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THE GREEK-ALBANIAN DISPUTE IN THE 1990s

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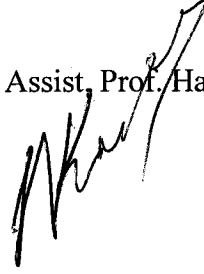


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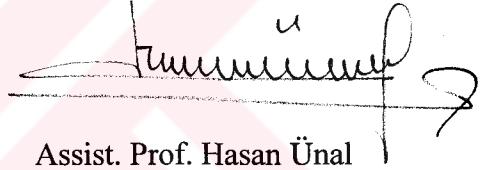
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ABSTRACT

The long-running Greek-Albanian dispute could not show any signs of improvement with the demise of the communist regime in Albania. It took some time. In 1995 a period of rapproachment began; reaching its peak in 1996. As far as the year 1997 was concerned, it symbolizes the beginning of a new period for Albania as well as a historical turning point for the Greek-Albanian relations. Clearly, the most significant point of friction between Greece and Albania is the minority issue. In this respect, Greek-Albanian dispute has some similarities with other minority questions in the region. There are other points of dispute partly related to the minority problem, questions such as what happens to the Albanian minority and the illegal Albanian workers in Greece. Throughout this masters thesis, it has been firstly tried to put forth the reasons for the dispute, the relations among these reasons in the framework of the above remarks. In the second phase, the bilateral relations in the 1990s has been evaluated in the light of the information given in the previous chapters.

ÖZET

Yunanistan ve Arnavutluk arasında uzun yıllardan beri süren anlaşmazlık, Arnavutluk'ta komünist rejimin çökmesi ile beklenen iyileşmeyi gösterememiş ancak 1995'te başlayan ve 1996'da hızlanan bir gelişme dönemine girilmiştir. 1997 yılı ise Arnavutluk için yeni bir dönemin başlangıcı olduğu gibi iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler açısından da tarihi bir dönüm noktasını teşkil etmiştir.

İki ülke arasındaki sorunlar ve ilişkilerin seyri incelendiğinde, en önemli ihtilaf noktasının azınlık konusu olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu yönüyle Arnavutluk-Yunan anlaşmazlığı Balkanlardaki diğer çatışmalarla ortak nitelikler taşımaktadır. Anlaşmazlığın diğer sebepleri olan faktörlerin de esasında azınlık problemi ile bağlantılı olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Gerek Yunanistan'daki Arnavutluk azınlığı, gerek kaçak Arnavut işçiler konuları taraflarca karşılık verme esası çerçevesinde kullanılmaktadır.

Bu master tezinde öncelikle anlaşmazlığın sebepleri ve yukarıdaki mülahazalar çerçevesinde, bu sebeplerin arasındaki ilişki ortaya konmaya çalışılmakta; ikinci aşamada da 1990'lı yıllardaki ikili ilişkiler ilk bölümde sunulan bilgiler ışığında değerlendirilmektedir.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Greece and Albania have always had a dismal record of bilateral relations since the establishment of an independent Albania. Relations between the two worsened after the end of World War II, but during long decades of the Cold War the conflict was contained. Albania's awakening from many years of almost total isolationist policies, and the beginnings of internal relaxation were encouraging. However, this relaxation was to further exacerbate the Greek-Albanian problem with Greece renewing some of its claims to Albania's southern provinces.

Albania is situated between Greece and what many call Serbia (instead of Yugoslavia). And due to its geographical position, the country has been living under the constant fear of becoming sandwiched by its two powerful neighbors. Indeed, while Albania was being established, it was these two neighbors that opposed the idea of an independent Albania. They tried to sandwich Albania into two with the south going to Greece and the north to Serbia. The natural boundary, the Shkumbini river, which cuts Albania from east to West was to have been the dividing line. There is no doubt that Albania lived through these fears from 1913 onwards. And its foreign policy was to a large extent shaped by these. When the Stalinist regime collapsed in Albania in early 1990s, Tirana government looked around for friends in the 'new world', but at the same time was suspicious of the same neighbors' designs.

At the time the Yugoslav conflict had already erupted into violence, and many had been expecting new conflicts inside and outside Yugoslavia. One of the potential flash points was thought to be Albania, either through Albania's involvement in a war in Kosova which would then bring Greece into the scenario, or some sort of a direct confrontation with Greece in one form or the other. While on the one hand searching for new outlets in world about which it knew very little, Albania was faced with increasing demands from Greece on behalf of the Greek minority in the south of Albania. All these served no other purpose than to strengthen the suspicion at the back of the minds of the Albanian politicians that Greece might attempt to detach the southern parts from Albania by taking advantage of Albania's weak internal and international situation. Therefore, in much of the period under review here, the Greco-Albanian dispute became complicated though there were some times of ups and downs.

This dissertation aims to set out the points of dispute between Albania and Greece. It also aims to analyse the real reasons behind the points at issue between Tirana and Athens. The present dissertation is composed of eight chapters, four of which focus in depth on the major reasons for the conflict, in addition to the chapter providing an historical background and to the one dealing with the significant developments in the last seven years, while the other two consist of the introduction and conclusion.

The dispute between Greece and Albania is in many ways similar to the other ones prevalent in the region. Therefore, to understand the Greco-Albanian dispute would

also help to analyse other similar ones in a larger context. The way we have analysed the Greek-Albanian dispute may offer some clues as to how other disputes should be handled. To this end, the subject requires a series of analyses at various levels. First the whole dispute should be put in its setting and then placed in a larger Balkan framework. It necessitates certain analysis of the transition period of Albania from a Stalinist regime to a multi-party system. Second the whole dispute should be studied in terms of its implications for regional security. What attracted me to the present topic was the fact that, although the Greek-Albanian dispute is in many respects similar to the other conflicts in the region, the way it has developed over the last few years has a number of peculiarities. For instance, the events from the beginning of 1997 leading to the fall of Berisha and replacement of it with the Socialists government. The implications of this change of government and the new pattern of relationship, which is developing between Tirana and Athens may set a precedent for conflict resolution or might exacerbate it. All this remains to be seen. The aim of this study is manifold: (I) to set out the disputing point between the two countries, (ii) to grasp the general patterns of approaches displayed by each of the disputing parties, and (iii) to make forecasts into the future of developing relations.

Following the introduction, the second chapter provides a brief historical summary of events which planted the seeds of confrontation.

The third chapter concentrating on the Greek minority in Albania, examines the issue in various aspects in detail. It first sets out the situation of the minority beginning

from the Enver Hoxha period. The second part of the chapter examines the validity of both the complaints of the minority and the perception of threat that host state (Albania) perceives from mother state (Greece) as well as from the minority.

The fourth chapter, though slightly shorter, is a crucially important one. It describes the situation of Albanian minority in Greece. The fifth chapter deals with the religion issue. In this chapter the issue is examined from a different angle apart from its impact on the Greek minority, i.e. the interference of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, violating its autonomy.

The sixth chapter concentrates on the illegal immigration of Albanians to Greece. The mass exodus and the growing number of Albanian people in the neighboring country caused uneasiness in the Greek society and led to further friction. The seventh chapter deals with, in the light of the information provided in the previous chapters, the significant events happened throughout the last seven years. In this framework, the year of 1997 deserves special attention since it symbolises a turning point in the bilateral relations between Albania and Greece.

CHAPTER II: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Greek-Albanian relations, rarely a model of good neighborliness were arguably the worst prior to 1970s.

In 1971 Greece and Albania reestablished diplomatic relations; these had been broken in 1940 when fascist Italy invaded Greece, thereby putting Albania automatically on a war footing with Greece. It was not until 1987, that the government of Andreas Papandreou formally ended the state of war that technically existed between the two countries.¹ However, this initiative did not receive an overall welcome in Greece. The opposition party, New Democracy harshly criticized PASOK government, asserting that the latter had left the Greek minority in Albania to its fate. Mass demonstrations were held in order to prevent the government's signing of the agreement which ended the state of war.²

One of the main characteristics of foreign policy followed by Enver Hoxha, who ruled Albania for almost forty years, had been the view that Albania's immediate neighbors-individually or collectively-represented the main sources of external threat. This perception accounted for Albania's refusal to join its neighbors in attempts at mutual cooperation. Soon after Ramiz Alia's accession to power in 1985, significant changes became evident in Albanian perceptions about

international politics, signaling that the post-Hoxha leadership would inject a new flexibility into the foreign policy.³

However, this was not to be easy. For instance, for Tirana, the expansion of relations with Athens was imperative both politically and economically. But Yugoslavia became uneasy about Tirana's search for good relations with Athens. As a result, Belgrade launched a coordinated media campaign against Albania, focusing attention on human rights abuses, particularly the alleged persecution of ethnic Greeks. In an attempt to drive a wedge between Tirana and Athens, the Yugoslav media had given prominent coverage to anti-Albanian Greek nationalist activities.⁴

Increased Yugoslav economic, military and political pressures and support for what Albania considered Greek "reactionary forces" aroused suspicions in Tirana of a possible Belgrade-Athens alliance-a recurring nightmare for the Albanians-and brought back memories of past Yugoslav-Greek discussions on partitioning Albania. In a posthumous book on Albanian-Greek relations published in July 1985, Hoxha had set the tone about Tirana's diplomatic shift toward Athens. He asserted that, faced with Yugoslav hostile actions, "we were obliged to take the necessary defensive measures... We were not going to allow the Titoites to act as they liked with our rights, to try to isolate us, to sabotage us as they did even by

holding up our trucks which were transporting goods to the markets of Western Europe, and so on. This would have been impermissible.”⁵

After a series of negotiations and exchanges of senior Foreign Ministry delegations, in the mid-1980s Albania and Greece signed a long-term economic agreement. In July 1985 the two countries signed a military protocol on the maintenance and repair of border markers and the prevention of border incidents. During a visit to Tirana in November 1987, the then Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias signed a series of agreements, including a long-term agreement on economic, industrial, technical and scientific cooperation; an agreement on expanding cultural exchanges; a four-year agreement for cooperation in the health sector; and a protocol on banking cooperation.⁶ In April 1988, the two countries signed agreements on border trade and on the establishment of a ferry line between Corfu and Sarande.⁷

The first visit of Greek Foreign Minister was reciprocated a few months later. A useful outcome of this initiative was that when a Balkan Conference was convened at Belgrade in 1988, Albania was represented for the first time since the World War II, together with Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey and Romania.⁸

However some political developments put an abrupt end to the normalization process. Chief among them were the status of the Greek minority in southern Albania; the continued influx of Albanian economic migrants into Greece, the role of the Northern Epirus question in Greek domestic politics and Greece's attitude toward Albania's strengthened relations with Turkey.⁹



CHAPTER III: THE GREEK MINORITY IN ALBANIA

The question of the ethnic Greeks in Albania has always been a bone of contention that affected Greek-Albanian relations. As soon as Albania got its independence in 1912, problems arose with its southern neighbor, Greece. Greek nationalists considered the southern part of Albania as Greek irredenta because of the Greek minority that lived there and because of the region's predominantly Orthodox religious profile. They called the region as Northern Epirus, which implies that the region is part of the Greek region of Epirus annexed in 1881.¹ They even base their claims on historians' writings, stating that every ancient historian from Herodotus to Strabo who mentioned Epirus characterized it as part of the Greek world.² They considered the acquisition of Northern Epirus as part of the fulfillment of Greece's Megali Idea which means to rule all the territory inhabited by ethnic Greeks in the whole of the Near East. As a result widespread violence took place between Greek irredentists and Albanian nationalists.

The region of Northern Epirus was brought under Greek jurisdiction three times, either through military operations or international conferences. In 1913, the Greeks captured Northern Epirus; but this was to be short-lived because they were obliged to withdraw within the framework of the Protocol of Florence (December, 1913). However the Greeks of Northern Epirus who did not accept this arrangement

formed a revolutionary government, under the leadership of Christakis Zographos and occupied the disputed territory.³ While an International Commission was endeavoring to arrange the frontiers of the newly independent Albania, the Epirotes proclaimed at Gjirokastra (Argyrocastro) the Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus, on February 28, 1914.

But, this autonomous republic could not persist international pressure for long. On May 17, 1914 after long discussions the Commission and the aforementioned republic came to an agreement known as the Protocol of Corfu.⁴ According to this Protocol, the Northern Epirus won complete autonomous existence under the nominal hegemony of Prince William of Wied, a thirty-five-year-old captain in the German army, who had been chosen by powers to head the State.⁵ The Albanian Government agreed to the Protocol on June 23, 1914, but soon afterwards World War I broke out, which prevented its implementation.⁶ Protocol of Corfu was later annulled by the 1921 Paris Conference. In this Conference, the boundaries of 1913 were retained and Albania had escaped partition. Its relations with its neighbors remained anything but tranquil, but they had not been able to acquire large sections of Albanian territory.⁷ However, some Greeks assert that the terms of Corfu treaty are still in force, despite the intervening wars and changes of regimes, because the principle of “pacta sunt servanda” applies to them.⁸

In 1940, during the Second World War, Greece recaptured for the third time the

region, with a counter-offensive against an Albanian based Italian attack. However, after the German-Italian occupation of Greece, the latter was forced to abandon its claims for a territorial arrangement involving Northern Epirus. The question was later referred to the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers (USA, Great Britain, Soviet Union and France), and has ever since remained in limbo.⁹ Athens objected to the admission of Albania to the United Nations until the border question was settled. However, in 1955 a package deal engineered by Moscow brought it into the world body along with Japan, which the West was anxious to have admitted.¹⁰ Despite the fact that Greece never signed a bilateral agreement with Albania, the issue has been covered by the Final Act of Helsinki clause about the inviolability of borders in Europe.¹¹

In this context, the postwar history of the Greek-Albanian relations reveals a striking monotony in Greece's position toward its northern neighbor. Greece continually maintains that the Greek minority is mistreated, while the Albanian government responds by saying that it is doing all it can to ensure equal treatment for Greeks and majority Albanians.¹² Although the Greek minority is officially recognized, the Albanian government denies that there is such a thing as a Northern Epirus question and instead refers to the Greek ethnic group located in 99 villages between the cities of Gjirokastra and Sarande along the Greek border.¹³ To this the Greek side asserts that, thousands of ethnic Greeks live in the medium or large scaled cities in the South, like Gjirokastra, Sarande, Permet, Vlore, Korce,

Himara and even Fier and Tirana; therefore, all these cities should be regarded as Greek minority's area.¹⁴

Albanian historians say that the country's ethnic Greeks are not autochthonous but moved to their present place of residence in the Dropulli region, in the eighteenth century as farmers employed by Albanian feudal families,¹⁵ whereas the Greek nationalists claim direct lineage from antiquity.¹⁶ This issue has various aspects, and on every aspect there has been clear disagreement between the two countries.

3.1. The Number

The number of the Greek minority is always disputed. In the 1955 census, ethnic Greeks were said to comprise 2,5% of the population, while the 1961 census set the figure at 2.4%.¹⁷ According to the last Albanian census conducted in 1989, the population of Albania which had been only 1.040.000 in 1938 reached to 3.182.400.¹⁸ The same census put the number of ethnic Greeks at 58.758 or 2% of Albanian population of about 3 million whereas Greek officials assert the figure as 300.000 or 9%.¹⁹ Tirana always argued that the official figure of 58.000 ethnic Greeks might even be too high, given the fact that the number of Greek minority dropped as a result of continuing exodus of Albanian citizens to Greece in search of better economic opportunities.²⁰ In the beginning of 1991, the exodus of more than 5000 members of Albania's Greek minority who since late December 1990 had been crossing the border into northern Greece, deteriorated relations between

the two countries. Thousands more who gathered in border villages preparing to cross found little resistance from the once-feared border guards now that the penalties for attempting to leave the country, which had been up to 20-year prison sentences, were no longer in force.²¹ Therefore, it might be affirmed that their number has been decreasing due to this reason, given the call of the Greek Prime Minister Papandreou during his visit to Albania in January 1991, urging ethnic Greeks not to leave Albania,²² even pledging economic aid to them as an incentive.²³ Later Mitsotakis followed the same way and sought to curb the further exodus by urging ethnic Greeks to remain in Albania and keep faith in reform process.²⁴

On the other hand, an independent estimate might suggest a community of about 120,000 based on an extrapolation from the 1992 general election results in which the ethnic Greek party polled 54,000 votes.²⁵ Greek émigré sources claim that some 400,000 ethnic Greeks live in Albania. This estimate is based on historical accounts of Greeks in Albania, Greek schools and churches formerly in Albania and individuals formerly registered with the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania which uses predominantly the Greek language. The discrepancy in numbers, a not unfamiliar theme in the Balkans, partly arises from the fact that this number includes all those who are Greek Orthodox by religion -Slavs (Macedonians and Montenegrins), Albanians, Vlachs, as well as Greeks -and would, therefore, appear to be very unreliable for assessing the ethnic Greek population.²⁶

A UN report, in which all people registered are of Albanian nationality, put the number of citizens of Greek nationality in Albania as 43,000. According to the latest census, 98% of the population in Albania is ethnically pure.²⁷ The main place in this percentage is taken by the Greek national minority, which according to most latest census, counts for 43,307 inhabitants. Along this, there are also 5,097 people of Macedonian origin, 100 of Serb-Montenegrin origin and 3,053 nationals of other nationalities. So Albania has a total of 51,557 citizens who are included in the category of national minorities. According to the same source, there are 13,000 citizens of national minorities who for 72 years (since the first census of Albanian population was made) have created crossed nationalities as a result of marriages with Albanian nationals.²⁸

3.2. The Structure

In contemporary Albania, Greek settlement seems to be concentrated in the region adjoining the Greek border centering on the cities of Sarande and Gjirokastra, in the valley of Drinos river, with a long chain of Greek villages strung out along the river between the border and Gjirokastra, and the coast of the Albanian Riviera as far north as Vlore. The traditional Greek community in Korce seems to be in decline, although there is a Greek presence in many villages around the city. There is also a substantial number of Greeks in Tirana.²⁹ The minority in Albania can be roughly divided into two fairly clearly defined groups: the rural inhabitants of the Vjose (Aoos) valley and the nearby-towns of Sarande and Gjirokastra as well as

the coastal strip as far north as Vlore, who are highly conservative in their Orthodox culture and outlook; and a significant Greek professional and managerial group, based mainly in the capital, Tirana, many of whom have family links with those who fled Greece in the aftermath of the Greek civil war about 50 years ago. The former group can trace descent from ancient times, whereas the latter is essentially a recent phenomenon and is predominantly secular in outlook. Many of them were well integrated into the Communist system in Albania. One member of the minority, Spiro Koleka, was a close associate of Enver Hoxha and a member of the Party of Labor Central Committee for many years. Other members of the minority rose to high state positions, such as the last Communist Defence Minister, Simon Stefani, and the academic lawyer responsible for the Communist Constitution, Professor Pascal Haxhi.³⁰

In that period, the minority community was significantly divided, with its more educated members living in the main urban centres, often strongly supporting the one-party state, while the southern rural majority were left leaderless and as a result saw their security and potential for freedom being dependent on the efforts on their behalf of the Orthodox church in northern Greece. The extreme political conservatism of many northern Greek bishops is well known, and as a result the minority was torn between extreme political positions for many years.

