Albania Divided:

An Analysis of the January 21, 2011 Demonstrations Through the

Albanian Print Media

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the political controversies in contemporary Albanian politics through the analysis of the media accounts on the January 21, 2011 demonstration. We analyse the opinion articles in mainstream media and find out that there are two representations of political reality that compete for legitimacy: one in favour of the government and the other against it. The picture we see from the media accounts is that events, political action and political personalities are subject to the perceived judgement of external actors, whose confirmation or support is taken as the legitimating factor. Thus, the accepted patterns of power put the international community at the top, from where they control, monitor and confirm or not political elites. Local elites operate within their domain of influence, in which they control part of the electorate and use them to further their political objectives, while the people are exposed to the many influences, including that of the media.

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I. Introduction

The Albanian path to democracy started after the demonstrations of December 1990 as part of the democratic revolutions of 1989-1990 that swept the whole communist Central and Eastern Europe. Pluralism was negotiated with the old elite, and only in 1992 did the new Democratic Party (DP), self-positioned on the right of the political spectrum, earn its first governmental mandate against the Party of Labour, soon to be renamed Socialist Party (SP). Sali Berisha, a former Secretary of the Party of Labour, became president. As the presidential prerogatives increased, his regime began to "show worrying signs of authoritarianism" (Bideleux and Jeffries 2007: 45). The elections held in 1996 were considered to be heavily manipulated, but the people were appeased by the proliferating pyramid-schemes, which collapsed in January 1997, costing a lot of families their savings. An insurrection defined as civil unrest followed. The Albanian state collapsed and the country was led by an interim government until the election of June 1997. The Socialist Party governed Albania until 2005, whereas Berisha led the opposition as the head of the DP. This period has been characterised by fractions developing into new parties from both sides, mostly leaving the main party because of the autocratic leadership in the SP and the DP (Bideleux and Jeffries 2007: 45-72). After eight year of SP rule, the DP returned to power and Berisha became prime minister in 2005, while the Mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama, replaced the exiting prime minister, Fatos Nano, as head of the SP.

In the 2009 elections DP and its right-wing smaller pre-election allies won a discrete majority of 70 (out of 140) seats in the parliament (VOANews.com 24.07.2009) and entered into an alliance with the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI) led by Ilir Meta, former SP prime minister who left the SP after power conflicts with Nano in 2004. SMI had only 4 seats in the parliament, but they were crucial for the DP to form the government, so they managed

to have Meta appointed vice prime minister and Dritan Prifti as Minister of Economy. The SP declared that the elections' results were manipulated, in particular because the Central Elections Commission (CEC) refused to open a few ballot boxes, which they declared as irregular. The SP continued to protest and requested the opening of the ballots and recounting of the vote, arguing for full exposure from the government, a request that was denied. Consequently, they have been continuously boycotting the parliament as illegitimate. After failed attempts to mediate between the government and the opposition from the international community, CEC following routine procedures destroyed the ballots in early January 2011 (BBCAlbanian.com, 8 January 2011). Meanwhile, the SP continued to argue against the illegitimacy of the government and accused several ministers, including those of SMI of corruptive abuse of governmental power, which culminated in January 11, 2011 with the publication of a video recording in which the Vice Prime Minister Meta and Prifti, who had shortly been removed from his position, were discussing corruptive deals over a tender offer. The Socialist Party announced a new wave of demonstrations, which were to start on January 21 and which would request the resignation of the government and the delivery of the corrupt officials to justice.

On the 21st January 2011, according to official reports twenty thousand people demonstrated against the current government in the city of Tirana, marching from four different directions[1] and arriving in front of the Prime Minister's office. As a result of the confrontation between the people and the order forces, three demonstrators were killed, tens of demonstrators and police officers were injured and a fourth person died in the hospital (*Shqip* 26.01.2011). Immediately after the killings, the opposition accused the government of killing peaceful protestors on the street and demanded institutional justice while asking the government to take responsibility and resign. The government claimed that it had been target

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[1] This is the enactment of an Albanian expression "nga të katër anët e vendit", which means "from all over the country".

of a *coup d'Etat* and that people were murdered by the opposition, so that they could use them for political reasons. That is why the prime minister publicly attacked the General Prosecutor (GP) and accused her of being part of the *coup*, and eventually refused to deliver the guards called to testify by the GP's office. Although eventually the guards and other people, including the prime minister and several members of parliament were called for a preliminary investigation, nobody has yet been held responsible or officially charged.

The event was shocking, considering that in the official reports the country has been making "progress" in terms of consolidating democracy and working to achieve EU and NATO membership. Acceptance to NATO in 2009 and the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in the 2007 and the Visa Liberalisation Agreement in December 2010 have been considered positive indexes of the democratic consolidation process in the country. Authors like Bideleux and Jeffries (2007: 72) called the type of regime and its practices in Albania "a rude yet very vigorous democracy of sorts", in which although party politics is rough and there are frequent allegations of electoral malpractice, "since 1999 Albanian politicians and voters have not looked to violent conflict, the army, paramilitary forces or coups d'etat to determine political outcomes", which the authors define as "notable achievement". And yet, rudeness turned into violence.

Such behaviour would seem to confirm the pre-dominant perception in the West of Albanians, understood within the wider context of the Balkans that "this part of Europe is frequently shattered by unpredictable outbreaks of violence" (Kressing 2002: 14). The stereotype is built upon a combination of the Ottoman legacy, the socialist legacy and the different path to modernisation these countries have undergone compared to the rest of Europe (Todorova 2004: 10-17). And then the ethnic conflicts that characterised the first ten years of transition "fuelled the pictures of this Balkan otherness, cementing the impression

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that despite all efforts this part of the world is not able to Europeanise itself" (Kaser 2002: 28).

Until the fall of communism, Albania was widely unknown to the eastern and western publics alike. First it was because of it being part of the Ottoman Empire, within which it was peripheral, anyways. So, the limited information that was available came from the nineteenth and early twentieth century writers, who fostered myths and stereotypes of the country and people as violent and revengeful "barbarians", which was co-existent with its opposite of the "humble, proud, brave and righteous mountaineer" (Kaser 2002: 28). Then the socialist legacy put the country, as all other Eastern European countries, into a different ideological and developmental track from that of Western Europe. This experience reinforced their marginality, in particular due to its 45 years of self-isolation under the communist regime of Enver Hoxha. Both legacies have helped the creation of "a very distinct character for Albania that has been described as Archaic – Oriental – European" (Kressing 2002: 13-14).

Furthermore, the image seems to have persevered even after the Cold War, in particular because of the extent to which they shaped the international intervention packages that were offered to the country (Pandolfi 2002: 204-5). The discourse of the external aid soon developed into that of international state-building, according to which in order for the transitional countries to succeed in building democracy and not failing economically is to build their institutional or state capacities, which would then provide the frame for the becoming of resilient and democratic citizens. Such understanding of the state is that of a de-politicised entity, which should be built according to the principles of efficiency (Chandler 2010).

Exposure to the image that was and has been dominating the outside world also affected the way Albanians see themselves in relation to the rest of the European continent. The communist isolation period had affected not only the perception of the West, but also

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Albanians' image of self. The communist rhetoric fostered an identity of self-pride and righteousness which was rooted in the National Revival discourse but fed with the party ideology so intrinsically that the fall of the regime caused a serious shock to their national identity, as well (Sulstarova, 2003: 96-7; 102).

So, the period of transition in Albania has been characterised by "continuous massive changes in the spheres of society, communication and economy politics" (Schwandner-Sievers 2004: 105). Exposing oneself to global flows of 'ethnoscapes', 'mediascapes', 'financescapes' and 'ideoscapes', Albanians have experienced the repeated collapse of government and state in various periods which has encouraged "individual initiatives and re-definitions of political structures on both a local and national scale as well as disillusioned expectations of quick prosperity following an international policy driven implementation of economic liberalisation and attendant changes" (Schwandner-Sievers 2004: 105-6).

The exposure to a post-communist global world has affected Albanian political, economic and social development even more because of "the contradictory outside influences in the 1990s, as many times in her history before" (Kressing 2002: 22). Albania's modern state history presents several instances of struggle against foreign imposition or influence as well as against local leaders' tendencies to corrupt and autocratic patterns of power.[2] Such tensions have resurfaced in the latest period of transition to a democratic regime, which has also been characterised by ongoing re-definitions of the political reality.

Currently, the contradiction is not only the result of the differing attitude of the many actors that have been operating in the country, but also of the ambiguous reporting of the

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[2] After 500 hundred years of Ottoman rule, Albanians declared independence on 28 November 1912, but it was not recognised until July 1913, when the Conference of Ambassadors in London decided to grant it conditional to their distribution of territories, an appointed external sovereign and an international presence in the country. Plus in 1928, Prime Minister Ahmet Zogu declared himself "King of the Albanians" and prosecuted all political opposition. Several invasions and territorial claims were made until the end of World War II, when the communists came in power, under the isolated "one country socialism" regime of Enver Hoxha (for more on Albanian history see Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994; Elsie 2004; 2011).

international organisms present in the country. One example is the reporting on elections, which have been regularly monitored by OSCE/ODHIR. In the executive summary of the report on the national elections 2009, we read (italics added):

> The 28 June 2009 parliamentary elections marked *tangible progress* with regard to the voter registration and identification process, the legal framework, adopted in a consensual manner by the two main parties, the voting, counting and the adjudication of election disputes. These *substantial improvements were overshadowed by the politicisation* of technical aspects of the process, including during the vote count and tabulation, which temporarily blocked the counting process in some areas, as well as by *violations* observed during the election campaign. These actions of political parties *undermined public confidence* in the election process.
> While meeting most OSCE commitments, these elections did not fully realise Albania's potential to adhere to the highest standards for democratic elections. The conduct of democratic elections depends also largely upon the commitment of all Albanian political parties to respect the letter and the purpose of the law and to discharge their electoral duties in a responsible manner in order to preserve the integrity of the process (OSCE/ODHIR, 2009: 1).

The language used suggests that the elections were not democratic, although there seem to have been made some improvements compared to previous rounds, which likewise were considered acceptable.

Some of these themes in which "meaning is created and contested" (Taylor 2001: 9) had already been articulated in the Albanian media but they were accentuated and proliferated by the event of January 21. Thus, while previously the media was mostly concentrated on denouncing corruption, after people were shot in the square, the attention was focused on the broader effect of the "incident", and the initial purpose of the demonstration was intertwined with a myriad of themes such as political violence, the state of democracy in the country and the relationship between the various state institutions; the relationship of the state institutions with its citizens; identity; and the role of the international community in domestic politics. Commentators were skewed in two main positions, although at various degrees, the first one being in support of the government and the second against it, which was reflected in their conflicting interpretations and representations of the political reality in Albania. Furthermore, as the analysis will show the interaction with the outside world has become central in the

Albanians' perception of self, as a fundamental way of defining themselves as compatible or not with the western model of democracy and citizenry.

