Ferit BAÇA, PhD iD
University of Tirana, Albania
ferit.baca@unitir.edu.al

Majlinda KETA, PhD iD
University of Tirana, Albania
majlinda.keta@unitir.edu.al

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS: PREREQUISITES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF ALBANIA INTO THE EUROPEAN UNION

ABSTRACT: *The Europeanization of Albanian society is the process through which Albania aligns its cultural, economic, and political systems with those of the European Union to promote respect for freedoms and human rights. These strategic objectives can be best achieved by enhancing pluralistic democracy, state institutions, and the educational system attended by young people. Given that the democratic quality of any society is determined by the conduct of free and fair elections, it is vital to educate the youth about democratic principles and norms. Therefore, Albania's journey towards European integration should not be interpreted as a "melting" and loss of national identity but rather as a fusion of universal political, economic, and military values and interests in support and enhancement of democracy. To enrich the tapestry of European culture, young Albanians should be well-versed in the material and spiritual customs inherited by our people. The study aims at recognizing and implementing freedoms and human rights as prerequisites for Albania's integration into European Union structures. It synthesizes the links between democracy and respect for human rights in relation to improving citizens' living conditions and implementing democratic reforms and values. At the core of its analysis are the challenges facing Albanian democracy, such as citizens' emigration, their participation in electoral processes, and political elites' role in social life. The study examines efforts to provide deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for strengthening democracy and improving Albania's political structures in its integration processes toward the EU.*

Introduction

A democratic society represents a fresh correlation between authority and individual liberty. Human rights and freedoms take the form of a "spiral" that only sees progression, starting from the time when different intellectuals introduced the notion of "human rights", culminating in the United Nations Charter, which embodies the rights and freedoms of individuals and human society as a whole. Breaching these rights would indicate the violation and downfall of democracy within society itself. Throughout a prolonged and challenging phase of transition, several scholars and prominent figures from the EU and the US have evaluated Albania's advancements in upholding and enforcing the rule of law, in addition to human rights and freedoms.

Thus, democracy and the implementation of human rights operate on two tracks: one as theoretical and philosophical concepts, and the other as practical application in democratic societies. Therefore, Albania's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures requires a continuous effort to recognize the Union's standards and their correct application in daily life. Due to the communist dogma's legacy, Albania has been sluggish in the

implementation of fair governance and faces challenges. The slogan of the country's youth and intellectuals during the democratic changes, "We want Albania like all of Europe," remains relevant as a guiding principle in Albania's journey towards Europe. In all these historical events, the key role is played by shaping a new contemporary mentality that paves the way for changes in Albanian society. A critical indicator of content and democratic governance is the respect for human rights and freedoms, which have at times sped up or slowed down the integration processes.

Democratic principles and governance promote social collaboration, assuming people are interested in developing their skills and capacities. Culture fosters an environment for voluntary engagement in shared activities, enhancing social effectiveness that preserves and reinforces democracy's ethical values. In a democratic system, the main focus is governance and decision-making by the majority in compliance with the constitution and democratic laws and norms. Therefore, breaching freedom and human rights values has become a defining boundary that has transformed the country's governance into a political structure and a regressive power. Today's concept advancements underscore the ongoing need to enhance democracy and its fundamental qualitative components.

Contemporary notions on democracy and human rights intertwine with a series of democratic values within a political system, where the essence is linked to broad public participation in public affairs and crafting policies to promote overall welfare. Contemporary theorists emphasize that a regime is democratic when the majority has the right to vote and elect their leaders. The materials focus on the theoretical-philosophical exploration of the following topics: freedom and human rights: premises for democracy, Albania and human rights, democracy and the integration of Albania into the EU and culminate in focused conclusions.

1. Methodology of the paper

While addressing the topic "Democracy and human rights - prerequisites for the integration of Albania into European Union" many questions arise about the directions and problems that Albanian society faces in everyday life. The study methodology presents a theoretical and analytical report in examining the relationship between human rights, freedom, and democracy in Albania. In the elaboration of the study, we have referred to the concepts of prominent philosophers, such as Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Spinoza, Nietzsche and others, to highlight their meaning and influence on Albanian society. A reinforcing support for the study is the treatment of Freedom, Human Rights, and the premises of democracy. The methodology relies on philosophical literature and various theories on freedom and democracy to analyze the historical and theoretical developments of these concepts.

