

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ALBANIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE

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Throughout history, Serbs and Albanians have had periods of co-existence and cooperation, but more often than not there have been periods of conflicts, with the long-standing one regarding the control over the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Nevertheless, almost half a century since the appearance of the concept, there have been no significant efforts to define basic characteristics of Albanian strategic culture, which are evident shortcomings of Serbian strategic studies. This paper has the aim to initiate a process of systematic study of the above-mentioned research problem, with the aim to objectively and rationally obtain basic characteristics of Albanian strategic culture by applying almost all scientific methods, especially hypothetico-deductive method. The paper's main hypothesis states as follows: basic characteristics of Albanian strategic culture are predominantly "mercantile" approach towards diplomacy with strong support from diaspora, by which they seek to support persistent aspirations for the control over the territory with the majority of Albanian population, whereby they do not hesitate to use political violence, while the military force is engaged exclusively with previously provided support from great powers. Basic characteristics of Albanian strategic culture point to the necessity to reevaluate our strategic approach towards Albanians.

Key words: *Albania, strategic culture, national values, foreign policy, national security, war.*

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Introductory observations

The key starting points of a prominent theorist Colin Gray regarding the observations of the significance of strategic culture point to the following arguments: 1) strategic culture is extremely useful for better understanding of others, ourselves and the way others perceive us; 2) cultural awareness can enlighten us, but also limit understanding and diminish possible options for solving problems and 3) insufficient and inadequate understanding of strategic culture of others can be very dangerous for international peace and security (Gray, 1984: 26–28).

Strategic culture is determined by those factors of national culture which are connected with security issues. Strategic culture is a certain expression of society culture, especially its political and security components, and it significantly influences strategic thinking, as well as formulation and implementation of key strategic affiliations of one people. Taking into account that this is an expression of national culture, understood in its broadest sense, immediate resources of strategic culture are complete historical heritage of one people, its tradition, beliefs, myths and legends, but also geostrategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic factors, as well as constant influences of different foreign political factors. Many theorists addressed the challenge of providing a comprehensive definition of strategic culture. For example, Ken Booth defines it as “national tradition, values, attitudes, habits, symbols, behavioral patterns, achievements, and uniqueness in the way they adapt to the environment and solve problems regarding threat or use of force”, while Colin Gray defines the abovementioned phrase as “long-term adopted social ideas, attitudes, tradition, mindset and predominant way of more or less specific relationship towards geographically-oriented approach of security community which has significant historical experience” (Blagojević, 2019: 167). It is of important to emphasize that geopolitician Milomir Stipičić defined it in the following way: “Serbian (military) strategic culture is a system of continuous and comprehensive understanding, thinking, behaving, defining, planning, institutionalizing and acting on the military security level for the purpose of achieving Serbian national interests, set in Serbian identity code” (Stipičić, 2019: 169).

Taking into account the abovementioned theoretical basis, and with the aim of defining key parameters of Albanian strategic culture, it is necessary to define the period and historical context of the formation of its specific characteristics. It seems that this is non-mistakenly the period from the beginning of the Eastern crisis to the period when Albania gained its independence. Therefore, the abovementioned period will be analyzed separately, so we would be in a position to look at specific historical circumstances which resulted in formation of, relatively constant determinants of strategic culture of Albanians. It is necessary to emphasize that the strategic culture analysis does not deal with issues regarding the historical accuracy of data on which values of one people are based (as it was mentioned, the myths are one their resources), but what is significant is that some of the beliefs are generally accepted by the whole society. From now on, principle of objectivity must be consistently applied to the greatest extent possible, because this is the only way to obtain reliable results of the analysis

of characteristics of Albanian strategic culture (Schwandner-Sievers, 2008: 47–64). When it comes to the analyzed period, the period of communist autocratic regime of Enver Hoxha will not be given much attention due to the very nature of his rule where strategic culture of Albanian people could not be expressed.

