

# Albania and Kosova in the Circle of Immigration Mobility in the XX Century

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## Abstract

The European continent has been known throughout history for endless wars and conflicts. The first half of the XX century was too heavily burdened. Two destructive wars that brought immense nightmares. After 1945, the continent knew a 45 year peace. In the last ten years of the '90-ies the nationalistic conflicts were reborn in Europe, where without doubt the wars in the former Yugoslavia occupied the principal news in media. In these wars, the Albanian case is the most sensitive. Albanians are people divided in five states in the Balkan Peninsula. This element is enough to make the region have always in mind the Albanian question. After the fall of communism, Albanians were forced to immigrate due to difficult economic situation in the country. During the war in Kosova and the crises in Macedonia in 2001, the Albanians there were forced to move in order to escape genocide.

The end of wars brought Albanians come closer to Europe through mobility. The old continent has been for years the forbidden dream of Albanians. The Albanians in the Balkan region faced very hard challenges during the XX century. In this article I have tried to compare the past mobility of Albanians with the present times and to draw the conclusion that in the first years of the XXI century, the dream of free movement of Albanians is put under question. The methodology that I have introduced in this article is mainly

focused on historic issues of the past with elements of today in order to draw a comparative study between what has happened and what is expected to happen to Albanians in the Balkan region.

In this article I have tried to make an effort to explain why Albanians were forced to move and why the territory of Albanians was turned into a violent greed by the neighbours. The descriptive and comparative elements that I have tried to introduce in this article possibly shed new light why this forced mobility among Albanians is still in a first view unstoppable.

**Key Words:** Albania, Kosova, Europe, Serbia, Greece, mobility, conflict, history, economy, integration

### 1. Introduction - Mobility as a human necessity

Viewed from retrospective, it is obvious that, humanity as a whole has advanced because of its unstoppable displacement for better living conditions. The historic science has enormously advanced in searching the truth and facts. Humanity, as a very important element of history, influences beyond any doubt in the recognition of things hidden in time. Different authors as Vico, described the human mobility and movement in three stages - the divine stage, the heroic stage and the human stage.<sup>1</sup> While August Kont specifies the human mobility as theology, metaphysics and positivist.<sup>2</sup> In the contemporary age, scholars as Francis Fukuyama have described the human mobility as the end of history, while Samuel Huntington as "clash of civilizations".

In the contemporary societies, humanity as a consequence of its displacements had had a great necessity to build an institutional system of laws. A person has to obey to the law, but on the other hand, achieve the fundamental rights of citizenship.<sup>3</sup> The free movement in Europe, was authorized with the famous Helsinki Conference in 1975, when all the countries of Europe (including USA, Canada and the Soviet Union) signed the famous baskets for the human rights and free movement. It is very strange the fact that the only country who refused to sign the Helsinki Charter was Albania. It was strange because this small Balkan country is

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<sup>1</sup> Chaupreade, Aymeric "Géopolitique; constantes et changements dans l'histoire", (Paris: Ellipses 2007), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Aziri, Etem "Sociologjia", (Tetovë: ArbërDesign 2007), p. 144.

situated in the most strategic edge of the western Balkan where since ancient times all the most important commercial and political roads are intertwined with a rich combination of western and eastern contours. The only systems who oppose the free movement are the dictatorships. For a dictatorship, doesn't care about the free movement and at that time Albania was experiencing the most ruthless communist dictatorship. The dictatorships are against free movement, because this means change of mentality among the people they rule. In all the human ages, the progress of humanity came as consequence of competition and not mortification. With a territorial extension of 28748 km<sup>2</sup> and a seacoast of 410 km, Albania gets a very important position in the Balkan region and in the South Eastern Europe. The XX century was the age where Albanians had to survive among countless difficulties. The very difficult land to cross was an obstruction for the integration among different Albanian areas. It's not by chance that the difficult geography influenced in many areas of Albania and this is seen in many different customs that surround this little country.