There are two competing representations of Albania and Albanians in the media. The first one is that of a perceived image of a primitive and violent country and people, unable to build a sustainable democratic regime and therefore need the external intervention of the international community to guarantee the continuity of democracy in Albania and prevent that it slips back to authoritarian forms of rule. The second representation is articulated against the first one, and its supporters argue for an understanding of the political situation and political behaviour as the proceedings of a context of politics in which conflict is normal, as long as actors involved have interests and objectives, whereas international intervention is considered as a violation of the country's sovereignty and consequently a negative influence for the democratisation process in Albania.

The question is then how are these political controversies created? How are media accounts constructed in order to create assumptions and beliefs about specific events, courses of action or political actors? What are their intentions? What do they tell us about patterns of power and the attitudes towards these patterns? What do they tell us about Albanian democratisation? These questions encouraged me to undertake this project of researching political discourses in the media and analyze the patterns of power that cause the ambiguities in the Albanians' perception of self, which underlie and shape the discourse of media commentators, who construct their position in support or against such patterns and present them to the general public in an attempt to legitimise and/or engage into political action. These interpretations are so conflicting that they create ongoing tensions in society leading to continuous crises that have put the political process in a deadlock.

In this thesis I am going to argue that through mainstream media discourses such as opinion articles, we can identify accepted patterns of power in which the international

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community is the authority legitimizing or not the acts of the political elite, which then control each of "their" people, while trying to influence the rest of the public opinion. The alternative discourse, which is underrepresented in opinion articles of the mainstream media, tries to demarcate Albanians against such influences, by supporting the claim that it is or it should be the people as a body politic that transfer their decision-making power to political representatives, which interact in their behalf at the international level. And because no external actor can replace the people, the moment the political elite do not respond to the will of the sovereign, then they lose legitimacy and turn into usurpers.

The study of media discourses is relevant because of the relationship that exists between such media discourse and public opinion. Although they are treated as "two parallel systems of constructing meaning" (Gamson and Modigliani 1989: 1), we need to explore the media discourses to which the society is exposed to in order to understand the formation of public opinion on a particular issue or event. Discourse is, as Fairclough (1992) tells us a mode of action and representation and analyzing it helps political scientists understand positions and attitudes of those that have constructed such discourse. Furthermore, through their language we can construct a picture of the influences under which the Albanian public opinion is exposed to, and which they employ in order to give meaning and construct the world around them. In other words, we use media as a window to look at the state of democracy in the country.

Apart from uncovering the specificities of the Albanian case, this case study can help us understand some dynamics that operate in a similar context, such as that of other Eastern European countries, more specifically the Balkan countries, with which Albania shares the Ottoman and the socialist legacy while being exposed to similar external influences as they are undergoing the democratisation process. Moreover, considering that the Balkans is a more unified concept in the mind of outside observers than to insiders, this case study should be

considered as a step towards more comprehensive intra-state or intra-Balkan studies "in an attempt to 'trivialise' the Balkans, and thus to normalise them" (Todorova 2004: 16-17).

Methodologically I will focus on the political discourses through which the "essence" of the Albanian society has been constructed (Kajsiu 2010: 234). The angle I have chosen is that of analyzing dominant discourses present in the mainstream printed dailies with the highest circulation, focusing on the particular case of opinion articles. Analyzing media discourses allows us to understand how language is used to create meaning and represent reality. As we identify patterns of language, we can "show how these constitute aspects of society and the people within it" under the basic assumption that "the language available to people enables and constrains not only their expression of certain ideas but also what they do" (Taylor 2001: 9). In the specific case of opinion articles, by looking at discourse we see how commentators (and possibly their publishers) see the process of democratisation in Albania and how they want their readers (the public) to see it. Although what we see is subject to interpretation, and in an analysis we might be including certain aspects, while leaving out intentionally or not some others.

This study does not pretend to be exhaustive, because due to availability of time and space, I will be doing discourse analysis on a selection of 50 opinion articles published after the event in five mainstream daily newspapers and covering a time period of ten days. However, this exercise is important for paving the path for a more in-depth comprehensive and comparative study of Albanian media discourses and their role in public opinion formation.

The paper is structured in five chapters. After familiarising the reader with the context of Albanian politics and state of affairs, the research question and its main thesis in the introductory chapter, in the "Discourse and Politics" chapter I present an overview of the theoretical debate on issues of language and politics upon which is constructed the analytical

framework of the study. The approach to data selection, analysis and the interpretation are explained in details in the methodology chapter. The subsequent analysis chapter focuses on the interpretation of three main themes: the international community; Albanian identity with a special focus on the concepts of the people, political violence and the elites; and the state of democracy in the country. I conclude with a summary of the main research findings, explain some of its limits and provide a few suggestions for further research.

II. Discourse and Politics

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework upon which my analysis is based. As I am going to describe the patterns of power that underlie the competing representations in the opinion articles of mainstream Albanian media, I begin by explaining what political communication is, the role of the media in contemporary politics, the role of discourse as a discursive and social practice, and move on to explain the mechanisms that are employed discursively to reproduce and transform power patterns in a society.

Political communication has become a multidimensional phenomenon conducted in various forms both face to face and through mediation of people or structures. With the professionalization of politics, even its communication has proliferated in particular thanks to the mass media. The political process is already three-dimensional and politicians now operate within two parallel political environments, each with its own practices and discourses, namely the substantive policy making, also known as elite politics, and the hype, in which imagery and mythology are manufactured, also known as mass politics. The third dimension has become the meta-level in which the political game is planned and managed (Louw 2010: 11).

In order to understand media discourses and present a plausible interpretation of the underlying power patterns that we can observe in them, we need to see how these three dimensions interconnect and interact. The elite politics is conducted by the so-called insiders and semi-insiders, which we can also call producers. Insiders are the ones who actually take the decisions, thus shaping political reality, whereas semi-insiders are collaborators of the decision-makers and act as intermediary between the political elites and the masses. The relationship of the masses with the political elites is complicated, in particular because the elites are usually part of the state, which is a provider of benefits, but which can also posit

threats to its own citizens. In a democratic situation the state is considered an instrument that works for the people. Nevertheless, it is directed and operates through elites, who in many cases are perceived as if they use the power conferred to them by the masses for their own purposes. This perception is reinforced when the state is seen as working against or neglecting the majority of its own citizens. In the first scenario the citizens recognise the state as legitimate and identify with its structures, whereas in the second the citizens antagonise with the elites that control the state, which means that the relationship between state and citizens resembles the patterns Edelman defined as "Now it is 'us' and often it is 'them'" (Edelman 1985: 1).

In order to ease the tension between elite politics and mass politics, it is the semi-insiders who facilitate the relationship between these two groups. They are usually well-educated individuals, perhaps middle-class, which do not hold decision-making positions in the state structures, but work for the insiders in creating the hype with which the outsiders, i.e. the general public, are presented with and expected to be subject to. They work with the media mostly in the role of commentators, serving as interpretative or persuasive intermediaries between the elites and the masses, which means that they have the means to articulate and distribute their thoughts to wider audiences of outsiders, or consumers, mostly through mainstream media. Their power stands in the selection and shaping of the themes to be found in political discourse, thus attempting to influence public opinion.

Public opinion is a process characterised by conflict and disagreement on how public issues should be understood and resolved. Individual opinions are the building blocks of a collective opinion. They gain significance beyond the level of individual thought and action only when joined and somehow integrated together. Without a comparative process for the assumptions, feelings and beliefs of others, whether in accord or disaccord with their own, though, individual opinions do not tell us much of the collective public opinion, unless there

is mutual awareness which emerges from the process of communication, which in our case is facilitated by the media; and which in turn leads to the emergence of collective opinion (Crespi 1997: 47-9).

Because of the ubiquity of media in current political communication, its role is inescapably ambivalent in this respect. Media representations are not univocal: "leaders are perceived as tyrannical or benevolent, wars as just or aggressive, economic policies as supports of a class or the public interest, minorities as pathological or helpful" (Edelman 1988: 2). The whole political spectacle is constituted by media continuously constructing and reconstructing issues of public concern, such as social problems, crisis, enemies, and leaders, thus creating a series of threats and reassurances for the publics concerned with them. They are meaning machines that generate points of view, and therefore perceptions, anxieties, aspirations and strategies. Political controversy revolves and feeds on conflicting interpretations of current political actions and developments. Consequently, media accounts of political issues, problems, crises, threats, and leaders become devices for creating contrasting assumptions and beliefs about the world rather than stating facts. These representations of political reality are used as instruments of winning support and opposition for specific courses of action and for particular ideologies (Edelman 1988: 1-11). In other words, they are employed both to stimulate and/or discourage existing frames, which turns them into competing representations (Gamson 1992).

Fairclough (1992: 62) recommends that when analyzing language as discourse, the scholar has to take into consideration several dimensions, which are discourse as text, as discursive practice and as social practice. When we look at discourse as text, we should see it as a way "to uncover and de-mystify certain social processes in this and other societies, to make mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagogy, and propaganda explicit and transparent," and then we look for "as many indicators, data and knowledge as possible

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concerning the whole context of these processes (which) have to be examined, to enable us to interpret and understand how and why reality is structured in a certain way" (Wodak 1989: xiv). It is at this point that we can also investigate whether there is any discursive change in relation to cultural or social change (Fairclough 1992), and if we observe a change in language, then we consider it as a manifestation of social change (Wodak 1989: xv).

There is a linguist dimension to discourse as a referential representation of reality, as well as a metaphorical one realised through its words and grammatical structures (for example Halliday 2007: 261; or Wodak 1989), but for the purposes of this study the most relevant aspect in analyzing political discourse is to see language from the perspective of a discursive and social practice. That implies two important elements: firstly, that discourse is a mode of action "one form in which people may act upon the world and ...upon each other, as well as a mode of representation" (Fairclough 1992: 63); and secondly, that "discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure," (Fairclough 1992: 63) which means that social identity and the very norms and institutions behind them shape discourse. So, language is a way not only to represent the world, but also to give meaning to it, i.e. constitute and construct the world in meaning (Fairclough 1992: 64).

Discourse is constitutive in several aspects such as social identities, social relationships and systems of knowledge and belief. Through discourse we can read into and understand how people perceive and describe their own identity, how they understand and construct their relations to each-other and to things or institutions, and how they construct their system of knowledge or belief. Due to its identity, relational and ideational functions, discursive practice contributes to both the reproduction and the transformation of a particular society (Fairclough 1992: 65).

Discursive practices are not separated from social practice which means that discourse is not only where power struggles are fought but also something over which power struggles

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are fought for. As a social practice discourse has economic, cultural, political or ideological orientations that are interwoven into it, without any of them being reducible to discourse. As a political practice, discourse "establishes, sustains and changes power relations and the collective entities between which power relations obtain" (Fairclough 1992: 67). As an ideological practice, it "constitutes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations" (Fairclough 1992: 67). These practices are not independent, "for ideology is significations generated within power relations as a dimension of the exercise of power and struggle over power" (Fairclough 1992: 67). In other words, it is a struggle for hegemony, in terms of producing, distributing and consuming texts, a struggle that contributes to the reproduction or transformation of the order of discourse, i.e. how prior stories are articulated in new as well as existing contexts of social and power relations (Fairclough 1992: 86-93).

