



THE RISE OF CHINESE INFLUENCE IN ALBANIA: THE POLITICAL
MATURATION OF ALBANIA WHEN DEALING
WITH ITS HISTORICAL ALLY

MASTER THESIS

EPOKA UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TIRANA, ALBANIA
January 2023

**THE RISE OF CHINESE INFLUENCE IN ALBANIA:
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ITS HISTORICAL ALLY**

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Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of Requirement for "Master's Thesis for Master of Science in
Political Science and International Relations"

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Master's Thesis, titled "The Rise of Chinese Influence in Albania: The Political Maturation of Albania When Dealing With Its Historical Ally" is based on my original work except quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this thesis has not been previously or concurrently submitted for the award of any degree, at Epoka University, any other university or institution.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I'd like to convey my heartfelt appreciation to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lisen Bashkurti, my advisor, for his unwavering support of my project and research, as well as his patience, motivation, excitement, and enormous motivation. Throughout the research and writing of this thesis, his counsel and presence whenever I had questions were invaluable. For this important dissertation, I could not have asked for a better mentor.

I'd like to express my gratitude to my peers, friends and loved ones who always challenged me, made me think outside the box and always made me strive for the heights. They were an extremely positive force in my journey and from them I learned not only to accept different points of views but also understand that a person could change for the better.

I'd like to express my warmest gratitude to my family for making this long journey happen, through thick and thin, being always there to support me emotionally but not to forget financially. Without my family I wouldn't have the opportunity to get an education at such a prestigious school, and for that I am eternally thankful. I want to especially thank my mother and father, I love you both, I also want to thank my sister who supports me emotionally and I wish her a successful journey at Epoka just like me. Last but not least I want to thank my grandmother for her support and my late grandfather who was the catalyst of always trying to get me the best education there is. Without either of the aforementioned people, this journey wouldn't have been possible.

I want to finish my thoughts with the slogan of my former alma mater, my former high school Glebe Collegiate Institute, "In Alta Tende " which translates, from Latin, to Strive For The Heights. There is wisdom to these words just as 8 years ago when I just joined high school to this day.

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ABSTRACT

When we first started this research, I noticed that there were a significant number of studies focused entirely on China's Belt and Road Initiative in the African continent and reshaping African politics, yet very few is being said about the Chinese increasing influence in the Western Balkans. The Rise of Chinese Influence in Albania: The Political Maturation of Albania when Dealing with Its Historical Ally, which is the title of this essay, came to me as a very intriguing idea. This idea of a far eastern country influencing the Balkans for the first time is both exciting as a prospect but also concerning when considering the past or which country is the one that is spreading all that influence. A common misconception regarding China in global politics is that the Chinese state is working towards what some pundits in the West call it 'global dominance'. I believe that this is an incorrect assumption. China first and foremost lacks the military capabilities of the United States regarding the capacity of projecting power. In this study the findings I had gathered, show that China has operationalized its vast economic power to influence the politics of the Western Balkans towards their national interests. This hypothesis is based on the theory of political economics where economy is used as a factor to influence a country's politics, but also contemporary geopolitical theory. The expectation was that the influence of China is not as malign and negative as it is often portrayed, however there is a clear national interest centered approach where China is only looking only for their own interests and bottom line, while caring little for implicit negative effects that its economic investments might have in the respective countries. Albania was chosen as the main area of research because Albania has become quite the battleground of influences from both the East and West in recent years.

ABSTRAKT

Kur fillova për herë të parë këtë kërkim shkencor, vura re se kishte një numër të konsiderueshëm studimesh të fokusuara tërësisht në Iniciativën e Kinës Brez dhe Rrugë në kontinentin afrikan dhe riformësimin e politikës afrikane, por shumë pak po flitet për ndikimin në rritje të Kinës në Ballkanin Perëndimor. Rritja e Ndikimit Kinez në Shqipëri: Pjekurimi Politik i Shqipërisë kur Merret me Aleatin e saj Historik, i cili është titulli i kësaj eseje, më erdhi si një ide shumë intriguese. Kjo ide e një vendi të Lindjes së Largët që ndikon në Ballkan për herë të parë është edhe emocionuese si perspektivë, por edhe shqetësuese kur merret parasysh të kaluarën ose cili është vendi që po përhap gjithë atë ndikim. Një keqkuptim i zakonshëm në lidhje me Kinën në politikën globale është se shteti kinez po punon drejt asaj që disa ekspertë në Perëndim e quajnë atë “dominim global”. Unë besoj se ky është një supozim i gabuar. Kina para së gjithash i mungojnë aftësitë ushtarake të Shteteve të Bashkuara në lidhje me kapacitetin e fuqisë projektuese. Në studimin tim, gjetjet që kisha mbledhur, tregojnë se Kina ka funksionalizuar fuqinë e saj të madhe ekonomike për të ndikuar në politikën e Ballkanit Perëndimor drejt interesave të tyre kombëtare. Kjo hipotezë bazohet në teorinë e ekonomisë politike ku ekonomia përdoret si faktor për të ndikuar në politikën e një vendi, por edhe në teorinë bashkëkohore gjeopolitike. Pritshmëria ime ishte që ndikimi i Kinës të mos jetë aq keqdashës dhe negativ siç portretizohet shpesh, megjithatë ekziston një qasje e qartë e përqendruar në interesin kombëtar ku Kina kërkon vetëm interesat e saj dhe fundin e saj, duke u kujdesur pak për efektet negative të nënkuptuara. që investimet e saj ekonomike mund të kenë në vendet përkatëse. Zgjodha Shqipërinë si fushën kryesore të kërkimit, sepse Shqipëria është kthyer në fushëbetejë të ndikimeve si nga Lindja ashtu edhe nga Perëndimi vitet e fundit.

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Albania and China, two countries with an unlikely relationship

The research question to answer for this project is; “How does China’s economic involvement in the Western Balkans affect local politics?”. This area is indeed worth studying for various reasons. The data collection questions are “Where does China invest more in the Western Balkans?” “What kind of relations does China have with Albania or Montenegro?” “What is the Belt and Road Initiative?” “Where is the BRI more present in the Western Balkans?” “What kind of political alignment does Albania or Montenegro have globally and domestically?”. It is hard to explain the relations that Albania and China share with each other. First off, Albania and China recent rekindling of partnerships is not new for either country. The history of China and Albania’s relationship goes back more than half a century ago. During the 46 years of communist regime in Albania, the Albanian state found its path crossing with the People’s Republic of China. In modern times, at first glance, the Far East’s behemoth’s interests in Albania are nothing more than a stepping stone of building relations with their Belt and Road Initiative and 17+1 format members. This can be deceiving to a researcher with no empirical experience of the years that the Chinese and the Albanians shared an ideological and cultural bond together. To the author of this thesis’s findings, China and Albania shared a relationship that transcended purely economic reasons. Not many countries that consider Albania an ally now have thriving communities of their own nationals choosing Albania to live their lives and work in. China by all means considers Albania a historical friend and once allies and many Chinese nationals have chosen Albania as their host. This thesis aims to show how much the Chinese state has influenced Albania in the past decade, but also the progress of the Albanian economy with Chinese aid. Parallels between the Sino-Albanian alliance throughout the 1960s and 70s will be drawn in comparison with the modern Republic of Albania partnership with China. In 1946 Mao Zedong proposed the “Three Worlds Theory”, a precursor to the BRI

The Belt and Road Initiative saw a reproachment of China in dealing with developing nations. We will talk in depth on how the BRI shaped the Chinese geopolitical zeitgeist of the early 21st century. The Chinese state came a long way from being a pariah to the world, to the so-called “world’s factory” and a leading global partner to most countries of the world. This remains China’s primary approach with most countries. As we will see, Albania and China had a period of significant rapprochement since the uneasy years of the Sino-Albanian split. However, as we will soon find out, both countries no longer follow a similar ideology, nor share similar political worldviews. Since the political fallout of the final divorce between Enver Hoxha’s regime and the People’s Republic of China and the subsequent fall of communism, Albania has integrated in the Euro-Atlantic alliance. The post-communist Albanian republic has been able to achieve membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and as of 2022 is a candidate for membership in the European Union. Quite the far cry of the days of anti-revisionist brotherhood between the Chinese and the Albanian state. This however has not stopped the new Albanian republic to reapproach the former historical friend. Pragmatism has been a driving force in the Belt and Road initiative but so has China’s pragmatic approach in geopolitics as a whole. This theory combined with national interests have shown the Albanian state that China was ready to restart their relations with the small Balkan state. China has shown to Albania that it was willing to ignore the rather bad taste the Sino-Albanian split left in Beijing’s mouth. In the last decade interactions between the Chinese and the Albanian representatives there have been in a steady upward rate when considering the importance of meetings and trade relations between the countries but also cultural exchange and aid given to the developing state of Albania. However, we will also find that beyond the rose-tinted glasses of the seemingly endless Chinese aid, there might lie rather ulterior motive to why China is ready to spread its money around the globe in an effort to help developing nations. China might be the largest state under a communist system, but their economy is capitalist driven. Christopher McNally, Ph.D. (2012), describes the Chinese economic system as “Sino-Capitalism”

It is a capitalist system that is already global in reach but one that differs from Anglo-American capitalism in important respects. Sino-Capitalism relies on informal business networks rather than on legal codes and transparent rules. It also assigns the Chinese state a leading role in fostering and guiding capitalist accumulation. China ultimately, is a large developing economy with a distinct socialist and imperial legacy

This goes to show that like any business-driven country, China is no longer investing in countries out of a self-perceived need to be leader of the third world, but it expects a return of investments. The Belt and Road Initiative in many senses is Chinese capitalism introduced to the world. In the recent years where China has achieved to become the second largest economy in the world after the United States, the Chinese desire through the BRI to expand its economy and thus be able to achieve the dominant role in world economics and subsequently dominance in world politics. As it will be shown in this thesis, economic leverage is an important tool used by bigger states to influence smaller states. China has utilized the prospect of economic leverage to its fullest extent, making it part of its main tactics while using the BRI to expand Chinese influence through the developing world. The weaponized economic leverage has been a double package in many cases related to China's creeping influence especially in the Western Balkans. The other half of the package being cultural influence. The BRI is unlike any other initiative taken before by the Chinese state. The distrust towards the People's Republic of China exists firstly because of its political system. The Balkans has been oversaturated with anticommunist propaganda due to our fairly recent history. Communism most often is equated with lack of wealth, lack of commodities, lack of freedoms and an overall authoritarian society. While China checks out in most of these categories, such as lack of basic freedoms and political choice, the Chinese however surpass most of the world's oldest democracies in economic wealth, and has risen to become not only the second biggest economy after the United States but it also projected to surpass America within the current decade. China's model breaks the common trope you see in modern authoritarian leftist or socialist states. The examples of Cuba, Venezuela and North Korea come to mind and the three states have some of the poorest performing economies in the world and also being closer ideologically to China due to its political system resembling a communist state, with one communist party leading, no multiple party choice elections, a state that controls most of the society's aspects and visual communist imagery to reinforce that idea that these states are indeed communist in nature. Economic growth and China's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" makes China a unique country with a communist system leading it.

1.2 A short introduction on political maturation and Albania's difficult journey on achieving it

Political maturation's primary definition is commonly connected to an active and politically aware population who engages in politics, as maturation is often portrayed as a physical or mental trait applied to humans rather than ideas or organizations. A national awakening or reawakening can be attributed to a political maturation of a nation's society. A national awakening is the people's ability to define what nation they belong to and create the pillars of what the nation is, such as a commonly shared culture, traditions and common language. The culmination of such a movement has been historically winning autonomy or independence. Either case shows that the people of the nation have reached the point of political maturation to recognize themselves first off as a nation and second as a state. However, becoming a state and gaining independence cannot be considered the endpoint of political maturation.

This is the difference between a politically mature nation versus a politically mature state. To become politically mature as a country is a hard and long process. Albania in the first 2 decades of its independence had been a very unstable land. The only period of relative stability and the longest rule before the Second World War being King Zog's 11 uninterrupted years of rule from 1928 to 1939. The main issue that the Albanian state faced during these tumultuous, shady years was the apparent lack of legitimacy first as a country in the world stage and second legitimacy to its people. Governments would rise and fall routinely, peasant uprisings, be those led by Muslim or Christian rebels were commonplace. The territory of the Albanian state was not recognized until 1920 with American support at the post-war treaty of Paris, but throughout the war country's neutrality was violated by warring foreign armies and even after the war the territory of Albania was coveted by its unfriendly neighbors (Yugoslavia, Greece and Italy)

Albania as a new country suffered from having a political elite that would accompany being part of a new state. Inexperience in foreign and internal affairs hindered Albania's prestige in the world. Because of Albania's small territory and small reach, it became target of an expansion focused fascist nation such as Mussolini's Italy. The most shameful display of how insignificant Albania was considered in the world, that the international

body and preceding the United Nations, the League of Nations, did not take any sort of action to help a fellow member. It can be assessed now more than 70 years later that Albania in 1939 was still not considered a legitimate member of the international community. That can explain how apathetic the League of Nations was when the membership of the organization dwindled by one, and not by the request of the membership holder but rather forcefully. However, as this thesis will assess, Albania's political maturation has grown exponentially. As the Albanian state traverses the 21st Century world, the small Balkan state was once a non-entity in the region, while in recent years through its political maturation it has become a regional player and an important proponent of stability and democracy in the region. Albania's level-headed assessment over the rapport that our country enjoys with the People's Republic of China ties the main area of research of this dissertation, the Chinese influence in the Balkans and specifically the Albanian state. Criticism is part of dealing with discussing the prospect of Albania being politically mature. Albanian governments are often criticized in internal governance of the country. Corruption remains a lingering problem in Albanian society. White collar crime and local government cooperation with organized crime has been one of the most devastating factors that hindered Albania's progress towards a majorly legal and democratic society. Corruption can also be used by foreign actors to further a state's own goals. In the case of Montenegro for example, corruption has been in the forefront of Chinese investments in the country. China's money would grease the people responsible for the approval of the projects and specifically in the case of Montenegro, the corruption allegations grew stronger due to the factors that many subcontractors were connected to the President of Montenegro (Brelie, 2021). These allegations however severe on the corruption of high-level politicians in Montenegro, might first sound as a fluke made up by the opposition parties as a political tactic but in reality, it is a problem that has manifested in the form of an unfinished highway which by all means has become a scar in the country rather a connecting artery to world. Corruption is still a problem in Albania but the Albanian politicians were not lured by foreign money that would eventually lead their country into a severe debt crisis, as this dissertation will show in a few chapters in the case of Montenegro.

The maturation of both China and Albania in the 21st Century is seen in both, as both countries conduct politics in very different ways than they did back during the first honeymoon period in the 1960s. As Dittmer and Hurst (Dittmer) explain in the case of China, neither Marxist-Leninist nor Mao's Thought, are no longer present in China's

political and diplomatic level, which is the same that can be said for Albania, which communist era is now regarded as a nightmare that the modern Albanian politicians and diplomats are trying to get rid of, through new alliances and new perspectives. What was once a relationship between two communist states, based on the Marxist theory of International Relations. The common good based on the teachings of Marx is no longer applicable for either state. From the research, it can be concluded that due to the reform and maturation in politics of both countries, the relationship between them has become one based on another International Relations theory, that of the neorealist one, where both states enjoy economic relations based on meeting bottom lines, rather than a pure ideological relations. This however can be seen in a different aspect relating to the modern Albanian state. Due to the political maturation and reform of the Albanian society and politics, Albania has proven that it opposes China in fundamental constructivist issues, such as declaration of human rights issues, or the treatment of certain minorities within China's territories. These issues also prove that Albania will not conduct the policy of closing one eye with regards to fundamental issues regarding entirely societal issues that in reality do not hinder economic diplomacy as many states have done it before. However, the modern Albanian state has proven that it is ready to fight on principles rather than give in to more economic prosperity when it comes to international relations, even when dealing with a former historical ally such as China. The theories of economic diplomacy and neorealism were a massive contributor to this thesis, however as the research went along, there was no clear or definitive theory that entirely described Sino-Albanian relations, which was a clear indicator that the relation between these two states was in no means something entirely cut and dry, like most international relations between respective states.

1. 3 Hypothesis, Difficulties, Literature review and Methodology

In this study, the findings were that China has operationalized its vast economic power to influence the politics of the Western Balkans towards their national interests. This hypothesis is based on the theory of political economics where economy is used as a factor to influence a country's politics, but also contemporary geopolitical theory.

What was faced as the biggest difficulty in the case of this thesis, related to the lack of accessible research in official archives in recent years. Due to the law Nr.9154, dated on 6.11.2003, On Archives, it was unable to reference much of the research that could be glanced on during the periods of study in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Europe in Tirana, Albania. This is due to the fact that classified material can be only removed from that status after a period of 30 years, which meant that most contemporary years required a special permit, which in no way was accessible to a university student. However, this did not stop me from accessing historical data, hence the scope of this research expanded from contemporary China and Albania to historical deliberations, which the archives had plentiful information about. The archives proved resourceful even that they could not be referenced directly, to direct me to the proper resources by researching on the matters that was in the documents, so essentially cross research by finding if there was data related to what the archives mentioned, which in many cases there was.

