

**THE ALBANIAN POLITICAL ELITE'S DISCOURSE TOWARD KOSOVO**

**Dorina Ndoj**, PhD Candidate European  
University of Tirana, ALBANIA

**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to investigate the Albanian political elite's discourse towards Kosovo during the period 2008-2015. The discourse is considered to be an important instrument in understanding state behavior. Hence, this paper aims to identify the key themes in elite's discourse used to portray bilateral relation as well as to detect important issues of concern among both countries. The main research question is: How is treated the relationship with Kosovo in the discourse of Albanian political leaders? This article seeks to investigate the basic discourse of the Albanian political leaders, especially the PM Edi Rama and the previous one, Sali Berisha, regarded to the bilateral relationship with Kosovo. The article is based on the constructivist approach. The method applied is the Discourse Analysis and the data include a group of texts, particularly statements and speeches of the two main leaders, as well as declarations of high representatives of state of both countries. The main argument is that by playing the idea of threatening with "national unification/union" by the Albanian political elite, eventually the EU is marked as a key external actor in the ongoing relationship between Albania and Kosovo. But as long as there is no resonance found among political leaders' discourse and official foreign policy discourse, we cannot talk for the stabilization of such a discourse.

**Keywords:** Political Elite's Discourse, Foreign Policy, Albanian-Kosovo Relations.

**INTRODUCTION**

The bilateral relation between Albania and Kosovo are of special importance not only due to their historical connection, but also for the common economic and political development and stability of the region as a whole. In many cases the declarations of leaders of both countries have been a source of discussions and tension in their relation with other countries, particularly when the Albanian leaders have articulated the issue of national unification [union] of Albanians. Lately this issue was brought in attention of the audience in a common interview for Klan Kosovo, in 4 April in Ulcinj, of the Albanian PM, Edi Rama and the Deputy PM of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci. PM Rama said that "the union is inevitable and it will happen in the EU. But it can happen in another form if Europe does not intervene in the strategic calculation of the Balkan states..." (Rama, 4 April 2015). In this context, it is important to research on positions/ discourses of the leadership of two countries, as a key aspect in envision of bilateral relation.

"The unification of Albanians" is one of the most salient and controversial topics in the discourse of the Albanian leaders related with Kosovo. Understanding "the unification of Albanians" as a foreign policy discourse makes necessary the study of the ways this discourse is articulated by the political leaders and investigate if we can talk about a dominant and stabilized discourse. This overview of the bilateral relations is often characterized by an ambiguous language that creates paths for different interpretations. In one side is appreciated "the excellent and fraternal relationship between Albania and Kosovo and their strategic partnership is a fundamental instrument that defines and will define in future the relevance of the Albanian factor in the region" (Rama, 09 March 2015). On the other side, articulations of

“unification of Albanians/national unification” have raised another debate, which has involved not only a considerable part of the political and intellectual elites in both countries, but has spread out reactions and political worries in other countries of the region as well.

Political discourse is a key source of information, rather necessary to be analyzed than to be taken for granted. As many other political situations or actions, a major part of diplomatic activities happens in a discursive level and a detailed analysis of these practices does not only help to understand these practices but also explore the possible consequences in foreign policy. This article aims to explore the dominant discourse of Albanian leaders regarding to Albania- Kosovo relationship. Exploring the elite’s political discourse, particularly the two main leaders, PM Edi Rama and the previous one, Sali Berisha, the paper seeks to identify the main themes and issues that have shaped discourse toward Kosovo. The main research questions are: What is the dominant discourse? How is portrayed the relation with Kosovo? What are shifts and continuities in the political discourse of the Albanian leaders regarding the bilateral relation with Kosovo? The main argument is that by playing with the idea of threatening with “national unification/union” by the political elite, eventually the EU is marked as a key external actor in the relationship between Albania and Kosovo. But as long as there is no resonance found among political leaders’ discourse and official foreign policy discourse, we cannot talk for the stabilization of such a discourse.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign policy has generally been out of the object of study of discursive approaches due to its focus on ground theories of International Relations and hence [that is why] the discourse was not considered as an important tool of analysis. But in the last decades there has been an increase of studies that connect foreign policy with discourse analysis and they are becoming part of research agendas of many theoretical approaches such as the constructivism, post-structuralism and the critical theory. Main contributions regarding the linkage of foreign policy and discourse analysis are to be found in the works of the Copenhagen School’s authors such as Lene Hansen (2002; 2006), Henrik Larsen (1997; 1999) and Ole Weaver (1996; 2002). In “*Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe*”, Henrik Larsen (1997) presents the analysis of political discourse as an alternative approach in foreign policy, where through a detailed study of the British and French discourse on Europe, national security and the nature of international relations, he shows the importance of political discourse in shaping foreign policy. While in “*British and Danish European Policies in the 1990s: A Discourse Approach*”, he argues that “differences in European policies between these two countries [Great Britain and Denmark] have been formed by different meanings and of the concepts of the state and of the nation, meanings that have influenced the content and procedures of their policies” (1999; 451). Weaver shares with Larsen the idea that a discourse analysis of foreign policy should be seen as complementary to other approaches (Weaver, 2002). Hansen (2006) puts special efforts to the methodology and offers concrete instructions in mapping the research based on this method. According to Milliken (1999:225) “theorizing discourse surpasses and mixes the boundaries among post-structuralism, post-modernism, feminism and social constructivism” because being a post-positivist approach, discourse analysis is difficult to be localized.

