

Albania in Perspective

An Orientation Guide



Technology Integration Division
June 2010



DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

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GEOGRAPHY

Country Overview

Albania is a small, mountainous nation located on the southwestern edge of the Balkan Peninsula, comparable in size to Maryland. It lies next to the Adriatic Sea and the Strait of Otranto that connects the Adriatic with the Ionian Sea. Albania's mountains isolate the inaccessible regions of Albania from the Balkan Peninsula, including other sections of Albania. This geographical isolation was intensified by political isolation during the mid-to-late 20th century, when the government of Enver Hoxha pursued a strict Marxist-Leninist path of communism that sealed it away from other communist nations of the Soviet bloc. Albania, therefore, emerged from its communist era in the early 1990s as possibly the poorest and least developed nation in Europe.¹



One lasting reminder of the Hoxha era endures as one of the most dominant features on the Albanian landscape. Bunkers were built between 1972 and 1983, when Albania became increasingly isolated from all other nations.² Approximately 750,000 cement-and-iron bunkers, designed to withstand tank attacks, remain strewn across the Albanian countryside—along city streets, in farms, on sandy beaches, and encased within mountain slopes. Since the bunkers are nearly immovable, some enterprising Albanians have begun converting them into kiosks, stables, planters, restaurants, and even residences.³ These industrious transformations of the ubiquitous “concrete mushrooms” are symbolic of the larger institutional changes that Albania is undergoing to become a political and economic member of the European Union.

Geographic Regions and Topographic Features

More than two thirds of Albania's landscape consists of mountains broken up by river valleys. Such terrain has contributed to the relative isolation of many Albanian communities.⁴ The most rugged peaks and narrowest river valleys are found in the Northern Albanian Alps, in the region near the Montenegrin and Kosovan borders. This range is the southern-most section of the Dinaric



¹ *Albania: From Isolation Toward Reform*. Blejer, Mario I.; and Mauro Mecagni, Ratna Sahay, Richard Hides, Barry Johnston, Piroška Nagy, Roy Pepper. “Introduction [p. 1].” 1992. Washington, D.C: International Monetary Fund.

² ConcreteMushrooms.com. “Concrete Mushrooms: Bunkers in Albania [p. 31].” 2009. <http://concrete-mushrooms.com/files/concrete-mushrooms-final.pdf>

³ ConcreteMushrooms.com. “Concrete Mushrooms: Bunkers in Albania [p. 45].” 2009. <http://concrete-mushrooms.com/files/concrete-mushrooms-final.pdf>

⁴ *Albania & Kosovo*, 3rd Ed. Walbank, Frank W. “History of Albania and Kosovo: Life Among the Tribes [p. 66].” 2001. London, England: A & C Black Ltd.

Alps, mountains that parallel the Adriatic Sea coastline northward all the way to Slovenia. Much of this northern region of Albania remains forested and largely unpopulated.⁵

In central Albania, the mountains run north-south along the eastern half of the country. Within this section lies Mali i Korabit (Mount Korab), a border peak that is the highest point (2,764 m, 9,068 ft) of both Albania and Montenegro. To the south, the mountains shift to a southeast-northwest orientation and the river valleys separating the ranges become wider. Tree cover in this region is thinner than in the north, and many of the hillsides serve as grazing land for livestock.⁶

Much of Albania's coastal lowland belt consists of marshlands, lagoons, and barren badlands in their natural state. Where irrigation is feasible, some of this land has been reclaimed for agricultural purposes.⁷ On average, this strip of coastal land reaches inland less than 16 km (10 mi) from the Adriatic Sea. It extends from Albania's northern border to just south of the coastal city of Vlorë. Beyond this region to the east lies a narrow area of mid-elevation rolling hills (100-900 m, 328-2,953 ft). Many of Albania's largest cities are found here, including Tirana, Elbasan, and Berat.⁸

Within the mountain regions of Albania lie numerous river valleys of lower elevation that support hillside agriculture. In the east, near where Albania, Macedonia, and Greece occupy a border region along Lakes Ohrid and Prespa, lies a high plateau (850 m, 2,800 ft) surrounded by mountains. Within the plateau lies Korçë, the largest city within Albania's eastern mountain region. The countryside surrounding Korçë is one of the nation's primary wheat-growing areas.⁹

Climate

Although Albania is relatively small, its climate is remarkably variable due to the altitude difference between the coastal region and the inland mountainous areas. A Mediterranean climate dominates the coast, characterized by mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers.¹⁰ This pattern continues into the middle elevations of the inland regions. Farther east, rainfall totals increase dramatically along the western slopes of the first major mountain ranges, where coastal and continental air masses converge. Here,



© Viktor Kaposi
Rain in Berat

⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: Land: Relief." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42616>

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: Land: Relief." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42616>

⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Iwaskiw, Walter R. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Physical Environment: Topography." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0044\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0044))

⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization. Shundi, Andrea. "Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Albania: 3: Climate and Agro-Ecological Zones." October 2006. <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/Albania/albania.htm>

⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Korçë." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9046055>

¹⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: Land: Climate." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42618>

temperatures vary more in the summer (compared to the coast), and winter reaches much colder temperatures. Snow is common at the higher altitudes during this time of the year. In Albania's eastern-most mountainous regions, where the coastal and continental air masses are less likely to interact, precipitation levels are lower than in the mountains to the west.^{11,12}

Precipitation levels in Albania tend to be the highest in the north and decrease toward the south. They are uneven throughout the country, since elevation differences and distance from the coast affect rainfall patterns. In the North Albanian Alps, annual precipitation is more than 2,500 mm (100 in.) in some areas. In contrast, less than 760 mm (30 in.) of annual rainfall occurs in parts of the nation's southeastern corner.¹³ Korçë, for example, averages 720 mm (28 in.) of annual precipitation, whereas the city of Vlorë, located at nearly the same latitude but roughly 100 km to the west along the coast, averages nearly 1,000 mm (39 in.).^{14,15}

Rivers and Lakes

Rivers

Virtually all of the rain and snow that falls in Albania never leaves the nation's borders as it flows in rivers westward toward the Adriatic Sea.¹⁶ The Drin River, Albania's longest river at a length of 282 km (175 mi), is fed by two major tributaries—the White Drin (Drini i Bardhë) and the Black Drin (Drini i Zi).¹⁷ They originate in Kosovo and Macedonia, respectively. The Drin is economically the most important river in Albania because of the three hydroelectric plants built along its northern-most stretch. Under normal conditions, the plants supply about 90% of the nation's electricity.¹⁸



¹¹ BBC Weather. "Albania." 2010.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT003310

¹² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Iwaskiw, Walter R. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Physical Environment: Climate." April 1992.

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0046\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0046))

¹³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: Land: Climate." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42618>

¹⁴ BBC Weather. "Average Conditions, Vlore, Albania." 2006.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT003320

¹⁵ *World and Its Peoples: Western Balkans*. 2010. London, England: Marshall Cavendish.

¹⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Iwaskiw, Walter R. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Physical Environment: Topography." Raymond Zickel; Walter R. Iwaskiw, Eds. April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0045\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0045))

¹⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: Land: Drainage." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42617>

¹⁸ Control System Engineering. "Drin River Hydropower Plants [p. 2]." August 2006. http://www.cse-engineer.com/My_Homepage_Files/Download/DrinCascade_HPP_monitoring.pdf

Albania's other rivers are very seasonal in their flow, alternating between raging torrents during the heavy winter rains and dusty riverbeds during the dry summer months. Among the longer of these rivers are the Seman and the Vjosë. Both drain the southern mountains of Albania via their source rivers and primary tributaries (Osum and Devoll Rivers for the Seman; Drino and Shushicë Rivers for the Vjosë).

The Shkumbin River, which flows through Elbasan has been one of the most important rivers in the western Balkans. During the Roman Empire, the Via Egnatia running through the Shkumbin river valley was one of the region's major trade and military routes. It connected Albania's Adriatic coast with Thessalonika (modern Thessaloniki) on the Aegean Sea and Byzantium (modern Istanbul) on the Bosphorus.^{19,20} The Shkumbin is also the traditional dividing line between speakers of Tosk and Gheg, the two major dialects of the Albanian language.²¹

Lakes

Most of Albania's larger bodies of water are reservoirs. Two significant exceptions are Lakes Ohrid and Prespa. Both are part of the border between Albania and Macedonia. Lake Ohrid, Europe's oldest lake, is one of the world's most unique large lakes in that much of its water comes from surface and underwater springs. It has been isolated from other bodies of water for millions of years, resulting in the evolution of a large number of plant and fish species that are unique to the lake.²²



Lake Prespa sits astride the meeting point of the Albanian, Macedonian, and Greek borders, southeast of Lake Ohrid. (It is also sometimes called Great Lake Prespa, as a very narrow isthmus is its only separation from a smaller lake that lies mostly within Greece.) Lake Prespa is situated at an elevation more than 150 m higher than Lake Ohrid and supplies water to its lower neighbor through underground channels, which flow through the porous limestone bedrock that separates the two lakes. Through this underground connection, Prespa serves as the headwaters of the Black Drin River (*Drin I Zi*), whose outlet lies on the northern shore of Lake Ohrid within Macedonia. As a result of being



¹⁹ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "The Via Egnatia, Durrës to Lake Ochrid [p. 335]." 2001. London, England: A&C Black Limited.

²⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Ancient Ilyrians." Raymond Zickel; Walter Ikaskiw, Eds. April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0014\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0014)) [retrieved 6 April 2010]

²¹ *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th Ed. "Languages of Albania." M. Paul Lewis, Ed. 2010. Dallas, TX: SIL International. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AL

²² WorldLakes.org. Lake Net. "Lake Profile: Ohrid." 2004. <http://www.worldlakes.org/lakedetails.asp?lakeid=8770>

used for excessive irrigation, Lake Prespa's water level has declined by more than 5-6 m (16-20 ft) over the last 60 years, representing a loss of roughly 25%. Lake Prespa has also suffered from an increasing amount of chemical nutrients in its water, a process known as eutrophication, which leads to poorer water quality and biological diversity.²³

Lake Shkodër, the largest lake in the Balkans, lies along Albania's border in the nation's northwestern corner. An extension of the Adriatic Sea in former years, Lake Shkodër now receives the water from six rivers that flow out of the mountains of Albania and Montenegro to the lake's north and northwest.²⁴ The Buna River drains the lake's southern end and for its last 25 km (16 mi) forms the boundary between the two nations.

Cities

City	Census Population 2001 ²⁵
Tirana (Tiranë)	343,078
Durrës	99,546
Elbasan	87,797
Shkodër	82,455
Vlorë	77,691
Fier	56,297
Korçë	55,130
Berat	44,191

²³ BALWOIS 2010 Conference. Patceva, Suzana; and Vas Mitic. "Chlorophyll *a* Content as Indicator Eutrophication of Lake Prespa." 25-29 May 2010.

http://www.balwois.com/balwois/administration/full_paper/ffp-1483.pdf

²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Lake Scutari." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9066419> [retrieved 9 April 2010]

²⁵ Pop-Stat.Mashke.org "Shqipëria." 2010. <http://pop-stat.mashke.org/albania-cities.htm>

City	Census Population 2001 ²⁶
Lushnjë	32,580
Kavajë	24,817

Tirana (Tiranë)

Tirana, the capital and largest city of Albania, lies approximately 27 km (17 mi) inland from the Adriatic Sea, at the southeastern end of the fertile Ishëm-Gjole-Tirana River Valley. While the site of the city has been inhabited by humans since prehistoric times, the city really did not emerge until 1614.²⁷ At that time, Süleiman Pasha Mulleti, a local feudal lord and general in the Ottoman Empire army, supposedly built a mosque, bakery, and Turkish sauna in the region. Thereafter, the city steadily grew as a regional trading center.²⁸



Tirana was still a modest Albanian city of roughly 12,000 people with virtually no industrial development when it became the temporary national capital in 1920.^{29,30} (Five years later, it was named the permanent capital of the newly constituted Republic of Albania.) With few Ottoman influences still visible, the central part of the modern city reflects a mix of Italian-style government buildings constructed during the 1930s and drab Soviet-era architecture. A notable exception is the Ethem Bey Mosque, often celebrated as the city's landmark building. The mosque was completed in the early nineteenth century, but was closed for many years under communist rule until its reopening in 1991.³¹

Today, Tirana is unchallenged as Albania's political, industrial, and cultural center. Lacking the many historical buildings of other Albanian cities such as Durrës and Shodkër, Tirana has begun to refashion itself as a modern city. Since current Tirana

²⁶ Pop-Stat.Mashke.org "Shqipëria." 2010. <http://pop-stat.mashke.org/albania-cities.htm>

²⁷ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Tirana [p. 132]." 2001. London, England: A & C Black Ltd.

²⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Tirana." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9072598>

²⁹ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Tirana and Kruja [p. 125]." 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

³⁰ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Tirana [p. 133]." 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

³¹ New York Times. Levathes, Louise. "Albania's Capital Gets a New Coat." 14 August 2005. <http://travel.nytimes.com/2005/08/14/travel/14surf.html>

mayor Edi Rama, a former Parisian artist, assumed office in 2000, many of the dreary communist-era buildings have been repainted in bright colors and eye-catching patterns that have visually transformed the city. Others are scheduled for demolition, to be replaced by new buildings designed by some of Europe's most innovative architects. Acres of new parks and thousands of newly planted trees have contributed to the city's remaking.³²

Durrës

Albania's primary port is at Durrës, a city whose history stretches back to its founding in the 7th century B.C.E. by colonists from the island of Corfu (modern-day Kérkira in Greece). Originally known as *Epidamnus* by the ancient Greeks, the city later came to be called *Dyrrachium* by the Romans, who made it the western end of the Via Egnatia (which linked the Adriatic coast with Byzantium). Ruins from the Roman and Byzantine era still dot the area near the city's port. During Ottoman rule, Durrës was again renamed. Known during this time as Diraç, the city declined significantly under Turkish rule. By the middle of the 19th century, only about 1,000 people lived there.³³



© Zachary Korb
Durrës, Albania

During the 20th century, the city's fortunes improved. Between 1918 and 1920, Durrës served as the temporary capital of the Principality of Albania. The city's first harbor was constructed in 1927, although it was destroyed by aerial bombardment during the latter stages of World War II. Following the war, the port was rebuilt and rail connections were constructed that eventually would link Durrës to most of Albania's larger cities. The marshlands surrounding the city were also drained, opening up the area to agriculture and relieving the city of its plaguing malarial mosquitoes.³⁴

Besides being Albania's major seaport, Durrës is the site of several manufacturing industries, such as shipbuilding, food processing, cigarette production, leather, and plastics. South of the city, a tourist industry has developed along the beaches that front the Adriatic Sea.^{35,36}

³² SkyscraperCity.com. New Yorker. Kramer, Jane. "Painting the Town: How Edi Rama Reinvented Albanian Politics." 27 June 2005. <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=228294>

³³ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Durrës [pp. 337-339]." 2001. London, England: A&C Black Limited.

³⁴ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Durrës [p. 339]." 2001. London, England: A&C Black Limited.

³⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Durrës." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9031590>

³⁶ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Durrës [p. 339]." 2001. London, England: A&C Black Limited.

Elbasan

Located on the Shkumbin River, Elbasan (known first as *Masio Scampa* and later *Hiskampis*) was an important trade center along the Via Egnatia during the Roman era. Though once the site of an imposing fortress, it could not save the city from destruction by invading armies of Ostrogoths in the late 5th century and Bulgars roughly four centuries later.^{37,38}

In 1466–67, Elbasan’s fortress was rebuilt by Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II. Over successive centuries, the city became a commercial center, with a large merchant class. The fortress was again razed in 1832 by Ottoman Grand Vizier Reshid Pasha. This time, it was demolished as part of a campaign to quell resistance to Ottoman administrative reforms by local Albanian feudal and tribal chiefs.^{39,40}



© Elizabeth / flickr.com
Elbasan, Albania

In the 1930s, Elbasan industrialized, starting with the construction of factories that produced cigarettes and alcoholic beverages.⁴¹ Heavy industry arrived during the 1970s, when Albania’s largest metallurgical complex was constructed with major Chinese assistance on the city’s southwestern flank. At one time, the “Steel of the Party,” as the complex was known, employed about 12,000 people producing 50 types of metal over a vast array of factories linked by roughly 50 km (30 mi) of railway.⁴² The pollutants released from the unfiltered chimneys of the Elbasan complex have left a damaging environmental legacy in the area. In 2004, the author of a UN report on Elbasan, stated his belief that the soil in the Elbasan region was “the most contaminated in Europe.”⁴³ Environmental technicians have since made filtering improvements at the metallurgical

³⁷ *Italy and Her Invaders: The Ostrogothic Invasion, 476-535*, Vol. III, 2nd Ed. Hodgkin, Thomas. “The Two Theodorics in Thrace [p.99].” 1896. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

³⁸ AlbanianLink.com. “Elbasan.” No date.

<http://www.albanianlink.com/load.php?uVH=AlbaniaLinkWebSiteAboutAlbaniaInformationsAccessMapsCitiesToursShopMakingBlogsAndContactsAlbanianLinkWebSite&l=2&r=3&sm=4&c=elbasan&smN=3&m=4>

³⁹ Balkania.net. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Batakovic, Dusan T. “From the Serbian Revolution to the Eastern Crisis: 1804-1875.” 1999. http://balkania.tripod.com/resources/history/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part2a.html

⁴⁰ AlbanianHistory.net. Texts and Documents of Albanian History. Elsie, Robert. “1854. Johann Georg von Hahn: Travels in Central Albania.” No date. <http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts19/AH1854.html>

⁴¹ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. “Elbasan [p. 353].” 2001. London, England: A&C Black Limited.

⁴² BBC News. Hollingham, Richard. “Albania’s Struggle With Privatisation.” 19 May 2005.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/4560229.stm

⁴³ The Guardian. Brown, Paul. “Elbasan: From Market Garden to Dead Zone.” 27 March 2004.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2004/mar/27/internationalnews.pollution>

complex. In spite of this, a report in 2009 still found soil within 15 km (9 mi) of the site to be heavily contaminated with copper, zinc, and cadmium.⁴⁴

Shkodër

Few, if any, Albanian cities have as important and extensive a history as does Shkodër. It has been held, at various times over the millennia, by virtually every group of outsiders that ever laid claim to what is now Albania. During the Ottoman era, Shkodër was easily the largest city within modern-day Albanian borders. From the last half of the 18th century through the early 19th century, Shkodër was the capital of a semi-autonomous *pashalik*⁴⁵

that included the northern half of Albania and parts of modern-day Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia.^{46,47} Later, the city served as an Ottoman province.⁴⁸



© Christian Guthrie
Shkodër, Albania

Shkodër is located adjacent to the southern tip of Lake Shkodër. Southwest of the main part of the city, Albania's longest river, the Drin, joins the Buna River near where the latter flows out of Lake Shkodër. Within the narrow strip of land between these two rivers is a promontory of long-time military importance. This has been the site of several fortresses and castles, whose ruins (Rozafa Castle) can still be seen.

The city has always been the major market town for Albania's mountainous northern region. It was also a commercial center for trade routes that linked the Adriatic Sea with inland areas of the central Balkans.⁴⁹ Industrial development took place in Shkodër's northeastern section beginning in the 1930s and expanded during the communist period, with local factories manufacturing textiles, cigarettes, wood products, processed foods, copper-wire products, and other items.⁵⁰ Many of these factories, however, are dilapidated and have closed since the 1990s. New businesses, particularly textile and shoe manufacturers, have since been recruited to the city's old industrial zone, which has become the country's first industrial park.⁵¹

⁴⁴ World-Food.net. Sallaku, Fatbardh; and Shkelqui Fortuzi, Odeta Tota, Bujar Huqi, Demosthenis Chachalis, and Mohamend Darawsheh. "Heavy Metal Soil Contamination Around the Metallurgical Plant of Elbasani in Albania." 3 October 2009. <http://www.world-food.net/scientificjournal/2009/issue3/pdf/environment/43.pdf>

⁴⁵ A *pashalik* was an administrative region within the Ottoman Empire governed by a Pasha, a title granted by the Ottoman Sultan to the highest dignitaries within the Empire.

⁴⁶ *The Albanians: A Modern History*. Vickers, Miranda. "The Nature of Ottoman Rule and the Rise of the Great Pashaliks [pp. 18-19]." 1995. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co.

⁴⁷ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Shkodra [p. 221]." 2001. London, England: A&C Black Limited.

⁴⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Shkodër." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9067454>

⁴⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Shkodër." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9067454>

⁵⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Shkodër." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9067454>

⁵¹ USAID. Local Governance Program in Albania. "Booklet on Shkodra and Its Industrial Zone." 2009. [http://www.lgpa.al/files/12 Shkodra booklet_ENG_16sept%5B1%5D.pdf](http://www.lgpa.al/files/12%20Shkodra%20booklet_ENG_16sept%5B1%5D.pdf)

Vlorë

Vlorë is Albania's second largest port city, situated on the Bay of Vlorës in an area sheltered from the open sea by the Karaburun Peninsula and Sazan Island, Albania's largest island. The city began as Aulon, a Greek coastal colony on the ancient Illyrian coast, later renamed Vlorë. Like most Albanian towns and cities, Vlorë has been either occupied or dominated by numerous kingdoms and empires during more than two thousand years of existence. In November 1912, the city was the site of a hastily arranged assembly from which emerged the Albanian Declaration of Independence, marking an end to several centuries of Ottoman rule. Shortly thereafter, Vlorë became the capital of the Provisional Government of Albania, whose prime minister was a Vlorë native, Ismail Qemali. The new government would be short-lived, however. Approximately two years later, Vlorë was seized by Italian troops, even though Italy had not yet entered World War I.⁵²

During Albania's communist era, the Soviet Union upgraded the Vlorë harbor for use as a naval facility and submarine base.⁵³ When, in 1960–61, Albanian communist ruler Enver Hoxha severed relations with Moscow in favor of closer ties with Maoist China, the Soviet Union threatened to occupy Vlorë in retaliation.⁵⁴ The concurrent Cuban Missile Crisis, however, quickly overshadowed the Albanian standoff within the Kremlin's inner circle. Subsequently, the threat against Vlorë was never carried out.⁵⁵



Vlorë's economy continues to center around port trade. Local agricultural products such as fruit, olives, and olive oil are exported from Vlorë, as are petroleum products from oilfields and refineries located in the city's northeast. Beaches in the southern part of Vlorë have helped jumpstart local tourism.

