

DEMOCRACY, ISLAM AND POLITICS IN MODERN ALBANIA

MODERN ARNAVUTLUK'TA DEMOKRASİ, İSLAM VE SİYASET

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ABSTRACT

Many academics have discussed the relations between political Islam and liberal democracy. Their main question was/is 'is it possible to find a kind of compatibility between Western regimes' characteristics and Islam?' According to this paper, this question's answer is affirmative in term of Albanian society concerned.

This paper is a case study and tries to achieve three purposes that functioned also as guidelines throughout the entire study including the quest about the compatibility between Islam (most of all in its political aspects) and democracy through the study of the Albanian case; and analysing those historical and political happenings that affected the current situation of the country and in addition to investigate the perceptions that the Albanian youth has about the issue in order to describe the present and also to make some suggestions/previsions about the future. In other words this study describes how Islam is perceived by Albanian society within the political life enriching in this way the portrait of the development of the relations between Islam and politics in the country during the last ten years. The paper provides various tables and data in order to prove its stands and explains how Albanian thought on ascribed issues.

The paper concludes that the secret of Albania is that this nation enjoys its role of miscellaneous of two cultures since they know the importance and the value of both; therefore, thus Islam and Liberal democracy naturally coexist and the Albanian Islam differs from many other.

ÖZET

Siyasal İslam ile liberal demokrasi arasındaki ilişki birçok akademisyen tarafından tartışılmaktadır. Bunların temel sorusu: 'İslam ile Batı rejimlerinin karakteristikleri arasında bir uyum bulunabilir/ bulmak mümkün mü/ mi? dir.' Bu çalışmaya göre bu sorunun cevabı özellikle Arnavutluk toplumu gözönüne alındığında olumlu görünür.

Bu makale bir örneklem çalışmasıdır ve üç amaca ulaşmaya çalışmaktadır ki, bunlar aynı zamanda bu çalışmanın da çerçevesini oluşturmaktadır. Birinci amaç, Arnavutluk örneğinde demokrasi ve İslam (siyasal kısmı) uyumlu mudur?; mevcut siyasal gelişmeleri tetikleyen siyasal

ve tarihi gelişmelere analiz etmek ise ikinci amacı oluşturmaktadır. En son amaç ise Arnavut gençlerinin algularından yola çıkarak onların mevcut ve gelecek durum hakkında ne düşündüklerini öğrenmek amacı ise araştırmaya ek olarak konulmuştur. Başka bir ifadeyle, bu çalışma İslamın Arnavutluk'ta nasıl algılandığını açıklarken, aynı zamanda son on yılda İslam ve siyasetin ne tür bir gelişmeyi ortaya çıkardığını ve siyasal hayatı ne derece zenginleştirdiğini de ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Makale söz konusu ortaya konulan iddiaları bir çok tablo verilerle desteklemektedir ki, bu tablolar vasıtasıyla da Arnavutların yukarıda açıklanan konularda ne düşündüklerini de ortaya koymaktadır.

Arnavutların iki kültürün farklı tezahürlerinin kendilerine yükledikleri rollerden memnun oldukları ortaya koyan bir ulus olduğu sonucuna varıyor ki, bunlar hem önemli hem de çok kıymetli değerler olmaktadır. Sonuçta her ne kadar siyasetin dışında Arnavutluk İslamı farklılık gösterse de İslam ve Liberal demokrasi doğal olarak Arnavutlukta içiçe girmiş ve uyumlu olarak yaşanmaktadır.

Keys Words: Political Islam, Liberal Democracy, Albania, Democracy, Religion

Anahtar Kelimeler: Siyasal İslam, Liberal Demokrasi, Arnavutluk, Demokrasi, Din

1 INTRODUCTION

The quest on the relation between liberal democracy and political Islam aims both the international academic scenario and the creation of political strategies for the foreign policies of states and international organizations. The issue is delicate and most of all has been treated by a lot of scholars, sociologists and political scientists and there are many trends answering the question: is it possible to find a kind of compatibility between Western regimes' characteristics and Islam?

The purpose of this paper is to circumscribe this issue within the Albanian dimension, action that would permit an effective analysis of the aforementioned problem in a particular and little discussed display. In other words this study want to describe how Islam is perceived by Albanian society nowadays within the political life enriching in this way the portrait of the development of the relations between Islam and politics in the country during the last ten years. For this purpose this paper tries to analyse various factors like the level of integration between Islam and politics, public sector, economy and private life.

It must be specified that until 1991, there were not democratic experiences in Albania that, once reached the independence after a very long period of diverse occupations, became a kingship and later one of the harshest communist regimes of the world. Therefore democracy is a new term in Albanian known history; for this reason, more likely, this situation, Albanian democracy is called 'in unfinished transition' by people. Despite the

peculiarity of this condition it is not well investigated even by those authors that wrote about the political history of Balkans and Albania before and during the communist regime and as well as during the first decade of the so called transition. The existence of this significant gap in treating this issue together with the topicality of the Albanian case are the main justifications of the birth of this paper. Subsequently in fact it would situate the findings of the case study in the optic of the general debate stressing the trends that have conducted the country to the present situation of equilibrium and balance making it a virtuous example of cohabitation of Islam and democracy.

This paper composes its structure as follow. Initially, research methods of the paper will be discussed. Then the literature review will be placed. The research results and discussion will be following. After completing these parts, the study will be accomplished by a conclusion and some suggestions.

1.1 Methodology

The first part of the research process deepens the historical and geo-political aspect to better understand the reality of the country within the whole Balkan area and subsequently the current Albanian reality will be approached through the point of view of the public opinion. In fact the paper embodies an introductory part in which using the existing literature the author explains how to generally refer to Islam and its political aspects and contextualize the situation of Albania inside its historical background and a second piece in which the attention will be focused on the perception of common citizens, but also of those people that most represent the Albanian Muslims in the fields that influence Albanian society in the present and would have in their ends its future too. For this reason, the methodology of this paper is quantitative and qualitative.

The qualitative part of the research consisted in the collection of interviews of competent people and recognised institutions and in the investigation of the personal perceptions and recommendations of the sample. On the other hand the second part of this study adopts a quantitative method and chose two surveys in order to collect empirical data. In this way maintaining the same points of the aforementioned theoretical part as reading keys would emerge how the presence or the absence of certain historical, political, social and economic characteristics create an equilibrium between democracy and Islam quite unique in Albania. In fact, the author was very interested in implementing this academic research with a direct contribution of the young part of the Albanian civil society as the most vivid source to outline the current reality of the country.