Tensions increased considerably in the period of the most intense persecution of religion in Albania, in the 1960s and 1970s, with minority members who were

practicing Orthodox Christians in the rural south suffering serious human-rights violations at the hands of the Albanian secret police.³¹

3.3. Religion

As far as Albania is concerned "religion" issue deserves a more careful examination. The minority's identity derives mainly from its adherence to the Orthodox Church and the use of the Greek language and names. Religion has been, as elsewhere in the Balkans, of primary importance in self-identification in Albania. For both the Greek and the Orthodox Slav minorities, the Orthodox church has been essential in protecting (and often, especially for the Greeks, increasing, by assimilation through the past control of the education process) their numbers. As such, the fact that the Albanian authorities attempted to ban all religious practices merits close attention.³²

Religion was officially attacked after World War II when the communists took power and again in 1967, when Albania was officially proclaimed "the first atheist state in the world" and all forms of organized religious activity were banned. The words of article 37, added to the Albanian Constitution in 1967 read: "The state recognizes no religion and supports and carries out atheistic propaganda in order to implant a scientific materialistic world outlook in people."³³

The culminating move against religion came in 1967 with Hoxha's declaration that "Albania is the world's first atheistic state, whose only religion is Albanianism."

This is an ironically resonant statement, for during the movement for national independence (1878-1912) Vasho Pasha, an Albanian who held a high position in the Ottoman Administration had also declared: "the only religion of Albanians is Albanianism." In this very different historical context, Vasho had meant not to wipe out religion but to bring Albanians of Muslim and Christian religions to work together so that Albania would survive its neighbors designs. In contrast, Hoxha's reduction of religion to nationalist loyalty was a move, partly inspired by the Chinese cultural revolution.³⁴

In September 1967, the government announced that it had closed all religious buildings, including 2169 mosques, churches, monasteries and other institutions. Among these were 630 major Orthodox Churches which were razed to the ground and an equal number converted to other uses such as grain depots, theaters, coffee shops and stables. The constitution of 1976 expressly outlawed religion. Article 55 stated: "the creation of any type of organization of a fascist, anti-democratic, religious, or anti-socialist activity and propaganda is forbidden". Article 55 of the 1977 criminal code was similarly worded and carried a sentence of between three and ten years imprisonment.³⁵

All the post war East European communist regimes were initially very hostile to organized religion but none went as far as Albania. The main reason for this was that the majority of Albania's population were and probably remain Muslim and this helped delay the Albanian national awakening, as the Ottoman Empire was a

multinational (not a national Turkish) state, all Muslims were treated as first-class citizens with many Muslim Albanians, at times, occupying high posts in the Ottoman hierarchy. Another factor of this Ottoman millet system was that the other religious denominations were seen as more important differentiators for population groups than ethnicity- this is still shown in the respective national (Greek, Macedonian, Serbian etc.) claims and counter-claims for the Orthodox population, including Orthodox Albanians in the Greek case, in the former Ottoman territories. As such, in the Albanian context, it could be argued that religion was a potential threat to the forging of an independent unified Albanian nation which would be able to resist past foreign incursions.³⁶

Combined with this was Enver Hoxha's personal ideological dogmatism, and it is no coincidence that the anti-religious campaign took place in Albania at the same time as the Cultural Revolution did in Albania's then ally China- indeed, in Albania, the campaign was part of what was called "the Cultural and Ideological Revolution". The communist Albanian elite led by Hoxha was, compared to other communist elites in Eastern Europe at the time, well educated, and this, combined with the extreme backwardness of the Albania they inherited, may have been a factor in the tendency of Hoxha to indulge in such radical attempts at social engineering. However, despite this frontal attack on religion by the state, reports always pointed to the continuation of private religious practice hidden from the watchful eyes of the authorities.³⁷

In Albania, the Hoxha regime, while pursuing a policy of extreme denial of individual human rights, did allow educational and cultural rights to its minorities.³⁸ However the attempt at eradicating organized religion adversely affected minorities like the Greek one, part of whose self-identification is bound up with the Orthodox Christianity. There were also other measures relating to names and reports of de facto restrictions on the use of the Greek language in some settings. The Hoxha regime, while not pursuing an open assimilatory policy did undercut some of the fundamental bases of minority identity by its harsh policies, its fervent Albanian nationalism and attempts to unify the country, as well as its rigid ideological standpoints.³⁹ As noted above, the post-war communist government attempted to eradicate religious practices; it forbade the use of "foreign" and religious names; and reportedly, discouraged the use of the Greek language in public places.⁴⁰

In 1975, the government ordered name-changes for citizens who had inappropriate names and offensive surnames from a political, ideological, and moral standpoint. Local civil affairs offices were supplied with lists of government-approved names. According to refugees, this order did not affect Muslim names (Hoxha himself -his name means Muslim priest- should have had to change his name otherwise). However, non-Muslims- Albanians, Greeks and members of other ethnic minorities -with religious names, were reportedly obliged to change them. Muslim refugees stated that the name-changing campaign did not affect them while

virtually all Greek escapees could later recount at least one instance of an imposed name-change.⁴¹

According to one former resident the government apparently circulated a list of "acceptable" names to the Greek community as early as 1967-69. Some have seen the measure to be more for nationalistic rather than religious reasons, namely to eliminate "alien influences" in the names of persons, as well as places, and replace them with what the regime regards as "purely Albanian names". Decree No. 225, also in 1975, ordered changing geographic place names with religious connotations. Towns named after Christian saints have been renamed. This decree was also apparently applied to some non-religious Greek town names as well. The name-changing campaign disrupted long-standing traditions of the Greek community. Greeks name their children after their grandparents, or saints, martyrs or other religious figures. Parents sometimes registered an Albanian name with the government and used a Greek name at home. Such children were reportedly obliged to use their Albanian names at school.⁴²

3.4. Language

Although there is no direct evidence of legal prohibitions against the use of Greek in public, many refugees have reported de facto restrictions in certain settings. A non-Greek escapee said that in his village, none of the minorities -Macedonian, Italian or Greek- were allowed to speak their own languages outside their homes. Some schools allegedly forbade children to speak Greek to each other, and Greeks

in internal exile. Further reported restrictions on the use of Greek are when visiting prisoners in Albanian prisons and during military service. There is, however, a weekly Greek language newspaper -Laiko Vima, organ of the Democratic Front of Gjirokastra for the Greek minority- which has been published since 25 May 1945.⁴³

Education in Greek constitutes another set of contentious issues. Whereas Greece has always complained that Greek minority students in Albania are denied schooling in their mother tongue, Albanian officials argue that the Greek minority enjoys better educational opportunities than the Albanian majority. They state that the teacher-student ratio in Greek schools, is often as low as 1:2, better than in Albanian schools. While acknowledging that Albania has met Greek demands for state-funded education in Greek, Athens was for a long time dissatisfied that such programs are limited to “minority zones” where ethnic Greeks are in the majority. Albanian government responds to this by stating that it is due to the financial constraints. Athens’ wish to see Greek schooling offered in all areas where Greeks live, has been a point of friction between the two countries.

Greek language schools have existed in Albania since the 16th century. In 1922, the Albanian government reported that 36 Greek schools existed in southern Albania. There is one Greek language teacher-training college serving the community, and schools are provided with some Greek language texts, apparently in Greek with Albanian instructions. If a village is comprised of Greek residents

then the village may obtain a Greek language school and other privileges. However, minority status is reportedly granted only to wholly Greek villages and once two or three Albanian families arrive, the village loses that status. Greek children attending Greek language schools are taught in Greek during the first four years, subsequent Greek instruction being only as a foreign language.⁴⁴ When the Albanian government closed all minority schools in the early 1930's, Greece brought this matter to the Council of the League of Nations, which referred it to the Permanent Court of International Justice.⁴⁵ In its 1935 advisory opinion on "Greek Schools in Albania"; the Permanent Court concluded that members of the Greek minority were entitled to substantive equality with Albanian citizens, including the maintenance of their own Greek institutions and schools.⁴⁶ This was generally regarded by the Greek side as being something more than a mere procedural or legal equality.

Additionally, the authorities temporarily relocated individuals and families through legislation which was first introduced in 1949 and updated in the 1950s and 1960s again as Decree 5912 of 26 June 1979. Such decrees have been widely used by the authorities. Decree 5912 specifies internment of those "who represent a danger to the social system". It also permits the internment of those persons whose relatives fled Albania or went into hiding within the country. Reportedly, ethnic Greeks tended to be interned in the north of the country while ethnic Albanians were moved south. There are also allegations that the authorities moved Albanians into Greek majority areas and moved Greeks out, thus dispersing the Greek community.

Albania was a highly centralized state which attempted to exert a great measure of control over individuals' lives and many of the above measures are also applied to the entire Albanian population and as such are not explicitly aimed at the Greek or other minorities.⁴⁷ In last years, Berisha, who was President of Albania until July 1997, encouraged Albanians from the north of the country to settle in the districts where people used to speak Greek, thus both satisfying the land hunger and diluting what was left of the minority population. However, few northerners have moved south.⁴⁸

During Albania's communist era, successive Greek governments were unable to influence the Albanian government's policy on the Greek minority. With the advent of democracy in Albania, Greece hoped to be able to exert more influence. Under Enver Hoxha all foreign contacts were severely limited while his successor, Ramiz Alia, began to ease the restrictions in the late 1980s. For example, visitors in 1988 report extensive restoration of churches and mosques as cultural relics and tourist sites. Albania opened its borders to allow Greek nationals to visit relatives in Albania and some Albanians were allowed to travel to Greece with the prospect of free travel in the near future, following mass protests in December 1990. Numbers have increased steadily: in 1984, 87 Albanians traveled to Greece; in 1985, 301; and in 1986, 535. In 1985, 1265 Greeks traveled to Albania and in 1987 the figure was over 6000. Cultural exchanges were also occurring between the two countries.⁴⁹

3.5. Minority's Political Organisations

With the opening up of Albania, ethnic Greeks even established a party; however, things did not take the expected course and led to a deterioration of relations. In December 1991, the Greek minority was allowed to set up its own cultural organization, called OMONIA. The organization received permission on 31 March 1991 to field candidates in the country's first postwar democratic elections and won five seats in the parliament.⁵⁰ According to critics from both the opposition and the ruling socialist party, OMONIA had declared itself a party just before the elections without the knowledge of the Albanian public. These critics claimed that OMONIA was able to field candidates only because it was supported by President Ramiz Alia and some of his close pro-Hellenic associates. Although these allegations seem to have been basically election propaganda, just before the election, Berisha's Democratic Party introduced to the Parliament an amendment.⁵¹ The People's Parliament passed a law on 4 February 1992 forbidding parties based on ethnic principles and thus stopped OMONIA from standing. The law's proponents claimed that OMONIA could be classed as a political party only in a federative Albanian state and that the existence of such a state was contrary to the constitution. The ban received support from all parties in the parliament, except five ethnic Greek representatives. As a tide of anti-Greek and nationalist sentiment swept the country, the law was approved almost unanimously. This may in part be considered retaliation against Greece over the refugee question, since there was a growing disturbance among Albanian public caused by the deportations of Albanian illegal workers in big numbers by the Greek authorities. However, as one

OMONIA deputy said, “this will create another political crisis at a time when the Albanians need bread to eat and not nationalism.”

The Greek-minority political leaders complained that the ban violated the principles of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and threatened to boycott the elections. The Greek government protested the decision on the grounds that it was a blatant violation of minority rights. On Greece’s initiative the Council of Europe called for the law to be revised and hinted that it might otherwise withdraw the special guest status in the Parliamentary Assembly which it recently granted to Albania. But the leaders of the two main Albanian political parties-Fatos Nano of the Socialist Party and Sali Berisha of the Democrats- turned down the request. The controversial ban prompted the secretary-general of the Council of Europe, Catherine Lalumiere, to send a letter to President Alia voicing her concern about the rights of the Greek minority in the forthcoming elections, in March 1992.⁵²

Consequently, OMONIA placed their 29 candidates on the list of the Human Rights Union which henceforth was seen by all as the ethnic Greek Party⁵³ and in the March 1992 elections won 2 seats in the 140-Member People’s Assembly. They were the Human Rights Party deputies, Kostas Makariades and Thomas Mitsos. (The other two ethnic Greeks in the Albanian Parliament were Socialist Party deputies Anastasios Angels and Thedoros Beis.)⁵⁴ Later, OMONIA was

seriously divided over policy, with an emerging radical wing wanting enosis with Greece and border revision. OMONIA's previous policy of seeking improvements for ethnic Greeks within Albania has progressively been abandoned either for autonomy or enosis⁵⁵ (complete unity with Greece along the line of the Shkumbi river). In fact, there appears to be some sort of a dividing line in Albanian politics which, the Greeks might think, would help their ambitions. And the elections held twice after the end of the communist regime indicated that there might emerge a renewed ethnic/geographical polarization between the Gëgs who live in the north of the Shkumbini river and the Tosks who live to the south of the same river.