Thus, language is not a neutral means of reflecting and describing the world (Gill 2000:176). Consequently, when analyzing discourse, one should be aware of the presence of intentionality in the process. Competing discursive representations are shaped by the intent of persuasion, i.e. they are trying to establish one version of the world in the face of other competing versions, what Fairclough above called establishing or confirming one's hegemony. The latter concept was introduced by Gramsci, according to whom hegemony was composed of three tasks: building consent and legitimacy for the dominant group and support for their interests; organizing alliances between the various interest groups in society; and the deployment of coercion (see Leuw 2010: 14). Therefore, hegemony is constructed through the ideology of the power holders, produced by them to legitimate their position and claims. Furthermore, "the logic of hegemony presupposes the existence of a social field criss-crossed by social antagonisms and the availability of contingent ideological elements" (Howarth 2005: 323). Opinion formation is done through the employment of these ideological elements,

which operate through the mobilisation of discourse. In this way by mobilizing meaning the processes of ideology serve also as means of mobilizing consciousness (Thompson 1987 in Billig 1991: 14).

When analyzing opinion articles we consider them as social representations, both in their particular and universal senses (Billig 1991: 58). They are generated during transformations, through the intervention of the mass media or by the act of the individual in two main ways: through anchoring and objectification, the first one being a universal process, whereas the second a particular one. Anchoring is the process of reducing unknown things that seem threatening to ordinary categories, thus integrating them into the pre-existing system of thought. Considering that all societies have their own system of naming and classification, anchoring is a constituent process of perceiving that refers to a social universal. Objectification also turns the unfamiliar into the familiar, a process that has been described as the materialisation of an abstraction (Moscovici 1983 in Billig 1991: 63-65).

That is why Gamson proposes the combination of three elements when studying discourse: competing frames, media practices in forwarding and transforming these "original inputs" and the cultural tools by means of which people respond and assimilate them (see Donati 1991: 139). The cultural mechanisms employed in order for the persuasive rhetoric to be more successful are themes of common sense, which in the case of competing representations would even use common sense to criticise common sense (Billig 1991: 1; 20-2). Common sense has cultural and historical grounds, which means that in contemporary discourses one often finds the use of past events or stories to describe current ones by drawing parallels of positive or negative similarities and analogies. These modes of expression are called cultural resonances and are represented by different dimensions of cultural themes, as well as their counter-themes (Gamson 1992: 135-145). The cultural element in discourse is an expression of the dependence on the past experience in a particular society, the evocation of

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which provides the resemblance necessary to make the new content easy to capture. In that cultural past lie some basic determinants of the collective behaviour, and hence of public opinion. However, evoking the past is not enough to gain legitimacy and support, because despite intentionality, the results are dependent on more than one piece of discourse. Thus, public opinion can be explained by culture, but more completely so, if we look at the process of socialisation, the political leaders and the specific events (Doob 1966: 46-52; 60). Looking at them in context will definitely help us understand discursive practices and processes in the Albanian media.

A final element to be taken into consideration when analyzing media discourses is the construction of these social representations as "objective" and "impersonal". Potter (1996: 150) called the procedures designed to provide a sense of neutrality and detachment *out-there-ness*. These procedures are used to draw away the attention of the reader from the writer as a representative of a particular ideology or position, and hence free them from accountability.

These representations are found in the anti-politics discourse, in which, as Blendi Kajsiu (2010) speaking in the context of crisis of representation in Albania says, politics is blamed for the unsatisfactory outcome of the democratisation as well as social and economic development process. The understanding of politics in these constructs is reduced to an interaction between individuals, which excludes the institutional aspect, either intentionally or not. The result is thus the articulation of a separation of state institutions from politics, which would allow for a reformation, if not building of state institutions according to democratic standards as a pre-condition for democratic politics.

Such representations rely heavily on the discourses that come from outsiders, in particular from the western developed world. As already mentioned, post-communist transition was characterised by exposure to western perceptions and influences which have

created new power patterns and hierarchies within particular societies. To that we add the conditionality that came along with the aspiration to be member of international bodies such as the EU or NATO. It was not long before the initial foreign and humanitarian aid intervention of the 1990s was replaced by the new impersonal and depoliticised rhetoric of institutionalism, empowerment and state capacity building. According to this type of discourse intervention is no longer seen as violating state sovereignty, but as a necessity to prevent fragile transitional states from failing in their attempt to democratise and develop economically. Such discourse is based on the assumption that certain states are limited in their capacity to autonomously democratise (Chandler 2010: 189-191).

In order to understand how the international state-building discourse is being reproduced in the Albanian media we have to look at the underlying dimensions that constitute such discourse. David Chandler argues that these discourses are ideological too and that they serve the purpose of hiding interests of power. Nonetheless, they do reveal "political changes at the level of the Western Self's capacity for projecting power internationally" (Chandler 2006: 191). In a post-cold war era, the threats to the western way of life are no longer articulated as ideological or political, but as economic and institutional. In this discursive frame the understanding of different capacities serves as apologia for the status quo of international intervention, according to which it becomes paramount to assist weak or transitional states to build the institutional capacities necessary to eliminate threat (Chandler 2010: 191). The impact of such practices is already visible: sovereignty, for example, no longer demarcates the dividing line between what or who is inside and who is outside a particular political community. Poor countries as well as those eastern European countries, such as Albania aspiring accession to the EU, all under the category of non-western states, nowadays "lack even the formal capacity to formulate public policy independently of the

requirements of international institutions", having thus being reduced to administrative bodies of external international powers (Chandler 2006: 191-2).

III. Methodology

In this study, I analyze a selection of opinion articles published in the Albanian daily mainstream newspapers: *Shekulli, Gazeta Shqiptare*, *Panorama*, *Shqip* and *Mapo*, from January 21 to 31, 2011. The newspapers I have chosen are considered to be the most read in Albania, according to the regular surveys conducted by the independent Research Centre Monitor (*Monitor* 2010: 33). The selected dailies are considered as "independent", although you can trace some political inclination towards left (*Shekulli*, *Gazeta Shqiptare* and *Shqip*) and right (*Panorama* and *Mapo*), which means that the first three would currently be positioned as oppositional to the government, while the other two as pro-government. These newspapers are owned by larger businesses in the country, which fits with the description Lani and Çupi (2002: 80-86) make of the media in the Balkans as economically weak, hence linked up with various business groups, both local and international. For the case of Albania, they add that "the free press initially emerged as a party press. Subsequently, some steps were taken towards an independent press, but the threads that link the journals with the headquarters of the political parties generally still exist" (Lani and Çupi 2002: 82).

Shekulli, *Panorama* and *Mapo* have 24 pages each, *Shqip* and *Gazeta Shqiptare* 32 pages. These dailies cover issues like politics, chronicle, economics, sports and entertainment (news on art included) and are considered as broadsheets, but they also cover issues that classify as tabloids. They all reserve one or two pages to editorials, opinions and commentaries, ranging from one to four articles per issue, in which individuals of a sort of public profile comment on the latest issues of concern in the public debate, mostly political of nature; however, social and economic matters are also present. The articles do not necessarily embrace the main editorial line; they do nevertheless reflect it extensively. There are attempts by *Shekulli* to put a disclaimer about the opinions held in that section, while we see in *Shqip* and *Mapo* articles that clearly go in a different direction from the editorial line. For example,

Galdini has been an official in the political administration of the Berisha government but manages to publish his opinions in *Shqip*, while Pirro Misha has published his open critique to Berisha's political behaviour in *Mapo*. A plausible explanation for this might be personal connections as well as public profile of the writer, which allow certain people to make their opinions more visible in public, even through writing newspaper articles.

The writers range from professional journalists such as Sokol Shameti, Anila Basha and Edlira Gjoni, prominent well-known journalists or so-called opinionists such as Fatos Lubonja, Andrea Stefani, Mustafa Nano or Henri Çili (people who have started their career and journalists, but who are currently involved in other business activities, such as Çili, and who are currently regularly invited to talk shows to give opinions on various issues) to lecturers at the university such as Grida Duma and Ermal Hasimja, professionals and representatives of the civil society such as Arian Galdini and Elsa Ballauri and other prominent figures such as the writer and literary critique Rexhep Qosja or the artist Xhovalin Delia. They become important influential political actors, because under the journalistic cloak they exert an influence that is reinforced especially when they publish under the umbrella of "independent media" (Patterson 2008: 23-39).

Newspaper articles were chosen not only because of the practical ease to collect the data, but also because of "their very ubiquity, coupled with intensity of usage, public attention and political influence" (Mautner 2008: 32). As a political scientist, the interest in newspaper articles is mainly in their being part of the political communication channels. Furthermore, the section on opinions or commentaries, although presenting individual opinions, are richer in their content and allow for a more in-depth analysis and interpretation of the political discourse. Despite their individual character, they do serve as social representations of themes competing for a legitimised position in the Albanian public discourse (Gill 2000: 276). They are written by semi-insiders and published in mainstream media, which means that they

represent an account of the ruling rhetoric or ideology, considering that the ownership of the means of production is the ownership of the means of persuasive rhetoric (Billig 1991: 4). They also reflect the constitutive context in which and about which they are articulated, and as such we can observe *what* is being said, as well as *how* is being said (Billig 1991: 20).

In this particular case, they are a sample of elite discourses and their interpretation of a particular political event: the demonstration of January 21; and as Mautner put it "if you are interested in dominant discourses, rather than dissident or idiosyncratic voices, the major dailies and weeklies are obvious sources to turn to" (2008: 32). Furthermore, categorised as opinions they give us the opportunity to understand the main representations of Albanian politics, and give us a hint of the main discussions in the public opinion, especially considering that they try both to reflect and shape such an opinion (Fairclough 1992: 55). In other words, by analyzing these types of articles you can detect the perceived patterns of power in the country.

Because of the size of the sample and the qualitative method of analysis, we cannot know how representative the ideas presented in commentaries are of the general Albanian public opinion. We do, nevertheless, know that "dissemination to large audiences enhances the constitutive effect of discourse – its power that is, to shape widely shared constructions of reality" (Mautner 2008: 32). Consequently, by analysing the opinion articles in mainstream daily newspapers we will be able to cast light on these discourses. In short, we could say we will be able to have a view on the current political discourse in a post-communist country still undergoing the democratisation process such as Albania.

The data were initially collected from nine newspapers covering a time period of 6 weeks starting from January 14 (one week before the event) until the end of February. I was downloading the newspaper *Shqip* from the website, as it was available for free on line in pdf format, a process which I started since the end of January. However, other newspapers allow

you only to copy-paste from the html version, which I tried to do regularly. Then, during field research, I went to the Albanian National Library, where I consulted the newspapers' fund. Firstly, I verified the data and collected the ones missing. Meanwhile, I contacted some of the newspapers, so I was able to have in pdf format Shekulli and Mapo, while Panorama and Metropol (one of the papers I later removed from the data body) I could have in hard copy. The rest of the newspapers were then photocopied.