Formation of Albanian strategic culture

Even though Albanians had earlier fought for creating independent state, there is a relative consensus that the awakening of Albanians' national awareness can be traced back to the third decade of the 19th century when the movement Albanian Revival (Albanian: *Rilindja*) was founded. What is interesting is that it was not founded in the territory where Albanians were the majority, but it was founded by their diaspora who lived in the cities which are in the territory of present-day Romania, Bulgaria, Syria, Egypt, Italy, The United States of America and elsewhere (Bart, 2001: 12). The largest number of Albanians lived in Istanbul, approximately sixty thousand, while the largest city where the Albanians were the majority back at the time was Shkodër with the population of approximately forty thousand people. The movement Rilindja stood for cultural emancipation which would be implemented by introducing the Albanian alphabet, language and schools in their language. It is important to mention that the same name was used by the Kosovo Albanians' newspaper and publishing house during the period of communist Yugoslavia. It is common knowledge that this was not a coincidence and that for Albanian population it represented a symbol of continuous fight for emancipation, while for the non-Albanian population it was a less significant "coincidence". This is an illustrative example showing in what way the Albanian factor achieves continuity in their fight for their national interests, even in conditions of extremely unfavourable ratio of power potential. Certainly, these facts should not be "interpreted" as Albanians' ingenuity, but as an indicator of Yugoslav authorities' misunderstanding or disregard of reality.

The membership of the Movement strived to nationally emancipate their compatriots in homeland who "settled for" this way of living, because they did not know any better, due to lack of schools, poor economic situation and omnipresent bigotry. The policy of the Sublime Porte certainly contributed to such state by propagating general attitude that Arabic alphabet and Turkish schools were sufficient for all Muslim people (Draškić, 2000: 17-43). One cannot avoid more than obvious correlation with the events during the 1990s when diaspora had a huge role in strengthening the extremism of Albanians in Kososvo and Metohija, as well as in North Macedonia. It can be stated that the way of founding of the Rilindja movement points to one of the constants of Albanian strategic culture. It is about unique strategic approach and acting of diaspora and motherland regarding the implementation of national interests.

Compared to the other Balkan peoples, Albanians started the process of national awakening several decades later. There is an important "justification" for that. As predominantly Muslim people they enjoyed significant privileges within the Ottoman Empire, especially after Serbs supported Austrians in the war against the Sublime Porte

towards the end of the 17th century (Bart, 2001: 50-61; Blagojević, 2019b: 94-95). As a reminder, Serbian patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević made an agreement with Vienna and Serbs populated the area across the Sava River and the Danube River, thus initiating centuries-long process of emigration of Serbs from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. It is important to mention that this depopulation of Kosovo and Metohija territory was a challenge for the Albanian factor and a chance to ensure control over fertile land they lacked. This fact should also be "justified" by "being restricted by great attachment to Turkish oligarch system" of Albanians (Borožan, 1995: 5). During this historical period Albanians show a new dimension of their own strategic culture, and that is certain commitment towards control and organization of their "national" territory, which is a significant constant of their foreign political and security acting. One should not forget the fact that the "attachment" of Albanians towards the Ottoman Empire can be seen from the point of view of their immediate strategic surroundings. Namely, they are completely surrounded by Greek and Slavic population, which implies different ethogenesis, language, culture and religion. All this resulted in somewhat understandable mistrust and conservative national policy.