An important ethical challenge faced was related to the Chinese state. China is the largest authoritarian country in the world with an abysmal human rights record. Political freedoms enjoyed in many of China's partners in the West are illegal there and subject to the law. This raises the question of the morality of dealing with such a country. Do countries sacrifice their political integrity domestically and abroad when they deal with a dictatorship who violates the rights of minorities and the general population alike? In this thesis the researcher was as impartial as possible, but these issues remained in the forefront of ideas and research when dealing with the sensitive issues related to China.”

The empirical gap this research will fill will be in contemporary geopolitics in relation to the Western Balkans. It will also develop the theoretical gap in Political economics and influence of politics and policies of a country through the economic investment or sanctions of third parties, in this case China. A combination of primary and secondary sources in order to have a more complete understanding for the research will be used. One

of the papers chosen for the literature review is “China’s Road: into the Western Balkans” by Plamen Tochev who is a founding member of the European Think-tank Network on China and a member of the EU Chapter of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific committee. In this paper he discusses the ever increasing influence of China in the region of the Balkans. Back in 2013, the paper said that Xi Jinping, the current Premier of China, assured that the Belt and Road Initiative was an entirely Asian venture and it will not be exported outside of Asia. Several years later however this was disproved by the fact that China has given 10 billion dollars of credit to investors to invest in the Balkans. China has invested more than 1 billion euros in Serbia and the number keeps rising. Infrastructure projects could bring more jobs for local populace in a region with such complex affairs and still developing economies. What’s in it for China is to increase the track record in Europe and to ensure that Chinese companies have exclusive infrastructure to deal with when they are investing in the Balkans. This would also mean more jobs for the people and development of the economy. However, there are several underlying issues and downsides. The paper explores how in many such cases, Chinese projects have been completed almost entirely by Chinese workers brought in from the mainland, while not creating any jobs for the local populace. The local infrastructure which is improved under the BRI could also be indebted to Chinese state-owned enterprises which means that critical infrastructure in Serbia or Montenegro would fall under the jurisdiction of the Chinese government. Many such issues and the issue of corruption with tenders are a few that paint a fuller picture of Chinese involvement in the region (Tonchev, 2017). Another piece of literature that chosen for this is Vladimir Shapov’s “Decade of patience: How China became a power in the Western Balkans” Vladimir Shapov is a lecturer specialized in dealing with Asian matters. He has been teaching Asian studies in the University of Sofia in Bulgaria but he has also been teaching about the European Union, NATO, security, and south-eastern European affairs at the Diplomatic Institute of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 2004

The article starts by mentioning China’s formalized, seemingly nonchalant, attitude towards the Western Balkans. In the past decade, the country has become the most prominent third actor in this part of the European Union’s neighborhood. There is growing evidence that Beijing is expanding and embedding its presence across the Western Balkans in a variety of sectors, while engaging with an increasing number of local actors. The process appears to be accelerating at a time when there is an emerging Western consensus on the challenges posed by Beijing’s forays into the region. This newfound wariness of

China runs somewhat counter to the country's public image as a source of huge economic opportunities in an era of geopolitical change. Understandably, most analyses of China's activities in the Western Balkans focus on economic cooperation with, and investment in, the region in the last decade. Yet Beijing's wider political, social, and cultural initiatives there deserve a great deal of attention – which they are only now beginning to receive. China is moving onto a new stage of engagement with the Western Balkans, implementing a policy of heightened interaction with various parts of society in numerous policy areas. This paper argues China is on the cusp of acquiring real leverage over policy choices, political attitudes, and narratives in some parts of the Western Balkans. While it has not defined this endeavor as following an explicit strategy, Beijing has implemented policies designed to establish a significant presence along key land and maritime routes that run deep into Europe. The paper describes China's expansive approach to the Western Balkans, which centers on the development of numerous relationships with individuals and institutions (many of them starting from a relatively low base). These relationships – which involve everything from infrastructure and energy to culture, the media, and party politics – are intended to promote Chinese narratives and interests. To this end, Beijing has exploited the geopolitical ambivalence of many Western capitals, grasping the opportunities to invest in strategically important sectors that arise from the persistent development gap between the Western Balkans and the EU, as well as the region's lack of sustained political and economic convergence with the bloc. Finally, the paper argues that Chinese leaders have capitalized on a political affinity with elites in captured states. Beijing is creating incentives for cooperation within these insider groups and beyond, with many citizens of Western Balkans countries adopting a transactional mindset as their dreams of European integration are fading. This process is gradually leading to the emergence of an economic and political ecosystem in which China and Western Balkans countries have significant shared interests (Shopov, 2021). The other article chosen is China's "Hub-and-Spoke" Strategy in the Balkans, written by four authors who work for The Center for Strategic and International Studies is a think tank based in Washington, D.C., in the United States. The summary of the article is as follows. The Western Balkans is an area of geostrategic competition. Western Balkan countries have progressed somewhat on the path to Euro-Atlantic integration but still suffer from lax governance and economic standards, including corruption and inefficient state owned enterprises (SOEs). China has recognized the region's potential and hunger for infrastructure financing and invested in the region during the past decade through its Belt and Road Initiative and 17+1

format. This report assesses Chinese economic activities in seven countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) from January 2012 to January 2020 (McCalpin, 2020).

Mixed methods were used to conduct the research. The mixed methods are the best way to approach this issue. The use of Secondary Data Analysis / Archival Study but also Observational research, which was pretty important to this research was conducted. Learning to use archival study techniques so the time at archives was used much more effectively. One of the approaches to reduce mistakes would be data triangulation or cross-examination. This is the preferred method so it can be seen if the data shows the same results so it can be understood that it is reliable and valid. Theoretical sampling will also help me when comparing between and among those samples of activities, populations etc. As my sample are countries, the comparison of them would give me different results but also similar findings. This means that the grounded theory will help me in my data analysis and even helped with the hypothesis, since in this theory the researcher does not start with a clear hypothesis but goes along with the data until he can make one.

2. THE SINO-ALBANIAN RELATIONS DURING COMMUNISM AND AFTER

2.1 Hoxha -Zedong axis against Khrushchev

A golden age as a metaphor, refers to a period of time or era that scholars, historians or philosophers among others describe as the time of great accomplishments and great endeavors. This metaphor could best describe the decade of strategic partnership and alliance between Albania and China. China, who only recently had come out of a brutal civil war, where the Communists stood victorious, was essentially alone in the world stage. In 1961, following a period of continuous increase of tensions, the Sino-Soviet split became official. Until 1961, both countries had kept the rhetoric against each other only related to the cases of Yugoslavia and Albania and dealing with the two countries. The situation by the year 1961 had changed since the gloves had come off and the rift between the former communist allies was proven to be more than a difference of opinions between dealing with the socialist camp but rather a head-to-head rivalry (Logoreci, 1967). Mao Zedong's breakup of relations with the Soviet Union's leader Nikita Khrushchev can be summarized as it happened along ideological and geopolitical reasons.

Mao, who was a public adherent of Stalin, saw the De-Stalinization of the Soviet Union as detrimental to what he perceived as the purest form of communism. Albania had their own problems with the Soviet state along similar lines of what China's issues were. Enver Hoxha, de facto dictator of Albania, saw the de-Stalinization process as potentially his own downfall, which only reinforced the feelings of suspicion towards the Soviet leadership. Khrushchev organized pro-Soviet party members of the Albanian Workers Party (Communist party) to prepare a coup against Hoxha (CIA 1962). The coup attempt was the Soviet Union's last card to play to gain back their former satellite. Hoxha, who was already suspicious of a Soviet plot, was aware that the Soviets were planning a coup, as the information was passed along by the Chinese (CIA). The coup attempt failed and it gave the Albanian dictator the justification to purge once more the Albanian society, the government and party from any pro-Soviet elements. This move was seen very positively by the Chinese leadership that the Albanians proved that their anti-Soviet sentiments were legitimate and not a ploy. Khrushchev had given in and thrown the towel in late 1962 when it came to the issue of Albania. In a banquet organized in Moscow during the time that the relations were not completely strained with China, he had told the Chinese delegation that the Soviet Union "lost an Albania" while the Chinese "gained an Albania".

The Chinese communist state had the world's largest population, figures describing its population in 1961 around 640 million people, and yet this country had no seat in the United Nations. That seat belonged to their nationalist counterparts whom the communists fought against and won in the brutal Chinese Civil War. The nationalist had retreated to the island of Taiwan, east of mainland China. This situation of almost complete global isolation, brought China and Albania together. The seat in the UNSC was permanently taken by the civil war adversaries from the little island of Taiwan and the council itself was filled with countries that China had no international relations with besides the Soviet Union, which were as mentioned above, extremely tense. The world's other superpower, the United States had no relations with the Chinese communists to begin with. The United States recognized the nationalist government of the Kuomintang, that ruled from Taiwan as the sole representatives of China, despite that they held no control over mainland China. In eyes of the international community and from a geopolitical standpoint, this kind of behavior from the United States and the rest of the Western camp could only mean two things; the West saw the rule of the Chinese communists as completely illegitimate and that if however unlikely the hostilities between the nationalists and the Chinese would

rekindle again, the UN would have to back the internationally recognized Republic of China which ruled from Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. In the communist camp, after the breakup with the USSR, the Chinese had soured their relations with most Soviet satellites but in a strange way they had found a friend in Albania. The Sino-Soviet split gave Albania the opportunity to officialize in the eyes of the world, that much like their Chinese comrades, another communist state has joined the anti-Soviet bloc. From 1961 to 1968, Albania was de jure part of the Soviet led Warsaw Pact, the communist counterpart of NATO. However de facto, Albania had since broken off relationship with the alliance leader, that being the Soviet Union and since fostered relationships with China (CIA, 1962). This left Albania completely isolated and without an ally in Europe, since the Soviet Union had excluded Albania from CEMA, and its technical and military aid programs (Logoreci, 1967). This made the Sino-Albanian alliance much more likely to happen. Albania was in dire need of technical assistance and raw material, as well as food and military security. China gave the Albanian state that lifeline it needed for it to survive. China almost instantly became Albania's main trade partner, technical and military advisor. Initially China's request for the Albanian communists was that Beijing had a voice internationally. This would capitalize on the newly formed UN, which had risen in importance in the post-war world, both as a way for countries to gain legitimacy as part of their recognition as part of the Assembly but also to express their official opinions on various matters to an international crowd.

Unlike China, Albania had an official seat in the United Nations, having that position since 1955. This gave Albania and China a perfect opportunity to address the legitimacy issue that the PRC had with Chiang Kai-Shek's Taiwanese government. Generalissimo Chiang was a veteran of the Sino-Japanese war, the war was won by China when the Japanese finally capitulated in August of 1945. Ironically the Chinese nationalists had a united front with the Communists until the war against the Japanese ended and the old civil war reignited. The loss Chiang suffered at the hands of the Chinese communists reduced his realm to one island, but his legitimacy held at least de jure over the Chinese mainland. Albania had recognized the communist Chinese as the legitimate ruling body of China. Albania under direct Chinese influence, used its annual United Nations gathering to move a resolution to expel Chiang's government and to bring in Mao Zedong's regime to solely represent China in the world stage. These attempts culminated in the 1971 UNGA Resolution 2758 Metzler, 2017). This was Albania's first backed draft-resolution.

The resolution passed with 76 voted for and 35 voted against. It was a historic moment for Albania and it was seen as a huge coup in the eyes of the Albanian state. This passing resolution saw the debut of both Albania and People's Republic of China in the global arena. This could have been perceived as the first step of the small Balkan state towards its international recognition as an entity and political maturation and to become a productive member of the region but also engage more in global politics. These things however were not meant to be as the thesis will show in full detail, however this resolution still remains a nice detail for Albania. 50 years after China joined the UN seat, the event is still marked in history and the Albanian governments since then are still under the impression that this fact has to be stated when dealing with China, in order to foster a better bilateral relationship.

2.2 Chinese dominated Albania

The dynamics of relations between China and Albania were not in any way shape or form relations that would be considered equal. The first interaction between the two communist states came in 1954, just after Stalin's death. The Chinese state saw the Albanian communists as a potential ally. The two countries signed a trade agreement that became the catalyst for the later interactions between Hoxha and China (Biberaj 1987). What characterized Albania as different from the rest of the Soviet camp had in many ways to do with the Albanian politburo and the origins of the worker's party were not in Moscow. By all means the Albanian Worker's Party was much more autonomous to Moscow. It was Hoxha's desire to have the Soviet Union as its first international ally after the fallout with Yugoslavia in 1948. Albania had much more wiggle room to deal independently with China because of these factors. Albania also enjoyed a degree of autonomy because of its geographical position. Albania shared its land borders with Yugoslavia on the North and East, with Greece covering its southern border.

Yugoslavia just like Albania had severed relationships with Moscow since Tito and Stalin split in 1948. The so called "inform biro" period started from 1948 and it lasted until Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union began to normalize relations. Enver Hoxha who feared a complete swallow up from Yugoslavia saw the opportunity to publicly oppose Tito and side with Stalin and the Soviet Union. The Albanian state saw several waves of purges of suspected Yugoslav supporters within the Albanian intelligentsia and government.

Among the most famous people to suffer from this purge was Koçi Xoxe, minister of interior at the time (CIA, p.10). In 1948, Hoxha had needed the Soviets to save Albania from a very likely Yugoslav annexation, and the Soviets had come to his aid, however just a decade later, the Yugoslavs despite having no diplomatic relations had come to Albania's aid against the Soviets in a very ironic twist. The Yugoslavians firstly proved to be a natural boundary against a possible Soviet invasion. In the case of Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968 had no border, the Soviets were more than willing to use their full force when it came to dealing with rogue states in their satellite sphere of influence. The Soviets invaded both countries using their full might of their military power. Neither Hungary nor Czechoslovakia stood a chance. Both states shared borders either with Soviet Russia or a fellow Warsaw Pact member. Hoxha's paranoia over a possible Soviet invasion was justified as we explained in the previously above, however no actual invasion did happen, which left it more as a perceived threat rather than an imminent threat to Albania's continued existence. Even in the case of Hungary or Czechoslovakia, the Soviets did not annex or partition the territories of their satellites, the borders stayed the same, but instead a pro Soviet leadership was installed. We can come to the conclusion that Hoxha was not fearing Albania's extinction, giving the possible Soviet reprisal a patriotic connotation, where national sovereignty of Albania would be touched. In a reappraisal of that situation Hoxha was not fearing for his country's future but rather his own future, that would not have been him being dictator of Albania no longer if the Soviets indeed intervened and removed him from power. Hoxha however used the threat of invasion to bring Chinese investments in Albania rather than just verbal declarations of association and friendship.

The PRC was responsible for a vast array of investments in communist Albania. The one that dwarfed any other industrial work built with Chinese technical and financial aid was the Iron Nickel Plant in Elbasan or also called the Metallurgic Plant "Steel of the Party". The plant was one of the most important industrial achievements of the Albanian state. The Chinese whom help built the plant were also settled in the city of Elbasan, in an area that even after the Chinese specialists left is still called the "Chinese Quarter". It goes to show how influential culturally the presence of the Chinese workers was in the city of Elbasan, some even having fond memories and nostalgia. In the 1970s, the Metallurgical Plant was built in Elbasan, the largest industrial work of that time. Chinese engineers and specialists moved to live in several buildings, somewhere near the Pedagogical School in Elbasan or near the city's stadium. Since then, naturally this area in one of the largest administrative

districts so naturally began to be called "Chinese Quarter" (Agaj, 2020). These industrial works became responsible for Albania's continued self-reliance in construction of other works, but still of course with extensive Chinese aid. During this period, Albania continued massively to industrialize in order to be able to produce more complicated products. Albania had to move from being just a state of resource extraction to an industrialized autarkic economy that would be able to fulfill its own market's needs. The economics of Albania being completely state planned, meant that China's support would be crucial to achieve the desired status.

The Chinese proved to be a reliable ally for Albania in the field of military too. Before the Chinese became Albania's primary foreign partner, the Albanian military that was built with Soviet assistance consisted of a very small force, with minimal motorized capacities. The air force consisted of one squadron of jet airplanes that would have been under Soviet command in case of a possible conflict. This meant that Albania's military was in a poor shape and unable to stop any kind of foreign invasion. Even though in contemporary times, after Albania joined NATO, it is hard to perceive a time when Albania was isolated and surrounded by unfriendly neighbors whom were not shy about their ambitions to occupy Albania. This meant that territorial integrity could only come with a capable military to defend the country. To emphasize the point that Albania was under threat, it is to be noted that the Yugoslavs constantly violated Albania's territory via air.