Unfortunately, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Vlorë became well known for its criminal activities such as human trafficking and contraband smuggling. These occupations became so prominent that they began to rival the city's legitimate businesses.⁵⁶ Speedboats operating out of Vlorë's harbor would ferry their illegal cargo across the Adriatic Sea to Italy each night. The situation became so critical that the Albanian government banned the use of speedboats for a three-year period beginning in

⁵² *The Albanians: An Ethnic History From Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jacques, Edwin E. "25. The Fourteen Successive Ineffective Governments (1912-1925) [p. 360]." 1995. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

⁵³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Vlorë." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9075622>

⁵⁴ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Vlora [p. 467]." 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

⁵⁵ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. "Vlora [p. 467]." 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

⁵⁶ Institute for War and Peace Reporting. "Traffickers Risk Death on Albania's High Seas." 21 February 2005. <http://www.iwpr.net/report-news/traffickers-risk-death-albania%E2%80%99s-high-seas>

2006. Recent evidence indicates that these and other governmental measures have put a significant dent in Vlorë's smuggling.^{57,58}

Environmental Concerns

Albania faces many environmental challenges. While the fall of the communist regime in the 1990s led to the closing of many of the worst polluting factories in the country, other sources of pollution increased in the post-communist era. The number of cars on Albanian roads skyrocketed as stolen vehicles from Western Europe were smuggled in on ships from Italy.⁵⁹ As consumption increased, so did waste; illegal trash dumps were scattered throughout the nation's beaches, rivers, and forests—particularly near major cities.⁶⁰



© Jason Rogers
Pollution in Albania

Another environmental problem is the burning—as opposed to dumping—of trash. Unregulated garbage burning is one of the major sources of air pollution in Albania. Others include emissions from automobiles, cement plants, oilfield and refinery operations, and fuels consumed for heating purposes. Many aging industrial plants have been closed since the early 1990s. However, those still in operation (particularly in Tirana and Elbasan) contribute to air pollutant concentrations two to five times higher than allowable levels.⁶¹

Land erosion and soil contamination are also serious issues for the country. The nation's mountainous topography and heavy winter rainfalls create natural conditions for extensive erosion. Furthermore, activities such as overgrazing, deforestation, and river dredging have added significantly to Albania's soil loss. Soil contaminated by chemicals is generally not a problem in agricultural areas, but some soils close to industrial areas are dangerously polluted and unfit for vegetable gardens.⁶²

⁵⁷ European Stability Initiative. "Vlora." May 2008.

http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=298&city_ID=58

⁵⁸ Balkan Insight. Likmeta, Besar. "Smuggling Hub to Real Estate Boom Town." 24 August 2009.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/21779/>

⁵⁹ New York Times. Perlez, Jane. "Albania's Auto Industry: Dealing in Stolen Cars." 16 August 1997.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/08/16/world/albania-s-auto-industry-dealing-in-stolen-cars.html?pagewanted=1>

⁶⁰ Institute for Environmental Policy. "Pollution." 2009–10. http://www.iep-al.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=67

⁶¹ Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration, Republic of Albania. *Albania's Second National Communication to the Conference of Parties Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. "2.6 Environment [p. 47]" November 2009.

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/natc/albnc2.pdf> <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/natc/albnc2.pdf>

⁶² The Guardian. Brown, Paul. "Elbasan: From Market Garden to Dead Zone." 27 March 2004.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2004/mar/27/internationalnews.pollution>

Most of Albania's rivers north of the Vjosë contain stretches that are considered polluted.⁶³ Perhaps the worst cases occur where rivers flow through urban areas. Tirana, for example, does not treat any of its domestic or industrial wastewater.⁶⁴ Water-monitoring studies have shown that the Lana River, which flows just south of the center of Tirana, is one of the two most polluted rivers in Albania.⁶⁵ The other is the Gjanica River, a small tributary of the Seman River that flows through the city of Fier and by a nearby refinery in the town of Ballsh.⁶⁶



© Predrag_Bubalo / flickr.com
Lana river, Tirana

Natural Hazards

Albania is one of the most seismically active regions in Europe, and small earthquakes occur regularly. Moderate earthquakes (magnitude ranging from 5.0 to 7.0) are much rarer, and large earthquakes (magnitude larger than 7.0) are unknown in the historical record. Such large earthquakes have occurred primarily along regions of the Adriatic-Ionian coast next to modern-day Albania.⁶⁷ The most deadly earthquake to have struck Albania since 1900 had its epicenter off the coast of Montenegro. Thirty-five Albanians died in the 15 April 1979 earthquake that also left over 100 dead in the coastal region of Montenegro.⁶⁸



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Earthquake damage
in Montenegro

Earthquakes generated in the Mediterranean Sea may increase the risk for tsunamis along the Albanian coast. Historically, the most damaging waves to strike Albania occurred in 1866 along the coastline near Vlorë.^{69,70}

⁶³ Water Observation and Information System for Balkan Countries. Miho, Aleko; and Lirika Kupe, Orgeta Jaupaj, Satu Maaria Karjalainen, Seppo Hellsten, Gunnar Pritzl. "Overview of Water Quality of Albanian Rivers [p. 3]." 27-31 May 2008. http://www.balwois.com/balwois/administration/full_paper/ffp-969.pdf

⁶⁴ Universiteti I Tiranës. "Chapter VII: About Environmental State of the Albanian Rivers Under the Study (an English Summary)." <http://www.unitir.edu.al/doc/fshn/ALB-RIVERS-WEB-PDF/007-Kreu7-0-Summary.pdf>

⁶⁵ Water Observation and Information System for Balkan Countries. Çullaj, A.; and A. Miho, P. Lazo. "Environmental Assessment of Water Quality of Albanian Rivers [p. 1]." 25-29 May 2004. http://www.balwois.com/balwois/administration/full_paper/ffp-619.pdf

⁶⁶ United Nations Environment Programme. *Post-Conflict Environment Assessment – Albania*. "Chapter 3 – Principal Industrial 'Hot Spots' Investigated by the Mission [pp. 31-32]." 2000. http://enrin.grida.no/htmls/albania/reports/postcon/docs/post_e.pdf

⁶⁷ Earthquakes Canada, Geological Survey of Canada. Aliaj, Shyqyri; and John Adams, Stephen Halchuk, Eduard Sulstarova, Veronika Peci, Betim Muco. "Probabilistic Seismic Hazard Maps for Albania [p. 4]." http://earthquakescanada.nrcan.gc.ca/hazard/13wcee/13WCEEp2469Aliaj_etal.pdf

⁶⁸ EM-DAT. The International Disaster Database. "Top 10 Natural Disasters in Albania for the Period 1900 to 2010 Sorted by Numbers of Killed." 14 April 2010. <http://www.emdat.be/result-country-profile>

⁶⁹ *Tsunamis in the Mediterranean Sea, 2000 B.C. – 200 A.D.* Soloviev, Sergey L.; and Olga N. Solovieva, Chan N. Go, Khen S. Kim, Nikolay A. Shchetnikov. "Characteristics of the Source of Tsunami Generation

Extreme weather and climate events lead to Albania's most costly natural disasters: droughts and floods. Because of the country's heavy reliance on hydroelectric plants, insufficient precipitation reduces the electrical power supply. One such drought in 1989–1990 forced many of Albania's factories to shut down when the Albanian communist government was struggling to retain control against a rising tide of political protest.⁷¹ Floods are even more costly and occur relatively frequently. In January 2010, about 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of northwestern Albania were flooded after heavy rains caused the Drin and Buna Rivers to overflow in the region around the city of Shkodër.⁷² Less than 8 years earlier, this same region was also one of several to be hit hard by floods that left 26,000 hectares (64,000 acres) of the Albanian countryside underwater.⁷³

Self Study Questions

Historically, Albania's political isolation was intensified by its geography. True or False?

Albania's "concrete mushrooms" continue to have military application. True or False?

Most of Albania's largest cities are found in its coastal lowlands. True or False?

Albania has a consistent climate. True or False?

Albania is home to Europe's oldest lake. True or False?

and Description of Tsunami, 19th Century [pp. 105-106]." 2000. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

⁷⁰ *ISET Journal of Earthquake Technology*, Vol. 42, No. 4. Papadopoulos, Gerassimos A.; and Anna Fokaefs. "Strong Tsunamis in the Mediterranean Sea: A Re-Evaluation [pp. 161-163]." 4 December 2005. <http://home.iitk.ac.in/~vinaykg/Iset463.pdf>

⁷¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Economic Policy and Performance: Isolation and Autarky." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0070\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0070))

⁷² Xinhuanet.com. "Heavy Floods Sweep NW Albania." 12 January 2010. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2010-01/12/content_12795732.htm

⁷³ Relief Web. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Sparrow, John. "Albanian Flood Catastrophe." 30 September 2002. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/ACOS-64BKWR?OpenDocument&rc=4&emid=FL-2002-0607-ALB>

History

Introduction

Albania became a nation in 1912, after spending many centuries as spoils of various empires. The modern Albanian state was carved out of the Ottoman Empire, with the new country's borders based on the regions where many (but far from all) Albanian speakers live. Up until the latter half of the 19th century, there was little sense of a shared cultural identity among the inhabitants. Unlike other modern nations of the Balkans, religion has never been a unifying force in Albania. That role has mostly been played by the language, even though significant linguistic differences existed between the Albanian spoken in the north (Gheg) and that spoken in the south (Tosk).⁷⁴



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Enver Hoxha 1971

After World War II, Albania was a communist nation for over 40 years, led for most of that period by Enver Hoxha. During the later stages of his reign, Albania was one of the most isolated countries in the world. Communist rule ended during the early 1990s, and since then, the nation has traveled a bumpy road to becoming a modern democracy with a market-based economy.

Early History

Illyria

The Western Balkans region that is now the Republic of Albania has been occupied for millennia. Archaeologists have found flint tools in caves that date back to Paleolithic times (pre-10,000 B.C.E.).⁷⁵ Then, about 1,000 B.C.E., tribes of people appeared in this region. Today, the ancient inhabitants of the Western Balkans are known collectively as Illyrians. The origin of the Illyrians is a matter of historical debate, as is the connection between the ancient Illyrians and modern Albanians. There is some supporting linguistic, archaeological, and anthropological evidence that the Albanians and their language may have descended from the Illyrians. However, no Illyrian



© Joonas Lyytinen / Wikipedia.org
Odeon in ruins of Apollonia

⁷⁴ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1. Draper, Stark. "The Conceptualization of an Albanian Nation" January 1997. http://sdraper.ece.wisc.edu/researchDir/pdf/ERS_97.pdf

⁷⁵ *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jacques, Edwin E. "Chapter 1: Archaeological Reconstruction of Prehistoric Life in Albania [p. 4]." 1995. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

inscriptions or written documents have yet been discovered, so it is nearly impossible to resolve the issue.⁷⁶

The Illyrian tribes occupied a region that extended from modern-day Slovenia in the north to the Greek region of Epirus in the south. Semi-nomadic pastoralism dominated Illyrian life during the first millennium B.C.E., and can still be found in some of the most isolated parts of Albania.^{77,78} The vestiges of several well-fortified hill settlements from this period indicate that attacks launched by rival tribes or marauding groups from the north were a constant danger.⁷⁹

Between the 6th and 8th centuries B.C.E., the Greeks living to the south of Illyrian lands sailed north and established coastal trading colonies. The most famous of these were Epidamnus (modern-day Durrës) and Apollonia (near modern-day Vlorë), whose ruins can still be seen today. Exposure to the more advanced Greek civilization influenced the Illyrians, who soon began forming more sophisticated tribal confederations that eventually would lead to the first Illyrian kingdoms.⁸⁰ Several of the larger kingdoms would fall in battle during the 4th century B.C.E. to the Macedonian leader Philip II and his son Alexander the Great.⁸¹

The Roman Empire

By the early 3rd century B.C.E., many of the Illyrian tribal kingdoms had arisen once again. One of these was the Ardiaean Kingdom, whose capital was at Scodra (modern-day Shkodër). Ardiaean raids on Italian trading vessels in the Adriatic Sea led to a Roman naval invasion against Scodra in 229 B.C.E. Further Roman campaigns against Illyrian rulers in 219 B.C.E and 168 B.C.E. eventually brought all of Illyria under Roman control.^{82,83}

⁷⁶ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Walbank, Frank W. “Background Information: History of Albania and Kosovo: Albania and Kosovo in Antiquity [p. 65].” 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

⁷⁷ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Walbank, Frank W. “Background Information: History of Albania and Kosovo: Albania and Kosovo in Antiquity [p. 67].” 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

⁷⁸ *Macedonia and Greece: The Struggle to Define a New Balkan Nation*. Shea, John. “Chapter 2: Origins of the Macedonian Population [p. 47].” 1997. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=InyEqBVhH->

http://books.google.com/books?id=InyEqBVhH-EC&pg=PA47&lpg=PA47&dq=Illyrians+pastoralists&source=bl&ots=qU1j5RMDTT&sig=_8Uxw2fJVDxCTbn9vmVLT7_0pPI&hl=en&ei=QinPS8S2GoqAswP79p2lBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CBgQ6AEwBjge#v=onepage&q=Illyrians+pastoralists&f=false

⁷⁹ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Walbank, Frank W. “Background Information: History of Albania and Kosovo: Albania and Kosovo in Antiquity [pp. 67-68].” 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

⁸⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: Antiquity: The Greeks.” 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42641>

⁸¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Ancient Illyrians.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0014\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0014))

⁸² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Ancient Illyrians.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0014\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0014))

For several centuries, Illyria remained under Roman rule, with the region divided among several provinces during that time (Illyricum, Macedonia, Epirus Nova, Praevalitana). The Romans brought a period of peace that generated prosperity, at least for some. The Via Egnatia was built, linking the Adriatic coastal settlements at Apollonia and Dyrrachium (the Roman name for Epidamnus) to other parts of the Balkan Peninsula. It became a major military and trading route between the Adriatic and Byzantium.⁸⁴



© Decius / Wikipedia.org
Monument of Agonothetes

The Medieval Era

The Byzantine Empire

Christianity arrived in the Western Balkans during the 1st century C.E., and by its end Dyrrachium was the seat of a bishopric.^{85,86} When the Roman Empire was divided into western and eastern parts in 395 C.E., the lands that now constitute Albania became part of the Eastern Roman (“Byzantine”) Empire, ruled from Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). However, the Christians of “Albania” remained under the jurisdiction of the Roman church until 732 C.E., when the Byzantine Emperor Leo III placed the Albanian church under the patriarch of Constantinople.⁸⁷ During the Great Schism of 1054, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches split, and so did the Albanian church, with the south remaining loyal to Constantinople (Orthodox Church) and the north turning its allegiance back to Rome.⁸⁸

The Byzantine Empire would survive for over 1,000 years, but its Balkan territories experienced frequent incursions by outsiders. During the late 4th and 5th centuries C.E., Albanian lands were invaded by Germanic Visigoths and Ostrogoths, respectively.^{89,90} The northern Illyrian regions—the modern-day countries of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia

⁸³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: Antiquity: The Greeks.” 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42641>

⁸⁴ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Walbank, Frank W. “Background Information: History of Albania and Kosovo: Albania and Kosovo in Antiquity [p. 72].” 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

⁸⁵ *International Diction of Historic Places: Southern Europe*. “Durrës (Durrës, Albania) [p 198].” 1995.

Chicago, IL: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers.

http://books.google.com/books?id=74JI2UlcU8AC&pg=PA198&lpg=PA198&dq=Dyrrachium+bishopric&source=bl&ots=jtuJeEy1GJ&sig=DijzSWuPjWVH9nphKrMcNMobtA0&hl=en&ei=q3_PS8zAFo2esgOvpejQBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CA0Q6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=Dyrrachium%20bishopric&f=false

⁸⁶ A bishopric is the office of a high church official.

⁸⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Ancient Illyrians.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0014\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0014))

⁸⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: The Byzantine Empire: From Illyria to Albania.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42644>

⁸⁹ BalkanTravellers.com. MacPhail, Bruce. “Byllis, Albania: Ancient City in the Sky.” No date.

<http://www.balkantravellers.com/read/article/739>

⁹⁰ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Pettifer, James. “Durrës.” 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

and Herzegovina, and Serbia—were overrun by Slavic invaders between the 6th and 8th centuries. Ultimately, the Slavs assimilated the Illyrians in these areas, and the native Illyrian language disappeared, replaced by South Slavic languages. However, in the southern Illyrian lands, including Albania, no such assimilation took place.⁹¹

Invasions and Political Fragmentation

Between the 9th and mid-14th centuries, the Byzantine Empire proved increasingly unable to control the Western Balkans. Bulgarians, Norman Crusaders, Venetians, and Serbs invaded Albania, one-after-another in successive waves. The fall of Constantinople in 1204 during the fourth crusade led to political fragmentation in the remnants of the Byzantine Empire as several successor states emerged. One of these was the Despotate of Epirus, which encompassed virtually all of modern-day Albania plus significant sections of other Balkan lands. Thereafter, Epirus began to splinter as succession battles divided the Despotate into several quarreling fiefdoms.⁹² In this weakened state, and with the reconstituted Byzantine Empire enmeshed in a civil war, Epirus and the other Albanian feudal states were easily conquered by Serbian ruler Stefan Uroš IV in the 1340s.⁹³ The rapidly expanding Serbian Empire would prove to be short lived, however. Already, a new powerful army was advancing westward towards the Balkans from its initial base in northwestern Anatolia. These Ottoman Turks would bring Islam to the Balkans, introducing lasting changes that are still readily visible in Albania.



The Ottoman Empire: Early Years

The Ottoman Turks, under their leader Osman I, emerged during the 14th century from a small *ghazi* emirate, one of several such states in Anatolia during the time. *Ghazi* warriors were quite similar to the knights of the Crusades, except that they wished to spread Islam rather than Christianity.⁹⁴ In 1389, a Serb-led coalition army that included Albanian troops was defeated by the Ottoman forces at Kosovo Polje (located near Kosovo's modern-day capital of Priština). Over the next several decades, all of the feudal

⁹¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: History: The Byzantine Empire: From Illyria to Albania." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42644>

⁹² *The Albanians: An Ethnic History From Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jacques, Edwin E. "Chapter 13: Quarreling Feudal Families Vulnerable to the Ottoman Turks [pp. 164-169]." 1995. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company.

⁹³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Barbarian Invasions and the Middle Ages." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0015\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0015))

⁹⁴ *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*. Ansary, Tamim. "Chapter 10: Rebirth [pp. 171-172]." 2009. New York, NY: Public Affairs. http://books.google.com/books?id=4rgTr0W32-kC&pg=PA172&lpg=PA172&dq=Ghazi+emirate&source=bl&ots=rYQmARTBj7&sig=z-AzCoZC_4koVIYAoiRk2biv6mA&hl=en&ei=xOXR57jnPIi4swOdy5CDCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CBsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Ghazi%20emirate&f=false

families of the Albanian region capitulated to Ottoman rule. Some of the coastal cities affiliated with the Republic of Venice, such as Shkodër and Durrës, were able to hold out a bit longer, but by the beginning of the 16th century virtually all of Albania was under Ottoman control.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Osman I

During the 1440s, Gjergj Kastrioti, the son of a feudal leader in the Krujë region north of Tirana, formed an Albanian force of about 30,000 fighters that resisted the Ottoman troops for nearly a quarter century.⁹⁵ Kastrioti, better known today as Skanderbeg, converted to Islam while a hostage to a Turkish sultan. He later served as a military leader in the Ottoman army. After his Ottoman forces were defeated in a battle near Niš (located in present-day Serbia) in 1443, Skanderbeg returned to Krujë and re-converted to Roman Catholicism. Afterwards he campaigned against the Ottoman Turks until his death from malaria in 1468. Today, Skanderbeg is widely viewed by Albanians—both Christians and Muslims alike—as their nation’s greatest national hero.⁹⁶

Modern History

Ottoman Rule

Albania remained part of the Ottoman domain for over four centuries. During this time, a majority of the population converted to Islam. The Ottoman Turks did not initially promote conversion to Islam, but this policy changed in the late 16th century and continued through the 17th century.⁹⁷ The people of the Albanian northern highlands, a mountainous, remote region, successfully resisted the Ottoman authorities. Those living in more accessible lowland regions, however, faced strong pressures to convert.^{98,99} One of the most effective Ottoman measures to encourage conversions was the burdensome poll tax paid by non-Muslim citizens. Some Catholic and Orthodox Albanians



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Durrës in 1573

⁹⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Albanian Lands Under Ottoman Domination, 1385-1876: The Ottoman Conquest of Albania.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0017\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0017))

⁹⁶ *Encyclopedia of World Biography Supplement*, Vol. 23. “Gjergj Kastrioti-Skanderbeg.” 2003. http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC?vrsn=149&OP=contains&locID=cfsc_remote&srchtp=name&ca=1&c=1&AI=U13989396&NA=Skanderbeg&ste=12&tbst=prp&tab=1&docNum=K1631008173&bCon ts=35

⁹⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: The Ottoman Empire: The Nature of Turkish Rule.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42648>

⁹⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Albanian Lands Under Ottoman Domination, 1385-1876: Albanians Under Ottoman Rule.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0018\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0018))

⁹⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: The Ottoman Empire: The Nature of Turkish Rule.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42648>

staged rebellions against Ottoman rule, most of which were quickly quashed, while others either converted or moved to areas not under Ottoman control.^{100,101} An estimated 25% of the Albanian population fled the region during the Ottoman era, moving primarily to Italy, Sicily, and the Dalmatian coast.¹⁰²

Ottoman authorities granted temporary landholdings (*timars*) to members of the Ottoman army as compensation for their military service. This system of land ownership largely replaced the tribal system in areas of Albania south of the Shkumbin River.¹⁰³ By the 18th century, however, the timar system had mostly broken down as Ottoman central authority waned. The timar lands became mostly hereditary fiefdoms managed by powerful families or clans, the equivalent of local rulers in their provinces.¹⁰⁴ During the late 18th to early 19th century, two such clans fashioned semi-autonomous domains over parts of modern-day Albania. In the north, the Pashalik¹⁰⁵ of Shkodër, under the rule of the Bushati family, oversaw a large region that included modern-day Kosovo.¹⁰⁶ To the south, Ali Pasha's increasingly autonomous Pashalik of Janina grew through a series of murders, alliances, and other intrigues. At its peak, the Pashalik of Janina consisted of all of southern Albania and northern Greece.^{107,108} Both the Janina and Shkodër pashaliks would eventually be overthrown by the Ottoman sultan in 1822 and 1832, respectively.¹⁰⁹ (Two



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Alexandre Dumas

¹⁰⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Albanian Lands Under Ottoman Domination, 1385-1876: Albanians Under Ottoman Rule." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0018\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0018))

¹⁰¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: History: The Ottoman Empire: The Nature of Turkish Rule." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42648>

¹⁰² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: History: The Ottoman Empire: The Nature of Turkish Rule." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42648>

¹⁰³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Albanian Lands Under Ottoman Domination, 1385-1876: Albanians Under Ottoman Rule." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0018\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0018))

¹⁰⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: The Albanian Lands Under Ottoman Domination, 1385-1876: Albanians Under Ottoman Rule." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0018\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0018))

¹⁰⁵ A pashalik is the territory governed by the Ottoman dignitary known as a pasha. Pashas were nonhereditary titles conferred by the sultan on high officials or military commanders.