1. Data body

The result of my preliminary data collection was a data body of 700 articles, which due to time and space constrains I was obliged to narrow down through a cyclical process (Mautner 2008: 35). The first scaling down of the data was done by reducing the number of the newspapers that I would analyze. The choice was difficult, because, although you see certain authors publish in more than one daily, most of them have different editorial lines, and possibly different readership (which due to lack of empirical studies, I cannot confirm). Nonetheless, the choice was based on three criteria: time period, sale rates, and variety of authors writing in the commentary/opinion section. I decided to analyze only the first ten days starting from the day of the protest until the end of January. Furthermore, as mentioned above, *Monitor* (2010: 33) conducts regular surveys on the readership and according to their data: *Shekulli*, *Gazeta Shqiptare*, *Shqip*, *Panorama* and recently *Mapo* are the most sold newspapers for the first quarter of the year. The third criterion is that of authorship: I decided to remove from my sample the articles of *Metropol*, *Koha Jonë* and *Standard*, because they had a smaller number of authors, i.e. their opinion section resembles more to a column, in which the same person publishes regularly, while others are sporadic. Likewise, *Tema* was removed because it is now available only online, and resembles more to a blog and its main articles are sometimes published in *Shekulli*.

The first selection reduced my data body to 128 articles, which I read through and conducted a preliminary analysis. After the preliminary analysis, I decided to select 50 articles (10 for each newspaper) for my final thesis, which range from approximately 500-2000 words. The selection was content-based and format based. I removed from my set most of the shorter articles as well as those without authorship (which were published under the Editorial column). I also chose one or maximum two articles from the same author, in the cases when they had published several times during that ten-day period. And finally the relevance of the content of the articles was taken into consideration. For example, Artur Zheji had published three articles in *Mapo*: "The day after", "Help us Arvizu!" and "The Honour of the Guard and the Honour of the Soldier." I removed the latter from the sample, because it was written as an appeal to respect order officers, without dwelling into the other themes that are at focus in the analysis. Whereas the first two articles give a more comprehensive view of the understanding of the event and what followed ("The day after"), and of issues of identity, as well as the relationship between Albanians and the international community, through the particular example of the American Ambassador ("Help us Arvizu!").

Although the articles were published from January 21 to 31, they were not selected on a one-per-day basis, but on their relevance to the research question of this thesis. However, in the total sample of 50, there is at least one article published on every selected date and ten articles for each paper. The selected articles are focused on themes such as the interpretation of the demonstration: causes, effects and responsibilities; predictions and recommendations on the future; and interpretations of the follow-up behaviour of the various agents such as the state institutions (in particular the General Prosecutor and the President), the government, the opposition and the international community. Some of them take a comprehensive outlook at the issue, while others concentrate on one single aspect and link it back to the event. In the first days the focus was on political violence, but soon moved to the issues of state and

institutional functionality, and by the end of this time period we see the expansion of the international community diplomatic intervention topic.

2. Sensitizing concepts and main themes

As it was explained in the theory chapter, Fairclough (1992) proposes to look at discourse as text, as discursive practice and as social practice. The first aspect of the framework entails linguistic analysis, such as the frequency of words and their use in linguistic structures such as phrases, sentences and eventually text. For the purposes of this study, I did not look in detail at the linguistic aspects of discourse, but on its discursive practice, which means that I was looking at the content of the articles and how concepts were used to explain the event within the Albanian context. In other words I have looked at language use as a form of social practice not an individual activity, as a mode of action and of representation. Consequently following Fairclough's framework, while analyzing the newspaper articles immediately after the event of January 21, I tried to detect the societal and cultural constrains that shape Albanian discourses and saw how discourse constitutes social identities, relationships and the systems of knowledge and belief in the contemporary Albanian context.

In order to do that I worked with sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954), which are concepts, ideas, notions or questions that serve as a starting point or guidance for a researcher, directing her attention to where to look, what to look for, and perhaps also serve as preliminary hypotheses. They are fluid and subject to change during the research process, and could easily be posed as questions in order to facilitate the researcher's use without risking turning into fixed definitive and isolated instruments. Such operating characteristics of the sensitizing concepts were very useful for they allowed me to be open to the new attributes that the concepts I was working with had acquired in the texts I was analyzing. As the literature suggests, it is easier to refine them or even replace them completely with new appropriate

context-specific ones (Blumer 1954; Denzin 1978; Connolly 1983; Blaikie 2000; Patton 2002; Guba and Lincoln 2004; Bowen 2006). In this way, I was able to identify the particularities of the context I was interpreting.

I expected many themes to be represented in the newspaper articles, so to guide my analysis I used some sensitizing concepts, namely violence, legitimacy, reputation, reconciliation, democracy, institutions, the people, elites/leaders, in the frame of competing representations for the event in question. With these sensitizing concepts in mind, I read and reread my articles to get familiar with them. Then I went through them again highlighting the sections in which the sensitizing concepts were mentioned, and putting the initials on the margins of each page, such as ppl for people or leg for legitimacy and so on. During the pre-analysis, I looked into the articles and just identified the sentences in which authors mentioned and/or spoke of the above, while realizing that there were more important concepts dealt with that I had initially incorporated. The pre-analysis was important because it helped me conduct the cyclical selection of the saturated sample of 50 articles. Then I realised that apart from the category, the attributes associated with these concepts were important twofold: firstly, because as partial propositions they help us construct a more detailed comprehensive concept; and secondly, because they construction of these concepts is done in two competing frames of representation, which if ignored would confuse our results (See Gill 2000: 179-181). For example, violence is specifically discussed as either verbal or physical, and state violence is put in juxtaposition with the violence committed by the mass of protestors. A similar process was conducted for all selected themes, which are:

Political violence was used to define type, i.e. verbal and physical violence, and agency, i.e. a state vs. the masses.

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Democracy was articulated as the process of democratic state-building. In that frame there were discussed issues of separation of powers and the independence of the institutions, trying to make the difference between governance and government, legitimacy and usurpation, state (institutional)-building and state capture.

The concept of the *people* was developing around what can be seen as a new articulation, in which the difference is made between the people as a single unitary body and various interest groups, which are divided into the lines of political, economic and social centre and periphery. Other attributes are those of public and private, which are discussed in terms of self-determination and instrumentalisation from the elites.

The concept of *elites/leaders* then is articulated in terms of their role in the events, focusing mostly on personality traits, such as autocratic, insane and closed.

Reputation was discussed within a major theme, such as that of *identity*, in which were reflected Albanian state-formation history and the recent past, as indicators of current behaviour in the frame of historical determinism and fatality.

Reconciliation and *reputation* were found to be directly linked with the concept of *international community*. The understanding of the media commentators was that their agency was decisive in the Albanian democratisation. The dynamics of power in the country cannot be clearly understood if we do not include the international community into the agents involved in the context.

3. Issues of validity

The method of analysis is based on the theoretical traditions of analysing discourse. Maxwell (2002:42) argues that validity of one's research in the particular case of qualitative research refers to the accounts, rather than data. There are three levels of validity to be taken into account (Maxwell 2002: 49-51): firstly, descriptive validity, which means that the researcher

has to be accurate in her reporting of facts. The way I ensured descriptive validity is by backing up my interpretations with direct quotations of the original articles, translated accurately, although unofficially, by me. Secondly, it is interpretive validity which means basing the accounts of meaning on the conceptual framework of the subject of study. Therefore, I relied as much as possible in the language of the people under study, i.e. their words and concepts, be those conscious or not. Thirdly, theoretical validity is attained by the concepts employed, as well as the relationship that are believed to exist among them. In order to achieve that I worked with sensitising concepts which guided my analysis and helped me identify the main themes in the data body.

Furthermore, while the above-described selection process provides a clear understanding of the discourses to be analyzed, it also contains certain limitations. The number of articles, their media distribution as well as chronological distribution is limited, and selected according to non random procedures. Therefore we cannot draw any generalisations from our results (see conclusion).

There is obviously more to these opinion articles than the selected themes, but at a certain point a guided selected had to be made, and while it does not pretend to be a complete expose of the contemporary political discourses in Albania, it does, however, aim to understand them by opening a window through media into such discourses. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the accounts presented in the analysis below are inescapably an inference and a construct of the author of this work.

IV. Analysis

In this chapter I will present the main findings of my analysis. The themes discussed here are the international community; issues of identity explained through the subthemes of the people, political violence and the elites; and the state of democracy and democratic institutions in the country. The main claim is that the perception of the outside world is central to the way political reality is constituted in Albania. Therefore, media accounts attribute an extended power of leverage in the way domestic politics are conducted to the international community.

There is a relatively clear pattern of pro- versus anti-government discourses, along the lines of pro- versus anti-government media. *Mapo* and *Panorama* are mostly pro-government, with the exceptions presented in the Methodology chapter, whereas *Gazeta Shqiptare*, *Shekulli* dhe *Shqip* are anti-government, although in *Shqip* we have two articles that are pro-government (Galdini 26.01.2011 and Duma 26.01.2011). While pro-government discussions are complying with the international authority, there are two distinguishable patterns in the anti-governmental articles: that of compliance, but which produces an alternative representation of the Albanian reality in order to gain support for their party; and that of critique, which demands the international community not to violate democratic rules of the game, including sovereignty.

1. International Community

The analysis will start with the interpretation of the international community theme. Considering that the construction of the competing representations in the Albanian media is based on the perception of the role the international community plays in domestic politics, it is important to start by analysing what the international community means for the media commentators and how they are situated in the accounts about political reality. Knowing how

the media sees and interprets the position of the international community will help us understand their accounts on the related themes of identity and state of democracy in Albania, as well.

The international community is referred to in Albanian dailies as: the internationals, the international factor, international community, the diplomats, the West, Westerners, EU and the US, Europe and America, our partners, and international allies. In the first days after the January 21 demonstrations, the international community is briefly mentioned, either as an entity or body to which Albanians have to report to because of their international engagements, such as membership to NATO or the aspired membership to the EU. Both pro and anti-government media express their concerns on how the demonstration will affect Albanian reputation in terms of EU conditionality. In one anti-government account, the author arguing against violence and states that "we are not pretending to enter Africa, but Europe and as Europeans" (Delia, Shqip 23.01.2011). Another one argues that political murders are unacceptable for a NATO member and an aspiring EU candidate: "but murdering someone in the middle of Europe, just because they expressed their anger in a demonstration, for a NATO country that aspires to be accepted in the EU, this is unacceptable" (Gumeni, Shqip 27.01.2011). Likewise, EU membership is threatened by the demonstrations of January 21, even for a pro-government author, who says that: "last Friday their European future was once again threatened" (Ylli, Panorama 23.01.2011).

The discussion of the position of the internationals proliferated immediately after the first declarations of the international representatives who condemned the violence in the square and appealed for consensus and return to the institutions. One of the most commented upon was that of the American ambassador, who called Berisha "a real statesman", because he accepted to withdraw his intention for a counter-demonstration one week after January 21.

