries to establish an „open door policy” towards citizens. Among others, a specific „youth agency” has been founded. The pro-active communication approach has already delivered results, the minister explained. He pointed to the recent pension

reform. Although cuts had to be made within the reform, it was approved by 65 percent of the population. The positive picture given by the minister did not remain unchallenged. A participant reminded of very negative reactions of officials to a report on hospital waste provided by a NGO. Arrogance of those in power had not evaporated with the new government, the discussant said.



Others also challenged the assessment provided by the official: The director of an Albanian think tank criticized the dominant narrow understanding and perception of civil society which concentrates on some big NGOs and excludes smaller CSOs and non-profit organizations of the country. Even worse, as the attention is devoted / reduced to big NGOs, these were systematically privileged by international donors with the presumption that they „absorb“ the respective donations easier. It would be more demanding, but also more effective to

support and work with a bigger number of smaller grass roots' organizations. The participant insisted that traditional community structures should be developed into civil society actors: neighborhoods, trade unions, but also religious communities. It was stated that, similar to the political arena, a strong polarization exists also on the NGO scene. It is partly a result of the existence of GONGOs (Governmental NGOs).



A key value which is often missing is accountability. This doesn't go for politicians and NGO people only, who too often do not feel responsible to their constituencies or donors. More and more international diplomats and EU-bureaucrats are intervening directly in Albania. Though this interference is not as obvious as in the case of Kosovo's „semi-protectorate“, it is still widespread. Critically there's is no systematic coordination, let alone institutional oversight, of this influence. Hence there's no accountability. These

impressions, voiced by several participants, are also reflected in a report, which was disseminated during the conference (Primatarova/Deimel: Bridge Over Troubled Waters? The Role of Internationals in Albania, Ms. 2012). The report criticizes among others the „on-and-off approach of international actors who are acting as crisis-managers and become often arbitrators in the national



rivalries. As such they mingle with the power game instead of helping to define new rules for this game.

In an attempt to deepen the debate an anthropologist warned of „cultural explanations” for perceived pathologies of the Albanian society. In general, it was said, culture is not the cause but the consequence of specific socio-economic conditions. As example the speaker referred to clientelism, which, according to this opinion, is a phenomenon that is not a result of cultural heritage like clan systems, blood feuds etc. It is rather a rational reaction to an environment of weak state institutions (easily to be captured by parties) and the scarcity of an economy where access to wealth is regulated by political power, represented again by clientelistic parties. The expert called for a more „critical thinking”. It was reminded that Albanians traditionally conveyed avoidance of conflicts; “you do not speak against the older” is a social obligation. Therefore, the authoritarian, hierarchical structures in families, communities and the state would not allow for free competition of ideas, suggestions and critique in general. Niches need to be established, especially in the education system, where critical thinking has to be trained and valued. Finally, a provocative interpretation of corruption was proposed: Corruption should not only and always be seen as an evil, the anthropologist expert suggested, but could also be regarded as a mechanism „which makes things happen” and as expression of „taking care of people”.

A journalist, talking about the media situation, praised the relative good position of Albania on the Press Freedom Index, where an improvement (though from a very low level) has taken place in the last years. But overall journalists live a difficult professional life. Intimidation, law suits and in most cases the lack of regulated working contracts make them (and free speech) vulnerable. Government still has a lot of media control as it is one of the biggest advertisers. Also implicit or explicit threats of tax inspections contribute to keep media organizations in line. An open information policy of government and administration is lacking. Providing information to media is considered by too many officials as a favor rather than their duty.

The fact that Albania is almost not present in international media was deplored. Where media do report the coverage is often highly stereotypical and mono-thematic: Blood revenge, Kanun, corruption... – Always the same few topics give a narrow rather than a differentiated picture of Albania and Albanians. One participant called for a media strategy of the government to encourage international media coverage on Albanian affairs.

The discussion concluded with a firm warning from one participant not to underestimate the current problems of Albania. He pointed out that the country had a leading position in the region when it comes to corruption in the administration. Not everything was improving, he said. The current level

of corruption was higher than a decade ago, and civil society still confronted with many difficult challenges ahead.

Panel III: Economy, Environment and Education



It was commonly underlined and agreed that better results in the employment sector are very important as Albanian economy is at the crossroads. Despite the fact that it was one of the fastest growing economies before the global financial and Eurozone crisis in the past years, Albanian economy has had almost zero growth, and there are lots of households who have to live from less than five US-dollars a day. According to the World Bank extreme poverty has increased for both urban and rural areas. Another matter of

serious concern is the continuous rise of Albanian public debt to almost seven billion Euros in 2014; especially problematic are the education and health funds. Hence Albania is the most indebted country in the region. 720 million USD of social spending were not paid yet. The rate of public debt has reached 72 percent of GDP. Tax evasion is widespread and also due to non-paid bills the revenues to the state budget remain low. It was mentioned, that the electricity sector shows a deficit of 600 million USD. There is growing need to restore fiscal stability now in the country. The government had to borrow 700 million USD from the World Bank and the IMF so far in order to serve the debts. Fiscal stability but also structural reforms are required since the rate of foreign direct investment has declined. This may result in painful reforms, affecting people who just earn 40 USD a month and are living below or close to the poverty line. How to protect the most vulnerable and the poor in this process remains unclear.

