European Integration Of Albania As Model Of Religious Tolerance And Dialogue

Ali Zaimi

*PhD candidate, Department of International Relations and Political Science,
Epoka University, Tirana, azaimi09@epoka.edu.al*

Abstract: The spread of Islam has reshaped the religious landscape in the Balkans and, subsequently, it has been a discussed topic among academics whether Islam constitutes an obstacle of the Western Balkan to join the European Union (EU). In line with such a trend, this paper discusses the integration of Albania to the EU from the religious perspective. It seeks to analyze Albania as a model of religious tolerance and dialogue and its contribution to the European religious landscape.

Keywords: EU enlargement; Copenhagen Criteria; Albanian Muslim population; integration; tolerance; dialogue

1. Introduction

The European Union enlargement toward Western Balkans is important both for the EU and the Western Balkan (WB) countries. Regarding the nature of enlargement of the EU toward the Western Balkan countries, there is a vast literature that we can subdivide into four main groups. One group focuses on the political or democratic conditionality used by the EU as a transformative leverage in Central European Europe and Western Balkan. This group analyses the effectiveness of political conditionality in the post - communist countries (Kelley 2004; Pridham 2005; Vachudova 2005). Second group focuses on the adaptation and implementation effects of the EU legal order, known as EU acquis, on the national legal system (Dimitrova 2004; Linden 2002). The third group, focuses on the integration process analysing more the conditionality imposed on the WB (Duma 2010; Kalemaj and Deltina 2010), the regional challenges of Albania joining the EU (Xhindi 2010; Zisi, Shosha and Anamali 2010), or legal aspects of trade liberalization between the EU and Albania under the Stabilisation Association Agreement (SAA) (Zajmi and Caka 2010;

Hajdini and Skara 2017; Skara and Hajdini 2021). Meanwhile, the fourth group analyzes the question of religious identity in the EU (Kassomeh 2012; Challand 2009) and reasons why Turkey cannot join with the EU. Toghill (2012) argues that the rejection of the EU to accept Turkey as a member of the EU is not related to complying with the official criteria (Copenhagen Criteria) but with the fear of the EU to accept a country with a Large Muslim population. He adds that "the legal, political criteria are, in Turkey's case, a fig-leaf", covering the substantial Orientalist, and to an extent racist, attitudes of the EU towards Turkey and Islam" (Toghill 2012, 32). Until now, to the best of my knowledge on literature, none of the researchers has been focused on European integration and Albania as a model country of religious tolerance and dialogue.

The increasing Muslim presence has reopened debate on Europe's identity internally on the so - called Islamophobia defined by Britain's Runnymede Report, Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All as "the dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims" (Esposito

2011, 235). The report adds that Islamophobia is based on "an outlook or world – view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination". In her article Imane Karich (2007, 73) argues that "discrimination towards minorities has increased in recent decades [and] the consequences of this discrimination are also often understated. Stress, loss of self-confidence, discouragement, frustration, insecurity and the absence of prospects or the inability to plan projects are all perfect ingredients for marginalization". As a result of exclusion in government decision making, public life, social activities, education and discrimination on the religious grounds by prejudging Islam as not compatible with the Western values, the European countries are facing the so called ghettoization or parallel society formed by the Muslim communities (Esposito 2011, 235). Consequently, the marginalization of the Muslim community as monolithic has a negative impact on the integration of the Muslim population to be part of the wider European citizens (Angenendt 2007, 46 - 47).

It has been widely debated about the benefits of the Albanians becoming member of the EU but none of the researchers has been focused on the contribution of Albania with a majority Muslim population as a model country of religious tolerance and dialogue. In this paper, the integration of Albania to the EU and the role of religious tolerance and dialogue will be discussed. The paper argues that the integration process is not linked with the religion factor as some academicians or politicians articulate. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes that Albania with its model of religious tolerance and dialogue will be an added value for the EU in terms of religion.

The paper consists of this introduction and three sections. The second section sheds light on the debate raised about the Albanian identity as a result of the Muslim conversion of the Albanian population. The third section provides a general overview of the EU role as a promoter

of stability and prosperity in Albania and discuss the compatibility of accession criteria with the Islam view. The fourth section describes the main features of Albania as a model of religious tolerance and dialogue that would contribute to the EU religious landscape.