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on the constructivist approach of Foreign Policy Analysis, combined with Critical Discourse Analysis. More specifically the European branch of constructivism is often prescribed as post-positivist or interpretative and that considers language to be a structure of meaning that makes possible specific actions of

foreign policy. The interpretative constructivists analyze the historical conditions and social discourses that make possible the change in “the foreign policy behavior” (Hopf, 2002). The scholar Demirtas Bagdonas notes that “policy makers articulate their policies (present certain policies as a part of a general policy orientation or articulate the need to move away from traditional policy), and as such discourse analysis is the best mean to study the ideological templates constructed in foreign policy discourses” (2008: 52).

## METHODOLOGY

This study applies a discursive approach. Studies based on discourse analysis use language as an instrument that methodologically involves the process of reading and text interpretation of different speeches. Discourse analysis is based on the analysis of meanings of special concepts that structure and articulate what the actor is saying. According to Titscher et al. (2000:32) one of functions of texts is representation, through which we achieve to distinguish group or situational features that is object to analysis. The methodology applied for this article is Critical Discourse analysis, based on works of N. Fairclough, R. Wodak and T. Van Dijk. Based on Weaver’s idea (2004: 198) on discursive approaches, this article treats CDA both as a methodology and as a theoretical approach. By analyzing “discourse/ language as a social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), it can facilitate the understanding of main themes/issues of political discourse regarding the relation between two countries. Specifically CDA “is focused in the ways how discourse preserves, confirms, legitimates, reproduce and challenges power and dominance in society” (Van Dijk, 1988:953), and it also stresses out “how power relation are exercised and negotiated in discourse” (Wodak, 1996). According to Fairclough power within the discourse has to do with the dominant signifiers, who control and oblige the contribution of less powerful signifiers (Fairclough 1989: 46). The analysis is based on: a) content, what is said or done; b) relations, social relations of people included in the discourse and c) subjects or “roles/ positions” that people have/ play.

Political discourse is identified by actors or authors (politicians) that create it. Studies on political discourse deal with texts and conversations of political actors. According to Titscher et al. (2000:32) one of functions of texts is representation, through which we achieve to distinguish group or situational features that is object to analysis. The data include a group of texts, particularly statements and speeches of the two main leaders, as well as declarations of high representatives of state of both countries, held in official bilateral meetings, agreements or any public appearances. The study covers the period 2008-2015 and for this reason we have conducted a preliminary research on key moments or events, relevant for our analysis and that facilitated the research and analysis in the further stages.

