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RRUGA PËR NË EVROPË. KONCEPTUALIZIMI METAFORIK I PROCESIT TË INTEGRIMIT EVROPIAN NË DISKURSIN POLITIK SHQIPËTAR

Ledia Kazazi*

**Fakulteti i Shkencave të Aplikuara dhe Ekonomike, Albanian University*

Abstract

Since the demise of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the notion of Europe has assumed a prominent role within political discourses in Albania. The interpretation of this concept has exhibited a degree of fluidity, its meaning evolving according to the prevailing context and political circumstances in which it has been invoked. Nevertheless, one consistent thread running through these varied usages is the portrayal of Europe as an inescapable destiny for Albania. During the most recent term of the socialist government led by Prime Minister Edi Rama a notable shift in the discourse concerning the European Union has been noticed. The EU is depicted as a fortress, a demanding parental figure, a capricious bride, a dissatisfied professor, and even abstractly alluded to through references to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. This paper's aim is to delve into the construction of the EU concept within contemporary political discourses in Albania, with a specific focus on Prime Minister Edi Rama. The study draws upon the methodologies and practices of Critical Discourse Analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to explore the dynamics of power relations conveyed through the linguistic analysis of selected textual material.

Key words: *critical discourse analysis, conceptual metaphor, political discourse, conceptualization, EU*

Introduction

In recent discussions in linguistics, psychology and philosophy, the relevance of metaphor for social and political conceptualization has been acknowledged in much more positive terms. In particular, the school of cognitive metaphor analysis, part of the larger fields of Cognitive Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson effectively founded with the publication of their work "Metaphors We Live By" in 1980, has produced significant evidence that "metaphors play a central role in the construction of social and political reality". (Johnson, 1980, p. 159)

The field of Critical discourse analysis has garnered significant interest among researchers in linguistics, language studies and other social sciences in the past two decades. (Chouliariaki & Fairclough, 1999) Extensive studies on the field have displayed how closely related language, power and ideology are and especially that language is far from being neutral.

The present paper endeavours to investigate selected metaphorical expression used to denote the relationship between Albania and the European Union from the perspective of contemporary Albanian political discourse and it is anchored on the critical discourse analytical theory. Even though broadly recognized as an interdisciplinary approach it possesses a clear linguistic feature as

it mostly relies on linguistic categories. Of course, the content is very significant, but its analysis also depends on linguistic concepts. (Meyer, 2002) Political discourse, known for its skilful deployment of persuasive linguistic techniques, offers a fertile ground for exploring how power, ideology, and context shape cognitive processes. More specifically the paper relies on Critical Metaphor Analysis, which aims at revealing the covert intention of language users, (Charteris-Black, 2004) focusing on the pragmatic aspect of metaphors which is in line with the principles of CDA as its primary interest lies in process-ing social issues through discourse studies. (Van Dijk, 1993)

Theoretical framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

The school of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was established at the beginning of the 90s and it was characterised by an interdisciplinary approach of the problem-oriented analysis. Even though, in essence, it is a linguistic oriented discipline, it does not study a linguistic unit per se but rather social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi/ inter/ trans-disciplinary approach. It mostly aims at unveiling patterned mechanisms of the reproduction of power asymmetries. The term critical here, should not necessarily be considered from a negative perspective. Being critical means discovering how language use is related to causes we are unaware about. (Fairclough, 1995) Thus, the critical reading in CDA goes beyond hermeneutics. In essence it aims at demystifying texts shaped ideologically by relations of power; focuses on the relationship between discourse and societal structure and does so through open interpretations and explanation. The importance of the critical study of language is mostly emphasized by Norman Fairclough, who states that there is a need for an approach that gathers social sciences with linguistics within a unique theoretical and analytical framework. (Fairclough, 1999) According to him, discourses are shaped by a variety of linguistic uses and other symbolic forms, and they do not just represent a social entity but, on the contrary, they are an essential part of them. Critical discourse analysis should aim at considering exactly the social effects of discourse. A more historical oriented approach to CDA is provided by Ruth Wodak who considers discourse as a total of simultaneous, sequential, and intertwined speech acts which are created within the social spheres and shaped as “texts” or “speeches” that on their own belong to different semantic typologies. (Wodak, 2002) In her view, CDA should analyse the cases when social interactions are translated into linguistic entities. Her historical approach involves the systematic integration of all the possible historical background in the analysis and interpretation of written or spoken texts.