2. Debating on the Albanian Identity

The conversion process of the Albanian population to the Islam religion is one of the most debated issues in the media among academicians and scholars. This debate has been concentrated on two aspects. The first aspect is related to the factors that enabled Albanians to be converted into Muslims and the second aspect concerns whether Albania with majority Muslim population belongs to European civilization or not.

Regarding the first aspect, according to Ferit Duka (2003, 99 - 101) the conversion of Albanian people happened in two different methods, thus changing the religion balance in Albanian cities: one through converting the civic population and secondly through migration to other cities. For instance, at the end of the 16th century the percetage of the population converted to Islam was as follows: Shkodra 100%; Peja 90%; Vuciterna 80%; Elbasani 79%; Tetova 71%; Kercova 65.5%; Kruja 63%; Berati and Prishtina 60%; Prizreni 55.9%; Dibra 51%; Tepelena 50%; Permeti 41%; Struga 24%; Vlora 23%; Korca and Trepca 21%; Janjeva 14% and Delvina 4% (Albanian Academy of Science 2002, 590).

Moreover, the Ottoman presence in the Balkans changed the religious structure of Albania. Long debates occur whether the conversion is a result of Ottoman pressure, or it was fulfilled upon the free will of the population. According to Stavro Skendi, one of the most influential thinkers during 1930s and Petrika Thengilli, the massive spread of Islam during the 17th century was due to three main reasons: the wish of avoiding the payment of taxes; the facilities given by the Ottomans to local population such as political, economic rights and lastly, the insufficient catholic clergy to supply spiritual needs of the population

(Kullolli 2009, 4; Thengjilli, 2003, 40; 177). In the north of Albania, the conversion process was superficial because many converting people maintained their Catholic religion simultaneously (Kullolli 2009, 5; Bartl 2006, 106 – 121; Albanian Academy of Science 2002, 592 - 593).

According to Ali Basha, the argumentation that the Ottomans forced the indigenous population to convert to Islam for economic reasons by paying a special tax (jizya) is not relevant. Based on Islamic law (sharia), those who pay this special tax are non-Muslims (Dhimmi) have the right to perform their religious practice by imposing on the Ottoman Empire the responsibility to protect their lives and wealth in case of all types of aggression (Basha 2005, 15 - 16). According to John Esposito "The dhimmi were non - Muslims living under Muslim rule who paid a special tax (jizya) and in return were permitted to practice their own religion, be led by their religious leaders, and be guided by their own religious laws and customs" (Esposito 2011, 74). In addition, as Karen Armstrong points out,

> In the Islamic empire, Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians enjoyed religious freedom. This reflected the teaching of the Quran which is a pluralistic scripture, affirmative of other traditions. Muslims are commanded by God to respect the People of the Book, and reminded that they share the same belief and the same God

(Armstrong 2002).

Moreover Sami Frashëri, a representative of Albanian Renaissance, agrees that the conversion occurred as a result of the free will of the Albanian population. He argues that

> in addition to the spread of Islam by invasions, there also exists another way in which a religion can be spread; it is a way not mentioned by historians. It is the way religion spreads by itself, without invasions, swords or soldiers. Even though this way is not more powerful than the first one, it is almost equal to it (Kullolli 2009, 6).

The main argument of Sami Frasheri was based on that the other Slavic populations in the Balkans did not embrace Islam but they preserved their orthodox religion.

The second aspect of the debate is related whether Albanians as the result of the conversion to the Muslim religion belong to the European identity or not. In the European landscape the debate over European identity took place during the drafting of the Constitution of Europe. In a nutshell, the debate consisted on the request to emphasize the Christian roots of European civilization in the Treaties as a fundamental value of the European identity or at least in the preamble of the Treaties (Lenaerts and Nuffel 2011, 167). None

of these proposals suggested were adopted. A compromise solution was reached, and the preamble of the Treaty of European Union refers to Contracting Parties "drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe". Despite the debate on Albanian identity, the Albanian government signed the SAA in June 2006. The agreement entered into force in 2009.

