Democratization in the Western Balkans: all in the name of EU Enlargement?

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I Introduction

Why are EU accession oriented reforms in many Western Balkan countries so painfully slow and why does it seem that some aspects are almost even deliberately delayed, despite a clearly communicated wish to join the EU? The Western Balkan countries offer an interesting field for studying externally influenced democratisation and institutional reform, and especially so Albania and Macedonia\(^1\). While it has been stated that donor driven transitions in Africa have been “problematic and led to ambiguous outcomes” (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 219), in general, the present EU approach to reforms and future membership for the Western Balkan countries, the so called conditionality, has been a successful method to promote democracy in post-communist societies (Ethier 2003, McDonagh 2008). The attraction of future membership is seen as the main reason why countries actually accept to undertake dramatic domestic reform as required by the EU: “the greater the benefits of membership, the greater the potential political will in applicant countries to satisfy intrusive political and economic requirements” (Vachudova 2005: 108). This attraction is generally held as a strong component in the rapid changes in the Central and Eastern European countries resulting in not only democracy and market economy, but also EU membership. It is hoped that the Western Balkan countries will be equally attracted by the prospect of EU membership to overcome not only the communist, non-democratic, past but also the worst versions of nationalism which has brought such devastation to the region. The exchange of rewards for reforms is clear: fulfilling EU(opean) standards will bring the countries closer and closer to EU membership.

All Western Balkan countries will soon have a contractual relationship with the EU in the shape of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the first step towards membership of that club, which gives the EU enormous influence over these countries. In this sense, Western Balkan, and to some extent also Central and East European, transition and democratic consolidation are quite different from that in other regions of the world: reform reluctant domestic politicians have a strong carrot in the prospect of EU membership. And the EU is eager to use the strong foreign policy tool of enlargement to influence domestic politics in these countries. Its political efficiency can be seen in the arrest of Radovan Karadžić soon after the new pro-EU government took office in Serbia recently. What is striking, however, is that some fundamental issues of democracy and good governance are continuously pointed out year after year in reports from the

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1 The name of the state is disputed, where Greece does not recognize its constitutional name “Republic of Macedonia”. The name “Macedonia” will be used throughout this paper, without expressing any political preferences. Regarding the two biggest ethnic groups in Macedonia, the names “Slav Macedonian” and “ethnic Albanian” will be used, simply to distinguish them easily from each other. All citizens of Macedonia are considered “Macedonians”, not just the Slav majority. “Albanians” are consequently citizens of Albania, their ethnic kin in Macedonia are thus ethnic Albanians with Macedonian (or other) citizenship. Ethnicity and statehood in the Balkans are as always sensitive matters.
European Commission and other bodies. Obviously these are areas of particular difficulty which require time to work out efficient reform strategies and to allow consolidation of implemented reforms. But the puzzle here is that there seems to be something more than just that, there seems to be a lack of political will to change. And that, in light of the enormous advantages for these countries an EU membership would bring, is the key puzzle for this paper: what is holding reform back? The answer to that question does not only have implications for the countries under study and the region of the Western Balkans, but could give clues to struggling reform under external influence in other areas of the world.

While the Western Balkan countries show steady progress regarding reforms and adaptation towards EU standards, there are signs that not all is well. The European Commission writes that Macedonia “faces major challenges in implementing and, especially, effectively enforcing the legislation” (Commission 2005a: 5), that “political changes still have a deep impact” on public administration (Commission 2006a: 8) and that “the judicial system shows the same serious shortcomings as in previous years affecting both its independence and its efficiency” (Ibid: 10). Rule of law is not deemed to be fully consolidated, and a sufficient degree of compliance with membership criteria for opening membership negotiations - despite candidate status - is not yet reached (Commission 2005a).

Albania struggles since several years with fundamental issues such as establishing a functioning civil register and full protection of and clarity over land ownership, which hampers important reforms regarding elections and the business climate (Commission 2005b: 10 and 30). Political influences over appointments in public administration is still high (Commission 2007a: 13), and elections most often do not fulfil international standards for free and fair elections (OSCE/ODIHR 2005).