The methodology used is analytical-interpretative, which enables the use of various philosophical sources in examining the relationship between freedom and the state, as well as how these ideas have found application

in contemporary political systems. Critical analysis has helped understand the concept of freedom and human rights, which have developed within the framework of the rule of law and democracy and occupy an essential place in the legislation and practices of various states. The panorama of human rights treatment in Albania enriches contemporary philosophical literature.

The methodology for addressing this issue focuses on analyzing Albania's efforts to meet the standards for membership in the European Union with the aim of building a common family that wants to live in harmony, based on shared values of brotherhood and solidarity between their peoples, respecting the culture, history, and traditions of each country. The methodology also analyzes political developments in Albania, focusing on the challenges of creating sustainable democracy and efforts to strengthen the rule of law. The study addresses the challenges faced by Albanian society in building a democratic system.

In this context, the problems of the electoral system, voting rights, and governance processes, which are important for the functioning of a healthy democracy, have been examined. The study uses theoretical methodology and in-depth analysis to highlight Albania's challenges and opportunities for strengthening democracy and respecting human rights. The use of literature and periodical sources helps reflect the problems closely related to democracy and human freedoms in Albania. The methodology creates opportunities for examining changes in the electoral system and the impact of recent laws on Diaspora participation in political processes, and analyzes these changes' impact on political rotation and elite circulation. The arguments are based on Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) data and other analyses related to increasing democracy's efficiency.

2. Freedom and human rights: premises for democracy

In every historical era, people's relationship with freedom has been and remains the subject of philosophical studies, and there are different perspectives on it. Freedom, as a natural right, embodies the essence of individual beliefs and free will. The concept of freedom serves as a critical indicator of a society's advancement and its citizens concerning the challenges posed by all authorities, including the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. Nietzsche, the German philosopher, viewed freedom as enriching, deepening, and broadening its boundaries: *"Freedom is the will that makes you responsible for yourself, distancing and separating you from the influences of others for a unique independence of thought about existence"* (Nietzsche, 1999. 28). In a more pragmatic sense, freedom denotes the aspiration to satisfy our needs and desires within the constraints of our circumstances. Spinoza, in his book "A Theological-Political Treatise" published in 1670, asserted that *"the people, or a public body of citizens, is a majority of individuals who, through a social contract, act collectively as if directed by a single mind"* (Spinoza, 2013. 61). This idea underscored by Spinoza openly expresses that the sovereignty of a state stems from the people. Despite individuals unconditionally obeying

their state, their right to think remains unrestricted as they possess the liberty to deliberate and evaluate according to their understanding. Spinoza cautions that "*when a government attempts to restrict the freedom of thought and speech of its citizens, even when they adhere to the laws, it behaves irrationally and jeopardizes its survival*" (Spinoza, 2013. 63). By articulating these perspectives on the values and threats to freedom, he concludes that "*under a democratic system, citizens can uphold their freedom as long as the state adheres to its fundamental goal, i.e., the welfare of its citizens, their freedom of thought, and speech; that is, as long as the state maintains its rational essence*" (De Cuzzani, 2015). This acknowledgment leads reasoning to prevail over impulses in safeguarding common interests. For Spinoza, democracy is the most intrinsic form of governance as it encapsulates the freedom bestowed by nature to every individual and best achieves the objectives of the state. This is because, through free assemblies, individuals establish the laws that will govern them.

Patrice Canivez identifies the source of authority in the law; thus, he asserts, "*Citizens must acknowledge or accept the authority of the law and not the personal authority of an individual, a family, or a social class*" (Canivez, 2001. 23). A citizen is free as long as they recognize the supremacy of this principle; they are not subject to any specific individual, meaning no individual possesses the sole power to govern. The harmonious interplay of rights and responsibilities in a democratic society is evident in the fact that while individuals enjoy rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, and religion, which epitomize the democratic level of a society, these rights are not solely to be used by individuals as instruments or "freedom of expression" to oppose the majority. Democracy necessitates collaboration, concession, and tolerance among all citizens. Ultimately, the utmost significance of freedom is closely linked to assuming accountability for one's own fate and the community in which they reside, rather than liberation from responsibility towards them. Democracy cannot magically transform all its citizens into model citizens; however, it demands that all citizens uphold their rights and obligations.