Nevertheless, the process of national awakening of Albanians had relatively continuous development for several decades. The beginning of the Great Eastern Crisis, the Russo-Turkish War and the uprising of the Albanian Catholic tribe Mirdita in central Albania in 1878, sped up the process of formation of self-awareness of Albanian people. The provisions of the Treaty of San Stefano made Albanian pioneers to intervene to the Sublime Porte, because they thought that the part of national Albanian territories was wrongfully given to other nations. Taking into account that the spreading of Russian influence in the Balkans did not suit the Danubian Monarchy and Germany, shortly the Congress of Berlin was held whose aim was to revise the Treaty of San Stefano. Only three days before the beginning of the Congress of Berlin the so-called League of Prizren was founded on 10th June 1878 when Albanian pioneers gathered mainly from the territory of present-day Albania, Kosovo and Metohija and North Macedonia. Since the League was mainly composed of Pashas and Beys who were under great influence of Turkey, the Sublime Porte helped the League at the beginning, because it was believed that in this way they could mobilize Albanian population for fighting against the provisions of the Congress of Berlin. Within this context one should consider several memoranda issued by the League of Prizren to the Congress of Berlin, in which they stand for autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. However, in one letter sent to the representative of Great Britain Disraeli and Bismarck at the Congress of Berlin, Albanian pioneers stand for independence elaborating that one people with its own tradition, culture and language lives in territory from the Bojana River to Ioannina. In this Memorandum of Shkodër, formulated by Catholics, the independence of Albania is suggested. They state that gaining independence is not entrusted to the Sublime Porte, but they suggest the formation of international board which would implement that process. Also, they emphasize that they have nothing against the rights of Slavic peoples to form one or several states in the Balkans, but not to the detriment of national Albanian territories (Stojanović, Blagojević, 2017: 120-121).

The analysis of acting of the Albanian factor during the Eastern Crisis, several characteristics of Albanian strategic culture can be singled out. Firstly and certainly is togetherness which was manifested during the formation of the League of Prizren which was attended by 300 representatives of Albanian tribes and prominent people. That ensured great legitimacy of decisions made by Albanian population wherever they lived, but also their national affiliations in the long term. The act of sending two memoranda to the Congress of Berlin shows another characteristic of Albanian strategic culture, which can be briefly described as mature diplomatic action and awareness of strategic historic moment. As both Muslims and Catholics, Albanians only seemingly act divergently, but essentially they make efforts to obtain as many territories as possible in a very unfavourable strategic environment. They try to "trade" with the Sublime Porte offering self-government within the Empire which is certainly only a phase towards implementation of the final goal – creation of independent Albania. On the other hand, the "Catholic" Memorandum openly requests for independence, thus "increasing its value" in exchange for balancing Russian influence in the Balkans and Slavic factor. Of course, these suggestions were not seriously considered at the Congress of Berlin, primarily because the Albanian factor did not possess enough power potential. Nevertheless, the existence of two memoranda unambiguously points to "mercantile tendencies" of Albanian strategic culture in accordance with the principle "who offers more" for carrying out their national interests and with strategically justified maxim "never put all your eggs in one basket".

The League of Prizren, besides being politically organized, formed volunteer military formations. It is important to mention that Turkish army helped arming them and tolerated the refusal of young Albanians to serve in the Turkish military. The provisions of the Congress of Berlin additionally antagonized the relationship between Albanians and neighbouring Christian nations. These formations won victory over Montenegrin army in the battles for Plav and Gusinje in 1878 and 1879, thus preserving the control over the abovementioned territory and earned respect. As compensation for the abovementioned territories, Cetinje got Ulcinj thanks to the mediation of Italian diplomacy. Simultaneously engaged in border conflicts, the League of Prizren carried out persecution of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija, in agreement with the Turks who also tolerated the formation of certain Albanian authorities in the territory of Kosovo vilayet. Nevertheless, the border issue being solved, Turkey had no intention of tolerating the actions of the League. The Sublime Porte sent army led by General Dervish-Pasha with the aim of destroying the League. He did it very efficiently by applying cruel methods in 1881 which also represents the end of the First League of Prizren (Stojanović, Blagojević, 2017: 121-122).