The assumptions that would be done are the fruit of field investigations consisting in two different surveys which will be used in this study: the first is carried out by Epoka University, titled "Albanian Public Perceptions of the socio-cultural and foreign policy issues" held in Tirana, published in 2011. This survey has twenty-seven questions, but this research

only use six questions in order to compare findings with a second survey created by the author of this paper.

The second survey was submitted to 75 university students from public and private universities in Tirana and Durres between August and September 2012. It is composed of 11 multiple-choice questions, aimed to investigate the general perception that the Albanian youth has of democracy, political Islam, their role in the country, their level of compatibility and their effect on the reputation of the country abroad.

In order to reach this purpose the author submitted the survey questions to the rector of the new Albanian theology faculty for collecting the perception of those young people that possess deep knowledge and interest in Islamic sciences; however the permission was denied and this dimension is missing in this study. Furthermore the author submitted an interview to the administration of the official Albanian Muslim Community (*Komuniteti Mysliman i Shqiperise*) to explore the positions of the most pregnant institution in merit of the subject of the investigation and also in this case unfortunately did not receive an answer. The Albanian Muslims Community (AMC), the central organization of the Albanian Muslims 'belongs to the same spectrum of liberal Islamic movements which have found a position for themselves in a secular system'. The information about the role of Albanian Muslim Community (AMC) in history are anyhow complete and referred to its website¹ and relied on to other international sources. This premise is not to be read as sterile polemic; but as an auto critical admission of an unintentional gap in treating this issue.

The author did not divided the sample into categories of age because it belonged entirely to the range of 20-25, neither of gender because for the purposes of the investigation it was more interesting trying to build a sort of general voice of the next coming working and ruling class in order to have the possibility to see the presupposition of the future valence of political Islam in the society and the main expectations about its development. Although ten per cent of the randomly selected samples were double checked by the SPSS data coordinator, an error margin of about one point five per cent remains inevitable.

The two different surveys have similarities and differences that combined or compared give to the researcher's fresh and more specific information about the treated topics. The choice of matching these two instruments is due to the necessity to create a complete perspective from which to look to the subject both from chronological and from sociological level. In fact making the two polls a bigger range of population is investigated, different states of mind emerge according to the time and the evolution of the public thinking is stressed out.

¹ Komuniteti Mysliman i Shqiperise (KMSH), <http://www.kmsh.al/>, last access 25/09/2012

1.2 Literature Review

There are literatures on Albanian politics and Islam concerning the post communist era. However, there are not enough available sources on the relationship between politics and Islam in Albania according to our research and reach.

The process of literature review for this study has been divided into two sections. The first part has been focused on political Islam and liberal democracy in general, in order to clarify and find reliable and unbiased information about the terms. The sources such as essays, books and reports that have been taken in consideration were drafted by authors from all over the world and with diverse religious beliefs. The theme was thoroughly treated from all the possible perspectives: historical, religious and political; subsequently the author had had to do a selection from the numerous sources trying to synthesize them without neglecting important issues and without being repetitive. The search was meticulous and no gaps about the general issue emerged; so the piece of the study related to this part of literature review has been aimed to introduce the issues as exhaustively and comprehensively as possible.

The second part of literature review has been dedicated to investigate the matter within Albanian reality; unlike the abundance of material about the general issue, the situation of the country was really little treated. The most of the sources were written by the same authoress, Nathalie Clayer that sometimes alone and sometimes in collaboration with other scholars like Xavier Bougarel deepened with various interviews and books the relation between Islam and democracy in the Balkan region through the history until the end of the '90s. Some other authors e.g. Christopher Deliso and Federico Maria Bega treated the issue from the perspective of the Islamist and terrorist threat. Both of them deepen the description of Albanian Muslim dimension in comparison with the other realities of the Balkan region: the former by stressing the existence of relation with dangerous terroristic bodies and extremist cells within the country; while the second drawing a map of Balkan Islam from a geo-political sight. However the contribution of these authors was limited because it was related to the period between 1991 and 1998. As a consequence the theoretical part regarding the Albanian case concerns the history of the country until the beginning of 21st Century; otherwise the current period was investigated by materials collected on the field by the two above mentioned surveys.

2 RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDIES: THE PERCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY, ISLAM AND POLITICS TODAY

From the answers to the surveys it emerges that the understanding of the people has changed from the first decades after the fall of the communist regime. It seems that the conception of democracy is more rooted in the citizens' conscience and that no other identities can overcome the national

one: the survey in fact stress that the 74.95 per cent of the participants answered that they introduce themselves first of all as Albanian and only the seven point three per cent as Muslims in a total of about nine per cent that refer their identity to their religion first (Yenigun, Ozcan and Baltaci, 2011, p.27). So if the Islam did not gain a dominant role in the identity conception of Albanian people, in which fields does it appear stronger? To answer this questions the author uses the data collected by his own survey. In the following figures the missing values are discarded and only valid data percentages are used but in the tables they are left unchanged to show the exact data.

Table 4.1 In Albania Islam influences social life

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	12	16,0	17,14	17,1
	Agree	34	45,3	48,57	65,7
	Neither agree nor disagree	16	21,3	22,9	88,6
	Disagree	5	6,7	7,1	95,7
	Strongly disagree	3	4,0	4,3	100,0
	Total	70	93,3	100,0	
Missing	No answer	4	5,3		
	More than one answer	1	1,3		
	Total	5	6,7		
Total		75	100,0		

Table 4.1 shows that 17.14 per cent of the respondents strongly agree that Islam influences social life in Albania; in contrast 11.4 per cent to some extent disagree on the influences of Islam to the social life of Albanians.

