

# Performing Europe: Speech Acts and the Discursive Construction of European Integration in Albanian Political Discourse

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**Abstract:** This paper examines how Albanian political leaders discursively construct European integration as a process of identity formation, legitimacy, and political belonging. Since the early 2000s, Albania's aspiration to join the European Union (EU) has functioned not only as a policy objective but also as a central element of national self-representation. At the highest levels of state authority, discourse on European integration performs a symbolic reorientation from historically grounded political identities toward a contemporary European normative framework. Drawing on Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, this study examines an extensive corpus of public speeches delivered by Prime Minister Edi Rama from September 2013 to the present, with particular emphasis on the period 2019–2025. The corpus is supplemented by selected speeches by senior ministers directly involved in the European integration process: Olta Xhaçka, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (January 2021–September 2023); Igli Hasani, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (September 2023–September 2025); and Taulant Balla, Minister of Internal Affairs (July 2023–July 2024). Adopting a diachronic, identity-oriented perspective, the analysis investigates how illocutionary acts func-

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tion as discursive resources in the evolving construction of Albania's European identity over time. The findings identify four interrelated performative functions—commitment, legitimation, mobilization, and identification—realized through commissive, assertive, directive, expressive, and declarative acts. These speech acts not only articulate policy positions but also enact Europe as a cultural, moral, and political point of belonging. While performative discourse sustains institutional credibility and collective belief in the European project, its success ultimately depends on material reform and political delivery. The study demonstrates that Albania's European integration is simultaneously a political process and a discursive performance of identity, highlighting the constitutive role of elite political language in contexts of EU enlargement.

**Keywords:** Albanian political discourse, European integration, performativity, political identity, speech acts

## Introduction

Since the early 2000s, Albania's pursuit of European Union (EU) membership has constituted one of the most powerful organizing narratives of its political life. More than a policy objective or diplomatic strategy, European integration has become a discursive framework through which political actors negotiate national identity, legitimacy, and cultural orientation. Statements articulated at the highest levels of state authority—by prime ministers and senior ministers—do not merely reflect political positions; they performatively shape collective understandings of who Albanians are, who they aspire to become, and where the nation belongs.

From a critical discourse perspective, such authoritative statements acquire particular symbolic force. They signal a broader cultural shift from historically grounded political norms toward contemporary European value systems, positioning Europe as both a moral horizon and an identity anchor. This study therefore approaches European integration discourse not simply as political communication, but as a site of identity construction, where historical narratives of transition intersect with contemporary performances of belonging.

To capture this transformation, the analysis adopts a comparative diachronic perspective, examining how discursive strategies evolve over time and how contemporary European identity is articulated in relation to earlier political

imaginaries. By focusing on the performative dimension of political language, the study demonstrates that Albania's path toward Europe is enacted not only through reforms and negotiations, but also through repeated linguistic performances that normalize Europe as the nation's political and cultural home.

The study of political communication in the context of EU enlargement increasingly recognizes that discourse does more than reflect policy—it helps to construct it. As Diez (1999) argued in *Speaking "Europe"*, the European project itself can be understood as a "discursive formation" through which political actors define identities, hierarchies, and norms. Within this framework, speech act theory—originating from the works of Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969)—offers valuable conceptual tools for analyzing how utterances in political speeches *do* things: they commit, promise, persuade, legitimate, and identify. By examining what politicians *perform* through speech, rather than merely what they *say*, we can uncover how the discourse on European integration in Albania enacts the process it describes.

In Albania, political discourse on EU integration frequently alternates among commitment (e.g., "We will complete all reforms required for membership"), assertion (e.g., "Albania has achieved significant progress on the rule of law"), and expression (e.g., "Europe is our natural family"). Each of these utterances represents a distinct illocutionary act, serving not only to convey meaning but also to fulfill specific social and political functions. Leaders use promises to demonstrate credibility to both domestic and EU audiences. Assertions serve to legitimize policy outcomes and reform narratives, while expressive and declarative acts symbolically construct Albania's European identity. Collectively, these speech acts *perform integration by enacting* belonging and progress through language, even when material integration remains incomplete.

Despite the significance of such discourse, few studies have systematically applied speech act theory to Albanian political speeches on European integration. Existing analyses of political communication in the Western Balkans tend to focus on media framing, populism, or policy compliance, often overlooking the performative dimension of political language. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining how Albanian political leaders use speech acts to articulate,

legitimize, and enact the European integration process. Drawing on a qualitative discourse analysis of selected speeches delivered between 2019 and 2025—including parliamentary statements, ministerial addresses, and official remarks at EU–Albania Stabilization and Association meetings—the study investigates how different types of illocutionary acts contribute to the construction of Albania’s European narrative.

