

The Culture of Political Communication in Albania in the Process of Integration to the European Union

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Abstract

In focus of this paper is the analysis of political culture in Albania towards EU integration processes. To give as much of an inclusive a picture as possible, the recent views and positions of three categories of political communication have been addressed: political elites, the media and the public. Topics include issues such as the orientation and support of the country's European integration, attitudes towards the required reforms and obstacles and difficulties encountered in this process, attitudes towards EU co-operation and assistance regarding the consequences of the earthquake of 2019, the situation created by COVID 19 pandemic, etc. An in-depth analysis focused on some of the most important factors within each category, such as: opportunism, political use of this process, common features and differences in attitudes within political elites; the role and attitudes of the media; public perception, issues related to measuring public opinion, etc. This article briefly deals with the relationship and mutual influence between the aforementioned categories, especially between political actors and the media.

Keywords: political communication, European Union, political elite, media, public, reforms

Introduction

1. A brief introduction to the creation of the European Union

The European Union is a voluntary, political, and economic union of different European countries that share common visions, values, and goals. There are currently 27 member states.

Its beginnings can be traced in 1951, when with the initiative of six countries, namely Belgium, West Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, the European Community for Steel and Coal (ECSC) was created. Among other things, the idea was for economic cooperation to prevail over the new political conflicts that might arise. This was also expressed in Schuman's statement on May 9, 1950, that: "...

any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible" (EC, Schuman 2015).

In 1957, the Treaty of Rome¹ established the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) and the European Economic Community (EEC). The aim of the EEC was "among other things to establish a common market, defined as the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital" (Cini & Borrigan 2010: p. 24). During the next stage its focus would be on enlargement. Thus, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark (1973) and Greece (1981) joined. Spain and Portugal took this step in 1986. During these years, there were developments in the political, economic, and legislative aspects of the community by adopting acts and decisions that helped the functioning of this institution. The end of the Cold War and developments in Eastern Europe brought about the need for changes in the structure of the European Community as well. In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty² created the European Union (EU), and in 1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden joined, bringing the number of member states to 15.

2. Accession of new states after 2000. Accession process.

In 1999, the EU launched the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP). The purpose was to create a framework for the preparation and gradual integration of the aspiring countries.

The Treaty of Nice³ paved the way for the membership of the new states. The European Council (1993) adopted the criteria for the membership of new EU countries, known as the Copenhagen criteria. According to them, each applicant country should have stable institutions that guarantee democracy, human rights, minority rights, have a functioning market economy competitive in the European market, and ability to take on obligations arising from the EU membership. The biggest enlargement of the EU dates back to 2004, when ten new members were admitted, namely: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Bulgaria, Romania (2007) and Croatia (2013) also joined.

The Thessaloniki Summit of 2003 offered the prospect of membership for the Western Balkan countries. This summit reaffirmed that all SAP countries were potential candidates for EU membership. In 2008, the Regional Cooperation Council was established, a body that actively promotes the European future of the Balkan states.

But in 2014 the candidate who would win the post of President of the European Commission Jean Claude Juncker declared that: "... no further enlargement will take place over the next five years" (Juncker 2014: 11). His statement caused discontent

¹ Two treaties were signed on 25 March 1957.

² Approved in February 1992, effective on November 1, 1993.

³ Signed in 2001, effective on February 1, 2003.

and pessimism in the Western Balkan countries. However, the European Union, in meetings of various levels of its bodies has consistently expressed clear support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

After a country is recognized as a candidate, there are several steps to be taken to full membership, such as the opening of negotiations, meeting the accession criteria and officially becoming a member of the EU. Duration depends on the pace and progress made by the applicant country, but as evidenced lately it also depends on the political, economic and social situation of the EU and its member countries.

The EU has set up several tools to facilitate this process, including providing financial assistance to those countries that need to carry out the necessary reforms. This is exactly what the adoption of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) has taken into account. At the same time, the candidate and potential candidate countries can participate in most EU programs by signing specific agreements for each program. Among those programs are: Erasmus, Horizon 2020, COSME, FISCALIS, etc.