Map 1 – *The territory populated by Albanians circa 1900*
(Source: Bart, 2001: 13)

In the behavior and acting of Albanians during the period after the Congress of Berlin, one can observe the characteristics of strategic culture related to the circumstances and goals when they are ready to use military assets. It is clear that Albanians were late with diplomatic preparation for the Congress of Berlin; their provisions were adequate to the effort made and their power potential. Taking into account that they realistically estimated the strategic environment, Albanians simultaneously created political platform and started organizing military forces which would be engaged for the implementation of national goals. This is precisely one of the characteristics of Albanian strategic culture; they are predominantly “mercantile”-minded which means that they use political and economic assets to achieve their goals and interests. If they are not in a position to achieve their national interests peacefully, they would not hesitate to use violence, but only if they have support of great powers, as it was the case with violence against Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija with “tacit” support of Turkish authorities.

After the Congress of Berlin, the influence of Austria-Hungary is more prominent, with simultaneous attempts of the Ottoman Empire to make necessary reforms in its control over the Balkan territories, but also the efforts of Italy to strengthen its influence from the other side of the Adriatic Sea. On the other hand, the Balkan nations had already had their own national fervor, therefore, each one in its own way organized riots and uprisings against Turkish authorities. Albanians stood against Turkey in 1911 due to Turkish efforts to introduce obligatory military service again, and not bashi-bazouk as it was the case until then. During the Balkan Wars in 1912/1913 Albanians were mostly neutral, hoping that Slavs would free them from the Ottoman rule. Such estimates proved to be correct, but Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek military seriously threatened with complete takeover of Albanian territories during the war operations against Turkish army. This resulted in support of the Danubian Monarchy and other West European centres of power to creation of independent state of Albania. It can be said that Albania gained independence, among other things, thanks to the fear of Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Germany and Italy from territorial expansion of Serbia and Montenegro, especially since Vienna always perceived this as Russian interest (Stojanović, Blagojević, 2017: 121-122; Popović, 1996: 197-206; Borozan, 1995: 39-60; Draškić, 2000: 85-89). It is important to emphasize the fact the United States of America also supported Albanian fight for independence, with American president Woodrow Wilson being very prominent in this matter. The support from Washington for Albanian independence was constant until 1920 when it became clear that there were no oil deposits in Albanian territory. Namely, it was conscious misinformation of Albanian diaspora in the USA with the aim of providing a motif for Washington to support Albania. After the stated period, the USA did not show any significant interest for Albania until the end of the Cold war (Silajdžić, 1991: 103-117).

This period is the most significant in the history of Albanians because they gained independence from the Sublime Porte without the use of military force but with a "wise" choice of neutral status which was in accordance with their "mercantile" approach towards foreign policy. This was also the result of objective assessment of one's own forces and strategic environment, that they did not have organised, ready and armed army for frontal conflicts of great extents. The importance of Albanian diaspora should also be emphasized, which made significant and mostly correct assessments of strategic development of events, from both the Ottoman Empire and the West. It is also a fact that in 1911 the uprising of Albanians was suppressed and that they did not have time to recover. It seems that gaining independence in such a way permanently influenced Albanian approach towards diplomacy, which can be definitely characterized as "mercantile" in accordance with the Eastern maxim "trade, but in a way that no one can buy you". Theoretically speaking, this is about classification of diplomatic negotiation by Harold George Nicolson which implies division into so-called heroic (warrior) and trade (mercantile) diplomacy. The first approach has key characteristics of war where there must be a winner and a defeated side. The mercantile approach towards diplomatic negotiation implies efforts to reach a compromise (Blagojević, 2017: 83-84).