¹⁰⁶ *The Albanians: A Modern History*. Vickers, Miranda. "Chapter 1: The Nature of Ottoman Rule and the Rise of the Great Pashaliks [p. 18]." 2006. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co.

¹⁰⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ali Pasa Tepelenë." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9005718>

¹⁰⁸ *The Albanians: A Modern History*. Vickers, Miranda. "Chapter 1: The Nature of Ottoman Rule and the Rise of the Great Pashaliks [p. 20]." 2006. New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co.

¹⁰⁹ *The Albanians: An Ethnic History From Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jacques, Edwin E. "Chapter 21: Revolutionary and Diplomatic Efforts for Albanian Independence [pp. 249-252]." 1995. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company.

decades later, Ali Pasha's downfall would become a fictionalized plot device in Alexandre Dumas père's famous novel, *The Count of Monte Cristo*.)¹¹⁰

First Stirrings of Nationalism

During the mid-19th century, the Ottoman rulers tried to reestablish their authority through a series of reforms known as the *tanzimat*. The goals of this program were to modernize the Ottoman state and to reassert its authority against the nationalistic movements developing within the Empire. Overall, the *tanzimat* measures failed badly, and Balkan nationalist movements flowered in Serbia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece.¹¹¹ Albania, with a much higher percentage of Muslims than these other regions, was relatively late in developing a nationalistic anti-Ottoman movement. Nevertheless, as the Ottoman Empire weakened further, Albanians were forced to coalesce around their national identity. They did so defensively, to create a unified front against proposals to divide Albanian-populated lands among other post-Ottoman Balkan states. In 1878, the Ottoman forces suffered defeat in the last Russo-Turkish war. The Treaty of San Stefano, which followed the war, called for splitting up parts of Albanian-populated lands between the new Balkan states of Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria.¹¹² Later that year, the first nationalist group—the Albanian League—was formed at a meeting in Prizren (in modern-day Kosovo). The League's initial goals were to stop the proposed San Stefano treaty and to gain autonomy for all Albanians within the Ottoman Empire.¹¹³



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Russo-Turkish war scene

The Albanian League's call for unification faced significant challenges. The chief one was the lack of a strong national consciousness. Although Albanians all spoke the same language, unlike their Slavic counterparts in other Balkan areas, religion was not associated with nationality.¹¹⁴ At the time, Albanian speakers within the Ottoman Empire lived within four vilayets ("provinces") of the Ottoman realm—Shkodër, Kosovo, Manastir, and Janina. None of the four could be described as the political or cultural center of the Albanian people. Unlike the Serbs or Bulgarians, for example, the Albanians

¹¹⁰ Novelguide.com. "The Count of Monte Cristo." 2010.

http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/nfs_19/nfs_19_00014.html

¹¹¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918." April 1992.

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0020\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0020))

¹¹² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Rise of Albanian Nationalism." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0021))

¹¹³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Rise of Albanian Nationalism." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0021))

¹¹⁴ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "Event Summary: The Development of Albanian Nationalism." 2005.

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event_summary&event_id=109275

never created a medieval empire that could later become a touchstone of national identity.¹¹⁵

Even language, the main unifying link of the Albanian people, was problematic in terms of forging a national identity. The written Albanian language lacked a standard form that could serve as a bridge to communication. Instead, it consisted of three main scripts (Latin, Cyrillic, and Arabic), each having a religious connection (Roman Catholicism, Orthodox, and Islam, respectively) that alienated the other two major religions of the Albanian-populated region.¹¹⁶ The absence of a standardized form of written Albanian had the effect of creating division, not unity. To further complicate matters, schools teaching in Albanian were nonexistent; Turkish and Greek were the main languages of instruction.¹¹⁷

The First Albanian Resistance

The San Stefano treaty that had followed the Russo-Turkish War was never implemented. Instead, a European Congress held later, in 1878 in Berlin, modified the treaty by redefining the Balkan borders such that more of the Albanian lands were left under Ottoman control than had been proposed under the San Stefano treaty.¹¹⁸ Although the Berlin Treaty lessened the amount of majority-ethnic Albanian territory ceded to neighboring Balkan states, this change provided little comfort for Albanians living in areas designated to become parts of Greece, Montenegro, or Serbia. In these regions, Albanian resistance movements took root. Ultimately, Ottoman forces were compelled to put down these rebellions in 1881 and to arrest and deport the Albanian League leaders. Nonetheless, the 1878-1881 Albanian League resistance first raised the issue of Albanian autonomy and foreshadowed and inspired a more widespread Albanian resistance movement over 30 years later.^{119,120}



Courtesy of Wikipedia
San Stefano Treaty site

¹¹⁵ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. “Event Summary: The Development of Albanian Nationalism.” 2005.

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event_summary&event_id=109275

¹¹⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Rise of Albanian Nationalism.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0021))

¹¹⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Rise of Albanian Nationalism.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0021))

¹¹⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Berlin, Congress of.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9078798>

¹¹⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: The Ottoman Empire: Albanian Nationalism.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42649>

¹²⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Rise of Albanian Nationalism.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0021))

The Balkan Wars

A coalition of reformers, popularly known as the Young Turks, came to power in Istanbul in 1908, espousing full constitutional rights for Albanians. The reformers also promoted the establishment of schools that would offer subjects taught in Albanian. Contrary to these stated goals, however, the Young Turks soon followed a path of Ottomanization in the outlying regions of the Empire. This path conflicted with that of Albanians seeking greater autonomy. In March 1910, a revolt broke out in Kosovo over a newly instituted tax levied by Istanbul. Although the rebellion was put down within a few months, new insurrections continued to break out in Kosovo and regions to the south over the next two years.^{121,122} By August 1912, Albanian rebels controlled large portions of the four Albanian-populated Ottoman *vilayets*. The Ottoman government was forced to negotiate a settlement in which the predominantly Albanian *vilayets* would become a self-governing province within the Ottoman Empire.¹²³



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Ottoman Empire peace agreement

Leaders of Balkan states adjoining the Albanian region wanted to annex parts of these same *vilayets*, and viewed the prospect of an autonomous Albania with deep concerns that soon translated into actions. In October 1912, the Ottoman Empire's Balkan regions erupted into war as Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro—the so-called Balkan League—attacked the remaining Ottoman lands from all directions. Albania was quickly occupied by the latter three members of the Balkan League during this First Balkan War. During the war, the city of Vlorë, one of the larger Albanian cities not under occupation, served as the site of a November 1912 national assembly. It was here that the 83 delegates established a provisional government and declared Albania an independent nation. Fighting continued into the summer of 1913 after three of the Balkan League members turned upon their former ally, Bulgaria, thus triggering the short Second Balkan War.

¹²¹ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*. Walbank, Frank W. "Background Information: History of Albania and Kosovo: The Young Turk Revolution 1908 [p. 79]." 2001. London: A&C Black Limited.

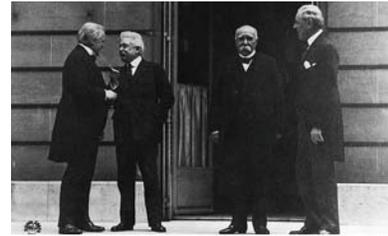
¹²² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Rise of Albanian Nationalism." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0021))

¹²³ *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jacques, Edwin E. "Chapter 21: Revolutionary and Diplomatic Efforts for Albanian Independence [pp. 272-274]. 1995. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Company.

The First Albanian State

After the fighting ended, the Balkan League members, under pressure from the Great Powers of Europe (France, Britain, Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary), negotiated a treaty with the Ottomans. Under the terms of the accord, Albania became an independent principality, secured by the protection of the Great Powers.¹²⁴ The borders of this new Albanian state were similar to those of modern-day Albania, and thus excluded several regions that contained a high percentage of Albanian speakers. In particular, most of Kosovo, the center of the 1878 and 1910 Albanian revolts against the Ottoman Empire, became part of Serbia. This decision had major repercussions more than 80 years later with the advent of severe ethnic fighting in the region.¹²⁵

Albania's independence came at an unfortunate time. In Europe, military alliances between the Great Powers were creating conditions in which regional conflicts could escalate into warfare that would overtake the entire continent. When World War I broke out, the armies of Italy, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and later Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and France soon occupied parts of Albania.¹²⁶ After the War ended in 1918, Greece, Italy, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (the Western Balkan state later known as Yugoslavia) placed territorial claims on parts of Albania. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, British, French, and Greek negotiators agreed to such a division, but American President Woodrow Wilson vetoed the proposed deal. Shortly thereafter, the United States established formal diplomatic relations with Albania, which became recognized as a fully sovereign state upon admission into the League of Nations in December 1920.¹²⁷



© Capt. Jackson, US Army Signal Corps
Peace Conference after WWI, Paris, 1919

¹²⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: The Balkan Wars and Creation of Independent Albania." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0022\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0022))

¹²⁵ Department of Geography and Native American Studies, Evergreen State College. Grossman, Zoltán. "Map: Albania in the 20th Century." No date. <http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/20thCentAlbania.jpg>

¹²⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918: World War I and Its Effects on Albania." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0023\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0023))

¹²⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Interwar Albania, 1918-1941: Albania's Reemergence After World War I." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0025\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0025))]

*Interwar Albania*¹²⁸

Albania in the early 1920s was one of the poorest and most underdeveloped nations in Europe. Feudal agricultural practices from the Ottoman era continued to dominate in the country's central and southern sections. For example, the vast majority of peasants practiced subsistence farming, using methods and tools that had changed little over the centuries. Illiteracy was rampant, and the average life expectancy was only 38 years.¹²⁹



Courtesy of Wikipedia
King Ahmet Zogu

In the first half of the 1920s, Albania's politics were dominated by an ongoing battle between conservatives and reformers. The conservatives supported the status quo concerning land ownership policies. The reformers, on the other hand, wanted to adopt ambitious programs to restructure land ownership and to modernize the nation's economy and infrastructure. The leaders of these respective movements were Ahmed Zogu, the son of a feudal landowner from the Mati region of north-central Albania, and Fan Noli, a Harvard-educated bishop of the Orthodox church.^{130,131} In 1924, Noli assumed power after a peasant revolt forced Zogu into exile. However, Noli himself was forced to flee just six months later when Zogu reentered the country with the support of a Yugoslav-backed army.¹³²

Zogu quickly consolidated power. As Albanian President under a new constitution passed in January 1925, Zogu eliminated all vestiges of opposition to his rule. In 1928, another newly passed constitution established Albania as a kingdom under the rule of Zogu, now known as King Zog I.

Albania under Zog depended on Italy's economic and military support. Such dependency did not please many Albanians, who still remembered Rome's interest in obtaining Albanian territories before and after World War I. Zog, sensitive to this growing popular discomfort over Italian domination, periodically carried out measures to establish more distance between the two nations. Nevertheless, by 1939, roughly 70% of Albania's

¹²⁸ The "interwar" period refers to the years between the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II (1918-1941).

¹²⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Interwar Albania, 1918-1941: Social and Economic Conditions After World War I." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0026\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0026))

¹³⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Interwar Albania, 1918-1941: Government and Politics." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0027\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0027))

¹³¹ AlbanianLiterature.net. "Fan Noli." 10 April 2010. http://www.albanianliterature.net/authors_classical/noli.html

¹³² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Interwar Albania, 1918-1941: Government and Politics." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0027\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0027))

exports went to Italy, and all of its imports were either produced by Italian factories or paid for by the Italian government.¹³³

World War II

1939 became a turning-point in the short history of the Albanian nation. In April, Italy invaded Albania and quickly annexed it, with King Zog fleeing to Greece.¹³⁴ Italy's attempt in 1940 to invade Greece using Albania as a base was unsuccessful, but the German army proved more formidable in April 1941, when it captured both Greece and Yugoslavia.¹³⁵ Both nations were carved up among the Axis allies: Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria, which separately administered their portions of the newly acquired territory. Much of Kosovo and the Albanian-populated regions of Montenegro and Macedonia fell within the Albanian Protectorate of Italy.¹³⁶ Ironically, the Albanian League's goal of a unified country eventually came closest to fruition under an Italian puppet state established during World War II.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Balli Kombetar anti-communist resistance forces

During the Italian occupation, two main Albanian resistance groups fought against the occupiers: the Balli Kombëtar (National Front) and the National Liberation Movement (NLM). The latter was dominated by communist leadership, headed by Enver Hoxha, a former teacher at a French school in Korçë. In September 1943, both groups were affected when the Italians signed an armistice agreement with the Allies and the German army, almost immediately thereafter, entered Albania. The occupation by German troops forestalled a takeover of Albania by resistance fighters. Berlin tried to curry favor with Albanians by taking a less heavy-handed approach in their administration of the Albanian Protectorate. For example, the German government officially recognized the new Albanian government as an “independent,” neutral state and supported popular proposals, such as the annexation of Kosovo. These tactics neutralized the National Front, several of whose leaders joined in to become government officials. At the same time, some anti-communist National Front units joined the Germans in opposing the NLM's activities.¹³⁷

¹³³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Interwar Albania, 1918-1941: Zog's Kingdom.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0029\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0029))

¹³⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: History: Independent Albania: Bishop Noli and King Zog.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42649>

¹³⁵ *Albania at War, 1939-1945*. Fischer, Bernd J. “Chapter 3: Italian Greater Albania [p. 83].” 1999. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

¹³⁶ *Albania at War, 1939-1945*. Fischer, Bernd J. “Chapter 3: Italian Greater Albania [pp. 84-85].” 1999. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

¹³⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. “Chapter 1: Historical Setting: World War II and the Rise of Communism, 1941-44: The Communist and Nationalist Resistance.” April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0032\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0032))

The NLM (now known as the National Liberation Front, or NLF) continued its resistance, both against the German and other Albanian resistance groups. With the British supplying arms, the communist partisans of the NLF captured southern Albania in January 1944.¹³⁸ By that summer, NLF forces had entered central and northern Albania. They helped to establish a provisional Albanian government in October 1944 in the town of Berat, with Hoxha serving as prime minister. The Germans left Tirana on November 18 after several weeks of fighting, and Hoxha entered the city 11 days later, now the leader of the newly liberated Albanian state.¹³⁹

Post-War Albania

Even while planning their retreat from Albania, the Germans continued to occupy Kosovo. In that region, Kosovar ethnic Albanian nationalists (who were more anti-communist and anti-Serb than they were anti-German) were purging ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins. Albanian resistance forces joined the Yugoslav Partisans under Josip Broz Tito in liberating Kosovo. Afterward, Kosovo became an autonomous region within the Serbian Republic of post-war Yugoslavia.¹⁴⁰



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Marshal Josip Broz Tito

Under Hoxha, the Albanian Communist Party quickly consolidated power and instituted increasingly radical reform measures, beginning with the agrarian sector. Authorities confiscated the large agricultural estates of the beys¹⁴¹ of southern Albania. Then they divided the property among peasants who were either landless or land-owners of tiny parcels. As early as December 1944, the government began to nationalize industries, corporations, banks, water and mineral resources, and commercial and foreign properties.^{142,143} The first steps toward collective land ownership began in 1947. Twenty more years were needed to complete the job by bringing in the resistive, small farming communities of the nation's northern hills.^{144,145}

¹³⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: World War II and the Rise of Communism, 1941-44: The Communist Takeover of Albania ." April 1992. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0033\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0033))

¹³⁹ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 3: Albania, 1944-1948 [pp. 40-41, 235-236]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁴⁰ *Albania at War, 1939-1945*. Fischer, Bernd J. "Chapter 8: German Retreat and the Construction of a Stalinist Albania [pp. 237-240]." 1999. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

¹⁴¹ A bey is a Turkish title that roughly translates as "lord." During the Ottoman era and the years beyond, beys in the southern part of Albania were the primary landowners.

¹⁴² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: History: Socialist Albania: The Stalinist State." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42655>

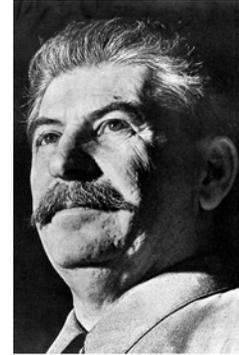
¹⁴³ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 3: Albania, 1944-1948 [p. 42]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁴⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: History: Socialist Albania: The Stalinist State." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42655>

¹⁴⁵ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 9: Albania, 1948-1991 [p. 161]. 2002. London: Longman.

Failed Alignments: Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union

Albania continued to be Europe's poorest country, and it turned to a series of benefactors among the communist nations for the economic support needed to modernize its economy. Initially, Hoxha pursued an alliance with Yugoslavia, Albania's large neighbor to the north. Similar to the situation with Italy in the 1930s, Albania increasingly found itself economically reliant on and integrated with Yugoslavia. By early 1948, Tito, Yugoslavia's leader, was moving forward with plans to absorb Albania into the Yugoslavian federation, assisted by Koçi Hoxe, Albania's minister of the interior.¹⁴⁶ Only Yugoslavia's June 1948 expulsion from Cominform, the Soviet-led association of European communist parties, spared Albania from a Yugoslavian merger and Hoxha (the Albanian leader) from being removed from power and possible execution.¹⁴⁷



© Margaret Bourke-White
Joseph Stalin

For the next 13 years (1948-1961), Albania's communist sponsor was the Soviet Union. Relations began to deteriorate after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, but during those initial years Albania's health care and educational infrastructure rapidly improved.¹⁴⁸ Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, took a more tolerant approach toward Tito and Yugoslavia than his predecessor. He soon normalized the Soviet Union's relations with the renegade socialist state, a move that was viewed with alarm in Tirana. Increasingly, Hoxha voiced complaints about Khrushchev's de-Stalinization measures and his acceptance of Yugoslavia's "separate road to socialism." By 1960, relations between Albania and the Soviet Union had reached rock bottom, marked by an inflammatory speech delivered by Hoxha in Moscow in which he denounced the Soviet Premier. After the speech, Hoxha returned to Tirana by train, fearing an "accidental" crash if he flew, and never again traveled outside Albania.¹⁴⁹

Enter the Chinese

Albania's next communist benefactor, China, proved an odd partnership from the beginning. Separated from China by thousands of miles and with a still primitive economy, Albania offered little to Beijing other than a limited presence in Europe and a mouthpiece at the UN. (The People's Republic of China, until 1971, was not a member of that body because Taiwan held the Chinese seat.) To some extent, Chinese aid helped

¹⁴⁶ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 3: Albania, 1944-1948 [pp. 48-49]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁴⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Communist Albania: Albanian-Yugoslav Tensions." [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0036\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0036))

¹⁴⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Communist Albania: Albania and the Soviet Union." [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0038\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0038))

¹⁴⁹ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 9: Albania, 1948-1991 [p. 160]. 2002. London: Longman.

offset Albania's loss of Soviet assistance, although Chinese equipment proved less sophisticated and its delivery was less timely than had been the case with the Soviets.¹⁵⁰

Albania's period of close relations with China (1961-1978) encompassed the Cultural Revolution of the P.R.C., and Hoxha followed in lockstep with his own Cultural and Ideological Revolution. During this period, the Albanian government abolished organized religion, severely curtailed access to foreign publications and media, and instituted restrictions on dress for women and facial hair for men. The government even went so far as to eliminate ranks in the armed forces.¹⁵¹ During the early 1970s, the first concrete "mushrooms" were built, 750,000 bunkers designed to provide shelter to a civilian army, which in theory would protect Albania from any form of foreign invasion.¹⁵² Built to survive artillery attacks, most of these bunkers are still visible today.