The paper argues that the four main functions of speech acts in the discourse of European integration serve:

1. Commitment – signaling intent and responsibility toward EU accession;
2. Legitimation – affirming progress and aligning national reforms with European norms;
3. Mobilization – calling institutions and citizens to collective action; and
4. Identification – expressing belonging to Europe as a shared cultural and political space.

By analyzing these functions, the paper demonstrates that the European integration process in Albania is not only institutional and technocratic but also profoundly discursive and performative. Understanding this linguistic dimension provides fresh insight into how political actors construct credibility, identity, and legitimacy within the broader context of EU enlargement.

Following the introductory section, Sections 2 and 3 present the theoretical framework, outlining the core principles of Speech Act Theory and Political Discourse Analysis, with particular attention to Albanian political discourse on European integration. Section 5 presents the analysis and interpretation of the corpus, identifying and examining the main speech acts employed by political actors in the Albanian context. Section 6 concludes by summarizing the main findings.

## Speech Act Theory and Political Discourse

Speech act theory, first articulated by J. L. Austin in (*How to do things with words*, 1962) and later refined by John Searle (1969), provides a foundational framework for understanding language as a way of action rather than mere description. According to Austin, every utterance performs three levels of action: the *locutionary act* (the act of saying something), the *illocutionary act* (the act performed in saying something, such as promising, warning, or declaring), and the *perlocutionary act* (the effect achieved by saying something, such as persuading or inspiring). Searle (1976) further classified illocutionary acts into five categories—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—each defined by its particular social function and the speaker's intention.

The applicability of speech act theory to political discourse has been widely recognized in linguistic and communication studies. Political language does not simply describe the world; it attempts to change it. As Chilton and Schäffner (2002) note, political discourse is inherently strategic, aiming to perform acts such as legitimizing authority, persuading audiences, or mobilizing support. Through promises, declarations, and commitments, political actors construct relationships of trust, credibility, and obligation. For instance, when a government official declares, “we will complete all reforms necessary for EU membership,” the utterance operates as a **commissive speech act**, as it commits the speaker—and, by extension, the state—to a specific future course of action.

Research on the pragmatics of political speeches underscores the centrality of performativity. Dylgjeri (2017) argues that Albanian political communication frequently relies on performative acts—particularly commitments and declarations—to create impressions of progress and accountability. Similarly, Arsith (2015) and (Bourdieu, 1991) highlight how political leaders use illocutionary acts to assert authority and define social realities, suggesting that the success of such acts depends not only on linguistic form but also on contextual factors such as the speaker's institutional power and the audience's expectations. These insights align with Austin's notion of felicity conditions—the

contextual circumstances that enable a speech act to “succeed” or be recognized as valid.

In this framework, political speeches can be seen as sites of performative power. Declarations of reform, promises of transparency, or assertions of progress are not simply statements of fact; they are linguistic moves that attempt to make those facts *real* through public commitment. By focusing on the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of political utterances, scholars can uncover how language contributes to the construction of legitimacy, authority, and political reality itself.

## European Integration Discourse and the Albanian Context

The discursive dimension of European integration has long been an object of scholarly inquiry. Studies of EU communication have shown that the process of integration is not purely institutional or policy-driven but also discursively constructed (Wodak & Weiss, 2008; Diez, 1999). The idea of “Europe” is continually reproduced through political speech, media narratives, and symbolic acts. As Diez (1999) famously argued, European integration discourse functions as a “system of meaning” through which political actors define belonging, modernity, and progress. In this sense, talking about Europe is itself an act of *performing Europe*.

In the Western Balkans—especially in Albania—the discourse on European integration performs a **dual function**: it projects an image of modernity and legitimacy to international audiences while simultaneously nurturing hope and a sense of collective identity among domestic publics. As noted in Elbasani (2013) and Bieber (2020), the rhetoric of Europeanization in the region frequently operates as an instrument of both **external signaling** and **internal legitimation**. By invoking EU values—rule of law, democracy, good governance—political leaders present themselves as aligned with European norms and thereby deserving of accession. This rhetorical alignment can be seen as a speech act of assertive legitimation: affirming belonging to the European project through discourse.

In Albania specifically, the discourse of European integration has evolved from a post-communist aspiration into a central political narrative. As Xhaferaj et al., (2025) demonstrate, political speeches in Albania frequently deploy “European” references as markers of national identity and collective destiny. Expressions such as “the sun rises in the West” or “our home is Europe” exemplify what these authors term *populist markers of European belonging*—linguistic devices that blend national pride with supranational aspiration. Such utterances perform expressive and declarative acts that linguistically “place” Albania within Europe, regardless of the actual status of accession negotiations.

