A Concise History of ALBANIA

Bernd J. Fischer
and Oliver Jens Schmitt



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PREFACE



Contemporary Albania

Visitors to Albania typically arrive at the modern Mother Teresa airport in the capital city of Tirana. A thirty-minute taxi ride brings one to Skanderbeg Square, the heart of the metropolis of over 850,000 people. Twenty-three miles from the coast on a lowland plain underneath mount Dajti to the east, modern Tirana is, on the surface, just another Balkan capital choked with traffic, shoddily constructed apartment buildings, cafes and restaurants – overwhelmed by the modern. Yet, in and around the city it is still possible to at least catch a glimpse of the remnants of some of the different civilizations that have over the centuries contributed to the creation of the modern Albanian state and nation.

In the distance some eighteen miles to the north is the ancient hill town of Krujë with its imposing citadel used by Illyrian tribes as early as the sixth century BC. The bastion later became the stronghold of the Albanian national hero Skanderbeg who fought off the Ottomans there in the fifteenth century. Some eleven miles to the south of Tirana on a hill above the Erzen river are the ruins of the Petrelë castle, a fortress from the Byzantine period built around a much older central tower. The castle was used by the Byzantines to forestall Norman invaders from the coast in the eleventh century. Twenty-three miles to the west is the port town of Durrës, founded by the Greeks in 627 BC, which then became an Illyrian settlement, then a Roman town, the terminus of the Via Egnatia from Byzantium. The town contains the largest Roman amphitheater in the Balkans, and eventually developed into a Byzantine fortress city with still existent imposing walls, only to fall to the Normans, the Venetians and finally the Ottomans, all of whom left their imprints.

Tirana itself boasts a veritable riot of different historical traditions. Just off Skanderbeg Square are the remnants of the sixth-century Fortress of Justinian, although all that is left are the Ottoman walls and parts of an Ottoman road built by the powerful land-owning Toptani family. The five-century Ottoman period is very well represented with Ottoman houses, mosques, Bektashi *tekkes* (monasteries) and Ottoman public architecture, including sections of road, and the small Tanners bridge, a fine example of a classic arched Ottoman bridge. Directly on the square is the small, exquisite mosque of Et'hem Bey with its unique exterior wall paintings. Completed in 1827, it is one of the best examples of late Ottoman architecture in the country. Next to it stands a distinctive Ottoman clock tower built in 1830, an architectural symbol of the city that can be found on most travel brochures and postcards. Many of the fine nineteenth- and early twentieth-century villas have survived, including one behind the Fortress of Justinian that serves as the residence of Crown Prince Leka II, the grandson of King Zog who ruled Albania in the interwar period.

The period of Zog is also well represented, and indeed much of the center of Tirana was laid out by Italian engineers and architects during the reign of the king. Just behind the communist-era Skanderbeg statue is a collection of fine Italianate government ministries built in the 1930s that have been carefully preserved, with the exception of the fascist decorations, which were finally removed after the collapse of communism. Just outside of town we find the Palati Zogu, the king's palace built for him by the Italians but finished only following his ouster by Mussolini. Today it serves as the residence of the president of the republic.

The communist period is also well represented by Skanderbeg Square itself, which the dictator Enver Hoxha laid out as a typical communist parade ground. On the square we find several large communist-era buildings including the imposing Palace of Culture, whose cornerstone was laid by Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, and the National Historical Museum with its massive socialist realist mosaic depicting Albania's fight for freedom from the ancient Illyrians, through the nineteenth-century Albanian nationalists, to the anti-fascist partisans during the Second World War. Between the clock tower and the Et'hem Bey mosque is Bunk'Art 2, a former secret bunker system built for the Ministry of the Interior during the communist period, which is now a museum depicting the history of Albania's security services.

Hoxha's residence, known as Villa 31, still sits somewhat awkwardly in the so-called block area, which during the communist period was the heavily protected quarter reserved for the highest level of party leadership. Today it is the trendiest restaurant, bar and nightclub zone in the city. Hoxha was originally buried with honors in the Martyrs' Cemetery just outside of the city across from the Palati Zogu, in the shadow of the massive socialist realist statue of Mother Albania. Just east of the block on the main boulevard we find perhaps the most gauche of Tirana's monuments celebrating the Hoxha cult of the personality, the so-called pyramid, designed by Hoxha's daughter meant to serve as a memorial to the dictator. The pyramid, certainly the oddest structure in the country, is now virtually abandoned and deteriorating, but was saved from complete demolition and is slated to become an education center.