Going It Alone

China began to open itself up to the West in 1972, but Hoxha refused to open Albania up in a similar fashion. After Chairman Mao's death in 1976, relations between the two countries quickly deteriorated, leading to a formal break in relations in 1978. For the first time since the end of World War II, Albania had no foreign ally to help support its economy. Self-reliance became the new guiding principle as an ailing Hoxha began planning for his succession. Hoxha's long-time ally and Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mehmet Shehu, refused to step aside and clear the path for Ramiz Alia, a rising star in the Albanian Party of Labor. (This was the official name of Albania's communist party; abbreviated, APL.) Ultimately, Shehu committed suicide under circumstances that suggested he may have had little choice.¹⁵³



© S016n6 / Wikipedia.org
Ramiz Alia, transition leader

Hoxha died in April 1985, ending a 40-year hold on power that made him the longest serving European leader in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁴ Alia, his successor, began to establish contacts with Western European nations, the United States, and neighboring countries in the Baltics. As the 1980s ended, the socialist countries of Eastern Europe were swept up in a series of revolutions, both peaceful and violent, that rejected the

¹⁵⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Communist Albania: Albania and China." [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0039\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0039))

¹⁵¹ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 9. Albania, 1948-1991 [pp. 161-162]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁵² Concrete Mushrooms Project. "Concrete Mushrooms [p. 31]." 2010. <http://concrete-mushrooms.com/files/concrete-mushrooms-final.pdf>

¹⁵³ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 9: Albania, 1948-1991 [p. 164]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁵⁴ "Seeing Red: America and Its Allies Through the Eyes of Enver Hoxha [p. 58]." Less, Timothy. In *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945-2003*. Hammond, Andrew, Ed. 2004. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

ruling communist governments and ushered in an era of new multi-party political systems. In Albania, street protests began in January 1990. Alia responded by making some concessions, such as the May 1990 National Assembly act reintroducing freedom of religion. However, the unchallenged authority of the APL did not crack until later that year when alternative political parties were finally allowed to form.¹⁵⁵

Period of Transition

Albania's first multi-party elections since World War II were held in spring 1991. The APL (which changed its name to the Socialist Party of Albania, or SPA, a few months later) retained power, largely on the basis of its strong showing in rural areas.¹⁵⁶ The nation itself was also soon thereafter "re-branded," with the name changed from the "Socialist People's Republic of Albania" to the "Republic of Albania."¹⁵⁷

Name changes alone, however, were not enough to still the growing wave of protests and strikes by dissatisfied Albanians. In the northern city of Shkodër, four protesters of the 1991 election results were shot and killed by the police.^{158,159} These "Shkodër martyrs" would become a rallying point for the Albanian protest movement, which also gained momentum as inflation and unemployment quickly rose. By December 1991, the coalition government headed by the SPA collapsed, and elections were called for the following spring, just one year after the previous elections.^{160,161}



© Dardani89 / Wikipedia.org
Skyline in Shkodër

In the 1992 elections, the Democratic Party of Albania (DPA) claimed a sweeping victory. Party leader Sali Berisha, a noted cardiologist, became Albania's new president, and Aleksandër Meksi was chosen as prime minister. The Berisha/Meksi regime would head the Albanian government for the next five years, a period of wrenching changes as the leaders shifted the centrally planned economy to one of an open market. Foreign aid helped to reduce some of the worst problems, including a food shortage during 1992–1993. By 1994 the Albanian economy had begun to stabilize. Political stability, however, began to decline, especially after a referendum giving the president greater powers was

¹⁵⁵ George Fox University. *Religion in Eastern Europe*. Hiorth, Finngeir. "Albania: An Atheistic State?" 1990. http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/Hiorth_Albania.html

¹⁵⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union. "Albania—Parliamentary Chamber: Kuvendi Popullor—Elections Held in 1991." 1991. http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2001_91.htm

¹⁵⁷ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 16: Albania Since 1991 [p. 299]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁵⁸ New York Times. Binder, David. "Albanian Troops Kill 3 Protesters and Wound 30." 3 April 1991. <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/04/03/world/albanian-troops-kill-3-protesters-and-wound-30.html>

¹⁵⁹ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 16: Albania Since 1991 [p. 299]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁶⁰ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 16. Albania Since 1991 [p. 300]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁶¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union. "Albania—Parliamentary Chamber: Kuvendi Popullor—Elections Held in 1992." 1992. http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2001_91.htm

defeated in November 1994. Despite the defeat, Berisha's presidential powers remained substantial, and the Berisha/Meski government increasingly used those powers to stifle oppositional voices.¹⁶²

Chaos

Shortly after the DPA returned to power in 1996 elections, which were judged by monitoring groups “not [to] meet international standards for free and fair elections,” Albania was teetering on the brink of total chaos. The triggering event was the (inevitable) failure of several pyramid investment schemes¹⁶³ into which a large percentage of Albanians had plowed their savings. Albania's relatively primitive financial sector provided little opportunity for investment, thus making the high rates of return offered by the pyramid schemes attractive.¹⁶⁴



© R. D. Ward / Wikipedia.org
Fatos Nano, former Prime Minister

The pyramid schemes collapsed in January 1997, and rioting and looting immediately erupted on the streets of Tirana and other cities. Berisha declared a state of emergency and ordered police and military units to intervene. Rather than helping to control the situation, however, the presence of military forces seemed to fan the flames. Crowds broke into armories, stripping the military of much of its weaponry. (Many of the estimated 750,000 stolen weapons would later help arm crime syndicates operating in Albania and insurgency groups in Kosovo and Macedonia.)^{165,166} Roughly 2,000 Albanians died during several months of conflict in the streets.¹⁶⁷ The intervention of a UN-mandated, Italian-led coalition force of 6,000 troops may have prevented the country from slipping into a civil war.^{168,169}

¹⁶² *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. “Chapter 16: Albania Since 1991 [pp. 301-303]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁶³ Pyramid schemes are investment funds that operate by offering high rates of returns to the initial investors. With the fund having no real assets to generate profit, the initial investors are paid their interest by using the money of subsequent investors in the fund. Eventually, however, money from new investors is insufficient to cover the interest payments for existing investors, so the scheme usually collapses in a quick and messy way.

¹⁶⁴ International Monetary Fund. *Finance & Development*, Vol. 37, No. 1. Jarvis, Christopher. “The Rise and Fall of Albania's Pyramid Schemes.” March 2000. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2000/03/jarvis.htm>

¹⁶⁵ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. “Chapter 16: Albania Since 1991 [pp. 304-305]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁶⁶ International Crisis Group. “A View From Tirana: The Albanian Dimension of Kosovo Crisis.” 10 July 1998. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/albania/036-a-view-from-tirana-the-albanian-dimension-of-kosovo-crisis.aspx>

¹⁶⁷ New York Times. “As Split of Albania Socialists Worsens, Prime Minister Quits.” 30 January 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/16/world/first-troops-in-peace-force-get-a-fanfare-from-albania.html>

¹⁶⁸ Defense Technical Information Center. U.S. Army War College. Marchiò, Riccardo. “‘Operation Alba’: A European Approach to Peace Support Operation in the Balkans. [p. 2].” 10 April 2000. <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA378201&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>

A few months after security forces restored order, the SPA (Socialist Party of Albania) won a landslide victory in a hastily called election. Fatos Nano, who briefly served as prime minister before the 1991 elections, became the new prime minister. He resigned one year later, in 1998, after what may or may not have been a failed coup attempt.¹⁷⁰ Nano began serving his third stint as prime minister in 2002 after being appointed by Alfred Moisiu, the new president of Albania. The latter emerged as a compromise choice when the 2001 elections produced a political impasse in the nation's parliament.¹⁷¹

The War in Kosovo

During 1998 and 1999, Albania became deeply affected by a violent conflict involving ethnic Albanians living outside the country. In the Kosovo province of Serbia (one of two remaining republics of Yugoslavia), the Kosovo Liberation Army, an ethnic Albanian resistance group, initiated armed attacks against Serbian security forces. Yugoslav military and police forces were then ordered into action by Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević. The troops responded to the uprising with a brutal campaign that targeted Kosovar Albanians.¹⁷² Ultimately, NATO entered the conflict and extensively bombed Serbian cities in an effort to stop what was widely perceived to be a case of ethnic cleansing. Over 800,000 Kosovar Albanians fled Kosovo during the Kosovo war, with over half of these refugees ending up in Albania.^{173,174}



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Bombing of Yugoslavia

¹⁶⁹ New York Times. Bohlen, Celestine. "First Troops in Peace Force Get a Fanfare From Albania." 16 April 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/16/world/first-troops-in-peace-force-get-a-fanfare-from-albania.html>

¹⁷⁰ *The Balkans Since the Second World War*. Crampton, R. J. "Chapter 16: Albania Since 1991 [p. 306]. 2002. London: Longman.

¹⁷¹ International Crisis Group. Whyte, Nicholas. "The European Parliament Flexes Its Muscles—in Albania." 27 June 2002. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/albania/whyte-the-european-parliament-flexes-its-muscles-in-albania.aspx>

¹⁷² Kosovo, at the time, was an autonomous province within the Serbian republic, known officially as the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

¹⁷³ United Methodist Committee on Relief. United Methodist News Service. "Q: How Big is the Refugee Crisis?" No date. <http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/emergency/kosovoqa.stm>

¹⁷⁴ NATO. "NATO's Role in Relation to the Conflict in Kosovo." 15 July 1999. <http://www.nato.int/kosovo/history.htm>

Recent Events

Elections in 2005 brought the DPA-led political alliance to power. Sali Berisha, whose presidency had crashed and burned during the pyramid schemes crisis of 1997, once again rose to power, this time as the new Albanian prime minister. Berisha's government pursued a policy of integrating the nation into the top European economic and military institutions—the European Union (EU) and NATO. In 2008, Albania, along with Croatia, was voted into the latter group, and became a part of NATO in April 2009.^{175,176} That same month, Albania officially applied for EU membership. Most observers, however, expect the country to be involved in years of talks before it is accepted into the EU. The anticipated delay is the result of ongoing concerns about organized criminal activity within the country, reports of governmental media intimidation, and a fractious political environment.^{177,178}



© Antje Wildgrube / Wikipedia.org
Sali Berisha, Prime Minister

The year 2009 also witnessed Albania's most recent round of parliamentary elections. Berisha's DPA alliance narrowly carried more seats than the SPA alliance and was forced to form a coalition government with a minority coalition party holding a critical number of seats. The defeated SPA alliance, led by Tirana mayor Edi Rama, protested the results, staging large rallies, parliamentary boycotts, and hunger strikes in support of their demands for a recount.^{179,180,181}

Self Study Questions

Albania first became a nation after World War II. True or False?

The link between modern-day Albanians and the ancient Illyrians is disputed. True or False?

A number of Albanian coastal cities were affiliated with the Republic of Venice. True or False?

¹⁷⁵ Washington Post. Baker, Peter. "Alliance Invites in Croatia, Albania." 3 April 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/02/AR2008040200678.html>

¹⁷⁶ America.gov. Aranaga, Carlos. "Albania and Croatia Join NATO." 1 April 2009.

<http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2009/April/20090401130205dmslahrellek0.6114008.html>

¹⁷⁷ EUObserver.com. Phillips, Leigh. "Ministers Give Nod to Albania's EU Application." 17 November 2009. <http://euobserver.com/9/29001>

¹⁷⁸ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. "2009 Human Rights Report: Albania." 11 March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eur/136016.htm>

¹⁷⁹ BalkanInsight.com. "Albania Opposition to End Parliamentary Boycott." 25 February 2010. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/26128/>

¹⁸⁰ BBC News. "Election Row Spills Into Albania's Streets." 3 May 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8658279.stm>

¹⁸¹ BBC News. "Protesters March in Albania Amid Vote-Rigging Claims." 30 April 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8655575.stm>

Christianity was brought to the area of modern-day Albania in the Middle Ages. True or False?

Ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries, a majority of the population adopted Muslim affiliation. True or False?

ECONOMY

Introduction

Arguably, no Eastern or Central European country entered the post-communist era in worse economic condition than Albania. Despite this disadvantage, the country has made significant economic strides since the early 1990s. However, the collapse of pyramid investment schemes in 1997 destroyed the early momentum toward developing a stable market economy. Still, Albania has experienced steady growth in recent years, although poor rural regions have not yet experienced this improvement.



© Chlámens / wikipedia.org
Rehabilitation in Tirana

One lingering impediment to economic reform has been the high volume of business that is conducted via cash transactions, the so-called “informal” economy. These transactions are hidden in official economic statistics. By some recent estimates, the informal sector of the economy may make up as much as 50% of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁸²

Agriculture

The agricultural sector is a significant part of the Albanian economy, especially in terms of employment. Over 60% of Albanians work in agriculture, which generates about 20% of the nation’s GDP.¹⁸³ Because of Albania’s mountainous terrain, only 39% of the land is used for agricultural purposes, and just over half of that is devoted to arable crops.¹⁸⁴ (i.e., cereals, fruits, or vegetables grown on frequently cultivated land). Another 37% of Albania’s agricultural lands are grasslands used mostly for raising livestock. The remainder (about 11%) supports permanent crops such as olives and grapes.^{185,186}



© Charles Roffey
Farm in Albania

Most of Albania’s former collectives and state farms have now been privatized. The average farm is tiny (1.2 ha, or 3 acres), six times smaller than the smallest average farm

¹⁸² Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Albania.” June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

¹⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. “Albania.” 21 April 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

¹⁸⁴ European Commission – Agriculture and Rural Development. “Albania – Agriculture and Enlargement [p. 2].” 2009. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/enlargement/countries/albania/profile_en.pdf

¹⁸⁵ European Commission – Agriculture and Rural Development. “Albania – Agriculture and Enlargement [p. 2].” 2009. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/enlargement/countries/albania/profile_en.pdf

¹⁸⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization. Shundi, Andrea. “Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Albania.” October 2006. <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/counprof/Albania/albania.htm>

plot (7.2 ha in Hungary) among the European Union's 27 countries.¹⁸⁷ These small farms are also often divided into four or five parcels that may be separated by large distances.¹⁸⁸ One of the Albanian government's pressing agricultural policy goals is to provide credit to farmers to allow them to expand and consolidate their acreage. Currently, most farms are too small to justify investing in modernization or expansion to achieve economies of scale. If implemented, these strategies could make food crops more competitive in domestic and foreign markets.^{189,190}

Small Albanian farms typically grow a subsistence-level mix of crops, including cereals (mainly wheat), vegetables, potatoes, beans, tobacco, and forage crops (grasses, alfalfa and wheat grasses). Many also include grapevines and a mixture of olive, fruit, and citrus trees. Small numbers of milk cows, sheep or goats, chickens, and pigs are also found on most of these farms. Only larger farms in coastal regions or near cities focus on fewer crops that are to be marketed rather than consumed locally.¹⁹¹ Very few of Albania's agricultural products produce significant export revenues. One notable exception is medicinal and aromatic plants, which are harvested in the wild and then sold to other countries of Europe and to the U.S.^{192,193}



¹⁸⁷ Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture. "European Union: Basic Information: Agriculture." 4 January 2010. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/EuropeanUnion/basicinfo.htm>

¹⁸⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization. Shehu, Agim. "Land Fragmentation and Consolidation in Albania [p. 4]." 17-20 March 2004. http://www.fao.org/regional/seur/events/tonder/docs/Albania_ppt.pdf

¹⁸⁹ Council of Ministers, Republic of Albania. *National Strategy for Development and Integration: Progress Report 2008*. "3: Economic and Social Development [p. 60]." November 2009. http://www.dsdc.gov.al/dsdc/pub/national_strategy_progress_report_2008_450_1.pdf

¹⁹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization. Sallaku, Fatbardh and Odeta Tota. "Land Consolidation as an Instrument to Strengthen Rural Development in Albania [p. 3]." <http://www.fao.org/regional/seur/events/landcons4/docs/Albania.pdf>

¹⁹¹ Food and Agriculture Organization. Shundi, Andrea. "Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles: Albania." October 2006. <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/counprof/Albania/albania.htm>

¹⁹² International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Exports of Albania (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010. http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_EP_CI.aspx?RP=008&YR=2008

¹⁹³ "International Trade in Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Actors, Volumes and Commodities [pp. 160-166]." Lange, Dagmar. In *Medicinal and Aromatic Plants*. R.J. Bogers, L.E. Craker and D. Lange, Eds. 2006. Berlin: Springer. http://library.wur.nl/frontis/medicinal_aromatic_plants/11_lange.pdf

Manufacturing

The end of the communist era in Albania was disastrous for Albania's aging and inefficient industrial sector, which was unable to compete in the world market and collapsed during the 1990s.¹⁹⁴ Overall, manufacturing and industry dropped from over 46% of GDP in 1988 to only 16% of GDP in 1998.¹⁹⁵ Since then, it has slowly risen to nearly 20% of the nation's GDP, comparable to the percentage contributed by the agricultural sector.¹⁹⁶



© Zachary Korb
Old clothing factory

Manufactured items now provide roughly 70% of Albania's merchandise exports.¹⁹⁷ About 35% of Albania's factories are located in the Greater Tirana metropolis.¹⁹⁸

Today, the most active manufacturing sectors in Albania are food and beverage processing, building materials (mostly cement), apparel, and footwear/leather.^{199,200} The latter two categories of manufacturing together represent more than 10% of Albania's privately employed work force.²⁰¹ Because of Albania's low labor costs and close proximity to other European countries, shoe and apparel firms headquartered in the EU often outsource their unfinished goods to Albania for assembly.²⁰²

¹⁹⁴ *Europe Review 2003/04*. Pritchard, Eleanor. "Albania [p. 5]." 2003. London: Kogan Page.

¹⁹⁵ World Bank. "Albania at a Glance." 14 December 2009.

http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/alb_aag.pdf

¹⁹⁶ World Bank. "Albania at a Glance." 14 December 2009.

http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/alb_aag.pdf

¹⁹⁷ World Trade Organization. "Trade Profile: Albania." 2010.

<http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=AL>

¹⁹⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization. Verçuni, Arben and Edvin Zhllima. "The Food Supply and Distribution System of Tirana, Albania [p. 4]." Working Document 15, Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance. 2008.

http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/publications/docs/AGSF_WorkingDocuments/AGSFWD15.pdf

¹⁹⁹ World Bank. "Albania: Country Brief 2010." May 2010.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/ALBANIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20628674~menuPK:301419~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:301412,00.html#econ>

²⁰⁰ Rural Infrastructure and Agro-Industries Division, Food and Agriculture Organization. Verçuni, Arben and Edvin Zhllima. "The Food Supply and Distribution System of Tirana, Albania [p. 4]." 2008. Working Document 15, Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance.

http://www.fao.org/ag/ags/publications/docs/AGSF_WorkingDocuments/AGSFWD15.pdf

²⁰¹ Ministria e Punës, Çështjeve Sociale dhe Shanseve të Barabarta. "Statistikat 2008 [sheet 5]." 20 November 2009. <http://www.mpcs.gov.al/statistikat>

²⁰² Reuters. Tanner, Adam and Maja Zuvela. "Made in EU – Fashion's Legal Loopholes. 17 June 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE55H0DT20090618>

Banking and Currency

Albania's national currency is the lek (plural lekë; currency code: ALL). As of mid-June 2010, the U.S. dollar (USD) traded at an interbank value of about 110 lekë, significantly higher than the 77 ALL per USD rate of two years ago. During the same time period, the Euro's value also rose against that of the lek, although at a lower rate of increase.²⁰³



The banking system in Albania was nonexistent when the country began transforming itself into a market economy in the early 1990s. The State Bank of Albania shared attributes of both a commercial bank (e.g., extending credit to state enterprises) and a central bank (e.g., currency oversight) during the communist era when it was the nation's only bank. Post-communism, it became the Bank of Albania, the nation's central bank and overseer of the Albanian banking system.²⁰⁴ Three state-owned banks—the National Commercial Bank, the Savings Banks, and the Rural Commercial Bank—were spun off from the Bank of Albania to become commercial lenders. Other private, joint-venture, and foreign-owned subsidiary banks started up as well, although the vast majority of deposits remained in the state-owned banks.

The collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997 shook the nation's entire financial system and marked the beginning of major changes in Albania's banking system. That year, the government closed the insolvent Rural Commercial Bank. By 2004 both the Savings Bank and National Commercial Bank had been privatized through sales to foreign investors.²⁰⁵ By Spring 2010, 16 banks were operating in Albania, but only two were controlled by Albanian investors.²⁰⁶ Raiffeisen Bank, the Savings Bank descendant now owned by the holding company of a large Austrian bank, is the nation's largest bank.²⁰⁷ Next largest is the National Commercial Bank (presently majority-owned by a Turkish consortium).²⁰⁸

The Albanian banking system has been relatively unaffected by the global financial crisis that began in 2008 because Albanian banks did not deal in the complex financial products

²⁰³ ONANDA.com. "Currency Converter." 23 June 2010. <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

²⁰⁴ Bank of Albania. "A Brief History of the Bank of Albania." 2009. http://www.bankofalbania.org/web/A_brief_history_of_the_Bank_of_Albania_5338_2.php

²⁰⁵ World Bank. "Albania: Private and Financial Sector Development." 2010. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/ALBANIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20142299~menuPK:442574~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:301412,00.html>

²⁰⁶ Bureau of Economic, Energy and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "2010 Investment Climate Statement—Albania." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2010/138024.htm>

²⁰⁷ Raiffeisen Bank. "Bank History." 2010. <http://www.raiffeisen.al/english/default.aspx?id=199&idd=&iddd=&idjadok=415>

²⁰⁸ Bank of Albania. "Supervision Annual Report 2008 [p. 73]." 27 August 2009. <http://www.bankofalbania.org/previewdoc.php?crd=5515&ln=2&uni=200910221442387724>

(e.g., derivatives) that precipitated the crisis.²⁰⁹ The banking industry has also been conservative in its lending practices. Despite rapid growth in loans in the years prior to the global financial crisis, Albanian banks still have a relatively low ratio of loans to deposits compared with banks in Western Europe.²¹⁰

Trade

Albania's trade balance tilts heavily towards imports, because few of its potential exports are price competitive in foreign markets.²¹¹ In 2008, the most recent year for which data is available, the value of imports was nearly four times that of exports, resulting in a net trade deficit of nearly USD 3.9 million.²¹² The Albanian trade deficit for 2008 as a ratio to GDP was 26%, an extremely high ratio.²¹³ For purposes of comparison, the U.S. trade-deficit-to-GDP ratio was about 5% for the same time period.²¹⁴



© Jurgen / flickr.com
Imported cars in Albania

The most lucrative export categories for Albania are footwear/leather and apparel. Mineral ores and their concentrates—primarily chromium, copper, and aluminum—also contribute positively to Albania's trade balance, as do scrap metals (principally copper and aluminum) and medicinal and aromatic plants. In addition, Albania is a net exporter of crude oil and asphalt/bitumen, although its imports of other petroleum products dwarf these values.²¹⁵

Imports satisfy the demand for most consumer products in Albania. This dependence causes large trade deficits for imported items such as automobiles, electronics, household appliances, and pharmaceuticals. Although the country supplied itself with food during the communist era, Albania now imports large amounts of raw and processed grains (wheat, corn, rice, bread, pasta), meat, fruit, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages,

²⁰⁹ World Trade Organization. "Trade Policy Review: Report by the Secretariat: Albania [p. 8]." 24 March 2010. http://www.wto.int/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s229-01_e.doc

²¹⁰ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

²¹¹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

²¹² International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Exports and Imports of Albania (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010. http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_TP_CI.aspx?RP=008&YR=2008

²¹³ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

²¹⁴ Global Politician. Morici, Peter. "Economy: U.S. Trade Falls to 58.2 Billion in March, Lowers GDP by 250 Billion." 11 May 2008. <http://globalpolitician.com/24715-economics-trade-deficit>

²¹⁵ International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Exports and Imports of Albania (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010. http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_TP_CI.aspx?RP=008&YR=2008

cooking oils, and other items.²¹⁶ The Albanian construction industry depends on imports for much of its building materials and machinery. The largest contributor of Albania's trade imbalance is, by far, energy imports, especially electricity, refined petroleum, and natural gas.²¹⁷

Over 60% of Albania's export revenue, including virtually all of its footwear/leather exports, comes from Italy. The remainder of Albania's exports goes to neighboring Balkan countries (primarily Greece and Serbia).²¹⁸ Italy also tops the list of countries from which Albania imports goods, followed by Greece, China, Germany, and Turkey, in order of trade volume.²¹⁹

Investment

Foreign direct investment in Albania has increased in recent years, boosted significantly by privatizations of formerly state-owned enterprises. Still, it remains low when compared with that of other Balkan nations.²²⁰

Albania's low labor costs and close proximity to countries in the European Union are possibly its greatest attractions for many outside investors.²²¹ The economic

sectors that have received the most foreign investment include banking, oil and gas production, telecommunications, mining, manufacturing (especially footwear/leather and apparel), and cement production.^{222,223} The leading



© Skanderbeg Capital Group / flickr.com
Gjegjan Mining District in Albania

²¹⁶ International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Imports of Albania (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010.

http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_IP_CI.aspx?RP=008&YR=2008 [retrieved 20 May 2010]

²¹⁷ International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Exports and Imports of Albania – 27 Mineral Fuels, Oils, Distillation Products, Etc (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010.

http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_TP_CI_HS4.aspx?IN=27&RP=008&YR=2008&IL=27
Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products, etc&TY=T

²¹⁸ International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Exports of Albania – 00 All Industries (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010.

http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_EP_CI_P.aspx?IN=00&RP=008&YR=2008&IL=00 All industries&TY=E

²¹⁹ International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Imports of Albania – 00 All Industries (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010.

http://www.intracen.org/appli1/TradeCom/TP_IP_CI_P.aspx?IN=00&RP=008&YR=2008&IL=00 All industries&TY=I

²²⁰ Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "2010 Investment Climate Statement—Albania." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2010/138024.htm>

²²¹ AlbInvest.gov. "Fact Sheet No. 4: Labor Costs and Regulations." March 2008.