Moreover, the EU–Albania Stabilization and Association process has **institutionalized a discursive arena** where political speech acts simultaneously fulfill **diplomatic** and **symbolic** functions. When Albanian ministers speak at EU–Albania committee meetings, they engage in a form of **institutional performativity**: each pledge to reform and each declaration of progress becomes a **discursive enactment of readiness and reliability**. This dynamic reflects what Wodak (2020) terms the **politics of performative Europeanization**—a process through which political actors **perform European identity through language** even before it is fully realized through formal membership.

Despite a growing body of literature on political discourse in the Balkans, there remains a notable gap in scholarship directly connecting speech act theory to the discursive practices of European Integration in Albania. Most existing studies focus either on political rhetoric broadly (Dylgjeri, 2017) or on the symbolic politics of Europeanization (Elbasani, 2013), without systematically analyzing how specific illocutionary acts—commitments, assertions, requests, and declarations—function in Albanian integration speeches.

In addition to these broader strands of research, recent investigations in the Albanian context help situate political speech within wider public and historical discourses on EU integration. Idrizi (2025) examines how Albanian audiovisual media frame the EU accession process, highlighting the communicative

strategies that shape public understanding of integration. Nexhipi and Nexhipi (2019) provide an analytical overview of Albania's political engagement with the EU, emphasizing the interaction between political reforms and integration narratives. Venxha (2024) offers a historical perspective on Albania's trajectory toward EU membership, grounding contemporary discourse within longer-term political developments. Although these works vary in method and focus, they collectively contribute valuable comparative context to the present analysis and underscore the multifaceted nature of EU integration discourse in Albania.

This study therefore, positions itself at the intersection of pragmatics, political communication, and European studies. By integrating insights from local Albanian-language research, it situates elite speech acts within the broader societal discourse, providing a comparative lens on how European integration is linguistically and performatively constructed.

## Methodology and data collection

This study employs a qualitative interpretivist approach, combining speech act analysis with principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore how Albanian political leaders perform the process of European integration through public speech.

The interpretivist approach is appropriate because it treats language not merely as a communicative tool but as a form of *social action* (Austin, *How to do things with words*, 1962; Searle J. R., 1969). Political discourse, particularly in contexts of transformation and negotiation such as EU accession, is inherently performative: it shapes social realities by constructing legitimacy, identity, and political commitment (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002; Fairclough, 1995). Methodologically, performative speech acts are treated not only as pragmatic functions but also as discursive resources for identity construction, allowing the analysis to capture shifts from instrumental Europeanization to identity-based alignment.

1. Adopting both an exploratory and explanatory approach, this study aims to investigate and respond to the following research questions:
2. How are speech acts employed to perform the discourse of European integration?

Why are these linguistic acts significant for understanding Albania's political alignment with the European project?

The study does not aim to provide a quantitative mapping of speech acts or their frequency, but rather a qualitative interpretation of how European integration is performatively constructed through elite political discourse. The corpus was constructed using purposive sampling, focusing on high-salience speeches delivered at key institutional and diplomatic moments between 2019 and 2025. These moments were selected because they represent contexts of heightened discursive visibility, in which European integration is explicitly articulated, negotiated, and legitimized by political elites. This time frame encompasses critical milestones in Albania's EU trajectory, including the formal launch of accession negotiations in 2022 and the ensuing phases of reform monitoring and institutional alignment. These speeches were selected based on their explicit reference to the EU integration process and their official or semi-official status, such as parliamentary addresses, summit speeches, and statements at EU–Albania Stabilization and Association meetings. To ensure analytical robustness, additional speeches by Prime Minister Rama on European integration delivered during the same period were surveyed at a descriptive level, confirming the recurrence and stability of the performative patterns identified in the core corpus.

Transcripts were collected from official government archives and verified media sources (e.g., *puneteshatme.gov.al*, *kryeministria.al*, *arkiva.puneteshatme.gov.al*, *ambasadat.gov.al*, *ata.gov.al*, *euronews.al* or *rtsh.al*). To maintain and ensure textual integrity, all the passages were authenticated speeches delivered by the above mentioned political figures. For speeches originally delivered in Albanian, translations were made by the researcher, maintaining fidelity to idiomatic ex-

pressions and pragmatic tone. Preliminary examination of further elite speeches revealed a high degree of discursive routinization at the level of performative functions, indicating analytical saturation within the categories employed.