Pro-government media interpreted the first international declarations against violence as a sign that the international community does not consider the accusations of the opposition as founded, on the contrary, they ignore them. As one author put it: "It seems like the attempt to divide the West in its position will not be successful. It seems like the internationals do not consider the socialist leadership as an actor anymore" (Cako, Panorama 27.01.2011). To strengthen their account on the international support for the results of the last elections, pro-government authors underline the fact that they were confirmed by the international community and their bodies, such as ODHIR: "the last elections have been certified by ODHIR's internationals" (Cako, Panorama 27.01.2011; but also in Marku, Mapo 24.01.2011). In one article, the author extends the international support to the overall performance of the government : "All of us are witness to the fact that Albania under the rule of Prime Minister Sali Berisha, during the last five years has scored a large economic development, hiring thousands of people, building roads, even in those areas where before it was impossible to go even on foot, building hundreds of new schools and developing a democracy that has been supported by the international community, in particular the European Union" (Bajraktari, Panorama 23.01.2011).

The subsequent declaration of the American ambassador was also cheered at by the pro-government writers. In one article the author analyses the declaration of the diplomat and praises it as "awesome, extra (super) exact, extra benevolent, extra professional" (Zheji, Mapo 25.01.2011). The same author in a different article interprets the diplomatic declarations as a sign that the international community does not approve of a change in government. According to him the declaration of the American ambassador Arvizu clarified some misunderstandings and speculations on the attitude of the international community towards the government. The authors argues that despite SP's attempts, the international community does not support the removal of Berisha from power: "it was articulated more clearly than ever internationally that

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the violent political move of the SP to provoke the fall of the Government and Berisha's 'resignation', does not have any international support" (Zheji Mapo 29.01.2011).

In the anti-government media, we find more criticism about the international community and the relationship local politicians have with them. In an article titled "We upset Olympus", author compares the relationship between Albanian politicians and the international community with that of the Greek mythology gods with the mortals:

> We have established weird relations with them, like that of a child with a parent, a pupil with the teacher, sometimes of a servant with a master. We call them to save us, to legitimise our word and actions, to support our authority. Any time our political communication freezes in the momentous gridlock, we ask them to play the referee, so that we can continue with the next similar conflict (Vehbiu, Mapo 31.01.2011)[3].

Similarly, in an article titled "The hasty declaration of a higher diplomat", the author claims that there is no opposition to the international community, in particular from the politicians, who are continuously trying to interpret the ambiguous international rhetoric so that they can adjust their behaviour accordingly:

> "Here in our country it has been years since nobody wants to go against the internationals, even less so against the Americans. In particular the politicians who do not want to stain their biography because they "endanger" their career from the "American wrath"...They are conforming to the international will, trying to guess what that will is by subduing to the strong ones in global politics. The whole 20 years Albanian politicians have been stretching to read properly the messages from abroad, although they have often been ambiguous criticizing and giving the right to both parties, thus allowing both parties to cite and use those parts that were convenient in their internal war for power (Toçi, Shekulli 31.01.2011).

The same author argues that the American ambassador, who has just arrived in the country is not well-informed about domestic politics: "Mr. Arvizu has just arrived in Tirana, so obviously he has not had time to learn the history of this country, and he has not had time to learn the political history of the last twenty years" (Toçi, Shekulli 31.01.2011); therefore his

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[3] We can consider Vehbiu's article published at *Mapo* an "outlier". His articles are usually published in the anti-government media, in particular *Shekulli*.

appraisal of the prime minister in a press release is considered by the author as a negative influence in the political developments of the country: "Such a declaration in an aggravated time and situation like this, instead of calming will enrage more those who have chosen the path of protest to express their position against the current governance…" (Toçi Shekulli, 31.01.2011).

In another article, the author accuses the international community for maintaining an 'impartial' position, which for him means that they are not intervening to stop Berisha, because they have an interest in preserving stability in the country. However, he argues, the crisis is so deep that "It is not the time for western institutions to have 'impartial' positions. This time the west has to be on the side of justice and truth not stability" (Stefani, Shqip 31.01.2011). Justice in this context means that they openly take a position against Berisha's autocratic rule.

Similarly, another author accuses the international community of distorting politics in Albania in such a way that they, as internationals, actually contribute to the crisis "If the Albanian people today are at a crossroad, the International Community has part of the fault" (Rrozhani, Shekulli 28.01.2011). Their behaviour is explained, by the author, as the result of the various international actors' economic interests, which encourage them to maintain their established equilibria of influence in the country: "the Americans, Italians or the French are holding on to a regime that has thrown them a 'bone', for their businesses or their waste, so they blinded by the economic concessions that Sali Berisha is making with the money and the lives of Albanians, are not being able to see Albania's current reality: that it is deep in tyranny" (Shekulli 26.01.2011).

Another reason introduced for the alleged biased attitude of the west is that of a trade-off for keeping Albania "stable" in face of a world where multiple conflicts are being held or started continuously. In the context of the uprisings of January 2011 in Tunisia, an author

draws a comparison between the attitude of the International Community there and in Albania shortly before:

> While supporting the events in Tunisia, so that democracy can triumph, in the case of Albania, they [the international community] are using a different standard, against the will of the people, although the instigator of the crisis is the same person that was thrown away from power and put at the periphery of politics for several years[4]. (Rrozhani Shekulli 28.01.2011).

Among the anti-government press, we also find authors arguing that the international community has kept the distance in Albanian politics, a position which has had negative influences in politics. One author states that "For some time now they [international community] are refraining from having an active role in the dialogue, but encourage and support it... What the internationals know, but do not accept yet, is that in Albania this option is ineffective and non-real" (Krasniqi, Gazeta Shqiptare 29.01.2011). Therefore he argues that there is a need for more intervention in order for the political impasse to be overcome. His claim is that unless the international community does not intervene and unless local actors do not attend to the international guidelines, the crisis cannot be resolved. As a result of Albanian inefficiency, the only optimal long-term solution the author can propose is that it is given by the internationals and simply applied by the local actors:

> "the international (EU) negotiator should provide an extra solution... EU and USA rightfully think that a NATO member and a candidate country to the EU should not expect external solutions, but in the current conditions in which the country has become pawn of a politics that is extreme, exclusive and without solutions, it is responsibility of Brussels to behave outside the diplomatic practices. If Brussels does not do this today, tomorrow it is not excluded that it will be obliged to bring once again diplomatic peace missions and why not, even military ones for the protection of tranquillity and normality in Albania" (Krasniqi Gazeta Shqiptare 29.01.2011).

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[4] The author is referring to the fact that Berisha was president in 1997, when the country went through the civil unrest after the pyramidal schemes collapsed. After that he remained in opposition for eight years.

This author considers the crisis so deep that it might escalate to an open fire conflict that will need international humanitarian intervention. In this quote there is a cultural resonance with what happened in Albania during the civil unrest of 1997.

Very few anti-government newspaper articles address the issue of sovereignty. In one such article, the author comments on the behaviour of the internationals by questioning the its consequences: "The ball is in the field of the internationals, who, after having violently robbed Albania's sovereignty during the last week, in the coming week will have to prove that they did so to remove from this sovereignty only the excessive amount of poison and insanity, and return it clear from poisons, but still not castrated from our necessary critical instinct" (Shameti, Shqip 29.01.2011).

In another anti-government media article, though, the author argues that in a state of crisis, sovereignty becomes a secondary issue compared to the urgent need for establishing order: "The sooner this [international negotiation between parties] will happen, the sooner the crisis will be overcome and the country will go back to normality. Any alibis against this, such as the rhetoric on sovereignty or foreign non-intervention, are minor issues in comparison with the urgent needs of Albania for a functional democracy and democratic stability (Krasniqi, Gazeta Shqiptare 29.01.2011).

This interpretation of the relatively smaller importance of sovereignty in comparison to order is present even in the pro-government media. One author, for example, admits that the violation of sovereignty is not good, but for him the crisis is irresolvable by itself:

> "The internationals have strongly returned in the Albanian political gridlock, which with the events of January 21 turned into a political crisis. While it is clear that this is a regress for the Albanian life and society, it is not time to weep over this. It is time, more than ever, to strongly support and trust our international friends and allies, at their competence and impartiality, in order to overcome this crisis" (Çili, the title of the article is also telling "The obligatory return at the internationals", Mapo 26.01.2011).

In another article, we see the author articulating the international intervention as a necessity that derives not only from the current crisis, but also because he sees Albania fall into the same patterns of civil unrest regularly:

> "Help us Arvizu! And deeply ashamed of myself and what I represent, I ask you, Mr. Ambassador: 'Take into your hands the 'democratic whip' of the State Department authority, and remove them from this spiral, and then forgive them because they know but they also don't know what they are doing!' So, help us Mr. Arvizu, this old country, apparently goes crazy every 15 years" (Zheji Mapo, 25.01.2011).

Thus, international intervention is interpreted in two main ways. In the pro-government press the international community is the saviour of the day, in a political context where the domestic political actors are incapable of compromise and consensus, but most importantly of democratic practices. They use the rhetoric of the international community to legitimise their interpretations on current events. In the anti-government press their role is questioned not only for their perceived partiality, but also as violators of the country's sovereignty. While for some commentators this is unacceptable, for others such external intervention is acceptable under the current impossible conditions, in which the need for stability and democratisation is more important than national sovereignty. They criticise the attitude of the international community by underlining their ambiguous diplomatic statements and their unjustifiable intervention in local affairs through political and diplomatic pressure.

2. Identity

Another theme that is central in my data body is the issue of identity. The western stereotype of Albanians seems to have permeated the perception of the media commentators about Albanian identity. In the analysis below we will see that media commentators describe Albania as a small and controversial country, which due to its Ottoman and socialist legacy is always at the border between in and out, Europe and non-Europe, West and East, modernity

and primitivism, civilisation and barbarism, democracy and dictatorship, and because of these dualities always falling in the fatality of repeating one's own previous mistakes.

The marginal and ambiguous position of Albania is seen in the way January 21 is interpreted. According to one author it "demonstrated in front of the whole world that this Albania of ours has remained in the borders between two worlds, as it has been all its life at the border between empires" (Gumeni Shqip 27.01.2011). This statement reflects all the ambiguities of Albanian society, which are inherited from its past and perpetuated in the present, as it remains exposed to contradictory influences, one pushing it towards an aspired ideal, such as the EU and the other towards its backward past, in which it was subject to one eastern empire or another, i.e. the Ottoman empire and the Eastern Bloc. A similar understanding can be interpreted in the following statement: "Let us draw our lessons, but not by following the example of Tunisia, because we are not pretending to enter Africa, but Europe and as Europeans" (Delia, Shqip 23.01.2011).

While in the quotes above the borderline image of Albania is underlined, in other cases the image of the violent savage is reproduced: "Weapons would be the last and tragic resort. We Albanians pull them out first, not because we are brave as we boast ourselves, on the contrary, because we are savage cowards" (Delia Shqip 23.01.2011). The self-accusatory tone in "we are savage cowards" can be explained by the existing patterns of power, in which Albanians are still imagined as "under development".

Furthermore, the concept of identity is intertwined with that of the reputation and shame. There is expressed embarrassment in comments like "every Albanian above the age of 25 yesterday afternoon has had a mixed feeling of fear and disgust also felt in March 1997 or September 1998. And shame: a lot of shame!" (Hasimja, Panorama 22.01.2011) or "[t]oday, Albania wrote another page of shame in its history" (Shqip. 23.01.2011). The use of "another page of shame" in the second quote implies also a recurring pattern, which seems inescapable.

