AN ASSESSMENT OF ALBANIAN ELITES' PERCEPTIONS ON NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS, RISKS AND STRATEGY

I. BACKGROUND

The international security landscape in the last decades has challenged the national security concept in Albania. The identification and prioritization of the main national security threats and risks in terms of drafting the new National Security Strategy constitutes a great challenge ahead. Whereas the main focus lies on the drafting process of the Strategy and on this document itself, the contribution and perspectives of the actors involved in this process, represent not only an interesting but also a crucial aspect to be analyzed in the context of shaping the final product.

Accordingly, The Center for European and Security Affairs (CESA) has conducted an assessment of Albanian elite's perceptions on the process of identification and evaluation of national security threats and risks as well as their adequate reflection in the framework of policies and strategic documents related to the national security system. Moreover, the analysis overviews the perceptions of the security elites on the shortcomings of the process of drafting, as well as concerning the consultations and involvement of relevant actors or institutions, their reference to these documents and their subsequent implementation.

The study and analysis of the perceptions of local elite's representatives aims to give a valuable contribution to the process and work of policy-making institutions. In addition, this study will serve to help establishing a thorough process and benchmarks that would lead to improved processes of drafting, reviewing, implementation and monitoring of the national security policy framework, in line with Albania's obligation as NATO member country and contemporary standards of the North-Atlantic Alliance.

II. Methodology

This study is based on the results of the questionnaire conducted in the period November–December 2010 by the Center for European and Security Affairs (CESA), on a category of respondents well-informed and directly or indirectly involved in the process and/or discourse of addressing the national security issues and the respective strategy. These are some of the reasons that this study considers the respondents part of the national elite, whose contribution has the capacity to influence National Security Strategy policy-making and implementation process- through their involvement in the process of drafting, reviewing, implementing and monitoring of the Strategy in their role as political or professional representatives of public institutions or as elites of other social sectors (academia, media, civil society).

The survey is conducted on a representative sample of 70 representatives of the above mentioned elite groups. Seeking to involve as many security elite representatives as possible, the sample is distributed to a wide range of categories. The first category includes individuals who hold senior political position in the central government, such as minister, deputy minister, advisors, members of minister's cabinet, etc. The second category includes senior civil servants in the central government, such as secretary general, director of department, and senior experts. The third category includes members of the parliament. The fourth and the fifth categories include respectively senior political and nonpolitical positions at independent institution such as Armed Forces, Intelligence Service, President's office, General Prosecution, Ombudsman, whereas, in the last four categories representatives from academic cycles, civil society actors and media who deal with security issues take part.

The questionnaire is composed of 25 questions in total, out of which only 2 are open-ended questions, while in the others the respondents are asked to choose among one or more different alternatives (close-ended). The questionnaire is organized in five sections. The first part collects demographic data from the respondents, namely gender, professional categorization, age, and education. The second section deals with questions related to the process of national security risks and threats assessment. The third section concerns the concrete evaluation of elites' perceptions on security risks and threats and the two last ones focus respectively on the implementation of National Security Strategy and the role of institutions involved in this process, as well as the external dimension of the security sector contribution.

III. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

In the opinion survey conducted among preselected sample of Albanian elites, which comprises a group of 70 interviewees, an unequal gender representation (only 3% are females) can be noticed.

Figure 1
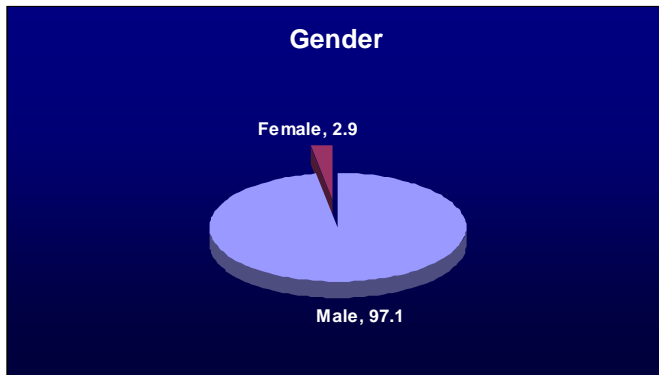
According to Figure 2, on the professional categorization of the respondents, 35% of the Albanian security elites are part of the central public administration. There is also a high representativeness from the academic cycles and civil society, which are actively involved in security issues, 20% respectively. Despite the efforts for a greater involvement of the parliament members in this questionnaire, this category remains represented in the levels of 7 % of the total sample. The same level (7%) refers to the respondents from the field of media. In total, there is an almost equal representation of the respondents from state institutions (whether in political positions or not) and the respondents from the non-state sector (namely academia, civil society, and media).

Figure 2
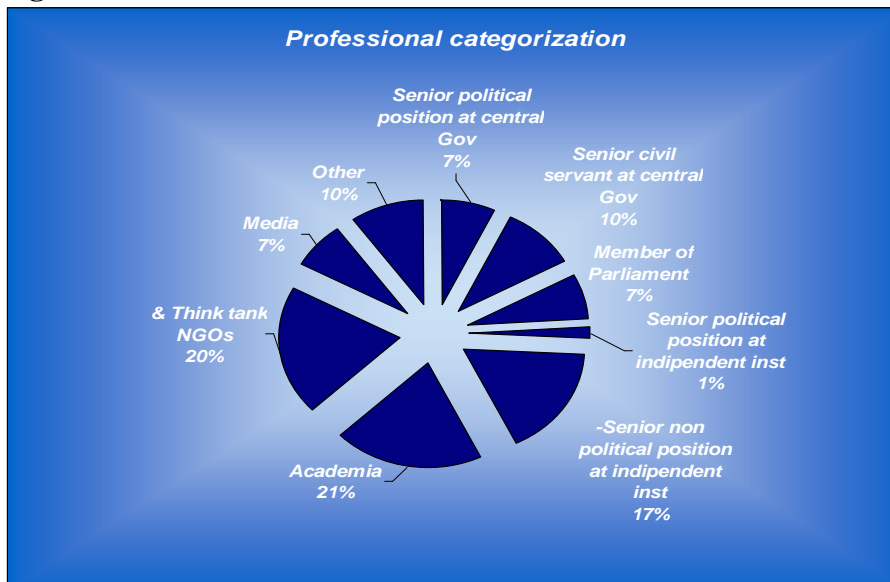
The main respondents (78%) fall into age range over 35. Most of them (74%) hold a post graduate degree. Both items of data are indicators of respondent's high level of expertise and/or professional engagement on the issue, which supports the general selection criteria of the categories that make up the sample- making them not only a well-informed group but also part of the policy-making processes and related public discourse. *See Figure 3 and 4 below.*
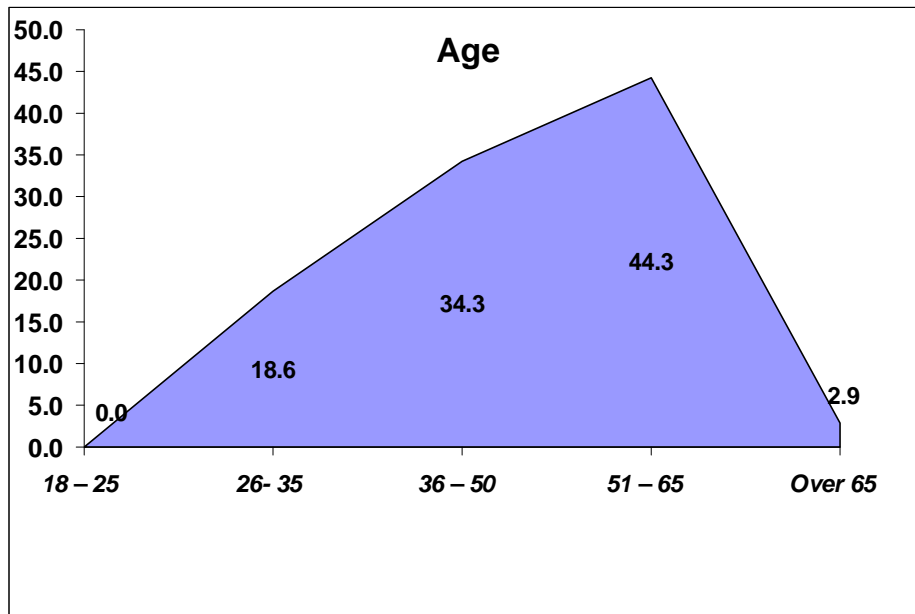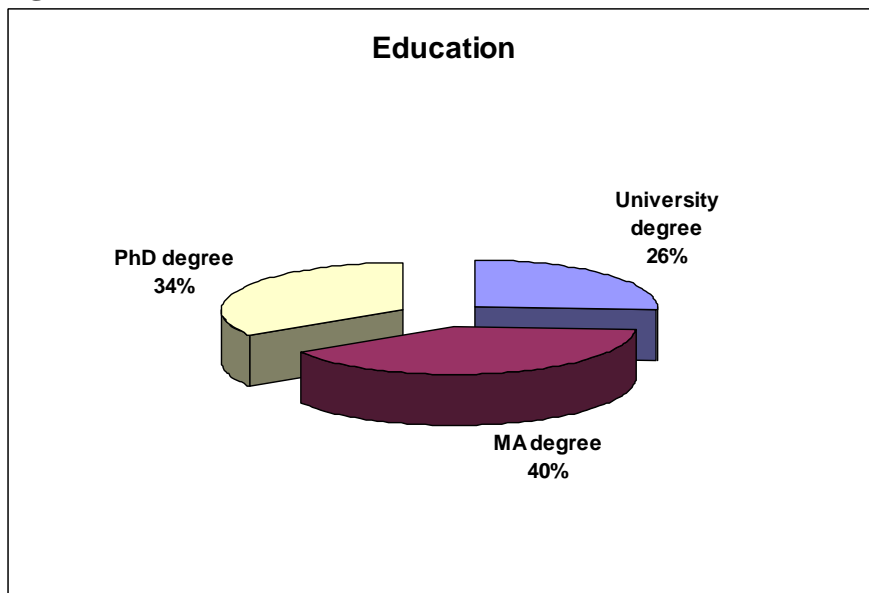
Figure 3