The interpretation of these texts is confronted with a number of methodological issues such as classification, definitions, the relation structure - agency, aims and their periodicity (Hughes 2005: 247-67). Referring to the above methodological explanation, the analysis of data is conducted in two main theme/groups: a) Actors/ subjects included in the discourse and b) themes/issues/object and strategies of argumentations. Regarding the first group we have analyzed: a) the discourse of two main political leaders, Edi Rama and Sali Berisha, when in power and in opposition: b) discourse of other high officials such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the head of state etc; c) discourse of the Kosovo representatives and d) discourse of third parts such as neighbor countries, the EU and the USA representatives. Regarding the second group we have explored attitudes/ statements towards: a) Albania-Kosovo bilateral relation, b) National unification/ the EU.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the main findings is that in the political discourse is noticed an ambiguous language that creates paths for diverse interpretations according to the audiences it is addressed to. There exists a constant ambiguity between statements that support Kosovo as an independent state and on the other side a nationalist rhetoric that proclaims national unity, contradictory to the first and that cannot be projected clearly within the discourse. Given this, we identify a constant interfere between two dominant discourses:

First, the bilateral relation Albania –Kosovo is considered to be a fraternal relationship (based on the cultural and historical connections). This is present in the discourse of both leaders, Rama and Berisha, and in all other representative of Albania and Kosovo. Among utterances used to express such a relation we can mention: fraternal, unique, very close, excellent, etc. In the political discourse we also find declarations that call for further intensification of bilateral relations through common agreements in different fields. The novelty on the discourse of Edi Rama (and in the program of foreign policy of the left government) Kosovo is marked as strategic partner. *“The strategic partnership between two countries is an essential instrument that defines the role of the Albanian factor in the region (...) the main and the most important goal of strategic common policies of both government is the improvement of the quality of life of our citizens, in our common space, administered by two state whose aspirations and interests are absolutely common”* (Rama, 09 March 2015). Defining Kosovo as a strategic partner is present both in the discourse of the political actors and in the foreign policy discourse of actual government.

Secondly, “the unification of Albanians” is one of the dominant themes in the political discourse regarding Kosovo. Being an “ambiguous narrative” caused by altered declaration on national unification on one side and union within the EU on the other side, the idea of unification between two states has served as instrumental discourse for domestic political goals for both leaders. Playing with this idea, the EU is imposed as a key external actor in the relation between two states. According to Larsen (1999:451) “understanding Europe as a dominant discourse is completely instrumental and the initial conflict lies between sub-discourses of this instrumental discourse”. The most discussed topics in the Albanian political discourse is Europe and the process of European integration and that is why “the unification of Albanian” could be seen as a sub-discourse that enriches that meta-discourse of Europe that is seen as a compass for the future of these relations. Based on this logic, “the national unification” becomes a sub-discourse depending on domestic political needs and interests and of the dominant discourse on Europe. Consequently the relations of Albania with the EU influence also the discourse on Kosovo and national unification. We notice that the more nationalist the political discourse, the more leaders raise criticism on EU.

Some of main shifts and continuities traced in the Albanian political discourse regard to Kosovo are as following:

The discourse of Rama and Berisha is characterized by populist and nationalist rhetoric. The relationship with Kosovo is quite politicized and as a consequence it is easy to play with people’s perceptions. The theme of national unification has been brought by both leaders, time after time, in different forms and special moments, such as the nationalist rhetoric of Berisha during the celebrations of 100 years of independence or Rama’s declarations in Ulcinj and particularly in the second joint meeting of the governments of Albania and Kosovo. Due to common historical and cultural connections, in general the relationship with

all Albanians in the region and particularly with the Albanians of Kosovo has been seen by Albania's political leaders as a possibility to project their role for the whole Albanian community in the Balkans. Consequently, they have played with the idea of national unification, presented through an ambiguous language. In the discourse of Berisha this idea has emerged as "we need to reunite with each other, united in Europe, the union towards Europe/ Albanians should not stop building their most supreme ideal, the ideal of national unification", while in the discourse of Rama have been noticed narratives as such: "the boundaries are of yesterday, the future does not have limits/ an old dream/ let's achieve unification through a new path/ a process of uniting our forces and institutions towards a common goal".

Regarding the political discourse of both leaders, one of the commonalities between them is that nationalist tones have been constantly increasing. Analyzing the domestic context, we notice that this has happened in key moments and events of domestic political conflicts or during pre-election seasons. For example, in Berisha's discourse is noticed a placement of these dynamics in two main situations: (i) before and during the celebration of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence and (ii) before general elections of 23 June 2013. In December 2011, in a meeting with students, Berisha, then PM, said that "*Kosovo and Albania are two independent states and they should have to administrations. In the project of national unification, I think that it is in the best of Albanians to preserve the actual territorial boundaries*" (16 December 2011), while a year later, during the celebrations of 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence we trace a change of statements in his declarations, requiring that "*nobody should not be afraid by the attempts of Albanians to unite, because it aims the concentration of their energies to build what they missed. Nobody should forget that Albanians meet the new century in liberty, but as a nation that had survived to huge injustices that did not allow it to build its future...*" (Berisha, 25 November 2012).

