

## **INTERNATIONALS AND THEIR LEGITIMACY IN THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC**

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### **1. Background: History of Internationals from state formation until 1990**

The role of internationals in the political history of the Albanian state has always been crucial. The international system is in a state of anarchy. In the classical equilibrium of powers, the actors are only the states and, for such a system to function, there must be at least five. In multipolar systems, some states - at least two or three - enjoy relative strength (Mingst, 2010). The Austro-Hungarian Empire stood by an Albanian state as a political barrier against Pan-Slavism and an empowerment of these peoples to dominate the Adriatic Sea. Despite self-proclaimed neutrality, only the intervention of two of the Great Powers of the time, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy saved the new state from total disintegration, although some land borders were sacrificed throughout the process (Kalemaj, 2014).

After World War II, with the power taken by the communists, Albanian politics would be oriented towards the socialist superpowers, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. This manifested itself in the form of post-war recovery and economic development; The 55million ruble loan would have an annual interest rate of 15% and would be repaid from 1980 to 1990. With this loan, during the third five years period 1961-1965, several works would be built, where what stood out was the construction of a glass factory with a capacity of 5600 tons of glass production and a factory for packaging (Boriçi, 2019).

The internal problems brought by totalitarianism, degradation and inefficiency of the centralized economy would bring about the end of the relations between Albania and China. After the fall of the dictatorship, international interest reappears and this time under the influence of the United States of America. But for realists, power is the currency of international relations. It is the means by which international actors reach out to each other (Mingst, 2010).

The great involvement of the internationals has always focused on the formation of the Albanian state as it is an element previously unknown to this population. A role that continues today, but, in post modernism, is this the real agenda or is it a feature of a personal agenda.

## **2. The role of internationals in the political reform process**

The functional role of international representations in the 21. century, belongs to a crucial role for several reasons such as: maintaining the stability of the international order, economic stability, strengthening the rule of law, common security policies, geo influence, etc. While many nations used the language and symbolism of democracy as a means of increasing the legitimacy of their respective regimes, democracy, as most Westerners understand the concept, was limited to North America, Western Europe, Britain, and the old Commonwealth (Mayer, 2001). This element makes it possible for the actions of internationals to be viewed by the public under the view of a guardian who guarantees the implementation of common rules and as a control mechanism in countries with transitional democracies.

The difference between order and anarchy is more fundamental than the difference between democracy and dictatorship (Huntington, 2011). So, what the internationals are looking for, is stability and achieving the necessary parameters to maintain political stability. The largest investment to date by the United States in Albania remains the organization of the reform in justice. A colossal reform aimed at cleaning justice of corrupt elements and ensuring its independence from politics. Technically, the justice reform had to go into a deep reflection to understand and analyze the reasons for its delay and its efficiency in implementation, meanwhile, after a decisive effort by the United States, it was decided to extend the term of the vetting members. This decision was voted by 118 out of 120 members of parliament.

Analyzing it democratically, there is no concrete reason why the mandates should be extended, on the contrary, each reform has its own timeline to be implemented. The extension of the mandates is a factor of an attempt to understand that something is lagging behind in the implementation of this reform. The reform must guarantee that it will be impossible to a prosecutor should not investigate everything accusations of corruption, while they who are corrupt to think that they will never be prosecuted. It must also guarantee that everyone, without exception, is equal before the law (Vlahutin, 2015).

It is true that a large number of members of the justice system have been fired and the Chief Prosecutor has been arrested but, when it comes to investigating politicians, this reform has not been effective, showing once again the panorama that the political caste the current still exerts a strong influence on a fundamental pillar such as the judiciary.

The main problem with Albania lies in non-recycling of the political elites and with deep problems in internal democratization. The lack of internal democracy is not seen as a problem by international representations. But referring to a January

2022 European Court of Auditors special report on EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans, Freedom House cites its findings that “such support and funding have had little impact on the advancement of fundamental reforms of the rule of law due to insufficient political will and lack of commitment” (Zaimi, 2022).

They follow their personal agenda. What needs to be understood today is that the real change comes from the dynamics of the domestic factor, because for internationals stability is valued, while for locals, there is the implementation of a competitive and comprehensive domestic policy, empowering to achieve state-building in those parameters in order for it to be worthily represented internationally.