Characteristics of Albanian strategic culture

Shortly after Albania gained its independence, the World War I broke out, and Albania, out of necessity, opted for neutrality again. Albania did not suffer great casualties like Serbia or Montenegro, and it was not interested in becoming closer with Slavs, with whom they came into conflict sporadically. Mostly, Albanians were engaged in ambush operations against lower military formations. Great powers unambiguously counted on the abovementioned antagonisms and used that for achieving their own interests in the region. The creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, greatly complicated Albanian actions towards unification of “national territories”, primarily in reference to disproportion of powers of the two countries. However, Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija and Macedonia rose in rebellion which was suppressed by engaging active army (Tasić, 2008: 229-278; 395-469). Speaking of “doctrinal principles” of engaging Albanian military (paramilitary) forces, one can speak with great certainty about the formation of characteristics of strategic culture already in this period. Namely, due to “chronic” lack of organizational culture and efficient institutions, Albanians opted for the use of land properties by engaging relatively small, tribally organized military personnel for predominantly carrying out ambush and raid operations, relying on the local population and political (military) support of the motherland. This characteristic of Albanian strategic culture can be followed up to modern period as *modus operandi* of independent engagement of Albanian military personnel.

After Fascist Italy occupied Albania, Victor Emmanuel III became the King of Albania as well, which was part of its empire until 1943 (Bart, 2001: 215-218). Crash of Italian empire forced German military intelligence service to help the formation of the so-called Second League of Prizren towards the end of 1943 with the aim to compensate for the Italian exit from the War by engaging Albanian people, which is only one of the obvious efforts to use the project of Great Albania for the Nazi war efforts (Bart, 2001: 218-225). By adding personnel to the SS Skenderbeg Division and the SS Handschar Division, namely ballists who committed great atrocities against non-Albanian population shows the continuity in Albanian animosity towards Slavs. When the communists took over the rule in Albania in November 1944, the Second League of Prizren ceased to exist. Albanian national elite made a mistake again and strategically binded its destiny to the defeated forces in the World War II, as it did with the Ottoman Empire. A link to a failed project of the so-called League of Prizren, as a continuity of fight for unification of all Albanians into one country, only deepened the conflict with Slavic population (Borozan, 1995: 360-369; Stojanović, Blagojević, 2017: 125). Even though, at first glance, it could be said that in one period of the World War II Albanians had military organization which was able to engage in higher military formations and efficiently wage war in frontal combat, that was certainly not the case. Namely, it should be emphasized that these units were used in accordance with the operational procedures of the Wehrmacht and they were commanded by German officers. Even though disciplined, and warrior-minded, Albanians kept the “bashi-bazouk mentality”

because they had the awareness that they are waging war for someone else's empire, as it was during the Ottoman rule. Such "mental code" and acting of Albanian soldiers in German military formations only confirms the behavioral pattern.

After the World War II, the ballists initiated armed rebellion towards the end of 1944, as they did after the Great War, so the Yugoslav government introduced military administration in Kosovo and Metohija. The armed uprising lasted until June 1946 when it was suppressed, while the ballist movement in Macedonia was eradicated only in 1948. From the point of view of foreign policy, the communist Albania used to change its source of support starting from the SFR Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and since 1953 the People's Republic of China. Here, one can clearly see the continuity, persistence and orientation towards implementation of strategic goals of Albanian strategic culture. It can be said that the methods have been changing as well as the ways of goal implementation depending on the power ratio, but Albanians have never come to terms with the fact that someone else is controlling "their national territory". The second constant is, certainly and unambiguously, client relationship of Albanians towards great powers.

The post Cold War period of international relations brought the process of integration as a consequence of globalization, and to the Balkans it brought disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia or smash-disintegration, as Miloš Knežević lucidly named it. Albania is going through a transformation process and from being the most closed European country, surrounded by bunkers, it is now becoming a "young democracy" facing all the challenges and problems same as other former communist countries (Bart, 2001: 233-270; Stutzman, 1996: 1; Doja, 2019: 24-55). Even though it has never built functional and efficient institutions of state administration, burdened with corruption and organized crime, Albania is turning towards the West and provides political and military assistance to the separatists from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija and North Macedonia. Albania joined the NATO aggression in 1999 and together with the rebels from Kosovo and Metohija formed land forces and provided intelligence and other support to the Alliance, engaging professional armed forces in the border area with the SR Yugoslavia (Daalder & O'Hanlon, 2000). Geostrategic area of Albania bordered by two seas, is significant for thalassocratic integration of the West, so after the period of "institution crisis" Albania joined the NATO after the Alliance Summit in Bucharest in 2008. Albania also has significant aspirations for the European Union membership, and since 2023 it has started the accession negotiation process showing that it has "one hundred per cent harmonized" its foreign policy with the common foreign and security policy of this organization (Edvana, 2015: 7-13).

