

Volunteering in Albania: From the Coercive State to the European Orientation – A Cultural Legacy and Strategic Challenges in the Post-Communist Path to the EU

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Received: July 22, 2025; Accepted: August 06, 2025; Published: August 16, 2025

Keywords: Volunteering, De-Stalinization, Eu

Research Objectives

This research aims to highlight how EU institutions address socioeconomic challenges in the integration process of the Western Balkans [3]. It explores the effectiveness of Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs) as mechanisms for institutional and social convergence [4]. Furthermore, it assesses the *acquis communautaire* as a tool for transforming social policy, and ultimately, it emphasizes volunteering as a mechanism for social sustainability.

Main Findings

1. Uneven Implementation of the *Acquis Communautaire*
2. The adoption of EU law in candidate countries is often superficial and limited to technical areas, while social policy remains weak [5].

Institutional Weakness and Internal Obstacles

Albania struggles due to unstable public administration, low absorption of EU funds, and a personalized political system [6].

Lack of Effective Social Cohesion Strategy despite the strategic approaches like COM (2020)57, operational tools for social inclusion are lacking [3].

Contradiction between Enlargement and Social Integration

The EU invests in territorial integration, but social convergence remains weak in the absence of a strong cohesion policy [7].

The Case of Albania – Historical and Cultural Background

Unlike other former communist states, Albania did not adopt de-Stalinization. On the contrary, it remained committed to a strict Stalinist-Leninist model [8]. Between 1945–1991, the country implemented:

- The abolition of religion.
- The abolition of private property.
- Mass state terror and social isolation [9].

Notably, the concept of “volunteering” took the form of imposed mobilization, with no element of spontaneous social participation, and was embedded in the socialist identity of the “ideal citizen” [2].

Transitionality and Inherited Perceptions

The fall of the communist regime in 1991 did not automatically bring about a change in political culture. Citizens, including younger generations, continued to perceive volunteering as a mandatory or state-imposed activity [7]. This intergenerational continuity highlights the resilience of the authoritarian model [5].

The European Dimension of Volunteering

The EU has promoted volunteering as a means of enhancing social cohesion [10]. Through the European Voluntary Policy Agenda [1], it seeks to establish active citizenship. However, in the case of Albania, implementation remains difficult due to:

- The historical burden of volunteering as a tool of state control
- Insufficient institutional infrastructure [2,9].

Conclusions and Recommendations

Albania is not merely a geopolitical challenge in the enlargement process; it is a complex case of transition where volunteering serves as an indicator of cultural memory and institutional variability.

Recommendations

Redesign the enlargement strategy with a focus on social cohesion

Strengthen civil society to disconnect volunteering from the state

Implement educational programs to redefine volunteering as a free act of social contribution

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