

## Functional Republic: A Historic Step Towards an Albanian Federation

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### ABSTRACT

The argument of this study is that the political unification of Albanians, in the form of a functional federation, is possible only on the basis of two fundamental premises: (1) the consolidation of a functional and economically developed state in Kosova, and (2) the deepening of Euro-Atlantic integration processes, which neutralize the geopolitical dimension of regional opposition. The study is based on theories of state-building, federalism and regional integration, as well as on the comparative experiences of Central Europe.

The state-forming transformation of Kosova in the first decades after the war has involved the clash between two opposing political logics: a republican-democratic model oriented towards institutional consolidation and a clientelistic model that relies on patronage, particularism and the capture of public resources. This clash produces profound implications for national security, regional stability and the long-term perspective of the Albanian nation. In this context, the narrative about the old political establishment's interactions with destabilizing actors—Serbia, Russia, and specific segments within the EU—should be understood not as a genuine empirical fact, but as a structural risk present in the political architecture of the Western Balkans.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### The Albanian Federation as a Historical Horizon

The discourse on Albanian unification has gone through several conceptual stages: from romantic idealism (19th century), to institutional nationalist projects (1912–1990), to the modern discourse of institutional integration after 1999. At this stage, the issue of unification is not treated simply as an ethnic project, but as a union of two functional republics within the framework of European standards, approaching federalist models such as the German-Austrian or Czechoslovak ones before the 1990s. [Noel Malcolm: 1998]

In this perspective, the formation of the Albanian Federation is seen as a natural step if two basic conditions are met:

- **The creation of a functional Republic in Kosova, with stable institutions and a competitive economy;**
- **The construction of a strategic harmony between Tirana and Pristina in foreign and security policy.**

The Republic of Kosova, proclaimed in 2008 as the result of a long process of liberation efforts since October 1912, when it was occupied by Serbia and lived the life of a typical colony for almost eight decades. This process would accelerate during the last decade of the 20th century, when the process of the dissolution of Yugoslavia began,

Kosova's independence is also related to the right of Albanians to self-determination, which is considered one of the most important cases of state-building in the post-Cold War Balkans.

Strengthening institutions, state functionality and economic stability are not only internal objectives of political development, but also strategic conditions with direct geopolitical consequences in inter-Albanian relations in the region.

In this sense, the creation of a functional, democratic and competitive Republic in Kosova constitutes a process that is directly related to the historical perspective of political, economic and security union with Albania — a process that is increasingly defined in academic literature as the creation of the Albanian Federation. [Dr. S. Ramabaja: 2016]

This concept does not imply the annulment of sovereignty, but its transformation into a shared sovereignty, similar to modern federal models in Europe.

State-building in Kosova is closely linked to the construction of effective institutions with administrative capacity, which includes:

- **depoliticization of the public sector,**
- **functioning of an independent judiciary,**
- **fight against corruption,**
- **professionalization of state administration.**

A state that achieves institutional stability becomes a predictable international actor, which is an essential prerequisite for any federalist project. [Weber: 1978]

## 2. THE NATION-STATE IN THE AGE OF TECHNOFEUDALISM

Despite the profound transformations brought about by the era of high technology, artificial intelligence, and digital corporatocracy — which some authors call the first stages of technofeudalism — the nation-state remains the central institution for guaranteeing democracy. As Varoufakis (2024) argues, algorithmic power and global platforms are rewriting economic relations, but they have not yet created an alternative architecture of political sovereignty that can replace the nation-state. Along the same lines, Zuboff (2019) warns that surveillance capitalism challenges democratic norms, but the very protection of citizenship and rights is still founded on the capacities of the modern state.

These analyses make it clear that, even in this new post-industrial reality, the nation-state has not been overcome; on the contrary, it remains the only institutional bastion that can protect political freedoms, civil rights, and accountability functions.

## 3. THE NATION-STATE AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IN THE AGE OF TECHNOFEUDALISM

New phenomena of economic power — digital platforms, data oligopolies, artificial intelligence — are challenging the traditional capacities of the nation-state to exercise control over the economy and public space. But, as Zuboff (2019) and Varoufakis (2024) point out, this very reality makes the nation-state even more indispensable as a protective mechanism for democracy.