The Commission reports on the progress of each country in its annual progress reports. Important decisions, starting with the decision to open negotiations, until the end decision to finalize full membership, are taken unanimously by the EU Council. It is worth noting that the prospect of EU membership and the process itself plays an important role in the transition of the countries of the former communist camp, towards democracy and a market economy. The treaties that have institutionalized the creation and functioning of the EU have also provided for the possibility that a state may leave the union. On 31 January 2020 the UK left the EU, which now has 27 member states.

3. Albania and the European Union

3. A. Some important steps...

Albania's relations with the European Union are based on the national objective of EU integration and are a priority of the government's foreign policy. "United Europe is our compass and the natural family to which we belong, but from where we are still missing"¹ (Këshilli i Ministrave, p.10).

In 1991 Albania established diplomatic relations with the European Community. On June 12, 2006, the negotiation process for the Stabilization and Association Agreement was concluded².

A multi-year negotiation process for free movement of Albanians citizens took place. The EU Council approved the Commission's proposal, and the visa-free regime entered into force on December 15, 2010. On June 27, 2014 Albania was granted the status of candidate country. The European Council set out several key priorities such

¹ Council of Ministers, Governing Program 2021-2025: 10.

² SAA entered into force in April 2009

as: public administration reform, rule of law, the fight against corruption, fight against organized crime and respect for fundamental human rights. These were conditions¹ that Albania had to meet before accession negotiations could begin.

Meanwhile the membership process continued at a slower pace. The European Commission monitors and evaluates the implementation of the Agreement through the preparation of Annual Progress Reports. In April 2018 the Commission recommended the opening of membership negotiations (EC, (COM), 2018, 65).

In a statement issued in March 2020, the European Commission declared: “... the Commission will submit proposals for negotiating frameworks with the two countries². These frameworks establish the guidelines and principles governing the accession negotiations with each candidate country... The first intergovernmental conferences should be convened as soon as possible after the adoption of the negotiating frameworks by the Council” (EC, March 2020).

In 2021 the Commission once again reported that Albania met the conditions for holding the Intergovernmental Conference. But Albania's accession negotiations have not yet opened.

3. B. The public, the support of Albanians for EU membership

In December 1990, one of the first students' slogans, "We want Albania to be like the rest of Europe!" would resound in all squares of protests against the communist dictatorship.

"Europe became the headline of every discourse of young political leaders. Soon all of the new forces that appeared on the political scene, even the former communists, declared their strategic objective to be the integration into what was then known as the 'Euro-Atlantic Alliance', which included NATO, in addition to the United Europe" (Misha, P. 2014: 12).

Researcher Arolda Elbasani (2014) thinks that “... Progress towards democratic consolidation and European integration has also been the hallmark of sweeping institutional changes undertaken in the last two decades. Successive post-communist governments have all taken credit for reshuffling country's institutional framework and furthering processes of democratization. Yet, the country ranks persistently in the category of post-communist laggards, and has progressed at a very slow, uneven and uncertain pace towards its twin goals of transition –democracy and EU accession” (p. 2).

After half a century of a dictatorial regime and extreme poverty and isolation, the country's integration to the EU is perceived not only as an affiliation that derives from

¹ The conditions have evolved with time, reflecting the situation in the country.

² Albania and North Macedonia

a geographical location and a common historical vocation, but also as an opportunity for social and economic benefits, free movement, etc.

Measuring of the public opinion, and various interest groups is a periodic practice. Several surveys have been conducted at the national level, within various projects of the Albanian government or other domestic and foreign institutions such as the Balkan Barometer, Eurobarometer, European Social Survey, etc.

To get a better idea of the reasons for the widespread support for the European integration process we may refer to some published data from the Balkan Public Barometer surveys. For several years (2015-2021), in their replies to the question: "What would the EU membership mean to you personally?" (the alternatives of the answers are predetermined), over 50% of respondents mentioned: economic prosperity. So, first of all, most citizens see membership as a tool for economic development and prosperity. Among other reasons mentioned in the survey are the freedom to study and/or work in the EU, freedom to travel, peace and stability etc. In 2021, the three most selected alternatives were: economic prosperity 66% (highest in the region), freedom to study and/or work in the EU 63%, freedom to travel 57%. The latter, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, has marked an increase of 36% from a year ago. It is also indicative that only 7% view it with concern as a loss of the country's sovereignty¹.