## **2. Albania and its geographic challenges**

As mentioned above in the introduction, Albania has a special position in the Southeastern Europe. During all the ages of history, Albanians faced different difficulties. Nearly always being threatened, Albanians were seeking for alliances which would make them feel safer. In the Middle Age centuries, in less than three hundred years (XI-XIV centuries), more than 32 invaders paid "visits" to the Albanian lands.<sup>4</sup> In those difficult times, when a part of the European civilization, the Catholic Church could overcome the other half, the Orthodox Church, Albanians saw themselves in the middle where the balances of the world order were established or ruined.<sup>5</sup> The ability to adapt to the influences coming from the East or West without losing the identity, speaks itself about the special individuality of Albanians given by history and recognized by it.<sup>6</sup> This special individuality of Albanians helped not less in their survival during the most turbulent centuries in the Albanian history.

The "London Albania" (taken this name from the ambassadors conference held in London in 1913), during all the XX century was

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<sup>4</sup> Xhufi, Pëllumb "Dilemat e Arbrit", (Tiranë: Pegi 2006), p. VIII.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. IX.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. X.

characterized from an economic, social and cultural backwardness and seemed that the industrial revolution never came in this country.<sup>7</sup> All the Albanian governments in the post communist era declared the importance for the country's integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures, but up to now Albania has been admitted only in NATO and this for strategic reasons, while regarding to EU integration the road seems to be long. Albania is a very complex territory. With a surface of 28748 km<sup>2</sup> with a difficult mountainous layout and very restricted lowlands, there are two climates; Mediterranean and Continental. Another very important element for Albania are the two seas (Adriatic and Ion). The coastal line is 410 km, and this makes Albania impossible to be isolated from the countries of Western Balkans. This characteristic has made Albania very coveted by its neighbours and different invaders. The powerful empires of the West and East would naturally clash in the Albanian territories because right there existed the shortest way to take advantage one on another. But, Albania is not only the territory we know. The Albanian nation is bigger than the Republic of Albania. Not in few cases the historic challenges found the Albanians unprepared and for this they have paid a terrible price with loses in human lives and territories.

During the difficult years in the end of XIX century, Albanians elaborated their own nationalism based on their language and not on religion as happened with their neighbours in the region.<sup>8</sup> The Albanian nationalism would not enjoy the support from the outside as used to happen with Greece, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Albanians had to fight alone and against all in the Balkans to survive. The element who woke the sleeping identity of Albanians was beyond any doubt the Diaspora. Albanians who had emigrated in different countries of the Balkans and throughout the world, turned to be the promoters of the Albanian national movement. As it's seen, the "fugitive" Albanians influenced in the promotion of the Albanian identity in the world and within the country.

The main geographic challenges of Albania were above all how to face the constant greed of the neighbours. First of all, the identity had to be studied as a phenomenon, as an ideology without being isolated from other

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<sup>7</sup> Boriçi, Gjon "L'ex Yougoslavie entre la violence et la paix 1987-1999", (Tiranë: GEER 2007), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Clayer, Nathalie "Në fillimet e nacionalizmit shqiptar; lindja e një kombi me shumicë myslimane në Evropë", (Tiranë: Përpjekja 2012), p. 11.

political and national identifications.<sup>9</sup> In the Albanian case, the religious diversity was not an obstruction to build the national identity and to identify it as has been for the other Balkan nationalities.<sup>10</sup> According to Eric Hobsbawm, among Albanians, Turkish was the language of administration, Greek and Italian were the languages of trade, meanwhile in some regions the Albanian or the Slav language remained for private use.<sup>11</sup>