Yugoslav jets were in contrast to Albania's air force really advanced and the Albanian Air Force was unable to catch up with them. The Yugoslavs constantly tested Albania's defenses and constantly signaled Tirana that a possible Yugoslav invasion was not a matter of if but a matter of when the Yugoslavs were completely sure of a swift campaign. The constant violations of Albania's airspace by Yugoslavia had alarmed the military strategists of Albania and a huge increase in military spending was needed. China had fulfilled that role during the periods of 1960s to the 70s. The Chinese however were really sceptic of Albania's possibility to withstand what Hoxha described a NATO or Warsaw Pact invasion. In 1968, merely weeks after Albania left the Warsaw Pact a delegation was sent to China to discuss the very nature of what was said earlier. Beqir Balluku, Albania's minister of defense had held a secret meeting with Chu Enlai, China's prime minister at the time. Balluku had given notice to the Chinese that Albania initially needed 6000 tons of concrete in order to start the process of bunkerization of the country. The proposed military

plans for Albania had taken the Chinese aback, Prime Minister Chu advised Balluku that the plan for this supposed huge frontal war for Albania were unrealistic and Chu expressed his sincere doubts that Albania would be even able to withstand such an invasion from two of the strongest military alliances in the world. The Albanian delegations to China however were most persistent in their military related requests to Beijing. In the end the Chinese were convinced despite many attempts to make the Albanians change their minds to send huge amounts of military aid to Albania. This secret exchange between Balluku and Chu Enlai can take a different understanding when seen through the historical lens. Balluku himself would be removed from office, arrested and executed by Hoxha merely 7 years after this encounter with the Chinese prime minister. As it will be explained later, Balluku was purged during the Maoist-inspired cultural revolution that happened in Albania that saw many politicians and military officers purged from the regime. It can be speculated that Balluku was purged due to differences in opinion when it came to Albania's defence. However, he was part of the current strategy as the 1968 secret meeting and his constant persistence to receive huge military aid from China showed us. This however was definitely due to Hoxha's influence over every aspect of Albania's continued existence during that period in history.

Hoxha wanted bunkerization in a huge scale and a huge military, and he had not consulted Balluku on this, only given him an order to receive the necessary material to fulfill this paranoid dream. Under this immense pressure from Hoxha, Balluku had convinced China to fill these objectives from the Albanian dictator. The Chinese military aid saw the delivery of over 600 tanks, hundreds of cannons, from anti air artillery to land artillery, jet fighters, torpedos, hundreds of millions of ammunitions for the heavy artillery and two groups of surface to air missiles, type "Lightning 2". This aid however was not completely free, this came in the form of a credit, where Albania eventually would have to pay it back in some form. Despite historical documents not revealing the scale of how much that credit would have been in monetary value, the vast amount of items and their value would have probably meant that the loan to be paid back to China would surpass any of the other credits or loans given to Albania by the communist state. Despite having an immediate effect to the determent of Yugoslav air incursions in Albania, the case being that the mint condition Chinese jets handed to Albania were now able to chase the Yugoslav planes immediately after they violated the sovereign airspace of the state, the Chinese military aid

and the cost that it came with, meant that Albania would enter a period of total Chinese control and influence, being completely dependent on Beijing.

While the Chinese cultural revolution had failed, in Albania it was still going on strong. Hoxha was inspired thoroughly by Mao's revolution that the Albanian dictator took cues on various aspects related to the cultural revolution. The first Chinese inspired reform was the abolition of all military ranks in the armed forces, essentially in the eyes of Hoxha, to create a competent army both militarily and ideologically. This however was not the case because Hoxha met opposition by career officers in this reform, a move that led some of Albania's most decorated higher officers to be classified as enemies of the state. Most of these elements would not retain their posts in the armed forces and would be stripped of duty, dishonorably discharged. Their post-army fate would see them persecuted, imprisoned or in worst case scenarios, executed (Fevziu, 2011). 461 servicemen and 54 officers were arrested in total. Hoxha had dealt a significant blow to its own regime with the removal of ranks in the army. The subsequent purges had dealt the biggest blow to the army itself since its creation in 1943 (Fevziu, pp.292-293) To understand why the army needs ranks and non-commissioned officers and officers in general you have to look at the effectiveness of these ranks in the case of battle. In communist countries the duties of leading an army unit fell both to officers and political commissars. Political commissars were handpicked party bureaucrats with an intensive ideological indoctrination through their academic years. Despite their commissar role, they lacked any meaningful armed forces experience, being essentially just party puppets to spread communist propaganda and inspire soldiers to fight better. The struggle for influence between officers and political commissars was present in Albania like in very other communist country, but with Hoxha's abolition of the ranks, the commissars had full control of the armed forces. Now Albania had an army common soldiers and commissars and nothing in between. This reduced the overall effectiveness of the armed forces, which in those years was given the tremendous task for the defense of Albania from any potentially unwanted visitors, be they NATO or Warsaw Pact ones.

Hoxha's disintegration of the armed forces officer corps was not the only measure taken under the influence of the Chinese cultural revolution. The now infamous *fletërrufe* or *dacibao* in simplified Chinese or in English big-character poster, were a dark reminiscent of that era of complete Chinese domination. The Chinese influence now that transcended the military and political sphere and spread to the society as a whole. The big-character posters were deemed harmful to the harmony of society even by China itself after Mao had

died. The letters were in theory to put people who lacked revolutionary fervor on notice publicly, as they had dedicated public spaces such as downtown areas or university campuses, near a major workspace etc. However, they became targeted letters to essentially publicly shame colleagues, even in unjustified cases, the latter being an important factor to why they were banned in China after Mao. They were prone to libel against the victim, baseless accusations that the perpetrators hoped it would lead to the victim's removal from office or even arrest in some cases. This is due to the big-character posters being considered a legitimate way to express political thought. This was certainly the case in Albania. The posters were not removed after Mao died, but rather the cultural revolution in Albania doubled-down in its Maoist rhetoric. Big-character posters had become the only legitimate way to anonymously express political thought in Albania. However, this was not the kind of political thought where the regime was criticized, this was the kind of thought where the notified people in the posters were shamed for not being radical enough. In many cases the posters were perpetrated in order to have character assassination in the Albanian society. Any actual or perceived deviation to party line would be the catalyst to have your name plastered over a big-character poster, publicly shamed and alerted to the authorities who took the accusations as genuine and legitimate enough to be investigated. In the case of the famous Albanian historical linguist Eqrem Çabej, several big-character posters were addressed to him, and he was obliged to respond in similar manner to the poster, so he would be able to disprove the targeted letter and defend his position. In no way shape or form should the victim of such poster ignore it.

That would only arise suspicion that the poster is indeed correct and essentially create more problems than fix them by ignoring it. With the arrival of democracy and free thought, the *dacibaos* or big-character posters were finally put to sleep in the Albania society, however the style of writing still lingers in the transitional Albanian society. Despite their disuse for 30 years, the news media and various commentators describe various political writings by different Albanian politicians as reminiscent of that particular style of writing, despite this time the writing is not anonymous and the freedom of thought essentially allows people to express their personal opinions without any repercussion. Whether they are indeed a reminiscent of that Chinese dominated era in culture or not is up to debate, the mere mention of them shows how much China influenced Albania politically during the fateful decades of the uncorgious.

2.3 The Sino-Albanian split

The Sino-Albanian alliance was far from a conventional alliance that we have come to see such as in the case of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. There was no official treaty signed by either state. There were no defense guarantees between states, nor coordination between militaries. In all sense of the word, the alliance was informal in nature. The bonding factor that created this alliance being the belief in both Beijing and Tirana was their belief for proletarian internationalism. To put simply, proletarian internationalism is the Marxist theory that guarantees a worldwide struggle against capitalism and reactionary elements with workers, or the proletariat as the main proponents and area for spread of these ideas. What struck both Hoxha and Mao that they chose to adhere to this version of Marxism was that this version of Marxist internationalism did not go against the idea of national self-determination. The national question is not against the proletarian revolution. Stalin, whom both Hoxha and Mao revered, explained in his own words that “the national identity must not be considered as a self-contained and isolated matter but part of revolution as a whole” (Chakradhar, 1964). This stuck true in both China and Albania. Both communist parties who lead the respective states were a product of a national movement against a foreign occupier. Albanian communist origins were rooted in the National Liberation Front, the movement that led the Albanian partisan activity against both Italian and later German occupiers, while they stood victorious. In China, Mao had fought against the Japanese aggression towards China, where his territorial gains and support among populace rose exponentially after the eventual Japanese capitulation in 1945 (Coble, 2007).

The official widely accepted date when the People’s Republic of China broke its friendly relations with Albania and cut off its development aid is 7th of July 1978. General Secretary and Dictator of Albania, Enver Hoxha, along with the Prime Minister of Albania, Mehmet Shehu received an urgent telegram from the Albanian embassy in Beijing. According to the telegram, the People’s Republic of China due to Albania’s inability to pay the 1975 military and economic loans would with immediate effect pull out all the technical and special advisors from the country (Shtylla, 1978). This was the final blow to the relations between the two states that had fallen off a lot from the once flourishing alliance. Deng Xiaoping whom was elected Supreme Leader of China in the same year had come with a heap of reforms for the Chinese communist state that had only recently come off the devastation of the cultural revolution. As it will be explained more intricately a bit

later, Deng Xiaoping will enact social market reforms and eventually open up the economy, marking a shift from totally planned economy to a freer market one. In this Deng had reevaluated the Chinese commitments abroad, among those being in Albania. The telegram of 7th of July was not as the Albanian saying goes, a lightning in a clear sky. The Albanian regime had not taken the reforms of Deng as positive and still adhered to Mao's teachings. The tone that the Chinese were essentially and finally fed up with Hoxha's regime was with the contents of the telegram. In it, Shtylla, the ambassador to China in that era notes the aggravated tone of the Chinese, which is to be said it was unprecedented in diplomatic cables. Shtylla states that:

Decoding top secret telegram from Beijing, comrade Enver, comrade Mehmet, comrade Nesti Nase, July 7 1978. Y Xhan handed me the note with 8 pages. It announces that the 'Chinese government expects its economic and military aid' and its payments for them for the year 1975 from Albania, and will pull out specialists, military and economic specialists who work in Albania and for this, he puts all these responsibilities on the Albanian side. He expresses the hope that the Albanian government will facilitate their return. The note is full of slander, distortions and baseless accusations. I denied all of them.

Shtylla, 1978, *Declassified telegram directed to the Albanian government*
(translated by author of thesis)

In the last part where Shtylla mentions slanders and distortions of facts, the Chinese now under a more economic centered government had accused the Albanians of essentially reaping the rewards of the Chinese aid. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had told the Albanian ambassador that the Albanians had received help from China throughout decades and sometimes this help would be in harm of China's own citizens, such as sending food to Albania while the PRC suffered from lack of food security. The telegram also mentions that China received thousands of Albanian intellectuals whom received specialization in China (Shtylla, 1978). Essentially this last part was sort of a reminder to Tirana, that indeed China has done much more in regards of aid and benefits to Albania than vice versa. Regardless of how true the accusations were from the Chinese side, the truth remained after this aggressive verbal note that China and Albania were no longer allies. The effect in Albania was almost immediate. All the Chinese specialists had left the country, leaving behind the vast Chinese built industry without a clear future. With the Chinese military aid stopping, Hoxha under increased paranoia due to no international partner to funnel him the necessary weapons, increased the efforts of the bunkerization of Albania. The bunkerization of Albania has been called one of the main factors of the

complete economic decline Albania suffered after China stopped its aid. The economy was brought in the brink of collapse and by Hoxha's death, bunkerization had not been finished and the project had stood at a halt. This goes to show how essential to Albania's security was China in the period of 1962-78. Due to the unfriendly neighbors Albania had at the time, the opposition to a total bunkerization of the small nation was not paramount. After several purges of officers and other military men, Hoxha stood unopposed in the fantasy of mass bunkerization that in his eyes would save Albania from any and all potential aggressors. Hoxha had taken the famous latinized phrase *si vis pacem, para bellum*, if you seek peace, prepare for war, to heart as Albania during the Chinese alliance had militarized excessively and it exceeded its capacity to maintain the vast military storage. So, when the Chinese had finally called it quits with Hoxha's regime, the communist state were left with a vast military stock but no Chinese logistics to support it anymore. In the daily consumer spending, the Chinese supplied the entire Albanian market, with the Chinese withdrawal, the Albanian consumers suffered. The economic downfall hit the hardest the day to day consuming in Albania. Since the economy was entirely planned centrally in both Albania and China, the daily economy would have to be satisfied by the state itself since consuming is not the driving factor for profits, but rather an expense that the state authority had to fulfill. The Albanian state once did not have to spend to fulfill raw material needs for its vast industrial sector, since the Chinese were the main supplier, but since the debacle of the Sino-Albanian split, the strained Albanian economy would have to fill that role too, in addition to state expenditure for its citizens' daily needs.

Culturally, the Sino-Albanian split took other and different dimensions. Chairman Mao himself had suffered blow to his cult of personality. The Cultural Revolution had catastrophic consequences in the Chinese populace. The Red Guards, a product of this revolution was an organized group of youths, mostly students who took it upon themselves to lead this popular upheaval called upon them by their own state's leader. Their brutal tactics and mob mentality were crucial in the organizing and implementation of the Red Guard policies (Heaslet, 1972). The disaster that followed led to the persecution of millions of Chinese citizens. Among the persecuted and lynched in many cases were members of the communist party even, and the revolution was close to getting completely out of hand. Under the pressure that the Albanians felt due to the initial neutrality in the struggle, official Tirana reacted in 1967. The Albanian communists in a public address had pledged support to Mao's faction in the struggle (Logoreci, 1967). The cultural revolution

however did not succeed. Mao would call off the Red Guards and personally take responsibility for the disaster. Mao however would keep his chairman status even though much of China's political and military hierarchy essentially became classless, in an effort to remove much of what Mao initially saw as a remnant of the previous non-communist society. He would still be China's leader until his eventual death. The issue of Mao's succession became critical in 1971 after his former comrade Lin Bao died in a plane crash. Lin Bao was being groomed by Chairman Mao as his successor, being the Vice Chairman of the CCP until his premature death. This fact was not up to debate as even Zhou Enlai in a public address referred to Lin as Mao's universally accepted successor. His death was a huge blow to Mao's legacy and it also began a quiet retreat of Maoism from the upper echelons of the Chinese society and politics. In 1972 after Henry Kissinger visited China to meet with Mao personally, Deng Xiaoping once referred as a "reactionary" by the cultural revolution and persecuted by Mao, had his figure rehabilitated and brought back in the fold as one China's top people. This move did not stand well with Hoxha, since not only rehabilitation of a major party figure never did happen in Albania under no circumstance, but also that Hoxha did not see Deng with a positive light, an attitude that will contribute to the eventual split, once Mao died, Deng would assume leadership of the country. Hoxha felt Mao's ideals were betrayed and his eventual war of words escalated to diplomatic tensions between China and Albania. These tensions culminated in 1978, and after the Chinese finally left the country, Hoxha felt that Albania was now finally able to achieve the communist utopia he had always desired.

2.4 Rapprochement between China and Albania post-Hoxha

Enver Hoxha, the infamous dictator of Albania passed way in 1985. By the end of his life long tenure as the de facto leader of Albania his political legacy was marred by the worsening condition of the Albanian economy that was under immense pressure to achieve complete autarky. Since the Sino-Albanian split, Hoxha had become increasingly paranoid and had invested a large amount of Albania's wealth to building of a country wide tunnel and bunker system, in order to what the dictator saw as a potential multi-frontal war against multiple foreign enemies. The wellbeing of Albanians was put in a permanent backseat. Hoxha's death in 1985 was publicly sold to the public and internationally as a national tragedy in the grandest proportions, diplomatically his death was proven to be a relief. Albania had reentered slowly but gradually in the world scene. Alia would reinstate relations with many Western nations, including Albania's neighbor Greece and the

neighbor beyond the Adriatic, Italy. Albania resumed its frozen relations with the People's Republic of China too.

A seemingly black hole exists in the period of the 1989-1992 relations between Albania and China in the academic scene. The studies revealed that the Sino-Albanian alliance and subsequent split were the most studied and expanded era of the Sino-Albanian relations. The years of the post-Hoxha Albania lacked any meaningful critical research. The most interesting part was that the 1989-1992 period saw a significant renewal of relations between the two communist states. Hoxha's legacy internationally had left Albania completely isolated in the world stage. Hoxha's successor, First Secretary Ramiz Alia was left with the tremendous task of first having to manage an economy in steep decline and the ever-growing cost of maintaining the heavy industry that the nation had built in the 1960s and 1970s with Chinese aid. One of the oldest running agreements that Albania has with a foreign power is the Protocol of the 1st Session of the Joint Commission of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and the People's Republic of China for Economic and Technical Cooperation. This agreement was signed on 23rd of November, in the year 1989. Despite the collapse of the communist regime merely 3 years later, this agreement is still in effect and has been always referred even as the numerical successors of the same protocol still refer back to the first protocol signed in 1989 (AMPJ, 1989). The year 1990 saw the People's Republic of China and the People's Socialist Republic of Albania completing the Protocol of the first session of the joint commission of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and the Republic of China for economic and technical cooperation. This was the first government level agreement and meeting between the states since the 1970s. This protocol primal focus was Albania's immediate need of assistance in the reconstruction of the Iron Nickel Plant in Elbasan and the Soda-PVC plant in Vlore. Both these plants exceeded the capacity of the then extremely strained Albanian economy. China's technical aid in the 1970s made able for Albania to build these two industrial behemoths.

With the establishment of the Metallurgical Combine "Steel of the Party" ferrous metallurgy was developed and the processing of iron-nickel ores began to be done in a complex and closed cycle manner. In 1984 the total industrial production of the iron-nickel and ferrous metallurgy was 18.7 times greater than in 1960 and 5 times greater than in

1970, while the extraction of iron-nickel ores reached 1,080,000 tons, being increased 4.2 times and 2.6 times, respectively. During the five-year period VII, it will increase 2.5 times. It ranks 3rd in the extraction of metal ores, after copper-chromium.