This polarization seemed all the more likely because conflict between north and south has in the past been an integral element of Albanian politics. For instance, the formation of the Albanian communist movement during the World War II was, in essence, a southern phenomenon. The early communist leadership was primarily Tosk and remained so for the duration of the communist period. Moreover, the inter-war northern domination led by the Gëg chieftain and Albanian King, Ahmed Zog, were resented by many southerners. Once in power, the communists made elimination of these differences an integral part of their program. The politically polarized labels "Gëg" and "Tosk" were abandoned, replaced by the neutral descriptions "northern Albanian" and "southern Albanian". However, the results of the aforementioned elections in 1992 looked like a comeback of regional differences.⁵⁶ The said government was dominated by northern Gëgs, with little contact or sympathy with the Greek minority, very few of whom ever lived in

northern Albania. In turn, Berisha's Democrats always distrusted many ethnic Greeks, who were suspected-sometimes justifiably-of having links with Communism and the Communist Party, at least among the Tirana professional elite, and in the Communist stronghold of Gjirokastra, Enver Hoxha's birthplace.⁵⁷

Ironically, the Albanian Stalinist leadership largely came from the south of the country. After 1992 right up to late June 1997 elections, the country's leaders tended to come from the north. Sali Berisha, for instance, hailed from Tropoje district adjacent to the border with Kosova in the north-east. Despite the government's democratic pretensions, this implicit religion-regionalism has only fanned Greek fears of unfair treatment.⁵⁸

Political tension in the minority areas rose steadily after the election of the 15-month-old Democratic Party (DP) government led by Dr. Sali Berisha in the 1992. Instead of minority rights improving with installation of first democratic government, ethnic Greeks say their lot was worsened as Berisha bowed to nationalists.⁵⁹

Another negative factor in community relations has been the widespread belief in the Democratic Party and some other quarters that since the end of Communism the minority has been receiving financial support and external investment-from Greece itself and from the Greek Diaspora-that were not available to ethnic Albanians.⁶⁰

3.6. Threat Perception

In fact, Albania has always been afraid that Greece still has territorial designs on Northern Epirus, briefly occupied by Greek troops during the World War I.⁶¹ Albania has always expressed fears about Greek extremists with designs on southern Albania, but Athens denies having territorial claims. However, Greek reference to the region as "Northern (Vorio) Epirus" might be considered as expansionist. The use of this geographical term is no less implicitly irredentist than the use of the name "Macedonia" by the former Yugoslav Republic at which Greeks themselves take so much offense.⁶² Relations became strained in the 1990s due to what the Albanians see as Greek Premier Mitsotakis' government's claims to southern Albania or, Northern Epirus. Deputy Prime Minister of Greece at the time, Athanasios Kanellopoulos, at a conference in Ioannina at the end of August 1990, reportedly demanded the redrawing of the boundaries and the Greek government reportedly attacked the previous Papandreou administration for lifting the state of war and its general policy of good-neighborliness towards Albania.⁶³

All Greek political parties profess support for defence of Northern Epirots. Although successive Greek governments have repeated that existing borders in the Balkans must be respected, a nationalist faction in the conservative opposition New Democratic Party spoke openly of the need to maintain the Greekness of southern Albania⁶⁴ and mentioned dangers facing Hellenism in the northern Epirus.⁶⁵ Defence Minister Kouris said in February 1994 that Greece might use

force to protect the ethnic Greek minority in Albania if its existence were threatened by an influx of Albanians from Kosova.⁶⁶ The then government spokesman, Venizelos reiterated that "the Greek community in Albania is entitled to certain well defined rights stemming from international law, and the Albanian Government has responding obligations which no one should overlook."⁶⁷ Greece, furthermore, raised the specter of territorial claims on southern Albania by insisting that Albania should be willing to grant ethnic Greeks the same rights it demands for the 2 million ethnic Albanians in the rump Yugoslavia.⁶⁸

By this way Greece apparently hoped to weaken Berisha's position and exact concessions on a special status for the Greek minority in Albania. But Greece's threatening stance had the opposite effect, resulting in an upsurge of support for Berisha and calls to halt the "Hellenization" of southern Albania. There was anger among Albanians over the deportations and, more generally, over the parallel Athens had drawn between ethnic Greeks and the Kosovars. Wary of its southern neighbor's long-term intentions, Tirana expressed concern that Greece, despite its assertion of neutrality in the Yugoslav war, had tilted toward Serbia; the Albanian media alleged that there was a "secret deal" between Greece and Serbia on southern Albania, Kosova, and Macedonia.⁶⁹

As in all former communist states, minority self assertion has been visible in Albania; demands for a panoply of "group rights" have perturbed Albanian leaders, fearful of social unrest and interethnic clashes.⁷⁰ Suspicions persisted at the same

time that the Mitsotakis government coordinated its policy with Milosevic to keep Albania destabilized in order to diminish pressures against Serbia for its repressive policies in the Albanian-majority province of Kosova. Indeed, Athenian claims that the status of Kosova and southern Albania should be directly linked to any international settlement indicated that Belgrade stood to benefit from Greek intransigence.⁷¹

Revanchist Greek circles, linked with Panhellenic extremists within the Greek Orthodox Church, have called for the acquisition of northern Epirus and sought to provoke an interstate crisis. Undoubtedly, Tirana played into their hands by overreacting to such provocation and by accusing Athens of deliberately fomenting unrest. Whereas the Mitsotakis government pandered to nationalist and xenophobia passions by expelling thousands of Albanian refugees, the Papandreou government demonstrated a willingness to play a more constructive role. Bilateral talks held in November 1993 aimed at easing tensions seemingly made progress in addressing minority issues.⁷²

While some signs of inter-ethnic cooperation, like the joint Albanian/Greek companies in Gjirokastra, came out, tensions were nevertheless growing. Many Albanians strongly reacted to the enthronement of the Greek Archbishop of the Albanian Autocephalous Church, Anastasios Yannoullatos, and demanded his withdrawal. Meanwhile, in Greece, nationalist pressure was growing for enosis. The Albanians appeared increasingly impotent in the face of actions such as that

when the ethnic Greek Olympic weight-lifter, Piros Dhimas, was feted in Greece, in the name of the Greek Prime Minister, as a Greek from "non-liberated lands".⁷³ Greek authorities claimed that they were making these statements because Greece's steadfast position was to make efforts to improve Greek-Albanian relations and assistance in Albania's development but they made it clear that any improvement in relations depended on respect for the ethnic Greek minority in Albania.⁷⁴ The then Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, for instance, stressed in July 1994 that the firm position of Athens was to improve bilateral relations but added that this depended on improving living conditions for the Greek minority, adopting a law for teaching Greek throughout the Albanian state and returning church property.⁷⁵

Berisha, in response, said that Albania was applying international standards in dealing with the ethnic minority problems but did not expect this to please Greek nationalists seeking to Hellenize southern Albania, and that Greece was making a fuss about the treatment of ethnic Greeks in Albania to distract attention from its own ethnic minority problems. He then called on Greece to apply to its minorities the same standards that Albania applied to its Greek minority. Berisha said that Greek nationalist circles would never be pleased, but that it was very important for them to apply the Copenhagen and Helsinki standards to the treatment of minorities living in Greece.⁷⁶

3.7. Claims About Minority Rights Violations

With some justification as explained above, the Greeks in Albania claim to have

suffered persecution during the country's half-century of Stalinism. Despite the fact that the changes that have taken place in Albania for the last five years have improved the condition for the population, in general, important problems remain to be resolved for the Greek minority, according to the Greeks. Specifically, these are as follows:

a) Minority rights are acknowledged only to the villages deemed "minoritarian" by the Government. Such is the case in 99 villages, in the prefectures of Sarande (Aghii Saranda) and Gjirokastra. If, however, even a few Albanian families move to that same village, its inhabitants lose such rights. They are no longer provided with an education in Greek, nor are they taught in Greek in the areas that are inhabited by members of the Greek minority, but which are not granted minority status. Consequently, Greek education and minority rights are absent in cities such as Korçe (Korysta), Himare (Himara), Tepelene, Fier, Vlore (Avlona), Shkoder, Berat, Permed, Elbasan, or even Tirana, where Greeks live. Even the cities of Sarande and Gjirokastra, capitals of two prefectures that have received the status of minority areas, are excluded from having minority rights. Despite the fact that a large numbers of Greeks live there, the minority is considered, officially, as being of non-Greek origin.

b) In the areas where Greek education is allowed, courses are designed to terminate at the fourth grade of the elementary school; schools are few and students are lectured on the history and civilization of the Albanian nation, and not the Greek. According to these claims, the violation of the educational rights of the Greek

minority in Albania dates from the time of the League of Nations. Such frequent violations forced the International Court of Justice in the Hague, to deliver the well-known decision of 1935, with which it forced the Albanian Government to comply with its international obligations, as they related to the educational rights of the Greek ethnic minority.

c) Within the framework of a policy of forced assimilation and deprivation of ethnic identity carried out by previous Albanian governments visa-a-vis the Greek minority, the statistical data have been altered significantly. The minority has always been currently presented as being a fourth of its real size (according to most estimates).

d) The region that has been declared a "minority area" is only a small part of the region where the Greek minority has traditionally lived. Greeks residing outside these bounds were considered of Albanian nationality and lost their minority rights. Moreover, in the past, the Greeks were encouraged to leave the region, in search of employment, or forced to abandon the minority areas, exiled by the Government. The campaign was to a large degree successful, and minority members were dispersed throughout the country. It is estimated that at least 15.000-20.000 are now living in Tirana ⁷⁷, being deprived of their minority status. At the same time, large groups of Albanians, or even Albanian villages in their entirety, were moved and resettled in Greek minority areas and villages.

e) The Greek toponyms were substituted by Albanian ones, Greek ruins were named "Lyric" and their character was significantly altered. Byzantine churches were shut down, turned into warehouses or destroyed.

f) The repudiation of religions in Albania, in 1967, had a particularly negative effect on Greeks (disproportionately larger than the effect on others, for example Muslims), since their Orthodox faith is a main element of their national identity. Religious freedoms have been recently reinstated, but the lack of churches, clergy and infrastructure in general, coupled with the fact that the property of the Church was taken away by the regime, makes practicing extremely difficult.⁷⁸

The Greek minority who has its own-language primary schools also wants its own secondary schools and university education, economic "decentralization", and full representation in the police, judiciary, military and civil service.⁷⁹⁸⁸

In 1994 the Greek government denounced Albania at the UN for flagrantly violating human rights and in particular religious freedoms safeguarded by international law and the UN Charter.⁸⁰ Papoulias had meetings with the then CSCE's High Commissioner for Minorities, Max van der Stoep on recent human rights violations against ethnic Greeks in Albania.⁸¹ In 1995 delegates at the 29th Congress of Panepirotic Federation of America, Canada and Australia which was held in Washington, issued a resolution calling on Albanian government to show respect for the political, cultural, educational and religious rights of Greeks of southern Albania in compliance with that country's binding international agreements, also called on Tirana to end public employment discrimination against members of ethnic Greek minority.⁸²

This resolution urged Greek government to make certain in its current dialogue with Tirana not to sign any understandings including a border agreement that did not guarantee the security and safety of the Greek community in Albania. It also asked Athens to provide Northern Epirotes working in Greece legal documentation to travel in and out of the country freely and to help them economically to return to their homes and earn their livelihoods.⁸³ The resolution also called on governments of the U.S., Canada and Australia to make aid to Albania dependent on Albania's progress in respect to the human rights of ethnic Greeks in Albania. The federation pledged that if Albania complied with international agreements, it would support its efforts to fully integrate into the international community.⁸⁴ President of Pan Epirote Federation in the USA also made several statements in the US Congress regarding the conditions of Greek minority in Albania.⁸⁵

Although US State Department spokesman responded to this at the time by saying that there was no reliable evidence to indicate that the Albanian government was oppressing the Greek minority,⁸⁶ the State Department report on state of human rights worldwide in 1994 included references to "serious violations of human rights in Albania", adding that the Greek minority continued in 1994 to have "complaints about unfavorable discrimination, especially in educational and religious matters." As a result, President Clinton told Berisha that the U.S. was looking to the Albanian government to respect the rights of the country's Greek minority concerning educational opportunity, freedom to practice one's religion and freedom from discrimination in employment.⁸⁷

Similarly, the Council of Europe tied membership for Albania to progress on human rights issues. The Parliamentary Committee recommended that Albania abolish death penalty and ratify the European Convention safeguarding the minority rights.⁸⁸ In fact, Albania tried to fulfill these demands by introducing a new penal code⁸⁹ and ratifying the European Convention of the Defence of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms.⁹⁰ These critics had repercussions. An interesting example is that Boston University abruptly canceled plans to award an honorary degree to Berisha, citing Albania's alleged failure to provide proper education to its Greek minority. The university president said "Boston University will have to resolve this doubt over the education issue before conferring an honorary degree".⁹¹

As an answer to these critics, Berisha said: "claims that Greek authorities are dissatisfied with the rights of Greek minority in Albania are not sincere and serious since these cases have been examined by EU Commission and the Parliament. Over the last two years, dozens of international commissions of CSCE, CE and EU have come and they have made no significant observations, apart from asserting the great improvement in the situation and the Greek minority's rights."⁹² He complained of what he called anti-Albanian propaganda broadcast by two private Greek radio stations.⁹³ The Radio Station run by Greek Orthodox Church was broadcasting Pan-Hellenic propaganda from northern Greece. The radio was operated by priests in Konitsa. The priests said Greek politicians were on the side

of Northern Epirus movement and it was a fact that Athens turned a deaf ear to Tirana's request for the radio to be silenced. Church authorities in Konitsa trained 40 young men belonging to Greek minority in Albania. They reportedly further expressed that these recruits were sent back to Albania after training to fight for pan-Hellenism and stop this land being taken over by Islam.⁹⁴



CHAPTER IV-CAMERIA-ÇAMURIA

4.1. The Albanian Minority In Greece

Albania stoked the Cameraia issue by way of tit-for-tat. Cameraia, in northern Greece, concentrated in the Suli region, has an Albanian minority (Tsamidhes-Çamuris) numbering roughly the same as the Greeks in Albania. It became part of Greece in 1913, although it was briefly under the nominal control of Albania during the Italian occupation in 1941.¹

While much commentary focused on the position of the Greek minority in Albania, there is very little information about the Albanian minority in Greece. Most of these Albanians were Orthodox by religion although there were Muslim Albanian Çams in northern Greece up till immediately after World War II. During the war attempts were made by the Italian occupiers to harness them against the Greeks, and as a result, there occurred a backlash against them after the war with many being driven into Albania and mosques burnt.²

4.2. The Structure And Number

The Orthodox Albanians, similarly with other Orthodox minorities, tended to become Hellenicized due to the Greek control over the education system. Three generations ago there were many Albanian-speaking people in Attica, Boeotica,

southern Euboea and Hydra while the Plaka district in Athens by the Acropolis was the Albanian quarter of the city with its own law courts using the Albanian language.³

According to the Greek sources, in 1923 there were 20.319 Albanian speaking Moslem people in Greece. But the Greek census of April 7, 1951 put their number as only 127. They further assert that, Çam people currently live in three villages; there are 13 people in Argyrotopos, 7 in Sybota and 36 in Mazarakia.⁴ On the other hand, the Federal Union of European Nationalities, based in Austria, claims that there are 95,000 Albanians in Greece while the Democratic League of Cameria, based in USA, claims the huge figure of over one million, of whom over 100,000 are claimed to be from the border region with Albania. Such huge figures appear fanciful in the extreme, and there is little sign of this minority today. It appears that the shared religion under Greek control and the education system greatly facilitated their total assimilation into Greece.⁵

4.3. Minority's Political Organisations

In March 1991, on the basis of the Presidential Decree dated December 19, 1990 and no. 7442, a political organisation named "Çameria-Vatra-Amtare" was established. The chairman of the Association, Abas Dojaka declared their primary aim as "recognition and respect of the rights of Çams" in their first meeting on March 17, 1991. Dojaka added that Çams should obtain their legal rights and be

recognized as minority by the Greek State; so that they would be able to enjoy their ethnic, cultural, religious and language rights. He condemned the politics of Greek government/s that has denied the existence of Çam people and the claim that the Çams collaborated with the Axis Powers during World War II. Dojaka further stated that the duty of the Association was to recover the significant documents and realities which would refute these slanders. The program of the Association stated that “Çameria-Vatra-Amtare” was to establish contacts with all international organisations, especially in the neighboring countries like ex-Yugoslavia, Turkey and Bulgaria, which dealt with the minority problems.⁶

4.4. Compensation Issue

The problem of compensation for the property of these people has arisen occasionally. At the latest, when the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, Goodneighborliness and Security was signed between Greece and Albania, a deputy of Republican Party put forward the problem of Çam people who have been pushed out in different circumstances from Greece after World War II. He urged that this treaty according to the documents should recognize explicitly rights of property to Çams, and he expressed his concern that Greek side based on its legal system might be interested to solve this problem in its favor.⁷ However, the Greek side did not accept the question of compensation for the property of Albanian minority of Çameria as an issue.⁸ The Greek authorities declared that Greece considered them to be war criminals since they assisted the communists during the

Greek civil war and collaborated with Axis powers during World War II.⁹ According to the Greeks, especially for two decades after the Albanian State was established in 1912, Çam people became a toy of politics. They assert that the Albanian side has been trying to create a minority problem in neighboring Greece.¹⁰ The Albanian Parliament decision's to unanimously approve a proposal, declaring 27th June the anniversary of the Çamuris' genocide was another factor which created a climate of tension in Greek-Albanian relations.