### In this context:

- The EU provides a regulatory framework to confront digital giants;
- The nation-state remains the main guarantor of democratic institutions and civil rights;

- *Political actors in small countries must understand that European integration does not replace their duty to build national capacities and develop effective public policies.*

## 4. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AS A PROJECT OF NATION-STATES

After the devastation of two world wars, the project of European integration was conceived from the outset as a mechanism to reinforce peace by strengthening — not abolishing — nation-states. Founding documents, such as the Schuman Declaration (1950) and Monnet's vision, saw intergovernmental cooperation as the most effective way to avoid a return to centuries-old rivalries. As Milward (1992) argues, the European Union was born not as a supranational project in the sense of a new federation, but as a "savior of the European state", giving each nation-state new economic and political instruments to manage globalization.

For this reason, the Council of the European Union, where the heads of state and government meet, and not the Commission or the Parliament, has the final say on all important decisions. At the table where the future of Europe is decided, ultimately only the representatives of the nation states sit, obliged to defend their respective national interests. Some believe strongly in the sovereignty of their countries, while others are more reserved. But none of them wants to be pressured by the Commission or the other member states. [Dr. Jan Zielonka: 2025]

Contemporary theories of intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik, 1998) confirm this: decision-making in the EU has been and remains in the hands of national governments, which are the main actors determining the pace and direction of integration.

## 5. THE DEMOCRATIC NATION-STATE, THE CLIENTELISTIC ESTABLISHMENT, AND GEOPOLITICAL RISKS

In the literature on state-building, the consolidation of the nation-state passes through institutions that limit arbitrariness, institutionalize accountability, and build collective trust (Tilly, 1992; Fukuyama, 2011). In Kosova, the attempt to create a modern, meritocratic, and functional state has been challenged by the legacy of patrimonialism and party patronage, a model that, according to the political economy theory of state capture, aims to control resources and the administrative apparatus in the interests of narrow groups (Hellman, Jones & Kaufmann, 2000).

In this sense, the clash between reformist forces and the clientelistic establishment is not a simple political conflict, but a confrontation between two state-building projects:

- **The democratic-republican project**, based on the rule of law, the depoliticization of institutions, and a Euro-Atlantic orientation;
- **The clientelist project**, based on patronage networks, control of state resources, and the logic of power as private capital.

These two logics cannot coexist without tension, because, as Krastev (2002) argues, clientelism in post-communist transitions hinders the very possibility of the emergence of a functional democratic state.

## 6. FUNCTIONAL STATE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR FEDERALIZATION

### 6.1. Institutional Functionality

According to the state-building literature, a state is considered functional if it manages to meet three criteria: the legitimate monopoly of violence, administrative capacity, and the effectiveness of public policies.<sup>2</sup> Kosova, in the post-independence phase, has progressed in several areas (e.g. fiscal reform, digitalization of administrative processes), but the setbacks remain evident in:

- **depoliticization of the administration;**
- **capacities of the justice system.**

Until recently, Kosova had not even extended full control over the entire territory, consequently one could not speak of genuine sovereignty. Meanwhile, this obstacle, with emphasis during the Kurti 2 government, respectively the eighth legislature of the Assembly of the Republic, this obstacle has already been overcome.

In the context of federalization, the issue of territorial control would first and foremost present a real risk, but the two remaining obstacles are not without risk, because federation requires two entities equal in performance, not just in sovereignty. In theory, federations built on economically or institutionally unequal entities (e.g. Bosnia, Ethiopia) have shown persistent problems. [Fukuyama: 2004]

### 6.2. Economic development as a basis for federal stability

The economies of Albania and Kosova are complementary, but not fully integrated. If Kosova manages to create a productive economy, oriented towards innovation and exports, then the asymmetry with Albania is reduced, creating ground for equal federal negotiation.

The model and paths followed during the process of German reunification, namely the federation of the German Democratic Republic [East Germany] with the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG], could serve well.

According to World Bank analyses, countries with sustainable growth and fiscal stability more easily embrace territorial integration. [NATO, "Annual National Programme – Republic of Kosova," 2021.] This makes the model even more applicable in the Albanian case.

### 6.3 Defense and security as an element of modern sovereignty

The Republic of Kosova has already established the Kosova Security Force (KSF), which is undergoing a gradual transformation towards a modern army, according to NATO standards. A functional state requires guaranteed collective security and effective territorial control. [World Bank, Western Balkans Regular Economic Report, 2024] Over the past decade, the security dynamics in the Western Balkans have been characterized by ongoing political tensions, increasing Russian influence through Serbia, and a fragile security architecture in Europe. In this context, the Republic of Kosova has begun to gradually build its defense capabilities, moving from the concept of a lightly armed force towards a modern and interoperable capacity with Western allies.