The main concern of the debate in Albania was whether Albania being with majority Muslim population belongs to Europe or not? (Plasari 2004; Kadare 2006). Ismail Kadare argues that Albanians are among the oldest population of Europe and consequently belong to Europe (Kadare 2006: 20). He adds that the Ottoman Empire and communist regime have prevented Albania joining Europe. While Rexhep Qosja, a prominent academician from Kosovo, argues that Albanians belong to two civilizations: Western and Eastern civilizations. With Eastern civilization, Rexhep Qosja refers to the Muslim civilization (Qosja 2006, 31). In this context, since Albania has already signed SAA (2006) and which also entered into force (2009) and has aspired for EU membership, this debate is now pointless. Geographically, Albania is a European country and legally speaking, Albania has signed a contractual relationship with the EU which means that once Albania fulfils the requirement laid down it will become a member.

Furthermore, while in the case of Turkey EU is reluctant, Albania with its model of religious dialogue and tolerance will be an added value for the EU. The following section describes the European Integration process and elaborates whether the Copenhagen criteria which are considering as accession criteria are compatible with Islam requirement.

3. The Accession Criteria and Compatibility with Islamic view

Contemporary European society, is mostly divided into three sections according to their religious tradition (Protestant Northern, Catholic Mediterranean, and Orthodox Eastern) (Abela 2004, 72) which have different experiences with the Muslim world. The situation of Muslims in Europe is a debated topic in the media and "more people in the political mainstream are arguing that Islam cannot be reconciled with European values" (Bilefsky and Fisher 2006) by implying unwillingness to be integrated in the European society due to the incompatibility with European culture.

After forty five years in isolation, the European Union along with other International Organizations were among the most important actors that contributed toward democratisation of the functional open market in Albania. Since 1992, one of the main priorities of Albania has been joining the EU. The first agreement was signed in 1992. Through signing the Trade and Cooperation Agreement that entered into force on December 1, 1992, Albania became eligible to profit from the EU Phare Programme (Ibrahimi 2009, 135).

Also, in this period, Albania was included in the General System of Preferences which is a program offered by the EU to countries that had contractual agreement. Financial aid provided by the EU helped Albania to move toward democratization of society and functioning of the open market. At the Thessaloniki Summit 2003, Albania and the other Western Balkan countries were invited to be members of the EU after fulfilling the conditions laid down by the European Council in 1993 (Copenhagen Criteria). Based on this contractual relation – Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA)- the future aim of the Western Balkan countries is joining the EU.

The European integration process is one of the key processes discussed among the Western European countries in the levels of academics, politicians, diplomats and in civil society. Regarding the meaning and definition of integration, there is no concise and unique definition, instead, it varies from different points of view. For instance, one might see the EU as an economic –integration entity starting from the aim of the European Economic Community (EEC) to create an internal market: others can argue for its political integration or

cultural integration including religion etc. Subsequently, integration of Muslims implies active involvement of Muslims in social, political, economic life and on the other hand, European institutions must take into consideration such actors by developing the spirit of multiculturalism in the decision making. In this way, Muslim Communities will not be discriminated or excluded from European society by creating ghettos or parallel societies instead, they will contribute actively as their religion requires and to leave traces in the development of a multicultural European society.

Based on article 49 of the Treaty of European Union and other decisions of European Councils concerning the EU enlargement, any European countries that want to join the EU "are able to assume the obligations of membership by satisfying the economic and political conditions required'. In order for a country to be able to accede to the EU, it has to demonstrate the fulfilment of, what have been referred to as, the Copenhagen Criteria:

> that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union. The Union's capacity to absorb new members,

> while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries (European Council 1993).

Generally, the main focuses of these criteria are in political, economic ability to take on the obligations of membership. They are elaborated furthermore in the fields such as: democracy, human rights, administration, open market, education, culture, defence, and competition. The list is not exhaustive. In this regard is Islam compatible with Copenhagen criteria?

By analysing the Copenhagen criteria and comparing with what Islam emphasizes on respecting human rights, economic market, administration capacity based on meritocracy, it can be argued that Islam is compatible with democracy and the EU values (Khatab and Bouma 2007). Khatab and Bouma (2007, 36) argues that "it is well established that democracy existed before the birth of Islam, but the democratic attitude towards individuals and groups had never reached the kind of attitude emphasised by Islam". Esposito, one of America's leading experts in Islamic Studies, concludes that "Muslims do not see any contradiction between democratic values and religious principles" (Esposito 2011, 191). These principles were proclaimed with the Constitution of Medina which is the first democratic constitution in the history of constitutionalism based on Quran and Sunnah (Khatab and Bouma 2007, 32). The initiator of the constitution as prescribed in the preamble was the Prophet himself. He established every community in its religion and property, determined the rights, duties and the position of every community in the society. The Constitution's preamble begins as follow:

> In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is a

covenant from Muhammad the Prophet [governing the relations] between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib [Medina], and those who follow them and joined them and laboured with them. They constitute one ummah (Khatab and Bouma 2007, 32).