This paper presents a first tentative analysis of the cases of Macedonia and Albania. After a discussion on conditionality, EU leverage and democratization, an outline of case selection and methodological aspects will follow. An overview of Albania and Macedonia after communism gives a brief background, which opens for an analysis of a pilot study carried out during the spring of 2008 and tentative conclusions for future research on the topic.

II Conditionality in perspective

The Central and Eastern European states (CEES) pose a particular position both in the context of democratization and that of EU democracy aid. In terms of democratization, their transition has been different from that of other regions, especially since they have needed to tackle not only the political spectre, but also economic and social aspects (Wiarda 2002, Meiklejohn Terry 1993, Gelman 2003, Bunce 2003). Regarding EU
democracy support, the post-communist European countries are unique in the sense that, accompanied by a economic support package, the EU has used the prospect of EU membership as both a carrot and a stick for reforms in these countries. This is particularly true regarding the Western Balkans, since the EU extended the prospect of future membership to these countries as a tool to avoid further instability and wars in the Balkans (Friis and Murphy 2000, Gori 2007: 48). It is to some sense impossible to study democratization and reforms in the Western Balkans without taking into consideration the influence the EU poses over the region. The EU has over time developed ever tighter conditions for accession, and done so especially in the context of enlargement towards the CEES (Pridham 2005) and also the Western Balkans (Phinnemore 2006). External support for democratization processes, democracy aid, has been a growing phenomenon which has developed in sophistication and efficiency (Carothers 1999). The EU has supported democracy all over the world in a more coherent manner since the 1970s, but it is not until the 1990s that this policy has become formalized as a political strategy (Lundgren 1998: 73, 74), where for example Macedonia offers a clear case of the connection between enlargement and EU support for democracy and stability. The EU offers perhaps the most efficient approach available: not only advice and resources aiming at socialization to reach democracy, but has to a limited number of states connected this aid to the incentive of membership of the EU itself (Kelley 2004, Vachudova 2005, Schimmelfennig 2007). The leverage of the EU over the countries subject to this policy of conditionality is very strong, but only as long as it is connected to future membership. Vachudova (2005) divides leverage in two components: active and passive, where the passive leverage is the attraction of membership and active leverage refers to all the efforts and instruments available to the EU in imposing reforms. Active leverage has little or no impact if the passive leverage is not present. Schimmelfennig and Scholtz argue that the impact of conditionality varies across countries: it is smallest in authoritarian states as well as states that have already achieved a high level of democracy. According to them, conditionality is most effective in countries which have partly democratized but not yet reached full consolidation (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008: 207). Haughton write that conditionality is at its most efficient when the EU is about to decide whether to open accession negotiations or not, because the connection between demand and reward is very clear at that point. Once negotiations are opened, the membership seems secured no matter what, and there is a great risk of resistance or delay in implementation (Haughton 2007: 243). It is normally assumed that an efficient conditionality policy is dependent on a strong and uncontested connection with future EU membership, as illustrated by Haughton's arguments above. However, Schimmelfennig and Scholtz have found that this connection is not as crucial as previously thought. They write that even though the impact of conditionality on countries where the promise of membership was distant and uncertain is
weaker than in countries where the promise is highly credible, the impact of conditionality is anyway statistically strong and robust (Schimmelfennig and Scholtz 2008: 207). This would be good news for the EU, especially since many observers see a clear drop in commitment from the EU towards enlargement in general, and towards the Western Balkans and Turkey in particular (Phinnemore 2006: 15)

Kelley has explored the relationship between different European institutions involved in democracy promotion. She concludes that the relationship between the OSCE, Council of Europe and the EU often is intertwined. She agrees that conditionality-based incentives are more efficient than socialization-based efforts, but adds that where these organizations team up, also socialization based efforts “gain instrumental leverage through their relationship with the admitting organization” (Kelley 2004: 450). In short, if a particular area of reforms which is not covered by the EU directly becomes connected to conditionality, the positive effects of conditionality include also this particular area. Or in the words of Kelley: “conditionality motivated the actors while socialization-based efforts guided them” (Kelley 2004: 453).