The EU accession process of Albania and other Western Balkan countries is long and challenging. Researcher Eva Teqja is of the opinion that "... *meanwhile there are signs of a 'fatigue' towards the European integration process...*" (Teqja, E. 2015: 300). Undoubtedly, the current politics of the EU, the vetoes of France and Bulgaria, have somewhat dampened the enthusiasm and credibility towards the EU integration process. Albania and northern Macedonia continue to meet the conditions for the opening of membership negotiations, and both countries have made steady progress on the path to EU reforms. This has also been stated by senior EU officials who have recently declared: "The delays in the official launch of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia are having a negative impact on the credibility of the EU. Pending bilateral issues between Bulgaria and North Macedonia need to be resolved as a matter of priority. It is crucial that EU Member States conclude the discussions on the Negotiating Frameworks without further delay and that the first intergovernmental conferences with both countries are held as soon as possible and before the end of this year" (European Commission²).

Also, another inner factor has a significant influence here. A study³ carried out by the Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS) states that: "These day to day

¹ Data from Balkan Public Barometer, 2015/16/17/18/19/20/21.

² Press Release 19.10.2021

³ Provided by the Western Balkans Fund, the Albanian Institute for International Studies, the Institute for European Policy - Skopje and the European Movement in Serbia have made three summaries regarding the integration situations in Albania, Serbia and Northern Macedonia.

changing dynamics have been met with responses by domestic politicians who have presented to the Albanian audience their own interpretations and explanations of them. Though the impact of this specific narrative of discussion on the Albanian public remains to be assessed, one can make an educated guess that confusion and a sense of negativity prevails. Moreover, the interpretation of these stances as serving the “domestic politics of member states” strengthens the perception of citizens that Albania is not assessed based on real progress but rather based on pre-existing stereotypes” (Cela & Kelmendi, 2020: 24).

In order to assess some indicators regarding the trust, attachment and the perception of Albanians towards the European Union, we refer to the Eurobarometer surveys for spring 2019, autumn of 2019 and the summer of 2020¹. More specifically, concerning trust in the EU, it was found that in 2020 - 62% of respondents believe in it, 31% do not and 7% belong to the category of ‘Don’t know’. It was noted that there is a decrease by 7% compared to the spring and by 11% compared to the autumn of the previous year. This might be due to the fact of the endless extension of the launch of full membership negotiations. Regarding the image of the EU, in 2020 the following data were provided: 67% see it as positive, 27% as neutral and 6% as negative. There is a decline of the positive image by 12% compared to autumn and 14% compared to spring of the previous year. As regards the attachment to the EU, 51% of respondents replied very much attached, 49% not attached. Also, here we see a decrease of 3% compared to the results of the survey from the previous year. Two important events should also be considered here. Albania faced two difficult crises in recent years: the 2019 earthquake and the pandemic crisis caused by COVID19. In the first case, the European help and solidarity was welcomed and had a positive effect. The second case is slightly more complex. Both issues shall be discussed briefly later. Here it should be noted that there are no known data on their direct impact on Albanians’ thoughts and feelings towards EU and its institutions.

However, despite the duration of EU integration process beyond expectations and sometimes due to questionable and unjustified obstacles, data on Albania have consistently shown a high level of citizens’ support for EU membership. According to the AIIS study mentioned above, in 2008, a year before the SAA was implemented, 95% of Albanian citizens were pro-EU. Two years later, after visa liberalization, 93.4% of them supported European integration. In 2014, 77.1% of Albanians would vote in favor of EU membership, as opposed to 9.1% who would vote against. (Çela & Kelmendi, 2020:18).

Currently, to the question: Do you think that EU membership would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad for economy, 84% of the respondents replied positively, 4% negatively and 12% were neutral. Data show that in six years (2016-

¹ Data from Eurobarometer 91, 92, 93

2021) over 80% of Albanian citizens believe in EU membership as a good thing for the Albanian economy (Balkan Public Barometer).

3. C. Political elite and European integration

“Albania's relations with the European Union, based on the national objective of EU integration, are strategic and a priority of the foreign policy. The primary interest of Albania in relation to the EU is the future EU accession” (MEPJ¹). This has been a major objective of all Albanian governments. Also, the Parliament passed a law² in order to strengthen its role in the integration process.