Since the collapse of communism in 1991 when the population of Tirana was approximately 250,000, the city has grown exponentially and is now home to over 30 percent of Albania's population. Many of the fine Ottoman villas have been demolished to make way for high-rise flats, with some of the dreariness painted over in bright colors by Edi Rama, who was mayor from 2000 to 2011. While many lament the loss of the villas, their destruction was often the only way to deal with a myriad of competing property claims. The city, then, is dominated by modern construction, including the futuristic new National Stadium opened in 2019 designed by Italian architects, on the site of an earlier one built during the Italian fascist occupation. There are, of course, modern shopping complexes, such as the Toptani Center across from the villa which houses the Albanian Academy of Sciences, built during the Zog period and used for royal functions.

But even some of the modern architecture speaks to Albania's past and its diversity, and here religious architecture serves as an appropriate example. The Hoxha dictatorship declared socialist Albania to be an atheist state and thoroughly suppressed organized religion of every stripe. With the collapse of communism in 1991, Albania experienced a resurgence of religious adherence and a boom in religious construction, often financed from abroad. Tirana's St. Paul's Catholic cathedral was one of the first new, large religious constructions, built under the direction of the Albanian archbishop Rrok Mirdita, who is himself immortalized in the stained glass, in a panel with his arm around Pope John Paul II, who laid the foundation stone in 1993. The Orthodox community answered with the much larger Resurrection of Christ Cathedral,

built across the street from the House of Leaves, the former surveillance center of the communist-era secret police. The cathedral is the third-largest Orthodox church in Europe. Not to be outdone, the Sunni Muslim community built the yet-to-be-completed, hulking neo-Ottoman style new Great Mosque of Tirana. The mosque, funded by the Turkish government, towers over parliament next door, and with its four minarets is the largest mosque in the Balkans, accommodating some 5,000 faithful. The Albanian intellectual Fatos Lubonja reacted by suggesting that "skyscrapers are the symbol of our new religion."

In a way, Tirana serves as a microcosm of Albania's complexity. It is the purpose of this book to provide some context for the complexity one encounters in the capital and elsewhere. There are myriad challenges in such an undertaking. Because much of Albanian history remains unclear, while we attempt to provide some explanations, the available evidence does not yet allow for definitive answers in all cases so inevitably we raise some questions as well. In reviewing Albanian history, we also discuss how others see the Albanians and how the Albanians see themselves, which is often not the same. Given the complexities reviewed above and the significant gaps in our knowledge concerning various periods in Albanian history, there is much room for interpretation and conjecture. Some historians and nationalists have attempted to simplify the complexities with myth – Albanian history, as with the history of all nations, is permeated by myths and mythical narratives that often serve political purposes. We attempt to deconstruct prevalent political and historiographical myths concerning Albania's past and present

and bring to light the ways in which Albanian myths have functioned as components of identity and as weapons in the struggle of conflicting political and historical claims, how they have served to buttress political power and contributed to internal cohesion.

The eminent Oxford scholar Sir Noel Malcolm has usefully defined what in his view constitutes the principal Albanian myths, some of which are shared by Albania's Balkan neighbors. Those that we will encounter in this review of Albanian history include the myth of ethnic homogeneity and cultural purity, the myth of permanent national struggle and the myth of indifference to religion, the basis of the oft-repeated notion, which originates with a nineteenth-century Albanian nationalist thinker, that "the religion of Albanians is Albanianism." Perhaps most central to regional struggles then and now is the myth of origin, which establishes a claim to priority in order to demonstrate that the Albanians were the original people of the Balkans, there before the coming of the Slavs in the late Roman Empire, but also before the Romans, and even before the Greeks. This narrative is used not only to solidify claims of historic right to territory, but it also enables its proponents to suggest that some of the best-known elements of ancient Greek culture actually had Albanian origins. As Sir Noel points out, such derivations exhibit some of the classic features of myth-style thinking; most notably they omit the difference between the ancestral past and the present identifying ancient people as Albanian and assuming that they spoke a version of the modern Albanian language.

These myths and narratives provide Albanian nationalists with the arguments to support a basic linear view of

Albanian history, one that was neatly summed up in a 1918 headline in the *New York Evening Sun* as quoted by Sir Noel. Referring to the beginning of the First World War, the headline read:

Ancient Illyrians in Entente: After 2000 years of Solitary Struggle Albanians join forces with Soldiers of Democracy – Dusk of a Picturesque Nation.