<http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/fsh4.pdf>

²²² Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "2009 Investment Climate Statement—Albania." February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2009/116574.htm>

²²³ World Bank. "Building Competitiveness in Albania." October 2009.

<http://apps.ubmasia.com/files/mediaobjects/Files/25/PSF/09 WB Albania Building Competitiveness.pdf>

investor countries have been Italy, Greece, Turkey, Austria, Germany, Canada, Spain, and the U.S.²²⁴

Energy and Mineral Resources

Energy

Albania has the most extensive oil reserves of any country in the Balkans, but its production is relatively modest, making the country a net oil importer.^{225,226} Most of the oil that is currently produced comes from fields in southwestern Albania, in a triangular region roughly defined by the cities of Durrës, Vlorë, and Berat.^{227,228}

One of these fields, located just east of Fier, is believed to be the largest onshore oilfield in continental Europe.²²⁹

This field has experienced very large gains in production since 2004 when Bankers Petroleum took over. Bankers Petroleum is a Canadian oil company and the largest single foreign investor in Albania.^{230,231}



© Skanderbeg Capital Group / flickr.com
Coal Mine in Albania

Albania's coal consumption and production has significantly declined since the 1980s.²³² Coal was used up until the 1990s to power much of Albania's heavy industry and, to a lesser extent, to heat some Albanian homes and businesses.²³³ All of Albania's obsolescent coal- and oil-fired power plants were decommissioned during the 1990s, leaving Albania almost totally dependent on hydroelectric plants for its electricity

²²⁴ Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "2010 Investment Climate Statement—Albania." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2010/138024.htm>

²²⁵ Encyclopedia of the Earth. "Energy Profile of the Balkans." 12 September 2007. http://www.eoearth.org/article/Energy_profile_of_the_Balkans

²²⁶ Energy Information Administration. "Albania Energy Profile." 1 April 2010. http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/country/country_energy_data.cfm?fips=AL

²²⁷ U.S. Geological Survey. *2008 Minerals Yearbook*. Brininstool, Mark. "Albania." February 2010. <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2008/myb3-2008-al.pdf>

²²⁸ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Industry: Energy and Natural Resources." April 1992. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0096\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0096))

²²⁹ BalkanInsight.com. "Oil Company Sees Albania Production Growth." 8 April 2010. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/27184/>

²³⁰ BalkanInsight.com. "Oil Company Sees Albania Production Growth." 8 April 2010. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/27184/>

²³¹ Southeast European Times. Austin, Robert. "Bankers Petroleum Set to Expand in Albania." 7 July 2007. http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2007/07/26/feature-03

²³² Energy Information Administration. "Albania Energy Profile." 1 April 2010. http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/country/country_energy_data.cfm?fips=AL

²³³ Black Sea Regional Energy Centre. "2: Energy Balance Data [p. 3]." No date. http://www.bsrec.bg/albania/albania_energbalance.html

needs.²³⁴ As the nation's demand for electricity has increased, Albania has had to import significant percentages of its electrical power, particularly in dry years when river flow is less.²³⁵ Unfortunately, the nation's ability to import electricity is impaired by an aging transmission system that has insufficient capacity. Thus, power outages of several hours a day have become an increasingly common phenomenon.²³⁶

Much of Albania's current hydroelectric power is generated by three large plants on the Drin River (located in the northern part of the country). Since 2007, plans have been put in motion for private companies to develop over 20 new small- and medium-sized hydropower plants on other Albanian rivers.²³⁷ In addition, coal- and oil-fired power plants are planned for the Durrës and Vlorë regions, respectively, although both projects have attracted controversy for environmental reasons and a perceived lack of public input.^{238,239,240} Construction is completed on the Vlorë power plant, but a problem that occurred during the testing phase delayed the plant's commissioning.²⁴¹

Minerals

Albania's mineral wealth primarily lies in its chromium and copper deposits. Iron is also mined, and nickel has been mined in the past.²⁴² Albania was once believed to be the world's third largest producer of chromite (chromium ore), trailing only South Africa and the former Soviet Union.²⁴³ Current chromium and ferrochromium²⁴⁴ production has

²³⁴ National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. Nashi, Agim. "Power Sector Infrastructure Development in Albania [p. 7]." [http://www.narucpartnerships.org/Documents/Generation sources and power sector infrastructure development in Albania_Nashi_Eng.pdf](http://www.narucpartnerships.org/Documents/Generation%20sources%20and%20power%20sector%20infrastructure%20development%20in%20Albania_Nashi_Eng.pdf)

²³⁵ Energy Regulator of Albania. "Annual Report Situation of Energy Sector and Activity of ERE for 2008 [pp. 23-24]." 2009. http://www.ere.gov.al/doc1/rap_dudaj_en_2008.pdf

²³⁶ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. "Albania: Country Profile [p. 2]." [https://ws99.myloadspring.com/sites/renew/Shared Documents/2009 Country Profiles/Albania.pdf](https://ws99.myloadspring.com/sites/renew/Shared%20Documents/2009%20Country%20Profiles/Albania.pdf)

²³⁷ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. "Albania: Country Profile [p. 12]." [https://ws99.myloadspring.com/sites/renew/Shared Documents/2009 Country Profiles/Albania.pdf](https://ws99.myloadspring.com/sites/renew/Shared%20Documents/2009%20Country%20Profiles/Albania.pdf)

²³⁸ BalkanInsight.com. Likmeta, Bezar. "Albanian City Opposes Coal Power Plant." 19 October 2009. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/22984/>

²³⁹ World Bank. "Questions and Answers on Vlorë Thermo Power Plant." 8 October 2009. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21430783~menuPK:258613~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258599,00.html> [retrieved 21 May 2010]

²⁴⁰ Austrian Society for Environment and Technology. EDEN Center. "Many Cooks Stirring Albania's Carbon Soup." http://www.oegut.at/downloads/pdf/ee_article_portoromano.pdf

²⁴¹ World Bank. "Restructuring Paper on a Proposed Project Restructuring of Power Sector Generation and Restructuring Project Loan to Albania." 30 June 2010. http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2010/06/30/000333037_20100630005208/Rendered/INDEX/553810PJPR0P0710Restructuring0Paper.txt

²⁴² U.S. Geological Survey. *2008 Minerals Yearbook*. Brininstool, Mark. "Albania." February 2010. <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2008/myb3-2008-al.pdf>

²⁴³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Industry: Energy and Natural Resources." April 1992. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0096\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0096))

greatly declined from peaks during the communist era, when the metal was Albania's principal source of foreign currency. However, the two chromite products collectively remain Albania's leading mineral export, followed by copper.^{245,246}

Standard of Living

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, Albania has frequently been labeled the "poorest country in Europe." This claim no longer strictly applies, since Moldova, Kosovo, Georgia, and Armenia are all poorer.²⁴⁷ Even so, Albania's GDP per capita, the most common statistic used to measure person productivity, is less than 20% that of the average European Union country.²⁴⁸ These figures would be even lower if not for the relatively high amount of money that flows into the country each year in the form of remittances sent by Albanians working in foreign countries. Most work in Greece and Italy, and their total remittances represent an estimated 10 to 15% of Albania's total GDP.^{249,250}



By any recognized measure, however, the standard of living in Albania has been improving during the last decade. The World Bank, for example, estimates that the number of Albanians living below the poverty line in 2008 was 12.4%, less than half the rate in 2002.²⁵¹ The official unemployment rate remains high (12%), and the unofficial rate may be more than two-and-a-half times larger, but there has been dramatic improvement since 2002.^{252,253}

²⁴⁴ Ferrochromium is an iron-chromium alloy obtained by refining chromite, the mineral from which chromium is derived.

²⁴⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Industry: Energy and Natural Resources." April 1992. [http://leweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0096\)](http://leweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0096))

²⁴⁶ International Trade Centre, World Trade Organization. "Trade Performance HS: Exports and Imports of Albania (2008, in USD thousands)." 2010. http://www.intracen.org/appl1/TradeCom/TP_TP_CI.aspx?RP=008&YR=2008

²⁴⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Country Comparison: GDP – Per Capita (PPP)." 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>

²⁴⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Country Comparison: GDP – Per Capita (PPP)." 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html>

²⁴⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Albania: Economy." 4 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

²⁵⁰ United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2009*. "HDR Statistical Tables. Table E." 2009. http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2009_Tables_rev.xls

²⁵¹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

²⁵² Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Albania: Economy." 4 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world->

Tourism

Albania's Adriatic coastline attracts vacationing beachgoers and water-sports enthusiasts and there are several historical and cultural sites in the country's mountainous regions.²⁵⁴ Albanian tourism revenues have risen in recent years, and in 2008 they accounted for over 4% of the nation's GDP. Most travelers come from other parts of Europe—Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro (all with significant ethnic Albanian populations) being the largest source countries.²⁵⁵ Despite this recent success in attracting visitors, the Albanian tourism industry is still hampered by infrastructure issues. Such problems include a poor road system, limited international flights, and insufficient hotel rooms in many areas. In addition, marketing and promotion efforts have been limited.^{256,257}



© Viktor Kaposi
Coast View from the Pass

Transportation

Albania emerged from the communist era with a sub-par road system, and until recently, few significant improvements had been made. Several high-profile road projects are now underway, one of which will ultimately link the Albanian coastal city of Durrës with the Kosovan border. When finished, this road will cut the travel time between the two points from six-plus hours to just two.²⁵⁸ Another major road project is a section of one of ten Pan-European Corridor roads planned to better link the countries of Eastern Europe.²⁵⁹ When this modern highway is completed, it will link Durrës with Bulgarian port cities on the Black Sea via a route that connects the Macedonian capital of Skopje with the Bulgarian capital of Sofia.²⁶⁰

factbook/rankorder/2004rank.html?countryName=Albania&countryCode=al®ionCode=eu&rank=131#al

²⁵³ BBC News, World Edition. Price, Matthew. "Albania Tries Image Makeover." 18 August 2002.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2200797.stm>

²⁵⁴ AlbanianTourism.com. National Tourist Organisation of Albania. "Welcome to Albania."

<http://www.albaniantourism.com/>

²⁵⁵ BalkanInsight.com. Likmeta, Besar. "Albania Registers Tourism Growth." 26 August 2009.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/21821/>

²⁵⁶ BalkanInsight.com. Likmeta, Besar. "Albania Registers Tourism Growth." 26 August 2009.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/21821/>

²⁵⁷ World Economic Forum. "The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index in Detail: Albania." 2009.

<http://www.weforum.org/documents/TTCR09/index.html>

²⁵⁸ ReporterNet.com. "Albania: Road Infrastructure Projects to Boost Eco Growth." 17 October 2007.

<http://www.reporternet.com/Albania/Special-Reports/item/47610-Albania-Road-infrastructure-projects-to-boost-eco-growth>

²⁵⁹ Albanian Business and Investment Agency. *Albanian Infrastructure Today* [p. 5]. 2008.

[http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/Albanian Infrastructure Today.pdf](http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/Albanian%20Infrastructure%20Today.pdf)

²⁶⁰ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. "Transport Division: TER and Pan-European Corridors: Corridor 8." No date. <http://www.unece.org/trans/main/ter/Countries/Corridors/corr8.jpg>

Albania's rural roads are notoriously bad and have hindered attempts to alleviate the rampant poverty of the nation's most isolated regions. In rural areas, more than 75% of workers still commute to and from work each day by foot.²⁶¹ Albania's roads are also a safety hazard, as Albania has one of Central and Eastern Europe's highest rates of fatal accidents per vehicle. Several international and European agencies have earmarked loans and other forms of aid to improve these roads.²⁶²



© Jason Rogers
Railway Line in Albania

Albania's rail system, consisting of 651 km (404 mi) of main and secondary lines, runs mostly north-south, connecting Montenegro's rail system with the main port cities of Durrës and Vlorë to the south. An east-west line runs to a point near the city of Pogradec, located on the southern shore of Lake Ohrid, but it does not connect to the rail lines of nearby Macedonia.²⁶³

All commercial air traffic and air freight in Albania goes through Tirana International Airport, located northwest of the city center near the village of Rinas. A German consortium has been managing the airport since 2005. During that time a new passenger terminal has been built, leading to an expansion in the number of airlines offering flights to and from the airport.²⁶⁴ No other domestic airports currently offer commercial air service in Albania.

Presently, Albania has four operating seaports—Durrës, Vlorë, Sarandë, and Shëngjin. Durrës is the most important of these four, handling nearly 75% of Albania's trade volume. A new container port is being planned for Vlorë.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ World Bank. "Transport: Albania." 2010.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTECAREGTOPTRANSPOR T/0,,contentMDK:20647645~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:571121,00.html>

²⁶² SFExaminer.com. Semini, Llazar. "Bumpy Road to Prosperity: Albania Gets Euro50 Million Loan to Rebuild Rural Thoroughfares." 4 March 2010. . <http://www.sfexaminer.com/economy/albania-gets-euro50-million-loan-to-rehabilitate-rural-roads-86350937.html>

²⁶³ Albanian Business and Investment Agency. "Albanian Infrastructure Today [pp. 11,14]." 2009. [http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/Albanian Infrastructure Today.pdf](http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/Albanian%20Infrastructure%20Today.pdf)

²⁶⁴ Airport-Technology.com. "Tirana (Mother Teresa) International Airport, Rinas, Albania." 2010. <http://www.airport-technology.com/projects/tiranainternational/>

²⁶⁵ Albanian Business and Investment Agency. "Albanian Infrastructure Today [pp. 7, 8]." 2009. [http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/Albanian Infrastructure Today.pdf](http://www.albinvest.gov.al/images/stories/dokumenta/Albanian%20Infrastructure%20Today.pdf)

Economic Outlook

Albania's economy has shown steady economic growth in recent years, averaging between 5.4% and 8% annual GDP growth from 2005–2008. In 2009 Albania's economy continued to grow, although at a slower pace than previous years, while most European economies saw their GDP decline due to the worldwide recession.²⁶⁶

Inflation has remained low, increasing at an average rate ranging from 2.2% to 3.4% during the 2005-2009 time period. The unemployment rate has also steadily decreased, although the recession in 2009 caused it to inch upward.²⁶⁷



© United Nations
Construction in Kukës

One of Albania's most significant economic concerns is its ongoing and sizable negative trade balance.²⁶⁸ Fortunately foreign direct investment and money sent back to the country by Albanians working abroad offset the trade deficit. Nearly 40% of the trade deficit is counterbalanced by remittances flowing into the country by Albanians working abroad.²⁶⁹

The Albanian government has recently emphasized improving its economic competitiveness. Its focus has been to better position itself to increase its level of business investment and ultimately its export base. Some of the steps taken include streamlining business-registration procedures and modernizing the nation's tax system.²⁷⁰ The government has certainly made progress, as measured by various rankings of country-level business environments. However, the Albanian economy still suffers from corruption, ineffective government bureaucracy, and weak infrastructure (electricity, transportation) that are difficult to address through legislation alone.^{271,272,273}

²⁶⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. “Country Comparison: GDP – Real Growth Rate.” 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2003rank.html?countryName=Albania&countryCode=al®ionCode=eu&rank=46#al>

²⁶⁷ European Commission. EU Candidate and Pre-Accession Countries Economic Quarterly. “Albania [pp. 17-20].” 9 April 2010.

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/db_indicators/cpaceq/documents/cceq_2010_q1_en.pdf

²⁶⁸ USAID. “Competitiveness and Openness Solution to Albania's Widening Trade Deficit, Reduction in Remittances.” 28 April 2009.

http://albania.usaid.gov/?fq=brenda&m=shfaqart&aid=310&kid=26&tit=USAID:_Competitiveness_and_Openness_Solution_to_Albania's_Widening_Trade_Deficit_Reduction_in_Remittances

²⁶⁹ European Commission. EU Candidate and Pre-Accession Countries Economic Quarterly. “Albania [p. 17].” 9 April 2010.

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/db_indicators/cpaceq/documents/cceq_2010_q1_en.pdf

²⁷⁰ World Trade Organization. “Trade Policy Review: Report by the Secretariat: Albania [p. vii].” 24 March 2010. http://www.wto.int/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s229-00_e.doc

²⁷¹ World Economic Forum. *The Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010*. “Albania [p. 66].” 2009.

<http://www.weforum.org/pdf/GCR09/GCR20092010fullreport.pdf>

International Organizations

Albania became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2000. It applied for membership in the European Union (EU) in 2009 and is a candidate for EU accession.²⁷⁴ The nation joined the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) as a member in 2007. This trade organization includes a large number of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that are not yet in the European Union, most in the Balkans. CEFTA has not had a major impact on Albania's trade patterns, although the CEFTA countries nearest to Albania (i.e., Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia) more than doubled their combined percentage of Albania's overall trade between 2006 and 2008.^{275,276}



Self Study Questions

The majority of Albanians are engaged in agricultural work. True or False?

Albania's terrain lends itself to extensive agricultural use. True or False?

Albania's larger farms are located primarily in the coastal regions. True or False?

Albania's smaller farms export most of their products abroad. True or False?

The end of the communist era was disastrous for Albania's industrial sector. True or False?

²⁷² World Bank. Doing Business. "Historical Data: Albania [Query with Economies: All, Topics: All, and Years: All]." 2010. <http://www.doingbusiness.org/CustomQuery/Default.aspx?excel=false>

²⁷³ World Economic Forum. "Table 4. The Global Competitiveness Index 2009-2010 Rankings and 2008-2009 Comparisons." 2009. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/GCR09/GCR20092010fullrankings.pdf> [

²⁷⁴ European Commission. "Albania – EU-Albania Relations." 27 May 2010. http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/potential-candidates/albania/relation/index_en.htm

²⁷⁵ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

²⁷⁶ World Trade Organization. "Trade Policy Review: Report by the Secretariat: Albania [pp. 115-116]." 24 March 2010. http://www.wto.int/english/tratop_e/tpr_e/s229-05_e.doc

Society

Introduction

“Wake, Albanian, from your slumber
Let us all, brothers, swear in common
And not look to church or mosque
The Albanian’s faith is Albanianism!”



Pashko Vasa (translated by Robert Elsie)

O moj Shqypni e mjera Shqypni (“Oh Albania, Poor Albania”)²⁷⁷

Albania, a crossroads of conquering empires and nations throughout recorded history, reflects the many influences that others have brought to the region. As noted above in Pashko Vasa’s poem—familiar to all Albanians, religion is just one of these foreign elements in the Albanian mosaic. Yet at the same time, Albania is one of the most culturally distinct countries of the Balkans. The Albanian language, believed to be derived from ancient Illyrian, is distinct from any other Indo-European language.²⁷⁸ As such, it has helped to define Albania’s character more than any other cultural element. In contrast, religious affiliation has played a greater role in cultural identification in other parts of the Balkans. Albania’s steep mountains, which have long provided an imposing barrier to outsiders, have also helped to isolate parts of the country and thus preserve longstanding clan traditions after other nations lost touch with such ancient roots.²⁷⁹

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Ethnic Albanians, defined as those who speak Albanian as their native language, are by far the largest group in Albania. The most recent census questionnaire (2001) did not contain any questions concerning ethnic affiliation or language. For this reason, estimates of the percentages of ethnic Albanians and minority groups in the country vary significantly from source to source.²⁸⁰ The most



²⁷⁷ Albanian Literature in Translation. Elsie, Robert. “Pashko Vasa.” No date. http://www.albanianliterature.net/authors_classical/vasa_poetry.html

²⁷⁸ Omoniglot.com. “Albanian (Shqip).” 2010. <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/albanian.htm>

²⁷⁹ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*, 3rd Ed. Pettifer, James. “Introduction [p. 11].” 2001. London, UK: A&C Black.