Education: Expectations were high since the new government took office especially when it comes to the reform of public administration. Some of them were not realistic, such as the one of graduates from universities who expected jobs with high salaries in the administration. The labor market – public and private – is still characterized by low compliance with rules and standards. Young people with low qualifications find jobs easier than those with diplomas and University degrees. The labor market is additionally challenged by the fact that 135.000 people came back to Albania in the last four years as a consequence of the European economic and financial crisis. The remittances from migrant workers – an important factor not only for the state budget but also for family incomes - are declining. It is additionally problematic that most of those people who return from abroad are not highly skilled and thus have to be supported by social and public services. For some of the children of re-migrants it is hard to integrate in the Albanian education systems, since

their families have been away for decades - they do not speak Albanian and have been educated in different schooling systems abroad. Many returnees have worked in Germany or Austria before. Thus their language and professional skills could be used for investors. It was underlined that more efforts should be put in vocational training, for instance in tourism management. Finally, it was criticized that the education and curricula at schools and universities do not really correspond to the needs of business and investments and should be adjusted to them.

The dialogue between the government and business associations remains crucial in this respect. For international business, the image problem of Albania persists, though most of the countries in the region have the same problem. It would be necessary to work on the visibility of these countries. Since this region has got „lost“ it would be hard to put it back on the map of decision makers and potential investors. The Western Balkans countries have to realize that they take part in a global competition. Improvements should focus on a better framework for investment and the fight against corruption. Fields of potential interest for investors were light industries, agriculture, food production and tourism. Especially tourism could help to improve the image of Albania.



The **environment** was another topic of discussion. It is a cross-cut issue. Concerns were raised that the main focus has been laid into development rather than in the preservation and conservation of the natural resources. Due to short term thinking and lacking capacities “we are not talking about sustainable development”, one discussant stated. Renewable energy is not only a trend in Western Europe but would also be a benefit on the employment side. On the other hand it is important to prevent a negative impact on the environment which would create additional costs.

Albania’s capacity for ecological development was discussed. While neighboring countries, like Greece and Montenegro, offer interesting packages of natural / eco- tourism, this should be developed in Albania as well. The rich bio-diversity of Albanian regional natural resources would be something that the country could offer. In this perspective, many participants confirmed that it is hard to talk about the state of environment in Albania without getting depressed. On the one side there has been an impressive year of public awareness on environmental issues – with the massive protests against the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons on Albanian soil and earlier against the import of toxic waste. The other side of the coin is, that these protests happened against imports of waste while there seems to be far less public sensitiveness concerning „internal threats“ of the country, which is poisoned with for instance chemicals in the soil and has to cope with chaotic garbage disposals. Nobody is protesting although people get flooded every year in Shkodra - not only due to the effects of global warming. One participant illustrated the situation with wildlife



animals: Everybody was talking about „the eagle that flew” in reference to the incidents during the soccer-match in October 2014 in Belgrade when the flag of Greater Albania appeared. But at the same time the numbers of eagles in Albania has decreased by 90 percent and nobody was and is mentioning that. In that opinion people who admired the drone with the flag would also be ready to shoot the eagles in Albania. Wildlife numbers are falling rapidly and hunting is one of the reasons for that. The case of bears in cages which are

placed next to restaurants in Albania - although illegal - is another point. The rest of Europe could profit from Albania’s long tradition and experience of co-existence with bears. The hunting moratorium was only introduced due to pressure from outside. Furthermore, protected areas are only “protected” on paper so far. Thus, the situation regarding the protection and preservation of the nature in Albania remains difficult.

Looking at the **agricultural sector**, 98 percent of the farms are family farms in Albania. Their competitiveness is low, because the average farm size is only 1.26 hectare and thus four to five times smaller compared to the average in Europe. Certainty of land titles is especially problematic and there is need of legalization of the farms. Informality has increased and due to the lack of registration, of quality and of standards, the competition with EU producers is at risk to become extremely difficult. Food safety is critical since the risk assessment capacity in Albania is still small and the veterinarian service is poorly organized and fragmented. Information for farmers would be also difficult since one person would be responsible for 2000 people. Also the University for Agriculture does not respond to the market needs, the curricula does not prepare for the job market and there was no practical education at the University. The government started with a public hearing process for the fiscal package and business and NGOs are involved, but the public hearing was not exercised for support schemes although these would have been important for the farmers. Farmers need more support not least since VAT is relatively high in Albania compared to other countries.

Panel IV: Towards a new political culture?