The state is an autonomous actor, conditioned only by the anarchy of the international system. The state enjoys sovereignty; namely the authority to administer matters that lie within its borders and that affect its people: the economy, security and the form of government (Mingst, 2010). Sovereignty recovered several times from the constant interference of the internationals. Decisions exist on the basis of reciprocity, transparency and involvement of several actors. In the end what is worth mentioning is that the representations reflect the interest of their countries. Not necessary do their interests coincide with the interests of the host countries. Given the anarchic nature of the international system, the element that secures the weight of political decision-making is based on the power that the state has. It is the possession of power that makes it possible for the "great nations" "to overlap with the “small nations”. Democracy of small nations is a peripheral propaganda element, but in fact the interest of large nations prevails over the tendency for more power and political stability in the host countries.

External influences may lead to democratization efforts before countries reach the area or they may delay or prevent democratization in countries that have reached that level of development (Huntington, 2011). This is observed in various intergovernmental organizations operating in Albania. Political elections organized in Albania show the same problems over the years as: vote-buying, family voting, delays in the outcome, militant conflicts and tensions, result disputes from political forces to protests and even revolts. International organizations such as the OSCE / ODIHR, for example, monitor and send reports, where they express the problems of the processes and reflect the current picture, while there is no concrete step to change the problems except of an advisory nature. Internationals are ready to interact with any of the political actors who take power regardless of taking and securing power, as after all, their role is only representative of the interest of their country and should not be more than that. In international politics, talks, at a glance, are discussions between official representatives in order to reach formal agreement between their governments on an issue that may be a common concern

or a dispute between them (Berridge, 2001). It must be understood that the real political changes stem from the internal dynamics of the country, from society itself. Stability and democracy do not necessarily coincide. Stability and democracy do not necessarily coincide.

As long as internationals operate on their own personal agenda then society itself must have its own personal agenda even if the social interest prevails over the international interest. And the consensus that is really a necessary condition is the procedural consensus, being in agreement on the so-called rules of the game (Sartori, 2010).

The anarchic nature of the international order also manifests itself in the internal anarchism of small countries. A political society without a rule for resolving conflicts is a society that risks compromising any conflict: and in this case "conflict" is the correct word (Sartori, 2010). Apart from the anarchy of the system which bears consequences in the dynamics of domestic politics, another element of pressure that affects the perception of public opinion, is the empowerment of civil society. The role of these internationally funded organizations provides for the development of various factors such as the promotion of elements of society with different character such as the promotion of democracy, law enforcement, respect for human rights, youth representation, public policy, sustainable development etc. It should be noted that the mode of existence of opinion, as described above, is applicable only in a democracy. It, in fact, presupposes three conditions: freedom of thought, freedom of expression, polycentrism (Sartori, 2010).

The major objective in addition to increasing civic activism, lies in organizing and creating a mechanism to exert pressure on politics. An independent network of associations is capable of mobilizing demands and interests independent of the state and, thus, provides an antidote to the uncontrolled concentration of power. On the other hand, civil society can contribute to the effectiveness and legitimacy of the state through "stabilizing hopes" or filtering and consolidating demands (Mayer, 2001).

### **3. The crisis in the Democratic Party and the March 6, 2022 election**

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the role of the United States has been and remains crucial in Albania's political process. One of the practices followed by the United States has been declaring certain individuals undesirable and banning them from entering the United States as "non grata". With the proclamation of Berisha non grata, the great schism within this party began. The political situation of the Democratic Party is totally an internal institutional issue. The competencies of all the officials of this entity are defined in the statute of the party. The pressure

exerted by the United States with the declaration of Berisha non grata, has formed a deep crisis in the party leadership, where today he is more contested than ever.

We are dealing with the phenomenon of elections within the party, a phenomenon which recently, in both political entities aspiring to governance, both the socialist party and the democratic party, have eliminated internal competition and vote of confidence by moving to personal appointments of officials and not towards a comprehensive vote of confidence, a clear sign that both major parties are moving towards autocracy where decisions are made by the party chairman or group presidency. Article 43 / point ç stipulates that the National Assembly declares a motion of no confidence in the President but it is the National Council which dismisses him by a majority vote of 50 + 1. The statute at this point overlaps with the powers, leaving the decision open for court interpretation.

The first criterion of consolidation seems to mean that a democratic regime is consolidated when it has gained a high degree of legitimacy (wide popular acceptance). This high degree of legitimacy is enough to prevent a serious opposition to the democratic regime itself, regardless of the degree of achievement of the regime (Mayer, 2001). This is the primary reason why the parties decided to hold separate assemblies, to measure strength that who would own the majority but the problem of transparency of delegates continued to remain unclear on both sides.