According to Bieber (2014) "Sali Berisha failed in his attempts to use the celebrations of Albanian state independence for his political survival". Even in the case of the actual PM we notice an increase of nationalist rhetoric mixed with critics against the EU. In a common interview with the deputy PM of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, for Klan Kosovo, held in 4 April in Ulcinj, Rama said that "*the union is something inevitable and it will happen in the EU. But it can happen in another form if Europe does not intervene in the strategic calculation of the Balkan states...*" (Rama, 4 April 2015). The Albanian political analyst, Fatos Lubonja, argues that if till this moment Rama used to have a double language (nationalist for the Albanians and post-nationalist for the westerners), in the joint meeting of two governments in Tirana, he started to use a more triple [complicated] language. "He used strong patriotic tones (...) It was evident a third [new] language for the Albanians of Kosovo, because now the PM has taken the role of the father for Kosovars, cause [Rama] thinks that they [Kosovars] have a stronger desire to unite and also need the protection of Albania against the injustices of Serbs and other Westerners" (Lubonja, 6 April, 2015).

One of the most major shifts detected in their discourse is when leaders are in power and when they are in opposition. When they are in power, their discourse is characterized by nationalist tones and features completely different from the period they were in opposition. For example in the discourse of Rama, when he was in opposition, the themes of national unification or Great Albania (referring to Berisha's declarations) were perceived as old politics. "*The national unification does not come from old paths of destructive revenge. The ghosts of nationalism do not have a place in our region. Let achieve union through the new road of Europe*" (Rama, 15 December 2012). The same features are found in Berisha's

discourse, now in opposition, who accuses the PM Rama for an extreme nationalism. Let's remember here the attitude of Berisha referring the declarations of Rama on Kosovo during his last visit in Belgrade: *"the independent Kosovo has its own legal representatives, nationally and internationally recognized and cannot be represented by any representative of Albania or any other country in Belgrade"* (Berisha, 15 January 2014).

Particularly the discourse of Rama is portrayed by an "extension/ spread of nonverbal aspects of interaction and communication (Wodak & Meyer, 2008:02). In his case, the symbolic has been quite present, having in mind that his first visit abroad as a PM was in Kosovo and the organization of joint governmental meetings, as well as the selection of place and all symbols that have accompanied these events. We can mention here the slogan "a land, a nation, a dream" of the second joint governmental meeting held in Tirana.

The state high officials, mainly Ministry of Foreign Policy representatives, are often forced to explain the attitudes of their leaders, especially those related with the idea of national union. As long as there is no resonance between the discourse of political leaders and the official discourse of foreign affairs, we cannot talk for a stabilization of such a discourse. Meanwhile, the strategic partnership theme has becoming the part of Albanian official discourse.

Even though in the first years after independence, Kosovo representatives were in resonance with declarations of the Albanian representatives, after the initiation of dialogue with Serbia under the umbrella of the EU, their discourse was altered being more politically mature emphasizing that union/unification will happen within the process of EU integration. Thereby, Kosovo's representatives do not refer the "national unification" theme in their declarations. We can mention here the declaration of Kosovo's President, Atifete Jahjaga, regarding the declaration of Rama in Ulcinj, claiming that *"today we live in times of integration and the European integration is the goal and the alternative of all Balkan states. Kosovo is an independent state and as any other state in the region it aims to integrate in the EU and it is working to accomplish all the criteria to gain membership"* (Jahjaga, 11 April 2015).

