

AAF CONTRIBUTION IN PEACE SUPPORT OPERATION BEFORE THE ENTRANCE OF ALBANIA IN NATO

Jonela Canaj*

*PhD.C, University of Tirana, jonelacanaj@gmail.com.

Abstract

Albania's accession to NATO constitutes a unique history of special relationship. This appears evident when it has been taken in consideration that there is no country in the Alliance that can base its NATO policy on a public opinion consensus exceeding 90 % of the population. Moreover, the history, population, culture, and geo-strategic of position offer a picture of a peculiar country that since the Italian Pelican and Alba operations in the Nineties has become a "security provider" able to contribute worldwide to the major NATO and European Union peacekeeping operations. Few nations experienced the profound transformation accomplished by Albania, while playing a crucial role in supporting Allied efforts to end the humanitarian tragedy in Kosovo and secure peace in region. Albania underwent a unique isolation that ends after 46 in 1991. At that time a multiparty democratic Parliament was established and Western freedom and values naturally become a common heritage of country ready to resume its role in the international community. In spite of dramatic events that struck the Western Balkans during the Nineties, Democracy in Albania strengthened its roots and grew quickly, overcoming also some "youthful errors". This historical process required vision, leadership, and an extraordinary commitment on the part of Albanian population. The satellite antennas that dot the Albanian town testify to the longing for free and pluralistic information issuing from a public opinion that since the early Nineties has strongly supported the Euro-Atlantic integration process. Among the countries belonging to the former Eastern bloc, Albania was one of the first to apply for NATO membership. Since it has joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992 (renamed Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997), the Euro-Atlantic integration has always been a major goal of all Albanian Governments and political parties. Looking back, the way paved by Albania toward NATO membership appears impressive: in 1994 Albania expanded its relationship with NATO joining the Partnership for Peace (PfP); during the same year, the Atlantic Council of Albania was established, bringing together the best representatives of the political, diplomatic, military, academic, and economic fields, as well as the new generations. In 1995, Albania developed the first Individual Partnership (IPP) and in 1996 the country entered the Planning and Review Process (PARP). In the same year, Albania forces joined the NATO-led SOFAR peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bilateral cooperation with NATO increased progressively in the light of the country's aspirant. In parallel Albania played a crucial role in supporting Allied efforts to end the humanitarian tragedy in Kosovo and in contributing to the stability of the region after the air campaign. On the occasion of the Washington Summit in April 1999, Albania achieved the Membership Action Plan (MAP) and became a NATO aspirant member country together with Croatia and FYR Macedonia. Since 1999, Albania was engaged in 8 MAP cycles and in April 2008 the NATO Head of State and Government meeting in Bucharest invited Albania to start Accession talks with the Alliance. NATO Allies signed protocols on Albania's accession to North Atlantic Treaty on 09 July 2008. The aim of this work is to do a preview of Albanian Armed Forces in contributing to all major NATO and European Union peacekeeping operations, ranging from ISAF to ALTHEA and from Georgia to Iraq.

Keyword: NATO, AAF, role, peacekeeping, contribution