The constitution laid down the functioning of the multi – tribal and multi - religious society. The objective of the constitution was "to maintain peace and cooperation, to protect the life and property of all citizens, to eliminate aggression and injustice regardless of tribal or religious affiliations, and to ensure freedom of religion and movement" (Khatab and Bouma 2007, 33). In this context of mutual tolerance and cohabitation among Muslims and non - Muslims, the call of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was global and comprehensive. He (pbuh) made clear that Islam is a religion that comes as a continuation of the highest human virtues wherever they are located. His message was not to exclude tradition and culture of Arab, non-Arab civilization but as complementary and supportive of the Islam Religion (Osmani 2008, 25). As can be seen, conditionality imposed by the EU is not compatible with what Islam religion proclaims. (Osmani 2008, 23 - 30).

4. Albania as a Model of Religious Dialogue and Tolerance

Albania is characterised by a religious dialogue and tolerance. The main features are as follows: i) education system; ii) being an indigenous Muslim population; iii) tolerance and cohabitation among other communities; and iv) public support for the EU membership are among the main features of Albanian model. The remaining part analyses these features.

4.1. Education System

According to the European Parliament study in 2007, an important element that has slowed down and prevented the integration of the Muslim communities, is the lack of religious education in schools (Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union 2007, 49). European countries have adopted laws allowing establishment and functioning of the religious schools yet, in practice, it is difficult to establish and manage them due to financing funds, the lack of qualified teachers and the most important "the fear that this kind of schools may slow down Muslim students' integration process" (Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union 2007, 49).

After the fall of the communism regime, Albania entered into a period of fundamental legal transformation and toward a market economy. The freedom of religion was allowed and the Muslim Community, which was closed in 1967, begin the activity (Zaimi and Kruja 2014, p. 9). In 1995, the Council of Minister adopted a decision permitting the Albanian Muslim Community to open religious education institution known as madrasas (VKM 1995). On 26 August 1996, the Council of Ministers granted the (license) for conducting teaching activities to the Mahmud Dashi madrasa in Tirana, the Hafiz Ali Korça madrasa in Kavaja, the madrasa "Liria" in Cerrik, the madrasa "Hoxha Tahsin" in Gjirokastra, and madrasa "H. Sheh Shamija" in Shkodra (Kutlu 2016, 169). The madrasas curricula are approved by the Ministry of Education and contain contemporary education combined with the religious courses (Kutlu 2016, 58).

On April 2011, by the Council of Minister decision 286/2011, the Muslim Community of Albania established the University College "Bedër" which consists of two faculties, respectively Faculty of Human Sciences and Law and Faculty of Technology and Business, and six department including the Department of Islamic Sciences. The mission of the Department of Islamic Sciences at University College "Bedër" is to provide education in full compliance with international standards, along with contributing to society.

To accomplish this mission, the Department of Islamic Sciences, in addition to developing its academic program, has carried out various activities in the field of teaching, research, and contributing to socially beneficial activities (Kruja et al. 2021, 340).

The Albanian experience with Madrassa and University College "Bedër" offer a good sample for the EU in the Muslim religious education system. This is a positive example and is in compliance with international conventions. Students in Madrassa and the Department of Islamic Sciences at University College "Bedër" "learn about religions and beliefs in an environment that respects human rights, fundamental freedoms, and civic values" (Kruja 2014, 31).

4.2. Being Indigenous Population

In contrast to the integration of Muslim communities in the EU as a migratory flow, Albanian Muslims population together with the other Muslim population in Western Balkans are indigenous population of the European society. As Mustafa Ceric, ex Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina said '.... as European Muslim, I want to make my contribution to European civilization and be automatically recognized as such' (Esposito 2010, 112). Therefore, Albanian population has to be proud of the Muslim identity which is an added value for European civilization. It has to be noted that Islam has been present in the Europe from the sixth century and have played an important role in constituting the European identity (Muhiq 2013).