In specific moments, the discourse of both leaders with regard to Albania – Kosovo relationship has caused reactions, problems and critics by the EU, the USA and other states in the region, especially by the Serbs. This international reaction has derived mainly as a strong response of against the declaration of "national unification" of Albanian leaders and thus threatening to put in risk the European future of both states. The EU and the USA representatives are seen as 'powerful signifiers' (Fairclough, 1989), because the power on the triangle EU-Albania-Kosovo relationship is in their hands and hence the perspective of European integration becomes an imperative on the relationship between Albania and Kosovo.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzed how is portrayed the relationship with Kosovo in the Albanian political elite's discourse. Based on a constructivist approach and CDA, the article traced the themes, issues and meanings that the Albanian political elite, especially the two main leaders, the PM Edi Rama and the former one, Sali Berisha, depicted to the bilateral relation with Kosovo. Among main findings we emphasize a constant conjunction of two main dominant discourses: (i) the political discourse is characterized by historical and cultural resonances,

fraternal and national ones. Beyond interstate relations, the connection with Kosovo is considered as fraternal and very close; (ii) “the union/unification of Albanians” is one of the dominant themes of the political discourse regarded to Kosovo, where both leaders, for domestic political goals, alter the national union and European integration in their declarations. The article claims that by playing with the idea of national unification as part of the political discourse, the EU is imposed as a key external actor in the relations among Albania and Kosovo. In general there is constant ambiguity, in some extend contradictory, between the statements that support Kosovo as an independent state on one side and the nationalist rhetoric on the other side, that contradicts with the first as long as its projections within the discourse is difficult to understand. But as long as there is no resonance found on between the discourse of political leaders [political discourse] and official discourse of foreign policy, we cannot claim for a stabilization of such a discourse.

## REFERENCES

- Bieber, F. (2014). Greater Serbia and Greater Albania do not exist: The myth of bad Serb-Albanian relations. *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*. [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015] Available from: <http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/biepag/node/113> [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015]
- Berisha, S. (15 January 2014). Berisha: Rama s’ka mandat per te diskutuar ne Beograd per Kosoven. Koherat e Hoxhes kane marr fund! [Berisha: Rama has no mandate to discuss on behalf of Kosovo in Belgrade. The Hoxha’s time has gone!] *Gazeta Panorama*. [Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015] Available from: <http://www.panorama.com.al/berisha-rama-nuk-ka-mandat-per-te-diskutuar-ne-beograd-per-kosoven-koherat-e-hoxhes-kane-marre-fund/>
- Demirtas, B. O. (2008). A Poststructuralist Approach to ideology and Foreign Policy: Kemalism in the Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse. Phd Thesis. [Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015] Available from: <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/iphdeo01.pdf>
- Fairclough, N. L. & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse Studies. A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Vol. 2. Discourse as Social Interaction. London: Sage.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. New York: Longman, Inc.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hughes, C. R. (2005). Interpreting nationalist texts: a post-structuralist approach. *Journal of contemporary China*, 14 (43). pp. 247-67.
- Larsen, H. (1999) ‘British and Danish European policies in the 1990’s: A discourse approach’ *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 5(4): 451–483.
- Larsen, H. (1997) *Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis: France, Britain and Europe*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science / Routledge.
- Rama, E. (9 March 2015). Partneriteti strategjik Shqipëri-Kosovë instrument për peshën e faktorit shqiptar në rajon. [The Albania-Kosovo Strategic Partnership, an instrument for the weight of the Albanian factor in the region] [Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2015] Available from: <http://www.kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/deklarata-per-shtyp/partneriteti-strategjik-shqiperi-kosove-instrument-per-peshen-e-faktorit-shqiptar-ne-rajon1425909038&page=1>
- Rama, E. (16 December 2014). Rama: Shqipëria dhe Kosova, shembull i gjalle i nje integrim te merituar ne BE. [Rama: Albania and Kosovo, a vivid example of an deserved EU integration] *Gazeta Shqiptarja.com* [Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015] Available from: <http://shqiptarja.com/lajme%20shkurt/2749/rama-shqip-ria-dhe-kosova-shembulli-i-gjall--i-nj--integrimi-t--merituar-n--be-260011.html#sthash.1W4jJqK.dpuf>

- Titscher, S. et al (2000). *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2005). Critical Discourse Analysis. In Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D., & Hamilton, H. E. (Eds.). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Wæver, O. (2002). "Identity, communities and foreign policy: discourse analysis as foreign policy theory" in Hansen, L., & Wæver, O. (eds). *European Integration and National Identity. The challenge of the Nordic States*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2008). *Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology*. [(Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> March 2015] Available from:[http://www.corwin.com/upm-data/24615\\_01\\_Wodak\\_Ch\\_01.pdf](http://www.corwin.com/upm-data/24615_01_Wodak_Ch_01.pdf)