This view certainly informs the communist-era mosaic on the facade of the Museum of History in Tirana. But does it comport with the rich historical traditions found in the rest of Tirana, the rest of Albania and among the Albanians living in modern Kosovo (the second Albanian state) and elsewhere in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean? An examination of this question in many ways forms the basis of our book, *A Concise History of Albania*. As the title would indicate, the central focus of our book is Albania, the state and nation. But Albanian history does not, of course, begin with the creation of the state of Albania in 1912. Indeed, without an extensive review of the origins of the Albanians and the development of the region where they were and are found, the creation of the Albanian state, and the nation, after 1912 cannot be fully understood. It must also be noted that the Albanians living in the modern Albanian state constitute just one part of the history of the Albanians. Since 2008, a significant percentage of those Albanians who in 1912 were left out of the national state have developed their own model of statehood, the independent state of Kosovo. Despite its multiethnic political model, which was imposed by the international community, Kosovo today is de facto a second Albanian state whose citizens do not any longer consider Albania as their motherland.

To facilitate an understanding of the Albanians we have divided the book into two parts, first the story of the Albanian people in the western Balkans, and then the story of the development of the first Albanian state and the formation of the nation on its territory. Part I is titled "Between Regional Self-Will and Imperial Rule," a reference to the Turkish term *inat*, which is roughly translated as "persistence" – in this case, a certain Balkan stubbornness, which explains the survival of the language and identity of a community without common institutions and an administrative sacral language. In this section, we address questions of origin, which remain difficult. But the study of language has provided some clues that in turn have led to the development of theories concerning the derivation of the earliest Albanians. The space where these earlier Albanians were found presents yet another challenge, but again language helps us. We deal with these issues at some length, as they are fundamental to understanding Albanians then and, perhaps more importantly for the nonacademic reader, they are fundamental to understanding Albanians today. Once these early Albanians came in contact with the surrounding political world, the picture becomes somewhat clearer. The Romans, the Byzantines, the Kingdom of Naples and Venetians have, as we have seen, all left their traces and their influence. With no centralized medieval political system of their own, we must rely heavily on the records of these empires, kingdoms and maritime republics (such as Venice and Dubrovnik) for our knowledge of the Albanians.

With the century-long Ottoman conquest, the Albanians and the area in which they lived (which the

Ottomans called *Arnavutluk*) are described in much greater detail. As elsewhere, the Ottomans ruled through a co-opted local elite, and, in part because of the sheer length of their rule, impacted all aspects of Albanian society including legal doctrines, social organization and, in particular, religious developments, creating a predominantly Sunni Muslim society, a feature which has, of course, endured. The nineteenth century saw the Ottoman empire's decline, as its principal competitors in the West industrialized and modernized. With aid from either Russia or the West, other Balkan nations became states, but the Albanians lagged behind in part because of their favored status in the Ottoman empire. But here, too, national activists accelerated the forging of an Albanian identity in anticipation of either an autonomous region within the empire, or in the advent of the empire's collapse, as an independent state. The western part of *Arnavutluk* was slowly transformed into modern Albania, while the eastern sections were conquered and annexed by Serbia in 1912 and later became part of Yugoslavia.

Part II, the bulk of this work, "State and Nation Construction," begins with the Ottoman collapse during the Balkan wars and the First World War and the foundation of an independent Albania. Born as a result of these external forces, the new state, unlike other Balkan states, was created prior to the creation of a modern Albanian nation. State and nation construction becomes the central focus of the various "Albanias" created during the twentieth century, a process that proves to be difficult in light of the various divisive factors that must be overcome or at least circumvented. These factors include religious division, regional differences and significant social

differences. Albania's first political system, a rather unstable principality system imposed by the Great Powers, evolves into an authoritarian regime dominated by Ahmet Zogu, a local chieftain who elevated himself to the position of King of the Albanians. While this development removed one of the divisive factors standing in the way of nation and state construction, that of politics, the Zog monarchy proved unable to successfully deal with a myriad of seemingly insurmountable social and economic challenges. The process is interrupted and further complicated by the Second World War, which witnessed the ousting of Zog, who was replaced by a series of puppet regimes following an Italian and then a German invasion.