As stated above, since the fall of communist regime, Albanian political parties, without exception, in their programs have considered Albania's membership in the EU as their strategic objective. At the same time, the continuous conflictual political climate in the country has hindered the spirit of cooperation between the political parties to achieve this goal. Their approach has been different depending on whether or not they are in power. The progress and pace of the integration process are conditioned by several requirements such as respect of human rights, the democratization of political life, the establishment of the rule of law, etc. The approach of parties in power when it comes to the EU integration process has focused more on its rapid pace, rather than strictly adhering to the fulfillment of the above requirements. While the opposition parties have insisted on the request that this journey should be accompanied by respecting their rights, which they claim were violated by the ruling majorities. The international community has been constantly engaged in negotiation processes between the parties and has often been forced to play the referee. The tense political climate, frequent boycotts of the parliament, the political protests and strikes, issues of the electoral process, etc. have been in the focus of various reports of the European institutions.

These two different approaches adopted by the two main political parties, when in power and in opposition, are clearly illustrated by the following examples. In 2012, ruling Democratic leader Berisha accused opposition SP leader Rama of blocking EU candidate status: “Never has an opposition leader dared to rise against the vital interests of his people, to block 3 laws, to block the integration process” (OraNews Online, 2012).

Six years later, Rama, now in the post of Prime Minister, said in a speech to the Parliament: “What can we debate here with these people? To debate that Albania has this opposition, which is the only one in the history of EU integration that is against the integration. Shall we debate this here? This is expressed by all the friends of

¹ Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

² Law no. 15/2015 - On the Role of the Parliament in the Process of Integration of the Republic of Albania in the European Union.

Albania whom we meet and who committed themselves to integration of Albania and Macedonia, doing more than them” (Koha Jonë Online, 2018).

In his analysis of the Albanian political class on this issue, researcher Lumnis Çela states: “... these actors, although openly expressed support of international norms and rules, under the rug they have often been their violators. Thus, despite the constant instructions and advice by the international factor, the behavior of the local political elite has not changed its essence, continuing to protect the existing system and clientelist relations. This political class has accepted the role of the actor of change only in those cases when its interests have not been affected or endangered by the requirements and set conditions.” (Çela, L. 2019: 87).

Lack of political dialogue, conflictuality, political party interests have damaged the progress of the integration process. This is noted not only by the failure to meet the requirements, in the creation of conflictual situations that have been conveyed in the agenda of the international bodies for Albania, but also in the deeply partisan interpretations for the public. Recognizing this situation, one of the well-known transition politicians, the former vice-chairperson of the Socialist Party, Pëllumbi states: “The Albanian pluralist political system needs a new political climate, let’s say it needs a ‘second pluralism’, where the primary focus shall be engagement, constructive consensus, both for the strategy of democratic development of our country and for the European agenda of political parties and ruling elites” (Pëllumbi, S. 2006: 148).

Even after the 2018 report when the European Commission stated that Albania has fulfilled its obligations, the landscape remains the same. Lately, the European Parliament reiterated: “MEPs welcome Albania’s clear strategic orientation and commitment to the country’s EU integration and call for the formal start of accession negotiations without any further delay, following the complete fulfilment of the conditions set by the European Council” (News E.P)¹. On two occasions, the start of membership negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia has not been approved. First it was the vote against by France, Denmark and the Netherlands. The second time accession was blocked by Bulgaria’s veto of Northern Macedonia, and because of the review process *en block*², consequently Albania was also denied.

But how were these developments interpreted by domestic political actors in Albania?

“In Albania, the majority party heavily invested itself in the public debate and opinion with a single explanation that focused solely on externalizing responsibility and citing President Macron almost exclusively as the reason behind this decision. PM Rama who had already begun to warn the public with pessimistic predictions even prior to the decision date, was very critical of EU, saying it was losing legitimacy and authority

¹ Press Releases 25.03.2021

² Albania and Northern Macedonia are assessed *en block* for the opening of accession negotiations.

in the region... The opposition, despite blaming the ruling majority did not put up a long or aggressive campaign to use this development for political credit letting down expectations that this would be a major political battle horse” (Çela & Kelmendi et.al, 2020:25).