The analytical process followed three sequential stages: identification, interpretation, and contextualization. The initial stage focused on identifying *what kind of act* was being performed in each instance, distinguishing between linguistic description and performative intent (Austin, 1962). Afterwards, each speech was examined line by line to identify utterances that performed clear **illocutionary functions** according to Searle's (1976) classification of speech acts—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. After classification, each speech act was analyzed in terms of its **illocutionary force**—what the speaker accomplishes in saying something—and its **perlocutionary effect**—the intended or actual influence on the audience (Searle J. R., 1979). Speech acts were then situated within their **sociopolitical and institutional context**, following CDA principles (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Weiss, 2008). Contextual variables—such as the status of the speaker, audience composition, and political timing—were considered essential to understanding the success or “felicity” of a performative utterance (Austin, 1962). The longitudinal span of the corpus allows for a comparative interpretation of how performative strategies evolve across time, particularly in relation to key developments in Albania's EU accession process.

## Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings from a qualitative discourse-analytical examination of a purposive but thematically coherent corpus of political speeches delivered between 2019 and 2025 by leading Albanian officials—Prime Minister Edi Rama, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Olta Xhaçka, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Igli Hasani, and Minister of Interior Taulant Balla. Although limited in number, the speeches were selected to capture key institutional moments across time and to allow for a comparative interpretation of how European integration is discursively constructed at the highest levels of state authority.

As stated in the introductory section of the paper, this analysis will focus on four main performative functions that emerge across the corpus: (1) Commitment through commissive acts; (2) Legitimation through assertive acts; (3) Mobilization through directive acts; and (4) Identification through expressive and declarative acts. These categories overlap across speakers and moments, producing a performative continuum that both narrates and enacts Albania's European trajectory. Importantly, these performative functions do not merely describe policy positions but contribute to the discursive construction of political and national identity in relation to Europe.

### **Commitment through Commissive Acts**

Commitment constitutes the foundational performative function in Albanian Europeanization discourse. Through commissive acts, political actors bind themselves—and the state they represent—to future courses of action, producing a discursive contract between speaker and audience. In Austinian terms, the commissive's felicity depends on sincerity and authority: the speaker must possess institutional legitimacy, and the promise must appear achievable (Austin, 1962). Searle (1969) further defines commissives as acts that commit the speaker to a particular future behavior. From an identity-oriented perspective, such commitments also function symbolically, projecting a future self-image of Albania as a fully European political subject.

Within this corpus, Edi Rama's, Olta Xhaçka's, Igli Hasani's, and Taulant Balla's speeches all perform commitment through explicit pledges of reform, progress, and alignment with European standards. In Rama's declaration before the United Nations General Assembly (2019) he states:

(1) "Albania's unprecedented justice reform; the process of making a major cleanup removing corrupt judges and prosecutors from judiciary, as well as establishing new judicial institutions tailored to tackle corruption and organized crime at highest levels is transforming the entire physiognomy of the country. ... As the new justice system grad-

ually takes shape and becomes fully operational, we hope that it will seriously curtail all acts of corruption and abuse of power and will finally assure the triumph of the sense of justice and the rule of law overall of the country I do deeply love and proudly represent here today” (Rama E. , 2019).

By referring to Albania’s justice reform “as transforming the entire physiognomy of the country”, Rama not only asserts an ongoing process but implicitly commits the government to its completion. The final movement, beginning with “As the new justice system gradually takes shape and becomes fully operational,” constitutes a commissive act. Rama projects into the future, pledging that the system “will seriously curtail all acts of corruption and abuse of power and will finally assure the triumph of the sense of justice and the rule of law.” The repeated use of the modal “will” transform the statement into a binding performative—one that commits the Albanian government to a specific future outcome. In Searle’s (1969) framework, the commissive binds the speaker’s future conduct, and by extension, the state’s institutional trajectory. The promise is intensified by Rama’s affective declaration of love and pride for his country, which serves as a sincerity condition that reinforces the legitimacy of his commitment.

Similarly, at the Conference of Ambassadors, Rama (2024) asserted:

(2) “The year 2030 should find us in full readiness to sit as equals at the table of the European Union, as equal members of the European family; this is our side, this is our duty” (Rama, 2024).

The statement functions as a **commissive**, binding Albania to a future-oriented target for EU readiness and establishing an explicit temporal horizon for the country’s accession efforts. By framing 2030 as a milestone, Rama creates both domestic and international expectations, signaling institutional commitment to EU-aligned reforms. Simultaneously, the statement contains a **quasi-declarative** dimension. By envisioning Albania “as equals at the table of the European Union,” Rama linguistically positions the country as already part of

the European political community, reconstituting its national identity from candidate to aspirant-equal. This rhetorical move is performative: it does not legally confer membership but symbolically enacts it, creating a discursive reality that anticipates institutional transformation (Austin, 1962; Searle J. R., 1969). The addition of the phrase “this is our duty” introduces a moral imperative, further binding the nation to the projected outcome and framing integration as an ethical, as well as political, obligation (Habermas, 1996). Here, the commissive act functions simultaneously as a temporal projection and an ethical imperative, binding Albania’s national identity to the successful fulfillment of EU accession. What is discursively significant here is not the empirical veracity of the promised outcomes, but the way future-oriented language is used to normalize European integration as an inevitable and morally binding trajectory.