Democratization is a process with two main components: reforming the institutional set-up, such as shaping the political landscape to fit a democratic system of governance, and changing behaviour to respect the new democratic and liberal norms which accompany a democratic regime. The institutional changes are often not very complicated, but the trouble comes when behaviour has to change. Numerous studies confirm this problem, and the whole discussion regarding “hybrid states”, or “democracies with adjectives” bear witness of the more flagrant discrepancies between formal and informal aspects of democracy (Diamond 2002, Carothers 2002, O'Donnell 1994, Collier and Levitsky 1997). The EU, often being seen as a value based community, has to some extent succeeded in transmitting some of its values and norms to third countries, but it is obvious that this process is long and complicated (Björkdahl 2005). The EU support for reforms in the CEE and the Western Balkans comes in various aid programmes. PHARE, OBNOVA, CARDS, etc., have been replaced by IPA, which is designed to closely follow a country through the accession process. Abbreviations and technicalities apart, what these programmes have in common is the aim to prepare a country for EU accession. That is very different from supporting democracy. However, the conditions for accession include not only the adoption of the acquis communautaire, but also the so called Copenhagen criteria established in 1993 (European Council 1993). Here the democratic nature of the state, including respecting rule of law and human rights, is included. However, not all aspects of democracy are covered by the EU conditionality or democracy support programmes. Political parties are excluded altogether, and elections figure only as part of priorities to sort out, not to be supported financially by the EU. Institution building is a strong component in the CARDS programme, while explicit support for democracy is
limited to civil society (Pridham 2006, Commission 2001). The conclusion is that while the EU is aiming at thorough reforms across many fields in the Western Balkan countries through the carrot of future membership, the actual support for reforms in the democratic field is limited. However, the leverage over these countries has the effect that also projects not covered by the EU support programmes but nevertheless included in the conditionality package are covered by the positive effect of both active and passive leverage.

**Case selection and methodology**

This paper studies the two countries Albania and Macedonia. These two countries are chosen for several reasons. First, they represent the two pre-accession categories, where Albania is a potential candidate state, and Macedonia is an official candidate state. Albania is in many senses decisively last in the current queue of countries to enter the EU, while Macedonia comes as number three, or even two if Turkey continues to encounter political problems in Brussels and European capitals\(^2\). Both countries score rather low in democracy indexes\(^3\), and are thus seen as still partly democratizing, indicated by the theoretical discussion above as particularly susceptible to EU leverage. They would also benefit enormously by an EU membership, given their small and vulnerable economies, and the large amount of economic and technocratic support for reaching their goal of EU accession supplied by the EU and its member states. Given that Macedonia is a non-negotiating candidate state, due to weaknesses in administrative and economic capacity, it is also highly interesting to see whether Albania and Macedonia pose similar or different aspects regarding these long term problematic reform processes.

Regarding the neighbouring countries, Croatia, the region's leading star at the moment, is not included, mainly because of the well advanced state of accession negotiations, which above is stated as a factor diminishing EU leverage. Bosnia and Herzegovina is excluded partly because of being the epicentre of the wars that broke up Yugoslavia, which not only creates particular problems during the democratization process, but also devastated the country to such a point that it has still not recovered. Bosnia has also been under international responsibility during the whole post-war period, and poses in itself a particular case not comparable to many others in the world. Serbia and Montenegro are also excluded because of a number of reasons. First, despite forming the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the two countries lived separate lives to a large extent at least from the fall of Milošević up until Montenegro declared independence in 2006.

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2. Croatia is currently negotiating together with Turkey for EU membership.
3. Freedom House rates both countries as “partly free” with the score 3.0 in their 2008 report Freedom in the World. Serbia, for example, is ranked as “free” with a score of 2.5. Freedom House 2008
Serbia,\(^4\) despite being a rather modern country with few actual difficulties in taking on an EU membership, was under Milošević considered a pariah state, and by some even seen as a pre-transition country up until his losing elections in 2000 (Dryzek and Holmes 2002). Serbia reluctantly signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement, the first contractual relationship with the EU in the accession process, only during 2008, and there has been little EU leverage over the country before that (Gori 2007: 117 ff). In short, the choice of Albania and Macedonia for this study is firstly because of their own merits, secondly to avoid aspects that could blur our picture of factors hampering reforms, and thirdly because of factors which make the other countries in the region difficult to compare with other cases.