Table 4.2 In Albania Islam influences only private life

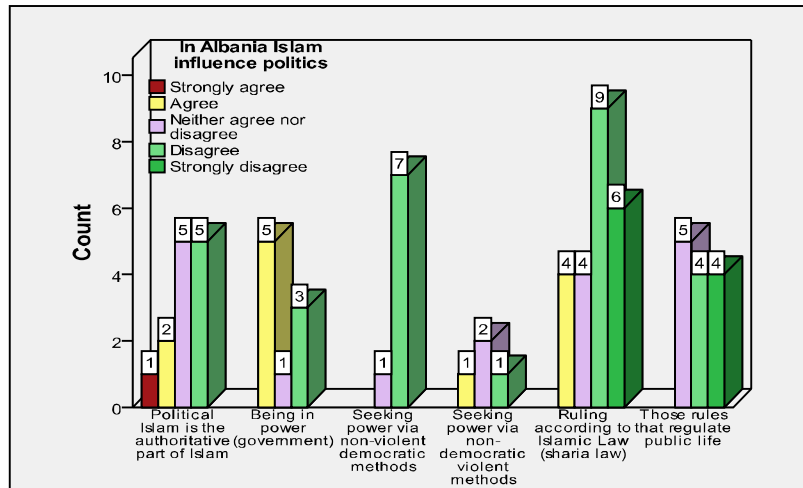
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	13	17,3	18,06	18,1
	Agree	22	29,3	30,56	48,6
	Neither agree nor disagree	13	17,3	18,1	66,7
	Disagree	19	25,3	26,4	93,1
	Strongly disagree	5	6,7	6,9	100,0
	Total	72	96,0	100,0	
Missing	No answer	3	4,0		
Total		75	100,0		

Table 4.2 shows that Islam influences private life of Albanians, as answered by the 48.6 per cent of the respondents. In contrast, it seems that the economic and political sectors are not significantly affected by Islam (respectively 33.4 per cent and 17.33 per cent).

These results could be explained thinking to the role that the Albanian Muslim Community started to occupy since from 1991: together with foreign NGOs and private donors the Albanian Muslim Community built mosques, founded Youth associations, intellectual forums and charity organizations; furthermore it printed journals and reopened *medreses*² and other cultural institutions (Clayer 2007). Its aim was to serve to fill the vacuum of civil society that flourished after the establishment of the first democratic regime (Clayer 2007). This was the reason why besides the private dimension Islam is perceived as something active and rooted in the social environment.

From these answers we can assume also that Islam in Albania has a politic value in the sense that has a role in the *res publica* (public affairs) not in political party dynamics or international relations like was happening in the 90s⁷ (Deliso 2007). The survey collected also the definitions that Albanian young people consider more suitable for the term Political Islam (PI). These data matched together with the previous ones give the image of what is the role of political Islam according to its definition.

Figure 4.1 Role of Political Islam in Albania according to its definition

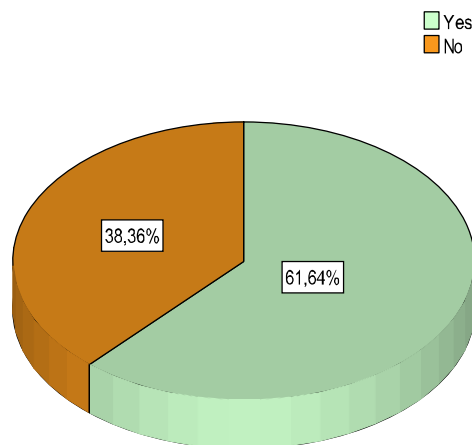


² Medreses are secondary schools with similar program to normal ones and in addition some Islamic models are taught.

According to the Figure 4.1, it emerges that even if the absolute majority believes that Islam did not influence politics, those people who define it in a moderate way like being in power by representation in the government agrees with the fact that Islam really has a weight in Albanian politics. It must also be noted as a frequency that only four people out of 75 (five point three per cent) described political Islam as a non-democratic and violent way to seek power and the majority defined it as the rule of *Shari' a*³. The figure also provides clear data that the majority of the respondents do disagree that Islam influence politics in Albania. In addition, the most of the respondents have clear idea what Islam is. So it can be concluded that those Albanian who think to political Islam in a moderate way see its affection in domestic politics; otherwise those who gave traditional definitions of this ideology, proper of Islamic Arab or Middle East states, did not recognize its interference in their country.

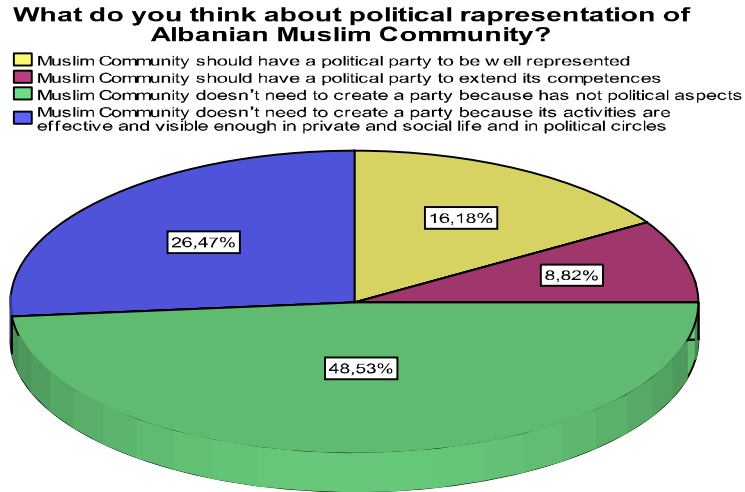
The following part of the analysis explores the issue of the political representation of Muslim movements or communities in the government by a political party. The survey deepens this aspect through three main questions: if Islam should have also political institutions (in general); if the potentialities of the Albanian Muslim Community are limited by the political assessment; if the Albanian MC does or does not need to create a party and why. The answers to these questions will emerge from the following data but can be said since now that the trend to which the public perception belongs is the one that circumscribes Islam into the private and social sphere, preserving the existence of a secular state without direct interferences in politics from religious bodies even if respected and recognized like the AMC is. However an interesting exception exists and its characters would be deepening more over.

Figure 4.2 Do people agree that Islam has also political institutions?



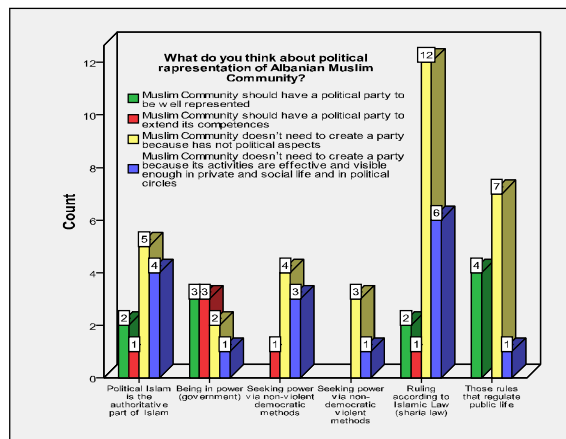
³ Refers to the Islamic Law.