On the other hand, Teun Van Dijk, another important personality working on CDA, seems to be not so focused on the text level. Discourse to him is something more than just text and context or social practices translated in language. He states that every semiotic stance embodied with meaning is considered discourse, whether it is a written text, gesticulations, image, or a multimodal object. Van Dijk defines discourse as “communicative event” and discourse analysis is thus an analysis of ideology. Here, ideologies are considered as a system of ideas belonging to thought and belief, known as cognition. They are also social elements related with different groups of interest. They can be used to legitimize or oppose power, domination or to symbolize social issues and contradictions. (V. Dijk, 1999)

Conceptual metaphor

Scholars like A. Musolff, P. Chilton and G. Lakoff under the effect of Lakoff’s “Metaphors we live by” have incorporated the mechanism of conceptual metaphor into the field of discourse studies. Conceptual metaphors go beyond the borders of rhetorical metaphor. Its importance lies in the fact that it manages to project a concrete domain of knowledge into another abstract domain. In political

discourse, metaphors conceptualize political behaviour and processes through an ideological point of view of reality. The analysis of metaphors in political discourse is very important since they can change the perception of reality. (Chilton, 1996)

Linguistically speaking, metaphor is considered as a reflection of the domain of knowledge that underlies the language users' view of the world that surrounds them. Thus, metaphor is not a random linguistic form, nor a simple rhetorical tool, but it is an embodied conceptual entity.

Metaphor exploration is very helpful in the study of political discourse. If our social experiences and conceptualizations are organized in terms of metaphors, then politics, as part of the social domain and the individuals' viewpoint, must also be perceived and constructed metaphorically. In relation to this, Lakoff has published "Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don't", in which he analyses the worldviews underlying political thinking in the United States of America.

Within the framework of metaphor usage within the discourse of the European Union we can distinguish the work of Musolff, Wodak, Judge and Durovic. Their work results in the common assertion that abstract processes of joining and integration in the EU are effectuated by connections between language, cognition and reality and metaphors as an essential aspect of cognition results as the most pervasive cognitive and linguistic device for shaping conceptualizations of a given reality. Thus, it gains a central role in the construction of social and political realities. (Lakoff and Johnson; 1980; 159) This definition navigates the same waters as the Critical Metaphor Analysis which states that if language is a prime means of gaining control of people, metaphor is a prime means by which people can regain control of language and create discourse. (Charteris Black; 2004; 253)

More specifically, Judge suggests that creating "a dynamic system of metaphors" would allow people to experience a shared European belonging and imagine a common Europe, mostly because metaphors assign Europe with names from non-political domains and construct the image of Europe referring to well-known and familiar concepts (Judge). This property provides the public with a cognitive tool for conceptualizing and understanding the European Community. For Judge, metaphors, especially those that spontaneously denote the European Union in political and public discourses are emotionally loaded and politically engaged. The investigation of these metaphors may shed light in how symbolic means can be used for political purposes.