FESH, 1985

(Translated by the author of this thesis)

However, after the suspension of friendly relations in 1978, these plants had steadily deteriorated because Albania lacked the proper technical prowess and the economy had reached a point that it could not afford the repairs. Albania unlike China who had immensely benefited from the reforms of Premier Deng's socialist market economy. Albania had refused to implement these reforms and since Albania had not been part of the Soviet camp since 1961, the perestroika reforms led by Gorbachev had no effect in Albania whatsoever. The Chinese however took the request from the Albanians as legitimate and the protocol assured Chinese technical assistance in the process. The full list of the aforementioned repair and construction were:

- vii. Reconstruction of the Iron Nickel Plant in the Metallurgical Plant, Elbasan
- ii. The reconstruction of the coke battery and the construction of a new coke battery in the metallurgical plant, Elbasan
- iii. Reconstruction of the air separation plant in the ammonium nitrate plant, Fier
- iv. Reconstruction of the tr PVC plant in the Soda-PVC plant, Vlore
- v. Completion of the wires department, of which in the metallurgical plant, Elbasan
- vi. Reconstruction of the carbide furnace in the Soda-PVC Plant, Vlore
- vii. Completion of the factory of carbon products

(Arkivi I Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme, 1990)

The resumption of good will relations with China was in many senses a continuation of the relations that Albania had with them in the 1970s. In the eyes of both Tirana and Beijing, the strenuous period of 1972 to 1978 was just a bump in the road (AMPJ, 1990) and that both China and Albania recognized that the historical friendship could resume once Hoxha and his rather extremist ideals were eradicated from the Albanian foreign policy. The late

80s proved a sort of test for the new Albanian leadership to welcome itself again in the world stage after a period of self-isolation that only weakened Albania to the point of economic meltdown. The first renewal of relations with China, saw also a rekindle of cultural exchange between nations too. Based on the goals set by the first protocol, a series of agreements were made from the year 1990 to 1992. The implementation of these agreements however was unfortunately not done in full effect. It is important to understand the situation in Albania at the time. The agreements had been signed and ratified by both countries and no legal ramifications came from them, however the Albanian communist regime was in dire straits. While these agreements saw increase in trade value between the states, the communist regime itself faced total disintegration. The severe economic crisis that common Albanians faced were one of the most important factors behind the eventual collapse of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. There was also an agreement on cultural exchange that was signed between China and Albania in the year 1991 for the year 1992. However, it is not known to have been concluded successfully. A deep search in the archives of the Radio-Television of Albania produced no results. The agreement is confirmed to exist after it is stored in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania. It could be suspected due to the political calamity of the communist regime in the year 1991-92, the agreement had fallen through. This agreement's first clause was concerned that both parties will exchange programs on the political, economic, cultural, scientific and artistic life and on the life of the children of the country of both countries, as well as light, classical and popular music recordings. The third clause stated that both parties would exchange radio programs in the form of magnetic tapes and tape recorders, accompanied by explanatory text in English or French languages (AMPJ, 1991). In the same year another agreement that was based on cultural and academic exchange was signed between the two states. The Albanians and the Chinese were eager on student exchange, academic and scientist exchanges and even sport related ones, as an effort to strengthen relations. In 1991 again in Beijing, both parties agreed on a bilateral agreement on the aforementioned issues. Both sides will support and promote cooperation and exchanges in the field of culture, education, science, arts, information and sports between the two countries.

These intensive attempts by Albania to rekindle relations are interpreted as the last gasp of a failing system. Even by Hoxha's death, the system was almost too far gone. Hoxha had created an essentially suicidal regime that was bound to fail after his death. Hoxha's

international standing was abysmal, since Albania had two major splits with two major allies and by his death, Albania was completely alone as it was aforementioned. Most importantly, Hoxha had dealt huge blows to his own legacy by periodically purging his own cabinet multiple times. His purges would not spare even his former closest associate and the widely accepted successor to Hoxha, Mehmet Shehu. Shehu's death officially ruled a suicide was huge blow to Hoxha's regime. While it can be speculated what would have happened to Albania if the purges against its own party did not happen, the truth remains that by the time that Hoxha passed away, he had taken his entire former inner circle to his grave (Fevziu, pp. 305-316). Even if Albania had started to implement economic and political liberalization in 1989 as it reopened trade relations with China, it can be assessed that it was indeed too late for the communist regime to survive, the dice has been cast for communism throughout Europe already. The collapse of communism through the years of 1989 to 1992 around the former Eastern bloc and the eventual civil war in Yugoslavia were critical factors that led to the collapse of the entire Eastern bloc. Albania remained the last communist country in Europe and the collapse of the system in 1991 officially made Albania the last country to overthrow communism. The 1992 elections saw the official end of the single party system in Albania. After the fall of communism and the arrival of democracy in Albania, the economic situation was in dire conditions. A massive exodus of Albanians to the West for better economic conditions was followed by a massive westernization of the state and society. For the first time in 50 years, Albanians were able to legally possess western media, wear western styled clothes and able to freely move outside or inside the country, all the above being completely illegal during communism. So, the eventual decline of the relations between China and the new Republic of Albania is explainable since to the Albanian politicians and society, the People's Republic of China remained a memory in the controversial communist regime times.

Throughout the 1990s, Albania had only one agreement signed with their Chinese counterparts. Ratified in 1995, the 1994 agreement was based on a goodwill gesture between China and Albania. China provided Albania with an undisclosed military assistance package in the form of a loan. This agreement was hugely beneficial to Albania since the Albanian military had inherited a vast stock of military hardware from the communist era. As explained earlier, the relatively modern military hardware was gifted by the Chinese throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, but by the 1990s and after the Sino-Albanian split, this hardware had fallen in disrepair. The backbone of the Albanian Air Force and the mechanized backbone of the Albanian Army was at the time almost

exclusively formed around Chinese manufactured equipment and vehicles. This agreement was the only significant interaction between China and Albania for at least more than a decade. This can be interpreted that Albania's immediate needs to transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market-based economy with minimal government interference prioritized the established Western European states that Albania not only was geographically close to but also aspired to mimic through its reforms. However, the economic recovery during the 90s made this loan by the Chinese a welcomed opportunity to the Albanian state. Albania and China's relations had stagnated once again, however this time the stagnation did not mean the decrease of relations from governmental level to purely trade, the framework of possible cooperation between the People's Republic and Albania had already been set with the 1989 protocol and the subsequent agreements. The mutual effort of both states for further cooperation in the fields of economy and culture was absolutely crucial to expand the existing relations that both countries enjoyed to this date.

2.5 Berisha's approach to Beijing

The year 2009 was for modern Albania, a very significant period of time when it came to international developments. The first of April 2009 saw Albania and Croatia both join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. For Albanian politicians on all sides this was the culmination of efforts made by the Albania to become member of the Euro-Atlantic alliance. The NATO alliance had proven reliable to Albanian state and nation. Regarding the Kosovo operation led by NATO, the small Albanian majority region came under an intensive genocidal campaign led by the Yugoslav state. This campaign was ended abruptly only by the NATO led intervention that started in March of the year 1999. Albania at the time had recently come out of the troubles in the fateful year of 1997 weakened economically, militarily and politically, and yet the Kosovar Albanians had come to Albania nonetheless to escape the state organized genocide in Kosovo. The Kosovo Liberation Army would use the Albanian border to cross it when Yugoslav army units were in pursuit. In April 1999, one such Serb unit crossed the border and entered Albania. This prompted an immediate military response by the Albanian government. The Serbs took advantage of the fact that Albania had limited international backing, and it was not part of any alliance.

The incursion led to the breach of diplomatic relations between Albania and Yugoslavia. This was the first diplomatic breakup that Albania undertook since 1961, when Albania officially broke up relations with the Soviet Union. Militarily, many Albanian villages were bombed by Serbian forces, and the Albanian army units organized a counteroffensive that led to the Serbian unit's withdrawal. After the Serbian aggression, the Albanian government had agreed to lend the communist era military bases to support the NATO intervention in Kosovo. This international incident only proved further that Albania needed international allies to protect itself from such occurrences ever happening again. Unlike the era of isolationism during Hoxha after the complete anarchy of 1997, the Albanian army was unable to completely defend Albania in a volatile time and region. The Balkans had been a hotbed of conflict and war since the Yugoslav breakup and the conflict had spilled over in Albania. The Albanian political elite had rightly assessed that as an aspiring democratic state in transition, Albania could only be part of a democratic alliance led by democratic countries. This alliance was NATO. In November of the same year, Albania introduced to the alliance its Membership Action Plan. This is the first move to declare the intentions of a country to join the multinational alliance. Even though Albania was not still part of the alliance, its action during the Kosovo war can be only interpreted as if Albania was unofficially aligned with NATO. The NATO intervention in Afghanistan saw the Albanian state send its own contingent of commandos and soldiers to contribute in the NATO-led mission in 2002. The period between 2002 to 2008, Albania had completely aligned with the objectives and the requirements of the alliance. The ascension in NATO came exactly 10 years after the events in the Yugoslav-Albanian border, marking the finalization of the long road that Albania followed geopolitically. With the NATO membership, an alliance or friendship with any Eastern states such as China or the recently democratized Russia was not in the cards by any means diplomatically.

Sali Berisha's government were the signatories of the finalization of the accession to the alliance of NATO for the Albanian side. Berisha, a self-proclaimed westernizer had accelerated Albania's accession to the alliance in his first four years of governance from 2005 to 2009 in a steady pace. Albania ratified agreements to modernize its army. The dismantle of decade old Soviet and Chinese ammunition was underway. Albania also disposed all of its inherited chemical weapons which could have been a source of a dangerous incident since they were not properly stored. All these reforms, coupled with more legal frameworks and the creation of the economic incentives for foreign investment

was the biggest indicator that Berisha himself had set the goal to fully westernize and modernize Albania by the end of the short-term plans.

There was however a significant shift in the second mandate that Berisha's party won in 2009 that lasted 4 years. The economic climate of 2009 was characterized as a post-financial crisis one. In 2008, the world went through one of its most significant financial crises since the Great Depression (Vincelette 2010). China however was the only major power that not only bounced back in record time but exceeded their expectations. This made China the best performing economy when the crisis raged worldwide (Lardy 2011). A feeling of the perfect opportunity for Albania to capitalize in this was discussed in Tirana's highest echelons of governance. Berisha had first started to approach China before the 2008 global financial crisis. The most significant investment by the Chinese state in Albania during Berisha's reign came in the year 2007. The Chinese Government had reached an agreement with the Albanian Government for a project related to the container inspection equipment that would be installed in the Port of Durrës. The equipment was essentially development aid by the Chinese government to the Albania. The Chinese Ministry of Commerce were the source of the funding but the sum remains still undisclosed which is due to the classified nature of some official documents. The Chinese government agreed to build "state of the art" scanners, using the contractor Nuctech Company. Nuctech Company is not an unknown name when it comes to container scanners. The company itself is a partially state-owned subsidiary, with ties to both the Chinese government and military. The ties to these both entities have raised suspicions on the intention of having scanners made from Nuctech. The United States, Albanian biggest ally and strategic partner has banned the company from operating in the territory of the United States. Despite this setback the company has grown to a world leader of container, airport and port scanners industry. NATO member states make the biggest market for Nuctech scanner technology. The company is a subsidiary of the CNNC, China National Nuclear Corp, a company that the US Department of Defense has assigned as a military company (Associated Press, 2022). The security concerns of having a partially state-owned with ties to the Chinese military no less, container scanner company, scanning every bit and person who passes through them are related to data and privacy breaches. The flow of sensitive information that goes through each scanner can be easily hacked or accessed by Nuctech. There is no way to confirm if Chinese tech giants illegally access the data that is processed through the scanners or not, but to the DoD and the US government, the risk is

clear. While the risk to data breaches of millions of citizens and containers is a real threat to Nuctech-operated scanners, the other more objective risk comes with quality. The scanners were installed in 2008 after the equipment was handed over to Durrës port authorities and in the presence of PM Berisha himself to mark the occasion (W&M Institute, 2015). The guaranteed operation time was around 1000 hours, however after 200 hours, the scanners were defunct and in need of intricate repairs. The quality of the scanner equipment is at doubt especially in Albania. The obvious disrepair became an issue, the equipment was out of use from 2012 to 2015, the year when Nuctech finally decided to repair the scanners. The risks of this are that it only needs only one container to smuggle illegal contraband, but what's even worse in the case of Nuctech scanner is that for many years the scanners were bust, so it had to be a physical search that would detect any possible illegal thing. Terrorist groups or organized crime can exploit this security breach in the Albanian ports and the threat to Albanian government and NATO stability is real. These facts give more weight to the American assessment of Nuctech as not only a tentacle of the Chinese state and military but also not capable to fulfill the required work from its scanners, like the scandal in Albania. Since its day that was put to work, these scanners have operated for over a decade and it can be only speculated on what risks it has put Albania in. While the international terrorism threat has gradually become less of a threat in 2022, in 2007 the threat was very real. A US House committee in 2003 assessed that the lax measures in the ports made containers a real threat to national security (Committee on Governmental Affairs, 2003). The use by organized crime had already been established by the committee but the risk that international terrorist groups could use the containers to smuggle weapons, personnel for terrorist attacks and funding the aforementioned groups through illegal activities. The committee also blamed the technology used by the United States in the container scanning procedure which left many other containers unscanned or the scanned ones possibly not scanned correctly and entirely, making the ports and the society at whole vulnerable to terrorist attacks. If one cargo container exploded due to containing an explosive device, a worst-case scenario could happen such as a chemical attack or dirty bomb. Albania did not suffer a terrorist attack in its entirety during the NATO intervention in Afghanistan and that Albania was part of it, the risk assessment of containers did not lower. The containers even as current as 2022 are continued to be used in various illegal activities which not only finance organized crime but also contribute directly to the harming of the rule of law in Albania. Nuctech scanners are not the only reason of the problems that contribute to the increased usage of ports for narcotics or other

illegal substances smuggling, that responsibility falls also on the port authorities that are bought to look the other way, as the investigation by the police has shown that in many cases there was an inside job. However even when the scanners properly worked such as the case in January 6th 2022, the scanners failed to detect the drugs that were later confiscated by the police only after the container had left the port. This crucial factor contributes to the ever-growing concerns that relate to Chinese state-owned companies and their security concerns in Albania.

After the Nuctech scanners investment, Berisha started an almost immediate rapprochement with the PRC. On April 21st 2009, Berisha had personally travelled to Beijing to commemorate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Albania and China. Berisha was given reception by the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. This marked the first time that the head of both states had met officially since Enver Hoxha's reception by Chairman Mao. The significance of Berisha's visit to China was proven to be the catalyst of bilateral agreements that followed suit. Berisha in his address to the Chinese media once he arrived was that the Albanian leader felt that as quote "I could feel the development of China every time I came here" (FMPRC, 2009). This affection for the Chinese style development characterized Albania's approach to China in the years that followed this meeting between the heads of state. Berisha would go as far as calling Albania in November 2012 as Europe's "Little China" (Ora News, 2012). In an appeal to the financial institutions of Albania, Berisha had encouraged them to support small entrepreneurs.

If there is a lesson that we can learn from the small and medium-sized European enterprise, it is the assessment, investment, encouragement in the development of this dimension as one of the most determining conditions of success in the continuation of enterprises

Sali Berisha, (Ora News, November 2012)

(Translated by the author of thesis)

Berisha's majority government also passed a year prior to Berisha's meeting with the Chinese Premier, the law of creation of 8-9 economic zones in Albania. These would be the Koplik Industrial Park in Koplik, Shkodër. The Shengjin Industrial Park with an area of 3,2 hectares. The Elbasan Industrial Park in the region of the former Metallurgic Plant. The

Durres Industrial Park in Spitalle, Durres, with an area of 850 hectares, state- and privately-owned area. The Vlore Industrial Park in Vlore. The Shkoder Industrial Park includes the former industrial center with an area of 137 hectares. Lezha: Industrial Park of Lezha, proposed by the municipality of Lezha and approved on 27 January 2009. The Industrial Park of Tirana approved on 22 July 2009 in Laknas, and the one free Zone “Vlora Free Zone” approved by the government on 11 June 2009 (Sherifi & Turan 2018). According to Sherifi and Turan (2018), these economic incentives that the government of Albania approved failed to make a difference. The problems that lingered these zones were related to Albania’s lack of proper infrastructure and the legal issues that arose with land owners in these zones. These industrial parks were built during the communist era which meant they were built on lands seized by landowners and with zero compensation given to them by the communist state. After the right possess land was legalized once more after the fall of communism in 1992, the landowners were in legal battle with the government so they could either get compensation or their former property back. Berisha wanted to counterbalance the failure of these zones to produce any economic benefits for Albania by sending signals to the Chinese investors. In another public address, Berisha had promised an unprecedented 1-euro fee for the whole Spitala free economic zone (Balkanweb, 2012). Berisha specifically appealed to Chinese investors whom he promised that they would have full government cooperation if they chose to invest in Albania. Analyzing these statements by Berisha, a certain view can be formed around the psychology and nature of these comments. Berisha had shifted his diplomatic focus in a rather radical way, coddling up to China rather publicly when the country itself just went through the process of joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the intergovernmental military organization led de facto by the United States whom had invested its own political power so Albania could join the alliance.