Figure 4.3 What do people think about political representation of Albanian Muslim Community?



From the figure 4.2 emerges that by thinking of Islam in its general meaning the majority of Albanians interviewed agree that it has also political institutions; but when the context of the question is referred to their proper country their position changes as showed by the figure 4.3 and the 75 per cent asserts that their Muslim Community does not need to create a political party either because its needs are represented enough (26.47 per cent), or because it has no political aspects (48.53 per cent). The position of the public opinion against the presence of religious issues in politics and leadership was clear also in the survey edited by Epoka University, where it gained the 78.47 per cent of the preferences (Yenigun, Ozcan and Baltaci, 2011, p. 23).

Figure 4.4 MC representations according to the definitions of Political Islam



However as said before from the investigation of the author of this study it emerges that a group of people gave a moderate definition of political Islam in general; this group corresponds to the people that has a positive understanding of the possibility of a political role of the AMC. In short the data of the figure 4.4 shows that the majority of the respondents identify PI to the application of the Shari'a and this majority also thinks that the AMC does not need to be politically represented. However summing the data referred to the other moderate definitions they represent the 61.4 per cent and between them a political role of the AMC is admitted. In addition it will be interesting to investigate what the above mentioned group of respondents thinks about Albanian MC's political representation and about its need of more public visibility.

Figure 4.5 MC roles according to the definition of Political Islam

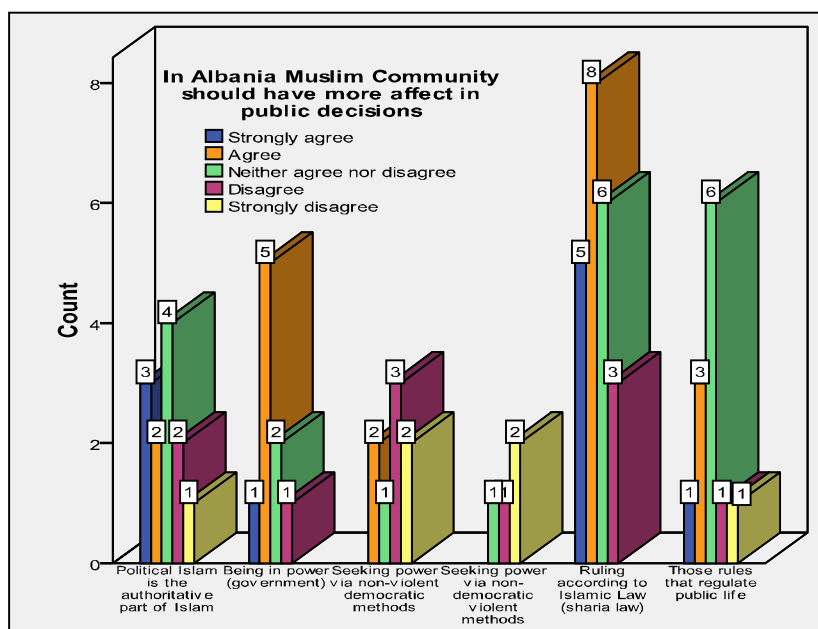


Figure 4.6 Satisfaction of MC needs according to the definitions of Political Islam

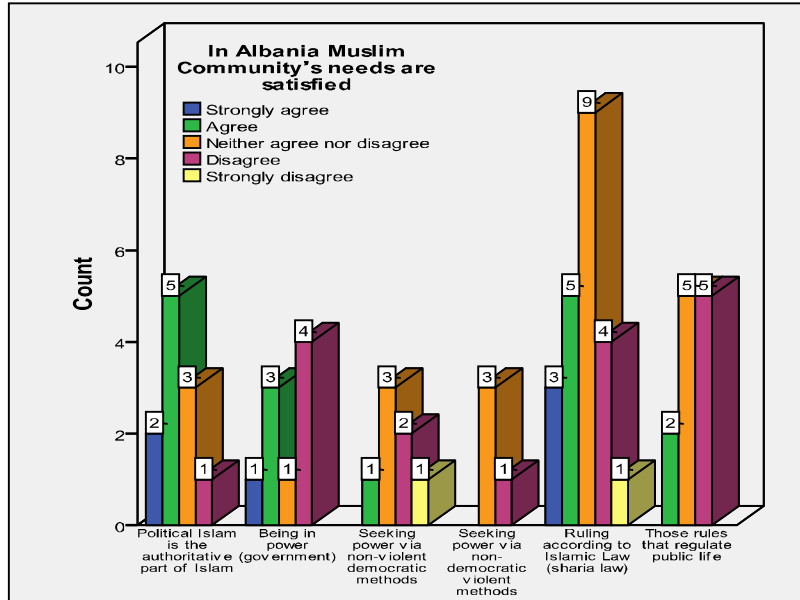
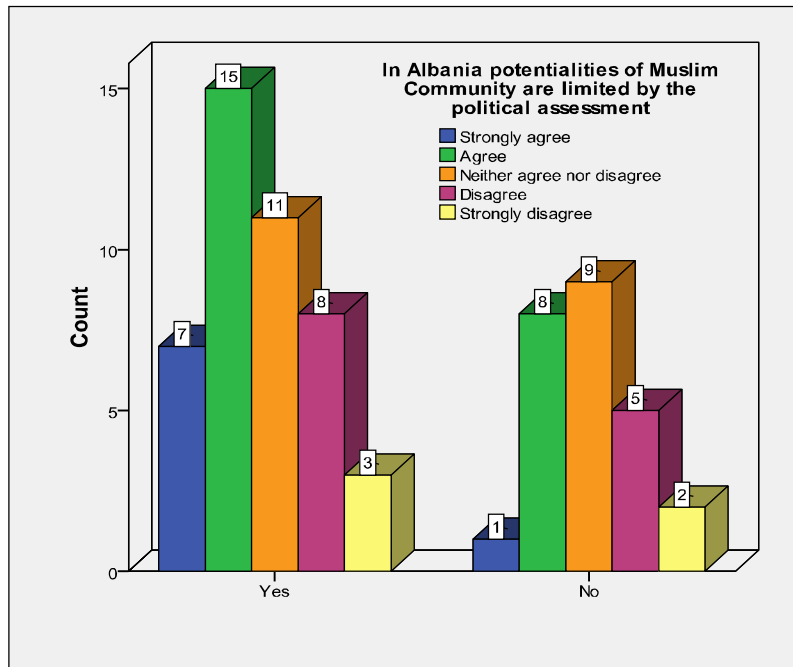