From the beginning Muslim immigrants coming to Europe were perceived as temporary. They were excluded from the education and engagement in social activities by forming "parallel societies" or "ghettos" characterized by crime, poverty and gangs (Esposito 2010, 25). Gallup conducted a survey on general life satisfaction of the Muslims in the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom, Germany and France by asking: "How do they see their current lives and how do they see their lives in the future?" (Gallup

2009, 126). According to this report based on the respondents answer to the question, 72 percent of British Muslims, 48 percent of German Muslims and 69 percent of French Muslims consider themselves "struggling", while 7 percent of British Muslims, 23 of French Muslims and 47 percent of German Muslims consider themselves "thriving" (Gallup 2009, 127).

4.3. Religious Diversity and Tolerance among Albanians

The religious tolerance among Albanians is one of the main fundamental values of the Albanian society (Kruja 2008, 135). All the religious communities have lived in harmony without confrontation or division between each other. Despite the diversity of religious communities, the religion factor has been contributing to the national unification and the existence of the Albanian nation (Kruja 2008, 186 - 187). As the Albanian Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Sali Berisha said in the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University 'I think the greatest asset of my nation is an excellent religious tolerance. This is a very great heritage. Never in my nation have we had the smallest conflict or incident [that was a] religion based one' (Sali Berisha, 2010).

After the communist regime, religious tolerance and freedom re - emerged as an important factor of Albanian society. For instance, the first prayer held at Plumbi Mosque in Shkodra was attended by Catholics. While Stephen Schwartz, Executive Director of the Center for Islamic Pluralism observed that in the eve of the 100th anniversary of Albanian independence, Ashura commemoration was attended by a Sunni imam, a Catholic priest, an Albanian Orthodox cleric, a Protestant minister and government representatives from different countries (Schwartz 2012). In the end, Schwartz argues that Albanians despite economic problems have maintained their dignity and as such Albania offers a good example of religious diversity and tolerance to the rest of the world.

Establishing religious education schools is another element of the tolerance shown by the Albanian government. Several religious education institutions have been established in Albania on the same legal basis as public education with the only restriction that the curricula have to be complied with the national education system. In this context, religious tolerance and diversity is an added value and a sample of European society.

4.4. Albanian Public Support for the EU integration

Albanian integration in the EU depends on the democratic legitimacy from both sides EU citizens and Albanian citizens. This requirement has been conditional since 2006 and aims to provide more power to the EU citizens for the future Enlargement of the EU (Commission of the European Communities 2006, 23). On the other hand, Albanian citizen's support is important because after the accession treaty to be signed between the EU and Albania, a referendum is going to be held in Albania where citizens will decide to join the EU or not.

The enlargement of the EU with ten states and the failure of the EU constitution has led to a tightening of the existing membership criteria by increasing the role of the EU citizens in the future enlargement (Commission of the European Communities 2006). Furthermore, considering the experience of Bulgaria and Romania, the EU shifted towards a more restrictive policy (Skara 2020, 5). The EU has upgraded its strategy by emphasizing the political criteria related to democracy, rule of law and human rights and reforms in the economic area (Commission, 2013). Recently, in 2018, the Commission launched a new enlargement strategy to reinvigorate the process and qualified the EU perspective of Membership for the WBc as 'a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values' (Commission 2018, 1). Therefore, the future integration of the Western Balkan will be difficult.

Since 2005, the public support of EU citizens for Western Balkan countries has decreased. The latest Eurobarometer Spring 2021 reveals an increase of scepticism among the EU Member States for future enlargement. While 46 percent of the respondents are in favour of future enlargement, 43 percent of the respondents in the 27 EU Member States oppose it. Opposition majorly comes from Finland (71 %), Netherland (67 %), Belgium (66 %), Sweden (63 %), Austria and Luxembourg (61 %), Germany (57 %), France (56 %) and Denmark (55 %) (Standard Eurobarometer 2021).

This increase of scepticism is related due to internal and external factors. Internally, the EU is experiencing an economic, political and rule of law crisis. Whereas externally, the flow of immigrants from Middle East and Western Balkan countries have put into question the EU internal security. Moreover, the lack of rule of law, organized crime, lack of economic development, and lack of democracy are determining factors for delaying the WBc joining the EU.