Another scholar who elaborates on the concepts of authority and power is Jacques Maritain. He distinguishes between them stating, "*Authority is the right to direct and command others, and power is the right for others to listen to or obey a leader. Authority requires power; power without authority is tyranny.*" (Maritain, 2008. 167). Thus, authority is about the right, while power signifies strength. The basis of authority among people originates from natural law, where the absence of justice leads to a lack of authority. Just as an unfair law is not a law and an unjust authority is not authoritative, the foundation of a democratic state relies on the establishment of a reciprocal relationship between the citizens and the state. This relationship is defined by the democratic ethos and ambiance that fosters the necessity for democratic standards and laws, most effectively realized through a legal state that represents and serves the interests of the populace. Moreover, the interaction of citizens with the state involves the state's right to institute norms and laws and the citizens'

obligation to adhere to these regulations. Genuine democracy thrives in a state only when its laws are formulated by the citizens themselves.

Democracy denotes constitutional governance; it embodies the democratic validation of political authority, the separation of governmental powers, and the acknowledgment and respect of political and civil rights. "*A democratic system is one founded on a set of constitutional principles, the confidence in society's advancement, and the articulation of a set of human rights*" (Baça, 2003 136). Democracy epitomizes the pinnacle of the philosophical and political concepts of governance. Philosophical perspectives on democracy reflect the evolutionary sequence of transformations and political-economic systems within a society. Representing the acme of philosophical-political deliberations, democracy continues to captivate the interest of scholars, philosophers, and policymakers who introduce numerous theories explaining the emergence of democratic regimes and in the face of society's resilience as engines of transformation and evolution in social frameworks.

In the context of escalating demands for expanded rights in daily life and active participation in legislative, governmental, and judicial bodies, societies worldwide exhibit an unceasing necessity for improvement. This realization underscores the fact that regardless of the level of democracy, *"a true democracy has never existed nor will it ever exist."* Rousseau emphasizes this point when he asserts that, *"If a people of gods existed, it would be democratically governed. Such a perfect government does not suit the nature of the people."* *(*Abellán Artacho, P. 2019)). Rousseau believed that a sound government should prioritize the freedom of its citizens; hence, the most desirable form of governance in modern society is one that upholds the individual freedoms of all citizens, with constraints deemed acceptable in a civil society. Despite this, Rousseau argued that *"freedom and equality are not genuine if equality only exists in the law but is not realized in practice. Furthermore, if there is a lack of equality or excessive inequality in property, then freedom and equality are just shams".* (Trang Do. 2023). However, he upheld the idea that certain government principles, if implemented, could offer societal members a degree of freedom that approximates the liberty experienced in the state of nature.

Within Rousseau's philosophical framework, significant attention is paid to his notions of human rights. Alongside Rousseau's beliefs, various ideas from other philosophers of his era began to emerge, profoundly influencing not only philosophical works but also many national and international organizations. These ideas substantially contributed to the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948 as well as the drafting of the constitutions in leading European countries and the United States. As stated by Hallo de Wolf, A., & Moerland, R: "*The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations on 10 December 1948 marked the beginning of the modern international system for the protection of human rights*" (Hallo de Wolf, A., & Moerland, R. 2023). Freedoms and human rights were acknowledged as values embraced by the entire global community.

From these reflections, it is evident that the concept of freedom's relativity hinges on the societal stage of historical development, serving as the foundation for the multitude of theories and ideas surrounding human rights and freedoms through both practical applications and daily life experiences. These human rights and freedoms embody the core of democracy within an advanced society. Consequently, human existence can be encapsulated as a pursuit of peace and its preservation in all conceivable forms, premised on the notion that peace is a collective human good.

Declarations in favour of human freedoms have their origins in various philosophical theories. The idea that man has rights by nature that no other person, not even the state itself, can appropriate or eliminate was developed by the father of modern naturalism, John Locke. According to Locke, *"the true state of man is not the civil state but the natural state, that is, the state of nature in which people are free and equal"* (Locke 2005, 84). The civil state is an artificial creation that has no other purpose than to permit the greater development of liberty and natural equality. Aristotle emphasized: *"Man is a political animal"* (Aristotle 2003, 9). As the only creature that produces thoughts and ideas, it generally acts from the point of view of purposes projected towards the future. By tending to the good, man has made progress on its path. We recall the development of the French Revolution, which was nothing but as Kant would repeatedly point out a moral attitude toward humanity. The cause of Kant's enthusiasm, or more precisely, as he expressed it, the sign of the moral attitude of humanity, was the appearance on the stage of history of the right that a people have not to be hindered by other forces to produce a civil constitution, which he considered good. According to Kant *"A civil constitution is a relationship among free men who are subject to coercive laws, while they retain their freedom within the general union with their fellows."* (Wit, 1997). Thus, by civil constitution He meant a constitution in harmony with the natural rights of man, such that those who obey the law must also make the laws. By defining natural rights as the right of every person to obey only the law for which he himself is the legislator, Kant defined freedom as autonomy and the power to give laws to oneself.