The historical determinism is more explicit in the following statement: "So, help us Mr. Arvizu, this old country, apparently goes crazy every 15 years" (Zheji, Mapo 25.01.2011). A similar understanding of the inability of Albania to democratise is presented in the article entitled "Why do we repeat our history?" in which the author draws on the similarities between the civil unrest of 1997 and the current protest, focusing on Berisha's autocratic and violent behaviour to the Albanian people and the institutions, as well as the international community (Basha, Gazeta Shqiptare 25.01.2011). In the same article, it is also questioned whether Albania can democratise if they do not follow western models: "I do not understand why the Albanian political class cannot produce a progressive politics, a vision towards the future, but we keep thinking in the past. … Albanians do not need to invent new histories, because the examples of democracy are readymade all over Europe and the democratic world. We do take these readymade examples. But we take them from our bitter past. The fault is again of the Albanians."(Basha, Gazeta Shqiptare 25.01.2011).

Nevertheless, there are attempts to transform this representation of Albanian identity. Some authors reject that image, by arguing that "barbarism" is no longer a characteristic of the Albanian people: "it was thought that Albanians would once again get the virus of self-destruction, like in 1997 and in 1998. Bad omen thoughts, but nonetheless legitimate thoughts and suppositions. Fortunately, this self-destruction virus was noticed to be deeply dormant or dead in the Albanians of the new century… It seems like Albanians avoided this virus, or better still, it seems they have become immune to it" (Zheji, Mapo 29.01.2011).

Others engage into arguing that the "violent" protestors are not representative of the Albanian society. They are that part of the community that is employed for political purposes, but which does not and should not affect the reputation of a whole country:

> "Unanimously the Albanian citizens who respect their personal and national identity today do not justify in any way or form and for no reason that street conflict, that barbarian act that appeared in the national and international media…Students, friends and countryfellows are expressing sadness and strong indignation against the

injustice of being signed once again with the seal of primitivity because of the political conflict… Nobody can say that this Albanian society deserves this type of politics, because the Albanian society is not identifying itself with these events at any moment. What happened in the Tirana's boulevard does not represent our society anymore. Those individuals that ignited and kept alive a conflict without name, do not represent the Albanian society, nor the will or the way in which we are looking forward to building a democratic society" (Duma Shqip 26.01.2011).

Similarly to the other themes, even identity is part of the pro- versus anti-government debate. The discussion revolves around the explanation on who is affecting negatively Albania's democratisation and the implied "civilisation". Pro-government media argue that it is the opposition with its methods that is continuously threatening the "European future" of Albania: "last Friday their European future was once again threatened" (Ylli, Panorama 23.01.2011). Others argue that it is the government that is demonstrating its authoritarian tendencies, in particular the communist legacy: "Politics in the first plan[5]! The Party above all! Especially the leader!" (Gazeta Shqiptare 26.01.2011).

Again the counter-hegemonic discourse that rejects the stereotype as misguided because it confines the Albanian people to a state of political immaturity is under-represented in mainstream media. We notice it in the argument in defence of legitimate protest, according to which the protest of the poor shows a democratic spirit fighting for their rights against a tyrant government (Zaimi Shekulli 24.01.2011). In this type of discourse, the backward mentality is maintained by the current patterns of power, and that the only way to escape from it is a radical transformation of that pattern by destroying the whole machinery that reproduces as a mode of action and representation: "The battle that started in January 21 SHOULD continue not only until the fall of this mafia and monstrous regime, but until the full cleaning of our society from the dictatorial mentality and the primitive pseudo-intellectual

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[5] This was an expression used by Enver Hoxha, and it means "Politics first". What the author means is that during communism every aspect of social life was politicised, to the point that the rest was conditioned by politics, subject to it, or otherwise ignored.

and anti-democratic methods that are destroying the moral and values of our society" (Prifti, Shekulli 24.01.2011).

This type of representation is a reproduction of the essentialist stereotype initiated by western writers of the nineteenth century, and re-introduced by western media in the early nineties, and more significantly by the official reports of a long line of international organisations and other foreign representatives who have been reporting to their superiors and donors for the last twenty years (Pandolfi 2002). Considering that several of the commentators come from that section of society that was employed by the international organisations and other foreign agencies in the country, they serve as semi-insiders not only for the local elites, but also for the international community, whose interest is vested in depicting a backward Albania that needs external intervention, under the new de-politicising rhetoric of international state-building (Chandler 2010).

2.1 People

In the Albanian contemporary political discourse the theme of the people has become prominent. In the pro-government media, the people distanced themselves from the protest, whereas in the anti-government media, the people were protesting in the street to express their disproval on government's performance. These two competing representations are another example of the ambiguities that have arisen due to the tension between what the people used to be and what they are nowadays. Furthermore, both parties perceive of the people as a target group, which they need to recruit in order to strengthen their position. In order to do that they use the inclusive form of the collective "we", in which the people and the speaker/s belong to the same side.

The Albanian conceptualisation of the people was inherited in its Romantic understanding as a single indivisible entity, a surviving entity throughout a long history of

invasions, attempts to assimilation, religious conversion and genocide, reinforced throughout National Revival when elites glorified the picaresque as the genuine and authentic "albanianness". The same discourse was adopted by the communist elite in its attempt to embed the socialist regime into the web of legitimacy and wider public acceptance. To further their purposes, they "aimed at encouraging intermarriage and intermigration between different regional groups…, in order to overcome long-held local and regional loyalties, and to eradicate traditional distinctions, despite very limited individual mobility" (Hall 1994: 28-9).

A similar understanding of the people has been dominating even after the fall of communism until now, which explains why the major trend observable is still that of the commentators speaking mostly on behalf of the people, in particular those who argue against the government (Spiropali, Panorama 21.01.2011). We can argue that they are both part of the communist legacy and a reflection of mass party politics and populist discourses of present day politics.

Nonetheless, we observe some tensions that come from the image of the "savage" already explained above. There is an attempt to separate the collective we from the negative stereotype, while trying to encourage a positive one. The impact of the western discourse is visible through the way local discourses are constructed: the language tries to state what Albanians are not or are not anymore, rather than describe them with specific positive connotational attributes. In this sense, among the discourses to legitimise or de-legitimise the events of January 21, one of the debates in the media was whether the protestors were really part of and representing the people and whether they were a conscious mass of protestors or not.

The pro-government media describes protestors as part of non-representative "guerrilla" groups who were employed by the opposition to disrupt order (Marku Mapo 24.01.2011); "anarchists with 'sucked brains', which … look for heroes and martyrs in the

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name of the political ego of a single person" (Brahaj Panorama 24.01.2011); or "militants or paid individuals" (Cako Panorama 27.01.2011). By denigrating the protestors, they aim at delegitimizing the protest, an intention that is sometimes explicitly stated "the opposition cannot convince anyone to believe that the demonstration was a popular rebellion" (Marku Mapo 27.01.2011).

The pro-government rhetoric proposes a new element: the stratification of Albanian society. By defining the protestors as low class with no political will, there is an attempt to make clear the distinction between these individuals and the rest of society, and the proposed alternative is the middle class. So, in one article we read: "for the first time it is clearly visible the big lack of the middle class as a very important factor of the social lift, that takes the message from the lower class to the higher one and plays the communication functions between them making social life more possible and functional" (Duma Shqip 26.01.2011). In this context, the middle class is conceived as the political and social intermediary, that would serve as a stability factor between the elites and the lower classes.

There are several opinion articles that define the people as mute, expecting, traumatised, angry and suffering, and at the same time with an inferiority complex, ignorant and incapable of understanding, which makes them vulnerable to manipulation from their political leaders, either of the government or of the opposition, and potentially dangerous (Hasimja Panorama 22.01.2011; Delia, Shqip 23.01.2011; Krasniqi Gazeta Shqiptare 23.01.2011; Rama, Sh. Gazeta Shqiptare 27.01.2011; Ballauri, Panorama 29.01.2011). For example, in one article we read that:

"Until today, the people have not had time to understand what is done in their name: the sad part is that they feel more than the leadership, but the complex of inferiority against the leader, the lack of the tradition of association and organisation, the lack of the civic conscience and tradition, the lack of real political models that could open clear and non-corrupt perspectives for them, all of these make the people incapable to act" (Ballauri, Panorama 29.01.2011).

In some articles (for example Rama, Sh. Gazeta Shqiptare 27.01.2011; Ballauri, Panorama 29.01.2011), there is a clear reference to the previous history of the country, in particular the socialist legacy, in which the charismatic leader would manipulate the masses into compliance. Consequently, by defining the protest as an illustration of the political polarisation, they put forward the "anti-politics thesis", according to which people should distance themselves from the political parties, and give them the "silent treatment."

In the anti-government rhetoric, the people (with the exception of a core clientelist elite) have been excluded from state policies, marginalised and put at the periphery, where they are constantly ignored (Shameti, Shqip 22.01.2011; Koloreto Shekulli 23.01.2011; Zaimi, Shekulli 24.01.2011; Gjongecaj, Gazeta Shqiptare 25.01.2011; Kajsiu, Panorama 26.01.2011; Kabo, Gazeta Shqiptare 28.01.2011; Rrozhani Shekulli 28.01.2011). Therefore, the protest is considered "the attack of the peripheries", a reaction of the ever widening gap between the poor and their miserable life and the elites and their spectacular life promoted constantly on TV (Koloreto, Shekulli 23.01.2011).

Within this frame, we see an attempt to vindicate the right to protest as pertaining to the people:

> "Their goal is to show that in the crowd there have been some wretched individuals, who had come because the SP had promised them a job, individuals without education, individuals that come from the lowest social classes, that are badly dressed, whose breath smells like alcohol, and who are not afraid of being imprisoned etc… Let me confirm this hypothesis to the government representatives and their spokespeople. Yes gentlemen, most of the people that confronted with their bodies the rubber batons and the bullets … were really what you say: plebeians, proles, a subclass, starving and dirty individuals, call them as you like. But it is exactly this crowd of the hopeless that gives legitimacy to yesterday's events" (Zaimi Shekulli 24.01.2011).

The author argues that people protesting in the streets is not a mere mindless response to the will of a particular leader, but a demonstration of the people's realisation of their conditions, a reaction to these conditions and to the exclusion they witness on the side of the government and its institutions. When representation does not function, the people will speak by

themselves: "what happened in January 21 in Tirana has pedagogical value, as it teaches all that Albanians still know how to protest and fight. Although, unfortunately, only when the blade reaches the bone. Let this lesson be learned by all of those who pretend to come to power, if you suppress, if you steal, if you kill and if you taunt the hopeless, then you will face their weapons" (Zaimi Shekulli 24.01.2011).

2.2 Political Violence

What distinguishes the event of January 21 from other protests and clashes between the political forces in Albania is the fact that there was an outburst of violence to property that escalated in four casualties. This occurrence matches with the stereotype of violent behaviour as an attribute of Albanian politics, both verbally and physically, which is very prominent in the mainstream media interpretation of the event. Directly linked to issues of identity, the discussion revolves around two main points: the origin of violence and the legitimacy of violence.