There are two schools of thought that were able to make up for this situation with the former Prime Minister. Firstly Berisha, despite his rebranding as the leader of the Democratic Party of Albania in 1992 was still an intellectual with ties to the communist era. This is not to say this would be a personal attack on the character of Berisha, because as it is undisputed that Albania went through 45 years of communist dictatorship, and the political class that came out after the total collapse of the communist regime were intellectuals whom were educated and part of the former regime’s society. This goes to say for most Albanians, they received a highly indoctrinated education, and lived in a

politically indoctrinated society, whether they had positive feelings towards it or not. Berisha not only an eyewitness to the vast economic and technical aid Albania enjoyed from China but he also lived throughout the era. The push to modernize Albania's backward economy was from Chinese incentive and it saw a huge economic growth and prosperity in the Albanian state that was never seen before. Witness accounts from the time period describe an Albania that for the first time in its history of independence could fill up the storefronts with Chinese produce and tools and there was food security. This is a case of purely communist nostalgia. Communist nostalgia is not an uncommon feeling among former communist countries. The term "rose tinted glasses" is referred when a person or a group of people see only the positive aspects of a topic, event, period of time, object or history. This is the case for communist nostalgia. According to Todorova and Gille in the book "*Post-Communist Nostalgia*", the feeling of nostalgia is rooted in this obsession about the so called good old days (p.138). This version of nostalgia being an ahistorical account of past events. In another article quoted in the book with relations to the Bulgarian society, it is stated that the Bulgarian people after two decades of democracy, that the society completely changed its attitude towards communism or socialism. "It is to be noted that we live in a society that do not know what it good about democracy, and have forgotten what is bad about socialism (p.41).

In the case of Germany and its past of communis for example, a certain type of post-communist nostalgia has developed, interestingly called Ostalgie. The term itself comes from the German word Ost which stands for East in English and nostalgia. This simply put being the desire of formerly East Germans who stood 45 years opposed to West Germany to go back at the times of the former German Democratic Republic or colloquially called East Germany. However, in the case of Germany as it is seen in election year, this feeling does not come from the desire of people to reinstate communist authoritarian government over Germany. Slavoj Zizek puts Ostalgie and post-communist nostalgia as part of this popular sentiment that goes with what he calls "the fascination of people with totalitarianism and radical politics and seemingly these groups blame "global multicultural capitalism" for repressing these kinds of political feelings in the post-communist blocks (2001,242-44). Zizek's view can be taken as genuine when talking about Germany for example when it comes to recent electoral results. The former territory of East Germany has become the hotbed of many recently rediscovered and rebranded ideologies from the past. Most of them ironically not being related to communism, at least how Marx

bequeathed it in his works that were so ever prevalent in Germany before communism fell. East Germany has become the hotbed of recent populist, far right, nationalist, nativist, monarchist and Eurosceptic movements. The AfD, Alternative fur Deutschland or in English, Alternative for Germany is a catchall party that united most of the sentiments listed above. In the recent elections the AfD had seemingly dominated Eastern Germany, winning almost completely in all the German states besides Berlin. The AfD however is a far cry from the communist party that once ruled the lands. Researchers see this as Ostalgie being part of this feeling that the former German Democratic Republic guaranteed the population a nativist pride that comes with the lay of the land. The AfD promises the Eastern Germans the same sentiment, to which they have to thank for the success.

In Albania a similar argument can be made. The Democratic Party of Albania and Sali Berisha have always been branded as the most anticommunist party in Albania. However, Berisha and his followers might not adhere to Hoxha's communist ideology, they certainly do seem to mimic it in some aspects, like the populist party Alternative for Germany, in Germany. Berisha wants to instill that national pride in Albanians, which is very reminiscent of Hoxha's rhetoric. Hoxha despite being a radical communist, put the Albanian nationalism in the highest pedestal next to the party of course. Hoxha like many of his communist peers, used nationalism as a tool to unite the people under his rule, while ideologically he remained a communist. Berisha on the other hand has always been self-branded as a populist leader before populism became a term. Albanian patriotism being officially core values of his conservative right Democratic Party. However, in the eyes of some of his peers, Berisha has not thrown away his communist coat but rather turned it inside out and rebranded himself as an anticommunist. This is certainly the case to Mr. Meksi. Aleksander Meksi's political career started in 1990 when he co-founded the Democratic Party along Berisha. He was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Albania after the March 1992 elections, a position he held until he resigned in March 1997. He was also member of the Albanian Parliament from 1991 to 2001. Meksi's split with Berisha became apparent in the years after he left the Democratic Party to the public eye. Meksi in an article written in 2009 for the Albanian newspaper "Gazeta Shqiptare" had this to say for his former political ally:

In this sense, one speaks of anti-communism from the position of crypto-communism or end-communism, as a matter of form (as it should be), that is, theater is being played; therefore, everything is a parody. Besides, contrary to how many people think today, the

nostalgia of communism is square and legalized (a legal term that politics uses to justify evil) in Albania in these last twelve years, its elements are the foundation of aberrations and deviations of the years '92-97. And the parody lies precisely in the declarative demands for its punishment and eradication. This parody-nostalgia is not random but created by the same occult centers of politics (not to mention power) in Albania. In this perspective, Chinese communism is viewed with "internationalis" enthusiasm and praised precisely because it survived until today "successful" even though the smoke will rise up later. In the same way, the so-called right-wing parties are filled with people with communist past, background and present, or who change parties to be in power forever.

(Meksi, 2009), Parodi e anti komunizmit apo nostalgji e komunizmit

Parody of anticommunism or nostalgia of communism

(Translated by the author of this thesis)

So, the former confidante and ally of Berisha and member of Berisha's cabinet had seen through the veil of this anticommunist Berisha that indeed Mr. Berisha was a fan of Chinese communism. Perhaps Berisha wanted to actually try to emulate and mimic the Chinese communist achievements like his visit in Beijing suggested. Was Berisha so much nostalgic for the communist past of Albania that he tried to instill to his followship that were of similar age that he would try to bring China in Albania in a very boasted and pompous way, or was there a more rational and objective explanation to this conundrum. Berisha in the early 2010s was under immense pressure internally and internationally. Albania had entered a period political crisis. DP's rivals in the parliament, the Socialist Party had boycotted for half a year with the pretext of electoral fraud in 2009, while in 2011, a political protest had turned bloody after 4 unarmed protestors were shot in front of the Prime Minister's office where Berisha was at the time (Çullhaj 2018). Berisha heavy handed approach to his political opponents got the attention of Albania's strategic partners too. His handling of the 21st of January 2011 protest had seriously damaged the reputation of the Albanian democracy and Albania's chances to start the ascension in the European Union. The Department of State under then Secretary Hillary Clinton had organized mediation talks between Berisha and Rama, the latter being the leader of the opposition at the time (Likmeta, 2011). The Albanian economy in the year 2011-13 was performing

miserably. The eurozone crisis was felt in Albania in a significant way. The government had failed to prepare sufficiently for the crisis and Albania's main trade partners at the time Greece and Italy were suffering immensely due to the eurozone crisis (Mero, 2012). Berisha was faced with the task of revitalizing the Albanian economy. His constant dog whistle to China to come to Albania to invest was not lost in the general populace, however it had become a bit repetitious in the overly dramatic speeches the former Prime Minister held during cabinet meetings. Berisha was using China's possible investiture prospects as a red herring to his own shortcomings in the economy. Asked by the media what his plans were to fix the economy in 2012, Berisha instead answered that he quotes "would make Chinese mandarin language the second language of Albania" under the argument that "Albanians as a nation are polyglots, so learning the Chinese language would be easy for them" (Balkanweb, 2012). However, in hindsight these attempts to divert attention to the ever-growing problems common Albanians were facing did not influence the voting population. Berisha himself would be voted out of power in the 2013 general elections and as of 2022 he has not held a public office as part of a governing body. Ironically for Berisha, the Belt and Road Initiative had taken global proportions in the same year that Berisha left power. Whether Berisha would have intensified Chinese presence in Albania or built much closer relations with them under the newly created initiative remains a speculation. The task of navigating Albania's relations with the economic behemoth in the Far East no longer rested upon Mr. Berisha's shoulders. His socialist successor Rama, who is still currently leading Albania for the past 9 years, would be the one dealing with potential partners from Beijing.

3. THE BRI, CHINA'S NEW APPROACH WITH OLD TRADITIONS

3.1 The Three Worlds Theory, Mao's third alternative to a dualist world

The Three Worlds Theory is a political theory attributed to Mao Zedong. The theory consists that the world consisted of the United States and its satellites as the first world, the second world which were the Soviet Union, People's Republic of China and their allies and the third world as the most populous, underdeveloped and oppressed of the three classifications (Yee, 1983). Since Mao Zedong broke up with the Soviet Union, the three worlds theory became the primary geopolitical strategy that concerned China. China began a massive increase of aid towards ideologically friendly nations. Mao's ambition lied into creating a new third axis to counterbalance what he saw as two enemies, the capitalist West and the revisionist Soviet Union (Poole, 1966). According to Poole, the Chinese increased aid to communist and left-leaning African and Asian countries tenfold. The communist aid diplomacy severely intensified after the Sino-Soviet split. China and the Soviet Union once would have been partners in the spreading of communism in the recently decolonized African and Asian continents, the split saw the creation of several Moscow-backed and Beijing-backed movements that were not shy to publicly oppose each other. Maoism had become the ultra orthodox interpretation of Lenin and Marx's teachings, a complete reversal to Khrushchev's Thaw, which was a period of liberal policies and guided economic policies that aimed to soften the Soviet dictatorship's iron grip on the country. This became the catalyst of radically changing the three worlds theory. Mao saw the liberalization of the Soviet Union and the desire of the Soviets to dominate Chinese affairs as both unacceptable. The Three Worlds theory came up as the idea of two powers controlling the fate of the world as completely unacceptable and unethical. Mao's assessment of China was as follows (1956):

Things develop ceaselessly. It is only forty-five years since the Revolution of 1911, but the face of China has completely changed. In another forty-five years, that is, in the year 2001, or the beginning of the 2^{1st} century, China will have undergone an even greater change. She will have become a powerful socialist industrial country. And that is as it should be. China is a land with an area of 9,600,000 square kilometers and a population of 600 million people, and she ought to have made a greater contribution to humanity. Her contribution over a long period has been far too small. For this we are regretful. But we must be modest-- not only now, but forty-five years hence as well. We should always be modest. In our international relations, we Chinese people should get rid of great-power chauvinism resolutely, thoroughly, wholly and completely.

Mao, 1956, In Commemoration of Dr. Sun Yat-sen

Chairman Mao's almost prophetic quote from 1956 have been the centerpiece of Chinese diplomacy ever since, despite that China as we have come to see has gone through changes since Mao passed away in 1976.

The Three Worlds Theory however was not by any means a theory that advocated pacifism towards the perceived ideological enemies that China had. The machinations behind the theory saw the complete overthrow of reactionary or revisionist regimes through any means, facilitating even the use of violence. In the 1960s, China had been publicly accused for taking part in many coups attempts throughout the developing world. Under the guise of purely economic aid to like-minded communist parties and states, China had funded discreetly Marxist groups that plotted the overthrow of the governments. In Indonesia, the Suharto government publicly accused China of supporting illegal Marxist groups that attempted to overthrow the legitimate Indonesian government. Indonesia was once a trusted ally to China, but differences between Suharto and Mao led to China resorting to the use of covert illegal actions in order to bring the South Asian country back into its fold (Poole 1966). In Africa, the Chinese had secretly funded and supported a leftist coup in the small island nation of Zanzibar. In Ghana, a military dictatorship led by a pro-Chinese general enjoyed yearly lines of credit up to 20 million dollars, roughly 200 million dollars after inflation measures from today. Ironically for the Chinese, the Ghanaian army overthrew their pro-Chinese leader in order to install a pro-Western government. A contributing factor to this is that China's influence over the nations that it supported under

the communist aid went through reforms that mirrored the radical reforms that China went through. This is called spread of influence and installing satellites in the recently stabilized countries. In the case of Chinese influence, this would mean a total disregard of humanitarian law. The state just like in China would have total authority over every aspect of their citizens lives. This would include economy, society and political aspects and to adopt a Chinese style leadership over the country. Indonesia and Ghana are the earliest proof that the radical Maoist ideology being spread through economic aid had failed, since in both cases, the powers that be in those countries before the coup could not be excised out of the hierarchy of power as much as the Chinese would want. This only lead to further tension and in some cases, countercoups like in Indonesia and Ghana.

What made the three worlds theory so effective in Albania's case was that Enver Hoxha was ideologically close to Mao Zedong from the start. Albania did not have to go through a foreign sponsored revolution or coup to achieve its communist status, the communist government had been in power since 1944. Hoxha as explained before had his own grievances with the Soviet Union. Hoxha's resistance to reforms and his adherence to Stalinism shunned him from communist community in Europe, hence a natural progression of relationships with China became much more likeable every passing day. The Chinese communists had gained a valuable satellite in Europe (CIA 1962). Albania's geographic importance as a historical meeting point between East and West gave China much more leverage in the region and the world, despite Albania having poor relations with both camps.

The Soviet Union, despite Albanian propaganda of the time, made several attempts to contact the Albanian authorities in order to normalize the strained relationship between them. Hoxha under direct directives of the Chinese communists refused every single attempt made by Warsaw Pact members and the Soviet Union to normalize relations (CIA 1962, Poole 1966). In 1968 a final attempt by the Soviets now led for around 4 years by Leonid Brezhnev who ousted Khrushchev in a party organized coup, to normalize relations with Albania. This attempt proved again unfruitful for several reasons. First off to be considered was the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. Despite that Albania had been effectively removed from all governing bodies of the Warsaw Pact, the country was still member of the pact de jure. Albania however did not receive protection from the pact forces with Albanian government request but to be considered, which saw Albania only become much more connected to China's aid for military purposes. The Prague Spring in

Czechoslovakia got an immediate brutal response by the new Soviet leader Brezhnev, which saw a quick invasion of the country and restoration of Soviet rule. Since Albania has been a satellite of China for more than 6 years, so it can be only speculated that Mao asked Hoxha to formally leave the Warsaw Pact and decrease the relations it had with its former Pact allies. This view can be reinforced by the reasons that China used its economic leverage in the past that had on Albania to force Hoxha to not normalize relations with the Eastern bloc (Logoreci 1967).

While it can be seen as moral act to condemn the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the Albanian state had dealt a blow to itself internationally by effectively cutting off ties with the East and China being its only connection to the world. Albania's post-Chinese split total isolation can be also attributed to China's influence over Albanian politics. China on the other hand had personally condemned the invasion as reminiscent of fascist Germany in relations to invasion of the Czech state by the national socialist state in the 1930s (Rea 1975). The culmination of the increase of tensions between China and the USSR came in 1969, when border clashes in Manchuria could have potentially led to a full-scale war between the former allies. This development in Albania was seen with much concern because it can be assessed that if China was unable to deliver anymore military aid, the Albanian state would have been effectively defenseless against a combined Warsaw Pact force. Thankfully for Hoxha, the border conflict remained just that. The Albanian regime that had many near calls with the possibility of being overthrown had yet again come out unharmed. In the eyes of Hoxha, Albania needed to reevaluate its commitments with China.

The disillusionment of Hoxha with the Three Worlds theory came after Nixon's visit to China in 1972. The Sino-Albanian split was already in the making by the year 1972 so this came to no surprise as a reaction. Mao with his action to get closer with the ideological enemy that was the United States meant that the theory that he created was altered. His actions meant theoretically Mao had reevaluated the Three Worlds theory, not as a theory of three poles struggling for dominance but a theory where coexistence between the axes might happen. This was the dynamics behind Nixon's famous visit to China. From a geopolitical viewpoint, Mao resigning from the two frontal influence war it had with both the Soviet Union and the United States, to essentially gang up on the Soviet Union by aligning with the US is a masterstroke of diplomacy. The People's Republic of China had

gained an important partner in the Northern hemisphere and had begun its gradual liberalization of economy and society within boundaries set by the CCP. Hoxha's final break with the Chinese in 1978 meant that Albania like Ghana and Indonesia would stop receiving aid from the Three Worlds movement-inspired China. This however did not have any effects on the Chinese worldview. Soon after Mao's death in 1976, China went through its biggest reforms since the end of the civil war. Deng Xiaoping, Mao's successor adopted the socialist market economy, the predecessor of Sino-capitalism, or commonly called capitalism with Chinese characteristics.