The war proved to be a defining moment for Albania, and in a way continues to inform domestic politics to this day. It also had profound effects and was immediately followed by the virtual destruction of the prewar political, social and economic order, replaced by a communist regime that claimed legitimacy by virtue of the fact that partisan units had constituted the most effective resistance to the invader. The communist regime under Enver Hoxha, which ruled until 1990, proved to be one of the most brutal of the Eastern European regimes, instituting and maintaining Stalinist policies for some thirty-seven years after the death of Stalin himself. But this regime too, like others in Eastern Europe eventually succumbed to overcentralization, overcrowding in the countryside, increasing unemployment, widespread corruption, constant shortages and growing access to Western media. While the change itself was peaceful, the powerful legacy of the communist period has made the process of establishing the next "Albania" anything but smooth.

The post-communist period began with euphoric hope. The first democratically elected leader proclaimed, "Hello Europe, we hope we find you well." And despite the economic disaster that faced Albania in 1992, significant social change was rapidly instituted. Almost overnight, Albanians were released from one of the most restricted and isolated social structures in Europe. But the old ways have lingered. Politics quickly degenerated into creeping authoritarianism, as Albania's new leaders prioritized power over progress. Much of the population as a whole remains poverty stricken, while oligarchs and crime lords flaunt their wealth and extend their influence into all aspects of the media, the economy, politics and the administration. A fully functioning rule of law remains a distant goal. Albania's population continues to shrink as the best and brightest emigrate. But there have been many positive steps. As Albania becomes more thoroughly integrated into Europe in general, the hope is that progress will continue and even accelerate and that some of those who fled in despair will return and commit their energy and talent to a new Albania. And we in turn hope that this brief introduction to the fascinating and complex story of the Albanians and the modern state of Albania may contribute to a better understanding of a part of the Balkans that remains insufficiently known.

PART I
BETWEEN REGIONAL SELF-WILL AND IMPERIAL RULE

1

The Space and Time of Albanian History

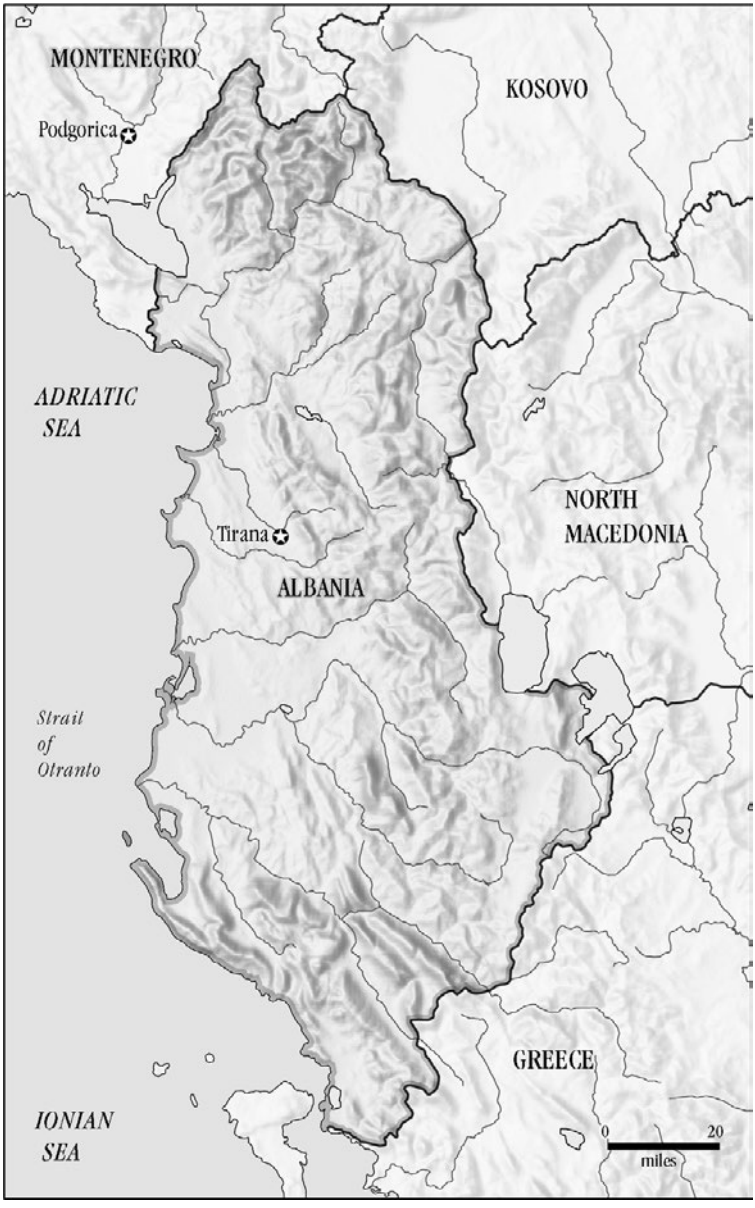
What Does Albania Mean?