In addition to the usefulness of the law, which is assumed to be equal for the leading elite of the state as well as for the common people, in reality the primary function of the law is to tighten and reduce the spaces of freedom as much as possible and to protect and uphold the freedom of the majority of the people. Of particular interest is the perspective of examining the relationship between rights and duties, which are two sides of the same coin. The ratio of relations between the laws implies the rule of law and the protection of freedom and human rights, and also the level or degree of democracy in a country. In the pyramid of the relationship between the individual and the state, the relationship between the rights and duties between them is of particular importance. If this relationship is viewed from the perspective of the individual, the rights come first in society, and if seen from the perspective of state interests, the duties and then the rights of the members of the society come first.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a supporter of exercising the right to direct voting on laws by the people. If the laws are the product of a general sovereign will, then, each individual is the true author of these laws, and in this way, each person obeys only himself. Moreover, he underlines that there will never be any genuine democracy. From the above, individualism turns into a philosophical basis of democracy itself according to the principle: one head, one vote. In states where dictatorial systems rule, individuals delegate their rights to the representatives of the monarch. In contrast, in the rule of law, the individual directly exercises his power through participation in elections, i.e., through his direct vote on many issues of vital importance to the fate of the country. In this sense, the state of the law is also the state of the citizens.

In the implementation of representative democracy, voting citizens do not make decisions about the organization of their lives but delegate these rights to their representatives. Experience has shown that no system of government is perfect. Philosophy and political sciences have offered people the most acceptable system of all systems to date, with its many benefits and also the shortcomings that accompany it. Despite the great advantages represented by representative democracy, it has not escaped the critique of Rousseau, who pointed out with despair: *"In any case, from the moment when a people submits to representatives, it is no longer free"* (Rousseau, 2008, 313). Views of philosophers on freedom, democracy, and other human rights have been sanctioned in various international treaties and conventions as the fundamental rights of man, the individual, and human society.

The notions of democracy and freedom encompass the way of governing people, their division and categorization, and the selection of the most suitable form and content of democracy for society as a whole. The essence of democracy encompasses the meaning attributed by Abraham Lincoln in the phrase *"government of the people, by the people, and for the people,"* (Richard A. Epstein, 2011), whose values remain inherent. Hence, we can posit that all political-social systems must inevitably undergo the scrutiny of the standards of demands for freedom and democracy of distinct peoples, varying based on their level of awareness. Democracy signifies a specific form of leadership or governance conducted in the name and interest of the majority. Its most democratic and accepted form is seen in societies where pluralism is nurtured, and the powers of the executive, legislature, and judiciary are both separate and autonomous, ensuring no single entity among them wields boundless and unmonitored power. Democracy also signifies the principle that the people collectively form the foundation upon which the entire political life of society is structured.

True democracy embodies prudent, conscientious, far-sighted governance, the rule of law, and order in pursuit of the common welfare of all its inhabitants. Therefore, democracy strives to be governed by the people, safeguarding their shared values and rights in the pursuit of justice and the law. Democracy, defined as the governance by the people, implies that every citizen, through their free will, casts their vote to represent themselves and entrusts the right to govern the nation solely to their chosen representative. Hence, it is the

people who determine the type of government in a democratic setup. The extent of freedom naturally hinges on the societal stage of historical development. This stage serves as a firm foundation to commence and reflect theoretically as concepts, and also in daily life, as the enactment of human rights and freedoms. This array of human rights and freedoms essentially constitutes the crux of democracy in an advanced society. The correlation between freedoms and human rights forms the bedrock of the democracy of a community. The articulation and philosophical underpinning for human freedoms and rights, starting from Hobbes, Rousseau, etc., also emanated from Kant's notions on "Perpetual peace." Even in the Kantian proposition, human rights exhibit a symbiotic relationship and interconnection with "perpetual peace" itself. Human rights now stand as the nucleus of a community's very democracy. They also mark the distinction between a democratic system and an autocratic one. Freedoms and human rights play a progressive yet intricate role in the safeguarding of religious beliefs, as they act as definite constraints on religious convictions, which indeed must be free but should not infringe upon the beliefs or freedom of others.