Figure 4

IV. KEY FINDINGS

Security elite's expertise and specific knowledge on the field enables this questionnaire to draw some basic conclusions, necessary to improve the present practice, in terms of building up a qualitative, efficient, and comprehensive process of drafting the National Security Strategy.

The first issue to raise concern deals with the process of identification and assessment of national security threats and risks; more specifically related to elites' perception that the process is not a product of a comprehensive institutional framework. They believe that the assessment of threats and risks is a product of partial involvement and consultation with a limited number of institutions or a process that happens within one or two specific institutions. In addition, a vast majority of respondents describe this process as being not thoroughly consulted with non-state actors such as civil society, academia, and media.

While assessing national security threats and risks, the security elites appraise the strategic importance of national security documents, and more concretely the adequate assessment of threats and risks, as a precondition in terms of drafting more realistic and applicable security policies from institutions. Of a great importance is the reflection of realistic priorities on National Security Strategy; especially in the context of respondents' general prevailing perception that the priorities described in the existing security documents are formal priorities or reflections of the international agenda of global threats, and not a response to realistic threats that exist in the Albanian context.

With regard to the implementation of the Strategy document and the role of institutions involved in this process, the main finding is that the high representatives of the institutions working in the security sector are partially familiar with the document and that, in overall, only some of the institutions are guided by this Strategy in their work.

Security elites support the improvement of the overall process on drafting the national security policy framework, in line with Albania's obligation as a NATO member. They continue to encourage the membership and its benefits, evaluating as positive the reforms fulfilled by our country.

Generally, the respondents view as important the necessity for further improvements in the process of implementation of the National Security Strategy. In this regard, they identify some of the main essential issues to be addressed: coordination and cooperation among security sector institutions, better prioritization of security threats and risks, a more realistic balance between the local and international agenda on security as well as a greater involvement of non-state actors and interest groups in the process of implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Security Strategy.

V.   SURVEY FINDINGS

V.1.   NATIONAL SECURITY RISKS AND THREATS ASSESSMENT

In order to have a complete view and a realistic analysis of the perceptions and assessments of elites' circles on different stages and the whole security sector in the country, it is necessary to have some basic information on respondents' knowledge on security matters. This is crucial for the interpretation of the survey findings but also considering that most of the respondents come from non-state sector, with an indirect contribution in the academic and public discourse on security sector issues.

Reading through the table, the level of acquaintance of the respondents with national security matters is perceived as relatively satisfactory. Security elites declare to be very familiar (24%) and familiar (57%) with the legislation on security matters and related institutions, contrary to 19% of them who seem less familiar. Generally, the same level of familiarity exists also for the policy framework and related documents on security matters. Meanwhile, they possess less information on the security sector performance, where a relatively considerable number of respondents (31%) are not very familiar.

Table 1.

|	Very familiar	Familiar	Not very familiar	Not familiar at all
Legislation on security matters & institutions	24%	57%	19%	0%
Policy framework and related documents on security matters	19%	61%	19%	1%
Security sector performance and capacities	14%	49%	31%	6%

The main source of respondent's information derives from their professional work (almost 46%) and from their academic interest (26%). Apart from these two main sources, media is referred to (from 13% of them) as another source of information, against the low level of information coming from other state institutions, think-tanks or other sources.

Figure 5
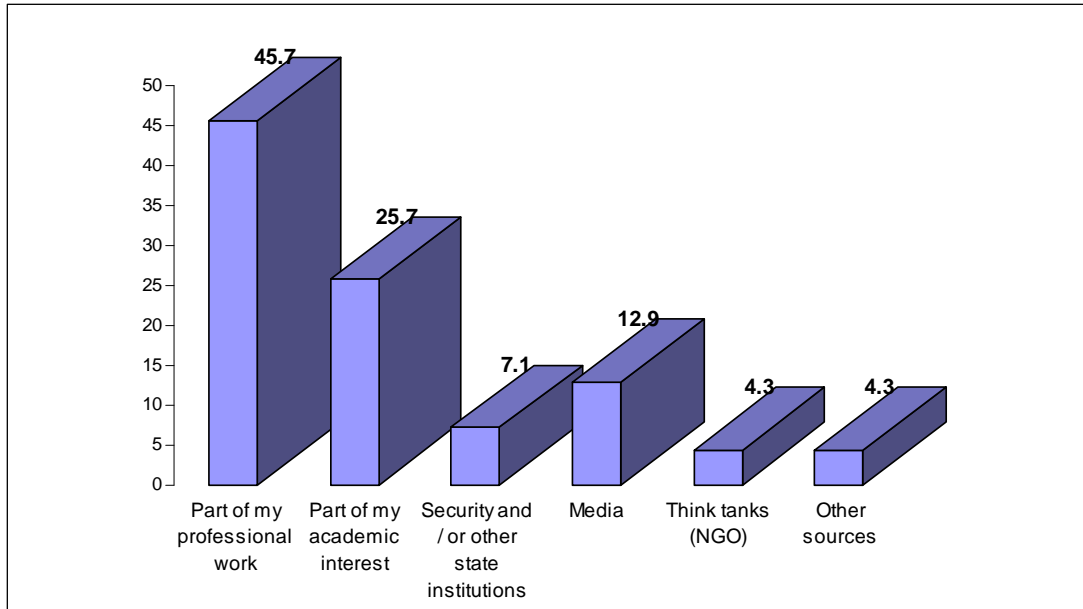
Asked about the process of identification and assessment of national security threats and risks at state institutions' level, only 9% of security elites consider this process a product of a comprehensive institutional framework. On the contrary, threat and risk assessment is conceived as a product of partial involvement and consultation and only from some institutions (45.7%) or a process that occurs within one or two specific institutions (24.3%). Moreover, not few of them (18.6%) think that it is a product of the work of some specific individuals who represent the main institutions in the security sector.