Another important commissive statement is that of the Foreign Minister Olta Xhaçka’s 2023 at the Berlin Process Summit. There, she emphasized diplomatic credibility and alignment with EU standards. Her rhetoric is characterized by assertive and commissive acts that seek to legitimize Albania’s trajectory through evidence-based affirmation. In one key passage, she asserted:

(3) “We will continue to meet every standard, not because Europe asks it, but because it defines who we are” (Xhaçka, 2023)

By so doing, the speaker extends this commissive dynamic through personalization and moralization. The performative force arises not merely from the future tense but from its ethical grounding: compliance with EU criteria is re-defined as intrinsic self-definition rather than external coercion. The commissive thus transcends bureaucratic obligation and becomes a moral pledge. In Habermasian terms, this corresponds to a communicative rationality in which the legitimacy of commitment rests upon shared normative values rather than strategic interest (Habermas, 1996). Rather than merely asserting capability, this utterance functioned as a promise, establishing for domestic and international audiences alike the expectation that the government would continue to uphold

reforms and maintain institutional alignment with the EU. The commissive force is nuanced by a **quasi-declarative dimension**, particularly in the phrase “because it defines who we are.” This part of the statement links institutional compliance to national identity, effectively declaring that adherence to European norms is constitutive of Albania’s self-conception. In other words, the act is not only a promise of future behavior but also a performative redefinition of collective political and cultural identity: meeting European standards becomes a marker of Albania’s national character rather than an externally imposed requirement. Perlocutionarily, this utterance serves multiple functions. Domestically, it fosters moral and political motivation among bureaucrats and the public, framing reform as an act of self-realization rather than external obligation. Internationally, it signals to EU institutions that Albania is a reliable, self-motivated partner, potentially enhancing trust and reinforcing the credibility of ongoing accession efforts.

During his tenure as Albania’s Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs from 2023 to 2025, Igli Hasani employed a sophisticated rhetorical strategy rooted in the performative power of language to advance Albania’s European integration agenda. His speeches were not mere vehicles of information; they constituted performative acts through which political identity, commitment, and reassurance were constructed and enacted. Igli Hasani’s speeches similarly enact institutional commitment. At the CEI Ministerial in Tirana (2024), he pledged ongoing cooperation:

(4) “Your dedication has been invaluable ... and I am deeply appreciative of the cooperation ... in fulfilling our obligations during this important tenure” (Hasani I. , 2024a).

The gratitude performs a commissive sub-text—acknowledging present cooperation while committing to its continuity. Here, the expression of gratitude simultaneously commits Albania to continue fulfilling its regional responsibilities, functioning as a commissive act that binds the speaker to a shared future course of action. The performative force of this utterance lies in its forward-looking

orientation, which sustains the narrative of Albania's consistent and responsible participation in the European and regional framework.

This rhetorical orientation is also evident in Hasani's statement on Europe Day, 9 May 2024, where he declared:

(5) "The acceleration of the accession process remains essential, as only in this way Europe will be more complete and safer" (Hasani I. , 2024c).

The commissive dimension here is underscored by the modal "remains essential," which both acknowledges a current commitment and projects a future one. Through this statement, Hasani reaffirms Albania's readiness to accelerate reforms, align policies with the *acquis communautaire*, and actively contribute to the EU's geopolitical cohesion. The commissive function, as Searle (1969) defines it, involves the speaker's undertaking of a future obligation; in Hasani's case, it signals Albania's pledge to persist in the reform process while situating national advancement within the broader European project.

In June 2025, Albania's Minister of Interior, Taulant Balla, addressed the EU–Albania Stabilization and Association Meeting in Strasbourg, delivering a speech that encapsulated the government's performative commitment to European integration. His rhetoric, combining directive and commissive illocutionary acts, was strategically designed to mobilize institutional willpower, reaffirm Albania's reform trajectory, and signal accountability to European partners. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), Balla's discourse exemplifies how political language functions as action—performing rather than merely describing the government's stance.

In one of the most striking passages of his address, Balla declared:

(6) "Albania will achieve full membership within this decade. We will not rest until every reform is delivered" (Balla, 2025).

The utterance performs a dual rhetorical function. It acts as a commissive speech act, binding the speaker—and by extension, the Albanian state—to a concrete timeline for achieving full EU membership. The repetition of the modal “will” conveys a sense of inevitability and determination, transforming a political aspiration into an institutional promise. As Searle (1969) argues, commissive acts commit the speaker to future action, and in Balla’s case, this commitment operates both as a performative declaration of reform continuity and as a reassurance to EU interlocutors of Albania’s credibility. The perlocutionary effect of such a statement is to project urgency and political will, shaping the audience’s perception of Albania as a country moving irreversibly toward integration.

