

## The particularities of EU-Albania mutual relations and the continuing challenge of integration

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### Abstract

During the transition years the integration agenda into EU has been characterized by a mix of achievements, featuring limitations and failures. Given the interest expressed by the EU to bring all Western Balkan countries within the Union, the case of Albania can illustrate some characteristic features that explain the slow pace of integration.

Albania's ambition to reunite with Europe emerged immediately after the collapse of the communism. The idea of change has been equated with the legitimate but premature desire of the Albanians to become part of the Western European family, thus entering a path of complex transformations, which started through many difficulties of the first decade of transition, and then continued with an attractive and tiring challenge of integration that is still far from being crowned with membership. EU integration is perceived more as an external socio-economic and political benefit with abundant welfare of all kinds, free movement, democratic rights, tolerance, etc., rather than an internal commitment with institutional responsibilities both political and legal, implementation of reforms, compliance with legal standards, free and fair competition, etc. So, it is an imperative to narrow the gap between exaggerated high expectations and deserved tangible benefits.

The role of the European Commission as a supporter and promoter of reforms is shown undeniable, given the two-year delay of the Albanian political class in agreeing and aligning with the relevant institutional requirements.

**Keywords:** EU, Albania, integration, transition.

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