3. Albania and human rights

The crucial aspect of contemporary society remains the ways of communication for ensuring the collaboration among different segments of society and within the society as a whole. This outcome of scientific progress serves as the foundation of human society, as a unique phenomenon that has not been witnessed in previous eras. In our era, the concept of human rights and freedoms is encroaching on wider vital spaces, such as the world and global unity, with clusters of nations facing similar issues and struggles of human existence and grappling with inherited issues from their socio-economic development history. In this era, the expansion of the concept of human rights and freedoms extends to broader essential spheres like the global field of environmental contamination, etc. Based on historical accounts of the progression of freedom and human rights, it is apparent that attaining a progressive objective signifies a level or point of growth, the infringement of which could result in society regressing. This illustrates that human rights and freedoms have turned into a protective barrier to the advancement of democracy, not only theoretically but also as a tangible asset of human society. Present-day individuals benefit from numerous advantages compared to those born half a century ago. Similarly, specific social groups are granted distinctive statuses, including children, minors, persons with disabilities, visually impaired individuals, individuals from various professions like miners, sailors, etc., notably women who account for approximately half of the global population; they now have increased rights safeguarded by national and international laws and treaties.

Thus, the democratic nature of a governing system must fulfil key rights in order to join the advanced European structures. Political pluralism, the organization of free elections, the necessity of democratic legiti-

macy of government, and the recognition and respect of the basic rights of citizens are conditions for international and regional cooperation of a country aspiring to build a democratic society. In the Maastricht Treaty, it is emphasized that democracy and human rights are prerequisites for membership in the European Union. The recognition and implementation of the will of the sovereign constitute the essence of democracy as a specific form of government. Thus, Montesquieu accurately underlines: *"In a republic, if the people as a whole have sovereign power, then this is democracy"* (Montesquieu, 2001, 15). Throughout its thousands of years of history, Albania, both geographically and culturally, has exhibited a European spirit and orientation, despite pressure and direction from foreign invaders attempting to influence its political, economic, and cultural life. Our ancient Illyrian history and culture, the struggles for freedom and independence led by the national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg), as well as the National Renaissance program infused with a European spirit, exemplify this trend, notably during the Anti-Fascist Front Decisive for World War II.

Crucial to the history of the Albanian people were the political system changes in the 1990s when the monist regime collapsed. The first step taken by democratic Albania in the 1990s was establishing diplomatic relations with the European Union. In 1992, both sides signed agreements covering trade and cooperation development. This allowed Albania to benefit from EU programs.

After these steps, naturally came the expansion of these relations in many other developing countries. Subsequently, these relations expanded into multiple areas of interest to Albania. The country became among the first to receive EU aid for Eastern European countries through the PHARE program, encompassing diverse aspects of the country's development. This progress led to negotiations for an association agreement and Albania's membership in the Council of Europe, providing substantial support for democracy building in Albania. However, a significant political-economic crisis hit Albania, slowing its relations with the EU. This period marked a setback in deepening relations with the European Union, with a sense that Albania was losing its privileged status with the EU. Developments on the Balkan scene raised concerns within the European Union, particularly due to nostalgic tendencies towards old monist regimes. The Balkan situation was worsened even more by the role evident in some Balkan countries.

The Balkan situation was further complicated by the influence of eastern regions with Russian orientation, exemplified by Slobodan Milosevic, who initiated a campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing against non-Slavic populations in former Yugoslav republic territories. Wars erupted between the peoples of this former republic, who had maintained unity through communist ideology, leading to challenging conditions for Albania, which had a fragile democracy. In response, the European Union introduced the "Association Stabilization Process" to support democratic, political, and economic developments in Southeast Europe. The EU prioritized deepening reforms and promoting the rule of law and market economies among institutions resulting from popular votes. This process aimed to bring Balkan countries closer to the EU than ever before.

The core of this process focused on stabilizing the political-economic situation in Balkan countries and enhancing relations with the European Union. Tasks for Western Balkan countries included embracing EU values, enhancing democracy, upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights and minorities, boosting market economies, and ensuring social justice. A key achievement for most Balkan countries was signing the Stabilization-Association Agreement with the EU, establishing a framework for cooperation and gradual adoption of European standards. To become an EU member, Albania must meet criteria set for all candidate states, approved by the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 including*: "ensuring democracy, the rule of law, and human rights".* (François d` Arcy, 2007. 24).