Across these instances, commissive acts perform more than institutional promises; they generate moral accountability. They also contribute to a longer-term discursive shift from conditional Europeanization toward an internalized understanding of Europe as integral to national identity. The political efficacy of commitment depends on its perceived sincerity and the government’s capacity to fulfill its pledges. When promises are institutionalized—such as the 2024 opening of Cluster 1 in EU negotiations (Council of the European Union, 2024)—the commissive achieves full felicity. Yet, as Austin (1962) warns, failed implementation transforms commissives into infelicitous performatives—a risk omnipresent in reformist discourse.

## **Legitimation through Assertive Acts**

If commissives create obligation, assertive acts generate legitimacy. Through assertions, leaders construct a discursive reality in which progress and credibility are presented as verifiable truths. Searle (Searle J. R., 1969) classifies assertives as acts in which the speaker commits to the truth of a proposition. Within a political-communication context, assertives establish authority by narrating success as fact. Furthermore, within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework, such assertions are analytically relevant not because they establish factual truth, but because they work to stabilize authority and marginalize alternative interpretations. Rama’s statement before the United Nations General Assembly (2019):

(7) “Albania’s unprecedented justice reform; the process of making a major cleanup removing corrupt judges and prosecutors from judiciary, as well as establishing new judicial institutions tailored to tackle corruption and organized crime at highest levels is transforming the entire physiognomy of the country. The corruption in the judiciary for decades did not only prevent justice from taking place, but became also an impediment to make be the rule of our daily existence as a society. (Rama E. , 2019)

The present-progressive tense collapses promise into achievement, performing what Fairclough (1995) identifies as discursive naturalization: presenting reform as an already-realized fact rather than a future goal. In asserting the factual transformation of Albania, Rama constructs institutional credibility while displacing the temporality of reform from projection to presence.

Olta Xhaçka similarly deploys assertive acts to authenticate Albania’s progress.

(8) “Albania’s progress in the rule of law and governance is recognized by our European partners. We have turned challenges into benchmarks of success.” By spring of 2023, it is expected that the screening report for the basic Chapters, from the European Commission, through which Albania will officially receive the opening benchmarks. Fulfilling the opening benchmarks will make possible the second Intergovernmental Conference that will open the negotiations for the Basic Group chapters,” (Xhaçka, 2023)

Such statements embody what Fairclough (1995) calls technocratic legitimation—where discourse derives its authority from external institutional acknowledgment. This statement is an assertive act—a claim presented as verifiable truth. The phrase “recognized by our European partners” functions as *external validation*, lending legitimacy to the domestic reform narrative. As Fairclough (1995) notes, such acts of legitimation transform policy outcomes into moral and institutional credentials.

The emphasis on assertive reassurance was reiterated in a press statement delivered on 2 October 2024, where Igli Hasani affirmed:

(9) “Albania now looks forward to an intergovernmental conference on October 15 to officialise the opening of the first cluster” (Hasani I., 2024b).

Such assertive formulations framed Albania’s progress in the EU accession process as a factual reality rather than a tentative aspiration, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of Albania’s trajectory. The statement coincided with the formal opening of Cluster 1, “Fundamentals,” during the Intergovernmental Conference on 15 October 2024 (Council of the European Union, 2024), confirming Albania’s progress in line with EU expectations. In this context, Hasani’s assertive acts functioned as reassurance mechanisms, designed to consolidate both domestic confidence and external trust in the Albanian government’s European project. Hasani’s affirmation, transforms diplomatic expectation into narrative certainty. The verb “*looks forward*” conveys a sense of anticipatory confidence, positioning Albania as a trustworthy partner already progressing along the path of institutional success. Likewise, Hasani’s ceremonial opening—“*It is both an honor and a privilege to address you ...*” (Hasani I., 2024a)—functions as a context-establishing assertion of authority, framing Albania as a key actor within the sphere of regional diplomacy. Through these assertive patterns, legitimation emerges as both a communicative and symbolic process. Albanian leaders cultivate legitimacy by portraying reforms as achievements, thereby aligning domestic policies with international expectations. Opposition actors construct counter-legitimacy by demanding proof. The interplay between assertion and verification thus becomes the site where institutional credibility is continuously negotiated. At the same time, this discursive strategy reveals how institutional credibility is negotiated through language rather than derived solely from material outcomes.

## Mobilization through Directive Acts

Directive acts constitute the performative engine of mobilization in Albania's EU discourse. In Austin's (1962) taxonomy, directives are utterances that aim to influence the behavior of others—requests, commands, or invitations. Within political communication, directives function less through coercion than through alignment; they invite participation in a shared project. From an identity perspective, such directives construct a collective “we,” symbolically positioning Albania alongside—rather than beneath—its European counterparts.