The history of the modern Albanian state begins with a hurried and premature declaration of independence on November 28, 1912, in Vlorë/Gr. Aulon/It. Valona, a coastal town in southern central Albania. Prior to that date, Albanians had never lived in a common national state. Albanian history does not, of course, begin in 1912. The Albanians are one of the oldest autochthonous ethnic groups in the Balkans, and in Europe in general. This dichotomy between the relatively recent construction of the Albanian state and sociocultural traditions that date back to antiquity will do much to shape the structure of this story.

Albania, the key term of our book, has a unique history. It is not only the name of a modern European state but also denotes a historical region in the southwest of the Balkan peninsula. Only very rarely mentioned in antiquity, in the context of *Albanian mountains* or *Albanopolis*, the term *Albania* reappears around AD 1100 in various forms: *Arbanon* in Greek, *Raban* in Old Serbian, *Albanum* in Latin. Spatially, it encompassed what corresponds roughly to modern central Albania, or generally the hinterland of the present-day capital Tirana, and was designated as a short-lived principality at the edge of the Byzantine empire. In the late medieval period,

spatial Albania shifted northward and southward, or to be more precise: Italian and Greek sources began to use the term to describe an area that stretched from present-day Montenegro (Bay of Kotor) to modern southwestern Greece (Gulf of Ambracia). This extension can be explained by its use in Venetian administrative language and by the movement of Albanian warriors and herdsmen into Epirus, an area that today is divided between Albania and Greece. When Venice, the leading trading republic in the eastern Mediterranean, established its rule in the coastal towns of modern north Albania and Montenegro between 1392 and 1423, it called its southern Adriatic urban districts Albania. Further south, in present-day southern Albania and northwest Greece, the formation of short-lived Albanian lordships around 1400 increased the political visibility of the Albanian element in a multi-ethnic society, and as in the north, *Albania* was used to designate new political power structures.

The term *Albania*, therefore, refers less to a rigid space than to a fluid area. It is mentioned in medieval sources, which were usually produced by non-Albanian observers, primarily when the Albanians became visible as political actors, or in the case of Greece, as migrants. This does not mean that Albanians had not settled in areas that were only later called Albania by external observers; nor does it mean that the emergence of the spatial term *Albania* occurred only in regions with a traditional Albanian population. To illustrate the latter point, one need only to bear in mind the waves of Albanian migration to Greece from the thirteenth century onward. *Albania* as a spatial term mirrors the dynamics of migrations that characterize Albanian history from antiquity to the present day.



Map 1.1 Relief map of Albania

So which areas did Albania actually encompass? Until the nineteenth century, the most concise answer was provided by members of the Catholic elite, writing in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Based on ancient geography and early modern spatial knowledge, this Albania stretched from the coastal area of Venetian Albania (present-day Montenegro) to the area opposite the island of Corfu. In the east, this Catholic version bordered with *Serbia*. In territorial terms, this Serbia described by the church corresponds roughly to present-day Kosovo. Most Catholics in Kosovo were not ethnic Serbs but Albanians, and this ecclesiastical definition of Serbia does not refer to the ethnic situation in Kosovo, but rather to the tradition of the medieval Serbian State that was conquered by the Ottomans in 1459. Serbia therefore conveyed the memory of a bygone Balkan state rather than the reality of early modern Kosovo with its substantial Albanian population. This example of Catholic space construction demonstrates that while clear borders were drawn, these borders included an ethnically mixed population. To the east, the north and the south, the Albanian world did not end abruptly; rather, it merged into multilingual environments. In the south, Albanian was spoken along with Greek and Aromanian (a Balkan Romance language), to the north Albanians coexisted with Slavic speakers in Montenegro, to the northeast with Serbs and Aromanians and to the southeast with Macedo-Bulgarians and Aromanians.

The Ottomans who ruled over the southwestern Balkans between the late fourteenth century and the first Balkan war of 1912 had perhaps the most appropriate spatial concept for these fluid boundaries. They coined

the term *Arnavutluk*, which literally means an area full of Albanians or a region where the Albanian ethnic element is dominant among many other ethnic groups. The second advantage to the term *Arnavutluk* is that semantically it is not related to any kind of institutionalized power. In terms of space and delimitations, its vagueness precisely fits the premodern sociocultural patterns of open and overlapping spaces. Until 1912, an exact and unequivocal spatial demarcation of Albania simply did not exist. The term *Albania* designated a territory with a high density of speakers of the Albanian language in the southwestern Balkans. But there have always been many Albanian speakers outside this core territory. Conversely, inside Albania, many speakers of languages other than Albanian, such as Greek, Aromanian and various South Slavic varieties, could be found.