Polarization remains the most pertinent feature of political culture in Albania. The two political parties, the currently governing Socialist Party and the Democratic Party, have governed the country alternating in power. Both parties have established strong electoral bases, which include networks of patronage in administration, the public and private sectors. The polarization is reflected by

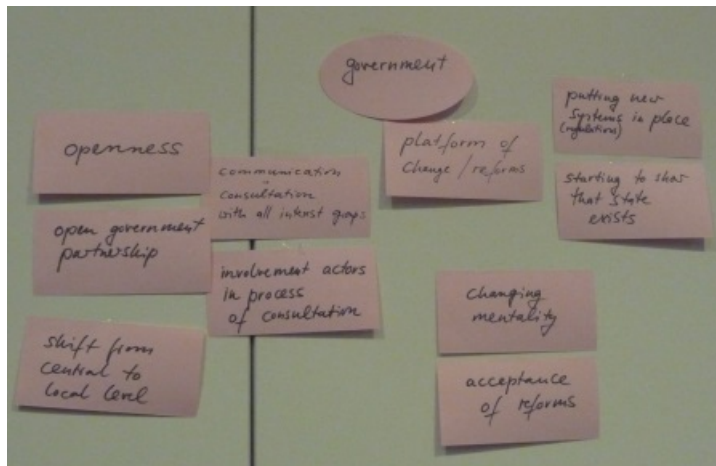
erosive behavioral patterns affecting the functioning of the institutions. The Parliament has been regularly boycotted by the opposition, at the time of the workshop (early December 2014) the Democratic Party did not participate in the work of Parliament. These boycotts are initiated by party leaders, who exercise considerable influence of all elements of the internal work of political parties and thus on the Parliament.

Civil society has for long advocated improving the functioning of Parliament, not least by “decriminalizing” politics. This implies three aspects: addressing corruption, breaking with the past and changing the public discourse. This means:

- Tackling the question of inexplicable wealth accumulation by many members of the political class – wealth that could have hardly been gained through regular economic activity - but also corruption in general. Business people are joining parties to seek immunity by going into politics.
- Investigating the crimes of the past and an irrevocable political and administrative rupture with the communist regime, including lustration, which goes beyond merely symbolic acts such as the opening of the bunker. Although, a result of the largest opposition protest so far, lustration has seen a long history of being used as a tool for making political scores rather than assisting a process of coming to terms with the recent history.
- Ending “criminal rhetoric” in the public domain. Criminal rhetoric has eroded the gravity of criminal activity, claims of criminality and charges have become ubiquitous and “banal”.

Such efforts need to be accompanied by judicial reform as prosecution and courts seem currently unable to address (high-level) corruption due to members’ of the judiciary own involvement in corrupted practices.

Another proposed solution to decriminalize politics and parliament has been the recruitment of new persons into the political parties. “Rejuvenation” happens when parties are in opposition; it started with the Democratic Party in 2005. Yet, what happened to the new recruits beyond changing the façade of political parties? Being young and being from civil society, as elsewhere, has proven insufficient to change Albanian politics. The cosmetic aspects of fresh faces have not touched the substance. This can largely be explained by the leader-driven nature and the lack of intra-party democracy. As leaders play the key role in nurturing new recruits, the latter owe their existence to the leader, not to the party and a democratic merit-based advancement. Who fails, when a newcomer does not make it in a political party? It is not only the individual, but one needs to have the support to negotiate a space within the party.



The two-party system replicated the authoritarian system, which puts a premium on owning the public sphere. Indicative for this tendency is massive election campaign expenditure, which regularly surpasses the officially declared budgets of parties. Furthermore, vote buying continues to be reported and may have a significant impact on the political process. The International Community also becomes a tool for domination of

the public sphere. Political parties are being lent support, either through the European political parties EPP and PES or through diplomatic missions in Tirana. Possibly unintended, yet the International Community and political parties are increasingly being junked together. This becomes the more pertinent as the EU agenda is increasingly dominating daily political discourse. In turn, the EU agenda for political, administration and judicial reform can become coinage in the domestic political strive for domination of the public sphere.

Here could be a responsibility of the EU for improving its societal impact in Albania and the region at large. Often, the EU preferred stability - sometimes at the expense of democratic accountability. Against the background described, the EU agenda did not help to limit the tendencies towards “illiberal democracy” characterized by a strong executive, by a weak parliament, by political control of the judiciary by the executive and by a weak intra-party democracy.

The emergence of a new option in 2008 (starting 2005) with the grass-root NGO MJAFI! (Albanian: enough!) has so far not changed the overall picture. Yet, the claim for stronger accountability of domestic and EU actors and civil society has become a new, seemingly continuing phenomenon. Supporting communities rather individual social entrepreneurship seems to be the more promising approach. This would also entail broadening the concept of civil society to more groups, including unions, religion, not least to counter centralism. These communities, in turn, should strive to influence parliamentary agendas, to turn Parliament into a real platform of dialogue in the country, which could create the basis for a new political culture.

END