At the joint press conference with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy, Mario Draghi, in Palazzo Chigi, Rome, Prime Minister Rama said: “The EU should keep its word, find a way to keep its word, because we should have started this process two years ago ... If this does not happen, it is up to the EU to take responsibility” (Xhajanka, 2021).

The road to European citizenship is long and currently people of the Western Balkans are caught between a rock and a hard place. “...The rock is constituted by the technocratic nature of the European integration process and EU capitals’ indecisiveness on the enlargement dossier. The hard place is made up of the Balkan governments’ inability – and often unwillingness – to act in an accountable and representative manner while in office” (Stratulat, C. et.al., 2018:2). This description offers as similar picture of the situation in Albania.

The slow progress, the frequent obstacles have brought about regional cooperation initiatives, such as the 'Open Balkans', another apple of discord between the position and the opposition in Albania.

While the country may not be ready for full membership, opening of negotiations is important for the people and political parties. With regard to that, Prime Minister Rama states: “Membership is another story, but negotiations are more important because they constitute the roadmap¹” (Dita Online, 2021).

3. D. Media and European integration

For purposes of this analysis the important issues are whether or not the media is fulfilling its role in terms of information, education, transparency, oversight; and media’s approach towards the integration process.

The widespread support of the general Albanian public for the European integration processes, according to AIIS study, can be explained by: “... with expansive national media coverage – the citizens are bombarded on a daily basis with information on the progress of the reforms implemented in the framework of EU integration. In accordance with the citizens’ positive attitude towards integration, the national media habitually portrays developments in the process in a positive light, oftentimes even prioritizing them over internal affairs” (Çela & Kelmendi., 2020:18).

Issues such as the European Parliament elections, Brexit, visits of senior EU officials to Tirana, EU positions on important international events, reasons for refusing to start

¹ From the speech of Prime Minister Rama at the "Europa Park" forum.

accession negotiation for Albania, etc. have been in the focus of the Albanian media. Given the frequency of such news, and the priority they are given in the print media or in radio and television newscasts, it may be concluded that European integration is undoubtedly an important part of the media's agenda..

Also, there are frequent programs that highlight the history, values and culture of different European countries. Meanwhile, based on the geographic proximity, similar cultural values, emigration or free movement, etc., Albanian media has responded to the public interest for a wider coverage of political developments in Italy, Greece, Germany, France, etc. The Albanian public is well informed in this regard.

But can more and better be done, and in what aspects? Researcher Demush Bajrami finds that: "... political elites in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia have no interest in changing the status quo. Nowadays new communication media outlets do not include topics on the EU" (Bajrami 2015: 499). Bajrami calls for communication strategies to inform the public, which should use "public opinion results" on important integration issues. He recognizes the importance of inclusion and use of social media as part of those strategies.

On the other hand, researcher Eva Teqja is of the opinion that: "... civil society and other important actors, who are engaged and affected by the European integration process (NGOs, academia, media, business, etc.) should:

- Improve understanding and awareness of the challenges and advantages of the EU integration process ...
- Further expand the communication links between them and the public in general, as well as facilitate the understanding of complex integration processes through Albanian political organizations" (Teqja 2015: 302).

The importance of the issue brought up by Teqja is evidenced by a study, conducted during 2021, focusing on the business community and integration issues. As regards the information on the integration process, about 73% of businesses think that they should be more informed about the European integration process. Only 16% of them consider the current information sufficient. It is interesting that companies from the agriculture and industry sector are more inclined to get new information (87% and 84% respectively). The interviewed businesses were also asked about the main sources from which they obtain information on the EU, where they can choose more than one source of information. The majority chose as their most important source of information on EU affairs, their business partners from EU countries (58%) and in the second place was listed the traditional media (55%), while as sources of information less useful business representatives consider political representatives (ACIT, 2021: 21-22).