Albania and Albanians being an integral part of the European continent alongside the success of Western European democracies underlines the aspiration that Albania not only belongs to the geographical, genetic, historical, and traditional framework of Europe but also contributes to its current community and new European identity by absorbing and transmitting values. Integration into the European Union entails aligning with and embracing the basic values on which the organization operates. It should be viewed as a reform program aligning the country with the European model of state, democracy, and economy rather than just a move towards the West.

4. Democracy and the integration of Albania into the EU

Both geographically and culturally, Albanians are people with European orientation. As evidence, it would suffice to recall the heritage of ancient Illyrian culture, its efforts in the Middle Ages (Medieval era) for freedom and independence, led by the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, and the program of the National Renaissance that embodies a Europeanist spirit. With the dream of democracy, Albanian society strives to join the European Union family. Other peoples of this family once dreamed and succeeded in turning their dream into reality. The pace of this progress accelerates, as do the demands for a society with broader rights in everyday life, for more active and decisive participation in the legislative, governmental, and judicial systems.

Albania's progress toward democracy requires respect and implementation of the law. Article 4, point 1, of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania states: *"Law constitutes the basis and limits of the activity of the state."* (QBZ, 2022. 2). The rule of law must be based on the recognition and respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms. This represents the legal, social, and political framework that embodies the state's functions. The constitution, relevant legislation, and all state power organs must clearly declare the acceptance, recognition, and respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Building a democratic system requires preparing citizens to recognize the rights and duties that stem from constitutional law. Citizens must obey constitutional obligations and relevant legislation. Open communication between citizens and government is an essential characteristic of democratic societies. Through this interaction, trust between parties is further strengthened, creating a positive climate in which all parties can engage in dialogue and find solutions to various problems that concern the community.

However, this system faces several phenomena that attempt to distort its nature to benefit individuals in power. In countries with developing democracies, the risks exceed those with consolidated democratic systems. Thirty years of democracy represent a brief period for a country like Albania, whose elites have adopted Western democracy as their standard. The experience of these years has highlighted several risks that require timely attention, as they can undermine its essence, transforming it from a government of the people and for the people into the government of powerful groups serving their interests. Since the initial years of political system changes in Albania, society has confronted the corrosive phenomenon of mass emigration, with people seeking better economic opportunities—a trend that persists today. According to data from the Institute of Statistics (INSTAT, 2020, 8), the Albanian Diaspora abroad increased to 1,684,135 individuals, comprising 884.719 males and 799.416 females. Their absence has adversely affected numerous areas of social and economic life in Albania. This phenomenon has not only significantly diminished the labor force in the country, causing the corresponding crisis, but it has also severely impaired their participation in the electoral process, the political rotation of ruling elites, and Albania's fragile democracy. The phenomenon of stagnation among ruling elites has been criticized by many scholars from academic circles and EU observers. Only after pressure from civil society and EU observers did parliamentary parties in Albania recently approve legislation allowing Albanian citizens in emigration the right to participate in elections. This significant step is expected to pave the way for the rotation and circulation of ruling elites. Another phenomenon undermining democratic values is the lack of democratic culture. Political party leaders participating in elections are guided by the principle: "The winner claims all victories, while the losers bear all losses!" Albania and Albanians, as an integral part of the European continent's mosaic of countries and peoples, have consistently been inspired by Western European countries' democratic achievements. Their goal remains integration into the European community.

The process of establishing and expanding the European Union follows a specific philosophy. This process relies on respecting treaties and joint decisions of relevant institutions. These relations are maintained through applying principles of compromise and consensus. The European Union is a community of states that enables free movement of people with equal rights. Citizens of this common society are united by social and moral values guided by solidarity, tolerance, and human rights protection. Integration into the European family requires the development and implementation of democratic processes.

The commitment and efforts toward EU integration are persistent. Among numerous demands and conditions for Albania's "homework" the requirement for developing free elections is prominent. The path to integration into the European Union family is exhausting and lengthy, filled with difficulties and fluctuations. However, the focus and attention of Albanian society's elites and people remain fixed on the light at the tunnel's end.