²⁸⁰ Insituti I Statistikës, Republika e Shqipërisë. “Questionnaires.” 2001. http://www.instat.gov.al/repoba/english/default_english.htm

frequently cited ethnic percentages, taken from the CIA World Factbook and based on 1989 estimates, are 95% Albanian, 3% Greek, and 2% other groups (e.g., Vlachs, Roma, Slavic Macedonians, Serbs, Bulgarians).²⁸¹

Albanians

The ethnic Albanian population is divided into two subgroups: the northern Ghegs and the southern Tosks. Traditionally, the Ghegs, occupying the mountainous north were viewed as more clannish, isolated, and independent than the southern Tosks. Exposed to the ways of foreigners, the Tosks were an agrarian society dominated by conservative Muslim landlords prior to the Second World War.^{282,283} Most of these cultural distinctions, however, were eliminated during the wrenching changes of the communist era.²⁸⁴ Many of the nation's leaders, including Enver Hoxha, the First Secretary of the Albanian Party of Labor, were from the southern (Tosk) part of Albania. Since then, however, the majority of Albanian presidents and prime ministers have been from northern (Gheg) Albania.²⁸⁵



The Ghegs and Tosks speak separate dialects of the Albanian language, with the Shkumbin River dividing the two groups.²⁸⁶ In 1972, the two dialects were combined to create a standard form of written Albanian. While more reflective of the Tosk dialect, the standard is generally used today by all ethnic Albanians, both inside and outside Albania.²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Albania: People." 24 June 2010.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

²⁸² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Interwar Albania, 1918-41: Social and Economic Conditions After World War I." April 1992. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0026\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0026))

²⁸³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: People: Ethnic Groups." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276843>

²⁸⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: People: Ethnic Groups." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276843>

²⁸⁵ Since April 1992, five of the six men who have been Albanian prime minister have been from north of the Shkumbin River: Sali Berisha (2005-present; Tropojë), Fatos Nano (1997-1998, 2002-1005; Tirana), Pandeli Majko (1998-1999, 2002; Tirana), Bashkim Fino (1997; Tirana), and Aleksander Meksi (1992-1997; Tirana). In the same time period, all four of Albania's presidents have been from the north: Bamir Topi (2007-present; Tirana), Alfred Moisiu (2002-2007; Shkodër), Rexhep Meidani (1997-2002; Tirana), and Berisha (1992-1997). [All biographical information from the Biography Resource Center: http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC;jsessionid=7CAEAE5CF9AEC1CF87D00E35F1D5476A?locID=cfsc_remote].

²⁸⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: People: Languages." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42623>

²⁸⁷ AlbanianLanguage.net. Elsie, Robert. "The Albanian Language." No date. http://www.albanianlanguage.net/home_ie6.html

Greeks

Ethnic Greeks are Albania's largest minority population and live predominantly in the southern regions of the country. They are the only non-Albanian ethnic group to have a significant political and social position within the Albanian-dominant culture.²⁸⁸ During the mid-1990s, southern Albania was the center of a conflict between the Albanian government and ethnic Albanian Greeks seeking autonomy (and even union with Greece). Though never easy, diplomatic relations between Tirana and Athens became extremely strained in 1994, when Greece expelled 100,000 Albanian workers. The action taken by Greece came after five ethnic Greeks in Albania were tried and convicted on espionage charges.^{289,290}



© Charles Roffey
Albanian woman from Cameria

Many of the southern Albanian cities and villages with longstanding ethnic Greek majority populations have been losing residents since the early 1990s.²⁹¹ To a great extent, this decline is a result of the Greek government's work permit policy, which favors ethnic Greeks from Albania over ethnic Albanians.²⁹² Over 40% of more than 450,000 Albanians working legally in Greece in June 2008 were ethnic Greeks—a percentage much higher than that of ethnic Greeks within the entire Albanian population.²⁹³

Other Groups

Vlachs speak Aromanian, a language derived from Latin, and are scattered in small communities throughout Albania and the rest of the Balkans. There are various theories about the origin of the Albanian Vlachs, who themselves consider modern-day Romania and Greece to be the most likely places from which their culture sprang. To some extent, Vlach attachments to either a Greek or Romanian origin appear based on pragmatic

²⁸⁸ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vicker, Miranda and James Pettifer. "Chapter 10: Ethnic Minorities in Albania after Communism [p. 186]." 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

²⁸⁹ ETH Zurich, International Relations and Security Network. Pettifer, James *The Greek Minority in Albania in the Aftermath of Communism*. In "Bilateral Politics, Emigration & Domestic Ethnic Relations [p. G97]." July 2001. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=38652>

²⁹⁰ *Central Europe Review*, Vol. 1, No. 21. Vidali, Maria. "Living in a Policy Vacuum: The Plight of Albanian Immigrants in Greece." 15 November 1999. <http://www.ce-review.org/99/21/vidali21.html>

²⁹¹ ETH Zurich, International Relations and Security Network. Pettifer, James. *The Greek Minority in Albania in the Aftermath of Communism*. In "Bilateral Politics, Emigration & Domestic Ethnic Relations [pp. G96-G97]." July 2001. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=38652>

²⁹² ETH Zurich, International Relations and Security Network. Pettifer, James. *The Greek Minority in Albania in the Aftermath of Communism*. In "Bilateral Politics, Emigration & Domestic Ethnic Relation [p. G97]." July 2001. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0C54E3B3-1E9C-BE1E-2C24-A6A8C7060233&lng=en&id=38652>

²⁹³ Triandafyllidou, Anna. "Migration and Migration Policy in Greece. Critical Review and Policy Recommendations [pp. 2-5]." 2009. <http://www.eliamep.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/migration-and-migration-policy-in-greece-critical-review-and-policy-recommendations.pdf>

economic and educational interests.^{294,295} Traditionally, the Vlachs were known as shepherds who moved seasonally with their livestock or as traveling merchants, selling surplus wool.²⁹⁶ Today, however, Vlachs are as likely to be living in cities as they are in mountain villages adjacent to pasturelands. This trend toward urbanized life, where Albanian is the dominant language, threatens the continued usage of the Aromanian language.²⁹⁷

The Roma (sometimes referred to as Gypsies) are found throughout Europe, although their numbers are largest in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. Their language is Vlax Romani, whose Sanskrit roots tie its linguistic development to the Indian subcontinent.²⁹⁸ The Roma are believed to have arrived in modern-day Albania over 600 years ago, thus predating the Ottoman Turks. Most Roma converted to Islam during the Ottoman Era, as did a large percentage of ethnic Albanians. The Albanian Roma are divided into four tribes, each of which is involved in distinct professions: Meckars (agricultural workers and entertainers), Kurtofs (small-scale trade and handicrafts), Kabuzis (musicians and artisans), and Cergars (traveling tradespeople and fortune tellers).²⁹⁹



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org
Aromanians (Macedono-Vlachs)

Albania's ethnic Macedonian population (as recognized by the government) lives in the region near Lake Prespa, close to Macedonia's southeastern border with Albania. In this region, the language of instruction at school is Macedonian. Macedonian rights groups claim that many more ethnic Macedonians, officially unrecognized by the Albanian government, live along the northernmost Albanian-Macedonian border, as well as in larger Albanian cities.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁴ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*, 3rd Ed. Winnifrith, Tom. "Background Information: The Vlachs in Albania [pp. 102-104]." 2001. London, UK: A&C Black.

²⁹⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Naegele, Jolyon. "Albania: Vlach Population, Aromanian Language in Danger of Disappearing." 7 November 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1097921.html>

²⁹⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Naegele, Jolyon. "Albania: Vlach Population, Aromanian Language in Danger of Disappearing." 7 November 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1097921.html>

²⁹⁷ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Naegele, Jolyon. "Albania: Vlach Population, Aromanian Language in Danger of Disappearing." 7 November 2001. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1097921.html>

²⁹⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Romany Languages." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9083842>

²⁹⁹ Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe—Southeast Europe (CEDIME-SE). "Minorities in Southeast Europe: Roma of Albania [pp. 6, 14]." August 2000. <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/cedime-se-albania-roma.doc>

³⁰⁰ HistoryofMacedonia.org. "The Macedonian Minority in Albania." 2003.

<http://www.historyofmacedonia.org/MacedonianMinorities/MacedonianMinorityinAlbania.html>

Religion

Religion was suppressed in Albania for several decades during the communist era. As many as 95% of all churches and mosques were either torn down or completely repurposed as warehouses, sports arenas, or other types of buildings as part of the government's campaign against religion.^{301,302} The 1990 lifting of the ban against religion marked the beginning of a gradual religious revival in which hundreds of buildings of worship have been rebuilt.^{303,304}



© Viktor Kaposi
Mosque ruins

The validity of statistics on Albanian religious practice is suspect since the numbers still cited today are drawn from the pre-communist era. For example, one commonly listed religious breakdown, representative of a much earlier period, is 70% Muslim, 20% Roman Catholic, and 10% Albanian Orthodox.³⁰⁵ However, in present-day Albania, it is believed that many citizens actually do not affiliate themselves with any organized religion.^{306,307,308} Among Albanians who are active practitioners, the most popular traditions are Islamic and Christian. Two branches of Islam (Sunni and Bektashi Muslims) and two Christian denominations (Albanian Orthodox and Roman Catholic)—are dominant among the diverse religious affiliations.³⁰⁹

³⁰¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Iwaskiw, Walt. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Religion: The Revival of Religion." April 1992.

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0057\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0057))

³⁰² *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vicker, Miranda and James Pettifer. "Chapter 6: The Revival of Religion [p. 99]." 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

³⁰³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Iwaskiw, Walt. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Religion: The Revival of Religion." April 1992.

[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+al0057\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+al0057))

³⁰⁴ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vicker, Miranda; and James Pettifer. "Chapter 6: The Revival of Religion [p. 99]." 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

³⁰⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Albania: People." 24 June 2010.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

³⁰⁶ Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Vickers, Miranda. "Islam in Albania [p. 1]." March 2008.

http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CSRC_Albania_Islam.pdf

³⁰⁷ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Albania." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127295.htm>

³⁰⁸ University of Virginia Library. Religious Freedom Page Project. "Religious Freedom Nation Profile: Albania." 6 June 2001. <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/nationprofiles/Albania/rbodies.html>

³⁰⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *International Religious Freedom Report 2003*. "Albania." 18 December 2003. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127295.htm>

Muslims

Albania's Muslims practice both Sunni and Shia Islam. Sunni Muslims are the larger of the world's two Islamic sects. Most of Albania's Shiite Muslims are Bektashi, a Sufi order that takes a mystical approach to the teachings of the Quran.^{310,311} The Bektashi sect is one of the most tolerant and least orthodox of Islamic orders, ignoring many Islamic norms such as the veiling of women and prohibitions against consuming pork and alcohol.³¹² Bektashi is considered the form of Islam most often practiced in rural areas and small villages.³¹³ In cities and towns, Albania's Sunni Muslims are divided between two factions: the Hanafi school, a relatively liberal form of Islamic legal thought, and the Salafi school, which takes a stricter interpretation of Islamic doctrine.³¹⁴



© Erik Stewart
Mosque in Tirana

Christians

Albania's Orthodox population lives primarily in the southern half of the country. The modern-day Albanian Orthodox Church traces its roots to Boston, Massachusetts, where the Albanian immigrant and noted linguist Fan Noli (who would later briefly serve as Albania's Prime Minister in the 1920s) first delivered the Orthodox liturgy in the Albanian language in 1908.³¹⁵ Even though the majority of the Albanian Orthodox community is ethnic Albanian, the church has long been associated with Albania's ethnic Greek population. This relationship dates back to the Ottoman era when all church services and cultural activities were conducted in Greek.³¹⁶



© Sean Long
Orthodox Church

³¹⁰ Slate.com. Thrall, Nathan. "Albania, the Muslim World's Most Pro-American State." 3 September 2009. <http://www.slate.com/id/2226840/entry/2226843/>

³¹¹ Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Vickers, Miranda. "Islam in Albania [p. 3]." March 2008.

http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CSRC_Albania_Islam.pdf

³¹² Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Vickers, Miranda. "Islam in Albania [p. 3]." March 2008.

http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CSRC_Albania_Islam.pdf

³¹³ Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Vickers, Miranda. "Islam in Albania [p. 3]." March 2008.

http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CSRC_Albania_Islam.pdf

³¹⁴ Advanced Research and Assessment Group, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom. Vickers, Miranda. "Islam in Albania [p. 3]." March 2008.

http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/CSRC_Albania_Islam.pdf

³¹⁵ Catholic Near East Welfare Association. "The Orthodox Church of Albania." 28 June 2007.

<http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&IndexView=toc>

³¹⁶ Catholic Near East Welfare Association. "The Orthodox Church of Albania." 28 June 2007.

<http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&IndexView=toc>

Roman Catholicism is primarily practiced in the northern half of Albania. The spiritual heart of the country's Catholic community has traditionally been the city of Shkodër. During the communist era, the city's large cathedral was repurposed to host basketball and volleyball games.³¹⁷ Today, Shkodër and Tirana are the seats of Albania's two Roman Catholic archdioceses.³¹⁸

Gender Issues

Domestic Abuse

As Albania begins the process it hopes will lead to membership in the European Union (EU), increasing attention has been drawn to Albanian human rights issues that may be in conflict with EU conventions. One example is domestic violence against women, a problem judged to be “underreported, under-investigated, under-prosecuted and under-sentenced” by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).³¹⁹ Albania's first law addressing such violence did not come into effect until June 2007.³²⁰ Since then, non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International have noted that progress has been achieved because women are now more likely to report abuse and seek out protective services.³²¹ In many cases, however, it remains difficult for women with limited access to employment opportunities and housing to come forward against abusive husbands. In 2009, Amnesty International estimated that one out of three women was still affected by domestic violence in Albania.³²² In March 2010, the Albanian government announced plans to provide monthly assistance stipends to at least some of the women who have left their homes to escape domestic violence.³²³

³¹⁷ InYourPocket.com. “Catholic Cathedral [Kisha e Madhe].” 2010.

http://www.inyourpocket.com/albania/shkodra/sights/Catholic-Cathedral_2994v

³¹⁸ Catholic-Hierarchy.org. “Albania: Current Dioceses.” 2010. <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/dal2.html>

³¹⁹ Amnesty International. *Report 2007*. “Albania.” 2007.

<http://archive.amnesty.org/report2007/eng/Regions/Europe-and-Central-Asia/Albania/default.htm>

³²⁰ Amnesty International. “Ending Domestic Violence in Albania: The Next Steps [p. 3].” March 2010.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR11/001/2010/en/f22a5393-9099-488a-8049-2a8e34d8ed9e/eur110012010en.pdf>

³²¹ Amnesty International. “Ending Domestic Violence in Albania: The Next Steps [p. 16].” March 2010.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR11/001/2010/en/f22a5393-9099-488a-8049-2a8e34d8ed9e/eur110012010en.pdf>

³²² Amnesty International. “Amnesty International Report 2009: Albania.” 2009.

<http://report2009.amnesty.org/en/regions/europe-central-asia/albania>

³²³ Amnesty International. “Ending Domestic Violence in Albania: The Next Steps [p. 12].” March 2010.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR11/001/2010/en/f22a5393-9099-488a-8049-2a8e34d8ed9e/eur110012010en.pdf>

Sworn Virgins

Among the clans of the mountainous regions of Albania, an ancient code of laws has long ruled village life. Known as the *Kanun of Lek Dukagjin*, it was an oral tradition handed down from generation to generation. Some aspects of the code are still practiced in pockets of Albania, although more than four decades of communist rule has weakened the *Kanun*'s hold on rural traditions. Preservation of honor is an important element of the *Kanun*, manifested most notably in the blood feud, in which a deadly sequence of reciprocal family-vs.-family revenge killings could be initiated by the slighting of one family's honor. Such feuds continue to this day, despite the Albanian government's attempts to bring this ancient tradition to an end.³²⁴



© Hans Memling
Allegory of chastity

Women's rights, under the *Kanun*, were limited, as the laws effectively institutionalized patriarchy in the rural communities. Arranged marriages were the norm, sometimes negotiated shortly after the birth of a child.³²⁵ Some women lived in families with no patriarch or wished to avoid an arranged marriage without causing loss of honor to the intended groom's family. In such cases, these women took vows of permanent chastity, cut their hair short, wore men's clothing, and were recognized, within Albanian village society, as men. Some of these "sworn virgins" (virgjinesha) still live in Albania to this day. The practice, however, has mostly disappeared as even the most isolated areas of the country are influenced by modern ideas about the role of women.^{326,327}

Traditions: Celebrations and Holidays

Religious Holidays

Each of Albania's four major religions celebrate official holidays during the year. Given that religious lines have long been blurred in Albania, especially after decades of religious repression, it is not uncommon for Muslims and Christians to enjoy each other's holiday festivities.³²⁸ For Albania's Orthodox and Roman Catholic communities, Easter and Christmas are the primary celebrations. Typical Christmas traditions—such as gift

³²⁴ International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR). Mangalakova, Tanya. "The Kanun in Present-Day Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro." 2004. http://www.imir-bg.org/imir/reports/The_Kanun.pdf

³²⁵ Jolique.com. "Crossing Boundaries: Albania's Sworn Virgins." 2007
http://www.jolique.com/gender/crossing_boundaries.htm

³²⁶ Washington Post. Zumbun, Joshua. "The Sacrifices of Albania's 'Sworn Virgins.'" 11 August 2007.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/08/10/AR2007081002158.html>

³²⁷ Sydney Morning Herald. New York Times. Bilefsk, Dan. "At Home With Albania's Last Sworn Virgins." 27 June 2008. <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/women-have-to-swap-genders-to-survive/2008/06/26/1214472673664.html>

³²⁸ BalkanInsight.com. Likmeta, Besar. "Albania's Muslim Easter." 29 April 2008.
<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/blogs/9733/>

giving, tree decorations, midnight church services, and large family meals—are as common in Albania as in other parts of Europe.³²⁹ Albanian Easter traditions include church services, candlelight vigils, and colorful Easter eggs.³³⁰ The Orthodox and Catholic churches use different methods for determining the date of Easter. For this reason, the holiday falls on the same date for both religions in certain years, while in others the Orthodox celebration may follow the Catholic observance by a week or more.³³¹

For Albania’s practicing Sunni Muslims, Lesser Bajram (also known as Eid al-Fitr), the celebration marking the end of 30 days of dawn-to-dusk fasting during Ramadan, is one of two major holidays. The other is Greater Bajram (Eid al-Adha), marking Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son according to God’s will. During the latter holiday, it is customary to sacrifice an animal, share some of the meat with family friends, and give the rest to the poor.³³² Both holidays are linked to the lunar calendar and each occurs approximately 11 days earlier (in the Gregorian calendar) each year.^{333,334}



© David Young
Eid al-adha

Bektashis in Albania celebrate Sultan Nevruz, a holiday marking the birth of Ali (the Prophet Muhammad’s son-in law) that also aligns with the spring equinox. Ali holds a special position within the Bektashi community, comparable in importance to Muhammad. To Bektashis, Ali is the revealer of the inner, mystical truths of the Quran.³³⁵ Lavish meals featuring sacrificed lambs are commonly a part of the Bektashi celebrations on this day.³³⁶

Non-Religious Holidays and Celebrations

In addition to the religious holidays, Albanians also commemorate several secular holidays. These include New Year’s Day (January 1), International Workers Day (May 1), Mother Theresa Day (October 19), and Liberation/Independence Day (November 28/29).

³²⁹ TheHolidaySpot.com. “Christmas in Albania.” No date.

<http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/worldxmas/albania.htm>

³³⁰ BalkanInsight.com. “Albania’s Muslim Easter.” 29 April 2008.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/blogs/9733/>

³³¹ Astronomical Society of South Australia. Mallen, Ronald W. “Easter Dating Method.” 2007.

<http://www.assa.org.au/edm.html#OrthCalculator>

³³² About.com: Islam. Huda. “Eid al-Adha.” 2010. <http://islam.about.com/od/hajj/a/adha.htm>

³³³ TimeandDate.com. “Eid-al-Fitr in United Kingdom.” 2010.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/uk/eid-al-fitr>

³³⁴ TimeandDate.com. “Eid-al-Adha in United Kingdom.” 2010.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/uk/eid-al-adha>

³³⁵ Bektashi.net. Abiva, Huseyin. “Bektashism and Its Presence in Albanian Lands.” No date.

<http://www.bektashi.net/history-bekbalkans.html>

³³⁶ Bektashi.net. Abiva, Huseyin. “Bektashism and Its Presence in Albanian Lands.” No date.

<http://www.bektashi.net/history-bekbalkans.html>

The end-of-November secular holiday marks two events: (1) the declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire by Albanian nationalist leaders during the start of the First Balkan War (November 28), and the withdrawal of the German army from Albania during World War II (November 29).^{337,338}

One of Albania's most festive holidays is Summer Day, which ironically falls in the late stages of winter (March 14).³³⁹ It is a holiday marking the coming of spring. Traditionally it has been associated with the city of Elbasan, but it has now become more of a national celebration. In Tirana, Summer Day is a day-long street festival marked by musical concerts and other forms of outdoor entertainment.³⁴⁰

No celebration in Albania, however, can top the wedding in terms of exuberant revelry. The wedding banquets and related ceremonies can involve hundreds of people and last for days.^{341,342} Non-stop dancing until dawn, continuous servings of food, ceremonial burning of handkerchiefs, and gifts of money showered upon the bride's head are just some of the elements that make up a typical wedding celebration.³⁴³

Cuisine

Albanian dishes reflect the nation's Mediterranean location and history of periodic domination by its neighbors. Italian, Greek, and Turkish influences are evident in many of the food items.³⁴⁴ Lamb and mutton are the most common meats, with fish dishes popular in coastal regions. One popular meat dish is qofte të fërguara, which consists of fried meatballs (often lamb) spiced with mint, garlic and/or onions, oregano, parsley, and feta cheese.^{345,346} Nuts, such as walnuts, pine nuts, and hazelnuts, are used in many dishes, often as



³³⁷ AGlobalWrld.com. "Liberation Day Commemorated in Albania." 29 November 2009.

<http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/liberation-day-albania/>

³³⁸ AGlobalWrld.com. "Albania Celebrates Its Independence." 28 November 2009.

<http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/liberation-day-albania/>

³³⁹ Moveoneinc.com. News and Views from Move One. Foster, Florence. "Public Holidays Around the World – Week 10/11." 5 March 2010. <http://www.moveoneinc.com/blog/relocations/enpublic-holidays-world-week-1011/>

³⁴⁰ Vargmal.org. "Summer Day Magic as Albania Celebrates Its Biggest Pagan Festival." 14 March 2008. <http://vargmal.org/dan1898>

³⁴¹ Everyculture.com. "Albania: Marriage, Family, and Kinship." No date. <http://www.everyculture.com/A-Bo/Albania.html>

³⁴² Omaha Newsstand.com. Ralston Recorder. Klinker, Adam. "Volleyball Career Takes Kelly Goc to Albania." 11 June 2010.

http://omahanewsstand.com/articles/2010/06/14/ralston_recorder/sports/doc4c1241c7eb57b675926378.txt

³⁴³ Bletebzz.wordpress.com. "Albanian Weddings for Dummies." 21 February 2007.