At the moment when both parties declare that they claim the majority, in a democratic society, it is the court that gives the final decision. The panorama so far expresses a fragmented political party and not suitable to emerge as a competitive alternative to take power.

The USA Embassy has publicly spoken out at the start of the political campaign for the by-elections where it does not accept any candidate supported by non grata USA individuals. Former mayor Vangjush Dako, non grata from the United States, joined the campaign in Durrës. The Democratic Party re-founding group led by Sali Berisha, non grata person from the United States. The campaign in Shkodra was joined by Tom Doshi, former chairman of the Social Democrats and former member of parliament, in support of the socialist candidate for Shkodra, and this non grata from the United States. But what difference did these elections make despite the USA embassy's warning?

Through the twitter platform<sup>1</sup>, the ambassador has made her position clear despite the fact that this is a decision which exceeds the competencies of an ambassador. It is worth mentioning that the American pressure was ignored and not taken into account at all.

The decision to expel Berisha from the parliamentary group was taken under direct pressure from the United States. The negligence shown by the current presidency, the full trust that this subject showed in the American embassy,

resulted in a catastrophic result in the local by-elections, which stands as a preparatory test for the 2023 general elections. Public opinion did not take into account the statements of the American embassy.

The by-elections ranked the Democratic Party as the third force, while Berisha's group managed to win the Shkodra municipality, a traditional political stronghold of the Democrats. During talks on politically sensitive topics, when publicity is inevitable and perhaps desirable, the issue of face is of particular interest in the "packaging" of the agreement. This implies the need to protect from extreme shame those parties which, because of the concessions they have been forced to make during the negotiations, become vulnerable and vulnerable to the anger of their supporters (Berridge, 2001).

Despite the pressure from the United States, such as a non-grata declaration or the statement from the USA Embassy calling for anti non grata, they ultimately yielded a result that directly punished the political entity that followed these instructions. The re-establishment commission's several-month-long election campaign against the passivity shown by the official democratic party, became decisive factors in the defeat of the democratic party.

The Albanian political phenomenon showed that the old roots are difficult to cut and that the guarantee of the internationals, regardless of their status, does not necessarily mean victory. The partial election campaign was conducted by non grata persons, on both the left . The USA embassy's calls were ignored by political forces because those declared non grata by the United States are influential individuals, former political officials and senior state officials with strong ties to areas where they have been active. Power is rational, as it is secured by numbers and not idealistic, especially in countries that are still in democracy transition. It still gives the same picture of the last 6 years, with a party that always wins, despite the long time in power and numerous scandals, with a divided opposition that shows internal problems, with people dissatisfied with the system where for various reasons approximately 60% do not vote due to the lack of new alternatives to ensure political change. Despite the result of these elections, since their end, there is a silence on the part of the embassy leaving this conflict as it should always be, internal where the chairman, the presidency of the party and the membership of the party show the courage and political discretion to solve their own problems.

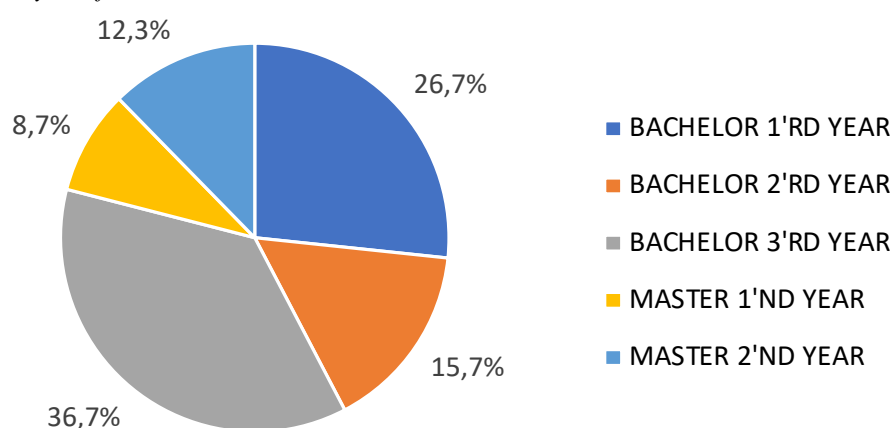
#### **4. Questionnaire on international perception**

A survey was carried out from February to March 2022 involving 300 students enrolled at the Mediterranean University of Albania in order to understand the opinion they carry on the role of internationals and whether their intervention

improves policy-making or affects the process of Albanian democratization. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS. Given the methods of selecting the sample and the aims of the research, there is no probabilistic sample: therefore, the results of the research cannot be the object of inference for purposes of generalization.