I have chosen to study two reform processes in each country. These processes are seen as key reforms by the EU, and represent important aspects of democracy and rule of law. They are also processes that continuously come back in monitoring reports, thus posing particular difficulties regarding implementation. Being aware of the risk of selection bias, I have deliberately chosen processes which demonstrate problems. I am specifically interested in identifying problems regarding implementation of reforms aiming at democratization, and therefore include only such cases which seem to give further understanding to this topic.\(^5\)

The processes chosen for this study are not necessarily under EU controlled implementation, nor under CARDS or IPA funding. The EU CARDS and IPA funded support for reforms is more often than not implemented by third part, such as local or foreign NGOs, or by independent EU funded organisations or missions, such as EURALIUS in Albania. In fact, the ever returning key priority of free and fair elections is not dealt with by the EU at all, but fall safely under the realm of the OSCE. The CARDS and IPA funds in Albania are under the supervision of the Commission Delegation, while in Macedonia the implementation of the funds falls under the responsibility of European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR). The EU leverage over reforms mentioned as priorities in the European Partnerships and Accession Partnerships is assumed to be high, regardless of implementing or funding agency, as discussed above. The European Partnerships, which define the priorities regarding the accession process, are clear on what is needed to be done and there is no room for interpreting EU funded and/or implemented projects as having higher priority \textit{per se}.

I have chosen to study judicial reforms in both countries, elections in Albania, and decentralization in Macedonia. Judicial reform is crucial in both countries, where the Albanian judiciary “has continued to function poorly due to shortfalls in independence, transparency and efficiency” (Commission 2007b: 9), and the Macedonian judiciary

\(^4\) Serbia here means the Republic of Serbia, as an entity of first Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and later Serbia and Montenegro, but also these two states in themselves. In the end, Montenegro is marginal with its 600 000 inhabitants compared to 10 million in Serbia.

\(^5\) For a further discussion on selection bias ans case studies, see George and Bennet 2004, p 23.
“continues to suffer from serious deficiencies, in particular as regards lack of independence and low efficiency” (Commission 2007c: 10). The judicial system is the backbone not only for the rule of law – and thus democracy - but also to secure a sane business climate where property rights and other fundamentals of a market economy are guaranteed in a transparent and non-partisan way.

Elections in Albania are a difficult matter. The electoral code has been rewritten several times since the fall of communism, and elections have been marred by both security related problems, improper voting behaviour and problems with the general organisation of the elections. Voters' lists, electoral administration and the handling of complaints are all contested, as they have been for many years (OSCE/ODIHR 2007a). Crucial political agreements are only pushed through at the eleventh hour after strong international influence (OSCE/ODIHR 2007b). Elections are perhaps the most important cornerstone of democracy, and of course the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership, but Albania obviously still have serious problems both politically and administratively regarding this crucial issue, despite the heavy influence by the EU and others to reach a proper working climate.

Decentralization is a key aspect of the Ohrid Framework Agreement which in effect is the peace agreement between the Macedonian government and the ethnic Albanian rebels from the crisis in 2001. It has been contested by the (Slav Macedonian) majority since the process is designed to give ethnic Albanians more local power, but is also a standard feature in Western Balkans aid packages. This process catches the difficult relationship between the ethnic majority and the biggest minority, but mainly the difficult process of handing over of power and economic resources to local authorities. The Macedonian communes are only lately gaining the rights and practical possibility to collect local tax, rather than waiting for money allocated by the central government, having been held up by political and administrative problems.