<http://bletebzz.wordpress.com/2007/02/21/albanian-weddings-for-dummies/>

³⁴⁴ Buzzle.com. "The Cuisine of Albania." 2010. <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/the-cuisine-of-albania.html>

³⁴⁵ Marga.org. "Qofte të Fërguara." No date. <http://www.marga.org/food/int/albania/qofte.html>

³⁴⁶ AlbanianTranslators.com. "20 Albanian Recipes." No date.

<http://www.albaniantranslators.com/recipes.html>

ingredients in sauces or combined with crushed garlic and olive oil as an accompaniment to vegetable and chicken dishes. Dairy items include yogurt (known as kos) and cheese made from the milk of goats or sheep.³⁴⁷

Stews (*fërgesë*) are a common main course in Albanian cuisine. A typical one is Tirana stew (*fërgesë e Tiranëse*), which can be made with veal (*me mish viçi*), peppers (*me speca*), or other ingredients. Salads made of fresh garden vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers, olives, and peppers, are often served with the main meal as well.

Bread (*bukë*) is the staple food of the Albanian diet, and its importance is reflected in the fact that *bukë* also translates as “food” in Albanian.³⁴⁸ In much of Albania, a variety of grains (e.g., wheat and barley) may be used in baking bread. In the mountainous northern areas, however, a flat, round maize (corn) bread is commonly consumed.^{349, 350} Phyllo dough (made from thin sheets of unleavened flour) is used both for vegetable pies and for desserts such as baklava. Salty Albanian vegetable pies (*byrek shqiptar me perime*) are sometimes served as the primary dish of a meal.³⁵¹

The national drink of Albania is *raki*, a brandy-like spirit that is made from grapes or, in more mountainous regions, plums.³⁵² Unlike Turkish raki, the Albanian counterpart has no anise flavoring. It is a very potent drink and is sipped, rather than quickly “downed.” At meals, beer, wine, and mineral water are frequently drunk.³⁵³

Traditional Dress

Today, most Albanians dress like their counterparts in other European countries. The colorful traditional dress is most often seen at Albanian folk festivals, Independence Day events, or in displays at ethnographic museums in larger Albanian cities.³⁵⁴ Different styles are visibly evident between northern and southern Albanian traditional dress.



© Andreas Welch
Albanian traditional dress

³⁴⁷ Buzzle.com. “The Cuisine of Albania.” 2010. <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/the-cuisine-of-albania.html>

³⁴⁸ Argjiro.net. “An English-Albanian, Albanian-English Online Dictionary.” No date. <http://argjiro.net/fjalor/index.php3>

³⁴⁹ Iliria-Agentur.com. “Traditional Cuisine Albania [p. 10].” No date. http://www.iliria-agentur.com/de/albanien-brochure_traditional_cuisine.pdf

³⁵⁰ Buzzle.com. “The Cuisine of Albania.” 2010. <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/the-cuisine-of-albania.html>

³⁵¹ AlbanianTranslators.com. “20 Albanian Recipes.” No date. <http://www.albaniantranslators.com/recipes.html>

³⁵² Iliria-Agentur.com. “Traditional Cuisine Albania [p. 10].” No date. http://www.iliria-agentur.com/de/albanien-brochure_traditional_cuisine.pdf

³⁵³ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*, 3rd Ed. Pettifer, James. “Practical Information: Food and Drink [pp. 40-41].” 2001. London, UK: A&C Black.

³⁵⁴ InYourPocket.com. “Albania: Traditional Dress.” 2010. <http://www.inyourpocket.com/albania/tirana/Traditional-dress-71540f?more=1>

Arts

Literature

At particular times in Albania's history, events have impeded the development of a body of literature in the Albanian language. During the Ottoman era, for example, a ban on documents or publications written in the Albanian language meant that writing was produced in Greek or Turkish.^{355,356} Later, during the communist era, severe constraints were placed on writers; they were allowed to produce only materials that conformed to the state-approved style known as Social Realism. Thus, most written works during this time embraced socialist themes, such as the development of a classless society and the importance of individual achievements as contributions to the greater social good.³⁵⁷



© vlorush / flickr.com
Albanian artifacts

Despite these constraints, however, Albania has produced several writers whose work is widely admired by readers around the world. One of the most notable of these is Ismail Kadare (1936-), a poet and novelist, who is frequently mentioned as a short list candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. He managed to produce writings of artistic integrity while living in Albania during the most repressive years of the Hoxha regime. Kadare is not considered a dissident writer, although some of his books in the 1970s and 1980s were oblique critiques of communist Albania and even Hoxha.³⁵⁸ He affected this form of criticism by situating some of his stories in different eras, such as the many centuries of Ottoman rule.³⁵⁹ Several of Kadare's books were banned in Albania for several years for content that violated state-mandated injunctions. As penance for having crossed the line in some of his other writings, the author was forced, on at least one occasion, to write a work of unabashed pro-Hoxha propaganda.^{360,361}

³⁵⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albanian Literature." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9005396>

³⁵⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. Sudetic, Charles. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: National Awakening and the Birth of Albania, 1876-1918." April 1992. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstty:@field\(DOCID+al0021\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query2/r?frd/cstty:@field(DOCID+al0021))

³⁵⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Socialist Realism." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9005396>

³⁵⁸ Kadare admitted in an interview that the act of writing genuine literature in a totalitarian state was, in and of itself, an act of dissidence.

³⁵⁹ Times Online. Fordham, Alice. "Interview: Ismail Kadare." 22 May 2008.

http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/fiction/article3986703.ece

³⁶⁰ Guardian.uk.co. McRobie, Heather. "Ismail Kadare Doesn't Need to Be Dissident to Be Good." 6 March 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/booksblog/2009/mar/06/ismail-kadare-siege-dissident>

³⁶¹ Village Voice. Ehrenreich, Ben. "Fates of State." 1 November 2005. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-11-01/vls/fates-of-state/>

Music

Few countries can boast that a form of their native folk music was designated a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Albania is an exception. Iso-polyphony³⁶² is a traditional Albanian form of folksong in which two separate melody lines are sung against a background drone. Several variations of this basic style exist, including differences in how the drone is sung. For example, among some groups of southern Albanians, the drone chorus continues after the soloists pause. Today, one is most likely to hear iso-polyphony performed at Albanian folk festivals or traditional-style weddings.^{363,364}



© Kevin Walsh
Young Albanian dancers

Instrumental Albanian folk music may feature various instruments, including clarinets, violins, bagpipes, and a single-stringed lute-like instrument known as the *lahuta*. Some of this music, such as the southern Albanian *kaba*, echoes the styles of iso-polyphonic vocal music, with a guitar most commonly supplying the drone element.³⁶⁵ Other types of Albanian music include the epic poetry of the northern Ghegs, often sung with *lahuta* accompaniment. Albania's Roma have their own style of music, characterized by a driving brass section.³⁶⁶ Some modern bands often fuse these various Albanian musical styles, often with nontraditional instrumentation, to create an aurally stimulating mix of old and new. An example is Fanfara Tirana, a Roma-style band from Tirana. Their 2007 composition *Apocalyptic Kaba* (a melding of Roma and *kaba* styles) is just one example of this recent trend of cross-fertilization of musical genres.³⁶⁷

Folk Tales and Folklore

Folk tales and legends have long been a part of the oral culture of the remote Albanian mountain regions.³⁶⁸ One such story (The Tale of the Eagle) explains how



© Rob Hogeslag
Mosaic of 'The Albanians'

³⁶² The *iso* of “iso-polyphony” refers to the *ison*, or drone-singing, of Byzantine religious music.

³⁶³ UNESCO. “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible History of Humanity [p. 10].” 2006. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001473/147344E.pdf>

³⁶⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Albania: Cultural Life: The Arts.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276851>

³⁶⁵ Magazine for Traditional Music Throughout the World. Kirkby, Andrea. “Review: Music From Albania/Vocal Traditions of Albania.” 29 July 1999. <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/reviews/albania.htm>

³⁶⁶ Magazine for Traditional Music Throughout the World. Kirkby, Andrea. “Review: Music From Albania/Vocal Traditions of Albania.” 29 July 1999. <http://www.mustrad.org.uk/reviews/albania.htm>

³⁶⁷ New.music.yahoo.com. “Albanian Wedding: Brass Explosion by Fanfara Tirana.” 2007. <http://new.music.yahoo.com/fanfara-tirana/albums/albanian-wedding-brass-explosion--52255675>

³⁶⁸ Scribd.com. Elsie, Robert, Transl. *Albanian Folk Tales and Legends*, 2nd Ed. “Introduction [p. 4].” 1991. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/89033/Albanian-Folk-Tales-and-Legends>

Albania came to get its name (which is generally interpreted from the Albanian language as “land of the eagles”).³⁶⁹ Other legends and epic poems trace the exploits of historical and mythical figures, such as Skanderbeg, famed for his long resistance against invading Ottoman armies. Others on the list include Gjergj Elez Alia (a great warrior who slayed a giant sea monster that was terrorizing the Albanian countryside) and the Muslim brothers, Mujo and Halil. These two siblings’ heroic actions are the subject of epic verses still recited and sung to this day by some northern Gheg folk singers.^{370,371,372,373}

Sports and Recreation

Soccer (known as “football” in most of the world) is Albania’s most popular sport. Tens of thousands of Albanians are members of one or more of the nation’s many professional and amateur football clubs. In world rankings, the national team has reached number 62 (August 2006), although it has yet to qualify for the World Cup or the European Championship competitions.^{374,375}



© Erik Stewart
Kids playing soccer

Basketball and volleyball are other team sports that Albanians both play and follow as spectators. Their level of interest in them, however, is markedly lower than it is in soccer. The country has senior basketball leagues (with players over the age of 20) for both men and women. Albania is currently trying to establish stronger youth programs for boys and girls that will eventually lead to more success in European competitions.^{376,377} Over 70 men’s and women’s volleyball teams compete at the senior, junior, and youth levels in cities throughout the country.³⁷⁸

³⁶⁹ Frosina.org. “Albanian Folktales: The Tale of the Eagle.” No date.

<http://www.frosina.org/culturehistory/eagle.asp?pf=1&>

³⁷⁰ Albanian Literature in Translation. Elsie, Robert. “Oral Verse: The Song of Gjergj Elez Alia.” No date.

http://www.albanianliterature.net/oral_lit2/OL2-02.html

³⁷¹ *Songs of the Frontier Warriors: Këngë Kreshnikësh*. Elsie, Robert and Janice Mathie-Heck. 2004.

Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers. <http://www.elsie.de/en/books/b35.html>

³⁷² Albanian Literature in Translation. Elsie, Robert. “Oral Verse: The Cycle of Mujo and Halili.” No date.

http://www.albanianliterature.net/oral_lit2/OL2-01.html

³⁷³ Albanian Literature in Translation. Elsie, Robert. “Legends of Mujo and Halili.” No date.

http://www.albanianliterature.net/oral_lit3/OL3-05.html

³⁷⁴ FIFA.com. “Albania.” 26 May 2010.

<http://www.fifa.com/associations/association=alb/ranking/gender=m/index.html>

³⁷⁵ FIFA.com. “Albania: Profile.” 2010.

<http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/preliminaries/europe/teams/team=43932/profile.html>

³⁷⁶ FIBA.com. Nilsen, Paul. “Pragmatism Mixed With Hope: Albania Part II.” 8 March 2010.

http://www.fibaeurope.com/nfID_232.coid_XSgAo44QHZoaFmacLwlhA2.articleMode_on.html

³⁷⁷ FIBA.com. Nilsen, Paul. “Back to School: Albania Part I.” 1 March 2010.

http://www.fibaeurope.com/coid_ptZViY2OGtw6Ptv,Wg3H42.articleMode_on.container_frontpage.html

³⁷⁸ Balkan Volleyball Association. “Albania.” No date. <http://www.balkanvolleyball.org/ALBANIA.htm>

Non-team sports in which Albanians regularly take part include swimming, gymnastics, cycling, weightlifting, and tae kwon do.^{379,380} Popular board games include backgammon and chess, with players of the former a fixture in coffeehouses, bars, and city parks all around the country.^{381,382,383} Albanian beaches in the summer months abound with tourists and locals enjoying various water sports, while further inland several of Albania's lakes and streams provide good opportunities for fishing.³⁸⁴

Self Study Questions

The Albanian people base their sense of national identity on ethnicity. True or False?

Greeks make up Albania's largest ethnic minority. True or False?

The written form of the Albanian language is based on the dialect of one group. True or False?

The two predominant faiths in Albania are Christianity and Islam. True or False?

The modern-day Albanian Orthodox Church traces its roots to the USA. True or False?

³⁷⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Albania: Cultural Life: Sports and Recreation." 2010.
<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276853>

³⁸⁰ *Albania & Kosovo, Blue Guide*, 3rd Ed. Pettifer, James. "Background Information: Popular Culture [p. 100]." 2001. London, UK: A&C Black.

³⁸¹ Lonely Planet. Cohee, Jim. "Touring Tirana." 11 September 2008.

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/thread.jspx?threadID=1664171&messageID=14677205#14677205>

³⁸² Gadling.com. Woodburn, Neil. "Balkan Odyssey Part 11: Valbona, Albania." 28 July 2006.

<http://www.gadling.com/2006/07/28/balkan-odyssey-part-11-valbona-albania/>

³⁸³ Gadling.com. Woodburn, Neil. "Balkan Odyssey Part 10: Lake Komani, Albania." 27 July 2006.

<http://www.gadling.com/2006/07/27/balkan-odyssey-part-10-lake-komani-albania/>

³⁸⁴ Country Reports. "Albania: Sports and Recreation, Kids Games." 2010.

<http://www.countryreports.org/login/login.aspx?myurl=/people/recreation.aspx&countryid=2>

Security

Introduction

The late 1990s were a tumultuous period in Albania. A large-scale uprising occurred in 1997 after numerous pyramid schemes had failed, eventually requiring the intervention of international military forces to quell the violence. Two years later, Albania received a massive influx of refugees from neighboring Kosovo during the conflict that took place there. Now, more than 10 years later, the domestic and regional security situation in Albania has calmed considerably, although an ongoing political stand off over the 2009 elections has raised fears that it could threaten Albania's application to the European Union if a compromise is not reached.



© United Nations Photo
Refugee boys carrying bread

Military

Since April 2009, Albania has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). To meet NATO military standards, Albania has restructured its armed forces and implemented various military reforms in the last few years. One of these reforms is the elimination of compulsory mandatory service. This move is part of the transition to professional armed forces, composed of 10,000 troops, by the end of 2010.^{385,386} In contrast, the Albanian Army had a troop strength of 40,000 in 1993, but the soldiers' training and equipment were deficient compared to now.³⁸⁷



DoD Photo by Lance Cpl. K.H. Holloway
Albanian soldier, NATO exercise

Albania's military budget for the first half of the 2000s averaged a little more than 1.3% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). However, that percentage has risen significantly since then.³⁸⁸ The most recent data show that Albania's military expenditures are now slightly more than 2.0% of GDP.^{389,390}

³⁸⁵ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Morelli, Vincent and Carl Ek, Paul Belkin, Steven Woehrel, Jim Nichol. "NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates [p. 6]." 14 April 2009. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34701.pdf>

³⁸⁶ Army Forces of Republic of Albania. "97 Years – Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania." December 2009. <http://www.aaf.mil.al/mat.php?lang=EN&idm=701&idr=101>

³⁸⁷ Center for Strategic Leadership, U.S. Army War College. Griffard, Bernard F. and R. Craig Nation, Daniel Grey. "Strategic Planning in the Albanian Armed Forces." January 2009. http://www.csl.army.mil/usacsl/publications/IP_1_09_AAFStratPlanning.pdf

³⁸⁸ Google.com. World Bank, World Development Indicators. "Military Expenditure as Percentage of GDP." 15 June 2010. http://www.google.com/publicdata?ds=wb-wdi&met=ms_mil_xpnd_gd_zs&idim=country:ALB&dl=en&hl=en&q=Albania+military+spending

³⁸⁹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." 14 June 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

Given Albania's many domestic needs, this percentage is significantly high for military spending.³⁹¹

Given the relatively small size of Albania's forces, NATO has encouraged the nation's military leaders to focus on developing specialized strategic capabilities to support NATO missions. Such units include rapid reaction forces, special operations teams, and explosive ordnance disposal specialists.³⁹²

Albania's reform goals include having 40% of its army troops trained and ready to participate in international military missions.³⁹³ As of July 2010, Albania had 250 troops active in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.³⁹⁴ A comparable number of Albanian troops participated in the U.S.-led Coalition in Iraq until the end of 2008.^{395,396} Fewer Albanian troops have also participated in the United Nations peacekeeping missions in Chad and the Central African Republic and in the European Union peacekeeping efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina.^{397,398,399}

U.S.-Albanian Relations

Since the period following World War I, the United States has had a strong relationship with Albania. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, American President Woodrow Wilson steadfastly resisted a plan by some



© NATO
NATO Sec. Gen. visits Albania

³⁹⁰ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Morelli, Vincent and Carl Ek, Paul Belkin, Steven Woehrel, Jim Nichol. "NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates [p. 6]." 14 April 2009. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34701.pdf>

³⁹¹ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Morelli, Vincent; and Carl Ek, Paul Belkin, Steven Woehrel, Jim Nichol. "NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates [p. 6]." 14 April 2009. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34701.pdf>

³⁹² Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Morelli, Vincent and Carl Ek, Paul Belkin, Steven Woehrel, Jim Nichol. "NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates [p. 6]." 14 April 2009 <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34701.pdf>

³⁹³ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Morelli, Vincent and Carl Ek, Paul Belkin, Steven Woehrel, Jim Nichol. "NATO Enlargement: Albania, Croatia, and Possible Future Candidates [p. 6]." 14 April 2009 <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34701.pdf>

³⁹⁴ NATO/OTAN. "International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Key Facts and Figures." 21 June 2010. <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/100706%20Placemat.pdf> Wood

³⁹⁵ People's Daily Online. "Albania Sends More Troops to Iraq." 5 September 2008. <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90853/6493565.html>

³⁹⁶ Huffington Post. Win, Hanna Ingber. "Albania's Troops Leaving Iraq." 18 December 2008. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/12/18/albanias-troops-leaving-i_n_151994.html

³⁹⁷ BalkanInsight.com. "Albanian Troops Head to Iraq." 4 September 2008. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/12894/>

³⁹⁸ BalkanInsight.com. "Albanian Troops Leave for Central Africa." 18 July 2008. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/11905/>

³⁹⁹ EUFOR. "Troop Strength." 14 September 2009.

http://www.euforbih.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=145:troop-strength&catid=186:eufor-structure

European nations to divide Albania among its neighboring states.^{400,401} Some 80 years later, most Albanians and their government strongly supported NATO's air strikes against Yugoslavia.⁴⁰² These attacks were in response to Belgrade's refusal to end the escalating violence in Kosovo, a region predominantly populated by ethnic Albanians. The role of the United States in this action and its later support of Kosovo independence generated pro-U.S. sentiment throughout Albania.⁴⁰³ The United States was also a strong ally in Albania's successful bid to enter NATO and is supportive of its membership application for the European Union.^{404,405}

In recent years, the United States has been providing between USD 23 and 31 million of annual foreign aid to Albania. Much of this assistance is directed to programs designed to promote good governance and democratic institutions, encourage economic growth, and implement security sector reforms.⁴⁰⁶

Relations With Neighboring Countries

Greece

Albania's foreign relations with Greece today are much improved compared to the early 1990s, when tensions escalated over the status of the ethnic Greek minority in southern Albania. For nearly a century in northern Greece and parts of southern Albania, there has been a small but vocal minority of people pushing for Greek annexation of southern Albania—the region that they call Vorio (“Northern”) Epirus.⁴⁰⁷ They have long advocated for the sovereignty of ethnic identity in defining Greece's northern border. Such an irredentist⁴⁰⁸ position has not been endorsed by any recent Greek government, but it has proved to be an unsettling force in



© Charles Roffey
Man demonstrating in Cameria

⁴⁰⁰ Christian Science Monitor. Itano, Nicole. “Why Albania Embraces Bush.” 11 June 2007.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0611/p04s02-woeu.html>

⁴⁰¹ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Albania.” 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

⁴⁰² PolicyArchive.org. Congressional Research Service. Kim, Julie. “Kosovo: International Reactions to NATO Air Strikes [p. 7].” 21 April 1999. <http://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/bitstreams/906.pdf>

⁴⁰³ Christian Science Monitor. Itano, Nicole. “Why Albania Embraces Bush.” 11 June 2007.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0611/p04s02-woeu.html>

⁴⁰⁴ Christian Science Monitor. Itano, Nicole. “Why Albania Embraces Bush.” 11 June 2007.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0611/p04s02-woeu.html>

⁴⁰⁵ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Background Note: Albania.” 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

⁴⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State. *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations: Fiscal Year 2011*. “Annex: Regional Perspectives: Albania [pp. 342-345].” 2010.

http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2011/2011_CBJ_Annex.pdf

⁴⁰⁷ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. “Chapter 10: Ethnic Minorities in Albania After Communism [p. 187].” 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴⁰⁸ Irredentism, or the advocacy of defining national boundaries on the basis of shared cultural attributes such as ethnicity, religion, or historical associations, is a phenomenon endemic to the Balkans.