Figure 6
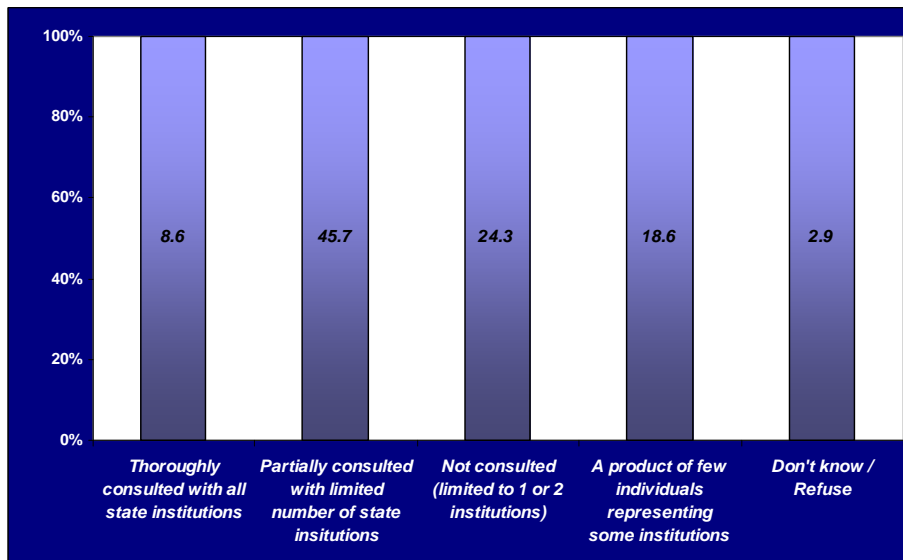
If we "crosscut" the answers of the respondents from state institutions with political or non-political position and the respondents from non state sector (academia, media and civil society) data analysis reveal some interesting trends.[1] *See Table 2.*

Table 2.

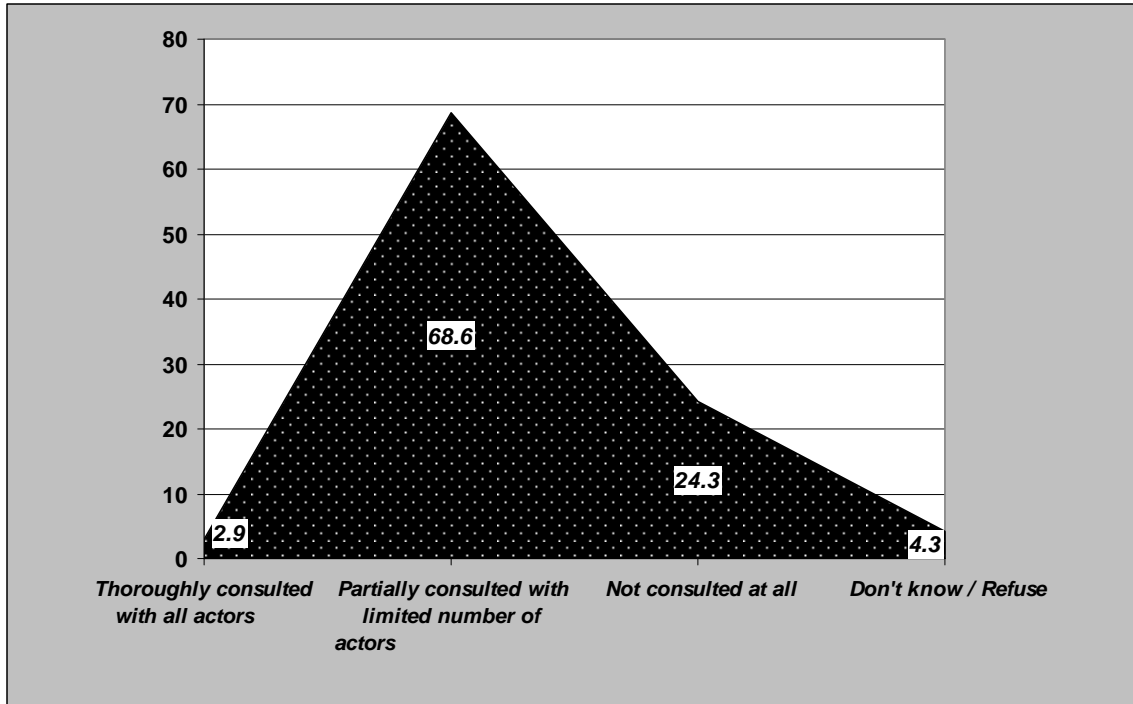| STATEMENT	THE RESPONDENTS	
	State institutions	**Civil society, academia, media**
Thoroughly consulted with all state institutions	17,2%	2,8%
Partially consulted with limited number of state institutions	44,8%	52,8%
Not consulted (the process is limited to 1 or 2 institutions)	17,2%	33,3%
It is a product of few individuals representing some institutions	20,7%	11,1%
Don't know / Refuse	-	-

As it is pointed out in Table 2, the vast majority of the respondents inside the two groupings agree with a slight difference of only 8% on the statement that the process of identification and assessment of national security threats and risks is "**partially consulted with limited number of state institutions".** While the perceptions of the two sub-categories—from state institutions and non-state sector--, differ considerably for all the other statements listed above.

The aforementioned standpoints on the shortcomings of this process are further supported by the perceptions on the involvement of other important actors, such as civil society, media and other interest groups. The vast majority of the respondents (69%) think that process of assessing the threats and risks to national security is not thoroughly consulted with all actors; on the contrary, it is finalized with a limited number of actors. On the other hand, not few of them (24%) believe that the process evolves in the total absence of these actors and only 3% say that it is a thoroughly consulted process involving all actors from the above mentioned groups.

Question: How would you describe the consultations with non state actors (civil society, interest groups, media etc.) in the process of identification and assessment of national security threats and risks?

Figure 7

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[1] Such a sub-division of the sample offers two almost equal sub-groupings.

Following the problematic of the institutions in charge of drafting security policies, the respondents were asked about the institutions that should be assigned the responsibility of institutional coordination in the drafting process. As shown in the figure below, the vast majority of the respondents (61%) consider the President of the Republic as the most appropriate institution for this role, contrary to 28.6% that appointed the Prime minister.