This study is limited between 2001 and 2007. 2001 was the year of the first Albanian general elections after the chaotic period between 1997 and 1999, and could be seen as a year of entering a new era. 2001 is also the year Macedonia not only saw the most serious crisis in its short history as independent state, but also the year when they signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, as the first country to do so. The signing of this agreement was very much used as a means of stopping the conflict, and could be seen as the start of strong international and European involvement in Macedonia (Madunic 2003). And from a Brussels perspective, 2001 was the year when the instruments of the Stabilization and Association process were being implemented, in the new effort in assisting the Western Balkans after the Kosovo crisis in 1999. The study ends in 2007 due to practical research reasons. These processes are by nature long term, and have already been ongoing for many years, and will most likely continue right up until a
possible accession to the EU is imminent, perhaps even further. The line has simply to be drawn somewhere. Where relevant, the study of the different reforms starts where a major programme is launched later than 2001, otherwise it starts during 2001.

The study will take the shape of process tracing, searching for particular turning points, such as laws or political deals, as well as important returning obstacles which perhaps do not grab the immediate attention. Analytically, I will distinguish between two levels of analysis: the political, where especially the law making process and the political climate is in focus, and the implementation level, where laws, projects, and political deals are turned into practice. I will to some extent depend on documentation coming from implementing organizations and relevant government bodies. This documentation will be complemented with interviews with politicians, representatives of international organizations, local analysts and NGOS, as well as those directly targeted by the reform efforts. I have already done a short pilot study in March and April 2008, trying to identify some macro variables important for reforms, and to map the reform work in Albania and Macedonia. The results will be presented below.

Albania and Macedonia in perspective

Albania

Albania was a particular case during communism: almost totally isolated from the rest of the world, and was being governed through a “totalitarian -cum -sultanistic” version of communism, to borrow from Linz and Stepan (1996). The collapse of communism was delayed in respect to the other transitions at the time, and Albania held its first pluralistic elections since 1945 in March 1991 (Vickers and Pettifer 1997: 55). These were won by the Communist Party, but already in 1992 the government was forced to accept fresh elections due to its inability to govern the country. The opposition had had a chance to organize itself, and won the elections by an overwhelming majority (Vickers and Pettifer 1997: 80). However, this democratic opening slowly turned sour, as the president, Sali Berisha, concentrated power around him and asked to formalise his power in a referendum on a new constitution. That referendum failed, but the country was to face worse challenges. Apart from a tumultuous transition characterised by poverty and lack of public order, Albania was almost descending into complete anarchy as the state protected economic pyramid schemes, where most people had invested almost all their savings, collapsed in 1997. Anger and frustration with Berisha’s government was coupled with the despair of losing everything. Army barracks and police stations were looted and a large number of arms were spread among the population. With little or no state control over the territory, the international community entered to try to restore if not law, at least some order. Even
though Albania managed to turn the page and restore some normality, crisis followed crisis. In 1998 the fragile situation was aggravated by a significant political murder, and in 1999 the country was flooded by journalists, refugees, military and relief aid workers as the Kosovo crisis unravelled. Politically, the climate entered a sort of cold war between the then opposition party lead by Berisha, and the reformed communist party in power since 1997. Relations with the EU were taken up again seriously after 1999 (and especially 2001), and the country initiated a pre-negotiation phase for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA).

The road towards signing an SAA with the EU proved to be long and difficult. The EU felt compelled to set up an additional monitoring structure to follow not only the technical details of the SAA, but also the political developments in the country. It was clear that the political aspects of the Copenhagen Criteria were of highest importance to the EU. But so was also the SAA for the Albanians. It was obvious that initiating negotiations, and eventually finish them, was a matter of greatest pride and honour to the Albanian political establishment. But despite this very strong desire to join the EU, the SAA was not negotiated and signed until June 2006, due to slow reforms and poor political climate, and the road ahead will be long, if the political climate does not change.

Macedonia

Macedonia was the poorest republic in the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, which, with its old fashioned industry and heavy reliance on tobacco agriculture, depended on the rest of Yugoslavia, and especially Serbia (Dobrković 2001, Mirčev 2001). Macedonia has always been contested and questioned by its neighbours, and this has only been aggravated since independence. Although Serbia, Bulgaria, and to some extent Albania all question the ethnicity, the language and the borders of Macedonia, Greece poses a particular problem since they are willing to block international relations for Macedonia due to the name issue.