CHAPTER V: RELIGION

Apart from reasons stated above, the religious dimension played a significant role in the deterioration of the relations. The Greek Orthodox Church traditionally adopted the most extreme position on the rights of the Greek minority, and the Orthodox leaders have been most vehement advocates of annexation of southern Albania to Greece.¹ Members of the Greek Orthodox Church appeared to be most vehement in their irredentist leanings towards southern Albania. Orthodox Metropolitan Sevastianos, based in the northern Greek town of Konitsa, whose diocese theoretically encompassed much of southern Albania, appeared to be a strong proponent of the cause of the Greek Movement for the recovery of 'Northern Epirus'.² He campaigned ceaselessly for the restoration of religious freedom in Albania with the support of Greek irredentist organisations in Greece.³

Particularly after Hoxha's death and the lifting of the ban on religious activity, which occurred in the 1989-92 period, a priority for the minority was the restoration of the position of the Orthodox church. In physical terms, this was achieved quickly, and on the whole without obstruction from the Albanian state. Afterwards, Albanian clerics became increasingly sensitive to the possibility that the Greek Orthodox hierarchy (and by extension the Greek government) might

exercise a strong influence over domestic religious affairs, and felt uneasy about the prospect of more clerics working in the country.⁴

With the rehabilitation of religion in Albania since 1990, religious argument has been increasingly interwoven with political and territorial considerations. Greek clerics, allowed into the country to help rebuild the churches, were subsequently viewed by some Albanians as a Greek nationalist fifth column, preaching division and secession.⁵ In October 1992, the appointment of a Greek Orthodox Exarch, Anastasios Yannoullatos as the Archbishop of the Albanian Orthodox Church by the Patriarch in Istanbul created problems since it contradicted with the Church statutes which stipulated that the leader of the Church must be an Albanian citizen. However, the Albanian government recognized the appointment of the Exarch, perhaps in order to avoid a serious diplomatic confrontation with Greece.⁶

The Albanian officials later stated that Yannoullatos was performing his duties well, pointing out that his appointment was in any case to be a temporary one until an Albanian could be made ready to assume the post.⁷ However, when Berisha made statements to the effect that he acknowledged the positive role of Anastasios, Greek side interpreted it as meaning that Albanian authorities used to make similar acknowledgments in the past, without this being an obstacle to their governments' efforts to intervene in the Albanian Orthodox Church and oust the Archbishop.⁸ But Anastasios has often found himself in the cross fire of relations between two

states. The deterioration of Albanian-Greek relations frequently reminded the Albanian state leaders that the Orthodox church is headed by a Greek priest.⁹

The tension soon heightened again with Tirana's decision in mid-1993 to expel Chyrosostomos ("Goldentongued") Maidonis, one of the three Orthodox archimandrites, ("abbot") who were appointed by the Patriarch on the grounds that his work transcended the religious scope of his assignment. "While working within the safe confines of the Orthodox Church", claimed the Albanian government, "he expressed openly territorial claims and engaged in the distribution of maps, leaflets, and brochures that present or demand the Hellenization and the annexation of southern Albania to Greece". In support of these accusations Albanian Television displayed evidence against Maidonis that included maps produced in Greece showing Greece extending to the Shkumbi River which runs approximately through the middle of Albania from east to west, just south of Tirana.¹⁰ The Greek consul in Gjirokastra was informed of the deportation prior to its taking place, but his attempts to physically prevent it came to no avail.¹¹

When some Albanian ethnic Greeks sought to travel to Gjirokastra to protest, they were forcibly stopped by Albanian riot police. Athens responded to this by reinvigorating its policy of expelling illegal Albanian immigrants, some 30,000 of whom were removed within days. While relatively minor by Balkan standards, these incidents were indicative of a wider malaise within the region, compounded

by the fact that while the Greek media rallied to the defence of the Orthodox church, the Albanian media ignored the Gjirokastra problems and carried round-the-clock reports on the plight of the Albanian expellees returning from Greece.¹²

The then Albanian President Berisha appealed to the then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali for UN intervention to put an end to the Greek government's deportations. He argued that the migrants had been indiscriminately seized, maltreated and beaten, a claim later reiterated by the Albanian foreign ministry. Berisha asserted that the expelled Greek cleric had openly expressed territorial claims. Albania recalled its ambassador to Greece for "consultations", and Greece canceled three planned official visits to Albania, making it clear that the expulsions would continue until all illegal Albanian immigrants had been returned. For their part, the Greek government sent dispatches to the UN, to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and to the World Council of Churches, complaining about the deportation of the cleric.¹³

In the meantime, there was an expansion of surveillance of the Greek minority by SHIK, the Albanian Secret Service. The Greek reaction was harsh. Particularly, aiming to preempt the opposition Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), avoid a break-off with Greek religious circles and, moreover, send Tirana a message, Mitsotakis used the Maidonis issue as a pretext to begin dealing with "the

Albanian Problem". In a very short time about 25.000 illegal Albanians in Greece were sent back to their homeland.¹⁴

Meanwhile, there were minor events, for instance, claims that the Albanian authorities were preventing the North Epirotes from celebrating Orthodox Easter. Despite repeated requests by Archbishop Anastasios in 1993 and 1994, the Albanian authorities refused to allow a procession for the burial of Christ and a celebration of Easter according to custom, since it would supposedly block traffic.

When Berisha proposed a draft constitution instead of a package of new laws introduced in 1991, having replaced the constitution which was in force since 1976,¹⁵ the Greek government said the specific article in the proposed constitution in essence meant the ousting of Archbishop.¹⁶ Consequently, Greece accused Albania of trying to remove the archbishop using the pretext of article 7 in a draft constitution requiring that "the leaders of large religious communities should be Albanian citizens, have been born in Albania and lived permanently in the country for the past 20 years."¹⁷ and denounced Albania to UN accusing it of engineering the removal of Anastasios through that article. However, voters eventually rejected the draft constitution in a referendum on November 6, 1994.¹⁸

In August 1996, Patriarchate of Istanbul had asked Archbishop Yannoullatos of Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, to perform the rite of induction of three Greek candidates to the senior posts of metropolitans of Gjirokastra, Vlore, Korce but Yannalloutos objected²⁰ since Patriarchy consecrated the three bishops

for three dioceses in Albania without the approval of Albanian church and state and fully violating the status of Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.²¹ The Patriarch said that following his own appointment in 1992, Berisha made it clear that he would not accept any more Greek bishops in Albania, therefore he favored dialogue with the Albanian state authorities.

The key point of the statute of Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church of 1929 says that the clergies and hierarchies should be of Albanian nationality and citizenship. The point is also included in the statutes of all the autocephalous Orthodox churches. The Istanbul patriarchate recognized the autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church in 1936.²² The Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church said in its explanation that Yannoullatos has said in his letters to Istanbul Patriarchate that "if the Patriarch, without coming to agreement with Albanian authorities, undertakes the realization of the said decision, the resistance will be much more negative".²³

The Albanian Committee for the Defence of Autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church on 1st August launched a protest to Istanbul Patriarchate Fanari, to Patriarch Bartholomeu, against the nomination of three Greek bishops as metropolitans of Gjirokastra, Vlore and Korce.²⁴ The protest said: "the Orthodox believers and the entire Albanian people consider this an ill-willing act and interference into the internal affairs of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church. It stressed that the main point of the autocephaly status of the Albanian

Orthodox Church attained in 1929, as well as in all other autocephalous churches of the other Balkan countries, requires that clergies and high-ranking religious hierarchies be of the Albanian nationality and citizenship, excluding the minority zones, where minority clergies will say masses in the Greek language".²⁵

The letter the representative of the Albanian government Bardhyl Fico handed over on August 2, 1996 to the Patriarch of the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church, Anastasios Yannoullatos, said the following: "We are surprised at the fact that the patriarchate without a preliminary talk with Albanian government representatives, takes the decision that the whole synod be composed of Greeks. This not only goes beyond any ethics of relations between sides, and at the same time jars into the national consciousness of our people, also including the Albanian Orthodox. Please, Your Holiness, make known our firm stand not to allow any foreign clergy to run the religion affairs in Albania." The letter of Albanian government stressed that this approach had nothing to do whatsoever with the friendship between the Albanian and Greek peoples.²⁶ The important point is that this incident did not produce any severe reactions on the part of Athens like in 1993 due to the smoothing climate, to be explained below.

CHAPTER VI: ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION OF ALBANIAN WORKERS TO GREECE

It is worth noting that some political and religious leaders in Athens began to revive the “Northern Epirus” question precisely at a time when increasing numbers of reports of mistreatment of Albanian refugees in Greece were issued.¹

The illegal Albanian workers in Greece and the rights of an ethnic Greek minority in southern Albania have always been among the most serious contentious issues between the two countries. Athens has accused Tirana of persecuting the minorities. Albania, as a response, claimed Greece was mistreating the Albanian workers and tensions frequently reached the highest point with mass deportations of Albanians from Greece. Greece has tried to use them as a leverage while Albania has been applying the same for the Greek minority. Therefore, it is necessary to see the developments against the background of the general problem of Albanian illegal immigration in Greece. With the collapse of Albanian communism and deterioration of the economic conditions, thousands of Albanians fled their homeland migrating either to Greece or to Italy.

As it follows the very remote terrain of the Grammos mountains, it has never been possible, then or since, to police it easily and prevent illegal population

movements. In historic terms, dating back to antiquity, these have largely been in one direction only-surplus population from the poor mountainous regions of Albania seeking to find work and a better future in Greece.

With a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of about \$350, Albania is at the same level as Sri Lanka. Figures on unemployment vary from 35% to 80%, a crisis, in either case. Inflation in 1991 was running at 600%, the state continued to pay workers 80% of their salaries. Production was almost at a complete halt owing to a lack of raw materials, and agricultural production declined some 50%.²

The workers are estimated sending home some approximately \$300 million Dollars in remittances a year to support their families, three times that of the country's annual exports³ and accounted up to 50% of GDP, which was officially estimated at about \$3 billion in 1994, up 8% from 93. After concerted expulsions in 1994, Athens said about 150,000 Albanians worked illegally in Greece,⁴ while Tirana declaring this number as being closer to 300,000⁵ -about 10 percent of the nation's labor force.⁶

According to the General Confederation of Workers of Greece (GSEE) estimates, 51,000 foreigners were working in Greece at the beginning of 1995. In 1994, the number of illegal immigrants exceeded 400,000 of whom about half were Albanians before mass expulsions in October 1994. The estimates did not differ greatly from Public Order Ministry figures which put the number of foreigners

legally working in Greece at 76,200 and illegal immigrants at 395,000.⁷ It might be thought that temporary immigration of Albanians to Greece helps diffuse tensions arising from the explosive social and economic conditions in Albania. In fact since the fall of communism and disintegration of Stalin regime successive governments looked upon immigration to Greece as the only way out of internal anarchy and total chaos. Eventually, Albania stopped policing its border, thus encouraging its citizens to cross illegally into Greece, this resulted in a massive exodus of criminals towards the more profitable Greek cities.⁸

At any one time, there are 100.000 or more Albanians working in Greece, most of them illegally, and from time to time the Greek government makes attempts to expel them in big numbers. In January 1991, more than 10,000 Albanians, many of them ethnic Greek, took the opportunity of political confusion within the country to trudge through difficult wintry mountainous conditions across the border into Greece. This prompted Athens to send an official delegation to Tirana - the first high-level government group to visit Albania since World War II- headed by Prime Minister Constantinos Mitsotakis. Agreement was reached to stop the flow and for Athens to send back the refugees "without adverse consequences" for them when they returned to Albania. In turn, Albania was promised an immediate credit of \$20 million by Athens. Yet this did not deter desperate Albanians who continued to take the difficult escape route throughout 1991.⁹ There were reports of up to 200.000 Albanians crossing the border, most of whom were forcibly sent back. Most fled Albania via its southern border with Greece and, despite deportations,

the influx continued. In late 1991 reports in Albania alleged that Albanians in Greece were being subjected to ill-treatment and forcibly being given passports with the names changed (presumably Hellenicized).¹⁰

For Greece, traditionally a country of emigration rather than of immigration, this sudden influx of a huge mass of people was almost a national trauma. Since Greece is a poor country by Western standards and has its own unemployment problems, it could not cope with either economic or social problems.¹¹ Moreover, the reports of the Greek Ministry of Public Order regarding the high rate of crime among the young Albanians caused uneasiness among the public. The Greek press routinely ran stories about Albanian criminal activity and tended to blame the Albanian migrants for a multitude of problems. While Greek officials described Albanians in Greece as imported violence.¹²

Police said that illegal immigrants crossing border into Greece coincided with a significant increase in crime reaching 40% in certain categories.¹³ In fact, criminality of Albanian citizens in Greece has been very high since about 2000 Albanians are held in Greek prisons.¹⁴ Even in last years, the Greek police carried out wide operations of expelling Albanian refugees from Greece upon the pretext that according to statistics, 70 % of stealing in Attica region in Athens were committed by economic migrants from Romania and Albania.¹⁵

Greece also complained that it spent 6.6 billion drachmas in deporting 1 million Albanian illegal immigrants over the past 4 years. In first 9 months of 1995 alone, police arrested 175.000 Albanian illegal immigrants. Repatriation costs include the hire of special vehicles, tickets, fuel, food expenses for sustaining and remunerating police participating in arrest and repatriation processes and renting buildings to detain illegal immigrants. Police announced, however, deportations were of little deterrence that those deported often attempted to return to Greece since border surveillance measures on Albanian side were non-existent.¹⁶ There was considerable popular pressure in Greece for stronger controls on refugee movements of ethnic Albanians and growing sympathy for the problems of the Northern Epirot Greeks. There was considerable risk of increasing and messy involvement of the Greek security forces in trying to hold the ring on the existing border between complex population movements and conflicting policy objectives in Athens.¹⁷

Greece had several reasons for removing Albanians : (a) they were exacerbating the unemployment situation in Greece by saturating the casual labor market; (b) they appeared to have a worse than average record of lawbreaking, a factor seized upon and emphasized by Greek politicians; and (c) Greeks were becoming particularly concerned about the post-communist resurgence of Islam in Albania and how it could "infect" the Orthodox Greek state. On the one hand, the expulsions appeared to be indirectly beneficial to the EU since the Union was substantially underpinning funding for Greek unemployment support, but on the

other hand, with an increasing interest in Albanian affairs, the EU had no wish to see potentially destabilizing acts taking place in the region.¹⁹ However, there appears to be no immediate end to the pressure to emigrate and on 11 January 1992 a crowd of over 1,000 "band on exodus" gathered near the port of Vlore and battled with the police.²⁰

In turn, Greeks living close to the Albanian border in northern Greece have been subjected to a widespread and pervasive revival of traditional patterns of Balkan banditry carried out by armed gangs of ethnic Albanians, and a general breakdown of law and order and widespread thefts of property by ethnic Albanian itinerants. In these conditions, with many residents of northern Greece believing that the government in Athens does not take their problems sufficiently seriously, there has been an increase in the formation of informal vigilante groups to protect property, a reversion to the pattern of life in the region in pre-industrial times. The government in Athens had then to announce its intention to form organized citizens militias to try to improve public order in these border regions.²¹

Subsequently, the then Greek Prime Minister Papandreou introduced strict border control with Albania in order to stop the wave of Albanians illegally entering Greece.²² On 8 September 1994, the border crossing point of Kakavije was blocked.²³ The Albanian authorities began to condemn what they claimed was a deliberate policy of persecuting and torturing Albanian refugees. In February 1994 a Foreign Ministry note sent to the Greek ambassador protested attacks on

Albanians, alleging "violence, beatings and humiliation" by the Greek border forces and describing them as a flagrant violation of human rights." The ministry also briefed US and West European diplomatic representatives on this "anti-Albanian escalation". The protest was taken by the Greeks as an attempt to soften the impact of reports that the previous week Albanians had gone on a three-day rampage, ransacking shops and political party offices and attacking individual members of the Greek minority in the southern towns of Delvine and Sarande, apparently in retaliation for the ill-treatment of refugees in Greece.²⁴

In its chapter on Greece, the US 1994 State Department report on human rights said "reliable reports on abuse of Albanian illegal immigrants by the security forces continued and the Albanian authorities have officially protested the arrests and deportations, of the period between August-November, 1994, of 115.000 illegal Albanians, which it claimed resulted in the deaths of 6-8 people".²⁵ There were also references to similar events in the 1995 Report.²⁶

Greece, on the other hand, tried to soften its new tough stance by declaring that it would increase emergency food aid to Albania, but reportedly this aid was either not forthcoming or on arrival, was earmarked by Athens mainly for ethnic Greeks in Albania.²⁷

Thus, the relations between Tirana and Athens entered a new stage which might be called as war of words. While the Albanian authorities began to condemn what they described as a deliberate policy of persecuting and torturing Albanian refugees, the Greek side accused the Albanian government of conniving the attacks on the individual members of the Greek minority in the southern towns of Delvine and Sarande as retaliation for the ill-treatment of refugees in Greece. During 1995-96, Greece and Albania tried to reach an agreement over the status of Albanians working illegally in Greece and Greece was working to find ways to legalize them perhaps as seasonal workers to avoid further incidents.²⁸



CHAPTER VII: LATEST EVENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Period Between 1994 and 1996

7.1.1. Episcopi Incident

It was not until 1994 that the Greek-Albanian relations took a sharp turn for, in fact the worst since the end of the Second World War. In April 1994, the Greek-Albanian relations deteriorated after an attack on a conscript training center two and a half miles from the Greek-Albanian border in Gjirokastra, near Episcopi in which two Albanian soldiers were killed and several others wounded. According to Albanian sources it was a commando style raid conducted by a small paramilitary unit shouting pro-Greek slogans.¹ Therefore, Albania claimed that the attack was carried out by Greek Special Forces.