3.2 China's revolutionary socialist market economy and reevaluation of diplomacy under Deng Xiaoping until Xi Jinping

Premier Deng Xiaoping became leader of China after Mao passes away. The Premier had lived through the years of the infamous Cultural Revolution and had seen China suffer greatly under Mao's misguided economic and political policies. Deng saw the need for China to modernize as it stood far behind the United States and the Soviet Union. Mao had adopted his own planned economy, and his reforms had harmed China to a great extent. Mao's apparent communist aid diplomacy had made the Chinese people had to experience great hardships under his rule. During the food crisis that China suffered in the early 1960s, Chairman Mao saw fit to send a vast amount of grain and other food products to Albania who was suffering from its own food crisis since the Soviets stopped their own aid through CEMA. Chairman Mao had justified this action as the need to help a fellow socialist nation but this delivery only exacerbates the food crisis within his own populace. This period of China opening up happened at the same time when Deng began the *Boulan Fanzheng*, simply translated to English as a Return to Normalcy. China's economic reforms saw great prosperity and even greater economic opportunity arise for its population, whom were suffering under the centrally planned economy system that Mao had implemented.

Politically, Deng had proposed a new constitution that passed in 1982. In the foreign policy section of the constitution, new China specifically states that the new Chinese diplomacy would base itself off an independent foreign policy and five principles for mutual respect and sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence in developing

diplomatic relations and economic and cultural exchange with other countries. The new constitution also states that China opposes any form of imperialism, hegemonism and colonialism, and will work to strengthen the unity of people in other countries but also support the oppressed nations of the world in their struggle to win and preserve national independence and develop their national economies, and strives to safeguard world peace and promote the cause of human progress (Zhao, 2003). Under Deng China began to gradually open up to world, and Deng saw the benefit that China could gain by coexisting with countries that would normally due to their own ideology and history would publicly oppose China. Deng's new China saw it undertake measures related to the importance of the UN and the Security Council, that China has been a part of for 10 years when the new constitution dropped. This new approach also included China's determined fight against international terrorism. China became signatory of multiple conventions related to transnational terrorism, such as the Hague Convention, the Montreal Convention and the Tokyo Convention to name a few (p. 182). This all due to what Deng started back when he became President of the People's Republic of China. Deng's thought differs completely from the early days of Mao's Three Worlds theory. China no longer pursued to spread Maoism through every mean globally but rather at least on paper, to coexist amicably with ideologically different states.

The radical readjustment of China's diplomatic strategies saw the abandonment of the leaning to one side policy. As explained previously, new China was once allied completely with the Soviets, then after the breakup with the Soviets, the People's Republic of China stood alone opposed to both capitalist and communist camps. Dr. Zhao Huaipu (2003) writes that Deng however saw the futility to be against both camps when in reality there is a clear possibility to turn your rivals into potential partners. Such was the case with the United States of America. America was at a confrontational status with the PRC since its early days (p. 197). America and China were at an undeclared war status in the 1950s under the context of the Korean War. Sino-American confrontation saw both countries soldiers fighting while supporting either side in the Korean War. The relations remained strained until the late 1960s where a period of rapprochement started between the two states. Richard Nixon, then President of the United States, saw it crucial for the US to begin rapprochement with China in order to counter Soviet influence in Asia and contain it. The first unofficial diplomatic relations between the two states started with the now famous "ping pong diplomacy" where ping pong teams of respective nations met and

exchanged culturally and the American team becoming the first Americans to officially step in Chinese soil since the end of the Chinese Civil War. This became the catalyst for the eventual high-level talks between Beijing and Washington D.C. After several high-level talks through the early 70s (p.199), Nixon would become the first American President to set foot in Chinese soil, in the year 1972, marking a historic event and a turning point for the Cold War. The Sino-American rapprochement seemingly of two opposite poles united by a common enemy, showed the world that communism and liberal democracy can indeed coexist. The United States in order to foster better relations with China, first recognized the People's Republic of China and in 1978 after Carter met with Deng, the US agreed to adhere to the One-China policy, affirming that Beijing was the only representative of China (p. 201), while removing America's recognition of Taiwan. Deng would personally visit the United States in a historic visit in 1979, where he had a country-wide tour and continued to foster good relations with the US. Throughout the 1980s Deng would continue to meet with the US leaders, Reagan and Bush Sr. Deng saw the approach to America as a way for China to progress, and indeed throughout his leadership of the PRC, China made huge leaps of progress, not only to the socialist market economy reforms but also to his understanding that cooperation rather than dominance in diplomacy benefits China and the world. Deng's successors in the 90s and early 2000s would continue their policy of cooperation in trade, politics and culture with the United States.

The USSR also had a period of confrontation and conflict with the People's Republic of China following the Sino-Soviet split. Deng's appeasement would reach the Soviet Union too because in 1982, Brezhnev, the Soviet dictator, would extend an olive branch to the Chinese. However, China had three main requests that they wanted to be reached in consensus by the Russians. Firstly, the Soviets would have to remove their troops from Afghanistan, a country they invaded a few years prior, the Soviet troops in Mongolia would have to be pulled out also the Soviet border units near China would have to be reduced and lastly the Soviets would have to influence their Vietnamese ally to pull out of Cambodia (p.218). These requests were ignored by Moscow, which meant that the rapprochement could not happen in 1982. With Gorbachev's rise to power in 1986, a period of liberalization and openness started in the USSR too, very similar to Deng's policies. In 1989, the complete normalization between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China was reached (p.219). Gorbachev would personally meet Deng in 1989, coincidentally the same year Albania normalized relations

with China. Even after the dissolution of the USSR, the goodwill relations continued with the new Russian Federation and Deng's legacy of good relations with all continued with Russia too (p. 221). Overall Deng's legacy was the cultivation of relationships with every country despite historical grievances and ideological differences, in order to continue China's progress but also be in mutual benefit of all parties involved. His legacy built the foundations of new modern China that now vies to become a potential superpower in a multipolar world.

Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and Supreme Leader of the People's Republic of China in November 2012. Due to his young age, he became the first General Secretary to be born after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The year that followed his rise to power marked a significant development for Beijing globally. 2013 saw the beginning of the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi Jinping is a main proponent of expanding influence by China throughout the Eurasian continent and Africa. The BRI was essential to this line of thought by Xi, as the Belt and Road Initiative promised a steady expansion of Chinese influence throughout the entire Eurasian area. Xi's ideological standing was ambiguous for the early years of his leadership. This ambiguity would cease to be in 2017 as a fourteen-point bulletin was published that showed what was called Xi Jinping's Thought. His main ideological beliefs that guided the Chinese leader and China's foreign policy. Xi would label his Thought as a continuation of socialism with Chinese characteristics started by Deng Xiaoping back in 1981. Most of the points glossed over internal issues of the People's Republic of China, the one-China policy and the promotion of unification with Hong Kong, however internationally Xi promised that China would become what he called a "major power" which means more responsibilities and a bigger player in international diplomacy. The leader as of 2022 has reached a decade in power, and by all means he is following his own ideological thought internationally, while the BRI has reached a level of international importance, reaching even Eastern Europe and Albania.

3.3 Chinese footprint in Albania after the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative

Albania as member of the 17+1 program since its genesis has played a role in the rise of influence of China in the region. Statistically, Albania has the lowest number of projects

that the Chinese implemented in the region after the 17+1 initiative. As of 2022, China through the timeframe of 2012-22 has only maintained 8 projects in Albania. These projects cover a variety of areas, from economic, to tele-communications, cultural and projects of high strategic value for Albania. However, trade-wise, the Sino-Albanian trade relations have increased exponentially since the turn of the 21st century. From 2000 to 2020, the Chinese imports have increased 8.97% of the overall national imports, reaching an impressive 10.8% from 1.83% it was 20 years ago. In these two decades, Chinese imports have overtaken in quantity many of Albania's traditional European partners. As of 2020, Chinese imports account for the second highest place of origin after Italy. In the case of China however it can be assessed through the data collection that China is among the only countries that has had growth by percentage and by trade value. This does not mean that other Albanian partners have not increased trade value with Albania but the growth has been smaller than China's. In the case of Italy, the Italian Republic accounted for over 30.3% as a country of origin in the year 2000, completely dominating trade in Albania, while 20 years later, the Italians have shrunk to 26%. Chinese industrial products such as machinery have become much more accessible by Albanian businesses after the increased importance that China put to Albania as a trade partner and the increase governmental level interactions between the two states. What I found even more interesting, Albania's strategic partner, the United States had a higher trade value than China in the year 2000, valued at 2.15%, bigger than the Chinese 1.83%, however after two decades, the US import trade value had shrunk to 1.46%, an almost indistinguishable value in global trade statistics. The most imported product by Albania is broadcasting equipment, related to radio and television equipment, audio-visual ones etc., the second being light fixtures and the third being air conditioners. The Chinese lead the world in broadcast equipment export, valued at around 25 billion dollars in 2020. China's vast advancement in technology and mass producing said technology has made the country a world leader in many machinery-based exportation of equipment, a testament to this is the ubiquitous "Made in China" label that is on almost every piece of day-to-day tech that most of the world uses, from regular cellphones to other electronic equipment such as computers.

In 2016, Tirana's only international airport, Tirana International Airport's main operator was sold entirely to the Chinese state-owned company, China Ever bright Group, completely with a sum valued at around 80 million euros or 90 million USD (Reuters, 2016). This move essentially made the Chinese state the sole owner of Albania's only

international airport at the time. The move from the Chinese to buy the airport was made in effort to steadily increase the Chinese footprint in Europe and Albania became the first country in Europe to have China own a major and important infrastructure such as an international airport. China Ever bright Group, not only would be able to control much of Albania's air traffic, but also be able to observe the military proceedings of the military wing of the airport. The international airport also hosts the air surveillance center that Albania has which connects to the integrated NATO air surveillance mechanisms. It is ironic to consider a NATO adversary to be able to bypass the fog of war by essentially buying off the access to give itself increased access to NATO proceedings because such was the situation in the Albanian airport. There is also a strong correlation between concerns in national security and China's presence in Albania. Much similar to the events in the port of Durrës, where Chinese cargo container scanners failed to detect illegal drugs, the private security that was operated by China Ever bright Group, failed to stop a major security event in the same year they bought the concession of the airport. In 2017, a major robbery happened inside the facilities of the airport. The value was significant, in the millions of euros and the Chinese company whom operated security with the confines of the airport had failed to stop the robbery (Erebara, 2019). The Albanian police were left baffled by the seemingly perfect execution of the crime and the seemingly ineffectiveness of the private-run security of the concessionaire. Another more severe event happened in 2019 where a four-man team of soon-to-be robbers were able to infiltrate the airport main runway and pull off another robbery, while in a gunfight with the Albanian police (Erebara, 2019). What was concerning is that again the private security that the China Ever bright Group had hired to guard the airport perimeter and facilities had failed to prevent a major crime. This became the last straw for Albania's main security echelons. The Albanian government had lost faith in the private security and in an unprecedented event, the Albanian Military Police and the Albanian Battalion of Special Operations were tasked with securing the airport, essentially making the Albanian military responsible for the airport perimeter security (Klan, 2019). In a show of maturation in national security concerns, the Albanian government stopped relying on a foreign company to secure the country's only airport due to the continuous criminal threats that had become a national security issue after the 2019 heist. Merely a year later, China Ever bright Group, sold 100% of its shares to the Albanian-based Kastrati group, which meant that the recent events had to have had an impact to the Chinese company as they sought to sell the concession 7 years before the official end of the concession which was in 2027 (CEL,

2020). While security concerns did stain the reputation of the Chinese company's legacy in the Albanian airports, the tourism impact during their short tenure was positive. The tourism statistics had exponentially grown, which by all means to a small state like Albania is a huge plus. The international airport had served according to the Chinese group, over 3.3 million people who passed through the airport, which was an almost whooping 1.3 million more than what was the overall number of visitors in 2016 (TIA, 2020). Overall, the experience for the Chinese was relatively short in time but a way to gain more experience as the Albanian airport was the first strategic air transportation asset that a Chinese company owned in the under framework of the Central Europe and Eastern Europe-China initiative (CEL, 2020), better called the One Belt and One Road Initiative.

3.4 Chinese investment in Albanian mines

The Chinese however do not require technology in their imports. As it has become clearer, what China lacks in vast quantities are resources. The import data collected from Albania's main body of statistics, the Institution of Statistics (INSTAT) where it showed that 95% of Albania's exports to China were mineral ores and the most traded one was Chrome or Chromium, valued at 9 billion Albanian Lek, as it was also confirmed by the China-CEE Institute in an official briefing in 2020 (Chi-CEEC Ins., 2020). The second being copper ore and at third, the textile industry of Albania. Neither country exported services towards each other in any year found data on, this shows that Albania and China trade exclusively only on product-level, while services are not wanted or required by either party. However, in total, China is not the main export partner of Albania, in fact the total trade value of China's involvement is around 2.29% out of the overall estimate. The export from Albania to China trade value is 76 million dollars, while the import value from China to Albania is in total 557 million dollars or around 65 billion Albanian lek (INSTAT, 2022). This means that the trade balance between the two state is in negative for Albania, which is almost 500 million dollars deficit. The trade value is imbalanced in the negative for Albania, showing that China does not find Albanian products desirable for its market however, the Chinese require the raw minerals that Albania extracts.

The reason why Albanian minerals such as copper are sought after in China relates to the Chinese involvement with the operation. The first project that was implemented after Albania become part of the Chinese-led 17+1 project happened in 2014. The Jiangxi

Copper Corporation became the first Chinese company that operates a resource extraction mine in Albania. The Chinese giant acquired 50% of shares of an Albania-Turkish company that operated in Albania's copper mines. The Chinese corporation gained access to 4 productive mines in Albania, the Munella, Karma, Qaf Bari, Paluce, Lakrosh, Tuc, and Fusha Arrez Mines, which have more than 10 million tons of raw minerals (copper and chromium mostly)(Serbia Energy, 2014). In the light of these new factors, the Albanian exports to China are better understood better since the mines which extract chromium and copper are essentially half owned by a Chinese corporation. This means that besides paying the concession fees to the government of Albania to operate in the mines, the lion share of all profits goes to China, and Albanian economy sees very little of it. This is a common tactic used by Chinese mine corporations throughout resource-rich countries. In Africa, it is estimated that China profits extensively from the extraction of mineral ores and precious metals from the African mainland, while local governments barely see any profits from it (Lee, 2009). This has raised concerns of a new sort of neocolonialist attitude of China when it comes to developing nations with territories rich in minerals. Albania falls into that category and the Jiangxi Copper attribution of the biggest mines in Albania is not the last Chinese presence in strategic reserves of Albania.

4.1 Patos-Marinzë oil and China's strategy of acquiring strategic assets globally

The Patos-Marinzë oil field is an oil field in the region of Patos, Albania. The oil field is the largest onshore reserve in continental Europe. The P-S oilfield accounts for Albania's current 95% of oil production. The P-S oilfield can be considered one of Albania's most important assets. Due to its overall potential to produce heavy oil, the P-S oilfield had been vied by foreign oil companies since its exploration. The oil field was discovered in 1928 by both Italian and British companies that were given concessions by the Albanian government to explore Albania for oil purposes. The P-S oilfield became a source of rivalry between the British and Italian oil companies but in the end the Italians were victorious in the rivalry as Italy surely put Albania inside their sphere of influence (Gerhard, 1932). The Italian invasion of Albania in 1939, gave the fascist empire of Italy full access to Albania's oil reserve and other strategic resources. While the imperialist policies of the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini did play a major part in the Italian decision to annex Albania, another crucial factor that the Italians considered were the oil reserves, that Italy saw as a significant for their economic growth. In the subsequent events

when Italy joined the Second World War in the side of the Axis the P-S oilfields had gained another overall new role in the conflict. The P-S oilfield became of strategic importance politically and militarily. According to American intelligence in 1944, the oilfield was crucial to the Italian war effort when before Italy surrendered in September 1943 due to its high output and the ease of access and transportation back to Italian mainland, unlike the other Italian colonies such as Libya that were suspected to be rich in oil, and in hindsight they were but the lack of proper infrastructure and lack of proximity to Italy made the operation more costly and less viable to bring back oil in Italy due to the war situation where the Mediterranean Sea had become a battlefield between the British and the Italian navies, while Albania was just a short jump to Italy by sea due to the Adriatic during the time being essentially an Italian lake (Zavalani, 1944). The American intelligence assessment showed that the German occupiers had taken over the Italian operations which meant that the Albanian oil from the Patos-Marinzë field now supplied another Axis state. The oilfields were severely damaged during the war however. The strategic importance they had for the enemies of the Allies made the oilfields a primary target for bombing raids (Fischer, 1999). The British constantly bombed sea ports and other strategically important trade hubs with precision bombing and the effect on the oil extraction industry was devastating to the Italian war effort but even to Albania after the hostilities had ceased. After the Second World War, the P-S oilfields' production had slumped to a bare minimum. This is due to the bombings during the war but also that the oilfield had come under direct Albanian supervision for the first time since its discovery.