Where Albania's first ten years after communism were marked by repeated internal problems, Macedonia's initial trouble came from abroad. The non-recognition as an independent state until 1993 kept it outside the reach of international financial institutions when it was really needed. The already poor economy suffered enormously by the economic sanctions against its main trading partner Serbia, and the economic blockade by Greece against Macedonia due to the name dispute (Reuter 2001: 38). Macedonia was

6 The opposition MP Azeem Hajdari was killed early autumn 1998, and the following turmoil contributed to the resignation of the PM Fatos Nano (Vickers 1999: 252)
7 Conclusions drawn by the author based on several interviews with politicians and representatives for international organisations, after having worked in the country during 2000-2002.
8 As mentioned in a previous footnote, Greece does not recognize the name of the republic, insisting that this name indicates territorial claims over parts of Greece. For further reading on this issue, see Pettifer (2001a) and Poulton (2000)
recognized in 1993 under the name “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and got a seat in the UN the same year. However, an agreement with Greece is still not reached, which blocked an invitation to NATO membership as late as April 2008.

As the international problems began to settle, the next serious problem arose: that of growing demands for minority rights by the ethnic Albanian minority. This issue is further complicated by the weak national identity by the Slav Macedonians due to the complex international situation (Drezov 2001, Daskalovski 2004). The ethnic Albanian minority represents around 20 per cent of the Macedonian population, and is rapidly growing (Pettifer 2001b 17). The ethnic Albanians have demanded cultural and linguistic rights, as well as that of education in Albanian. It was the denial of these rights that eventually caused the crisis in 2001, where ethnic Albanian rebels took up arms against the government, fuelled by the remnants of the Kosovo crisis in 1999 (Hislope 2003).

The EU stepped in to avoid a third serious Balkan crisis in ten years, and managed to negotiate a peace agreement tying it closely to the prospect of future membership (Madunic 2003), thus forcing the Slav majority to implement minority rights. The peace agreement, the so called Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), introduces the right to use a minority language spoken by at least 20 per cent of the population (in effect only covering Albanian); a decentralization process giving local government more powers, partly in order to give more independence to the Albanian areas in every day matters; and stresses the need for a more equal representation in public administration, i.e., employing more ethnic Albanians. The implementation process of the OFA has been long and difficult (Brunnbauer 2002), but has eventually been finalised, at least in terms of laws and regulations. It is in the context of this post-crisis environment that the EU has stepped up its work to support stability and democracy in Macedonia, and working to prepare Macedonia for EU accession.

III Preliminary results

A pilot study was carried out in Albania and Macedonia in March and April 2008 in order to identify relevant processes to study, and to map the work done by the EU and other international organizations. That study, together with published reports and evaluations from the EU and relevant international organizations form the basis for this preliminary analysis. Below follow an analysis of the interviews, which serves to give a general picture for further discussion as well as some tentative conclusions.

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9 These minority rights follow the Copenhagen Criteria fully, and do not pose anything outside the normal conditionality. However, the EU has to some extent got an easier task to impose these rights since they are connected to peace rather than EU membership.
Albania

Interviews in Albania reveal that politicians are rather impatient with the EU, and are to some extent disillusioned by the influence of this organization. EU is both seen as a heavy weight organization (Biberaj 2008) and as having little actual influence over politics (Zogaj 2008). All politicians interviewed acknowledge that Albania's own agenda and that of the EU coincide, the EU thus complementing the Albanian strategies (Dade 2008). While expressing the understanding of Albania not being a particularly attractive country for the EU ("We can only offer a bigger market, tourism, sun and culture" (Klosi 2008)), there is also a sense of resignation and need for a firm prospect. A date for accession is desperately wanted, and some politicians expressed a need for more European involvement in politics and debates to spread the message of what EU integration actually means (Dule 2008, Dade 2008). Perhaps the most significant conclusion of this handful of political interviews was that almost all expressed, implicitly or explicitly, that it is "a gross injustice" to Albania that Romania and Bulgaria became members, but that Albania has to wait (Zogaj 2008). All are very well aware of the fact that conditionality is not neutral. And if the accession process takes too long, Albania might want to opt out (Biberaj 2008). Despite the recognition that EU oriented reforms are in line with their own domestic goals, between the lines there was the impression that the politicians agree to change only when absolutely needed, rather than taking the advice readily. Some expressed a need of direct help and guidance on what to do, and how to do it, while others wanted a more direct and intensive involvement in the Albanian political debate and also directly with ordinary people (Klosi, 2008, Dule 2008, Dade 2008). The conclusion is that the political elite know very well what should be done, but are of the opinion that the EU has no particular interest in Albania as such, and that few, if no one, want to take responsibility for difficult and painful reforms, especially regarding behavioural changes.