Methodology and data collection

The criterion followed for metaphor identification in the actual article is adopted from Charteris Black, who defines conceptual metaphors in terms of semantic tension, role in persuasion and cross domain mapping in the conceptual system. The selected corpus consists of selected speeches, press releases and media reports centring the topic of Albania's EU accession, during the last five years. Regarding the sources, the paper relies on information published on selected online media immediately after the events. The metaphor identification process is divided in two steps. The first step involves close reading of selected speeches to identify metaphors and metaphor key words. The second step involves the evaluation of the semantic value of literacy of the key words based on the context of the selected speeches. (Charteris-Black, 2011)

The analysis then follows the basic guidelines as presented in Cameron Law. The selected metaphor expressions are grouped based on the general metaphors they represent and the results are used to suggest "understandings or thought patterns that construct the people's beliefs and actions. (Low, 1999) In this line, they are classified according to their corresponding conceptual metaphors, which are the grouped under the conceptual keys: POLITICS IS CONFLICT, POLITICS IS SPORTS etc

Findings

The empirical analysis of the present paper concludes that the most generic metaphors used to denote Albania's relationship with the European Union political discourse are EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IS A JOURNEY, EUROPE IS A FAMILY, EUROPE IS A BUILDING and EUROPE IS THE FUTURE. It also states that in political discourse, metaphors conceptualize political behaviour and processes through an ideological point of view of reality. Through the usage of metaphors political actors are enabled to convey only selected images and ideas which frame the way the public opinion perceives certain issues.

EUROPE IS A BUILDING/ EDIFICE/ HOME/FORTRESS

The metaphor of Europe as a building became very popular in the mid-1980s, after Mikhail Gorbachev used the phrase *common European home* to emphasize the "political vision of a collaborative way of living together for the European nations" (Musolff, 2004). The source concept of the building has mostly been used to denote the entity 'Europe' in its geo-political sense. It builds upon the traditions of metonymic identification between a political entity and the dynastic household or other ruling institutions.

However, in actual European political discourses, the *European house* almost exclusively denotes the European Union. When referring to the integration of Albania and other Western Balkans countries in the EU, the Union is depicted as a building or even fortress in some cases, which does not include the WB countries despite their undisputed geographical status as part of the European continent. This conceptualization of the EU as a building, is linguistically related to the famous phrase *building Europe*, uttered by French president, Nicolas Sarkozy in July 2008 during France's EU presidency, when he states that:

We must profoundly change our way of building Europe, which worries the citizens of Europe. (Telegraph.co.uk)

Non-EU nations that belong geographically to Europe are perceived as outsiders, who may have a future chance of being allowed into the European house, by way of an extension of the already existing European house.

During the Skopje Economic Forum in June 2021, immediately after failing to establish a date for the opening of accession negotiations, PM Edi Rama stated:

We did not fail, they failed, they have their own reasons. It's their house, not ours. We want to enter, but the house is not ours. (PM Rama)

We are in Europe, surrounded by European borders. They tell us that they want us to be inside, but you have to respect some rules which we have not established yet. (PM Rama)

In his statement Rama reinforces the concept of the EU as a fortress. He distinguishes between the European Union as an institution and Europe as a geographical entity, part of which Albania is. He plays with the paradox of being part of the European landscape, but still outside of the fortress. Also, he applies here an Us vs. Them narrative which is a rhetorical strategy that aims at oversimplifying complex issues by polarizing the involved actors and manipulating the audience into positioning themselves with one of the sides. He extensively uses the first-person plural pronoun We, also known as the Royal We, which here embodies a deictic function of expressing inclusivity. This kind of deictic expression is generally used by monarchs representing as one person the whole nation. In pragmatic theories this kind of reference is categorized as an "exclusive we" as it solely refers to the ruler or a close group of people close to him. However, in political discourses, the royal We reflects a deceptive "inclusive we" (Yule, 1996). By speaking as the representative of the country the PM includes

a broader audience in the discourse space which in this case are the common people of the Republic of Albania. By doing so he is spreading the responsibility of the failure beyond the government and governmental institutions.

What can be witnessed in the last decade is that the *building/ edifice/ house/ fortress* metaphor is not used by European officials and politicians coming from the member states but rather by those who are “outside the building”. Nevertheless, the mental image of the EU as a *building/ edifice/ house/ fortress* is reinforced by metaphors referring only to a part of a building, or better what divides the building from the other territory. They are *door* and *doorstep*.

