

The Turkish–Albanian Relations

In the Post–Cold War Era: Between National and Supranational Interests

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to analyze the Albanian–Turkish relations in the post Cold War era. The dynamics of these relations, which can be divided in two different periods, have been defined by both domestic and international factors. Respectively the first period runs from 1990 until 2002 and the second from 2002 to present.

Since the end of the cold war Albanian’s foreign policy has undergone profound changes. Turkey has been ever since one of the main partners of the country. In the first half of the 90’s, during the DP government, Albania increased bilateral relations with Turkey aiming to balance the influence of Greece in order to secure its political and economic interests. The situation changed after the elections of 1997 when the socialists came in power. Afterwards Albania started to develop closer relations with Greece meanwhile Turkey due to its domestic problems decreased its presence in the region.

The main characteristic of Turkish policy towards the region, until 2002, was to preserve Turkey’s security by active involvement in the region’s affairs in NATO and ONU military and peace–keeping operations. After the Turkish Justice and Development Party (AKP) came in power, in 2002, it defined a new vision of Turkey’s role in the international arena. Graeme Herd explained the Kantian strategic culture in the “new” Turkish foreign policy, which is based on a conservative realistic vision: zero sum balance of material power approach to international relations, self-help and mistrust. The new Turkish political leadership promoted, especially since 2005, a multi-dimensional foreign policy that pays more attention to the Balkans. The implementation of this policy relies basically in the use of soft power tools like economic cooperation, cultural projects, and the transposition of a Turkish lifestyle. This strategy is widely reflected in the Albanian–Turkish relations after 2005, which coincided with the coming in power of the Democratic Party in Albania.

After 2005 the bilateral relations were enhanced as a result of a different strategy adopted in the foreign policy of the two countries. The Turkish support to Albania’s NATO membership, the economic and military assistance as well as the transformation of Albania in Turkey’s main

strategic partner in the region are all evidences of this new era in relations between the two countries.

The “zero problems with the neighbors” principle of the Turkish foreign policy has also been adopted from the new socialist government as one of the main pillars of the Albanian foreign policy. The good relations and the bilateral interest of the two countries were evidenced in the official visit in October 2013, of the Turkish and Albanian prime ministers in Kosovo.

To sum up, the relations between the two countries were widely shaped from the different approaches toward the foreign policy, the different political parties have pursued in both countries. One of the most important and innovative instruments in the shaping of these policies was the role the cultural and religious factors played. The stress made on these factors differed from one political actor to another. Turkey as a more important actor played a supporting role in a parallel policy which aimed the strengthening of the Turkey’s role in the region and the EU membership goal. Meanwhile Albania had to preserve a difficult equilibrium between the EU membership aim and the preservation of the national interests in the delicate international environment of the Western Balkans.