Another important element for the Albanian geopolitics remain the dialects (Geg and Tosk). In facing the Slavs, the northern Albanians (Geg) would consider the Southern Albanian (Tosk) as members of the same family. Such a thing would not happen at the Southern Albanians because among them the ethnic conscience was not efficacious.<sup>12</sup> In my opinion the ethnic conscience among Southern Albanians (Tosk) had incurred changes because they had already started to immigrate earlier than northern Albanians (Geg). In this geopolitical spirit Albania faced some of the most difficult challenges of its existence. This difficulty was very complex. First, it was the composition of population. The emigration started with biblical proportions in the beginning of the '90-ies. Albanians, having been the most isolated people in Europe for 50 years (as irony of destiny it's not possible to isolate them) began to massively abandon their country. The second difficulty was the economy. After the fall of the "Iron Curtain", Albanians identified themselves as the poorest country in Europe and one of the poorest in the world. The third difficulty was the state collapse in 1997 as a consequence of pyramidal schemes failure. This fall was followed with a new wave of immigration. The fourth difficulty was the war for the liberation of Kosova. With these four painful difficulties Albania and Albanians had to find themselves in the global era that would take shape in the XXI century.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric "Kombet dhe nacionalizmi", (Tiranë: Toena 2012), p. 123.

<sup>12</sup> Clayer, p. 24.

### 3. The Albanians of Kosova and the long road towards self-determination

The greatest efforts to preserve the traditions and customs are made by the Albanians in the ancient Dardania which the Serbs in the era of Stefan Nemanja called Kosovo in the XII.<sup>13</sup> The author of Stefan Nemanja's life (XII century) forges the example of ancient Greek authors when he writes about the coming of the first Serbs in Kosova and the inhabitants of this land are called "barbarians", to distinguish them from the Serbs.<sup>14</sup> In the XX century, in the conflict of Yugoslavia with Inform bureau, the Serb repression in Kosova until today has been presented as an ideological conflict but indeed it was a constant chauvinistic and national conflict.<sup>15</sup> Serbs have tried to be tendentious with the argument of "mixed population" of Kosova which was served to deny Albanians the right to have their own republic within Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> According to the official register of 1981, the number of Albanians in Kosova reached 1.227.424 people. They constituted 77.4% of the region's population.<sup>17</sup> This index of overwhelming majority was higher even than that of Serbs in the Socialist Republic of Serbia (67.7%), of the Macedonians in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia (64.6%), of the Muslims in the Socialist Republic of Bosnia (43.7%).<sup>18</sup> The Albanians in Yugoslavia according to the register of 1981 were in total 1.738.878 persons and comprised 7.7% of the population.<sup>19</sup>

The battle of Albanians for survival and to preserve their right which was constantly threatened by Serbia, never ceased. Serbs tried by all forms and means to eradicate the Albanian element from the Kosova region. The Turkish-Serbian and after that Yugoslav-Turkish agreements to forcefully displace the Albanian Muslims from Kosova was the new form of politics aiming to empty by all means the Albanian lands given to Yugoslavia by the European Conferences. By force, the Serbs always lost their cause towards Albanians. Failing in this, the Serbs tried another way; "respecting"

<sup>13</sup> Boriçi, Gjon "L'ex Yougoslavie entre la violence et la paix 1987-1999", (Tiranë, GEER 2007), p. 217.

<sup>14</sup> Xhufi, Pëllumb "Dilemat e Arbrit", (Tiranë, Pegi 2006), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Lalaj, Ana "Kosova-rruga e gjatë drejt vetvendosjes 1948-1981", (Tiranë: Mësonjtorja e Parë 2000), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, mentioned work.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, mentioned work.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

the right of Albanians in Yugoslavia. The Constitution of the year 1974 was a step forward, but never a model of autonomy.<sup>20</sup> For Albanians was possible to open scientific institutions and a university, but everything was under the severe control of the Yugoslav authorities (Serb authorities). Even if the new constitution recognized the rights of Albanians, the preservation of the administrative boundaries of Serbia remained the focal point of the Serb politics.<sup>21</sup> At that time flourished the Albanian immigration and this was permitted for good reasons from the Yugoslav authorities. The massive immigration of Albanians began in big proportions in the beginning of the '90-ies as a consequence of direct chauvinistic policies against the Albanian population. This wry movement had its advantages and disadvantages. In the West, Albanians never felt persecuted and for this reason they were free to be active in politics, demanding the rights of their fellow countrymen.