Violence is used as an index of the democratisation in Albania. Some authors explain verbal and physical violence as indicators of the fragile Albanian democracy which has become a deformed show in which actors try to show who is the strongest (Hasimja, Panorama 22.01.2011; Misha, Mapo 28.01.2011), and for that they are capable even of sacrificing innocent people (Lubonja, Panorama 25.01.2011). One author describes the dynamics of power between political elites in this way: "In general political actors and factors of these last twenty years have had power as their sole objective, for which they have chosen the method of the annihilation of the other" (Lili, Panorama 24.01.2011).

We understand that there is a concern with the language of politics, which has become increasingly offensive and aggressive: "the language of political hate, whose discourse is aggressive, destructive, threatening, defamatory, blackmailing, up to murderous" (Lili,

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Panorama 24.01.2011). Such language is judged to be intentionally provocative of an ongoing situation of conflict. By turning it into a pattern, it is then difficult for parties to agree with each-other on issues of national interest, while encouraging cleavages through partisan lines. We observe two competing interpretations. According to the first one, state violence is justified in terms of order and protection of institutions, whereas in the second one, citizen violence is considered a "natural" reaction to a situation of political uncertainty and the threat or the clear absence of democratisation and democratic institutional practices.

The intentional use of violence is discussed by both anti-government and pro-government media, what they differ is how they interpret it and who they blame for it. The pro-government media justify police reaction as legitimate for defending the institutions from an organised attack. One of them in an article titled "Thanks to the state that did not fall" argues that it is because of the state institutions, including the police, that we could preserve our state and our life (Ylli, Panorama 23.01.2011)

At the same time, they argue against the violence of the demonstrators and blame the opposition for it. Some commentators foretold that Edi Rama's aggressive rhetoric would cause violence: "[d]uring these days the leaders of the Albanian opposition have been bombarding public opinion with threatening declarations, in which there is an appeal for massive demonstration, which according to the threatening party is foreseen to get out of control and degrade to violence" (Marku, Mapo 21.01.2011). A version that was then confirmed the day after: "violence was obviously inspired by the rhetoric of the opposition and its leader and their violent political discourse" (Çili, Mapo 22.01.2011). In this type of comments, it is claimed that the violent instinct has been historically inherent in the Albanian left: "Perhaps it is exactly this violent instinct that has traditionally characterised the Albanian political formations of the left, from that of Noli up to the left of Enver Hoxha, which has

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made possible the becoming head of the SP, twenty years after the fall of communism, of a leader of the anarchist type such as Rama" (Marku, Mapo 21.01.2011).

The most disturbing accounts are the pro-government ones in which authors argue that there was no substantial reason for a violent reaction on the side of the protestors, implying that it was a scheme organised by the opposition to manipulate the public opinion: "until the moment when three people were killed, the opposition failed in its lack of political control over a part of the protestors, who without any serious reason destroyed, burned and exercised violence on the police, private parked vehicles, on a part of state and privately owned property" (Nazarko Panorama 24.01.2011).

The anti-government media legitimises the protestors' reaction and condemns that of the state. Referring to the prime minister one author explicitly attributes him the violence that has been inflicted in the country: "he should not speak of violence, because he has been cultivating it all" (Fshazi, Shekulli 24.01.2011). Furthermore, "a government that sheds the blood of unarmed demonstrators can be tsarist, bonapartist, communist, fascist, but there is no way it can be democratic" (Stefani Shqip 24.01.2011).

Very few (Shameti, Shqip 22.01.2011; Zaimi, Shekulli 24.01.2011) argue that political violence is an expression of democratic will, an instrument of those that are marginalised by elite politics, and who have no other means of interacting with those in power. One of them describes the demonstration as a "genuine expression of democracy" and "the violence of Friday was born out of the right of the people for revolt, revolt against a tyrant that routinely infringes the social contract" (Zaimi, Shekulli 24.01.2011). If the tyrant uses law as an instrument of violence against its people, then the people will appeal to their right to revolt and present themselves in a state of nature and eventually use violence.

There are two competing interpretations of violence. The pro-government one condemns it as a criminal act, where the anti-government considers it as a political act.

Therefore, the accounts we are given on the origins and the repercussions it will have on Albanian society are also divided along the pro versus anti-government interpretations.

2.3 Elites/leaders

The concept of people is intertwined with that of the elites. From the many references above, we can see that the elites are considered as exclusive, clientelist and manipulative. According to the anti-government press political leaders stand in a subordinate position against the international community (see e.g. Toçi, Shekulli 31.01.2011); but at the same time they are the ones that control the people (see discussion on manipulation in subsection 2.1). Apart from the perceived patterns of power, a considerable role is given also to the individual leaders' personalities. Both the government and the opposition have their own group under control, but they address the whole population for legitimizing their position. But they are depicted as authoritarian and keen on personalizing power. In more than one article it is stated that it is difficult to advice them, a characteristic that is found in many autocrats.

In the anti-government discourse, some authors make reference to Berisha's alleged insanity (e.g. Dhima, Gazeta Shqiptare 30.01.2011; Rama, L. Gazeta Shqiptare, 27.01.2011; Aliu, Shekulli 29.10.2011). For example, in one article we read: "Albania is led by a patient. Unfortunately, the patient is not in the hospital, but in the Prime Minister's office. The largest psychiatric hospitals in Albania today are the office of the Prime Minister and the Parliament" (Aliu, Shekulli 29.01.2011). As we can see, insanity is attributed to the whole office of the prime minister and the Albanian parliament. Still, there are more comments about Berisha's autocratic personality Berisha; he is referred to as an "autocrat" (Rrozhani, 28.01.2011) and a "tyrant" (Zaimi, Shekulli 24.01.2011), while his regime "Salistan" (Blushi, Gazeta Shqiptare 26.01.2011), as he puts himself "above the law violating freedom, life and property" (Stefani, Shqip 24.01.2011).

Whereas in the pro-government press Rama appears to be an aggressive and self-destructive leader, whose actions are going to cost the SP a lot. So, we read: "By mobilising terrorist forces, Edi Rama has given an example of political ingratitude towards the citizens... Friday has changed the image of the socialists in the eyes of the Albanian people into that of some criminals that attack the state.... In that sense Rama has committed political suicide" (e.g. Marku, Mapo 24.01.2011). Because of their personalities and individual responsibilities is then used to argue for their removal from Albanian politics because they are representatives of authoritarian tendencies and autocratic leaders that still consider government as coming to exclusive power-holding and consequently, defend it as property: "It is time Albania gave birth to a movement that would take people in the streets to demonstrate peacefully but strongly ... to cast them out... We have to expel political leaders like Sali Berisha and Edi Rama, not only as individuals, but for what they represent... They are representatives of the culture of violence, immorality ... corruption, illegality that they encourage in the society" (for example Lubonja, Panorama, 25.01.2011).

The proponents of the alternative discourse address the issue from the perspective of the democratisation process, and look at the people as well as the elites as political actors, at this point, struggling for a variant of the political regime that would best fit their interests. Taking the side of the people they argue for a more democratic regime, for which political violence is justifiable (Kajsiu, Panorama 26.01.2011 and Zaimi, Shekulli 24.01.2011). For example, one author declares: "The battle that started in January 21 SHOULD continue not only until the fall of this mafia and monstrous regime, but until the full cleaning of our society from the dictatorial mentality and the primitive pseudo-intellectual and anti-democratic methods that are destroying the moral and values of our society" (Prifti, Shekulli 24.01.2011).

3. Democracy and state institutions

The topic of democracy and democratic institutions is ubiquitous in the articles following the events of January 21. The analysis evidenced that there are two main interpretations of the state of affairs in contemporary Albanian politics. The pro-governmental interpretation presents an Albania which has a still functioning democracy, despite the problems that led to the demonstration of January 21. Hence its supporters argue for the channelling of political clashes or conflicts in and through democratic means and institutions, such as the elections, the parliament, the justice system, and all the other related means foreseen in a democratic setting and constitution. They articulate the problem as an administrative issue of capacity building, which reflects the state-building discourse perpetuated by the international community. The counter-interpretation is presented by authors who argue that there is no democracy and democratic institutions in Albania; therefore, the only democratic action left is popular protest. Such ambiguities are very much present in the international reporting about Albania. Parties, according to their interests use certain elements of these accounts to construct their own. Pro-government media tries to reproduce the existing patterns of power, while the anti-government one tries to transform them in their favour.

Thus we see that pro-government authors argue that Albanian democracy is more or less functional, but jeopardised by events like the demonstration, which although a feature of democracy, are nevertheless a threat to it, so they should not be encouraged. So, one of them claims that "Albania is not a dictatorship, but a functional democracy, although a fragile one" (Cako Panorama 27.01.2011). Under such rhetoric, the reader could see the attempts to legitimise the existing government and its actions. Some are more explicit in their condemnation of the acts of opposition, whereas others while dimly admitting the possibility of a right to protest still condemn the very act of demonstrating or protesting as "non-democratic". So, they define the protest as an attack to institutions and an attempt to violently

overthrowing those in power, and an attempted attack against normality, as one writer put it: "a violent revolt aiming at the eradication of institutions and the creation of a new establishment" (Marku Mapo 24.01.2011).

For pro-government authors, attacking the government or the adjunct institutions means attacking the state, an action which is considered by them to be primordial: "For me and for every other common citizen, the office of the Prime Minister is an office of the State, without which you remain a tribe, a snobbish individual and you are not a statesman and a citizen" (Brahaj, Panorama 24.01.2011). By defining the office of the prime minister and a representation of the state, the author argues that attacking it means attacking the state, the very foundation of what makes people citizens and allows them to have a decent life. As the quote above infers, and later on the author states explicitly, the behaviour of the leader of opposition and his followers is non-democratic, and as such will not find the support of the common people and the international community.

Pro-government media considers the attack to government as unacceptable, so they describe protest as negative for democracy, because it allegedly destroys the fragile balance of the Albanian society. Hence, we read statements like:

> ...demonstrations like that … should be discouraged and severely punished... It is important that these types of demonstrations are not installed as precedents in the Albanian democracy, because this way we will never be able to have a stabilised society, a free society, a society in which power (i.e. government) is changed peacefully, in which we can elect freely and peacefully those who govern us (Çili Mapo 22.01.2011).

Drawing from the statements of the international community against violence, pro-government writers like the above reproduce that type of discourse by discouraging demonstrations and encouraging dialogue, so that "it gives way to political reconciliation, the reformation of the country, starting from the most important: the guarantee of free and honest elections in the country." In other words, "broad compromise, for the re-integration of the

opposition in the system, not only in the elections, but in the whole institutional life of the country" (Çili Mapo 22.01.2011). Such framing of the issue seems to accept the idea of protest, but not of the type of protest done on January 21, which also explains the appeal for dialogue and compromise in the name of preserving democracy.