The armament purchases of recent years – which include armored land vehicles, advanced artillery systems, precision weapons and tactical intelligence equipment – constitute a strategic turn with a direct impact on strengthening Kosova's security.

The modernization of the Kosova Security Force (KSF) is not only a technical process, but one of profound political and strategic importance. Military modernization de facto implies investment in stability and deterrence

#### 6.3.1 The principle of deterrence

In security studies, the concept of deterrence by denial emphasizes that a small state can prevent aggression not through large offensive capabilities, but by increasing the cost incurred by the potential aggressor.

The armaments purchased by Kosova – especially armored vehicles and detection and response systems – serve precisely this purpose: to increase the price of any military adventure against it.

#### 6.3.2. Balancing the asymmetry with Serbia

Serbia maintains a large military force supplied by Russia, China and France. Despite this disparity, Kosova is creating a minimum necessary balance, which is becoming a stabilizing element in the region.

This balance is of the following nature:

- **tactical – increasing** the ability for territorial defense in the north;
- **strategic – increasing** the credibility of the state in the international community;
- **psychological** – strengthening internal cohesion and institutional self-confidence.

## 7. THE GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSION: WHY FEDERATION IS ONLY POSSIBLE WITHIN THE EURO-ATLANTIC FRAMEWORK

### 7.1. Union as a process of Europeanization, not conflictualization

Theories of regional integration (Haas, Moravcsik) argue that state unions have real possibilities when they are seen as an extension of the existing international order, not as a challenge to it. [NATO, "Annual National Programme – Republic of Kosova," 2021]

In the Albanian case, the European Union and NATO represent the framework that neutralizes regional tension with Serbia and legitimizes union as an internal, coordinated, and internationally agreed process.

### 7.2. The effect of geopolitical rivalries

Over the past decade, Russia has used tensions in the Balkans – mainly the Kosova issue – to hinder Euro-Atlantic enlargement. [Dimitar Bechev: 2017] This factor makes the consolidation of a functional state in Kosova even more important, because without full institutional stability, any federalization process would be instrumentalized by rival actors.

## 8. ALBANIAN FEDERATION: POSSIBLE INSTITUTIONAL MODEL

### 8.1. Symmetrical Federation

The most acceptable model is one in which Albania and Kosova remain two equal federal units, with:

- **Federal Parliament with two chambers;**
- **Federal Government with competences in foreign policy, defense, common market, education;**
- **Federal Constitution;**
- **Preservation of internal competences for each entity.**

### 8.2. Economic integration as the foundation of the federation

The federation functions only on a real common market. Technical steps:

1. **harmonization of taxes and fiscal policies;**

2. **energy union (electrical interconnectivity + market integration);**
3. **unification of customs;**
4. **free movement of labor;**
5. **common industrial policy.**

This transformation automatically increases the national economic weight in the region, bringing the Federation to the level of small but highly developed EU countries.

## 9. HISTORICAL ARGUMENT: WHY THIS STEP WOULD BE A "HISTORICAL STEP"

### 9.1. Ending the cycle of Albanian state-building (1912–2025)

The Albanian state-building process has been fragmented due to geopolitical factors. Federalization between Kosova and Albania would represent:

- **the end of historical fragmentation;**
- **the full stabilization of the Albanian nation in the Balkans;**
- **the creation of a political entity that reduces regional and international interference.**

### 9.2. Federation as a factor of regional stability

Studies on federalism show that ethnically homogeneous federations have a long lifespan and minimal risk of conflict. [Alfred Stepan: 2005]

In this context, the Albanian Federation is more stabilizing than the current status quo, because it would reduce:

- **the ongoing Pristina–Belgrade tensions;**
- **the instrumentalization of minorities;**
- **diplomatic dependence on the international factor.**

## 10. CONCLUSION

- The functional republic in Kosova and the increasing pace of economic development on both sides of the border create the optimal terrain for a historic step: the formation of the Albanian Federation. This process is not simply a national project, but a modern strategy for regional growth, development and stability, firmly anchored in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.
- In the age of technofeudalism, the nation-state is not only not disappearing, but is regaining importance as the custodian of democracy, legal order and accountability. European integration

has been and remains a project of nation-states, not their replacement. The rhetoric of handing over responsibilities to Brussels is a sign of structural weaknesses in domestic politics and not a reflection of the real nature of the integration process.

- If Kosova achieves full institutional and economic consolidation, and Albania continues its integration into the EU, then unification – in the form of a federation – is not only possible, but historically inevitable.

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