

# The role of coordinates in border diplomacy: The case of Albania

Anduel Cauli <sup>a,\*</sup>, Pal Nikolli <sup>b</sup>, Oltion Pupi <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Head of Cartographic Section in Military Geographic and Infrastructure of Albania, anduelcauli@yahoo.com

<sup>b</sup> Prof. Dr. Department of Geography, University of Tirana, Albania, palnikolli@yahoo.com

<sup>c</sup> Pedagogue in University of Elbasan, Albania, oltionpupi@gmail.com

\* Anduel Cauli, anduelcauli@yahoo.com

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## Abstract:

This study addresses the essential importance of geodetic coordinates in border diplomacy, focusing on the case of Albania. State borders represent not only geographical divisions, but also sovereignty, national identity, and economic interest. In regions with complex histories, such as the Balkans, any technical discrepancy can have major political and legal consequences.

Geodetic coordinates function as a "neutral language" of border diplomacy, standardizing and verifying territorial space. For Albania, its strategic position and both land and maritime borders have required a careful geodetic and diplomatic approach. The 2009 maritime agreement with Greece and its annulment by the Constitutional Court illustrate how discrepancies in geodetic datum can escalate into political conflict. Similarly, demarcation processes with Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia show that harmonization of systems and international standardization are essential to avoiding tensions.

This paper examines the theoretical and legal framework for the use of coordinates, including the importance of geodetic datum such as ALB86, KRGJSH2010, and international standards like WGS84/ETRS89. The analysis shows that inaccurate transformations can cause significant displacements and differing interpretations of the border line, turning a technical issue into a diplomatic one. Furthermore, international jurisprudence has recognized the importance of coordinates as legal evidence in border cases, as demonstrated in cases such as *Qatar vs. Bahrain (2001)* and *Nicaragua vs. Honduras (2007)*.

The case of Albania highlights that:

- Coordinates are a strategic diplomatic tool, not just a technical instrument.
- Standardizing coordinate systems and integrating with international networks (EUREF, ITRF) increases credibility and prevents conflict.
- Technical cooperation between parties and transparent documentation of geodetic transformations are essential for negotiating land and maritime borders.
- Modern technologies (GNSS, GIS, LiDAR) improve precision but cannot replace political and legal consensus.

Ultimately, Albania serves as a case study for the Balkans: accurate coordinates and technical-diplomatic harmonization are crucial for border management, regional stability, and progress toward European Union integration. This study proposes that the use of unified coordinate systems, transparent documentation, and collaboration between geodetic experts and negotiators can strengthen border diplomacy and reduce political tensions.

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