In an interview for AFP in February 2020, PM Rama states that:

Albania will not stay at Europe's door and cry for it to open. (PM Rama)

This statement is reminiscent of a controversial interview that Rama gave to Politico in 2017 where he stated that:

The only way to keep the Balkans in this peaceful and cooperative mode ... is to keep the path to the EU open, to keep the perspective clear, to keep emotions about the EU positive. No one would like to turn [in] on themselves and look for smaller unions, everyone would like to unite in the big union. But if there's no hope, no perspective, no space, then, of course, little unions may happen. (PM Rama)

A union with Kosovo is not my wish but a possible alternative to the closed door of the European Union. (PM Rama)

The above cited statements serve to underscore the Prime Minister's assumption that Albania has satisfactorily met all the requirements set forth by the EU, thereby absolving itself from further obligations pertaining to the integration process. Notably, Prime Minister Rama implies a somewhat threatening tone when he states that the country will need to seek other alliances and look for other “smaller unions”. Apparently, this was not just a rhetorical device as evidenced by the events of July 2021, when Albania, in conjunction with Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia entered into an agreement to establish the “Open Balkan Initiative”. This initiative, notably, establishes a shared economic area encompassing all three participating countries.

EUROPE IS A FAMILY

The use of the family concept as a model for the nation state has a long and distinguished history in political thinking. It can be traced back to the theories of state development in antiquity and it has been handed down over the centuries. In this context, a sociopolitical entity is understood in terms of the conceptual complex of a family. In contemporary European political discourses, the metaphor of family is most frequently used to describe the relations between EU member states or between single states and the whole EU and/or its institutions. (Musolff, 2004)

The accession of new member states in 2004 and 2007 was represented as a *coming home of lost children* into the *fold of the family*. (Musolff, 2004) The metaphor of family makes possible, among other things, the creation of a hierarchy of European states and the paternalism of certain states in relation to others, and on several levels. The countries categorized as belonging to the *Western Balkans* are still far from *joining the European family* and to become members of it they still have to “qualify” for membership, or *prove their maturity*.

Sometimes the Western Balkans countries are perceived through a pedagogical context wherein their progress towards EU integration is likened to their academic achievements. For instance, Rama refers to the conditions that the EU has imposed to Albania as analogous to homework by stating that:

The country will continue to do its homework because we are not doing it for them, we are doing it for ourselves. (PM Rama)

This image of the *Western Balkan* countries as children restates and legitimizes the EU's paternalistic stance. This perspective frames these nations as individuals who cannot fully assume responsibility for their actions, viewing them as irrational entities in need of immediate assistance, supervision, and education. However, Prime Minister Rama's statement seems to challenge the conventional authority of the teacher-student dynamic. Instead, he emphasizes the act of completing the homework as a means of self-improvement, irrespective of the potential consequences.

In discussing concerning matters related to EU integration, Prime Minister Rama consistently employs first person plural pronouns such as "We" or "Ourselves". The use of these plural pronouns serves to reinforce the notion of inclusivity and involves the participation of both the domestic audience and the broader audience implied through mass media within the actual discourse. The primary objective of this involvement is to instil a sense of unity and belonging in the addressee (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisgl, & Liebhart, 2009). This is significantly important in difficult times or in circumstances of perceived failure where gaining the support of the audience is crucial.

In the framework of the EUROPE IS A FAMILY metaphor, the Albanian Prime Minister extensively employs the MARRIAGE schema to refer to relations between Albania and the European Union. In this schema, he characterises the EU as a picky, capricious bride who is hesitant to enter a marriage and Albania as a patient groom who unfortunately, struggles to persuade the bride of his maturity, readiness and commitment to the union. This metaphor was first introduced by the Prime Minister in February 2020 during a donors' conference held in Brussels, particularly in response to inquiries concerning the impending summit on the Western Balkans. Subsequently, he has consistently employed this metaphor in all his public pronouncements regarding Albania's ongoing pursuit of EU integration:

We are like lovers that wait to get married and then the other side don't show up. And imagine preparing for marriage – everything is ready and then the other side doesn't show up, so let's not speak about dates or months.