The wars in the former Yugoslavia in the beginning of the '90-ies helped directly the process of Albanian case. The liberation war for the right of life and freedom chaired by the KLA (UÇK) and the NATO bombings gave their benefits in 1999 when Kosova was liberated. Now, Albanians were slowly breaking the fictive barriers established from the European powers and were learning to know each other. The massive movement of Kosovo Albanians towards Albania to escape Serb barbarity in 1999, didn't serve to Milosevic and his clique to decimate Kosova. Right after the end of the war, even though the situation was dangerous, the Kosovo Albanians returned to their homes. This movement served as further enforcement of pan Albanian relations.

#### **4. Greece and Albania; the challenges and incompatibilities**

It is an undeniable fact that the greatest movement that Albanians made after the fall of communism was in direction of Greece. With the southern Balkan country, Albania has many connections starting with coexistence and ending with conflicts for territories. One of the reasons why Albanians headed to Greece was because the terrestrial borderline was much safer than the sea route towards Italy. Since establishing themselves as sovereign countries, Albania and Greece have faced each other fiercely harming the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 136.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 184.

chances for normal coexistence.<sup>22</sup> For decades, in the centre of Greek politics was the annexation of Southern Albania and the ethnic cleansing of the Albanian minority living in Greece.<sup>23</sup> Just before the establishment of the Albanian independence, when Greece understood that the Turkish government on August 18<sup>th</sup> 1912 had accepted the demands of Albanians for a wide autonomy of four vilayets, Greece took the initiative for establishing the Balkan League.<sup>24</sup> To mask its annexationist aims, they invented the "Great Albania" theses and proclaimed war on it.<sup>25</sup> Anytime Greece felt strong economically and politically with the right international circumstances has empowered its politics and annexationist activity.<sup>26</sup>

During the Cold War years, the Albanian - Greek irritation knew higher vertexes. Such was the Greek pretention in the Paris Peace Conference in 1946, where Greece demanded that Albania be treated as a defeated power like the fascists and as a consequence Greece must be compensated with the territory of Southern Albania. Greece moved slowly and with small steps in normalizing the relations with Albania. In the '90-ies, the Albanian emigration regardless the difficulties, achieved to be a very important factor in stabilizing the relations between two countries. Step by step, Albania and Greece are looking at each other as strategic partners rather than irreconcilable opponents. The nationalistic dogma left the place to the growing of trade exchanges between the two countries. Now Greece and Albania are in NATO. It is very important to mention that the Albanian - Greek tension were always political, never national. But exceptions existed. The Greek ambassador in Soviet Union in the '50-ies who declared that "the keeping of state of war with Albania was a great insanity from the part of Greece".<sup>27</sup> The Albanian immigration in Greece was a good guide for Albanian politicians and scholars. From them has been taken a very useful information about the way the Greek society functions. One of the best ways to obtain information is the mobility in different countries. In the past times, when the conquerors undertook occupation expeditions, they always took with the army a great number of scholars in order to learn as much as

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<sup>22</sup> Meta, Beqir "Tensioni greko-shqiptar 1939-1949", (Tiranë, GEER 2002), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Meta, Beqir "Shqipëria dhe Greqia 1949-1990; paqja e vështirë", (Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese Koçi 2004), p. 141.

possible about the cultures they were to conquer. Naturally, the invasion was preceded by a preparatory study of the territory which was to be annexed. "The invasion" of Albanians towards Greece in the beginning of the '90-ies was a very important element that helped the improvement of Albanians' life, living in Albania.