In the questionnaire organized on the role of internationals in Albania, according to the result of the samples collected, 51.3% are male and 48.7% female.

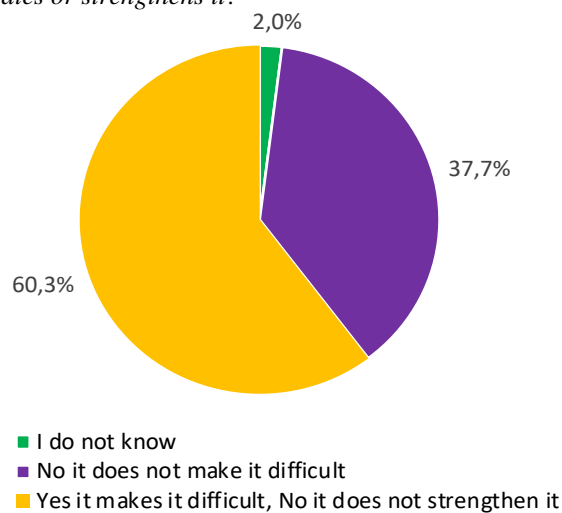
**Figure 1** – Cycle of academic studies.



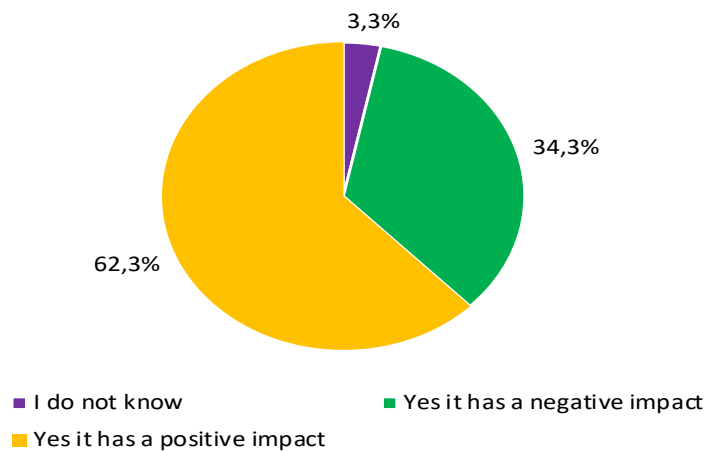
From this survey of young university students, it is clear that the majority of students, 60.3%, understood that the intervention of internationals in the democratic party had a destabilizing effect in the country, even though 37.7% were in favor of this intervention, being influenced by the former founder of this the party was declared by the United States of America as a “non grata” person.

Regarding the good governance of the country, almost two out of three students think that the international role has been positive throughout the Albanian political transition.

**Figure 2** – *Does international interference in the political situation of the opposition complicates or strengthens it?*



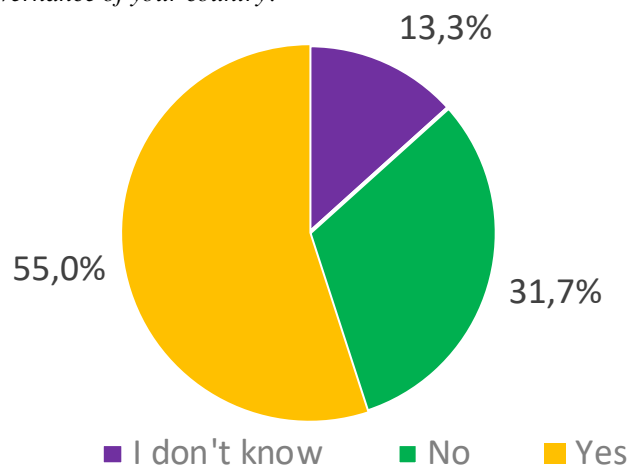
**Figure 3** – *Give your opinion if the role of internationals has a positive or a negative influence in the democratization process in Albania.*



In the process of democratization of the country, 55% of respondents say that the international role in completing and implementing reforms has a positive impact on policy making.