On 12 April, Berisha accused the Greek government, specifically its intelligence services, of promoting terrorism and general instability in the Balkans in the wake of the killing of two Albanian soldiers by a Greek irredentist band. Berisha blasted the Athens authorities as having adopted a policy of "bands and blockades", the latter a reference to Greece's unilateral embargo against Macedonia. On 13 April Tirana called for a European Commission inquiry and called on the UN Security Council to condemn Greece for state terrorism over the border incident. Albania also ordered the Greek Consul General in Gjirokastra to leave the country and

recalled its own ambassador to Greece. Athens in turn expelled the first secretary of the Albanian Embassy.²

Greek government flatly rejected Albanian charges at the UN that Greece was behind the terrorist act. However, Greece did not rule out the possibility that the attack may have been the work of Greek extremists since a previously unheard Greek group calling itself the Northern Epirus Liberation Front (MAVI) claimed responsibility for the attack.³ By the end of April 1994, Tirana had launched a series of raids on the headquarters and houses of OMONIA members. The raids resulted in weapons seizures and six arrests on 21 April, 1994: ethnic Greeks, Theodoros Bezanis, Heracles Syrmos and Costas Kyriakou, inhabitants of Gjirokastra; Vangelis Papachristou, inhabitant of Sarande; and Panagiotis Martos and Kostas Cavos, inhabitants of Delvine.⁴ Albanian authorities charged the six all high ranking members of OMONIA, with espionage, fomenting separatism and possessing weapons without license. The six were also charged with maintaining links with the Greek secret service and put on trial.⁵

The then Greek Minister of Press and Media and Government Spokesman Venizelos proposed a meeting between Greek and Albanian foreign ministers to defuse tension but rejected an international or CSCE committee being formed to look into the incident. He charged Tirana with violating international law with arrests of Greek minority,⁶ adding that "Greek people, that hosts thousands of Albanian citizens in Greece, thereby also supporting the Albanian economy, feels

offended by the conduct of the Albanian authorities against ethnic Greeks. The Greek government will take all necessary steps to protect internationally recognized rights of ethnic Greek minority.”⁷

At the beginning of May 1994, Papoulias and his counterpart Serreqi met to review Greek-Albanian problems. During the negotiations Albania called on Greek side to activate itself towards arresting perpetrators. Greece condemned the incident and rejected even indirect attribution of responsibility and called for the creation of a joint committee by two countries to resolve the incident. It also called for the release of the remaining five ethnic Greeks still being detained but no commitment was made by the Albanian side.⁸ After the meeting, the Greek government spokesman Venizelos accused Tirana of needlessly fermenting unrest without proof.⁹ He stated that “the rights of the Greek minority in Albania as mere declarations are not sufficient, specific legal, administrative, police and judicial practice must be formulated and the latest wave of arrest of ethnic Greeks neither creates the right climate nor provides the necessary guaranties for that.”¹⁰ Moreover, in reaction to the arrests, Athens blocaded an EU aid package of 15 million ECU's (19 million \$) for Albania.¹¹ Greek Deputy Foreign Minister said that Greece rejected granting EU aid to Albania until it saw the result of the Tirana trial and Albanian progress with respect to the Greek minorities' rights.¹²

Albanian Foreign Ministry declared that, “being informed that in the 16 May 1994 meeting of the EC economy and finance ministers, the Greek Government

representative blocked the decision to make a grant as assistance to the balance of payments, the Foreign Ministry expresses its regret for this action which runs counter to the EC Commission recommendations and the unreserved approval by the European Parliament. Besides this, no other representative from the 12 EC countries, present in the aforementioned meeting, had any objection to granting this assistance.”¹³

But all this fell on deaf ears in Greece which hardened its stance. Opposition New Democracy Party leader Miltiades Evert stated that there would be a collision between Greece and Albania if the persecution of the Greek minority continued while Foreign Minister Papoulias said that there would be a conflict situation at political and diplomatic levels.¹⁴ Papoulias said that he had sent a letter to the UN Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali and to the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher on what had happened and two ethnic Greek deputies sitting in Albania’s 140-member parliament, who had earlier denounced these detentions as a flagrant violation of human rights.¹⁵

On the other hand some adversary voices were raised in Albania. For instance, Albanian Socialist Party Deputy Chairman Hajdaraga said that trial of five citizens of Greek minority was proceeding in a charged atmosphere of relationships between Greece and Albania. He also said that further measures of a similar nature would only exacerbate the already highly charged atmosphere between the two countries.¹⁶ In September, five ethnic Greeks were sentenced to prison terms

ranging from 6 to 8 years by a Tirana court. Athens called the trial an attempt to intimidate the 300,000 strong ethnic Greek minority in Albania.¹⁷ Their conviction touched off a bitter diplomatic confrontation between two neighbors.¹⁸ Greece demanded release of prisoners as a precondition for establishing normal diplomatic relations.¹⁹

Berisha, on his part, demanded the resumption of dialogue with Greece, but he set conditions. Specifically, he called upon the Greek government to dissociate itself from, and condemn, the policy of the so-called Northern Epirus Movement. He also proposed the signing of a bilateral treaty on the existing borders between the two countries on the basis of CSCE principles, as well as recognition of Albanian minority in Greece. Responding this allegedly “provocative” statement, government spokesman Venizelos stressed that Berisha, being a captive of radical nationalists and extremists circles, opted for the road of tension.²⁰

On the other hand, the EU insisted that Greece and Albania immediately start negotiations to ease the tension in mutual relations. The EU, especially Germany, was bringing pressure to bear on Greece insisting that Athens compromise with Tirana in order to end the crisis. German Foreign Minister Kinkel told an informal meeting of the EU foreign ministers in Germany that Greece should lift its veto on EU economic aid to Albania.²¹ On 21 September, German Ambassador in Greece presented to Deputy Foreign Minister Kranidhiotis a letter from the foreign

ministers of Germany and France in which they asked for talks on the issues of Albania and Macedonia within the framework of the EU troika.²²

The German presidency assumed the responsibility of conveying to the Albanian government the EU partners' concern regarding the violation of human rights in that country and developments in the trial of five OMONIA members.²³

On Christmas Eve, Berisha pardoned one of five ethnic Greeks, Heracles Syrmos, since he had already spent 18 years in jail during the regime of Enver Hoxha and reduced jail terms of the others in what he called "a move to ease tension" with Athens. Greek government spokesman Evangelos Venizelos evaluated the move in a statement as a positive step but stressed that it obviously did not resolve the issue.²⁴ In the meantime, US President Clinton had undertaken an initiative to smoothen Greek-Albanian relations. Clinton called on Greece to begin unconditional dialog with Albania.²⁵

Greece responded to this call immediately as Papandreou said there was already a dialog with Tirana on the issue at level of ambassadors and foreign ministers but high level politicians' dialogue would bring no results as long as Tirana refused to put an end to sufferings of ethnic Greeks imprisoned on charges of spying. Papandreou expressed the hope that Berisha would realize that it was in his country's interest to have good relations with Greece.²⁶ President Clinton had sent

letters to the Albanian and Greek leaders and dispatched a senior adviser, Richard Schiffer to the region seeking to defuse the escalating feud.

In his letter addressed to Berisha, Clinton asked him to pardon the four ethnic Greeks still imprisoned on espionage charges. Clinton expressed his concern over the expulsion of illegal Albanian immigrants from Greece and pointed out that Papandreou agreed in principle in settling the issue on the basis of which Albanian temporary workers might enter Greece with proper documents. Clinton quoted Papandreou as expressing his readiness to propose a series of bilateral agreements that would improve Greek-Albanian relations and put an end to a relation that Berisha had earlier described as a cold war situation. Clinton called on Berisha to safeguard human rights and said that their case was an inseparable part of web of Greek-Albanian relations and should be confronted within the framework of any discussion in reducing tension between the two countries.²⁷

In January 1995, Berisha repeated his proposal for a dialogue and signing of an accord with Greece, to which Greece responded positively. Greece lifted its veto blocking a first installment of 15 million ECU of EU macroeconomic aid to Albania as a gesture of goodwill to Tirana,²⁸ while reminding Tirana that main assistance to the neighboring country was the approximately 300 million dollars entering Albania from Albanians working in Greece, and that Albania had not received this level of assistance either from Europe or from anywhere else.²⁹ Albania then allowed Greece's military attaché, whose appointment had been

refused in September 1994 citing allegations of increased troop movements along Greece's border with Albania and violations of Albanian air space.³⁰ However, relations remained testy.

On 8 February, Albanian Supreme Court at an appeal hearing upheld the original conviction, but suspended the sentences of ethnic Greeks -just short of declaring the defendants innocent.³¹ While Greek government voiced satisfaction, one of the opposition parties, Political Spring party spokesman Akis Gerontopoulos warned that release of them did not amount to their vindication since their sentence stayed and Berisha regime continued the flagrant violation of human rights of Greek minority. Another opposition party, Coalition of Left and Progress leader Nikos Constantopoulos expressed his satisfaction over the development and called on Athens to utilize the opportunity and initiate a process of dialogue with Tirana.³²

As an interesting remark it should be noted that, five ethnic Greeks visited Greek Parliament President Apostolos Kaklamonis for speaking on behalf of five, Bezianis thanked him for Greece's support during their ordeal, adding "We belong to Hellenism and we are struggling for Hellenism."³³ Following the release of the ethnic Greeks, relations improved considerably. Athens agreed to hold direct talks with Tirana and open a new chapter in bilateral relations. A meeting between Albanian and Greek officials in March 1995 called on mutual assistance aimed at easing polemics and on joint action in rooting out MAVI members.³⁴

7.1.2. Northern Epirus Liberation Front

Satisfied with the release of the four, Athens was now prepared to take steps to curb anti-Albanian para-military activities in Greece. On March 19, for instance, Public Order Minister Stelios Papathemelis said the three Greek nationals and four ethnic Greeks from Albania were arrested and were charged with possession of illegal weapons in northwest Greece near village of Delvinaki while trying to enter the Albanian border area. Greek authorities believed that arrest of seven averted a border incident. After investigations extended throughout the country,³⁵ eleven homes were raided by police in Athens and copies of Liberation Front of Northern Epirus (MAVI) statement claiming responsibility for the Episcopi border camp raid were found in the house of one of the arrested people.³⁶ Moreover, it was found out that the six kalashnikovs discovered in the possession of seven had been stolen from the aforementioned guard in April 1994.³⁷

Last heard of MAVI as a right-wing resistance group during the German occupation of Greece in World War II.³⁸ Very little was accomplished until the arrest of seven men believed to be MAVI members. On 25 March, two others were taken into custody in the Thessian suburb of Pallini, accused of being MAVI members.³⁹ MAVI's political goal, the incorporation of Northern Epirus into Greece, along with its anti-Greek government posture, for its criminal indifference to the plight of ethnic Greeks in Albania made it a threat to both Greece and Albania.⁴⁰ It was believed that MAVI may also have had a role in prior attacks against Albanian officials. Although most government sources believe MAVI to

be recently formed and active. Unconfirmed reports of a car bomb attack in Athens against the Albanian ambassador in 1991 made some observers point to 17 November, but MAVI claimed responsibility for that attack. Two other incidents near the time of the Episcopi assault may indicate MAVI responsibility. On 24 March 1994, explosives were placed in the homes of Albanian political party chiefs Bashkim Kodhima and Minella Boci. Although unconfirmed, Albania's intelligence service believed that leftist extremists were liable.

The second incident occurred after Episcopi on 10 May 1994. Nebil Cika, editor of local Albanian weekly, was the victim of a bomb placed in its home. Cika was strongly anti-Greek. The Supreme Court took over the responsibility for the prosecution of seven men suspected of guilty. Supreme Court Deputy Public Prosecutor Volonassis filed a petition for the assumption of the case by the Athens-based Supreme Court on the grounds that it involved serious inter-state consequences. Volonassis appeared to have suggested that the Supreme Court and the Athens prosecution authorities were the only competent bodies to investigate and try the MAVI case. Charges against the seven were changed from the misdemeanors of possession of illegal weapons to jeopardizing the country's peace and intent to murder.⁴¹

7.1.3. Diplomatic Contacts

In the meantime, relations between the countries continued to improve. After a year of stormy relations between Greece and Albania, Greek Foreign Minister,

Papoulias, made a groundbreaking visit to Tirana in March 1995. During this visit, the then Albanian President Berisha promised to respect international human rights charters, to safeguard ethnic Greek community and to provide re-entry travel visa for Archbishop Anastasios. The Archbishop, though suffered from eye problems, was reluctant to leave Albania for treatment fearing Tirana would refuse to grant him a re-entry visa.⁴² During the negotiations Tirana also pledged to ensure the opening of Greek minority schools in exchange for legislation concerning Albanian workers in Greece.⁴³

Greek- Albanian diplomatic dialogue continued in Athens on April 19 and 20 with a meeting of high level diplomatic committees from two countries. The Greek committee was presided by Ambassador Georgiou, Secretary General of the Greek Foreign Ministry; the Albanian delegation was headed by Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, Starova. The two sides agreed to proceed with the establishment of six sub-committees to examine pending problems in Greek-Albanian relations. Furthermore, the two committees exchanged drafts for treaties under discussion. In particular the Greek side prepared an outline of a Friendship and Cooperation Pact and a plan for the acceptance of temporary Albanian workers in Greece.⁴⁴

The six sub-committees convened in the second week of May and discussed the following issues:

- a) Financial affairs, including cross-border economic cooperation and the opening of new border crossings financed by European Union projects PHARE and INTEREG.
- b) Education and cultural relations, including the educational problems of Greek community in Albania,
- c) Labor relations and especially thorny problem of the Albanian illegal workers in Greece,
- d) Border and defence cooperation which refers to the delineation of the borderline between Greece and Albania,
- e) Security and public order,
- f) Establishment of Consulates and legal issues.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most important one, the joint Albanian-Greek sub-commission of labor and employment convened in Athens on 23-24 May 1995. The agenda of the talks focused on two main contentious issues: the procedure of the seasonal employment of Albanians in Greece and the legalization of Albanian emigrants who were living there.⁴⁶

Later, Greek Justice Minister visited Tirana in August 1995. Two ministers signed two agreements, concerning judicial support in civil and penal cases and the extradition and transfer of prisoners after talks between the Greek and Albanian justice ministry delegations.⁴⁷ The first convention covered mutual assistance in field of justice between judicial authorities of two countries and request for judicial

documents for expertise and to summon witnesses. It stipulated obligatory rules for two parties regarding execution of decision which have been reciprocally taken for nationals of two countries. It assured the same legal defence for Albanian and Greek citizens in respective countries, with regard to personal and owners' rights. The second convention defined rules for the extradition of persons wanted for penal cases.⁴⁸

In this regard Albanian side asked that Albanian nationals be given possibilities to bring an action against someone in Greek courts, a right which was also mentioned in Article 1 on the Convention. Extradition Agreement would make it possible for around 2.000 Albanian prisoners convicted in Greece to serve rest of their terms in Albanian prisons. It would also help in exchange of suspected criminals wanted in the respective countries.⁴⁹ Greek legal experts would also help elaborate basic laws of Albania such as the legal procedure code.⁵⁰ In August 1995, Greece and Albania signed also a protocol providing cooperation in transport sector.⁵¹

The visits of Greek Ministers of Foreign Affairs, National Defence, Justice and Finance which took place between March-August 1995 and the agreements signed were seen as a visible sign of improving relations between two countries.⁵² Albanian Foreign Minister Serreqi made a visit to Athens on 31 August 1995 for talks with his Greek counterpart Papoulias. Greece and Albania reached an agreement on a friendship and cooperation pact which would be signed during an official visit of the Greek President Stephanopoulos expected to take place in

Albania in Fall 1995. During the talks, Athens repeated its demand that three independent Greek schools to be set up in southern Albania. In return, Greece agreed to a deal granting legal seasonal employment to some of estimated 300,000 illegal Albanian immigrants in Greece, a long-standing demand by Tirana.

However, Serreqi disagreed with a proposal by Papoulias for operation of Greek schools and counter-proposed that Greek language be taught at existing Albanian schools.⁵³ This led to a temporary deadlock in talks between Papoulias and Serreqi. The signing of an agreement on seasonal employment of Albanians in Greece was delayed while Greek President Stephanopoulos postponed his proposed visit to Albania. Venizelos stated that it was made clear to Albanian side that a bilateral agreement on seasonal employment would only be signed under the condition that the issue of minority schools for ethnic Greeks in Albania was positively resolved, adding that Athens would never abandon the rights the Greek minority had for education.⁵⁴

Thus, language issue introduced a new phase of strained relations. Two members of Albanian Parliament who were of Greek origin Mitsou and Makariadis announced on 22 September 1995 their decision to abandon the Albanian Parliament as a sign of protest against lack of measures by Albanian government for education for the minority. In a letter the two deputies sent into the parliament, they pointed out that there was deliberate lack of care for the education of the minority which they attributed to the fact that the government did not fully apply

the existing law. In the same letter the two deputies noted that this behavior towards the Greek minority in Albania took place while there was a favorable climate on the Athens-Tirana relations.⁵⁵

The issue of schools for Greek ethnic minority was long overdue. The children of the Greek minority in southern towns first started classes in their mother tongue in 1991, during the time of the stability government. The Democratic Party government closed them down immediately after it assumed power in 1992 and refused to allow them to reopen during its four years in government. This stand taken by the Albanian government led to protests among the minority population of the districts concerned and also to embittered relations between Greece and Albania. The government covered up its stand on closing these classes with the half-baked measure of sending the town-dwelling children of the minority to schools in the surrounding villages. Another half-hearted measure of the Albanian government was to permit private schools, but not state schools for the Greek minority children in these towns.⁵⁶

After the issue of the minority education had created a crisis in the Greco-Albanian talks. Foreign Ministers of two countries held a meeting in New York in 27 September. They declared after the meeting that there had been some progress, but that two sides had different numbers of students in mind. A Greek-Albanian meeting of experts was decided to be held soon after in order to determine the exact number of Greek minority students attending Albanian schools. Papoulias

stressed political will existed on both sides, adding that this was very important while he characterized as exclusive and very urgent priority the minority schools issue, acknowledging that there remained one problem issue of seasonal Albanian workers in Greece.^{57,58}

A meeting between Greek and Albanian foreign ministry delegations was held on 7 February 1996 in Tirana during which the Greek side emphasized issues concerning the education of the Greek ethnic minority in Albania.⁵⁹ In his statement Serreqi emphasized that Albania observed most advanced international standards such as Copenhagen Document providing the Greek minority wherever it lived in Albania a contemporary education. Serreqi praised the negotiations pointing out the possibility of a Greek law on status of foreign immigrants including Albanians in Greece. He underlined that Greece as the only Balkans country in the European structures could give its contribution to accelerate Albania's integration in these structures.⁶⁰

Finally the expected visit of Greek president was realized in March 1996. Albanian Prime Minister Meksi held a closed door meeting with the President Stephanopoulos and the delegation accompanying him. Meksi thanked Greek government for its assistance to Albania, stating that the growth of Greek investments in Albania together with the growth of contributions from the EU for the realization of projects in infrastructure, as well as legalization of Albanians working in Greece and inter-border cooperation served a better climate. The two

senior officials also spoke of the observation of the rights of the Greek minority in education, culture, development and identity as an important factor which helped consolidate bilateral relations.⁶¹ Stephanopoulos stated that "it is a policy grounded in economic imperatives, the strengthening of ties in all fields, and the creation of preconditions that will facilitate the economic integration of the entire region and its eventual unification with Europe at large. Ours is a policy of assistance, whenever circumstances warrant it, without preconditions or ulterior motives."⁶² On 21 March, Albanian and Greek foreign ministers signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, Goodneighborliness and Security.