A better job can be done in terms of explaining and interpreting the causes and factors that have delayed the progress of the integration process. It is not uncommon for the media to show more interest in the accusations and propaganda of political parties

blaming each other. While it can and should interpret and investigate not only the requirements and their fulfillment, but especially the relevant causes and responsibilities that have led to the slowdown of the integration process and rejections that occur due to internal factors. The public can also be informed more broadly and at the specialist level, about the effects that EU membership will have on specific sectors of the economy, on the competition brought about by a common market, on social policies, on the difficulties encountered by countries that followed the same path etc. The media should expand the space for debate regarding the European integration process, where academics and specialists in the field should have an important place alongside other actors.

4. EU stance on two difficult situations in the country

4. A. The earthquake of 2019

On November 26, 2019, a magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck the country, causing extensive damage to public and private infrastructure. The earthquake killed 51 people, injured hundreds and left thousands homeless. Schools, health care facilities and other public buildings were also damaged. Immediately after, the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism was activated. Experts, search and rescue teams, equipment and aid from many European countries soon arrived in Albania.

In its first meeting held in December the European Commission awarded an initial grant of 15 million Euros for the reconstruction of priority public buildings.

The EU Ambassador to Albania Luigi Soreca stated that “The EU mobilised resources after November’s earthquake, treating the country ‘just like a member state’... this helped to restore the bloc’s reputation, which had suffered after Mr. Macron’s veto” (Financial Times, 2021).

The Donors' Conference "Together for Albania" organized by the EU was held in Brussels on February 17, 2020. A total of about 1,15 billion Euros were pledged (approximately € 295 million in grants, and about € 853million in loans) (EU projects in Albania¹).

The EU pledged additional funds at the donor conference. In July 2020, following the approval of the EU earthquake assistance package, the Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, said: “With the adoption of this €100 million financial package, the European Union is living up to its commitment to help Albania in the reconstruction efforts following the earthquake, just as we are also supporting the country to address the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. We have delivered on our promise to stand by the citizens of Albania and renewed our support to Albania and its European future” (European Commission, 2020)².

¹ EU Assistance for the earthquake in Albania

² E.C. Press Release,17.07. 2020.

4. B. COVID 19 pandemic situation

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic tested the solidarity among Europeans. The lack of access to the vaccine market during the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak brought discontent to the country. Prime Minister Rama would say: "... We were initially left out of the COVID-19 vaccines distribution scheme and by 'we' I mean not only Albania, but all Western Balkan countries. So, this neighborhood right at the heart of Europe, surrounded by the EU borders was practically isolated from the rest in terms of the capacities to fight the pandemic. Therefore, we had to make our own run and make our own efforts individually" (Rama, 2021). But the EU offered its help, be it financially, or by providing necessary medical equipment, and later in the vaccination process, etc. On 9 March 2020, the European Commission announced the financial support of the EU more than 3.3 billion euros for the citizens of the Western Balkans (EC (COM) 2020, 315).

The further pandemic response, and the assistance of the EU and European countries has been appreciated not only by officials and politicians in the country, but also by citizens who continue to massively support the country's European integration process.

Conclusions

The EU membership process is a long, difficult process and presents successive challenges to the aspiring country. Influencing factors are internal and external. The focus of this paper is the perception and level of public support, the role of the Media and the communication culture of political actors.

In summary, some of the conclusions are:

- Political actors in the country determined European integration as a priority of their programs. But the culture of communication among them and with the public on this issue needs to change. Hence:

the culture of constant conflict, blaming each other and using the progress of this process for the sake of party interests should come to an end. They should acknowledge their share of mistakes and work together towards the fulfillment of this common objective.

in their public discourse, political actors should take into account public opinion on such issues.

- The media has played an important role in informing, as well as in conveying the interpretations and explanations of political actors. But more can be done in the following aspects:

To allow more space for other non-political voices, especially for specialists in the field.

To give voice to the opinions of citizens through surveys on relevant issues.

To encourage debates on the impact of the membership process on various sectors of the economy in the country.

- In addition to the geographical position, and the European vocation, the Albanian citizens first of all see the integration in the European Union as an opportunity for economic prosperity, to live and study in the EU and for free travel.

The prolongation of the process of opening negotiations for full EU membership has led to a slight decline in the image and confidence of the EU.

However, European solidarity in the face of difficult situations was well received by everyone. The support remains high, 84% of Albanian citizens believe that EU membership is a positive step.

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