In 1996 about 400.000 Albanians were living in Greece and every year their remittances were 500\$ per year.<sup>28</sup> On the other side, Albania did not have a policy to stop the illegal immigration. The Albanian governments never had a constant policy for emigration having in mind that 1/3 of its population is living as emigrants.<sup>29</sup>

### **5. The visa free movement for the Albanians of Albania; the end of discord between Albanians and Europe?**

The European Parliament voted on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2010 with an overwhelming majority for visa free movement for Albanians and Bosnian citizens in the Schengen area. The decision of the Albanian parliament was acclaimed with enthusiasm in Tirana. The Albanian authorities hailed this decision calling it historic. The free visa movement gave the Albanians the opportunity they never had; to freely move across Europe. This was one side of the coin. The other is how would Albanians present themselves in Europe?<sup>30</sup> They would call themselves Europeans, Balkaners, Southern-Europeans or citizens of countries that could not be imitated?<sup>31</sup> The truth is that Albanians called themselves simply "Albanians" when they travelled in Europe. Even at the gravest of times when they were crossing the sea, they never gave up their identity. This was something great. They show to Europe they were escaping their poverty, never from their identity.

A lot has been discussed about this step taken from the European parliament in 2010. Which was the reason that made the free visa movement possible? Sometimes, the real politics achieve the impossible. Albanians are divided in five countries in the Balkan region. Nevertheless they have found the ways to move. The Albanian question is still on the European agenda. With or no visa, few were those Albanians that never left

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<sup>28</sup> Gambeta, Gjergji "Retrospektiva e emigracionit shqiptar" (Tribuna Shqiptare).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Rukaj, Manjola "Albania and the EU; a European dream?", Osservatorio Balcani, November 4<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

the country. The "invasion" towards Europe started in July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1990 when thousands of Albanians entered in the embassies of Western European countries in Tirana. Other thousands crossed the border in search of freedom. With these steps, Albanians were not anymore the most isolated country in Europe. The road to achieve the October 7<sup>th</sup> 2010 was long. Sometimes the rules established by Europe were broken and other times respected. Twenty years after the fall of communism in Albania the leaders of the European Union decided that Albania has fulfilled her duties. The Albanian people chose Europe for its future.

The great Albanian writer famously known all over the World, Ismail Kadare in an interview given about the age-long discords between Europe and Albanians has said:

*"Meanwhile we find ourselves in the epilogue of a 600 years discord with Europe. That's because we are so much concerned. In this case the easier thing and the worst for us is to rise and curse Europe that has not accepted Albania, or to curse ourselves for not deserving it. The best thing is to understand the reasons why the discord continues. Above all you have to understand that the orientation of a country, of a people, of a history cannot change for the caprices of the moment".<sup>32</sup>*

## 6. Conclusions

In the global era, Albanians are still searching for an all-inclusive way. The road of Albanians is the integration in EU. I hope that we all agree on this, but nobody speaks which are the criteria to be fulfilled. Kosova even though has won the judicial examinations about her independence, is known by only 108 countries of the world and is not yet accepted in UN. Meanwhile, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Macedonia nevertheless their internal problems are recognized and are members of United Nations. What obstructs Kosova to be accepted in UN with full rights?

Today it is widely spoken for the free movement of people and this movement should serve the general good. The new world order which is under construction, generally is aiming to better good services. Albanians have to get a proper position in the world order because have not solved yet the internal problems. The political crises in Albania are often. The same is in Kosova. After the election of 2014, barely after six months of negotiations and with the help of international community, the country has

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<sup>32</sup> Express, 14 February, 2014.

a government. Serbia continues to be a big bulk walk in the way of Kosova towards UN. Serbia has never admitted that it has lost Kosova for good. This backwardness of Serbia, should be exploited by Albanians. Another concerning fact is that some Albanians are going to fight for IS in Syria and Iraq. If the movement towards terrorism would be massive it will be a national catastrophe. The abandonment and condemnation from our allies would be total. Unfortunately, terrorism is part of free movement but with higher price. The XXI century entered its fifteenth year. Albanians should understand that in the global era you should not be an extremist, but an open-minded person for a free society.

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