Figure 8
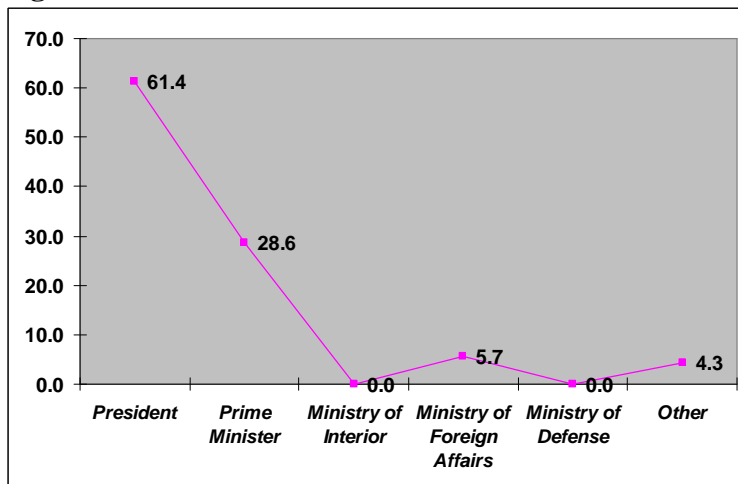
Question: In your opinion, which of the following institutions should be assigned the responsibility for institutional coordination in the process of drafting of national security policies?

In terms of the above question, the major part of the elites is skeptical (43%) towards the functionality and efficiency of the two bodies that operate in the security sector- National Security Council (NSC) and the Committee on Security Policies (CSP). In their argumentation on the issue, they point out the following shortcomings: lack of serious and institutionalized involvement of both these bodies in the security sector, due to technical reasons, such as lack of complementary staff, as well as non coordination and "institutional rivalry" between the President's Office and Prime Minister's Office in this area; and the lack of a clear strategy and segregation of functions and competences between these two structures.

Some 21% of the respondents declare in favor of CSP. Despite the existing remarks on the actual functioning of this body, their preference is based on their belief on the possibilities that this body has, when chaired by the Prime Minister, to exercise all the authorities, given that the executive branch exercises decision-making power and as such can potentially draft policies in the security field.

On the other hand only 13% of the respondents stated that NSC is an institution closer to security matters, because of its constitutional tradition as a consultative entity of the President.

Figure 9
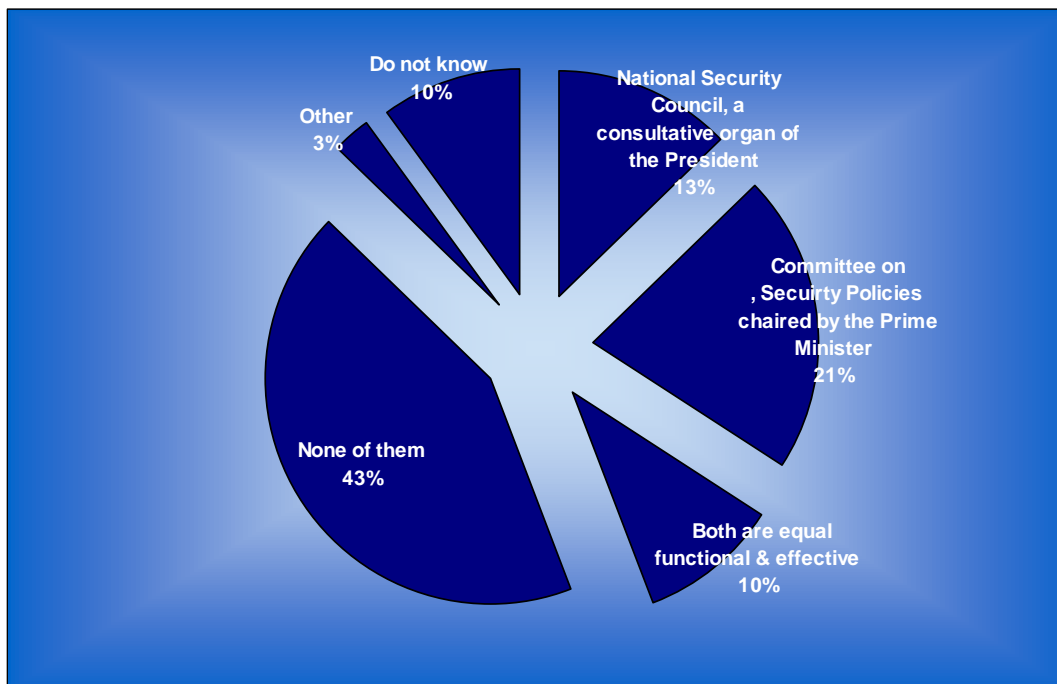
V.2. PERCEPTIONS ON SECURITY RISKS AND THREATS

In order to build up an effective process of security policies drafting, institutional coordination is significantly correlated with the necessity for a realistic and coherent assessment of security priorities, threats and risks. In this framework, the respondents

share the same perception on the importance of *realistic assessment of threats and risks*. Thus, 41.4% of the respondents feel that this would bring more coherent and applicable policies from the institutions. Further, the impact of this process is also reflected on defining realistic priorities on National Security Strategy (21.4%) and on playing a more active role of security responsible institutions (21.4%). According to 11.4% of the security elites, a more realistic assessment of security threats and risks would have a greater impact also in budgeting according to priorities.

Figure 10

When asked about security priorities reflected in the existing security documents, respondents assessed the entire drafting and enforcement process of the National Security Strategy both significative and similarly problematic. Thus, 54.3% of them believe that the priorities are mainly formal ones, which are not properly evaluated by the institutions; while another considerable part of the respondents (30%) consider them a reflection of the international agenda of global threats. Only 7.1% of security elites' representatives from this survey think that the existing security priorities are a response of realistic threats that exist in the Albanian context.

Question: Do you believe that security priorities as described in the existing national security documents generally reflect...

Figure 11
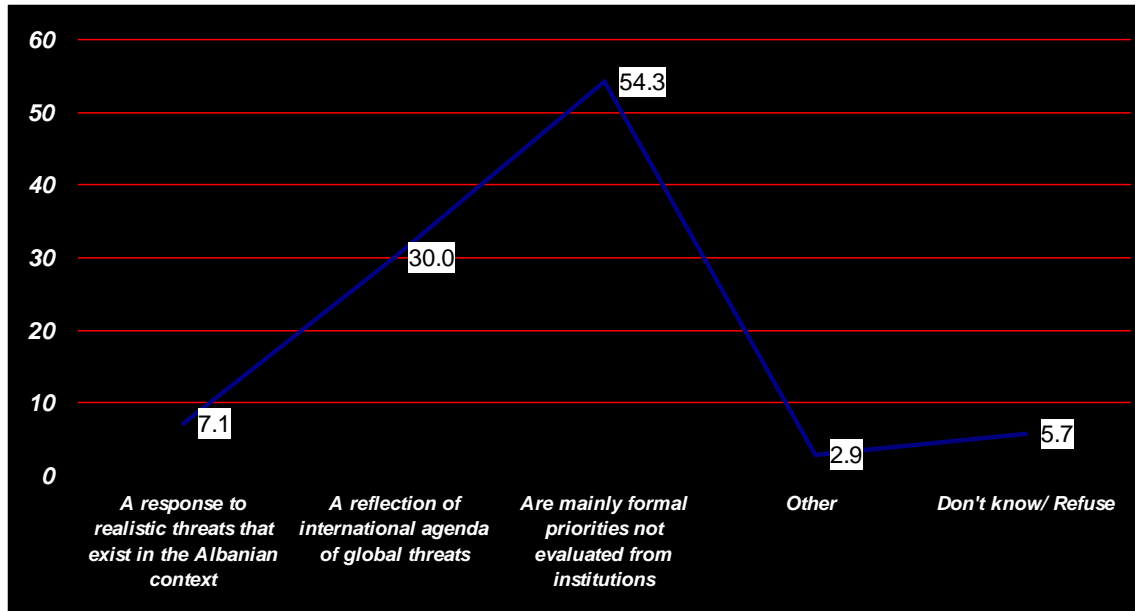
While assessing the threats and risks to national security, among many external and internal threats to our country, most of the Albanian security elites identify three main threats and risks as challenges to national security- *corruption* (41 respondents), *political instability and conflicts* that threat country's political stability (35 respondents), and *unemployment and poverty* (31 respondents), followed by organized crime within the country seen as threat from 28 respondents. The following Table gives an overview of the security elites' responses for the options they were provided with as major threats and risks to national security.