Figure 4.7 Limitation of the potentialities of Albanian Muslim Community (Islam's political institutions distribution)

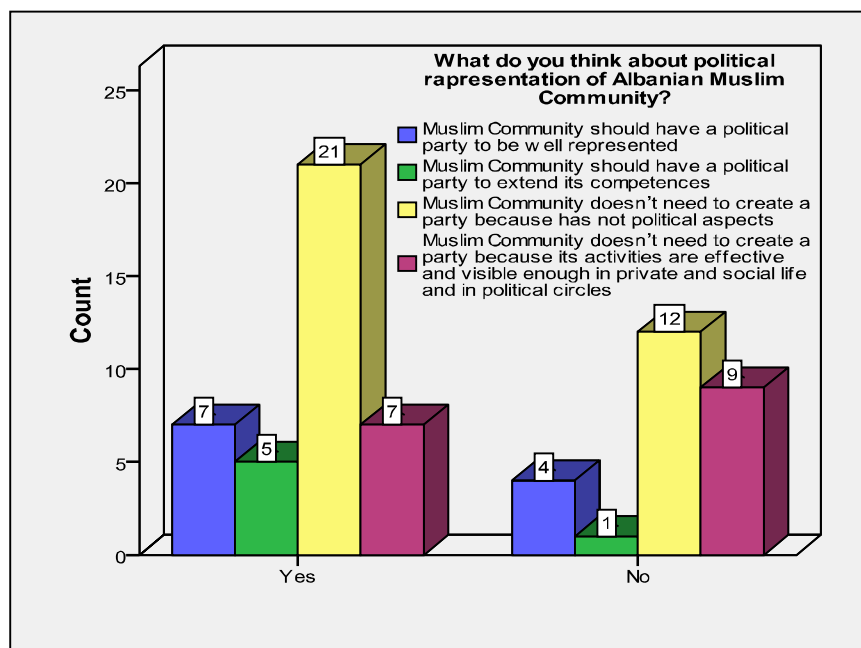


The figures 4.5 and 4.6 stress that the group with the more positive understanding of PI agree that the Albanian Muslim Community need to be politically represented in order to fully express its position and increase its effectiveness in public affairs and in order to extend its competences to fields that are evidently considered part of its nature. Furthermore they also show that who identifies political Islam as the rule of Shari’ a law thinks that the public involvement of the MC should be improved (in total the 43.5 per cent) even if not by political means.

The chart 4.7 chart shows that the 56 per cent of the respondents asserts that the AMC is limited in its actions and expressions by the political assessment. Furthermore from the figure 4.6 emerges that the 79.2 per cent of the sample thinks that the needs of the AMC are not satisfied. These data matched together can be useful in identifying the causes of the results exposed so far.

To conclude let’s see two more figures about this issue. They are two cross tables between questions examined before: the necessity of Islam to have political institutions and the representation of the former in the government.

Figure 4.8 Political representation of Albanian Muslim Community (Islam’s political institutions distribution)



The results emerged from the figure 4.8 are in line with the general trend: even if the majority thinks that Islam in general has political institutions; the respondents do not agree that the Albanian Muslim Community should gain political representation. It must be noted at the same time that a high majority also within those who agree with the existence of political institutions in Islam believe that the AMC is limited by the Albanian government.

This issue may be explained in two different ways: the first is that the discontinuous trend of the Albanian politics obstacles the activities of the AMC as well as all the ones of the others social and economic institutions in the country; the second is that the Albanian state's assessment is limiting the AMC's expression capacity.

In order to find which of these explanations is more suitable it is necessary to introduce the Albanian perception of democracy as investigated by the survey published by the Epoka University. It emerges that in 2010 the majority of the Albanians considered the democratic development as the main success achieved by their country after 1991 (Yenigun, Ozcan and Baltaci, 2011, p.19). Secondly to understand the following data it is interesting to see how Albanian people define democracy.

Table 4.3 What do you think of the most appropriate definition of democracy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government of, by, for the people	21	28,0	31,3	31,3
	Tolerance	9	12,0	13,4	44,8
	Rule of law	12	16,0	17,9	62,7
	Freedom of speech, thought and association	16	21,3	23,9	86,6
	wealth and development	5	6,7	7,5	94,0
	Equality	1	1,3	1,5	95,5
	Doing whatever you wish to do	1	1,3	1,5	97,0
	Rule of qualified elite	2	2,7	3,0	100,0
	Total	67	89,3	100,0	
Missing	No answer	4	5,3		
	More than one answer	4	5,3		
	Total	8	10,7		
Total		75	100,0		

Table 4.3 shows that 31.3 per cent of the sample chose the first definition proposed: 'government of, by, for the people', but sensitive percentages defined it as rule of law (17.9 per cent) and 'freedom of speech, thought and association' (23.9 per cent).

Remembering these definitions as basis for further assumptions now let's see in detail how public opinion expresses in merit of some core issues like the secularization of the state, freedom of religion and the equality of all religions.