Some pro-government authors argue that as a result of the opposition's representation of political reality the trust in institutions is not share by the whole society anymore. We are told that political polarisation has divided people, so they (people) now are confronted with two opposing truths (Çili Mapo 26.01.2011), one emphasizing the alleged normality of Albania's democracy...

> a normal democracy with a stable political and social equilibrium, expressed by the presence of 65 opposition MPs in the Parliament, the balance of the media and the equilibrium between independent institutions and the power of the government.

... and the other one stressing that

> There is a climate of mistrust pending in the Albanian society that the legal opposition, rightfully or not, has with regard to the political system, or more concretely the way in which elections are carried out in the country.

The pro-government interpretation is that "the opposition violated the rules of the political game, namely the constitutional law" (Cako, Panorama 27.01.2011); but because of the escalation of the conflict, in order to build a wide popular trust, they articulate the need for a new social contract, which has to be done through the employment of the existing institutions: "the need for a broad consensus up to a new Constitution and a new Republic, in order to solve in a new and better way the fundamental problems and those continuous crises, that have occurred to our democracy" (Çili, Mapo 26.01.2011). The proposal is ambiguous because the claims of the opposition are considered as "one of the truths", but because of the crises the controversy has caused the position of the government is not strong anymore, therefore a new deal must be made. This type of argument reflects once again the language of

forced compromise and consensus pushed forward by the international community, but which sustains the existing institutions as the only legitimate way of conducting politics in Albania, without taking into account the claim of exclusion put forward by the supporters of the counter-theme: democracy and democratic institutions are not functioning in Albania.

The voices against the government argue that there is no democracy in Albania. They describe Albania as a place where the government violently opposes criticism and where institutions do not function because they lack the necessary independence. The theme of rights, in particular of assembly and protest; that of the functionality of institutions; and that of the independence of institutions are interwoven in their articles. The event of January 21 is interpreted as a result of the malfunctioning of state institutions, such as the election, the general attorney and the government itself.

According to this representation of Albanian reality, the first evidence of the malfunctioning of the institutions is the protest itself. For example, one author argues that "if politics is not done and does not occur within the institutions, because the institutions are blocked, sabotaged or boycotted, then politics is not extinguished, it continues with the other mean, war" (Nurellari Shqip 26.01.2011). Likewise, the attempt to organise anti-meetings by the government is explained as a sign of transferral of the political loci in the street (Stefani Shqip 24.01.2011).

While these authors stop at stating that Albanian institutions are not functioning democratically anymore, others argue for a bringing politics back in, into the new institutions such as the square or the street in a pre-social contract setting where the body politic can constitute itself and recognise itself as constituted. Arguing that protest and people's violence is an expression of the extreme dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in the country of those without voice and representation, who have no other means of expressing their discontent but to react as they did (Zaimi, Shekulli 24.01.2011; Gumeni, Shqip 27.01.2011).

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Violating the right to protest is considered an assault to democracy. Authors declare that "democracy has been killed in January 21" (Kabo Gazeta Shqiptare, 28.01.2011); that "the Republic has collapsed in Albania and the state in which we live is an autocracy, where the law and the Constitution are respected occasionally or violated upon order and intentionally" (Kreka, Gazeta Shqiptare 24.01.2011).

The whole behaviour of the government is brought to the attention of the reader as the reason why institutions are not democratic and functional. According to anti-government media accounts the accusation of the prime minister that the General Prosecutor was biased were enough to put the justice system in the gridlock, and it was only under the supervision of the international community, namely the American ambassador, that the GP was able to finally call in the guards involved in the shooting (Stefani Shqip 24.01.2011; Gumeni Shqip 27.01.2011; Kreka Gazeta Shqiptare 24.01.2011). For example, in one article we read: "independent institutions were once again taken under the American 'armpit' in order to be protected from the majority" (Minxhozi, Mapo 27.01.2011). Furthermore, there is a call for international experts to investigate the events of January 21, which was supported by the government. These external experts were meant to provide guarantee of an impartial judgement: "Tomorrow the legal medical expertise based on the assistance of the American specialists might come up with a different conclusion, a third but definitive alternative" (Kabo, Gazeta Shqiptare, 28.01.2011), but the very fact that there was a need for external intervention shows according to the media commentators that there is no trust in the Albanian justice system, which has anyways, always been threatened by the attempts of the government, Berisha's in particular, to limit its mandate (Stefani Shqip 24.01.2011). As a result, the credibility of politics and of the independence of judiciary has been severely damaged, and by refusing the deliver the guards to the authorities, even the government's credibility is ruined. To gain some faith in the institutions, the government would have to step

aside and let the Prosecution do its job independently. One author explicitly states that "the solution can come only from the Prosecution" (Gjoni Panorama 26.01.2011).

The regime anti-government media describe is that of state-capture. Institutions are presented as not functioning independently, and the government as making personal use of the other institutions such as the police or the National Guard. The citizens in these accounts are described as utterly exposed and defenceless (Nano, Shekulli 24.01.2011; Rama L. Gazeta Shqiptare 27.01.2011, Rama Sh. 28.01.2011; Dhima, Gazeta Shqiptare 30.01.2011). The anti-government press define state capture as personalisation of power, institutional malfunctioning, lack of institutional autonomy and transparency has caused the current state of affairs in the country. One author accuses the prime minister of deluding the people: "Sali Berisha wants to sell us crime for heroism and robbery for governance" (Baze Shekulli 27.01.2011).

These views are synthesised in an article titled "Paper State[6]". The reader is given three combined reasons why the Albanian state is allegedly fragile: it is organised in a clientelist manner (clientocratic is the term used by the author), such organisation means that the clients are the major beneficiary and not the society in general therefore making the governance shallow, and finally because the model of development puts the state out of the society and produces a major social polarisation. These three interconnected factors according to the author show the reader that "we are dealing with a paper state, which in fact operates as a state only on paper" (Kajsiu Panorama 26.01.2011).

In most of the above articles, the issue of the democratic state-formation and state-building can be inferred through the extended discussion on the function of the institutions, the separation of powers and the relation between citizens and institutions. There are a few

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[6] From the article we can infer that it means the state has very weak foundations. At the same time it is a word game and it also refers to the fact that there is a detailed account of how the state should be in legal documents, but the rules are not applied, thus they remain true only on paper.

examples of authors that explicitly address the issue of state formation. Çili who was quoted earlier already, argued for a new constitution, as a potential solution. Another author speaks of corruption as a fatality which is leading to the definitive loss of the will for (democratic) state-formation. He engages in a lengthy explanation of how corruption can lead to crises that threaten the very existence of the state (Gjongecaj, Gazeta Shqiptare 25.01.2011). A third one suggests that the state-formation crisis is a repeated trend, which perhaps is connected to the inability of Albanians to form and have their own state (Basha, Gazeta Shqiptare 25.01.2011). The questioning of inherent democratic values and goals along with the historical deterministic approaches to the understanding of failures of Albanians to have a state and less so a democratic state seem to support the late 1990s early 2000 and ongoing western post-liberal rhetoric of capacity building and external state-building, in which state-formation can be assisted from outside by helping people and states build/gain the capacities/resilience to finally adopt democratic values and practices; a discourse which no longer considers intervention as negative and violating state sovereignty, but turns it into a language of preventive actions and capacity building (Chandler 2011).

V. Conclusion

In this study we tried to open a window through print media into contemporary political discourses in Albania. An analysis of the themes articulated in opinion articles published in five daily newspapers, discussing the demonstrations of January 21, 2001, shows that political polarisation is reflected in the media accounts. There is a pro-government and an anti-government rhetoric, which present opposing accounts and interpretation on the event, the behaviour of the various political actors and the implications it will have on the future of Albanian politics. Themes like the international community, identity and the state of democracy in the country are a reflection of the political polarisation that exists in contemporary Albania. These competing representations are used by the pro- and anti-government media as devices for creating conflicting assumptions and beliefs in an attempt to gain public support. There is an overall perception that the role of the international community is constitutive in constructing and validating political action in the country. However, accounts differ in their interpretation of what the international community is saying and what they expect the local elites to do.

The picture we see from the media accounts is that events, political action and political personalities are subject to the perceived judgement of external actors, whose confirmation or support is taken as the legitimating factor. Thus, the accepted patterns of power put the international community at the top, from where they control, monitor and confirm or not political elites. Local elites operate within their domain of influence, in which they control part of the electorate and use them to further their political objectives, while the people are exposed to the many influences, including that of the media, which as semi-insiders reproduce and/or transform the existing patterns of behaviour. Media commentators

are also subject to the influences of both the discourse of the international community and that of the local elites.

The pro-government press claims that the government has the support of the international community and that the police intervention during the demonstrations was a legal and legitimate move of a functioning state institution. They reproduce the international discourse on the fragile but nevertheless functional democracy in Albania and interpret opposition's demonstrations as an attempt to overthrow the fragile balance of the society. Therefore they appeal for compromise and consensus as a way to preserve stability and continuity.

The anti-government press interpretation is that Albania is not a democracy. The international intervention is forcing stability in a context where political controversy has led to a political gridlock that cannot be resolved, unless the rules of the political game are not changed. Through the articulation of the concept of the people as constitutive and of protest as political action, they ask for the transformation of the current patterns of power in Albanian society. The removal of the international community from the position of authority would finally allow for correction of current anomalies and the development of a legitimate and democratic politics, and consequently the establishment of a legitimate system.

Media discourses cast a light on some of the themes that constitute the continuous political uncertainty in Albania. They provide an interpretation of the political reality from the perspective of the semi-insiders, who, because of their connections to the political elites, nonetheless become their spokespeople. Consequently, although they might reflect it somehow, there is no way we can know how constitutive they are of the broader society's perception of the political reality in the country. The persuasive rhetoric underlying the opinion articles tell us that these representations are competing for legitimacy; however, we do not know how successful they are, in the sense of whether one of them dominates in the

public opinion. We can guess that there might be as much controversy among the population as there is in the media accounts. An assumption we can also base on the fact that in the last elections both parties have received half of the votes.

The analysis was focused on the detailed interpretation of 50 articles, covering a time period of ten days. Nevertheless, considering that it was a saturated sample, which was narrowed down out of a larger one, we can assume that it is quite representative of the mainstream media discourses in Albania. Furthermore, through discourse analysis we were able to look at the political media discourses and understand how political controversy is articulated and how competing representations are constructed in order to gain the support of the wider public opinion.

However, the findings of this study refer only to the media accounts on the event, the role of various actors and the political process as a whole. They encourage us to think of the accounts of the other three entities with which these media representations are interconnected. Future research could focus on the analysis of the discourses of political actors themselves, such as political leaders' speeches and other forms of public communication in order to observe the origin of political controversy and see how that is constructed. Likewise, an in-depth analysis of the international community reporting on Albania would also help us understand how they understand Albanian political reality. Although, methodologically more challenging, an attempt to analyze popular representations of the political reality would contribute extensively to our understanding of political processes in particular contexts. Finally, a comparative study of all these discourses might help us put them in perspective to one another in an attempt to have a glimpse at the complex bigger picture of politics. After all, the more windows we open, the more we will be able to understand political reality and ourselves.

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