Question: Please write down three most important risks and threats to national security

Table 3

	Nr of responses
External security threats / risks	6
Low capacities and underdeveloped military technique of Armed Forces	10
Unemployment & poverty	31
Political instability & conflicts	35
Organized crime within the country	28
Risks / threats from civil emergencies	16
Trans-border organized crime	7
Cyber crime	3
Regional conflicts	5
Environmental disasters	10
Corruption	41
Terrorism	12
Ethnic conflicts	1
Religious conflicts	2

The three factors or circumstances less perceived as threats to national security are ethnic and religious conflicts and cyber crime. While it is worth mentioning that "external security threats / risks" are considered relevant only from less than 10% of the respondents

When further asked about the **three main priorities**, it is noticeable that the main threats and risks considered as the most important ones coincide with the main priorities which come as measures or challenges to be addressed and as a response to threats and risks. In this regard, among the main priorities are ranked the following: the fight against corruption, economic development of the country and improvement of standard of living, as well as building sustainable and functional institutions; rule of law and increasing government legitimacy. A special attention was also given to other priorities such as building a well-functioning security sector, the need to further consolidate the security institutions, accurate assessment of the sources, and national capacities or prioritization of threats and risks to national security.

V.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY AND THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED

Question: Do you believe that high officials from security sector are familiar with the National Security Strategy?

The respondents reveal themselves as skeptical when it comes to assess the level of acquaintance with the National Security Strategy of the high officials who represent institutions *that work within the security sector*. Thus, about ¾ of them judge that high officials of these institutions are partially familiar with the document and only 11.4% of them believe that they possess thorough knowledge.

Figure 12
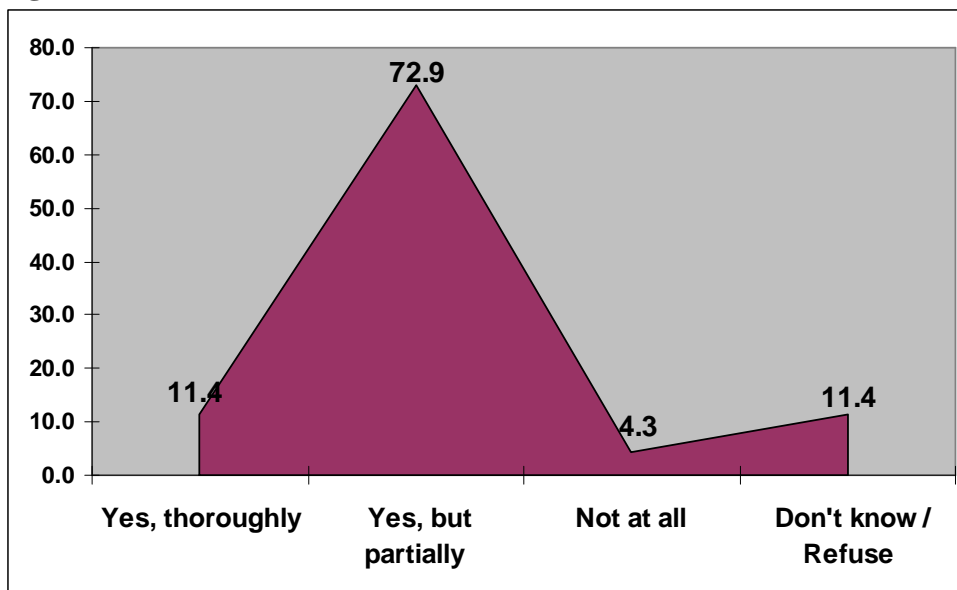
Starting from this prevailing assumption, it seems like the respondents' skepticism is extended also to other aspects of institutions' work. In fact, the security elites were asked if they think that "all security sector institutions are guided by the National Security Strategy in their work". Most of them (57.1%) believe that this statement is only true for some of them, whereas the other part is divided in their standpoints. *See the Figure below.*
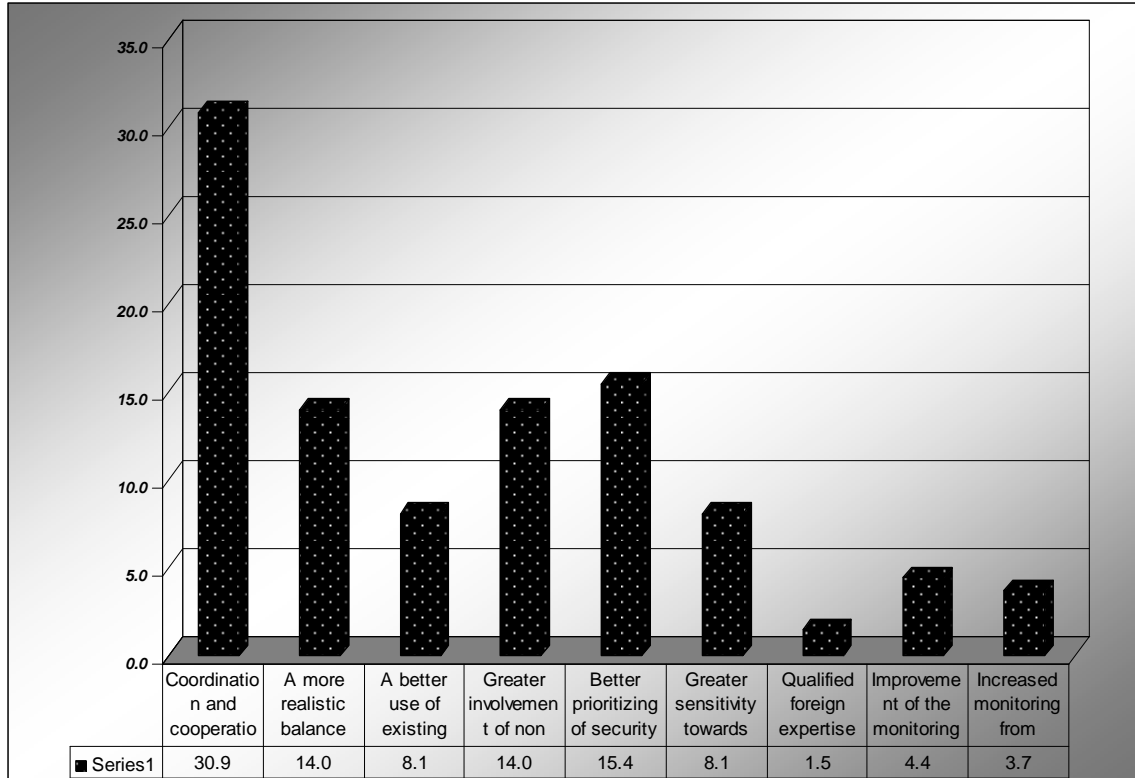
Figure 13
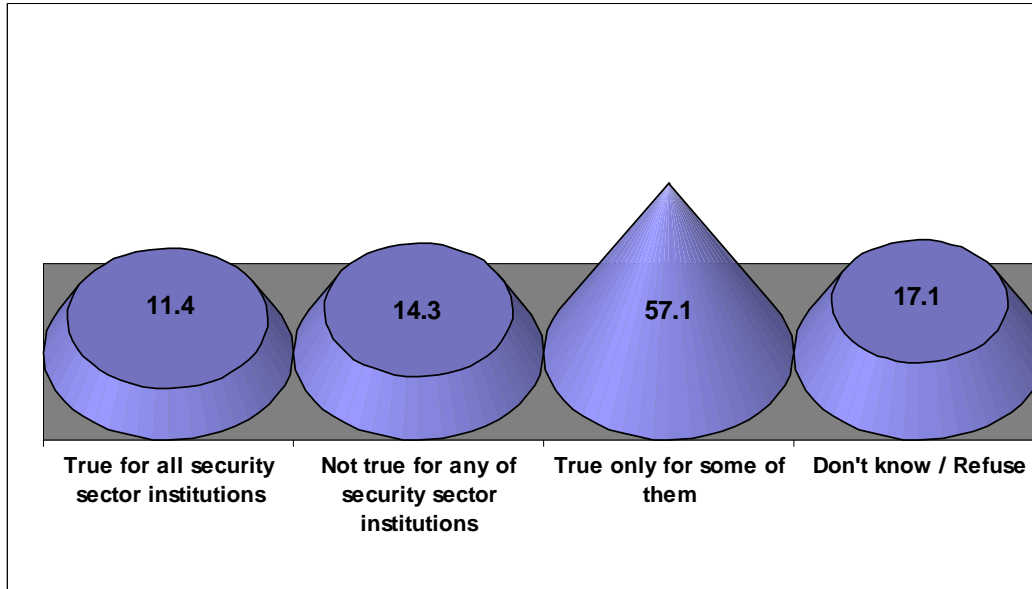
This majority of respondents 57.1% were further asked to list the institutions their answer was referred to and among them as the main important ones are ranked: the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and State Informative Service (SIS)