EU cannot say that they love us and want to get married to us, but they can't do it because we are badly dressed and smelly. We have done it all and are awaiting the marriage proposal. (Skopje Economic Forum, June 2021)

We prepared for the first big wedding with all the decorations. The European Commission said that we are ready for the integration process ... First wedding, the bride did not come; the second wedding, the bride did not come. We are not preparing any third wedding,

Albanians have their own disappointments with Brussels, but this doesn't change the conviction that we have to be there. We've consumed all the love stories before, and the marriages. (Referring to Albania's alliances with The Soviet Union and China during the Communist period) We're looking for a new marriage, not for old ones. But of course, this kind of marriage is difficult.

We have received declarations of love, but the wedding will not take place, not because the couple (EU) do not want to appear, but because they do not have time to get married. However, he says that when they are ready, the wedding will not be with fireworks.

The MARRIAGE metaphor which belongs to the broader domains of the FAMILY metaphor and LOVE metaphor can “carry evaluative and attitudinal biases that are related to particular political dispositions and preferences of the respective national discourse communities” (Mussolf, 2003)

Of particular significance in this context is the examination of gender roles within the discourse of the Prime Minister. In the conventional understanding of gender roles, masculinity is inherently linked with notions of power and authority, whereas femininity is not. Evidently, there is a reversal of these gender roles, strategically employed by the Prime Minister to fulfil his rhetorical objectives, specifically aimed at influencing and persuading his electorate at home. Albania, being a notably patriarchal society, aligns itself with the portrayal of a dominant masculine identity, a narrative crafted by Prime Minister Rama. This strategic portrayal enables him to garner the empathy and support of his constituents, simultaneously diverting attention away from the shortcomings of governmental reforms and diminishing the significance of the European Union decision-making process.

Rama’s discourse delves into the notion that a marriage between the two parties appears improbable due to the absence of mutual affection and attraction. Moreover, the EU, cast as the bride in this metaphorical construal, is portrayed as fostering insecurity, primarily driven by superficial concerns such as the groom’s poor attire and unpleasant smell. This implied scepticism has led the groom, symbolizing Albania, to refrain from orchestrating a *third wedding* attempt. This underlying pessimism signifies a noteworthy departure from past Albanian discourses surrounding the EU and questions the undeniable European future of Albania that dominated the political discourse up to date.

EU ACCESSION IS A JOURNEY

According to Lakoff and Lakoff and Johnson, the metaphor of *path* or *journey* is one of the main conceptual metaphors defined within the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics by the scheme: ‘departure point– journey–destination/goal’ (Johnson, 1980). Concrete examples of the conceptual metaphor ‘a purposeful act is a journey towards a goal’ can also be found in political and public discourses in EU member states. These countries travel towards their goals at different speeds and using various means of transport, with some deciding not to undertake the journey at all.

Albania’s accession is conceptualized in terms of linguistic devices of movement such as *start*, *move forward*, *push forward*, *pursue* and more concretely as *a path and destination*.

By no doubt the European path is not one of the choices for us, but it is the only and the ultimate choice. (PM Rama)

I am nor optimistic and pessimistic, I am just realistic, which means I know, we all know that it is not about us but it is about them, the EU I mean. We have done everything to deserve the formal start of negotiations since more than two years now. But they have not delivered yet because of their own problems and lately because Bulgaria is blocking North Macedonia. (PM Rama)

Nevertheless, I think this struggle help us realize that we must push and push forward as much as we can, without illuding ourselves while never giving up on pursuing the dream of many generations to be integrated part of Europe, whatever it will take. (PM Rama)

Prime Minister Rama’s statements regarding Albania’s path towards EU integration seem contradictory. On the one hand, he articulates a sense of pessimism by characterizing the country’s integration as illusory and akin to a dream. However, in a contrasting vein, he reaffirms the notion that this very dream remains a worthwhile pursuit and the singular viable alternative for Albania. This duality in his

discourse reflects the complexity and ambivalence inherent in country's EU aspirations.