Figure 4.9 Religion and politics must be separated

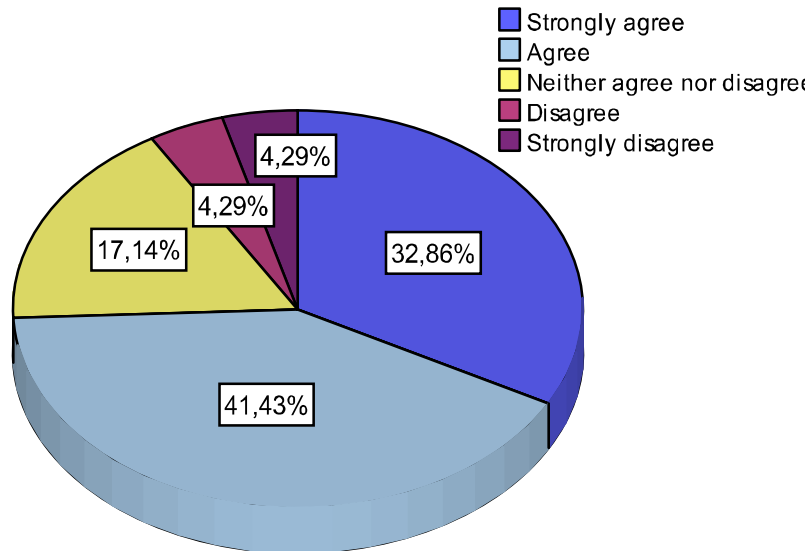


Figure 4.10 All the religions should have the same weight

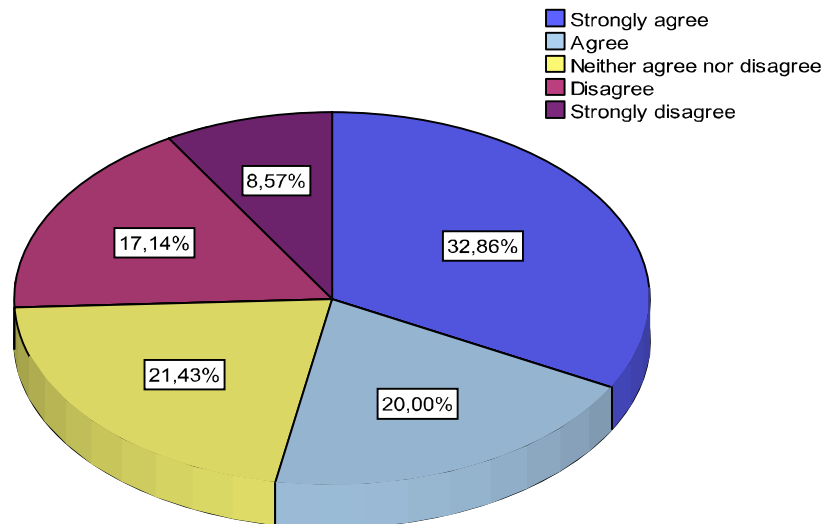


Figure 4.11 Freedom of religion is part of democracy

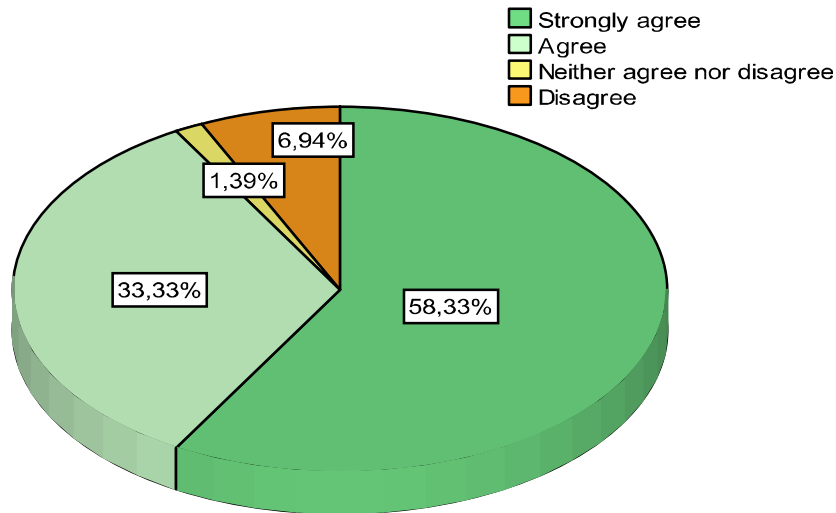


Figure 4.9 shows the respondents' views on the question of 'religion and politics must be separated'. 41.43 per cent of the respondents were agree and 32.85 per cent of respondents were strongly agree. This clearly indicates that there is no room in Albanian understanding to have religion and politics together (74.3 per cent).

Figure 4.10 informs that in Albania the majority of the people are firmly convinced that all the religions should have the same weight in the country. Summing the people that agree with the ones that strongly agree they reach the 52.9 per cent. This last data is not so impressive like the previous two, but in the first two charts is also sensitive the percentage of people that remained neutral in merit (respectively 17.1 per cent and 21.4 per cent).

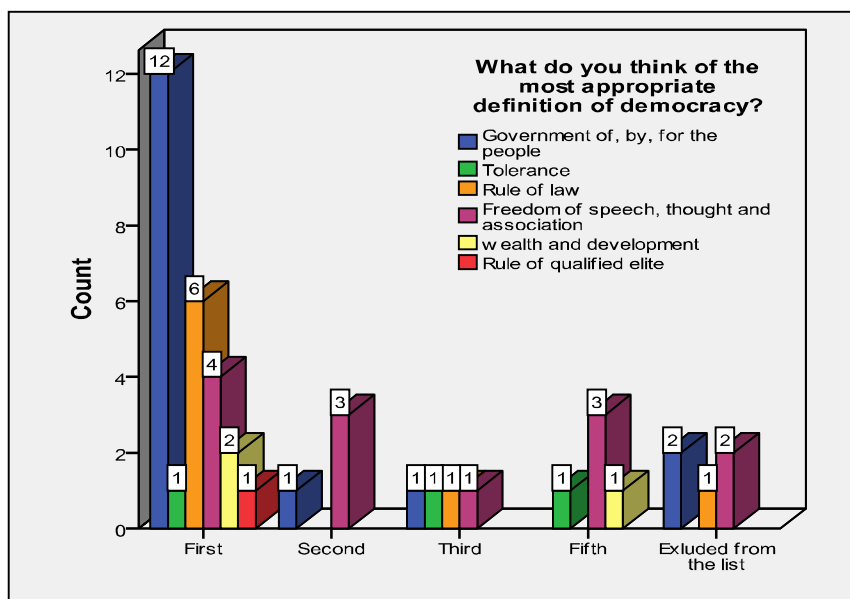
Resuming it can be said that Albanian youth today thinking about the features of a democratic regime refers to the concept of liberal democracy that characterized the West since the end of the Second World War and for this reason emphasize issues like freedom and equality between religions. Perhaps their state of mind is influenced by the proximity of the European Union, the tangible possibility to join it together with the long lasting collaboration with the US and other western countries for the country's development. At this point the amount of data collected about democracy gives the answer to the previous question (whether is the conflicting party's policies or the Albanian state's assessment the responsible for the limitations to the MC): the correct alternative is the first; in fact Albanians citizens are very proud of their democratic, republican and secular system and on the other side are often deluded by the discontinuity of government policies.