Coordination and cooperation among security sector institutions constitutes an essential issue and a great concern according to elites' perceptions. This aspect was identified as the most important one, from a considerable number of respondents (31%) when asked about the most important issues to be improved in the process of implementation of the National Security Strategy. Among other relevant issues to be addressed, the following were recommended: a better prioritization of security threats, a more realistic balance between the local and international agenda on security, greater involvement of non-state actors and interest groups in the process of implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the National Security Strategy.

Question: Please select two most essential issues for which you believe that there is still room for improvement in the process of implementation of the National Security Strategy.

Figure 14

	Coordination and cooperatio	A more realistic balance	A better use of existing	Greater involvement of non	Better prioritizing of security	Greater sensitivity towards	Qualified foreign expertise	Improvement of the monitoring	Increased monitoring from
■ Series1	30.9	14.0	8.1	14.0	15.4	8.1	1.5	4.4	3.7

Dividing the answers about the essential issues to be improved in the security field, according to the two main sub-groupings (state and non-state representative's), different perceptions may be observed. Senior officials at public administration consider as the two main concerning issues the coordination and cooperation among security sector institutions and the need for greater involvement of non-state actors and interest groups in the process of implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Security Strategy. Whereas, for the civil society, media and academia, the first issue to be addressed remains the same (coordination & cooperation), while the other one is creating a more realistic balance between the local and international agenda on security.

V.4. THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF SECURITY SECTOR CONTRIBUTION

After one year of membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, Albanian security elites share more or less the same opinion that our country fully deserved (44%) or to a certain degree (48%) the membership. *See Table 4.*

Table 4

	Yes	To a certain degree	No	Don't know
Do you think that Albania deserved the membership?	44%	48%	7%	1%

Do you still support country's NATO membership?	88%	7%	3%	1%

Although it is still quite early to draw any conclusion on Albania's overall performance, the perception is prevailing that Albania is performing at a satisfactory level related to a number of issues, such as, for example, the consolidation of political and democratization reforms (52%), though, on the other hand, not a small part of respondents (circa 30%) believe that there is no improvement in this field. Improvement of security-related legislation seems to be the better performing area; 60% of elites think that this has happened to a certain degree, against 30% that declare a full level of harmonization. Regarding the budget, 69% share the view for a relatively efficient use of the budget to respond to security sector challenges; 19% of them think this did not happen at all; and, only 11% declare that the use has been efficient. According to 27% of the elites, reforms for the modernization of Armed Forces have progressed successfully; 54% of respondents say this occurred to a certain degree and 10% of them are not informed at all about this criterion.

*Question: Do you think that Albania as a NATO member is performing at satisfactory level as regards:*

Table 5

	Yes	To a certain degree	No	Don't know
Consolidation of political & democratization reforms	14%	52%	30%	3%
Improvement of security related legislation	29%	60%	10%	1%
Efficient use of the budget to respond to security sector challenges	11%	69%	19%	1%
Modernization of Armed Forces	27%	54%	3%	10%

Albania's obligation as a NATO member to allocate 2% of the GDP for AF budget is considered from 52.9% of the respondents as affordable and worthy, given the benefits deriving from membership in this organization. However, 38.6% of them view it as unaffordable, although necessary to demonstrate and justify the capabilities of this country as NATO member.

Question: How do you consider Albania's obligation as a NATO member to allocate 2% of the GDP for AF budget?

Figure 15
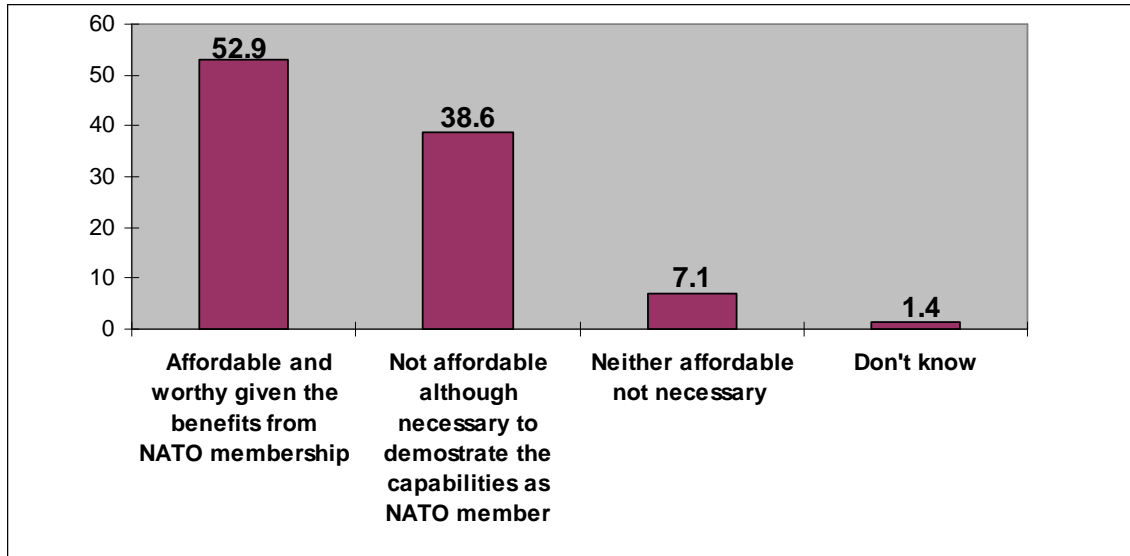
In the meantime, regarding a very debatable issue at the moment in NATO member countries- the missions outside the borders of the NATO countries- the respondents seem divided in their viewpoints. While about 50% think that this engagement is within real capabilities, 45.7% believe that it exceeds the real capabilities. *See Figure 16*.