Taulant Balla's Strasbourg address epitomizes directive mobilization.

(10) “Together with our European partners, we shall complete this journey side by side” (Balla, 2025).

This statement functions primarily as a **directive speech act**, encouraging collaborative engagement, while subtly presenting Albania as an equal participant in the process. According to Austin (1962), directive acts aim to get the hearer to do something; here, Balla's directive is not coercive but cooperative. The inclusionary pronoun “we” constructs a collective subject encompassing both Albania and its European counterparts, thereby transforming integration from a unilateral aspiration into a mutual project. Through this linguistic strategy, Balla reframes Albania's relationship with the EU, shifting it from a stance of dependency to one of partnership, reflecting what Wodak (Wodak, 2015) terms a “discursive negotiation of equality” within the rhetoric of enlargement.

This cooperative framing also resonates intertextually with Prime Minister Edi Rama's earlier speeches, in which declarative and commissive acts were used to assert parity between Albania and the EU. By adopting a similar discursive posture, Balla extends and reinforces the government's broader narrative of shared responsibility and co-ownership of the European project. The phrase “side by side” not only performs inclusion but also evokes a symbolic alignment with European norms and values. It invites the EU to recognize Albania not merely as a candidate but as a partner already embedded within the European political community.

Edi Rama's speeches also mobilize through directives disguised as appeals. His 2021 address to the diplomatic corps, reflecting on justice reform, implored patience, transforming a pragmatic observation into a collective exhortation.

(11) But it takes time, much more time than the time that mercilessly flies while results come just too slowly for the people of this country that have waited endlessly to live in a country, where everyone is equal before the law. It takes patience..." (2021)

The speech acts as a directive aimed at both citizens and officials, urging endurance while normalizing the slowness of reform. Similarly, Rama declared:

(12) "The year 2030 should find us in full readiness to sit as equals in European Union table..." (Rama, 2024)

In his statement, the modal "should" operate as a normative directive, converting a projected condition into a shared obligation.

On the other hand, Olta Xhaçka's directive force is subtler but equally mobilizing. She asserts,

(13) "We will continue to meet every standard, not because Europe asks it, but because it defines who we are." (Xhaçka, 2023)

By this declaration, Xhaçka addresses both bureaucratic and civic audiences, encouraging continuous compliance. The performative success of such directives depends on their internalization; they mobilize institutions by transforming obligation into identity. The future-oriented verb "we will continue" signals a clear commitment to ongoing action, binding Albania to sustained compliance with European standards. The commissive force is nuanced by a **quasi-declarative dimension**, particularly in the phrase "because it defines who we are." This part of the statement links institutional compliance

to national identity, effectively declaring that adherence to European norms is constitutive of Albania's self-conception. In other words, the act is not only a promise of future behavior but also a performative redefinition of collective political and cultural identity: meeting European standards becomes a marker of Albania's national character rather than an externally imposed requirement. Perlocutionarily, this utterance serves multiple functions. Domestically, it fosters moral and political motivation among bureaucrats and the public, framing reform as an act of self-realization rather than external obligation. Internationally, it signals to EU institutions that Albania is a reliable, self-motivated partner, potentially enhancing trust and reinforcing the credibility of ongoing accession efforts.

Igli Hasani's diplomatic register also contains mobilizing directives.

(14) "As we gather in this beautiful city with such nice weather, I am confident that our discussions will foster not only deeper understanding but also greater collaboration in shaping a shared, prosperous future for our region" (Hasani I., 2024a)

His appeal for regional cooperation invites interlocutors into collective agency. This directive is wrapped in optimism, functioning simultaneously as an expressive and mobilizing act. This expressive act, while ostensibly light-hearted, serves a deeper pragmatic function: it humanizes the diplomatic setting and strengthens relational bonds among interlocutors. By projecting confidence and goodwill, Hasani positioned Albania as a cooperative and forward-looking partner. Expressive acts of this nature resonate with Austin's (1962) concept of felicity conditions, which emphasize that the success of a speech act depends not only on propositional content but also on the social and emotional appropriateness of the utterance. The repeated use of inclusive and normative directives across speakers suggests a discursive attempt to socialize both domestic and international audiences into a shared understanding of European integration as a collective responsibility.

## Identification through Expressive and Declarative Acts

If commissives bind and directives mobilize, expressive and declarative acts construct identification—defining who the political community is and how it belongs. Expressives convey emotion or attitude, while declaratives, as Austin (1962) notes, change institutional reality by virtue of being uttered under proper authority. Together, they forge the symbolic foundation of European identity. This performative dimension is particularly relevant in contexts where institutional membership has not yet been achieved, but symbolic belonging is repeatedly asserted.