Signing of the treaty marks the highest level of relations between two neighboring countries. It is perhaps more important for the Albanian side since, as one Democratic Party deputy stressed, for the first time a treaty explicitly opposed the changing of borders and Greece recognized Albania's borders.⁶³ "Based on international documents and acts and aware of the contribution of Greek minority in Albania as well as assistance of Albanians employed in Greece " Albania and Greece declared in this treaty "their devotion to the internationally recognized principle of invulnerability of the existing borders." "Each of the parties will create possibility for the removal of legal obstacles that make difficult the acquisition of properties of nationals of one country in territory of other country." Moreover, in this treaty, Greece committed itself to supporting Albania's integration in all European structures.⁶⁴

The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, Goodneighborliness and Security also allowed Greek schools to open for the minority in Albania, in exchange for legalizing the Albanian workers. Serreqi and Papoulias met within the framework of Stephanopoulos' visit. They agreed to work towards institutionalizing seasonal employment between two countries and specifically to work towards finally legalizing Albanian workers.⁶⁵ The aforementioned treaty said that each side would guarantee the citizens of the other side who are settled and employed legally in its territory the rights of jobs in compliance with the national legislation and international obligations. This article paved way for legalization of 250,000 Albanian emigrants in Greece.⁶⁶ According to Serreqi, "after the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, Goodneighborliness and Security, our relations have found a new impetus."⁶⁷ In May 1996 Serreqi and Papoulias signed two agreements. First agreement was on seasonal employment to legalize the status of Albanian immigrant workers, a long standing stumbling block in relations between Albania and Greece. Second was the consular agreement on opening two new consulates in Thessaloniki and Korce.

First opened the way to economic emigration in general⁶⁸ and opened up the possibility of seasonal employment for Albanian workers in those employment fields that were not competitive with Greek workers. According to the second agreement a Greek consulate would be opened in Korce to issue to visa and an Albanian consulate would be opened in Thessaloniki to facilitate the circulation of people between Albania and Greece.

Evaluating the agreements, Republika newspaper, the mouthpiece of the rightist Republican Party, expressed, however, some doubts of the 'Albanian public'. It wrote that "under the first agreement the Greek government looking at the demands of labor market in its own country will make an application to Albanian government for a certain number of Albanian citizens who will be employed in Greece for a certain period. How effective will this agreement be ? On the basis of the Serreqi's not very optimistic tones, results of agreement will be half-backed, insecured and exclusively tailored to the wishes of Greek government. Although Albania gained a kind of promise, Greece, of course, emerged as the victor, achieving a long-standing ambition to open a consulate in Korce. The Greeks will thus now have consulates in those places where they claim Greeks live, and which are on the list of territorial claims of Greece's chauvinist and ultra nationalist circles."⁶⁹

Albanian Defence Minister Zhulali paid a visit to Greece on 19-21 May upon invitation of Greek Minister of Defence and both defence ministers signed the cooperation program for the year 1996.⁷⁰ During the second meeting of the Albanian-Greek joint sub-commission for the questions of border and defence held in Athens from 10-11 June 1996, both parties agreed on adoption of practical measures for carrying out indispensable working on border line between the two states and the conclusion of two agreements on border.⁷¹ On 5 August 1996, Albanian government decided "on a supplement to the decision on eight year

education in the minority's mother tongue" to start classes in their mother tongue for children of the Greek minority living in towns of Gjirokastra, Sarande and Delvine.⁷² The decision allowed the opening of several classes in public schools in said towns. The government's decision met one of the demands of the ethnic Greeks' Human Rights Party and the Greek government and helped the minority children in these districts to study in their mother tongue.⁷³

The proposal of the Ministry of Education and Sports came in the course of the talks between Albanian President Berisha and the Greek President Stephanopoulos in March 1996. The Greek President evaluated the opening of minority classes in Gjirokastra, Delvine and Sarande, beginning with the next school year, as a fact which would further strengthen the climate of confidence and cooperation between the two countries as well as the productive participation of Greek minority in Albania's reconstruction.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Education Minister of Albania had approved significant funds for preparation and printing of books for education of children of the Macedonian and Greek minority.⁷⁵

Greek Foreign Minister Pangalos declared that he applauded the Albanian government's decision to open schools in Gjirokastra, Delvine and Sarande as well as to reduce the number of those admitted to these schools from 32 to 20 pupils.⁷⁶ He also stressed positive role of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, Goodneighborliness and Security signed between two countries and underlined that

development of bilateral relations constituted a strategic target for the Greek government.⁷⁷

On August 31, 1996, the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs Theodoros Pangalos paid a visit to Gjirokastra on the occasion of the inauguration of the new Greek Consulate in this town of Southern Albania. During the talks, Pangalos stressed the necessity of accelerating the process of economic cooperation between the two countries, where a major importance had to be given to the improvement of infrastructure, road building, communication, etc. Another field of interest discussed between the two ministers was that of immigration. To soften this phenomena, Pangalos proposed three simultaneous steps: approving the status of seasonal workers, regulating the border regime, and increasing the number of visas for Albanians.⁷⁸ In this warm climate, Serreqi said his country could play the middleman role between Athens and Skopje in their dispute, adding that Tirana's relations with Macedonia were not directed against any other country.⁷⁹ Toward the end of 1996, it appeared that both Albania and Greece had learned to live with their conflict without making it poison their day-to-day contacts. It also appeared that the relations would witness further amelioration on the same basis in 1997. However, the events which unfolded at a bewildering speed in Albania, destroying public law and order, led to a completely different situation.

7.2. The Year 1997

7.2.1. The Turmoil in Albania

1997 has been a significant turning point in Albania from various aspects. The social unrest and the subsequent violence which was caused by the collapse of the pyramid schemes⁸⁰ and quickly turned into an armed insurrection associated with widespread looting and banditry, ousted the Berisha government from power. It also shattered in the process most of the country's public institutions including the army and police forces. It was followed by the establishment of a new government whose foreign policy goals have been quite different from those of the former one.

Starting in 1992, Albania undertook a number of major economic and structural reforms aimed at establishing an open, market economy. Achievements on the macro-economic and structural fronts were impressive. Albania achieved growth rates which were among the highest in Europe, in the range of 8 to 9 percent per annum during the period 1993-96.⁸¹ IMF considered that the growth rate in 1996 would place Albania among the fastest expanding economies of eastern Europe.⁸² Nonetheless, the country remained by far the poorest in Europe, with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita reaching only around 800 dollars in 1996.⁸³ A macro economic crisis was already in the making in 1996 as progress in fiscal consolidation, which had begun to stall a year earlier, was drastically reversed. By the end of 1996, the domestically-financed fiscal deficit had reached over 10 percent of GDP, basically undoing all the progress made on the fiscal side since

transition.⁸⁴ Industrial production almost halted, and agriculture's share in GDP rose to over 50% (although the sector was also badly affected by the transition). Over 300.000 people of working age - almost 10% of the population — left the country to work abroad, mainly in Greece and Italy, and black market activity increased significantly. It became increasingly clear that economic growth was based primarily on international assistance and remittances of foreign earnings.⁸⁵

Moreover, institutional development remained weak. This was reflected in particular in a weak judicial implementation capacity and inefficient public administration. A very important structural area - the financial sector - remained unreformed with an inadequate and poorly enforced legal framework and weak banking supervision capacity. Large scale fund-raising operations were established outside the formal banking system and several high risk pyramid investment schemes, by offering very high interest rates largely based on pure speculation, managed to attract a large part of the Albanian population's savings.⁸⁶

A major state crisis broke out in Albania in early 1997 when the pyramid schemes, in which Albanians were said to have lost up to 1.2 billion dollars or more than half the country's annual GDP collapsed one after the other.⁸⁷ It interrupted brutally a process of economic transition and recovery which had been initiated in 1992 after two years of chaos following the demise of the communist regime.⁸⁸

In fact, Albanians became aware of the dreadful proportions of the pyramid schemes in October 1996, when Minister of Finance Ridvan Bode spoke publicly of the International Monetary Fund on the phenomenon. A transparency commission elected by the Parliament at the end of December to investigate informal deposit-taking companies and determine whether companies that appeared to have productive investments were pyramid-schemes.⁸⁹ This move happened after demands from the International Monetary Fund to the Albanian government to control those schemes.⁹⁰ As early as November 18, 1996, Sude a four-year-old pyramid scheme failed to make payments. And the situation became dramatic when thousands of people were ready to rally against the government in the main square of Tirana when Sude pyramid scheme collapsed in December.⁹¹

One of the largest pyramid schemes in the country, the Vlore-based Gjallica also ended its activities at the beginning of the January 1997.⁹² On 15 January, hundreds of protesters demanding money back from Sude pyramid scheme clashed with riot police. When the government declared that the state-owned banks limited the liquidation of the deposits of companies up to 300,000 dollars daily and seized almost 255 million dollars deposited in state-owned banks, people in southern town, Vlore, started demonstrations.

On 21 January, the government created a commission to study ways to pay compensation to those who had lost money.⁹³ On January 23, the People's Parliament approved the Law on Banning the Pyramid Scheme Companies which

said that the organized activity of the pyramid-style borrowing companies was illegal.⁹⁴ However, all this fell short of satisfying the people who had lost money. At the end of the January protests spread, sparking the worst violence seen in Albania since 1991. Thousands of people gathered in central Tirana and clashed with police, while large crowds in Vlore occupied the centre of the port city. Government and Democratic Party buildings set ablaze in towns and cities across the country. The parliament called the army to guard government buildings.

Ten opposition parties from across the political spectrum formed the Forum for Democracy, vowing to hold protests across the country on January 30. They asked President Berisha to dismiss his government. Although Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi asked the Parliament to proclaim a state of emergency in Vlore, the Parliament put off the decision after a lengthy debate. Meanwhile, the situation was getting out of hand. In February, students started hunger strike in Vlore demanding the resignation of Aleksander Meksi's government. They asserted that the government was unable to handle the difficult economic situation, was responsible for the deception of people and the violence exerted on the local protesters.⁹⁵

State of emergency and nationwide curfew came into force throughout Albania on March 3 as the Parliament elected President Sali Berisha for a second five-year term in office. On March 4, army troops began enforcing emergency rule. However, this could not prevent rebels from having raided a naval base and seized

weapons in the southern Adriatic town of Sarande and burned down a military training centre in the port of Vlore.⁹⁶ Rioters in Sarande began to sack police headquarters, seize weapons, loot shops and banks. Police fled, troops deserted army barracks.⁹⁷ Salvation Committees were established and took control of the cities in the South of the country where more people had lost money.

On March 9, Berisha signed Accord on Reconciliation Government with ten political parties, aimed at ending the unrest, provided for an all-party government, and new elections by June under international observation.⁹⁸ As a result of the attempts of OSCE, Government of National Reconciliation was formed with the participation of all major political parties of Albania.⁹⁹ Two days later Berisha appointed Bashkim Fino, an economist from the opposition Socialist Party, as his new Prime Minister.

However, nothing could prevent the violence from spreading into northern Albania for the first time since the insurgency began. Up to 300 people forced their way into the Barracks at Bajram Curri, over 200 km (130-miles) northeast of Tirana, and seized hundreds of Kalashnikov assault rifles. It was not clear whether the looters were pro- or anti-Berisha.

After the requests of the Albanian authorities and Italy to authorise a force to help pull the state back from the brink of anarchy, on March 28, 1997, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1101, which “welcomed the establishment of a

temporary and limited Multinational Protection Force to facilitate the safe and prompt delivery of humanitarian assistance and to help create a secure environment for the missions of international organisations in Albania, including those providing humanitarian assistance.”¹⁰⁰ Thus the force was empowered, under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, to use force in self-defence. Bulk of humanitarian force came by ship and aircraft from April 14th onwards, which was specially entrusted with peacekeeping.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, Dr. Franz Vranitzky, former Chancellor of the Republic of Austria was appointed as Personal Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairman in Office in Albania.¹⁰² OSCE envoy Vranitzky managed to broker on May 9, a breakthrough agreement between the country's ten main political parties to ensure fresh elections go on as scheduled by the end of June.¹⁰³ The rebel committees, which nominally ran the main southern towns, and the mafiosi believed to be organising them, made Berisha's resignation a precondition for returning power to the elected authorities.¹⁰⁴ The anger of people turned against the government especially against Berisha. He was held responsible for all the bloodshed in the country,¹⁰⁵ even an assassination attempt against him was made during his election campaign in Durres on June 5.¹⁰⁶

The roots of the crisis laid in the flaws of the Albanian political system. The system was too weak to cope with the upheaval unleashed by the collapse of the pyramid schemes. The failure of these schemes was indeed the spark that set off

the street protests and demonstrations. But the scale of violence that followed is explained not only by financial losses but by the polarisation of political forces since the disputed parliamentary elections of 1996 which were widely perceived to be manipulated. There was a deep crisis of confidence between the Albanian people and their government. The government failed in their eyes to protect them against fraud and manipulation by the pyramid schemes.¹⁰⁷ In response, officials asserted that there was no political reason behind the ongoing events: there was only gang rivalry between gang members who dealt with drugs and prostitutes and the only reason for fights were to defend their economic interests.¹⁰⁸

The unrest is also fuelled by a widespread belief that members of President Sali Berisha's right-wing government were closely linked with several pyramid schemes which helped finance the ruling Democratic party campaign in 1996 general elections.¹⁰⁹ Small centre-right opposition Democratic Alliance Party asserted that during the Democratic Party's four years in power the main loan-taking enterprises have systematically served as its financial and psychological support.¹¹⁰

Moreover, there was another significant factor which probably accelerated the slide into chaos. Berisha who managed to get great American support beginning from 1992, began to lose it after May 1996 elections that was widely condemned in Albania and abroad as a fraud. After the accusations of human rights abuses, Washington began distancing itself from the leader it had so ardently embraced

only a few years earlier. Berisha was considered as increasingly authoritarian and unwilling to heed advice.¹¹¹

In the meantime, rumors prevailed that “some foreign powers” were inciting the unrest. Since the events first arrived in the Southern regions of Albania, where Greek minority lives, some circles both in Albania and abroad stated that Greece might be responsible. Greece was considered by them as having tried to realize its long-lasting goal of annexing “Northern Epirus” through creating unrest in the region. The rumors were fuelled by the hoist of Northern Epirus flags in the Southern towns, Sarande and Tepelena¹¹² and by an “unauthorized” visit of the Greek Deputy Foreign Minister, Yannis Kranidiotis in Gjirokastra and Sarande in March at the peak of the events. Kranidiotis visited the rebel-held towns as well as the ethnic Greek village of Dervican, south of Gjirokastra, where he was greeted with cheers and applause and met with rebel leaders.¹¹³ These rumors were so widespread, the Greek Premier Simitis needed to make announcements to the effect that the problem in Albania was a matter of democracy, not a problem that belonged to Greece and, of course, not a question related to the Greek minority.¹¹⁴ However, the events would give Greece the chance to enter into the Albanian political life in a very different way signifying an historical change, which seemed unlikely before, despite the relative improvement of bilateral relations in 1996.

At the initial phase of the events, Greece was concerned about a renewed influx of Albanian illegal emigrants following the fall of several get-rich-quick investment

schemes that ruined thousands of small investors.¹¹⁵ A steady flow of frightened Albanian women and children into Greece and hundreds of destitute Albanians queued outside the Greek embassy underscored fears that any attempt by the Albanian army to recapture the southern border region from armed rebels would trigger a massive exodus of refugees into northern Greece. Members of the ethnic Greek minority in southern Albania were among family groups pushing on to ferries leaving the rebel-held port of Sarande for Corfu or arriving at the Kakavija frontier post often without valid passports or visas.¹¹⁶

Greek authorities said that the army was watching the border with Albania closely, amid fears that violence sweeping the Balkan neighbor could send thousands of refugees fleeing for safety across the frontier and implied that Greece might interfere in case the Greek minority was in danger.¹¹⁷ Simitis declared that he had a telephone conversation with Albanian President Sali Berisha on March 4 and received assurances that the situation would be dealt with in such a way that the incident would not have negative effects on the Greek minority living in the country.¹¹⁸

At later stages Greece appeared as a voluntary candidate to play significant role in solving the crisis in the neighboring country. Greek authorities initiated diplomatic attempts and called the EU, OSCE and the international community several times to help Albania.¹¹⁹ The Greek Foreign Minister, Theodoros Pangalos visited Belgrade and Skopje to discuss the situation in Albania and attempts to proceed events

as Greece was concerned of the imminent danger of a spill over of the crisis in Kosova and Macedonia, where there is overwhelming presence of ethnic Albanian population.¹²⁰ Besides diplomatic attempts, Greece started a campaign for providing humanitarian aids to Albania.