Figure 16
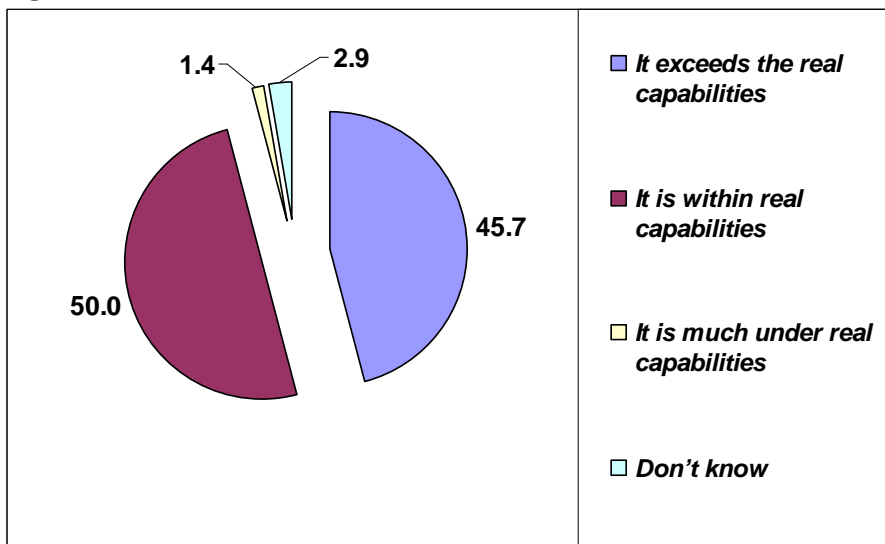
Further analysis of the given responses reveals a substantial division among the respondents from state institutions and the representatives from civil society, academia and media. Thus, the vast majority of the state sector thinks that Albania's participation in NATO's military and peacekeeping operations outside the borders of NATO countries is within real capabilities (Figure 16/a), while approximately at the same level, actors from civil society, academia and media declare that Albania's participation in those missions exceeds its real capabilities (Figure 16/b).
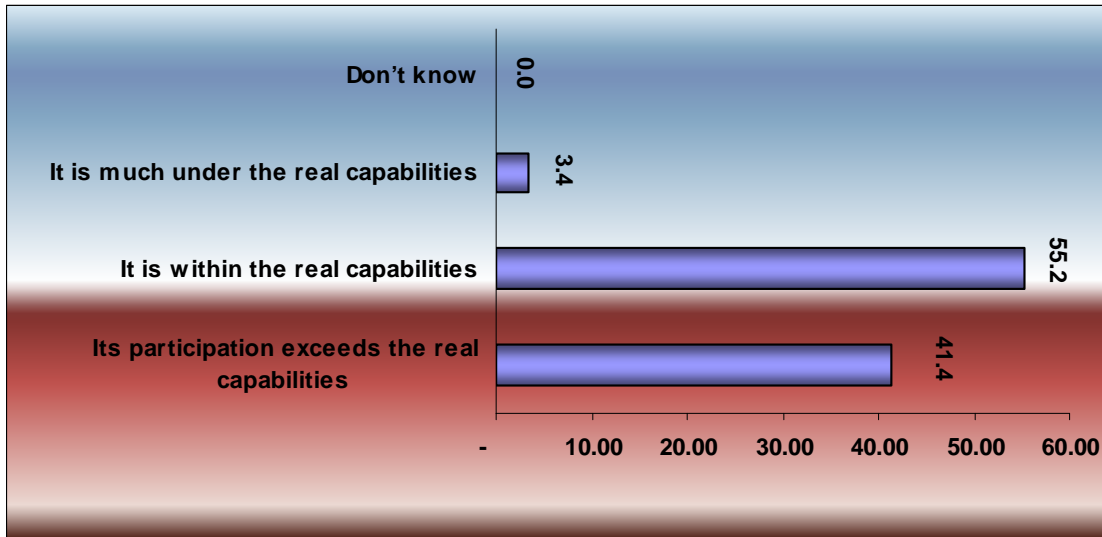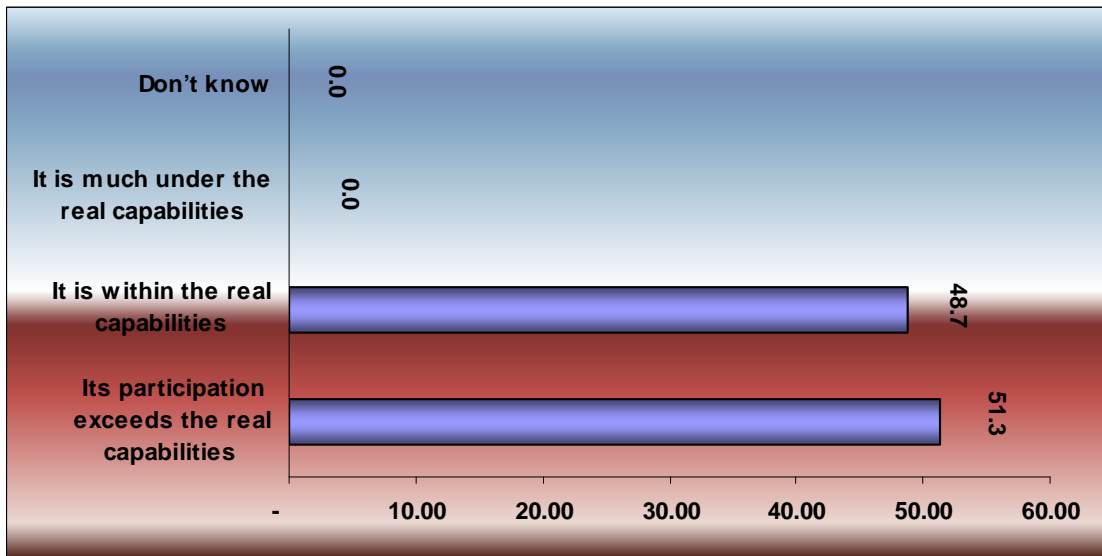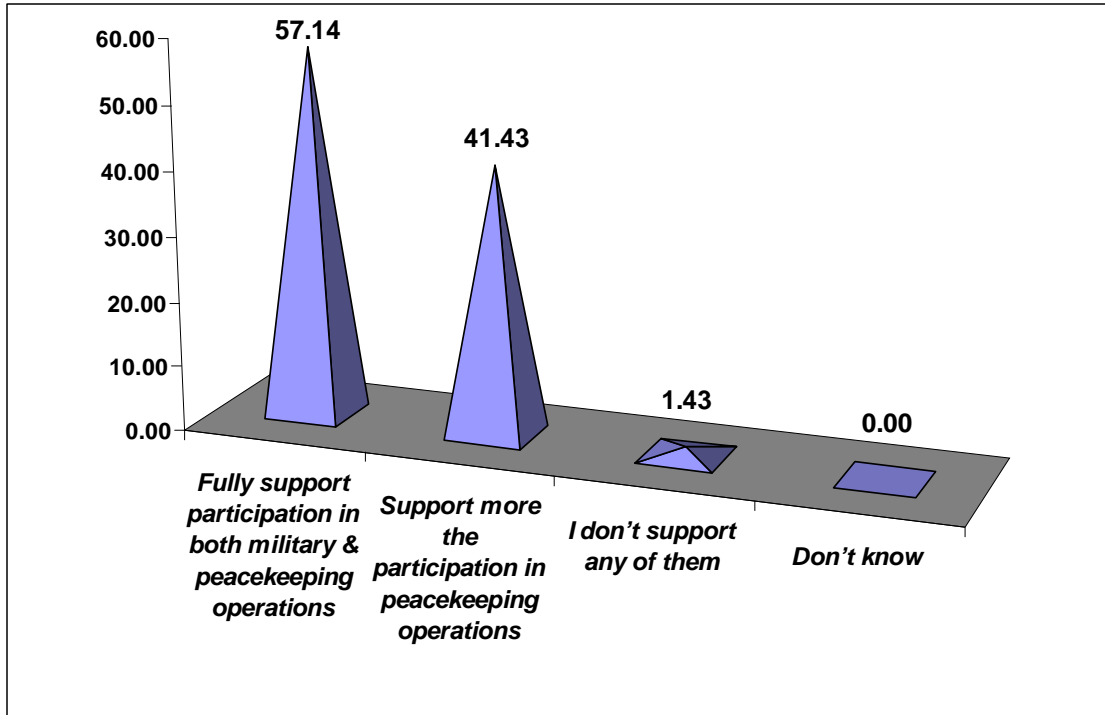
Figure 16/a