5. Conclusion

However, the study on "Democracy and human rights - prerequisite for the integration of Albania into European Union" examines Albania's efforts to meet democratic standards and human rights as prerequisites for membership in the European Union. The changes that occurred during the transition from a monist to a democratic regime have brought significant improvements to social life, including the strengthening of Albania's ties with international structures and the fulfillment of conditions for EU membership. The path taken in the democratic process has brought new challenges to Albanian society: massive emigration, stagnation of political elites, and citizen participation in electoral processes.

The determination of society and elites in Albania to continue deepening necessary reforms in political, legal, and economic fields remains essential. The concept of human rights and freedoms has expanded and deepened, being recognized as an essential element for democracy's development and European integration. These rights, strongly supported by international laws and conventions, have aided the progress of Albanian society and strengthened its ties with Europe. Human rights and freedoms are established as the cornerstone of the democratic system and socio-political developments.

Recent developments further promote movement toward the future and a united world, with states and groups of states facing similar challenges of human existence while carrying specific problems from their socio-economic development past. Viewed from the dialectic of development, the concepts and practices of Freedom and Human Rights progress systematically: achieving a goal or development threshold creates premises for future goals. People of our time enjoy many more freedoms and rights compared to those of a century ago. Notably, the concept that a democratic society represents the relationship between power and individual freedom stands out. During democratic changes, various theorists and high representatives of the European Union and USA have provided important assessments of Albania's achievements in protecting and implementing the rule of law and human rights.

References

1. Abellán Artacho, P. (2019). Rousseau, democracy, and his ideological intentions: Conceptual arrangements as political devices. Revista de Estudios Políticos, 186, 45-71. doi: https://doi.org/10.18042/cepc/rep.186.02

2. Aristotle. (2003). Politics. Tirana, Albania: "Plejad" publications house.
3. Baça, F. (2023). The Importance of Education for Democracy. In M. Koc, O. T. Ozturk & M. L.
4. Ciddi (Eds.), Proceedings of ICRES 2023-- International Conference on Research in Education and Science (pp. 131-140), Cappadocia, Turkiye. ISTES Organization.
5. Canivez, Patrice. (2004) "Éduquer le citoyen?. Pristina, Kosovo, Albanian edition by "Dikagjini" Publishing house.
6. De Cuzzani, P. (2015). Baruch Spinoza: Democracy and Freedom of Speech. In: Fløistad, G. (ed.) Philosophy of Justice. Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey, vol 12. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9175-5_7
7. François d` Arcy. (2007). The politics of European Union, Tirana Albania: "Papirus" Publishing House.
8. Hallo de Wolf, A., & Moerland, R. (2023). The UDHR as a living instrument at 75 and beyond. Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights, 41(4), 182-189. https://doi.org/10.1177/09240519231214481 (Original work published 2023)
9. Institute of Statistics, INSTAT, (2020). https://www.instat.gov.al/media/7848/diaspora-ne-shifra-2020.pdf
10. Jean Jacques Rousseau's concept of freedom and equality in the Social Contract, Trans/Form/Ação, vol. 46, no. 2, pp. 305-324, 2023. https://www.redalyc.org/journal/3842/384275142021/html/
11. Locke, John. (2005). The Second Treaty on Governance. Tirana, Albania: "Dita" Publications House.
12. Maritain .Jacques. (2008). Man and the state. Tirana, Albania: "ISP&DITA" Publishing House. Tirana.
13. Montesquieu, Baron Charles De Secondat. (2001). The spirit of Laws. Tirana, Albania: "Luarasi" Publications House
14. Nietzsche, Friedrich. (1999). The will to power, Tirana Albania: "Marin Barleti" Publishing House.
15. QBZ, (2022). Official Journal of the Republic of Albania, no 16 (10 of February 2022) https://qbz.gov.al/preview/635d44bd-96ee-4bc5-8d93-d928cf6f2abd
16. Richard A. Epstein, "Direct Democracy: Government of the People, by the People, and for the People," 34 Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy 819 (2011).
17. Rousseau J-J, (2008). Origins of Inequality Between People, Tirana, Albania: "Almera" Publishing House
18. Rousseau, J.J. (2007), Social Contract. Tirana, Albania: "Luarasi University Press" Publication House.
19. Spinoza, Baruch. (2013). Theological-political Treatise. Tirana Albanian: "Pika pa Sipërfaqe" Publishing House.
20. Wit. E, C. (1997). Kant and the limits of civil obedience: The University of Chicago. https://www.math.rug.nl/~ernst/kant.htm#:~:text=Kant%20says%2C%20%22A%20civil%20constitution,the%20state%3B%20but%20herein%20may