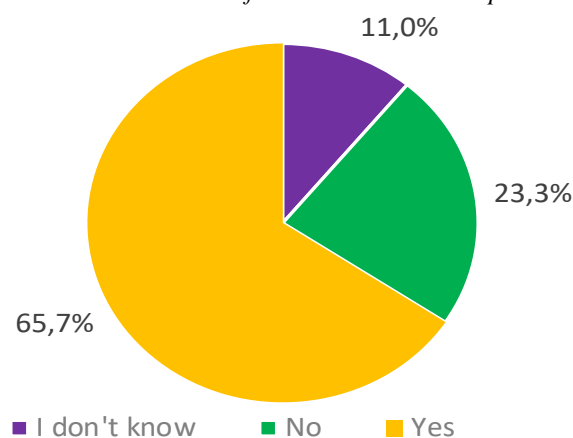


**Figure 4** – Do you think that the internationals have played an important role in the good governance of your country?



When it comes to domestic politics, over half of respondents say that the role of the US has a greater impact than that of the European Union. In particular, 65.7% of young people say that the American influence in Albania is greater than the European influence, this shows the political influence of the USA over Albania along this path of democratization, but of course there are not just a few 31.7% who think that the European perspective is that of right, even though both policies are complementary.

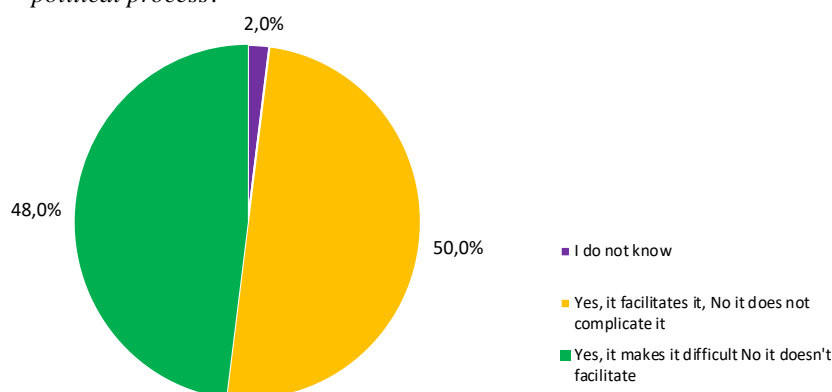
**Figure 5** – Do you think that USA is more influential than the European Union in Albania?



The results of the question “International intervention in Albanian politics, does it facilitate or complicate the political process?” almost split the thoughts of young Albanians in two. The political situation that Albania is going through at the moment, has meant that almost half of the university students think, the interference of the internationals in the Albanian politics has complicated the political progress in the country, and consequently the further developments of its democratic process.

Results revealed that there are no statistical differences among the students' opinions between age groups.

**Figure 6** – *International intervention in Albanian politics facilitates or complicates the political process?*



## 5. Conclusions

Based on the public perception realized according to the questionnaires addressed to university students, the chronology of political history, the political reforms in the transition period, the intervention in the internal politics of the political subjects, reflected a fragile policy and this was best perceived in the answers of the students, where almost half of them distanced themselves from the intervention of internationals in politics in the country as seen above in the results of this research. This phenomenon not only advances democratization, but is becoming an obstacle and brings destabilization especially to the Albanian democratic party. The role of civil society empowerment, and justice reform give an overview of the fragile Albanian reality. Given that Albania has determined its Euro-Atlantic trajectory, internationals will continue to be present in Albania non

only in a supervisory and advisory capacity, but also as a guarantor of the fulfillment of political standards, dictating healthy and necessary steps, for enabled security, political stability, social and economic developments in the country. Thus, the path to integration in the European Union will be even easier.

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## SUMMARY

This paper brings an overview of how the international factor has influenced the progress of Albanian state formation and how this factor is seen by Albanian society.

The research questions of this study are:

- Does the role of internationals affect the sovereignty of Albania?
- Where is the international element significantly noticed and how has this factor affected?
- How has the international element influenced the democratization of Albania?

This study is divided into three parts where in the first part, the historical context at different stages of the Albanian state and the role of internationals are represented, based on the realistic theory of international relations. The second part examines specific cases of international influence after the 1990s, such as the United States and the European Union, and their role in specific elements of domestic policy: determining elements in the international role in the democratization of the country, justice reform to direct interventions in political entities. In the third part is the opinion of young Albanian people on the role of internationals: a survey was carried out from February to March 2022 involving 300 students enrolled at the Mediterranean University of Albania in order to understand the opinion they carry on the role of internationals and whether their intervention improves policy-making or affects the process of Albanian democratization. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS.

Based on the public perception realized according to the questionnaires, the chronology of political history, political reforms during the transition period, intervention in the domestic politics of political entities, the role of empowerment of civil society, give an overview that in the Albanian reality internationals play a very influential role.