The poor Albanian state that came out of the war had no means nor any expertise to maintain this behemoth of oil reserves. The Italian engineers had fled after the war ended and had left the mines and oil fields essentially for the lack of a better word, pillaged. The Albanian communists were tasked to revitalize this industry in order to reap its benefits. The P-S oil field was rebuilt with the help of Albania's communist partners. Albania was able to build up its oil capacities with the help of the Soviet engineers. From the 1940s to 1961 when Albania finally broke up relations with the USSR. The Soviet vast experience in oil and gas extraction was a main contributor in the advancement of the oil and gas industry in Albania. Due to the political factors, the oil industry received a blow in 1961 after the Soviet-Albanian split, however the vast experience gained from the decades with Soviet supervision had helped Albania to tap into its vast oil reserves. The Sino-Albanian alliance was a boost also in the oil industry and in 1975, the yearly total was 2 250 000 ton

of oil barrels was extracted, the largest amount of oil to be ever produced by Albania and the record is still held to this day. Ironically, much like the previously mentioned Hoxhaist history of Albania, the oil industry was dealt the biggest blow not by foreign acts of sabotage, nor the lack of foreign allies, but by Hoxha himself. The dictator purged the brightest oil engineers and experts that Albania had in that era, personally signing orders for execution too. While reasons on why the move to purge the oil industry of its “barons” were as always up to debate due to no clear fact, the effect on the industry as a whole was almost immediate and devastating as a whole. The gradual and steady decline of the numbers of oil barrels extracted reached the historical low in 1989-1991. By the end of the communist rule, the oil industry in Albania was a shadow of its former self, a bad memory that lingered in the minds of economic strategists and experts. The yearly oil production had slumped steadily, it fell from 1.1 million ton to only 0.6 ton. Even for the staunchest supporters of the former regime, the nostalgic communists, the rate of destruction of the oil industry was not easily ignorable by the population as a whole. The need to revitalize and essentially resurrect the whole industry became a priority for Alb Petrol, the official state-run company that ran the oil fields. In 1993, an immediate cooperation began with multiple foreign companies to modernize the oil industry and to truly capture the potential of the oil industry and how it could bring prosperity to the Albanian economy.

In the year 2004, the Canadian company Bankers Petroleum bought the rights to operate the Patos-Marinzë oil field, essentially handing over almost the entire oil production of Albania to a foreign company, making the country dependent to a foreign company to extract Albania’s black gold. During the era that Bankers Petroleum operated Albania’s fields, the oil extraction steadily increased, the oil industry had become revitalized and steadily increased in its importance to the Albania economy. The environmental impact of the Bankers Petroleum acquisition became a problem in the surrounding areas of population. There were several instances of man-made quakes due to the exploration, and the affected population was not compensated by the private company, despite suffering damages to their households. Another environmental controversy arose with the continued degradation of the surrounding quality of land and air. Due to the oil pumping, natural resources such as clean running water became more and more contaminated. This led to the eventual exodus of the civilian population in the surrounding areas. The most significant development to the Patos-Marinza oil field in the recent years however came in 2016. The Canadian owners of Bankers Petroleum shares were sold completely to the

Chinese company Geo-Jade Petroleum. To Albania this meant that the Chinese company was in a position to buy the Patos-Marinza field and that exact event did happen. In 2016, with a record fee of around 475 million Canadian dollars. Since 2016, the Chinese company invested 3.5 billion USD in the development of the field, making it the most profitable oil field in European continent. One more interesting factor to notice is that Geo-Jade Petroleum did not rebrand its operation to the Chinese logo and brand the Chinese flag. The company used the rights that they bought from Bankers to keep using their Canadian symbols, logos and name. This has to be done to essentially keep the appearance that to the population and foreign actors that on the surface this is still a Canadian company, a company of western values. Unlike the controversy that arose from the Chinese flags being raised over the Tirana International Airport, when the state-owned company China Everbright Group owned 100% of its concessionaire and the ability that the people were able to notice this and react, the formerly Canadian Bankers Petroleum keeps up the appearances of a western company but now with Chinese owners. During the covid-19 crisis, the price of oil fell drastically since the lockdowns essentially blocked the freedom of movement of people, severely lowering oil consumption due to the lack of vehicle movement in the affected countries. Chinese owned Bankers Petroleum were not immune to this crisis; however, they bounced back significantly after the situation began to normalize with the lockdowns being lifted continent-wide. The period of January-March 2021, saw the most significant increase of oil production to be ever recorded in the oil fields of Patos-Marinza. Around 162 thousand tons of oil were produced in the first quarter of the year 2021, with around 11 thousand barrels of oil per day. The reason why the Patos-Marinza field is considered so crucial to the transitional Albanian economy can be understood from the economic benefits that the government gets from Geo-Petroleum's subsidiary, Bankers. The economy benefits from this particular field account for Albania's 80% of royalties, an overwhelming number that shows why the field has become such an important asset of Albania. All these numbers seen superficially seem great for the economy, however there is another aspect to consider. Chinese ownership of the oil field brings another layer of discussion to the table. Of course, economically there is almost no complaint about the significance and importance of Patos-Marinza, however the issues arise politically. The acquisition of Patos-Marinza was not by any means random or purely for economic reasons. China strategized with the acquisition and it's surely expanded its influence in Albania. One important thing to consider is this, Patos-Marinza produces 95% of Albania's oil, while the company that runs it pays off almost the entire tax collection

income of the small Balkan state. China has extended its reach in the Balkans exponentially in the last five years, using the BRI to spread its influence much more efficiently by purchasing important strategic assets. In Greece for example, the same year that the Chinese company Geo-Jade Petroleum acquired Patos-Marinza, Albania's southern neighbor's main port, the port of Piraeus was bought by China. Two significant moves that only deepen the presence of China in the Balkans. The Chinese state has used its capital to buy important assets globally in order to extend its reach, and with the 17+1 initiative framework that China is using, it made the purchases of such strategic assets much more likely to happen in Central and Eastern Europe, which by all means is poorer than the rest of Europe and in dire need of investment which the Chinese at the moment are providing in macro and micro scale.

4.1 The Chinese cultural footprint in Albania

While it is harder to assess cultural influence in comparison with economic influence since the latter is assessed by gathering of hard data, the cultural footprint of China in Albania is present much more than it might seem in the surface. As recent as 2019, the Albanian Radio Television, the only public broadcaster signed a bilateral agreement with their Chinese counterparts on one documentary-based film and one feature film to be shown to the Albanian audience through public airwaves. The most significant documentary being a state funded documentary on the life of the Supreme Leader of China, Xi Jinping, titled "China: The Time of Xi". The current Chinese ambassador saw the cultural exchange as quote: "In the new era, we need to get to know one another in a more comprehensive and profound way, which is also the basis and precondition for deepening cooperation of mutual interest" (SCIO, 2019). The documentary is a very well-funded piece of media that aims to change the world's perception on the new Chinese leader. This documentary has been the cornerstone of the state propaganda towards the global audience. Through this film, China aimed to export their soft power and influence by portraying Xi's China as "dynamic, developed and rather opened" (Bandurski. 2019). In another critical look of this documentary, this piece of media was produced by CICC, China's Intercontinental Communication Center, the company is operated by SCIO, the State Council Information Office, the main propaganda arm of the Chinese Communist Party. The documentary is being used by China for geopolitical means by essentially painting a positive picture of the Chinese communists while negating any sort of objective criticism. The worldwide reach

this documentary has, being funded and produced in a cooperative agreement between the American giant Discovery Channel and the CICC and available in Discovery + means only that the pro-communist Chinese propaganda is being normalized very openly in the Western World as China vies for ever increasing global influence. In the middle of this soft power turned sharp power diplomatic activity remains the Albanian state. While the documentary might not have had the reach that the Chinese hoped in the Albanian audience, the Chinese state has managed to cope in other ways to spread its influence and generate cultural ties with the small Balkan state.

The other prominent Chinese funded media in Albania is a national radio broadcast station. The radio station is called Radio “Ejani”, as in the Albanian word “to come with” or “join”. The radio’s international name is the CRI, short for China Radio International. The radio has a truly global reach, being broadcasted in in over 70 countries with 44 different languages, among them the Albanian language. The radio produces pro-Chinese content and its vast audience enables a wider reach. In the recent years the CRI has become an almost identical copy of the public radio and television, the Voice of America. The Chinese radio aims to build soft power across the media world which it would use to spread pro-Chinese propaganda to be consumed by an international audience (Qing & Shiftman, 2015). In Albania besides being tasked with fostering a more positive connection with its Albanian audience in the contemporary Sino-Albanian relations status, the radio has a dedicated program to the memory of the defunct Sino-Albanian alliance during the communist years. The nostalgia driven program is called “Kujtoj” in English being “Remembering”. The program’s main theme is a nostalgia filled monologue or dialogue in the form of an interview where the host and guests would discuss certain periods of the time in Albania when the two states enjoyed the unlikely alliance. The radio itself is one of the oldest running radios that exists in Albania, being founded in the year 1969 and enjoying over 50 years of uninterrupted transmission in the Albanian native language. As it can be expected the main audience of this public broadcast radio are the generations that remember the Sino-Albanian alliance years, the older generations being a crucial aspect in the continuing its whole mission of the Chinese state-owned radio in Albania since they form the main listener demographics. Internationally however the radio has grown to controversy. The US administration has designated the radio, a foreign mission, essentially calling the radio a state apparatus to spread propaganda. Such designation is bore by the former international Russian giant, RT News, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine

where the news media outlet was broadcasted freely in many countries. The Chinese radio broadcast entered the list of foreign missions in the United States for the reasons of flaunting its connection to the Chinese state and essentially being the main propaganda arm of the Chinese foreign relations missions. In Albania the cultural impact of the radio could be subtle or as of 2022, still unrecognizable in impact value. However, the aim of the Chinese propaganda is not to normalize the Chinese way of life to the international audience or to aggressively spread political messages, it is used to normalize the state of contemporary China to the global public. As Bandurski (2019) claims, the Chinese propaganda aims to make China less alien and foreign in the countries where they are heavily investing, so in the Eastern European countries, this propaganda would mean that the Chinese are investing to put up a façade in case people of these transitory or liberal democracies ever feel that the Chinese communists stand opposite to their own values.

If you follow the money, which goes back to China, the essentially shows that China is indirectly funding the Albanian government, through state-owned companies that account for the soft power approach China uses in Eastern Europe. For example, related to Bankers Petroleum, the year 2022 marked the first year where the company subsidized a program where Albanian youths would learn the Chinese language. The activity itself saw the presence of the Chinese ambassador, which gave it not only an important aura around the event but also an official Chinese government approval to the event, which was organized as part of the continued cultural exchange between the two countries. This event also shows how China is using its ownership of strategic assets to push its cultural influence in Albania, besides the CRI which is using the radio waves for similar end goals.

4. BRI'S NEGATIVE IMPACTS GLOBALLY AND IN THE BALKAN REGION

4.1 The Belt and Road initiative pivoting Chinese realpolitik in the world.

China like many countries in the world has territorial disputes with several neighbors of theirs. Xi Jinping's major power political concept besides having the Belt and Road initiative like we discussed earlier, it also reserves a place for China's regional geopolitical ambitions. The field of these ambitions lies in the South China sea. China is emerging as the global leader of the economy and as it has been for quite a while, the leading global population. It is estimated by 2028, the Chinese economy will surpass the United States of America as the largest economy in the world (Lin, 2020). In order to satisfy the growing demands of a growing population and booming economy, China has to look at external factors to bring the necessary resources it lacks. One such factor is Russia, which the Chinese government sees as the biggest partner in natural gas and other resources, but for the sake of this paper, the most important factor is the South China Sea. The South China Sea is the perfect target for the necessary economic expansion that China requires. The region has long been suspected to hold major gas and oil reserves that ultimately China needs for their economy and their growing military. This brought the creation of the so-called 'nine dash line', where China claims 90% of the South China Sea, and the subsequent economic benefits that such a vast area would give. The implications of such a move by China could potentially lead the communist country to a war with its neighbors and potentially the United States.

The South China Sea is a region of potential instability in the 21st Century. China's increasing aggressive posture, and the inability of the regional countries to have a cohesive policy, is leading to more instability and closer to a conflict in the Pacific. China's main claim presides over the territory of the South China Sea. The desire of China to claim the exclusive economic zone over the sea, has brought many disputes with China's immediate neighbors. China's increasing military presence, so called the 'Power Projection' theory, is a clear indicator that Beijing has chosen a hawkish approach in order to satisfy their goals. The dispute originates from a group of small islands in the region, called the Paracel islands. From this group of islands, the dispute has taken a regional scale and has the potential to bring more power players in the mix, increasing the possibility of conflict. The threat of conflict can be devastating to global trade, the South China Sea is used to transport through sea-lanes up to one third of the world's global trade, with hundreds of billions of dollars' worth. The South China Sea dispute has still to find a diplomatic solution that will benefit all sides. One important factor that contributes to this, is the lack of cooperation and a clear and cohesive strategy of the ASEAN nations in their response to the Chinese increasing threat. Founded in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has been an increasingly important aspect in economic development and geopolitical aspects of Southeast Asia. Despite similarities to the European Union in the faraway European continent, the two organizations do not have much in common.

The political and economic integration of the European Union is much evident and supranational than the ASEAN one (Cuyvers, 2002). The lack of such integration has shown that the ASEAN community does not always stand in solidarity with each other, in the matters of diplomacy and economy. This is displayed in the South China Sea dispute. China, as shown, claims indisputable sovereignty over 90% of the territory of the South China Sea, which has created in itself a dysfunctional relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations community (Thayer, 2013). The dynamic tensions of the dispute have led to China targeting specific members of the association, in order so unanimous decisions in relation to the Chinese aggression, are never considered officially, which has led many Southeast Nations to literally fend for themselves in response to China. China has used its infrastructure-building capabilities to gain more political favor with some ASEAN nations, in order to further the aforementioned policy. The Belt and Road initiative has been itself weaponized in the case of the South China Sea to further the expansionist goals of the Chinese state (Pavličević & Kratz, 2018).

In the case of Albania, a significant step to counter both expanding Russian and Chinese influence came in 2022. The United States European Command agreed to establish a permanent base of operations for the American special forces' units that will be stationed in Albania. Officially the special forces will establish a permanent presence in a NATO state such as Albania. Boosting capabilities of local forces but also providing immediate security to any arising destabilizing factors regionally. The special forces unlike regular army units are more flexible in their operations and more quickly deployed when needed. So, by all means officially this was a move that boosted not only NATO's presence in Albania but also made the alliance more efficient in the region (Bühler, 2022). Without saying the quiet part louder, the move was also made to counter the destabilizing Russian presence in the Balkans. As recent history shows us, the Russians invasion of Ukraine severely destabilized the stability of Europe and brought back fragility when talked about peace and political order in the rest of Europe, a ripple effect that the Balkans could feel most definitely. Conflict in Ukraine is unfortunately very likely to spill over in the Balkans, the soft underbelly of the European continent and the region most recently affected by war before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. So, it is understood why the United States would counter the Russian influence in the Balkans, militarily if needed, since even we are under the impression that the Ukrainian war is the opening chapter of a conflict that could engulf Europe widely.

American military acting as a force of determent for any potential Russian-sponsored aggression in the region, while also boosting local capabilities as previously mentioned is the perfect counter to such threat. However, the quiet part not said loudly is related to China's presence in Albania. There has been a steady increase of power projection by the Chinese state in countries where the BRI is present and a Chinese company owns a major strategic asset (Morning Star, 2022). In the case of Sri Lanka, Djibouti but even Greece, the acquisition of the sea ports through debt trap or purchase eventually brought the military presence of China in the respective nations. In Greece, a NATO state, the Chinese navy made a friendly stop in the country merely a year after the Chinese acquired the port of Piraeus. America has become much more vigilant to such occurrences, and the increased tensions between the two superpowers in Asia, is slowly spilling over in the Balkans. The United States rivalry with China in Albania is becoming much more obvious every year and the latest escalation came with the special forces base. Economically, the United States has a very small footprint in Albania, as previously mentioned, it is miles behind China's

economic presence. However politically and diplomatically, the US is no longer lagging behind in Albania, after a period of relative inaction in the small Balkan state. Albania's critical role in the biggest exercise after the Cold War led by NATO, Defender 21, the NATO acquisition of the Kuçovë airbase (Bühler, 2022) and the recent arrival of American special forces are all diplomatic moves to show China and Russia that Albania is not a vulnerable state that can be either exploited by eastern companies or destabilized for geopolitical maneuvers and end goals. By all means the possibility of Chinese military presence in Albania before 2022 was not farfetched as a proposition. As shown previously in Greece, China in a very subtle way introduced its navy to the port they own, all under the guise of a routine friendly visit. In other strategic projects under the BRI in continents of Asia and Africa, the Chinese investments brought with them a significant military presence. This military presence, unlike the American bases with American servicemen and servicewomen being visibly present for various reasons, the Chinese implemented a covert approach. Chinese PMCs, private military companies, have grown in importance and number since the implementation of the BRI worldwide. In Africa, Chinese PMCs are deployed as a private security arm of the companies to secure their own assets and investments in countries where national security and stability severely lacks.