Edi Rama's discourse is characterized by a blend of expressive and declarative elements. In his 2019 United Nations speech, he uses the clause:

(15) "I do deeply love and proudly represent [my country]" (Rama E. , 2019)

He employs this strategy to convert personal affect into institutional ethos. This expressive sincerity serves as a felicity condition for preceding commissive promises; emotion validates obligation. Moreover, when Rama proclaims that Albania "is transforming" or "will sit as equals at the table of the European Union" (Rama, 2024), he performs quasi-declarative acts that linguistically enact membership before it is institutionally achieved. These declarations speak into being the equality they name, transforming symbolic aspiration into enacted identity.

Olta Xhaçka's statement represents the corpus's clearest example of declarative identification

(16) We will continue to meet every standard, not because Europe asks it, but because it defines who we are." (Xhaçka, 2023)

Here, identity is not described but constituted through speech. The act of defining transforms a political stance into a performative essence: Europeanisation becomes a state of being rather than an administrative goal. Repetition of such declaratives consolidates identity through performative iteration—each statement reinscribes belonging.

Igli Hasani's expressive tone operates as affective diplomacy. Expressive warmth humanizes statecraft, creating interpersonal identification among regional peers.

(17) "As we gather in this beautiful city ... I am confident our discussions will foster ... a shared, prosperous future" (Hasani I. , 2024a)

Such affective alignment Wodak (2015) argues constitutes a form of performative Europeanization, where emotional language bridges institutional distance and embodies the ethos of cooperation.

Taulant Balla's and Rama's declarations of equality "we shall complete this journey side by side" (Balla, 2025) and "sit as equals at the table" (Rama, 2024)—further perform identification by asserting parity. Although lacking legal force, these declaratives possess symbolic authority: they linguistically reposition Albania within the European moral geography as an equal participant rather than a peripheral aspirant. Rather than merely reflecting a pre-existing sense of belonging, these speech acts actively perform and reproduce Europe as Albania's normative and symbolic home, indicating a broader cultural shift from transitional self-positioning toward asserted European identity.

Collectively, expressive and declarative acts transform Europeanization from a policy into a cultural-moral identity. They perform belonging through emotion, solidarity, and symbolic equality. Their success lies not in institutional outcomes but in affective resonance: by declaring and feeling European, Albanian political actors linguistically construct the very Europe to which they aspire.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the study found that Albania's discourse on EU integration was defined by a strategic interplay of declarative, commissive, and expressive speech acts that collectively performed the nation's European identity and its commitment to reform. Prime Minister Rama's declarative statements framed Albania's European trajectory as morally inevitable; Xhaçka's commissive pledges operationalized that trajectory through promises of alignment and delivery; and Hasani's expressives embedded the process within a shared emotional and normative framework.

Through speech, these leaders enacted integration even before its formal completion—transforming language into a political instrument of accession. Their rhetoric exemplified how post-communist European states employed discourse to bridge aspiration and reality, demonstrating that political speech functioned not merely to inform but to *perform* membership in the European project.

Across the analyzed corpus, Albanian political communication on European integration revealed a coherent performative architecture structured around four interrelated functions: commitment, legitimation, mobilization, and identification. Each operated through distinct illocutionary forces yet remained mutually reinforcing. Commissive acts generated temporal continuity and moral obligation; assertive acts legitimized institutional credibility; directive acts mobilized collective agency; and expressive-declarative acts constructed emotional and symbolic belonging.

The speeches of Rama, Xhaçka, Hasani, and Balla illustrated how political actors in transitional democracies transformed language into governance. Their words did not merely describe progress—they enacted it by aligning national identity with European norms and expectations. Albanian leaders derived authority from institutional roles, sincerity from emotional engagement, and context from the overarching European project.

Although performative success remained contingent, within this process, performative language functioned as both a promise and a catalyst: it enacted commitment, constructed identity, and sustained belief.

Methodologically, the analysis demonstrated the value of a performative-linguistic approach to Europeanization, bridging speech act theory with critical discourse analysis. By tracing how illocutionary forms operated within institutional and geopolitical contexts, it revealed that European integration was not only negotiated through policy but also *enacted* through language. The Albanian case underscored a broader theoretical insight: in transitional democracies, discursive practices did not merely reflect political transformation—they constituted it. This performative perspective invited further comparative research into how linguistic acts materialized integration across post-communist settings, showing that Europe—as both a project and an identity—was continually spoken into being.

Ultimately, the study demonstrated that the path toward Europe was as much a linguistic performance as a political process. Through commissives of promise, assertives of progress, directives of mobilization, and expressives of identification, Albanian leaders collectively performed Europe into being—making language itself a mode of integration.

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