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# Understanding Defense and Security In Correlation to Civil Society and Media

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## Security Sector Reform and the Media

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## **Brief History**

During the communist regime the army was one of the most important institutions of the country through which they defended this regime. Beside this they used also other forms in which to control and prolong their regime. The secret service and the indoctrination of the whole society would ultimately prolong the life of communism in Albania, and will make it the country to last longer than any other country in the Central-Eastern Europe as a communist regime. Moreover, a government that controlled all aspects of life led a totalitarian country like Albania. Most faithful people of the regime had key positions in governmental institutions. The military institution had even more selected and faithful individuals. Other instruments of control were the party, where large portion of party members were also army officers. These instruments were also followed by other forms of control such as repressive measures to cause fear among simple and particular citizens. The building of hundred thousands bunkers was also another way of indoctrination.

During the communist regime all these tactics and measures were forms of security and defense. As time has revealed, these measures were to control the population, to indoctrinate it, and to prolong the life of a paranoid government, that has destroyed Albania once and for all. The consequences of this regime will influence the development of the armed forces in the early 1990s, thus its security and defense strategies.

There was an immediate need to de-politicize the army, to reduce its size and to un-indoctrinate its mentality to protect the party. But most dissatisfaction among the army officials was caused by the reduction of the army size. Many officers of different ranks were forced to leave the armed forces. Most of them did not have any other education except that given in the army thus unemployed and with a small pension they were forced to enter small businesses or even working on the streets as traders. The new developments in the country undermined the old military status. The degradation of the social and economic status of the military brought the indifference toward defense and security issues after the 1990s.

The Albanian society perceived the army and other policing professions, negatively, because as they were indoctrinated in the functioning of these institutions from the previous regime. Also the attention of the mass population of Albania was primarily concentrated in economic and political issues. The "utopian" form of governance of the previous regime that kept Albania closed to any foreign country, had suddenly developed another outlook in the minds of the Albanians that no enemies exist in the world. Positions in police forces, or in secret

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services have being field later on from those who sought it as a great opportunity to trafficking and corruption.

### **Civil Society Media Security and Defence**

The fall of communism in the early 1990s brought in Albania the organisation of many people accosiations, foundations, and centres when the state accepted dejure the freedom of the citizens to engage and join diffrent strucures independent from state. Civil society in Albania wass created the same time when pluralism came into life, different from other Eastern European countries where freedom to create and join non-governmental organizations had long existed. This developed to an exten a problem for the civil society which in part became politicised as consequence of half century prohibition and a lack of tradition to freely associate in independent political or non-political parties. Unitl 1999. this became a big issue in the context of the political tendencies that different NGOs had for one or another pary. In 1999, the way civil society was working changed and emerged to a different level where liberalisation of procedures for the functioning and registration of these organisations would make them more independent and demanding from and toward the government.

Even though the work of these organisations in the Albanian life is very important there is little or no expectations from citizens toward these organizations. This because in actuality the civil society has little influence in legislatve or other workings of the governeemt. Even in extreme cases where people of such organizations protest or are in a strike for a period of time the Albanian government has not been sensitive to the demands presented by such organisations or the people. Moreover they continue to justify the insensitivity and the lack of the capacities for resolving most demanding issues. The same, organisations formed by ex-military officals or those that deal with security and defence issues have no or little pressure on the governments' decissions.

According to the law passed in1999<sup>1</sup>, "On the Right to Information on Official Documents", civil society has *de jure* right to access all political and public administration documents except those classified as secret according to the law. But to access documents on security and defense becomes very difficult because of the obstacles one has to pass forged by governmental authorities not interested to release them. On the other hand, not in all cases

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<sup>1</sup> Law Nr. 8503 30 June 1999. "Everyone has the right to request information on official documents related to the activity of state structures and individuals who exercise state functions, without the need to provide a motivation for the request. Public authorities are required to release all information related to an official document, except when the law states other wise."( pg 122)

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information required by different actors of civil societies is detained by government authorities. The Albanian government treats the pro-government and opposition media very differently. The pro-government actors are more favored, their access to different security and defense documents is easier, and the opposition actors are more discriminated. There are many examples to give in this matter when dealing with the media, specifically newspaper editorials.

Even though the concept of public relations has been introduced in the Albanian government, still is not functioning as in the democratic countries. In our country, these two words mean Propaganda. This concept is used to overwhelm the general public or to justify the insensitivities in the spectrum toward all Albanians. High officials of the government are very particular when dealing with the media. Thus, the information given by the government to those particular media actor that support its politics, even those dealing with defense and security, have a negativity on the general public because they do not really show what is the truth.

On the other hand, the opposition media does not have confirmed and accurate information therefore developing lack of belief among the people. This is a great issue that or society is facing because it certainly influences the development a disbelief and annoyance among the simple citizens.

The involvement of the civil society, the media, and the public opinion are important and necessary on the discussion and the drafting of new defense and security strategies. Previously, the participation of public policy and other research centers has been limited and the engagement of the expertise other than governmental has been minimal. Thus, there is a need that foreign donors should support more activities engaging civil society to participate in areas that are little debated by the public opinion. But to this effort we cannot say that there has been nothing done. A partnership between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and institutes, research centers dealing with civil control of the armed forces has been the first commitment of the government and civil society. In this regard, there have been made many seminars, workshops where military specialist and representatives from civil society opened debates and concluded in the creation of the Institute of Security and Defense. But this is just one example and maybe the lonely collaboration in the defense and security sectors. The fact is that there is still lack of collaboration. In many democratic and pluralistic countries governmental strategies are to collaborate with non-governmental organizations expertise. Where, to the Albanian Executive this is a foreign work strategy. Governmental specialist provides the expertise on defense and security.

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## Defense, Security and the Media

The information given by the media on defense and security issues are not differently characterized from other information on government or politics. There are two main problems first that of controlling of the Media by the government and second the lack of competence to administer and deal with information on security and defense.

Since 1992, both governments have controlled the media to their profit. As in many other countries, undemocratic in totality, media could be used for propaganda, and in many countries, "democratic in totality", is well known that media is propaganda. But in Albania governments used means that were unlawful, sometimes trials of media representatives and state officials, violence, imprisonment, and some other times more sophisticated tactics such as economic control, and financial conditioning of the media or the media owners. But in both cases these governments have undermined some of the basic human rights that of freedom of press.

On the other hand many specialists argue that the information on defense and security is usually scarce. For example, Ministry of Defense releases more news concerning negotiations for integration in the NATO rather than information on security and defense strategies in Albania. Moreover, the information usually lacks ethics. Some argue that the media was never appropriately involved in presenting the delicate issues dealing with security and defense. Also, media lacks in general the expertise to deal with these issues.

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