When attempting to assess the historical importance of Albanian speakers in the eastern Mediterranean, which is the goal of this book, Albania is, in many ways, a misleading concept, before and even, to a certain extent, after 1912. It conveys the idea of a closed national space in which Albanian history has played out. This might be true for approximately 60 percent of the Albanians in the twentieth century, or those Albanians who, after 1912, found themselves within the borders of the modern national state. The idea of one Albanian nation in its ethnically homogenous national state completely isolated from its neighbors was conceived of by the official historiography of communist Albania (1945–1991), which projected an ultranationalist state ideology and the concept of a people under permanent siege since time immemorial. This concept excluded all those Albanians, at least 40 percent, who in 1912 were

placed against their will under Serbian or Greek rule and remained therefore outside the communist project of state and nation building.

The communist concept of national history is based on statehood on the territory of modern Albania, and less on ethnicity. It is, therefore, not particularly useful for a full understanding of the dynamics of an ethnic group whose history is predominantly marked by integration into large empires (Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman) and by different types of middle- and large-scale migration under the umbrella of these empires. It effectively excludes those Albanians who until 1912 shared this historical experience with the Albanians of the modern Albanian state.

Before 1912 Albanian history encompassed all those areas where speakers of the Albanian language could be found. Because of the intense migration movements that characterize Albanian history, this space includes the southwestern Balkans: not only present-day Albania, Kosovo, parts of Montenegro, present-day southern Serbia, the west and north of the Republic of North Macedonia, but also central and southern Greece, where Albanians, still referred to as *Arvanites* to this day, settled beginning at the end of the thirteenth century. This space includes the southern Italian regions of Sicily, Calabria and Apulia, where Albanians sought shelter from the Ottoman onslaught in the fifteenth century and where their descendants, known as *Arbëresh*, enjoy the status of an officially recognized minority in Italy to this day. It also includes those parts of the Balkans where Albanians moved during the Ottoman period (from the late fourteenth century to 1912) including central Serbia, Bulgaria, Thrace and most notably the imperial capital

Istanbul. In the nineteenth century, Albanian traders and workmen migrated to present-day southern Romania and to Egypt (both formally part of the Ottoman empire), and in a later phase they discovered North America and Western Europe as new destinations for employment migration. In 1900, most cultural and economic centers of the Albanians could be found outside of the historical region of Albania. Istanbul, Alexandria, Athens, Sofia, Bucharest, Vienna, Brussels and Boston in the United States were central locations where the intellectual leaders of the Albanian national movement met and published.

It is clear that a concise history of Albania must essentially consist of two parts: a history of the Albanians in the context of empires and their history in the context of the modern national state since 1912. While the first part of this book spatially encompasses almost the entire Balkan peninsula and parts of the eastern Mediterranean, the second half is generally restricted to a more limited, but clearly defined space. While the first part concentrates on speakers of the Albanian language in various spatial and sociocultural contexts, the latter focuses on the citizens of a national state.

Language and the Question of Origins

Language plays a crucial role in defining the Albanians. It is only through the Albanian language and its speakers that Albanian history prior to 1912 can be written. Since the beginnings of a broad Albanian national movement in the latter third of the nineteenth century, Albanian national activists have highlighted language as the essential marker of identity and as an object of pride. Even

today, books claiming that the Albanian language is the oldest in the world or at least the oldest of all Indo-European languages have the potential to become best-sellers in Albanian communities. It is clear that Albanian nationalism compensates for the lack of a long-established state with the apparent agelessness of the Albanian language. What to outside observers might appear as an odd insistence on the age of the language can be better understood when bearing in mind that most nationalisms in Eastern Europe and elsewhere legitimatize their political and territorial claims by referring to national statehood stretching back into a medieval or, ideally, into an ancient past. Since the nineteenth century people without traditions of state institutions have been labeled as people without a history.