The issue of the accession to the EU had had an important part in the survey and would be deepened below; however before it would be interesting to look at the following cross table about the perception of the level of

harmonious coexistence between political Islam in relation with the different definitions of democracy.

A premise is necessary: the question 'In a scale of one to five what is the position of Albania as example of coexistence of democracy and Islam?' has been a little problematic for the sample and the number of missed answers is higher than the means of the entire survey, so this parameter would be used only in this case to underline a result.

Figure 4.12 Level of coexistence of democracy and Islam according to the definition of democracy



The majority of the respondents places Albania in the highest position and from this cross tabs emerges that the parameters that they take in consideration to do such assumption are the existence of a democratic regime as 'government of, by and for the people', based on tolerance and freedom. The data about tolerance is a comforting fact because while in the 2010 the Epoka survey where the 60.2 per cent of the respondent affirmed that religious diversity in the country would not lead to problems in the future and only the 0.19 per cent sees it as a threat for the country stability (Yenigun, Ozcan and Baltaci 2011, pp.16 - 23) in the perception of the students interviewed in this investigation the percentage of those who think that the existence of a Muslim majority would be problematic in the future goes up to 25 per cent. Maybe these young people are only more affected by the international campaign against political Islam, because in other two questions they answered that in the future they think political Islam in Albania would grow (30.8 per cent), but that at the same time it is not an obstacle for democracy even better as it can be enriching (44,2 per cent). So the current position of the Albanian youth is at the same time aware of the international developments of political Islam in Islamic countries; but is hopeful that in

Albania it would grow conserving its proper characteristic as an added value to democracy.

Concluding let's have a look at the public perceptions regarding the consequences that political Islam can have on the reputation of the country for foreign observers. Two questions are proposed: if the political Islam can be considered a threat by western countries and if it would be an obstacle to the EU membership.

Figure 4.13 Albanian Political Islam can be considered a threat by Western countries

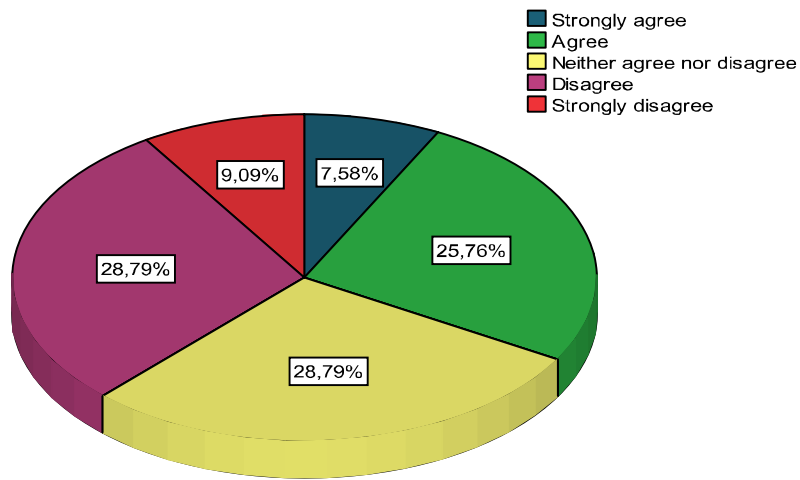
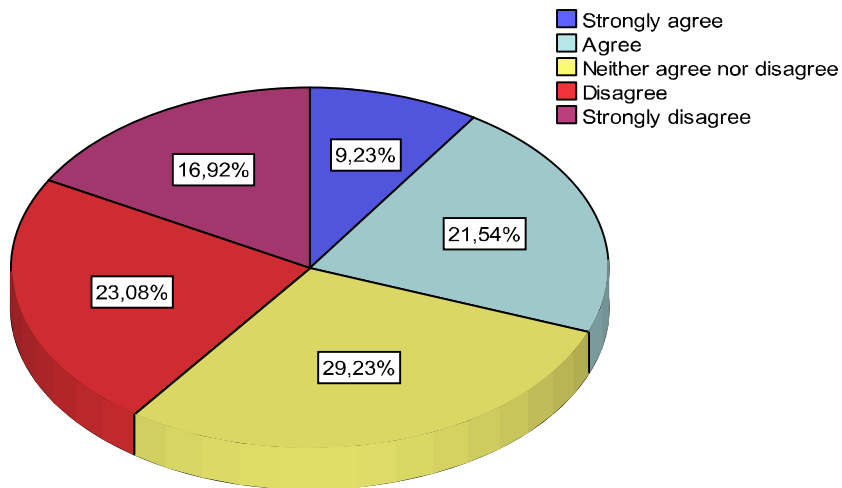


Figure 4.14 Political Islam can be considered an obstacle to EU membership of Albania



Combining 'strongly agree' with 'agree' and 'strongly disagree' with 'disagree' answers 37.88 per cent against the 33.3 per cent of the sample declared that political Islam should not be considered a threat by western countries (Figure 4.13), but only the 30.77 per cent against the 40 per cent (with a sensitive percentage of abstained) believe that it would be an obstacle to the access to the European Union (Figure 4.14). This second group is maybe influenced by the experience that Turkey, a country to which Albanians feel particularly close, (Yenigun, Ozcan and Baltaci, 2011 p.73), had had with the EU.

3 CONCLUSION

The introduction of this study the author delineated three purposes that functioned also as guidelines throughout the entire study. The first was to approach the quest about the compatibility between Islam (most of all in its political aspects) and democracy through the study of the Albanian case. In fact, this country represents a virtuous example of the peaceful existence of a majority of Muslims in a democratic and secular state.

The second purpose of this paper was to analyse those historical and political happenings that affected the current situation of the country and in addition to investigate the perceptions that the Albanian youth has about the issue in order to describe the present and also to make some suggestions/previsions about the future.

Before analysing the findings it is necessary to discuss some points found in the literature review to fulfil the second introductory goal. It emerges that the current is a critic period because of a diffuse conceptual confusion or superficiality particularly evident in the uses of the term political Islam and the concepts related to it (Benantar 1994). Furthermore because of what is called war on terror campaign, begun from the 9/11, the ideas of terrorism and violence are continuously associated to the Muslim world and to the religion-Islam.