Albania when issues of minority rights for Albania's ethnic Greeks have arisen.⁴⁰⁹

Since the end of the communist era, Greece has been a popular destination for poor Albanians seeking employment.⁴¹⁰ At one point during the early 1990s, it was estimated that anywhere from 10% to 20% of all Albanians were in Greece, either working or looking for jobs.⁴¹¹ During this period, the Greek government would regularly expel thousands of Albanian migrants, sometimes in response to actions deemed discriminatory against Albania's ethnic Greeks.^{412,413}

Somewhat intertwined in these disputes was the status of the Chams,⁴¹⁴ a group of ethnic Albanian Muslims who had long lived in coastal regions of northern Greece. Between 1944 and 1945, under the authorization and support of Allied military personnel, Greek anti-fascist resistance groups expelled what remained of the Cham population living in the country. Considered Italian/German collaborators, Cham residents were driven out of Greece in a bloody purge. Since then, especially in the past two decades, the Chams have tried to reclaim—or at least be compensated for—their confiscated lands in Greece.⁴¹⁵ The Albanian government has not pressed the issue in its relations with Greece, except between 1992 and 1994, when Albanian-Greek relations were at their lowest. A law was passed by the Albanian parliament declaring 27 June to be “The Day of Greek Chauvinist Genocide Against the Albanians of Chameria.”⁴¹⁶

⁴⁰⁹ Cultural Survival. Hart, Laurie K. and Kestrina, Budina. “‘Northern Epiros’: The Greek Minority in Southern Albania.” Summer 1995. <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csqa/article/northern-epiros-the-greek-minority-southern-albania>

⁴¹⁰ New York Times. Kamm, Henry. “Conflict With Greece Leaves Some in Albania Perplexed.” 19 December 1994. <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/19/world/conflict-with-greece-leaves-some-in-albania-perplexed.html?ref=albania>

⁴¹¹ New York Times. Kamm, Henry. “Kakavia Journal; With Nothing to Lose, Albanians Invade Greece.” 5 August 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/08/05/world/kakavia-journal-with-nothing-to-lose-albanians-invade-greece.html?ref=albania>

⁴¹² Cultural Survival. Hart, Laurie K. and Kestrina, Budina. “‘Northern Epiros’: The Greek Minority in Southern Albania.” Summer 1995. <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csqa/article/northern-epiros-the-greek-minority-southern-albania>

⁴¹³ Greek Helsinki Monitor. “Greeks of Albania and Albanians in Greece [p. 10].” September 1994. <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/pdf/ghm-greeks-albanians.PDF>

⁴¹⁴ The Chams are named after Chameria, the Albanian name for the region of Greece from which they originate.

⁴¹⁵ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. “Chapter 10: Ethnic Minorities in Albania after Communism [p. 208].” 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴¹⁶ AlbanianHistory.net. Vickers, Miranda. “The Cham Issue: Albanian National and Property Claims in Greece.” 2002. http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts21/AH2002_1.html

Macedonia

Albania and Macedonia relations today are marked by strong political and economic ties.⁴¹⁷ The two nations are also bound together by cultural connections.

Macedonia has a significant ethnic Albanian minority in its western regions, while a smaller number of ethnic Slavic Macedonians live in eastern pockets of Albania.

Altogether, ethnic Albanians represent about 25% of Macedonia's total population, although some sources estimate ethnic Albanians could actually make up more than 30% of the Macedonian population.^{418,419}



© Geoff Wong
Albania and Macedonia border

In general, relations between the two countries have been very good since Macedonia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Nonetheless, the status of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia has been a significant political issue, which has spilled over into Albania at times.⁴²⁰ Perhaps the most threatening point in bilateral relations came in 2001, when an ethnic Albanian rebel group began staging a series of attacks in the western and northern parts of Macedonia.⁴²¹ Known as the National Liberation Army (NLA), the group was composed of many former members of the Kosovo Liberation Army. There is no evidence that the rebels had any ties with groups inside Albania; indeed, the Albanian government in Tirana voiced strong, public support for Macedonia's fight against the NLA forces. Nevertheless, some Macedonian officials and media outlets in Skopje accused Tirana of allowing the NLA to establish training camps in Albania and crisscross the border on recruiting raids.⁴²² The situation simmered down in August after a peace deal that established the framework for guaranteed rights and access to political power for Macedonian ethnic minorities.⁴²³

⁴¹⁷ Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Macedonia." 17 March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26759.htm>

⁴¹⁸ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Macedonia." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html>

⁴¹⁹ New York Times. Gall, Carlotta. "Macedonian Chief Says Albanian Rebels Are in Disarray." 11 March 2001. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/11/world/macedonian-chief-says-albanian-rebels-are-in-disarray.html?ref=albania>

⁴²⁰ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. "Chapter 8: Kosova and the Question of National Unification [p. 162]." 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴²¹ BBC News. Wood, Paul. "Who Are the Rebels?" 20 March 2001. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1231596.stm>

⁴²² AIMPress. "Dualism and Nervousness in Relations Between Tirana and Skopje." 20 April 2001. <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/trae/archive/data/200104/10429-003-trae-tir.htm>

⁴²³ BalkanInsight.com. Marusic, Sinisa-Jakov. "Macedonia: Ohrid Accord is 'Only Alternative.'" 29 April 2010. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-ohrid-accord-is-only-alternative>

Kosovo

Kosovo and Albania have strong historical links. The majority populations of the two nations are overwhelmingly ethnic Albanian. Periodically, politicians on both sides of the border have called for “national unification” in the future.⁴²⁴ Such pan-Albanian appeals were far more common in the early 1990s. At that time, Kosovar Albanians were being persecuted by the Yugoslav government and Albanian political candidates could score political points by publicly supporting Albanian nationalism.⁴²⁵ Reality soon set in, however, as Albanian government officials reluctantly accepted that their nation was too weak, both economically and militarily, to become embroiled in the Kosovo conflict. Critically needed foreign aid was not likely to come to Albania if its leaders continued on a path of inevitable entanglement in an ever-widening Balkans conflict.⁴²⁶ In recent years, popular support for unification is not very strong among Kosovars and Albanians.^{427,428}



© DoD photo by Staff Sgt Angela Stafford
Ethnic Albanian kids from Kosovo

During the 1990s and 2000s, Albania was a strong supporter of Kosovo’s fight for autonomy. During the Kosovo War of 1999, Albania provided shelter for hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing the ethnic violence in Kosovo. Albania was also one of the first countries to formally recognize the Republic of Kosovo when it declared independence in 2008.⁴²⁹ More recently, Albania and Kosovo have tried to strengthen their economic ties by improving the transportation link between the two countries. Specifically, Albania is financing the construction of a new highway connecting its Adriatic coast to the major cities of Kosovo. Albania views the new road as a means to develop tourism and increase agricultural trade between the two countries. Some outside donors, however, perceive more of a political agenda at work and have been hesitant to offer financial assistance for the project. Building the road might lead to increasing calls for Kosovo-Albania unification, something few regional neighbors want to see.⁴³⁰ The

⁴²⁴ Ekonom: east Media Group. Tanjug. “Albanian FM Answers Serbia’s Protest Note.” 22 August 2009. <http://www.emg.rs/en/news/serbia/96938.html>

⁴²⁵ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. “Chapter 8: Kosova and the Question of National Unification [pp. 150-151, 162].” 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴²⁶ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. “Chapter 8: Kosova and the Question of National Unification [pp. 156, 163].” 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴²⁷ United Nations Development Programme. Report # 15. “Early Warning Report Kosovo [p. 16].” October – December 2006. <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/EWR15FinalENG.pdf>

⁴²⁸ International Crisis Group. Vickers, Miranda. “Albania: Pan Albanianism: Myth or Threat to Balkan Stability?” 1 April 2004. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/balkans/albania/albania-pan-albanianism-myth-or-threat-to-balkan-stability.aspx>

⁴²⁹ BalkanInsight.com. “Albania PM Greet Kosovo Anniversary.” 17 February 2010. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/25896/>

⁴³⁰ Reuters.com. Koleka, Benet. “Highway Set to Bring Albania and Kosovo Closer.” 28 June 2007. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL261003820070628>

highway project is controversial for two other reasons: feasibility studies were not carried out prior to its inception and spiraling cost overruns substantiate charges of corruption in the bidding process.⁴³¹ Though construction is ongoing, stretches of the highway are completed and open for traffic.

Montenegro

Montenegro has been an independent country since 2006, and has had excellent relations with Albania.⁴³² Montenegro's capital and largest city, Podgorica, is linked by rail and highway to the nearby Albanian border, although trade between the two countries is still rather limited. Both nations are currently candidates for entry into the European Union, and Montenegro has applied for NATO membership.



© Michel Guilly
Podgorica, Monténégro

Each of the two countries has small ethnic minority populations of the other within its borders. The most recent Montenegro census (2003) reported that a little over 7% of all Montenegrin citizens were ethnic Albanians, although this percentage dropped to about 5% (about 31,000 people) when only Montenegro's resident population was considered.⁴³³ The Montenegro government in turn estimates that about 30,000 ethnic Montenegrins live in Albania. If that figure is accurate, it would represent less than 1% of the Albanian population.^{434,435} However, other sources estimate the ethnic Montenegrin population to be only about 2,000 people.⁴³⁶

Terrorist Groups and Activity

Albania has taken a strongly proactive stance toward fighting global terrorism over the last decade and a half, although a lack of resources and effective border security have at times hindered these efforts.⁴³⁷ Domestic instability in 1997 led to lootings of Albanian arsenals; these arms were later used in conflicts in neighboring Kosovo and Macedonia. In 1998, the U.S. and Albania foiled a plot to attack the U.S. embassy in Tirana. That same year, an Al Qaeda forgery ring was also broken up and several suspected members

⁴³¹ Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. Likmeta, Besar and Gjergj Erebara. "Highway to Kosovo Becomes Headache for Albania." 16 April 2009. <http://www.bim.ba/en/162/10/18232/>

⁴³² Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

⁴³³ Njegos.org. "Montenegrin Census' From 1909 to 2003." No date. <http://www.njegos.org/census/index.htm>

⁴³⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Albania: People." 24 June 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

⁴³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Montenegro. "The Republic of Albania." 2008. <http://www.mip.gov.me/en/index.php/Bilateral-Relations/republic-of-albania.html>

⁴³⁶ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. "Chapter 10: Ethnic Minorities in Albania After Communism [p. 203]." 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴³⁷ Navy Department Library. Congressional Research Service. Woehrel, Steven. "Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans." 26 July 2005. http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/islamic_terrorism.htm#albania

of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad were arrested and handed over to Egyptian authorities.^{438,439} After the 9/11 attacks against the U.S. in 2001, Albania began preparing an anti-terrorist action plan. Resulting legislation included an anti-money-laundering law in 2003 that included international standard provisions for the freezing of financial assets of known terrorist support groups.⁴⁴⁰ Since the law went into effect, the Albanian government has frozen the assets of 6 individuals and 14 foundations and other organizations listed on a United Nations Security Council list of al Qaeda and Taliban supporters.⁴⁴¹

Issues Affecting Stability

Political and Electoral Strife

As Albania polishes its credentials for membership in the European Union, its candidacy continues to be tarnished by the nation's ongoing political crisis over the validity of the 2009 parliamentary election results.⁴⁴² The current crisis is simply another chapter in the frequently fractious political environment of Albania. The concept of "loyal opposition" has taken a long time to gain a foothold in Albania. This fact is not surprising given that the country never had any semblance of a democratic system of government prior to 1991.

Since the fall of the communist government, the political stage in Albania has been dominated by the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party. Between 1992 and 1997, the Democratic Party retained power even as party chairman and Albanian President, Sali Berisha, became an increasingly divisive public figure; he brooked no opposition in setting the administration's course.⁴⁴³ For some Albanians, Berisha's unwillingness to compromise and his focus on controlling the media stirred up bad memories from the communist era.⁴⁴⁴



© Erik Stewart
Government building

⁴³⁸ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State. *Patterns of Global Terrorism 1998*. "Albania." April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/1998Report/europe.html#albania>

⁴³⁹ Navy Department Library. Congressional Research Service. Woehrel, Steven. "Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans." 26 July 2005. http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/islamic_terrorism.htm#albania

⁴⁴⁰ Navy Department Library. Congressional Research Service. Woehrel, Steven. "Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans." 26 July 2005. http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/islamic_terrorism.htm#albania

⁴⁴¹ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State. Country Reports on Terrorism 2008. "Chapter 2. Country Reports: Europe and Eurasia Overview." 30 April 2009. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122432.htm>

⁴⁴² SETimes.com. "EU: Albania's Political Stalemate Must End." 18 February 2010. http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2010/02/18/feature-01

⁴⁴³ *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*. Vickers, Miranda and James Pettifer. "Chapter 12: The End of Party Politics?—Democracy Under Threat [p. 22803]." 1997. New York, NY: New York University Press.

⁴⁴⁴ New York Times. Perlez, Jane. "A Scoffer at Albania's Old Regime Scolds the News." 25 October 1996. http://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/25/world/a-scoffer-at-albania-s-old-regime-scolds-the-new.html?ref=sali_berisha

In the immediate wake of the pyramid schemes scandal and resultant violence, Berisha and the Democratic Party were forced out after the 1997 parliamentary elections. The latter fell one year after the previous election, which had been roundly criticized by outside observers for its numerous voting irregularities.⁴⁴⁵ The Socialists, who won the flawed but nonetheless fairly run 1997 election, retained power until 2005. Socialist Party infighting and Democratic Party opportunism between 2002 and 2005, led to parliamentary inaction on much needed social, political, and economic reform.⁴⁴⁶ In the 2005 elections, Berisha and the Democratic Party were narrowly returned to power.^{447,448} This election exhibited some of the same problems as in previous years: lengthy and controversial vote counting, inaccurate voter lists in some locations, and sporadic violence in the run-up to the vote.⁴⁴⁹ Given this situation, the 2009 Albanian parliamentary election was watched very closely by officials in European Union nations. The resulting street protests, hunger strikes, and parliamentary boycotts organized by the Socialist Party might have irreparably damaged Albania's short-term prospects for EU accession.^{450,451}

Pan-Albanianism

Much has been written about the concept of a “Greater Albania”—a hypothetical state made up of the areas with ethnic Albanian majorities in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro, and Serbia. There is little concrete evidence of any strong popular will in Albania to redraw the national boundaries. Stability is critical for the country's continued economic development, and any pursuit of pan-Albanian



© Mark Walley
Busy street in Albania

⁴⁴⁵ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “Observation of the Parliamentary Elections Held in the Republic of Albania, May 26 and June 2, 1996.” 2 July 1996. http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1996/07/1176_en.pdf

⁴⁴⁶ BalkanAnalysis.com. Petrillo, Enza Roberta. “Albania's Parliamentary Election 2009. Is the European Dream at Risk?” 12 April 2009. <http://www.balkananalysis.com/2009/04/12/albania%e2%80%99s-parliamentary-election-2009-is-the-european-dream-at-risk/>

⁴⁴⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Lalumiere, Catherine and Sir Russell Johnston, Javier Ruperez. “Final Report, Parliamentary Elections in Albania, 29 June – 6 July 1997.” 6 August 1997. http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/1997/08/1181_en.pdf

⁴⁴⁸ Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “Republic of Albania, Parliamentary Elections, 3 July 2005.” 7 November 2005. http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/11/16905_en.pdf

⁴⁴⁹ Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. “Republic of Albania, Parliamentary Elections, 3 July 2005.” 7 November 2005. http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2005/11/16905_en.pdf

⁴⁵⁰ Macedonian Information Agency. “Albanian Opposition to Boycott All Votes in Parliament Over Alleged Election Fraud.” 1 July 2010. <http://www.mia.com.mk/default.aspx?vId=75163137&lId=2>

⁴⁵¹ Daily News & Economic Review. Balkan Insight. “EU Parliament Fails to Mediate Albanian Deadlock.” 5 May 2010. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=eu-parliament-fail-to-solve-albania-crisis-2010-05-05>

irredentism would foster strong resistance throughout Europe. For Albania, the current national goal is to become part of “Greater Europe” (i.e, the European Union), rather than the center of an ethnic Albanian homeland.⁴⁵²

Corruption

As recently as 1998, the World Bank identified Albania as Europe’s most corrupt nation. At the time, nearly half of all Albanians reported having paid bribes, and two thirds of government officials polled conceded that bribery was part of the price of doing business in Albania.⁴⁵³ Since then, the Albanian government’s policy reform initiatives aimed at taxes, business licensing, and governmental procurement have improved the nation’s business climate.⁴⁵⁴



© Robert Nagle
Money exchanges on the street

Transparency International is a non-governmental organization that monitors transparency and corruption within more than 150 nations. It produces an annual Corruption Perceptions Index, which indicates that the level of transparency in Albania has shown significant improvement since 2006. Nonetheless, the nation still appears in the Index as more corrupt than all 27 EU nations and many EU candidate states, such as Croatia, Turkey, and Iceland.⁴⁵⁵

Furthermore, corruption has been a significant contributing factor to Albania’s ongoing problems in combating organized crime and drug trafficking. Investigations and prosecutions of criminal behavior are often stymied because of biased judges and other government officials.⁴⁵⁶

Self Study Questions

Albania is a member of the European Union (EU). True or False?

The collapse of financial pyramid schemes in 1997 was a catalyst for a major social uprising. True or False?

⁴⁵² *Albania and the European Union: The Tumultuous Journey Towards Integration*. Bogdani, Mirela and John Loughlin. “The Impact of External Factors on Albanian Politics and Policies [p. 231, 233].” 2009. London, UK: I. B. Tauris & Co.

⁴⁵³ World Press Review. Klan (Tirana, Albania). Peza, Alfred. “Corruption in Albania: Up From the Bottom.” 30 July 2001. <http://www.worldpress.org/1001cover5.htm>

⁴⁵⁴ Transparency International. “CPI 2008. Progress: Albania Shows Marked Improvement.” 2008. http://www.transparency.org/news_room/latest_news/press_releases_nc/2008/2008_09_23_albania_cpi

⁴⁵⁵ Transparency International. “Corruptions Perceptions Index 2009.” 2009. http://transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table {note: data for earlier years can also be retrieved from hotlinks listed on this page}

⁴⁵⁶ Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “2010 INCSR: Country Reports – Afghanistan Through Colombia.” 1 March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2010/vol1/137194.htm>

Albania's military has refused to cooperate in international peace-keeping missions. True or False?

Ethnic Greeks living in Albania have been fully assimilated into mainstream society there. True or False?

Albania's prospects for entering the European Union (EU) depend greatly on the government's ability to maintain civic order and run fair elections. True or False?

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Appendix A: Answers to Self Study Questions

Geography

1. Historically, Albania's political isolation was intensified by its geography.

True. The majority of Albania's landscape consists of mountains, which has contributed to the relative isolation of communities within the country, as well as of the country itself.

2. Albania's "concrete mushrooms" continue to have military application.

False. Albania's cement-and-iron bunkers, known as "concrete mushrooms," are undergoing conversion into kiosks, stables, planters, restaurants, and even residences.

3. Most of Albania's largest cities are found in its coastal lowlands.

True. Tirana, Elbasan, and Berat—three of the country's largest cities—are found along the coast.

4. Albania has a consistent climate.

False. Although Albania is a relatively small country, its climate range is remarkably wide due to the altitude difference between its coastal region and inland mountainous areas.

5. Albania is home to Europe's oldest lake.

True. Lake Ohrid, located in Albania, is Europe's oldest lake, and one of the world's most unique large lakes in that much of its water comes from surface and underwater springs.

History

1. Albania first became a nation after World War II.

False. A provisional government first declared Albania an independent nation after the outbreak of the First Balkan War in 1912.

2. The link between modern-day Albanians and the ancient Illyrians is disputed.

True. The connection between the ancient Illyrians and modern Albanians is a matter of historical debate. Though there is some supporting linguistic, archaeological, and anthropological evidence, no Illyrian inscriptions or written documents have been discovered.

3. A number of Albanian coastal cities were affiliated with the Republic of Venice.

True. Some of the coastal cities affiliated with the Republic of Venice, such as Shkodër and Durrës, were able to hold out longer against the Ottoman Turks, but by the beginning of the 16th century, virtually all of Albania was under Ottoman control.

4. Christianity was brought to the area of modern-day Albania in the Middle Ages.

False. Christianity arrived in the Western Balkans during the 1st century C.E.

5. Ruled by the Ottoman Empire for centuries, a majority of the population adopted Muslim affiliation.

True. Over the course of four centuries of Ottoman rule, a majority of the population converted to Islam.

Economy

1. The majority of Albanians are engaged in agricultural work.

True. The agricultural sector is a significant part of the Albanian economy, especially in terms of employment. Over 60% of Albanians work in agriculture, which generates about 20% of the nation's GDP.

2. Albania's terrain lends itself to extensive agricultural use.

False. Because of its mountainous terrain, only 39% of the land is used for agricultural purposes: just over 50% is devoted to arable crops, another 37% for raising livestock, and approximately 11% supports permanent crops such as olives and grapes.

3. Albania's larger farms are located primarily in the coastal regions.

True. Small Albanian farms typically grow a subsistence-level mix of crop. Only larger farms in coastal regions or near cities focus on fewer crops that are to be marketed rather than consumed locally.

4. Albania's smaller farms export most of their products abroad.

False. The products from Albania's smaller farms tend to be consumed locally.

5. The end of the communist era was disastrous for Albania's industrial sector.

True. The phasing out of state subsidies, prevalent under communism, left the industrial sector bankrupt.

Society

1. The Albanian people base their sense of national identity on ethnicity.

False. A sense of national identity among Albanians is based on the language they speak, not their ethnic heritage.

2. Greeks make up Albania's largest ethnic minority.

True. Greeks are the only ethnic group lacking deep roots in Albania that enjoys significant political and social clout. Tensions have erupted over their efforts to gain greater autonomy.

3. The written form of the Albanian language is based on the dialect of one group.

False. The written form, which was standardized in 1972, combined two dialects of Albanian.

4. The two predominant faiths in Albania are Christianity and Islam.

True. A number of branches of each religion claim followers in Albania.

5. The modern-day Albanian Orthodox Church traces its roots to the USA.

True. Fan Noli (who would later briefly serve as Albania's Prime Minister in the 1920s) first delivered the Orthodox liturgy in the Albanian language in 1908 in Boston, MA, where he was a member of the immigrant community.

Security

1. Albania is a member of the European Union (EU).

False. Albania has become a member of NATO, however, its application for membership in the EU is still under review.

2. The collapse of financial pyramid schemes in 1997 was a catalyst for a major social uprising.

True. An unregulated informal credit market emerged in the 1990s, but collapsed when investors could not get their money out. Riots ensued.

3. Albania's military has refused to cooperate in international peace-keeping missions.

False. Albanian troops have participated in UN and European Union-led peace-keeping missions.

4. Ethnic Greeks living in Albania have been fully assimilated into mainstream society there.

False. Ethnic Greeks who live in Albania experience discrimination because of their heritage. In retaliation, the Greek government has periodically expelled ethnic Albanians working in Greece.

5. Albania's prospects for entering the European Union (EU) depend greatly on the government's ability to maintain civic order and run fair elections.

True. The run-up to Albania's 2005 parliamentary election was marked by sporadic violence and controversy over electoral processes. In light of this history, EU nations watched the Albanian parliamentary election of 2009 very closely. The resulting street protests, hunger strikes, and boycotts over similar controversies have not inspired confidence among EU member nations.