In this vein, modern Greek and Serbian nationalists denied the Albanians the right or the capacity to build a state and justified their own repeated plans, nurtured during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to partition Albanian inhabited lands. A second argument in support of territorial claims is autochthony, often related to chronological priority, or the argument that this is our land, we were here first and have been here since time immemorial. In this line of reasoning, the target peoples are latecomers without any historical rights. Serbian nationalists advance this argument and claim that the Albanians immigrated to Kosovo as late as the seventeenth century. To counter this view, Albanian nationalist thinkers insist that the Albanian language predates any Slavic language and is at least as old as Greek. The Albanian argument justifies modern Albanian territorial claims to areas where they

actually live. More extreme Albanian nationalists have proposed the theory of an ever-shrinking Albanian territory due to constant pressure from its neighbors since Roman times. In the Balkans, linguistics is thus not a scientific discipline confined to a few specialists but a matter of general political interest. Albanian history and its interpretation depend to a significant degree on how language history is written.

Since language is a key factor in our narrative, it merits a more in-depth examination. Albanian is an Indo-European language but constitutes an isolated case within this larger grouping. It is divided in two main dialect groups, including Tosk, which is found south of the central Albanian river Shkumbin and is spoken from the Adriatic Sea to some Albanian pockets in the southwest of the Republic of North Macedonia, particularly in Struga and Bitola. Closely related to the Tosk dialects are the Lab and Çam dialects in the south. The latter were spoken in present-day northwest Greece in Epirus, or more precisely the region of Thesprotia – in Albanian Çamëria.

Today, two-thirds of Albanians speak variations of the second principal grouping, Geg dialects, which can be found in Albania north of the river Shkumbin, in Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and southern Serbia. The differentiation between the Geg and Tosk dialects is a rather recent phenomenon dating back to the Late Middle Ages. Both the Tosk and Geg dialects are divided into many subdialects. The extreme fragmentation of the Albanian landscape with its many isolated highlands and valleys has until recently severely restricted communication and preserved many local cultural and

linguistic peculiarities. Dialect speakers from the extreme south and the extreme northeast still have difficulties understanding each other.

The modern Albanian standard language was only codified in 1972 on the basis of the Tosk dialects and constitutes a common platform for a bewildering array of dialects. It was accepted by Geg Albanians in the former Yugoslavia, principally for political reasons, as an expression of national unity in a divided nation. Most Geg speakers outside of Albania, however, have considerable difficulty in mastering standard Albanian. Today, with Geg-dominated Kosovo as a second Albanian state and the national affirmation of Geg Albanians in North Macedonia, the standard language in its traditional form is being questioned. The prospect of reforms that take into account changing sociolinguistic realities faces considerable opposition in Albania where post-communist elites still consider the Tosk-based standard language to be a major achievement of the communist period.

The history of the Albanian language is not only crucial in an Albanian context; it also reveals much about Albanians in various imperial frameworks and in periods of major disruption. Along with the Basque languages in the Pyrenees and some Celtic languages on the fringe of Western Europe, Albanian is the only regional language in the Latin-speaking (or Latin-administrated) western part of the Roman empire whose speakers were never Romanized, unlike those in Portugal, Spain or France. And as with the Basque language, Albanian was recorded in written form only very late – the first reference to the Albanian language dates from 1282 in a document from the Dalmatian trading town of Dubrovnik that mentions a

man who was shouting in the mountains in Albanian. The first full sentence in Albanian – a baptism formula – is recorded in the acts of a provincial synod of the Catholic church in rural central Albania in 1462. The first Albanian book – the translation of a Catholic missal by Gjon Buzuku – was printed in 1555 and survived in a single copy that was discovered in the eighteenth century. The first original work in Albanian, *The Band of the Prophets*, written by the Catholic clergyman Pjetër Bogdani, appeared in print in 1685.

These few examples demonstrate that Albanian was mainly transmitted orally. In its written form it was initially cultivated primarily by Catholic priests who in the seventeenth century began to print books that contained, almost exclusively, theological content. Later, Muslims began to write in different genres producing Albanian poetry in the Arabic alphabet (*Aljamiado*) that has been preserved in manuscripts. Until the early twentieth century the few literate Albanians employed various alphabets that reflected their religious allegiance: Catholics used the Latin alphabet, Orthodox the Greek and, to a minor degree, the Cyrillic alphabets, and Muslims used the Arabic alphabet. The transition to the exclusive use of the Latin alphabet took place at an alphabet conference in Monastir (today Bitola in North Macedonia) in 1908. This was a truly revolutionary step: the Albanians were the first predominantly Muslim nation that abandoned the Arabic script in favor of the Latin alphabet, and they did it against the stiff resistance of Ottoman authorities, the Muslim clergy and conservative Muslim forces.