Albanian strategic culture is not defined by new characteristics in the unipolar period of international relationships. We still speak about the society which has not built functional government institutions, nor has shifted from the mentality of "Turkish kasbah" regarding the relationship of the citizens towards the country. A change which can be classified as qualitative compared to the previous historical periods is the fact that Albanians have positioned themselves as a client society to global hegemony. Simultaneously, the disintegration of the SFR Yugoslavia and satanization of Serbian

people in international politics has changed the strength ratio in the Balkans and has given the opportunity for Albanians to achieve their own national interests (Zela, 2013: 637). Albanian strategic culture of clientelism and its “mercantile” foreign policy orientation has fitted well into the expectations of the USA regarding the way its allies and partners should behave. The crisis and armed conflict in Kosovo and Metohija has once more confirmed togetherness and active action of diaspora in terms of lobbying, political and economic assistance to the motherland, which is one of the basic characteristics of Albanian strategic culture (Ker-Lindsay, 2009).

Concluding observations

Geostrategic conditions under which Albanian strategic culture was formed during the Great Eastern Crisis were not in favour of Albanians. The people “privileged” in the Ottoman Empire during the period of the Empire’s power decline, in a certain way Albanians were destined the role of Turkish ally against Greek and Slavic population surrounding them. Such position has created a certain sense of constant vulnerability which resulted in lack of willingness for building alliance in close surroundings, and being “closed” on the foreign policy level.

Due to such situation in close strategic environment, Albanians were “forced” to seek protectors in great powers, starting from the Sublime Porte to the USA in modern times. Due to a great disproportion in power potential, it would be no exaggeration to say that we speak about “client relationship” which was being created between Albania and great powers in different historical contexts. From such objective “client relationship” which is a constant of Albanian strategic culture, it logically ensues predominantly “mercantile” approach in diplomacy, which is another characteristic of their strategic culture. In other words, the alliances with Albanians exist as long as their interests exist, as well as the power potential of their allies, but when it comes to Albanians being somebody’s ally, that is out of the question.

The key and unifying factor of all Albanians is their commitment to “control and administration of national” territory, which is a significant constant of foreign policy and security acting and the most significant characteristic of their strategic culture. The history of Albanian foreign policy and security engagement was marked by their efforts to control the territory they perceive as their own, thus subordinating their other national interests which are more important to other nations, such as people’s life standard, economic development, freedom and others. It is certain that Albanian diaspora contributed to such state, which has always had great influence on the events in the motherland, because diaspora does not have a sensibility for the quality of life in Albania. On the other hand, such and that very diaspora ensured significant support for the efforts to achieve national interests, primarily regarding creating relatively positive international image of Albania in the West, which led to Euro-Athlantic integration, as well as in the economic field, which is often a consequence of “money laundering” obtained thanks to their illegal activities, which they are also notorious for.

The activities of the First and Second League of Prizren, and some would even say the Third as well, is an embodiment of Albanian strategic culture. The First and Second League were binded to empires in decline, while the “Third” is relied on current global hegemony and Euro-Athlantic integrations and is incomparably in a better geopolitical position compared to the previous ones. For almost century and a half Albanians have demonstrated great persistence, consistency in their efforts and readiness to make sacrifices for the purpose of achieving national interests thus showing togetherness, not only during a crisis, but also for systematic and gradual strengthening of foreign policy positions in accordance with the already mentioned maxim “trade, but in a way that no one can buy you”.