Turning to the level of actually implementing projects, it was revealed that project management in Albania is rather old fashioned in the sense that donors work through projects, rather than supplying the government with the funds for domestic implementation. In this sense, Albania is much less sophisticated than many African countries (Dutch Embassy, 2008). The capacity of the ministries to come up with ready initiatives is often lacking, and when advice is delivered, there is often no reaction to it at all. Where there is a good personal contact, the situation is however different. One international organization (IO) assessed that the reasons for this are perhaps a very hierarchical thinking, where initiatives are not encouraged, and that there are perhaps other priorities in the ministries than what is proposed by the IO (EURALIUS 2008). In addition to that, there are the political appointees, which often do not have a background in their actual position.

A general assessment of obstacles to reform is the ever returning issue of political
appointments and the subsequent reshuffling of staff. It makes training undone (OSCE 2008a), but is so common that it has to be taken into the equation when working in Albania (Dutch Embassy 2008). Normally, there is little or nothing done about it, except through a general criticism (EURALIUS 2008). Most often, there are no sanctions such as less aid money in that particular field or department. Other obstacles and problems regarding reform and implementation of projects identified by IOs were: lack of time frame for the EU accession process; a general lack of discipline in the public administration where for example judges don't work full hours or don't even show up in court; there is a high degree of informality in public administration; constant reshuffling of staff creates a feeling of insecurity, which in turn feeds corruption; there's a lack of vision within the public administration about what they would like to have done and why.

It is very interesting to notice that one senior representative of an IO expressed the opinion that especially businessmen, but to some extent also politicians, actually do not seem to want EU integration, since that would destroy their businesses, and that this sort of obscure politics exercised in Albania do not survive in a modern, transparent democracy.

Even though there are many small steps forward taken, much remains as it was in 2001. Yes, there are new tall buildings and roads, but the basic infrastructure is not there, illustrated by the fact that electoral reform discusses almost exactly the same issues today as in 2001 (OSCE 2008b).

**Macedonia**

The few interviews conducted with politicians show that at least the Albanian politicians are rather satisfied with the EU and the international community, although the international representatives nowadays are not if the highest level, perhaps reflecting the lower significance of Macedonia in world politics (Buxhaku 2008) The Macedonian political community is 100 per cent pro EU and NATO integration, which is the main priority for the government (Kadriu 2008), and actually it is Macedonia's only option for the future to join these organizations (Dogani 2008). EU in Macedonia is sometimes more of a guide, a mediator than directly involved in politics. They are mostly very careful (Dogani 2008), but it is also true that the EC Delegation is of very good support and the Ambassador is both present and active in all areas (Kadriu 2008). All in all, these politicians did not call for a further and closer involvement in politics or society as such. However, from the Albanian point of view, integration seem to be almost a little scary for the (Slav) Macedonians, since they have such a weak identity. In a fully integrated EU, there would be 6-7 million Albanians, but only 1 million Macedonians (Buxhaku 2001). This could explain some of the hesitations in reaching political agreements on crucial
Regarding reforms, it was stated that Macedonia unfortunately show results only after strong international influence, while there is a need for the country to show that it is able to reform without this pressure. The population is getting frustrated as they see little results of all the reforms. A date for opening negotiations is very much needed (Buxhaku 2008).

A voice from the civil service directly involved in contacts with the EU and other donors claimed that the IPA support is both proper and fair, and that most often problems are on a political level. There is sometimes a lack of political will both from the domestic politicians, but also every now and then from Brussels, when the EU insist on certain things and delay certain aspects (Secretariat for European Integration 2008).