However the literature gives several points important in order to challenge this trend. First of all must be clarified that Islam is not necessarily understood as a totalizing religion that embodies also a political ideology; nay the term political Islam indicates the antique flowing of diverse theories about how to rule a Muslim state (al-Jabri 2009). Furthermore only if this state is based mostly on the *Shari'a* law it can be called Islamic state.

Islamism, fundamentalism and radicalism are not synonymous of political Islam: they are three conservative approaches to three different fields: respectively politics, religion and theology. The first is a trend embedded in the political Islam but does not represent the entire composite doctrine (Benantar 1994); the second has a Protestant origin and theorize the return to the literal meaning of the sacred scriptures (Zakaria 2004) and the latter, even it comes from Catholic origins, is used within the Arab world to

define small groups of violent terrorists that reject modernity in its all aspects (Benantar 1994).

A parallel investigation on the term of democracy uncovers its ancient history: hence its linkages to the Greeks and the Romans, when it was intended respectively as a form of equal and direct participation in public decisions and as the equality before the law (Heywood 2007). Characteristics that maintained through time and that combined with two others (universal suffrage and real alternatives for the political choice) make the so called *minimal definition* of democracy (Bobbio 1984).

Furthermore the analysis of the term stressed out that after the two World Wars democracy acquired a complementary meaning of liberalism. The two terms began to be used together in the attribute liberal democracy that refers to those regimes that grant free, fair and regular elections together with the respect of human rights and chose equality, liberty and individuality as distinguishing political values (Zakaria 2004). From the historical examination to the evolution of both political Islam and liberal democracy some key points can be extracted in order to stress their core structures despite the historical changes and minor variants linked to particular applications in different places and times.

The peculiar key concepts of political Islam so emerged to be: the *umma*, the quest about the unity of religion and state, law, morality, just governance, ethnicism, modernization and the civil society. The main points of liberalism on the other hand were synthesized in: individualism, liberty, justice, rights, democracy, property, state and economy. These punctual structures have two functions: first of all to enable the reader in making intuitive assumptions on and connections between both of the concepts; secondly they help in fulfilling the purpose of this paper. Through noticing the absence or the presence and the weight that each concept has had in the Albanian history and has in the contemporary society, it will emerge which is more shared nowadays and in what way they coexist. From the literature review and the survey conducted expressly for this study it emerge how some historical factors and happenings rooted diverse principles within the culture of the country and how they remain there, grow of importance and influence political choices and economic trends.

Albanian history was characterized by frequent, onerous and lengthy occupations by foreign invaders and one of the most suffocating dictatorship of the world; that is why values like Albanian identity, liberty and freedom has been evidenced by the survey as very rooted in the conscience of the public opinion. Furthermore this fact explains why when thinking of democracy automatically the majority of people refers also to some liberal principles. In Albania different religions have ever coexisted peacefully or have alternated through history; hence people of different faiths are used to live side by side and today tolerance, coexistence and equality between religions are strengths of the contemporary Albania (Babuna 2003).

In order to conclude this list of examples it is important to cite the role of Islam in the region. This religion rooted in the country during the centuries even before the Ottoman occupation and later in the first decade after the fall of the communist regime played an important role in rebuilding the vacuum of civil society very problematic at this time. Islam institutions (together with Orthodox and Catholic ones) strengthened the moral values in a period of anarchy, fear, anger and violence and materially helped poor and needy people through charities and associations (Clayer 1997). These, among other reasons, justify the positive understanding of the public opinion about Islam and its beneficial effects firstly on private and social life, but also in a more political sense. The influence of media and current frightening trends about the danger of Islamic extremists and terrorists affected also Albanian perceptions; however within the moderate definition that they give to their proper political Islam some groups expect a growth of the political aspects of Islam in the country and advocate also the possibility of a political representation of the Albanian Muslim Community.

In the country for several years at the end of the XX century the threat of fundamentalism and terrorism materialized and challenged the future of Albania: with caution it can be said that the country passed that crossroad looking at the West; it made its choice as a nation and never again Islamist cells entered their boundaries (Deliso 2007, Babuna 2003, Bega 2007).

Albanian people had experienced the cruelty of an undemocratic regime and from their history learnt the importance of freedom. Nevertheless they knew also what does be prevented of practicing their cults implies and it can be said that now that they acquired the possibility to enjoy them it would be difficult that they would give any of these achievement up. In order to summarize the findings of the empirical part of this study and give some suggestions according to the data collected by the Epoka survey and the one done by the author of this paper, the attention must be focused on the perspective of a young public opinion that can describe the current situation but also allows outlining trends that would affect in the near future.

The more widespread conception of political Islam is the one that characterizes those Islamic governments of Middle East and Arab countries and that put the rule of the Shari'a law as the main character; hence according to this view the Albanian political Islam is seen as a quite irrelevant phenomenon and the Albanian Muslim Community is described as an institution very important at private and social level rather than in economy or politics. Moreover it must be noted that another minoritarian but coherent group exists. It is characterized by a moderate conception of political Islam and holds the principle of political representation. As a consequence it led to the acceptance of the possibility for the Albanian Muslim Community to create a party in order to express its positions without limitations due to the often conflicting policies of different governments. Another point emerged is that democracy is an essential value for the Albanian citizenship and the most shared definition of this concept is 'government of, by and for the people'. In

addition the survey pointed out that other principles considered inherent to a democratic regime are the rule of law, the separation of religion and state and the (religious) freedom. Other issues important for the sample have been tolerance and equality between diverse religions.

The survey stressed also the perception that young people have about coexistence of Islam and democracy. The majority was proud of the Albanian example and trustful for the future either in the case of a (possible) growth of political Islam, or in the same current condition. Islam was not perceived as a threat for the domestic stability but as an enriching character for democracy. Nevertheless some perplexities emerged with regarding to the foreign perception of Albanian political Islam, most of all in the optic of the accession to the European Union, still a very important goal for Albanian people.

In conclusion, the secret of Albania is that this nation enjoys its role of miscellaneous of two cultures since they know the importance and the value of both; therefore, thus Islam and Liberal democracy naturally coexist and the Albanian Islam differs from many other.

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