Nevertheless, even though the Albanian integration process has been in stalemate due to EU member states veto, the Albanian public support remains high. The European Integration process has served as an impetus for several reforms, most importantly judiciary reform. Numerous statistics, public reports and opinions have been released pointing out the strong desire of and support to the integration of Albania into the European family. In case of a referendum, according to the 2020 survey, a majority of 86 percent of Albanians would vote 'yes' for the accession of their country into the Union whereas a very small minority of just 7 percent would vote against (Cela et.al. 2020, 8). Main reasons for membership by the respondents remain the same despite the delay. 40 percent of the respondents vote for accession for economic reasons, followed by 16 percent who believe that there would be more employment opportunities and 11 percent who expect less poverty (Cela et.al. 2020, 10). Only 19 percent

associate the membership with functional of rule of law, less corruption and stronger democracy. Whereas, 14 percent oppose the membership arguing that would weaken the national identity. (Cela et.al. 2020, 10-11).

However, no data or surveys are carried out linking directly integration of Albania with the religious identity. During 2010, Center for European Studies and the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Epoka University carried out a survey on the Albanian Public Perceptions of Socio – Cultural Issues and Foreign Policy. According to this survey, Albanian citizens consider as most important with 68 percent of Albanians (728 out of 1084 respondents) the relations with the EU, followed by the USA with 14 percent (153 out of 1084 respondents) and countries of the region (10 percent or 111 out of 1084 respondents) (Yenigün et al 2011, 37). An even greater percentage of Albanians – 92 percent (995 out of 1084 respondents) desire the membership of Albania in the European Union. Only 5 percent (54 out of 1084 respondents) are against EU membership (Yenigün et al 2011, 41). The question whether religious diversity in Albania will lead to problems in the future, 60 percent (652 out of 1084 respondents) responded that "religious diversity will rarely be a cause for future problems. While 30 percent of the respondents had doubts on future religious conflicts, only 10 percent of the respondents (110 out of 1084 respondents) believed that religious diversity would certainly lead to conflicts in the future" (Yenigün et al 2011, 22).

The former Head of the Albanian Muslim Community, Haji Selim Muca, has emphasized that, during these 23 years of democracy, freedom of religion has been the most successful achievement. In addition, he stressed that:

> The EU has been one of the main external promoting democracy and security in Albania. As part of the European continent, we have to be proud of our cultural, religious tolerance and our identity. Religious tolerance in Albania has never served as a division factor but as a unification of national identity. I am confirmed that Albanian integration in the EU would be a success vis a vis religious diversity because the EU can learn from us on the model of tolerance and harmony (Muca 2012).

5. Conclusion

After the communism fall, the Albanian foreign policy has been oriented toward the Euro – Atlantic Organization. Aspiration of being a member of the EU has transformed Albania in terms of democracy, functional open market and has brought its domestic legislation in compliance with the EU legal order. This demanded transformation in the case of Albania is known as conditionality by the EU. The aim of this conditionality is to adjust their national policies in line with the EU policies. One of the conditions for a country to be admitted in the EU is to fulfill Copenhagen Criteria. However, having in mind first, the increasing Islamophobia in Europe and second, the lack of integration of Muslims in the European public space, it has been argued that Albania is not eligible to become a member of the EU due to religious identity. As Khatab and Bouma, (2007) emphasized in their book, democracy and respect for human rights that in Islam can be found in the Qur'an and in the sunnah, are compatible with democracy and European values because Islam should not be seen as simply a religion just performing daily prayer or fasting the holy month but, instead, as a system of religious and social norms including state, law and all spheres of human life.

Comparing to Turkey's accession where religion and culture have formed unofficial reasons to refuse from joining the EU (Toghill 2012), it can be argued that the Albanian model of religious tolerance and dialogues would be perceived positively. The integration of Albania in the EU would have a positive effect on the Muslim integration process. Albanian religion identity does not pose any problem for European enlargement but it offers a new perspective for the current situation of Muslim community. Education system established in order to educate the future generation with the basic of Islam religion, being indigenous European Muslims, the tolerance and dialogue through history of religion communities and very high public support are the main argumentation in favor of possible changes that Albanian integration would affect European landscape. As a conclusion, it can be said that the accession of Albania will change the stereotype of the European citizens on the Muslim population and, most importantly it will be an added value confirmed in the motto of the EU "unity through diversity".

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