Generally, all interlocutors expressed a fear of political instability (but not hostilities) if the NATO invitation would not come. They also expressed a concern over the future willingness to continue with reforms, since they all recognise that Greece is not only member of NATO, but also the EU. Not being invited to NATO thus would have implications for the prospect for EU membership, especially since Macedonia is eagerly awaiting a date for opening accession negotiations.

Regarding the implementation of reforms, the situation was nicely summed up as a “political dependency” on external actors, as no one wants to take responsibility for reforms (thus referring to foreign policy needs), but neither show to be a “marionette” in foreign hands (NATO 2008). There is a lack of political trust between the parties, resulting in laws rather than common political solutions (EC Delegation 2008). Unfortunately, also Macedonia suffer of big reshuffling of staff in public administration, and especially so after elections. As there is no tradition of hand-over procedures, much is lost in these changes of personnel. But since trained staff often end up on other positions, as such training and general competence is not totally lost (EAR 2008a). Projects covered by the EU in Macedonia are all implemented by third part, and while the Macedonian public administration is not still responsible for the administration of aid funds from the EU, they are involved in many aspects of prioritizing and selection of projects. Overall, the quality of different ministries varies greatly, due to several reasons: sometimes these problems are of political character, but also the old socialistic type of mentality prevail, giving little room for incentives and creativity. The constant hiring of staff on political grounds also result in a certain level of incompetence in the ministries (EAR 2008b). Ironically, military reforms have gone very well, and the Ministry of Defence is perhaps the best prepared of them all (Slovenian Embassy 2008).

Sometimes project are double funded due to a lax control over what is already covered by other agencies, despite the fact that the Secretariat for European Integration

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10 It is ironic because Macedonia did not receive the invitation for membership in April 2008, exclusively for political reasons.
offers a strong donor coordinating body (EAR 2008a), but generally the IPA offers good support for Macedonia (Secretariat for European Integration 2008).

Tentative conclusions

It is very interesting that politicians in Albania express a desire for closer hands-on support from the EU regarding reforms. That in connection with statements from the international community in Macedonia that there is a sort of "political dependency" on foreigners, indicate that politicians are not particularly keen on taking responsibility neither for reforms forced upon them, nor for taking the initiative to come up with political agreements facilitating reforms. This is extra interesting since politicians in both country claim that EU membership is the only way for the future, and that the EU agenda and the domestic agenda to a large extent coincide. In theory, that would mean that all external support should be highly appreciated and meticulously taken care of. The opposite seem unfortunately to be the reality.

Albania is obviously a country where public administration is very weak, even to the point that donors have to come up with initiatives for reforms. This is not true to the same extent in Macedonia, although the country is not entrusted with allocating and implementing aid money independently. However, some of the structural problems in both countries seem to be the same: politicized public administration where political appointments and constant reshuffling hamper both the hiring of qualified staff and the efficient planning and execution of projects. None of the interlocutors mentioned lack of funds as a problem hampering reform work.

It is obvious that there is a strong element of political will influencing a reform package. If politicians do not want to find a solution to a problem (let's say improving elections to reach an internationally acceptable standard), they can easily obstruct by not following recommendations and writing laws that can be manipulated. Issues with a political character are more often subject to this sort of behaviour, while for example agricultural standards and civil society projects rarely encounter big problems.

The future closer case studies should continue to divide every process in at least two analytical levels: political and implementation. In this way, it is clearer which level poses which problems. Since political will seem to be a very common and also big obstacle, it is important to understand to what extent this problem is present at the law-making and design level, and to what extent it filters through the also rather politicized public administration. It would be very valuable to detect reasons for this political interference: what would the politicians loose on not getting very involved in election preparations and the judicial system? One could always speculate in terms of domestic political costs, but it is also important to try to reveal the actual details.

The case studied should also try to detect to what extent a politicized administration
hampers developments, and how constant reshuffling of staff affects the daily work. But most important is to try to understand if each case poses particular problems in itself, which are perhaps not present in the other. While this brief pilot study has offered some insights and points to start with, it is of significance not to limit the scope of the case studies only to those parameters.
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