These mercenaries however are all former PLA soldiers, and their companies have indirect or direct ties to the Chinese military. Another reason why these military units deploy is to secure important transport hubs in the respective countries, again under the guise of protecting Chinese investments while in reality it gives China leverage to control said hubs for its own interests and it makes the host much more dependable to the communist state. This means that the BRI has been used to introduce unofficially the Chinese military worldwide, through the guise of privately owned security or military companies. Chinese private military companies have quietly expanded yearly, the mercenaries essentially used as geopolitical pawns by Beijing. So, the question remains, was there a risk of such a thing happening in Albania if the United States and NATO did not deploy their special forces or acquire strategic military bases? The answer is a definite yes. China's BRI has a main driving force, the inaction of the West to invest or assure their allies. For example, in Montenegro, Europe's top banks refused to finance a huge infrastructural project due to the assessment that the small state would be unable to pay back the loan, however where the West hesitates, China moves in. As it will be shown, the Chinese implemented debt trap strategies in the tiny Balkan nation in order to aggressively expand its influence. This and

the over 135 other projects related to the BRI has seemingly awoken the American revival of interest in the Balkans. Of course, Albania, Montenegro and Greece are staunch allies of NATO, and their geopolitical stance has always been pro-US due to their membership in the western alliance but this does not mean that American influence is always stable and unaltered. Chinese money has steadily faded American influence, which economically Washington in the Balkans is becoming less present, while China keeps creeping in.

4.2 possibility of a resource war in the Pacific and the ripple effect in Europe

Resource wars are not by any means a new concept, and in an era of where finite sources are on the verge of extinction, then the value of such resources increases. China has demonstrated the importance of acquiring such resources with their increasing military expenditure. The Chinese have shifted their military doctrine to a more marine and naval based warfare. This can only mean that the Chinese communists are preparing for a potential conflict in the Pacific. China fears that any possible war with the United States can lead the Americans to follow similar tactics such as the devastating and very efficient island-hopping campaign in the second world war against the Japanese. This is why the Chinese military top brass is essentially preparing to counter the US tactics and possibly employ those themselves. From these factors, it can be concluded that China is prepared for a limited war in the Pacific, but there are no guarantees that such a war would remain regional, and not create a greater threat to world peace.

The US on the other hand are furthering the tensions with their strategic policies in the Pacific. After the land reclamation initiative of China from 2013-16, the then Obama Administration started the Asia Pivot policy. This policy called for further strengthening of American capabilities in the region and buildup of military in the region. This move was counterproductive to diplomacy (Ross, 2012). It unnecessarily antagonized the Chinese, while also giving the communist state an incentive to follow a more hawkish path than it currently had up until then. Two administrations since Obama, not a lot has changed in the American containment efforts, and many see it as still completely counterproductive. If a diplomatic solution has to be found, the hawks of both countries have to take a step back, as history has shown us, there has never been a conflict averted by building up the military further and becoming increasingly aggressive towards your potential enemy state. Tensions beget more tension and a closer risk for a regional war between the two superpowers.

As it was mentioned above, China clearly showed its intentions of escalating the conflict and it used the BRI to spread its soft power turned sharp power. China is a recent arrival in the geopolitical arena as a major power. Xi Jinping's thought and his theory that China has to become a major power relates directly to the South China Sea situation. The situation can be explained as China being able to project its power beyond its borders, essentially using globalism for anti-globalist goals. Albania indirectly will be affected by a possible war in the South China Sea. Albania tries to keep the balance in relations between the two but it could see a similar situation such as the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2022. NATO and EU countries sanctioned Putin's Russian regime so that the Russian economy would not be able to finance the war as it was previously projected, such measure can be taken with China too. As a democratic state, Albania would be pressured to cut ties with China in the event of a conflict, due to the several moral and ethical issues that would arise if it is proven that Chinese import revenue helps the aggressive policies of Beijing. The other more extreme and very dangerous scenario is how an America-led intervention could see a potential war between the two states and Albania since it is an ally of the United States officially, it will be obliged to take extreme measures to help its ally. In both these extreme scenarios, the Albanian economy would be hit the hardest. As mentioned before, China maintains multimillion euros-worth projects in Albania, these projects benefit the Albanian economy. Unlike with Russia that barely influenced the Albanian economy, if the Western powers pressure Albania to sanction China, the immediate effects would be close to very damaging, and Albania is already a weak economy post-pandemic and post-Ukrainian war. A war in the Pacific can also disrupt trade to Europe and Chinese imports can be disrupted which will also be very hard to swallow by Albania, as it was previously explained that the Chinese account for 10.8% of yearly imports, being in the top three largest exporters to Albania. While the situation in the Pacific is unquestionably out of Albania's hands to influence or find resolution, the only preemptive measure for Albania to take is to continue its diversification of economy so in case of any eventuality, Albania would be prepared as best as it could under the circumstances.

4.3 The Belt and Road Initiative and the debt trap that China uses on weaker states

Another arisen issue that has been noted in the Chinese-led initiatives in the Balkans specifically are the ever-growing accusations towards the Chinese state of implementing a form of predatory diplomacy that is colloquially called debt trap diplomacy. China has been accused by the West more than once on using partially completed projects as a way to essentially hold a country hostage through its debt towards the communist country. The case under the most intense scrutiny in the Balkans is the now infamous and incomplete Bar-Boljare Highway in the small state of Montenegro. The Bar-Boljare Highway was the most ambitious strategic project that the Chinese undertook in the small Balkan state. The Bar-Boljare Highway would have been a key juncture to the connecting “Blue Corridor or as it is officially called the Adriatic-Ionian Highway. An ambitious 1.2 billion Euro project that would connect the entire Western Balkans coast through one highway, starting from Croatia and ending in Greece. The crucial juncture that would help build this mega project is the Montenegro-Albanian pathway. Through the huge investment in these two small states, the Blue Corridor would have connected the Balkans directly with the European Union member states and made it less costly for Chinese products to reach the economic powerhouses of the European Union. Additionally, it would also have a great tourist impact since it will vastly improve infrastructure in the Western Balkan states. An improved infrastructure would mean less time spent on the road for potential tourists and a huge incentive for a variety of investments.

This while on the first look seems like a great proposal and a grand strategic project that will benefit China but also eventually benefit the countries that the highway runs through is not the full picture of the issue. The Blue Corridor for once is considered to be one the most expensive projects in the Balkans. This was only the first phase of the project. Montenegro as a small state with limited funds were offered by China to build the highway, an offer they were in a such a position that they could not refuse. Therefore, the Chinese Road and Bridge Corporation began construction of the first phase of the highway. The CRBC is a subsidiary of the state-owned China Communications Construction Corporation. The corporation itself enjoys a truly global reach. The CRBC is present in Asia, Africa and now recently Europe (CRBC, 2022). The Chinese giant whom is also part of the Fortune 500 category as one the wealthiest corporations in the world, is also part of the state apparatus of the PRC. The Chairman of the corporation besides holding the highest managerial role does also hold publicly and as required by Chinese law, the title of

party secretary for the corporation, that being the Chinese Communist Party (Xiaomei, 2022). It can be assessed no matter how much Beijing might sugarcoat it, the huge corporations like the CRBC are not only connected to the state but also subservient to the communist party. Even Chinese billionaires are not spared by the Chinese Communist Party. The capitalist economy exists within the confinement of the communist system. The Chinese Communist Party ensures this way that the business class remains subservient to the state and as it is understood by the ownership status of such a large corporation such as the CRBC, the chairman is both a member of the communist party and was elected to that role by the state apparatus. While it cannot be surely assessed that the system that state run corporations in China are a meritocratic system, meaning it promotes leaders based on merit and achievement, one thing is certain in that negates the supposed meritocracy and that stands from membership in the Chinese Communist Party. Since to achieve chairman status in such corporation you also have to be a member of the CCP and part of the role of leading a corporate behemoth in China is also being the party's secretary in the corporate structure. One such move can only mean that the corporate structure in the end of the day must remain ideologically supportive to the state, and that the loyalty to the communist regime is paramount, regardless if such loyalty is in benefit or in the harm of the company. What the economic system in China really shows as it can be assessed through these factors is that while the profitability of a state-run company remains a high priority, the profitability is not taken into account if the billionaire who runs the company could be, is or has shown ideologically different or opposing views to the Chinese main narrative (Xiaomei, 2022). So, the expendable nature of the position that these Chinese billionaires find themselves, as they can be quickly replaced with one of their more loyal to the state subordinates, makes the corporate climate in China one where businesses have to essentially swear fealty to the Chinese state which will not only guarantee their rise in profitability in their field of business but also their freedom to operate and to do so.

The project would rise up to the cost of around 1,2 billion euros totally. The first phase of the project would run to 944 million euros. The Montenegrin government was unable to fund the 944 million euros project of the A1 highway or the Bar-Bolarje highway. Montenegro also lacked in proper infrastructure at the time. The small Balkan state being the only one with no functional motorway, which meant that cross country travel was much more difficult to traverse. The Montenegrin government was under pressure by potential foreign investors to upgrade its poor infrastructure since the potential companies

who would invest in the country would have a poor infrastructure to deal with which meant a higher cost of transport, be that of materials, personnel, or final product. To understand why Montenegro jumped to the opportunity given by China you have to understand in what position Montenegro found itself in the last decade. Montenegro, much like Albania's road to transition to a functional democratic society of rules and laws has been a rather bumpy one. The country still has a long way to be part of the European Union due to the issues with endemic corruption and weak economy, issues that echo very true in Albania too. Montenegro, however different from Albania, does not have a significant resource extraction industry, such as precious minerals mines or oil refineries. Montenegro was in dire need of a money pipeline as an incentive for its tourism industry. Montenegro, considering the destination of the highway, was looking for an exponential increase of Serbian tourists. There was nothing more incentive to tourism than a brand-new motorway that connected Montenegro to Belgrade. Serbia wholly supported such an endeavor. To put simply, Montenegro used to be part of Serbia. The former Yugoslavian state formally disbanded in 2006. The Montenegrins voted for independence but the Serbian influence still lingers in the small state. The Orthodox Church for example has been accused for decades that it is basically an extension to the Serbian state in Montenegro. The Church-State alliance in Belgrade is a hot issue that has prompted many individual research projects, but more importantly the Church if even a connection to the Serbian state cannot be confirmed as a tight sealed fact, there is a clear opposition by the church when it comes to Montenegro's accession in NATO and candidature in the EU. When it comes to the role of China related to the issue of Serbian influence in the Balkan, the highway is part of China's attempt to increase Serbian presence in the Adriatic and assert their position wholly regionally. It cannot be stressed enough how important to Serbia the access to Adriatic Sea is. While this section will be explained more shortly, the Serbians had played a major role in the Chinese decision to invest in Montenegro, due to historical factors and religious similarities between the two Balkan state.

The Chinese investment bank Exim Bank was given the green light by the Montenegrin government on a loan of specify amount of dollars and source that was to be paid directly to the CRBC. This is where the issues first started. The project for the highway was running into obstacles. The project missed its first deadline, and the costs began to mount. Whether this was intentional or human error to project an exact completion date is up to debate. China's plausible denial of any sort of debt trap diplomatic tactics employed by

them can be thrown out of window. The over a billion Euros loan taken by the state accounts for 25 percent of the country's external debt, one fourth of debt essentially owed to a Chinese state-owned bank. Before even finishing the project that has gone through inexplicable delays, the Chinese bank had officially requested the Montenegrin government to pay back the loan given to the CRBC acting as the middle man. In no way shape or form would any state be able to pay off one fourth of its own external debt in a short span of time, however the Chinese were asking Montenegro to do exactly that. This request might seem irrational but in truth it's a calculated risk that the Chinese take when considering to expand their influence. Once a state entity fails to pay back the debt to the Chinese, then the Chinese would take a valuable asset as compensation. In the case of Sri Lanka, the Belt and Road Initiative helped build a major seaport infrastructure project in the small Asian state, but much like Montenegro, Sri Lanka was unable to pay back the loan. The mechanism to pay back the loan in another form kicked in, essentially handing over the seaport, a major strategic infrastructure's property rights to China. This made China the sole owner of the formerly Sri Lankan port, essentially fulfilling the debt trap strategy implementation, in the end China increases its own footprint in the country while also potentially gaining a major strategic asset in the region. Montenegro fell in a similar trap like the small island nation of Sri Lanka. The risks were clear but also more dangerous in the case of Montenegro. Montenegro joined NATO in 2017, and since then the small state officially has been a staunch supporter of the United States. The implied political consequences that a NATO country would be trapped in debt to Beijing are beyond imagination. In essence, China would own land or an asset that used to belong to a NATO ally, not by purchase but by repossession like paying off the debt to a bank. Chinese state-affiliated media vehemently denied any wrongdoing related to the case of Montenegro. Beijing officially claimed that the clause where China would repossess thousands of acres of land that belong to Montenegro as a form of payment to the debt were by the Chinese called a "mistranslation". This is due to the fact that unlike Sri Lanka that lacked a strong alliance and partners to come to its aid, Montenegro is surrounded by NATO partner states that were appalled to the fact that China had dropped the mask of being a champion to developing countries where in reality it is exploiting them to its own benefits.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 The Future of China in Albania

While the BRI is still a remarkable achievement by the Chinese part, it is still a developing tool where the final product is far from perfect. It is not predicted for the foreseeable future that the BRI will be put into question of existence, due to the significant amount of money invested in the entire Initiative. There is no doubt however that in reality that the 17+1 model might be shrinking, as members continuously begin to have political problems with the Chinese communist state. What has been come up with is that China does not want differing opinions in the case of political issues such as the recognition of Taiwan over China. Albania does not seem like it has any intention of changing their position over the cases of the One-China policy any time soon, so by all means Albania is still considered a valuable partner by Beijing. The balances that Albania keeps with the Asian power, has created a unique relationship between the two, which values historical relations but also contemporary partnerships. The truth to the matter is that Albania simply cannot afford to break up any sort of relationship it has with major trading partners due to the difficult economic situation that the Balkan state finds itself in even after more than 30 years when communism fell. The Albanian governments have always been in dire need of international investments, and China has been the state that has provided more than once. As the English idiom goes, “beggars cannot be choosers”, the Albanian economy completely personifies this sort of manner as Albania itself as seen in the dissertation, can only export minerals and its oil in a grand scale, enough to be considered significant to the economy as a whole. China imports quite a lot of minerals from Albania, which makes it an important partner in the matter.

Politically, the Chinese are not present in Albania, nor they are pro to most of what Albania stands for. Albania continues to be an integral part of NATO and as the recent events have shown, the Albanian government stands firmly opposed to the Chinese stance on the Russo-Ukrainian war of 2022. The official stance of the governments of Albania even before gaining membership in NATO, has been almost exclusively pro-NATO and pro-US. By no means will this decades-old stance can be changed in regards of China. This is why politically, the Chinese employ ambivalence when it comes to Albania, in order to simply ignore the facts that neither Albania nor China are part of the same axis, or that officially Albania stands opposite to many countries that the Chinese deem allies or partners. However again there is no actual proof that the Chinese influence in Albania has transcended into political influence from purely economic and cultural, which is a huge plus for the transitional Albanian democracy, so that in any reason, the biggest communist country in the world has not employed political propaganda in order to create a more pro-Chinese state or pro-Chinese political class. It must be stated again that balance is the best approach for both countries to prosper, as the Chinese tread carefully in Albania, due to the fact that Albania continues and will be for the foreseeable future, a strategic partner and ally of the United States of America.

5.2 Future deliberations on the matter

As the research question went “How does China’s economic involvement in the Western Balkans affect local politics?” , this dissertation however is not the end of this research. As it is explained in the beginning, what hindered the progress was the fact that a lot of contemporary documents in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, were classified. This meant that the researcher could glance at them but in no way could he reference what he saw in the documents. Due to the law on archives, the minimum number of years that these archives stay classified is three decades. This means that any future deliberations on the matter will bring much more information and many new avenues which it will be used to expand upon the initial research. Even besides the archive matters, the Chinese influence in Albania is a dynamic and hybrid matter that can change almost daily. So, for me to expand upon this thesis, it will be much easier than anticipated, due to the abundance of information that constantly comes up upon the matter. This matter is not

historical and it is still currently going on, so even the future predictions on how China will conduct its business in Albania could be incorrect, but that will remain a matter of time and further research.

What can be predicted for this research on the matter is that in no way shape or form this will be the end of it. It is believed that this just started to chip away at the top of the matter, while legal issues related to the archives could have been for me the greatest hinderer of the progress. So yes, it is believed that the BRI will not be the end of the Chinese initiatives on a global scale. What remains to be considered is the scale and scope of the research, as Albania might be just a small cog in the vast machine and the vast array of the Belt and Road Initiative. It can be speculated at this point how the BRI started in Albania, due to the lack of accessible research, what political deliberations were behind Albania's decision to join rather than just the purely economic needs. It can also be speculated what the future holds as mentioned before, so in reality this is still open-ended research. China might still have a few unseen operators that are still expanding Chinese influence in Albania and by no means there will be an end to that in the foreseeable future. For Albania the future relations with China is not as amicable as it could be, rising tensions and the constant drumming for war by Beijing are hindering any sort of continued cooperation. Even as this thesis is written, China still increases tensions with its small neighbor, Taiwan, risking a regional war in the South China Sea. That still remains a dangerous proposal. For example, nobody thought Russia would invade Ukraine a year ago, and yet now the world faces another aggressive war in Europe, very reminiscent of the brutal wars back in the 20th Century. There cannot be a clear conclusion on how this matter will end, hence this thesis to me will be the beginning of a possible multiple years long research. Geopolitics has become completely unpredictable and peaceful conflict resolution seems a thing of the past even though historically, humans are known to wage wars rather than wage peace. Albania as a small country is in the middle of this whole conundrum and only the future years will show how it will navigate these dangerous paths.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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