The next characteristic of their strategic culture can also be synthetized from the example of the League of Prizren. It is about their approach towards the use of military assets, which we often emphasize as being primary in Albanian strategic culture. Nevertheless, with a more in-depth analysis of their foreign policy practice it can be stated that this is actually our stereotype. Namely, Albanian strategic culture is predominantly oriented towards diplomatic assets and making alliances by which they compensate for the lack of power potential. Only once they have support of powerful allies, Albanians are ready for military engagement, which certainly does not mean that their warrior tradition should be underestimated. Due to the undeveloped military professionalism of officers and constantly poorly built state institutions, they often use political violence of greater extents. This is another constant of their strategic culture, whose basics can be spotted in practice of Turkish bashi-bazouk until modern times. Unfortunately, Serbian population knows very well and remembers this characteristic of Albanian strategic culture and it does not require further elaboration. On the other hand, maybe this factor of strategic culture is the place where we should look for the reasons due to which Albanian society has never built functional and efficient government institutions.

In the end, we should emphasize an important characteristic of Albanian strategic culture which is often forgotten. We speak about people who think and act strategically. The key evidence for this claim can be found in the fact that almost for a century and a half we can follow the implementation of one strategic goal – effective control of “national territory” by applying different assets, in different historical contexts and with different intensity. Only nations who have tendencies towards strategic thinking and acting can do this, which may be the consequence of imitating former occupator the Ottoman Empire which had significant tradition in that regard. This shows Albanians’ vital strength politically speaking, which enables survival and political and/or strategic persistence. The chronic lack of power is another issue, which has often led them into making wrong direction when it comes to choosing their allies, and those choices were forced more often than not, and not the product of their strategic choice, as it the case with the majority of small nations.

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S u m m a r y

Albanian strategic culture was formed in specific circumstances in the period of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. Albanians' national awakening was late compared to other Balkan peoples, because Albanians, as predominantly Muslim people, had privileges with the Sublime Porte. Due to different origin, language, religion and culture, it seems that Albanians have always been distrustful of their Greek and Slavic neighbours, which is one of the significant characteristics of their strategic culture. This is the reason they often sought protection of great powers outside the Balkans, when they created client relationships towards them. Even though Albanians are perceived as a people who solves their national issues by means of armed conflict, the results show that their preferred means of achieving national goals is "mercantile" diplomacy in accordance with the maxim "trade, but in a way that no one can buy you". Only when the goals cannot be achieved in this way they opt for political violence or the use of military assets, but only if they have support and assistance of great powers.

One of the significant characteristics of Albanian strategic culture is togetherness, but only when it comes to vital national interests, because when it comes to other goals of lower priority, they are often not capable of achieving consensus. When it comes to togetherness, it is not referred only to Albanian society, but diaspora as well, which has had significant role in Albania's foreign policy and economic development, from the period of formation of independent Albania until present time, especially in the role of "money laundering" illegally obtained in the West. This is the reason Albanians have never succeeded in creating strong government institutions.

The characteristics of Albanian strategic culture became more prominent during the post-Cold War period of international relationships. As it is the case with other nations who are clientelistic oriented towards great powers, Albanian society fits well in the expectations and efforts of global hegemony of how the allies and partners should behave. Of course, the disintegration of second Yugoslavia and satanization of Serbian people in international politics contributed to Albania's increasing ambitions and gave it the opportunity to achieve national interests.

Nevertheless, Albanian strategic culture, which found its expression in "mercantile" foreign policy orientation, has positioned quite well in the region. It is founded upon common interests of Albanians and former Yugoslav republics to suppress Serbian national interests, primarily regarding the status of Kosovo and Metohija. Nevertheless, even though the relationships between Albania and Euro-Atlantic powers are "idyllic", Albanian strategic culture is cautious and preserves the alternative when it comes to its actions on international level in accordance with the principle "never put all your eggs in one basket". Close relationship with Turkey, as an important regional

power, and its membership in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation clearly confirm this characteristic of Albanian strategic culture.

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