Moreover, the dynamic participation of Greece, partly urged by the Greek media which gave extended coverage of developments in Albania, in all the international efforts to help Albania overcome the crisis has given an impulse to broader initiatives. Greek National Economy Minister Yannis Papandoniou declared in March that Athens was ready to extend Albania a loan on favorable terms as soon as the political situation in Albania normalised as he put it: "Greece is prepared to guarantee a loan of 80 million dollars with favorable terms to partly compensate those who lost their savings in the bankrupt pyramid Schemes as well as the recovery aid modernisation of the Albanian credit system."¹²¹

Foreign Minister, Teodoros Pangalos came to Tirana for a one day visit where he met President Sali Berisha, Premier Bashkim Fino and his Albanian counterpart Arjan Starova. Pangalos said his country would help Albania not only on bilateral relations but would also contribute in the European organisation Greece took part. He promised Albanian immigrants in Greece would be issued special permits to allow them to come in Albania, to vote and safely return to the area they lived and worked.¹²²

In the meantime, the elections were approaching. Berisha, who was under increasing pressure at home and abroad to step down, was faced with a powerful political rival, Fatos Nano. Socialist leader Nano was freed from prison in March. He was among 51 prisoners who were pardoned by presidential decree.¹²³ He had been prime minister twice at the head of Albania's last communist administration in 1991 and after the first multi-party elections won by the Socialists. But this term ended within weeks when he was forced out by a general strike. Later Nano was jailed on corruption charges that his Socialists say were politically motivated.¹²⁴

Nano, who was known to have close ties with the Greek Socialist government, made his first visit abroad to this country a week after he had been released and held a rally in the Northern Greek city of Thessaloniki. For the second time, in June, he paid another visit to the neighboring country during which he was received by Greek Prime Minister Simitis and Greek Foreign Minister Teodoros Pangalos and allowed to hold an unprecedented election rally in Athens attended by thousands of Albanian immigrants in Greece.¹²⁵

On June 9, 1997 during his election campaign, leader of the opposition Socialist Party, Fatos Nano took the step which would pave him the road for Prime Ministry, and promised to turn back the money lost in bankrupt pyramid schemes in case they came to power. It was the first time a leading opposition official promised outright compensation for the estimated 1.2 billion dollars losses of small creditors.¹²⁶

The election campaign showed the traditional polarization of country between the two major political parties. When the Socialist Nano tried to organize a campaign in northern town Mirdita, he was not allowed to enter the town by gunmen on 18 June.¹²⁷ Leaders of Albania's major left-wing coalition, including the Socialist and Social Democrat parties, toured several towns in the rebel south while Berisha tried to reach the Northern votes. The SP and SDP leaders, respectively Nano and Gjinushi, held meetings in Sarande, Delvina and Gjirokastra, in their drive to capitalise on a rebellion against Berisha and his Party over the handling of the pyramid schemes crisis.¹²⁸

7.2.2. New Government and New Foreign Policy

Although great difficulties in the weeks before the election caused many observers to doubt the ability of Albanian authorities to conduct a successful election, the large turnout of voters (73 percent) demonstrated that Albania, in close cooperation with the OSCE, was able to organize the voting. Central Election Commission officials and OSCE observers were astonished at the smooth preparation of Vlore, the most problematic city, to vote.¹²⁹ Over 500 short term observers, including 112 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the North Atlantic Assembly and various national parliaments, were deployed in more than 250 teams in 115 electoral zones. On 6 July, a second round took place in 32 zones. In addition, one zone held a first round of election. This followed a week of some tension, including a serious shooting incident during a

rally. The second round was monitored by over 150 short term observers.¹³⁰ Results gave the opposition Socialist Party (SP) a convincing lead with 101 seats, trailed by Democratic Party (DP) with 24 seats in 155-seat parliament.¹³¹ The mainly Greek minority Union for Human Rights Party (UHRP) which ran in 90 electoral zones, mostly, in the South of the country, without having entered any alliances with bigger parties won four seats.¹³²

A leftist coalition government was established under the leadership of Nano. Rexhep Meidani, who served shortly as a rank-and-file Socialist before becoming the Party's Secretary General in September 1996, was elected as Head of State by the Parliament.¹³³ From the Union for Human Rights Party Leonard Solis was designated as the Minister of Health, while Gjergji Leka was assigned as Deputy Minister at Ministry of Labor, Emigration and Andrea Marto appointed as Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Education and Science. The other deputy Thanas Poçi became Deputy Minister at the Ministry of Tourism. However this did not satisfy the Party leaders who had been pinning deputy minister at the Ministry of Education, as well as those of the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, which was intolerable even to the pro-Greek Socialists.¹³⁴

Greece was among the first countries to hail the establishment of the new Albanian government. Secretary General of the Greek ruling party, PASOK, visited Albania on July 26-27, meeting new Prime minister Nano and political leaders, and in the

meantime Greek President Stephanopoulos invited his Albanian counterpart, Meidani, to visit Greece.¹³⁵

Greece also has urged the Greek minority in Albania to support the new Socialist-led administration in an apparent effort to establish a new era of cooperation between the two neighboring countries.¹³⁶ It gave the first signals that both ruling Socialist parties in the two countries, Costas Simitis's PASOK and Fatos Nano's SP, wanted to overcome the previous period of confrontations.

Soon the new government proved that it aimed to make radical structural changes in the country. While the cadres of the government were almost totally changed, different policies of new administration began to take shape. The foreign policy has enjoyed winds of change considerably. Prime Minister Nano determined the aim of integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures and Europeanization of his country as the first priority. Both Prime Minister Nano and Foreign Minister Milo repeated several times that the development of relations with the European Union in support of Albania's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures has been the main priority of the foreign policy of Albania.¹³⁷

The second priority of the foreign policy of new government has been to establish good relations with neighbors. The fact that the Albanian government has given a top priority to Albania's relations with its neighbors, marks a turning point in the Albanian foreign policy. The new Albanian government and its respective foreign

affairs ministry announced they would do anything in the name of national interest in order to pursue a new policy based on dialogue and solutions through talks, to achieve decrease in tensions leading to the stability of bilateral relations with Belgrade and Athens.¹³⁸ Nano stated several times that Albania had cut down old history relations with its neighbors and turned to dialogue and therefore premises of contacts expected to extend relations with other Balkan countries in order to create the necessary structures for common markets and opportunities for citizens to travel being protected by international legislation.¹³⁹

Obviously, Greece benefited from this new strategy most, being both a Balkan and EU country. It soon became the gate to Europe for Albania and reached the same level of importance with Italy, the traditional ally of Albania.¹⁴⁰ Focusing on the relations with the neighboring countries, Prime Minister Nano said that “Greece together with Italy taking into account the geographic-natural specifics of the neighborliness with Albania, the intensity of the economic exchanges and the volume of investments, the extension of the human and cultural contact, their all-sided and detailed recognition of the Albanian situation by these friendly countries, of the role and priority contributions they have in the overcoming of the present crisis, as well as taking into account the logic of the perspective of Albania's integration in the European Union and NATO will be for us the main partners in the region. We will intensify especially with these countries, the political, economic, cultural and consular relations. The assistance and support that the friendly governments of these two countries gave to the government of national

reconciliation is a good basis of cooperation and understanding to overcome the extremely difficult and tense situation that Albania is in. We want to hope that the encouraging Italian and Greek promises to help Albania's reconstruction also imply the objective for the legal adjustment of the status of the Albanians who are actually working and living in Italy and Greece.”

However, this rhetoric and the slogan of “priority relations” of the Albanian politicians caused “competition” between the two countries. The "Nano 3" government was in a sense obliged to suffer the "jealousy" of the neighboring countries. Italy and Greece represented the two rival countries having interests in Albania. The Rome meeting held in July where Athens attempts to avoid the implementation of Italian draft-investment projects in the Albanian southern districts in order to guarantee a complete investment status and comprehensive administration of the Albanian south¹⁴¹ cleared up the big enigma of Albania's new destination.

The ambitions shown by the Simitis government in Greece for a decisive presence in the policy of the Balkans has finally taken its shape in the form of a concrete policy. Through a letter addressed to the highest authorities of the Balkan states, the Greek Premier has asked for cooperation. In the programming letter, the Greek premier outlined the concrete points of such expansion through cooperation and political coordinative action. The main points proposed by the Greek official side through the letter are firstly the strengthening of multi-regional relations and

cooperation, stressing the investments for infrastructure, the development of communication networks, humanitarian, social and cultural cooperation, coordination in the measures which need to be taken against crime, drugs and arms' smuggling. In this letter the Greek premier has asked his ministers to undertake concrete initiatives: for example each minister ought to organise about two meetings a year with his Balkan counterpart, as well as to study the possibilities about ways in which he can help his opposite number. Then, these concrete proposals have to be presented to the most important Greek vice-ministers, respectively the foreign affairs vice-minister, Kranidhiotis and that of the Greek National Economy, Baltas. Other points of Simitis' letter are the proposals for cooperation between Greek and other Balkan banks. All such initiatives in the foreign affairs policy of Greece aim at the strengthening the Greek presence in the Balkans. This was regarded as the first cycle to materialise what is called "the Simitis package" for the Balkans. In this strategy which materialised both politically and diplomatically by official Athens government was a new concrete relationship between Greece and its neighbors. especially Albania.¹⁴²

7.2.3. The Improvement in the Bilateral Relations

Greece expressed the importance it has attached to Albania through frequent visits of Greek officials to Tirana. In response, within a short period of time, Athens has received most of the important officials of Albanian policy. The first foreign politician the new government hosted was Pangalos. His visit was considered as a sign of good will on the part of the Greek government to support Albania and its

people in difficult times. It was, at the same time, an application of the new foreign relations program adopted by the government a few days previously, which anticipated new relations with neighboring countries.¹⁴³

Greek Foreign Minister, accompanied by Minister of Public Order, Romeos, five deputy ministers, seven parliamentarians and a large delegation of Greek experts and businessmen, aimed to establish new contracts with Albanians for the reconstruction of the country as the only EU country in the Balkans.¹⁴⁴ While Pangalos and his Albanian counterpart Milo signed a Seasonal Employment Protocol, cooperation agreements in fields of security, public order and defence were concluded by the relevant authorities and opening a Greek consulate in Vlore was agreed in principle.

His visit was soon reciprocated by Milo on September 12-14. During the visit Greece offered Albania two billion drachmas (almost 70 million dollars) as urgent economic aid; 7 million dollars would be given as free aid and 63 million dollars in the form of a low interest loan for public works in Albania. They also announced a series of measures and initiatives that would further strengthen ties between the two Balkan neighbors. Among these, Pangalos said, were plans for contacts between the public order ministries of both countries to "maintain law on both sides of the border", a planned visit by the chief of the Albanian armed forces to discuss the reform and reorganisation of the Albanian military with his Greek counterparts, as well as the establishment of three new customs points on the

border with Albania and the beginning of talks on territorial borders and the delineation of the continental shelf. Milo said that bilateral relations were at "their best point ever", thanking the Greek people and government for "standing by Albania in its difficult times". Pangalos said that relations with Tirana were developing "in a most favorable manner", "this is an element which Greece considers definitive for its foreign policy."¹⁴⁵

The willingness of Greece and Albania to intensify high level relations and intensive contacts which aimed at increasing cooperation between the two countries brought forth the visits of the Speaker of Albanian Parliament Skender Gjinushi, Defence Minister Sabit Brokaj, Greek Deputy Minister of National Economy, Alekos Baltas in early September 1997, and the visit of Greek Minister of Environment, which was preceded on November 5 by the Albanian Minister of Environment and Health, Leonard Solis, the only UHRP member of the cabinet. During almost all visits, protocols or agreements in relevant fields and infrastructure projects were signed.

The first official visit of a foreign head of government to Albania since elections was again realized by the Greek Prime Minister, Simitis. A series of measures including pledges of cooperation in the military, construction, telecom and energy sectors were formally adopted by the two sides.¹⁴⁶

An agreement on the opening of three border posts in the south, to stimulate development in the bordering areas was reached. Albanian President Meidani urged Simitis to legalize Albanian emigrants in Greece and to facilitate operation to provide Albanians with Greek visas and he confirmed the will of Albanian authorities to consider the minorities on the basis of the international standards. The Greek Premier underlined his government's wish to consolidate the further relations between the two countries. He confirmed that Greek government's help towards Albanian integration into EU and NATO structures would continue.¹⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Greece launched some ambitious initiatives. Together with Russia it called for an expanded Balkan meeting to discuss stability and cooperation in the volatile region. The proposal, which opens the way for Russia's formal involvement in southeastern Europe, also calls for the participation of the United Nations, the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, the European Union and other international groups.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, being the only Balkan country, which is member of the European Union and aims at assuming regional leadership Greece has assumed principal initiator of regional congregations. In this respect, Greece organized Crete Summit which brought authorities of Balkan politics together.¹⁴⁹ During the Crete Summit, using its good relations with both Albania and Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Greece managed to bring the leaders of both countries together to discuss Kosova issue. This was announced as the most important political development in the region.

In November following the example of several other ministers, Justice Minister Thirnio Condi payed a visit to Greece during which the Greek side stressed that they were ready to assist building of a new prison in Albania, preparing the Albanian legislation, and offering qualifying courses for the barristers and the educational staff of the Albanian prisons. Technical assistance was also offered to the new School of Magistrate.¹⁵⁰

Moreover, Interior Minister Ceka went to Greece in the first week of December. Ceka and his counterpart Romeos discussed one of the most important common problems: combating the organized crime. During the turmoil massive looting and smuggling of the military supplies from the military units of Southern towns to Greece turned into an issue of concern¹⁵¹ that Albanian crime penetrated into Greece raised when the proofs regarding collaboration between the Greek and Albanian mafiosi in smuggling and drug trafficking were revealed. It became apparent that there was a whole Balkan-wide trafficking network which was using the situation in Albania to its benefit.¹⁵² Greece had asked Albania for further protection measures at the state border. It deployed troops near the Greek villages, while helicopters patrolled the areas in search of possible Albanian intruders.¹⁵³ In this context, the two ministers of Interior agreed to have Greek ships patrol Albanian waters to stop smuggling, illegal emigration and drug trafficking.¹⁵⁴ Cooperation between Albanian and Greek police organizations was foreseen and the respective embassies were decided to have one official responding to both ministries on relation to crime across the border.¹⁵⁵

With the visit of the chief of army general Staff Aleks Andoni, relations improved more. The three-day visit of the Albanian senior military official to Athens consisted in devising details on two cooperation protocols signed before in October by the foreign Ministers of both countries. Greece undertook the complete restructuring of one infantry brigade near Tirana, another one in Vlore, a military center in Berat and the military hospital of the fifth brigade in Gjirokastra. The Greek military fleet would also help in the restoration of Albanian military ships in Vlore and Durres, as well as the reparation of helicopters of the Albanian Health Ministry. Greek military officers would also train Albanian naval staff and provide scholarships for Albanian military officers in Greek military academies.¹⁵⁶

However, even before the aforementioned Greek military fleet arrived in Albania, another small Greek military contingent which had already stationed in Albania, led to severe criticisms by the opposition parties against the government. A Democratic Party parliamentarian who head parliamentary defence committee criticized a government bill to extend the presence of a Greek military unit composed of 250 soldiers in Albania as contrary to national strategic interests.

He stated that there was no basis for a foreign force to stay in Albania after the UN mandate for a multinational force in country has expired. A bilateral agreement between the respective Defence Ministries of Albania and Greece allowed a Greek military contingent to be deployed close to the capital for a six-months in order to

help in the distribution of Greek aid to Albania, in protection of military barracks in Yzberish (close to capital Tirana), implement Greek military assistance to various sectors of training, create working conditions for military commissions and experts, and guard the Military Hospital in Tirana.¹⁵⁷ However, the Albanian parliament approved the bill giving the green light to the Greek military presence in the territory of the country against the background of controversy among ruling political forces and opposition.¹⁵⁸

However, it was not this event which overshadowed the “remarkable improvement” of the bilateral relations but the problem of illegal Albanian immigrants in Greece. Albanian public opinion seemed not to be convinced about the goodwill of the Greek side which has failed to fulfill its commitments for a very long time. The deportation of some 600 Albanians from Greece just after the elections¹⁵⁹ were followed by similar repatriations. Greek authorities, having repeatedly denied they have planned operations for the massive deportation of Albanian immigrants¹⁶⁰ stated that the Greek government was preparing the necessary legal framework in order to legalize the Albanian immigrants.