Figure 16/b

Security elites support Albanian participation in military and peacekeeping operations outside the borders of member countries by 57.1% (see figure 17). On the other hand, 41% think that participation only in peacekeeping operations is more feasible.

Question: What is your stance towards Albania's participation in NATO's military & peacekeeping operations outside the borders of NATO countries?

Figure 17

As regards public' perception on NATO (Figure 18) after the membership, the vast majority of the respondents (70%) believe that the public did not change its perception, while 22.9% think that it has changed for better.
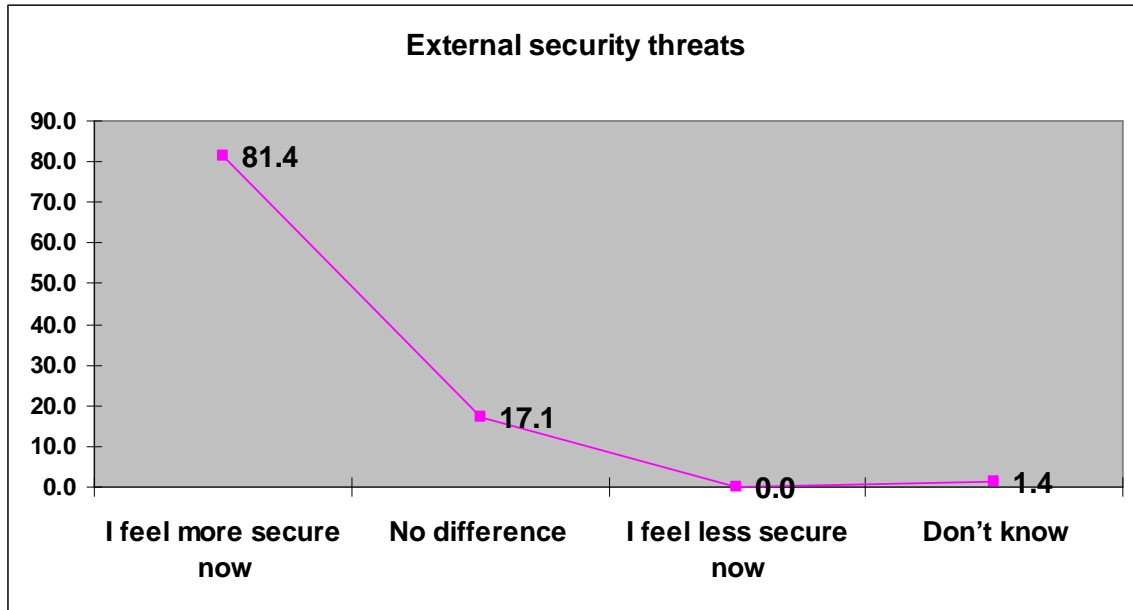
Figure 18
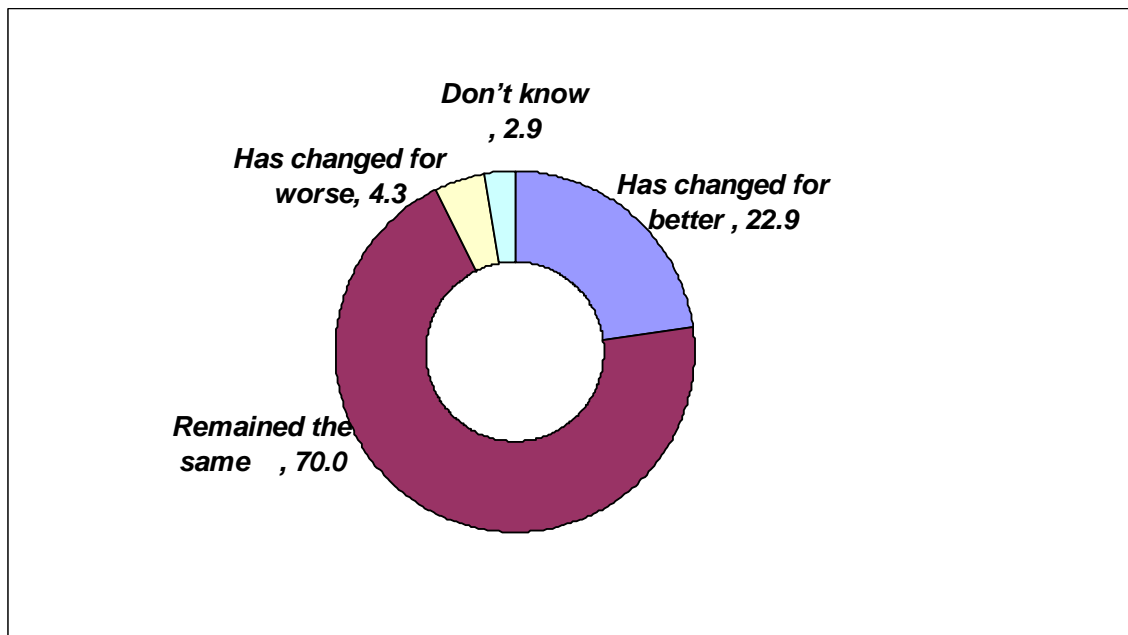
The elites' perception for the situation after the membership is more positive in terms of security threats to the country. Referring to data shown in Figure 19, the vast majority of

the respondents (82%) feel more secure now than before the membership as regards external security risks.

Figure 19

External security threats

Yet, there is not the same impact for security inside the country, where the perception that NATO membership did not bring any major changes on the internal threats and risks to security is dominating. Nevertheless, 36% of elites feel more secure also in this aspect. *See Figure 20.*

Figure 20

Internal security threats