EUROPE IS THE FUTURE

Different from the metaphors discussed so far, which mainly facilitate the spatial conceptualization of representations concerning the accession of the *Western Balkan* countries to the EU, the next representation involves the concept of time. Time is divided into the past and the future in relation to the present. The linear image of time flowing from the past towards the future, supported by accompanying metaphorical processes, reconstructs the concept of progress: whatever belongs to the past is reactionary and undeveloped, while the future is associated with notions of development and progress. Such a perception made possible statements within political discourses in which the *Western Balkan* countries' accession to the EU is portrayed as their *opting for the future*.

There is no possible influence that can change our European belonging. Europe is a religion for us and beyond all constraints and disappointments we want to be fully part of it as a choice of our vocation. (PM Rama)

We are proud members of a great Alliance, namely the NATO, and we are also proud Europeans for being Europeans and Albanians, who look towards Europe and see Europe as the door to our future. (PM Rama)

But contrary to Samuel Beckett's characters ... we are not really waiting, we are going forward, pushing and pushing ...to make the life of our people and the life of our countries better. (PM Rama)

Rama draws a connection between the future of Albania within Europe and identity of Albanians as inherently European people. He contends that European Integration is not merely a desire but a right that the Albanian people should rightfully possess. Nonetheless, he criticizes the protracted nature of the integration process, drawing an allusion to Samuel Beckett's renowned absurdist play "Waiting for Godot". In doing so, he implies that during the prolonged period of waiting, alternative paths may emerge and be considered as viable options.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the analysis suggests that in actual political discourses within Albania, the European Union is often conceptualized through metaphors such as BUILDING/ EDIFICE/ FORTRESS, FAMILY, FUTURE and EU integration as a JOURNEY.

The FORTRESS metaphor, which was once prevalent in the rhetoric of European officials, has gradually faded in recent years. Instead, they increasingly favour the more tempered "door/doorstep" scenario, characterizing Albania and other Balkan nations as being in close proximity to "entering" the European Union's fold. Nevertheless, this metaphor continues to be a recurrent theme in Prime Minister Rama's discourse. He further accentuates it by employing an Us. Vs. Them narrative to polarize the issue and manipulate the audience's perceptions. The FAMILY metaphor serves the purpose of establishing a hierarchical structure among the involved states, akin to a familiar relationship. In the context of EU political discourse, Albania is conceptualized within an academic context with an expectation to enhance its academic performance to qualify for integration. However, Prime Minister Rama opts for the "marriage" schema within the same domain by simplifying the issue, evading political responsibilities, and engaging his domestic audience. The JOURNEY metaphor as opposed to the other static metaphors, implies an immediate imperative for Albania to learn, mature and transform during this process. From the Albanian point of view, however, there are contradictory views on the matter. Prime Minister Rama frequently asserts that the European future of Albania is an undeniable right and occurrence, yet simultaneously regards it as illusory dream.

What can be witnessed is that during the last mandate of Prime Minister Edi Rama's government there appears to be a noticeable shift away from the previously optimistic and positive discourse regarding the EU integration process of the country. Also, the Prime Minister's discourse on matters related to the EU integration process seems to merge with his more general political discourse by always seeking to address his electorate and aiming to manipulate and persuade them.

By employing a WE vs THEM rhetoric, the Prime Minister, attributes the failure to commence formal negotiation talks with the EU to internal problems within EU institutions. This rhetoric suggests a shift in priorities, with Prime Minister Rama opting to explore the creation of new alliances rather than emphasizing the EU integration process.

This analysis underscores the importance of metaphorical frames in shaping and conceptualizing political realities, providing insight into the evolving dynamics of Albania's relationship with the European Union.

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