On the other hand, the Greek ambassador in Albania, Prevendourakis, defended his country's deportation policy of dozens of Albanian "undesirable" immigrants saying the Greek "broom" was less hard than a similar move by Italians. Prevendourakis maintained that the Greek authorities had deported only a small part of over 80,000 Albanian illegal immigrants that crossed the border during the

past four months of unrest in Albania whereas Italy was making plans to deport over 16,000 Albanian refugees that crossed the Adriatic sea.¹⁶¹ Prime Minister Costas Simitis also criticized Italy's handling of the refugee wave.¹⁶²

The Albanian media supported the argument to some extent making comparison between the attitude of the two countries. Dita Informacione wrote that “a comparison between the Italian policy and the Greek policy towards Albanian immigrants, reveals an obvious contradiction in principle; the number of emigrants in Italy together with the latest contingent does not exceed 100.000; Greece has five times as much. Also, “population density” of Albanians compared to the total local population is again higher in Greece than in Italy. Thus, in Italy there is one Albanian in 10.000 Italians while in Greece one Albanian in several hundred Greeks. Greece and Italy are both EU countries and are comparable with regard to standards of living and economic development.”¹⁶³

Greek Labor Minister Miltiadis Papaioanilou had declared at the beginning of January 1997 that President Stephanopoulos would soon sign a decree of legalization of immigrants, which would enable them profit from the social security network. The decree was supposed to envision the equipment of every immigrant who was not from an European Union country to apply for legal employment papers in employment offices in the country.¹⁶⁴

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However, the agreement on legalization of Albanian immigrants in Greece which was signed by Albanian Foreign Minister Alfred Serreqi and his Greek counterpart Pangalos in May 1996 and the second one signed by Pangalos and Paskal Milo could not be applied since the Presidential decree laying down the modalities for the legalization of Albanian immigrants legalisation, thus implementing the agreements, could not be issued for quite a long time. The decree drafted over a period of 10 months was introduced in June after several amendments and approved by the Cabinet on June 25.

However, according to the amendments made by the Greek Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Public Order, immigrants from Greece's neighboring countries have been excluded from legalization process. Greek authorities told that the legalization of immigrants from neighboring countries could lead to a new wave of emigration from Albania and Bulgaria, where the present economic situation was not stable. The decree said that the issue of immigrants from neighboring countries would be solved through seasonal employment agreements between the governments concerned.¹⁶⁵

After the appeals of the Albanian side Greek government decided to revise the legalisation decree to include also immigrants from neighboring countries.¹⁶⁶ Finally the Greek President Stephanopoulos signed the decree at the end of November 1997. According to the decree which will enter into force on January 1, 1998 all the Albanian illegal emigrants will register their names with the offices of

the Human Resources Organisation established in different parts of Greece. The ones who present the necessary documents, will be provided with temporary stay permit so-called "White Cards" within a time limit of five months. At a later stage, the administrative procedures will start through a commission which is in charge of reviewing every case on its own merits. It will be up to the commission's decision if the would-be-illegals are provided with the temporary permit, which will guarantee them temporary employment labelled "Green Card". Its validity will be from one to three years.¹⁶⁷

Soon after a group of experts from the Albanian Ministry of Labor led by the chief of cabinet Dritan Prifti went to Athens to discuss about relevant matters on Albanians legalization, and an inter-institutional agreement, consisting of ten points, had been signed with the Greek National Office of Employment.¹⁶⁸ The Albanian government reacted positively to such a long expected move commenting that "legalization of Albanians is one of the positive results of the evident improvement of our relations with Greece".¹⁶⁹

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the break-up of former Yugoslavia and the ensuing bloody wars have drawn the world public attention to the Balkans. Although at the time in early 1990s much of the attention focused on the areas where actual war was taking place like Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, many were aware that outside former Yugoslavia there were potential flash points. One of these was always the Greek-Albanian dispute. In fact, a cursory look at the way in which Tirana and Athens formulated their policies towards each other would reveal that, since the establishment of an independent Albania, the relationship between the two capitals has hardly been an example of good neighborliness. Though it looks very intricate and rather complicated, much of the dispute between Greece and Albania revolves around a minority question, namely the Greek minority in the south of Albania. Almost everything related to the minority is disputed, i.e. the definition of the minority, its size, its treatment, etc.. And in many respects, the characteristics of the dispute are quite peculiar.

Minority questions in the Balkans have certain common features. In a broader sense, some minorities in the region look to certain states, in most cases just across the border, for support and advice. The reason lies in the fact that some minorities associate themselves with the neighboring state which they consider as their 'mother state'. Though this is not to say that all minorities have a mother state, it is

safe to say that more or less every Balkan country has at least one minority which associate itself and its future with a neighboring state. And from the point of view of host countries minorities with a mother state are unsatiable because those minorities are normally used by neighboring countries as part of their larger designs upon host countries territorial integrity. The Greek minority in the south of Albania falls clearly into this category. In the Greek-Albanian case, there has been clear evidence of this mistrust which poison inter-state relations in the Balkans.

Contrary to public assertions by Greek and Albanian officials, the Greek minority has never played the role of a friendship bridge between the two countries. Instead it was always regarded as a fifth column by the Albanian state and was used by Greece as a stick with which to strike at Albania at every international platform. Albania has been suspicious that Greece still has territorial designs on what the Greeks call Northern Epirus, southern Albania, and has been afraid that Greek authorities would use the minority as a Trojan Horse to attach the region to Greece in one form or the other. On the other hand, the Greek side has always complained about the mistreatment of the minority by Albanian governments.

Although Tirana has consistently stated that the treatment it accords to the Greek minority corresponds to the human rights documents adopted by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), it has never persuaded its Southern neighbor. Indeed, Albania's record of human rights violation greatly improved since 1991. There would be no comparison between the Stalinist regime to which the

country was subjected for more than fifty years and the newly established democratic governance in terms of human rights in Albania. Correspondingly, there would be no doubt that the Greek minority has enjoyed more rights and freedoms since the early 1990s. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the relationship between Greece and Albania improved soon after the collapse of the communist regime. If anything, because of the mistrust, relations between the two countries took a sharp turn for the worse immediately after the establishment of a multi-party system in Albania. Greece never ceased to express its dissatisfaction of the treatment meted out to the minority, while Albania was never prepared to lend a sympathetic ear to Greece's advocacy of it. From the point of view of Tirana, Greece was simply using the minority issue to further its aspirations in southern Albania.

After the demise of the Communist regime in Albania, two new points of friction came about and they exacerbated the already volatile situation between the two countries. Lifting of the ban on religion and religious practices brought forth a number problems as to how to define the scope of these freedoms. Ironically, these problems had never existed in communist Albania which had banned religion altogether. While the Greek minority's demands for more religious freedoms were met by the Albanian government to a large extent, the minority was never fully satisfied. To make matters worse, Greece began to manipulate the Albanian Autocephalus Orthodox Church in a variety of ways and manners. All this served no other purpose than to strengthen the conviction at the back of the minds of the Albanian officials that Greece was trying to indirectly intervene in Albanian social

and political affairs by assigning Greek exarchs to the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and by violating the autonomy of the church. According to the Albanian government, the ultimate aim of Greece was to somehow detach southern part of the country from Tirana's control. And certain action Greece took in the past particularly at the time of the establishment of independent Albania convinced Albanian political elite of dubious Greek designs.

Sudden influx of people from Albania into Greece created another point of friction and gave Greece a powerful leverage over its northern neighbor. Immigration was unknown in Albania until the Cold War era ended. However, the poor population soon realised that they could find more fertile ground abroad. So, in almost six years more than 400.000 people or 12% of the whole population mainly under 30 years old left the country. This wave of immigrants was also a new phenomena for the Greek society. In a short time, due to increasing crime rate, which many Greeks attribute to illegal Albanian immigrants, caused uneasiness among large sections of the Greek populace. This issue sometimes seemed to be used by the Greek side as a tit-for-tat. The Greek government introduced harsher measures against the immigrants at the time the Greek minority was subjected to ill-treatment.

Regional instability brought about by the crisis in former Yugoslavia is another crucial factor in the Albanian-Greek equation. For instance, Greece's conflict with the Republic of Macedonia appears to have inflamed the nationalist fervor in Greek politics in general. As one of the first countries to recognize Macedonian

independence, Albania predictably drew Greek condemnation. But while Greek-Albanian relations have clearly suffered from the Macedonian dispute, it might be said that, the underlying strain between Athens and Tirana is linked to broader regional trends. In particular, the Greek government has been frustrated by Albania's excellent relations with Turkey, Greece's nemesis.

Greek officials declared several times in 1992 and 1993 that the alleged Ankara-Tirana-Skopje axis had placed Greece in a kind of encirclement. They asserted that the relations between the Berisha regime and Turkey, their extensive military cooperation, particularly Turkey's involvement in the training of Albanian officer corps and the police was clear indication that Turkey was endeavoring to encircle Greece. Though there was not much substance, successive Greek governments continued to associate the problem from the north with problem from the east.

In 1996, it seemed that that both sides were prepared to set their animosities aside. Indeed the relations improved, but only relatively. Nevertheless, there was no ups and downs in relations, and the relative amelioration became somewhat steady. While further improvement was expected, the year 1997 started with a crisis in Albania. Within a few months public order was disrupted. The slide into chaos was so fast that Albanian governmental authority disappeared completely, leaving the country at the mercy of armed bands who presented themselves as 'heroes'. The ensuing political changes in the country were to directly influence the relationship between Athens and Tirana.

Particularly during the first few weeks of the turmoil, some analysts asserted that Greece had been inciting the events in the Southern part of the country in order to de facto invade the Northern Epirus. However, these rumors seemed not to create any suspicions on the part of the new Albanian government against Greece which came to power following the early elections brokered through international mediation. Instead, Greece has suddenly become one of the most important partners of the current Albanian government.

Greek prime Minister Simitis' ambitious foreign policy goals which he had set out almost a year previously may have influenced the course of developments. Simitis declared in 1996 that the new goal of his government was to gain a strong position in the Balkans and to boost the development of constructive and mutually beneficial policy and economical relations with all states in the Balkan peninsula. He once stated that Greece both independently and as a member of the European Union and NATO could contribute to the search for Balkan States' new orientations, setting an example and helping them in their EU approach. Greece was continuing its efforts to improve a program of multifaceted inter-Balkan cooperation and promoting regional business activity. This strategy different from the "policy of conditionality" of the former Premier, Papandreou, coupled with the cooperative policy of the new Albanian government brought about a radical change in the political atmosphere between the two countries. Though the present state of relations between Tirana and Athens is quite encouraging, whether Greece will

manage to handle Albania without giving rise to suspicions again that it harbors territorial intentions over the northern neighbor remains to be seen.



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Greece. Paper claimed that discrimination of Albanian migrants by Greek police continued and pointed out that about 15 of them have been maltreated.

59-MPA, 8 February 1996.

60-SWB, 10 February 1996.

61-SWB, 25 March 1996.

62-Constantine Stephanopoulos, "Greek-Albanian Relations," Mediterranean Quarterly 7:4 (Fall 1996), 2.

63-SWB, 24 July 1996.

64-SWB, 25 March 1996.

65-SWB, 25 March 1996.

66-SWB, 24 July 1996.

67-SWB, 17 May 1996.

68-SWB, 20 May 1996.

69-Republika, 18 May 1996.

70-SWB, 24 May 1996.

71-SWB, 15 June 1996.

72-SWB, 8 August 1996.

73-SWB, 8 August 1996.

74-SWB, 8 August 1996.

75-MILS News, 12 September 1996.

76-SWB, 2 September 1996.

77-MPA, 14 September 1996.

- 78-Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Press and Information Department' Declaration, 2 September 1996.
- 79-ANA, 23 August 1995.
- 80-Pyramid schemes pay old investors with the deposits of the new. They collapse when they run short of new investors
- 81- Recovery
- 82-Kerin Hope, "Foundations Exposed by Pyramids' Collapse." Financial Times. (February 19, 1997), 2.
- 83-World Bank and the European Commission and the European Bank for Reconstruction. Albania Directions for Recovery and Growth. September, 1997, 2.
- 84-Reconstruction
- 85-Albanian Daily News (ADN), 30-31 August 1997.
- 86-The European Union. Albania : PHARE Concept Paper Orientations of PHARE Assistance. October 1997, 1.
- 87-ADN, 7-8 June 1997.
- 88-The European Union. PHARE Concept Paper. October 1997, 2.
- 89-Kerin Hope, "Defence-Nation's Army is waiting to Sign Up." Financial Times. (February 12, 1997), 3.
- 90-ADN, 4-5 January 1997.
- 91-ADN, 21 June 1997.
- 92-ADN, 4-5 January 1997.
- 93-Albania, 24 January 1997.

94-ADN, 25-26 January 1997

95-Rilindja Demokratika, 21 February 1997

96-ADN, 5 March 1997.

97-Zeri i Popullit 5 March 1997

98-ADN, 11 March 1997

99-OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

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100-SEE United Nations Security Council. Resolution no. 1101.

March 28, 1997.

101-Economist, 12 April 1997, 343: 8012, 46

102-ODHIR

103-ADN, 10-11 May 1997

104-Economist, 17 May 1997, 343: 8017, 46

105-Vlora Salvation Committee brought on September 8 an action against ex-President Berisha in the District Attorney's Office accusing him of being the major cause of the bloodshed in Vlora and in the whole Albania. ADN, 16 September 1997.

106-ADN, 6 June 1997

107-Albania, 18 July 1997

108-Rilindja Demokratika July 30 1997

109-Kerin Hope, "Pyramid Finance Schemes." Financial Times. (February 3, 1997), 2.

110-ADN, 11-12 January 1997.

111-Lee Hockstader, "Albania's Progress" The Washington Post.
(February 6, 1997), 5.

112-ADN, 6 August 1997.

113-ADN, 21 March 1997.

114-ADN, 6 March 1997.

115-ADN, 23 January 1997.

116-Kerin Hope, "Nation's Army.", 3 ; More than 1,000 Albanians are fleeing armed chaos in their troubled Balkan country every day for Italy and Greece, according to the United Nations refugee agency UNHCR reports.

117-ADN, 5 March 1997.

118-ADN, 6 March 1997.

119-Greece proposed that the European Union should give economic backing to Albania in a bid to restore stability to the region. at the EU's general affairs council on February 24.

120-ATA, 21 March 1997

121-Zeri i Popullit, 21 March 1997

122-ADN, 4 June 1997.

123-ADN, 18 March 1997.

124-ADN, 26-27 July 1997.

125-Zeri i Popullit, 13 June 1997; The Greek minority's party, UHRP also organized a rally in the center of Athens on June 22. UHRP appealed

to thousands of Albanians living as immigrants in Greece to return to Albania and vote, see Koha Jone 21-22 June 1997.

126-ADN, 10 June 1997; However, soon after he became the new prime minister Nano said his government would not reimburse people who lost money in the massive savings but hoped to compensate them with a revived economy and new jobs to be created thanks to the foreign aid.

See ADN, 1 August 1997.

127-ADN, 19 June 1997.

128-ADN, 11 June 1997.

129-ADN, 20 June 1997.

130-OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Final Report. November 13, 1997, 5.

131-Albania, 11 July 1997.

132-ADN, 3 July 1997.

133-ADN, 25 July 1997.

134-ADN, 19-20 July 1997.

135-ADN, 30 July 1997.

136-Independent, 10 July 1997.

137-ADN, 23-24 August 1997 ; the decision of the new Socialist government to quit the Organization of Islamic Conference due to the doubt that Albanian relations with Muslim countries would hinder the integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures marked this significant change in the course of the Albanian foreign policy. Prime Minister

Nano stated that having been member in the aforementioned organization had been one of the biggest mistakes of Berisha government. Albania did not participate in the OIC Summit held in December 1997 in Tehran; See Republika 10 October 1997

138-ADN, 22 July 1997.

139-Koha Jone, 5 November 1997.

140-Dita Informacione, 30 July 1997.

141-ADN, 5 August 1997.

142-ADN, 5 October 1997.

143-ADN, 5 August 1997.

144-Republika, 5 August 1997.

145-ADN, 16 September 1997.

146-ADN, 16 October 1997.

147-ADN, 16 October 1997.

148-Reuters, 10 June 1997.

149-Koha Jone, 15 October 1997.

150-Zeri i Popullit, 29 November 1997.

151-ADN, 31 July 1997.

152-ADN, 1 August 1997 also See Kathimerini, 3 July 1997.

153-Zeri i Popullit, 19-20 July 1997.

154-Albania, being unable to effectively control its waters and stop the illegal activities across the shores with Italy and Greece, had signed a similar agreement with Italy also.

155-Zeri i Popullit, 5 December 1997.

156-ADN, 21 November 1997.

157-ADN, 18 December 1997.

158-ADN, 20-21 December 1997.

159-ADN, 19-20 July 1997.

160-ADN, 31 July 1997.

161-ADN, 22 July 1997.

162-ADN, 8 April 1997.

163-ADN, 25 August 1997.

164-ADN, 7 January 1997.

165-ADN, 9 July 1997.

166-Gazeta Shqiptare, 24 July 1997.

167-Athens News, 1 December 1997.

168-Albania, 10 December 1997.

169-ADN, 10 December 1997.

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