Despite the dearth of written documentation in Albanian prior to the sixteenth century, the history of

the language, as well as the social and cultural history of its speakers, can be reconstructed by studying its grammar and principally its vocabulary. The latter is an extremely rich source for understanding cultural contacts between Albanians and the speakers of other languages as well as Albanian contacts with the imperial power structures that surrounded them and of which they were a part. Vocabulary and place-names are indeed the very basis for any study of the early history of the Albanians. Before embarking on a brief description of various theories on the origins of the Albanians, we should clarify what the term *Albanian* means. It designates primarily a speaker of the Albanian language. In medieval and early modern sources, however, *Albanian* (or *Arnaut* in Ottoman Turkish) also had other meanings – an Albanian could be a person from the area called Albania, an area which, as we will see, was ethnically and linguistically mixed; it could also designate a socioprofessional status. *Arnauts*, for example, served as guards in early modern Wallachia and Moldavia. In the premodern Balkans ethnonyms often had a social–professional meaning; a Greek was someone living in an urban space, a Bulgarian was a peasant from a rural area. The terms *Greek* and *Turk* also served as umbrella terms for non-Slavic Orthodox and for Muslims, regardless of the language they actually spoke. This is why in Ottoman times Muslim Albanians were often labeled as Turks even if they did not speak a single word of Turkish.

Albanian differs from the surrounding languages Greek, Aromanian, Slavic (Serbian and Bulgarian) and Turkish, all of which are not mutually understandable. Albanians were fully aware of their linguistic otherness,

and this constituted an important part of their identity. However, one should avoid falling into the trap of primordial ethnic identities – before the late nineteenth century, there was a vague sense of belonging to the same linguistic group, but regional, religious and socioeconomic differences prevented the formation of a political community that pursued a common goal. One should also be wary, however, of the idea that identities bound to linguistic allegiances are exclusively a phenomenon of modernity.

The very fact that many Albanians never gave up their language, preserving it over more than two millennia in different imperial contexts and confronted with imperial and sacral languages (Latin, Greek, Church Slavonic, Ottoman, Arab), constitutes one of the most important features of Albanian history in general. This does not mean that Albanians lived completely isolated from the world surrounding them. On the contrary, the Albanian language tells the story of cultural contacts, integration and self-preservation. Its vocabulary is so rich in Latin loanwords that Austrian linguists at the end of the nineteenth century described it as a semi-Latin language. Latin words encompass many semantic fields, from power and politics (*perandor*, from *imperator* – emperor; *popull*, from *populus* – people; *ligj*, from *lex* - law), social relations (*mik*, from *amicus* – friend; *armik* or in Geg *anmik*, from *inimicus* - enemy) to Christian culture (*shpirt*, from *spiritus* – spirit; *prift* – priest; *shejnt*, from *sanctus* – holy).

It seems clear that ancient or proto-Albanians lived in those parts of the Balkans that were administrated in Latin and not in Greek. The Austrian-Czech historian Konstantin Jireček, who studied ancient inscriptions in

the Balkans at the end of the nineteenth century, described a virtual line stretching from modern central Albania to the central part of the present-day Bulgarian Black Sea coast. To the south of this line, later referred to as the Jireček line, these inscriptions were predominantly in Greek and to the north generally in Latin. Although recent research has questioned this approach, the fact remains that the central and northern parts of the Balkans belonged to the Latin part of the Roman empire. In this region, Albanians shared a common history with the Roman conquerors who arrived in the southwestern Balkans in 146 BC. Roman rule in the Balkans finally collapsed in the first third of the seventh century AD. The Albanians, therefore, lived for eight centuries in the framework of Roman civilization with the Latin language. It was in this period, specifically in the fourth century, that they adopted Christianity.

The paucity of ancient Greek linguistic influence on the Albanian language stands in striking contrast to the deep Latinization. This is all the more surprising in light of the fact that since the seventh century BC the present-day southern and central part of the Albanian coastland had been colonized by Greeks, who established flourishing cities including Apollonia, Byllis, Bouthrotos or Epidamnos (present-day Durrës/Gr. Dyrrachion/It. Durazzo).

The Greek presence was thus older and at least as strong as the imperial Roman impact on the southwestern Balkans. Still, with the exception of a handful of loanwords, Albanians remained untouched by ancient Greek culture. This fact is a strong argument in support of the theory that modern southern Albania did not belong to the area where Albanians lived in antiquity.



1.1 2c BC Roman monument of Agnothetes in Apollonia, founded in 6c BC as Greek trading colony

While these linguistic deductions might seem a highly specialized debate restricted to scholarly circles, they actually are of the outmost political importance for Albanians. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Albanian nationalist activists have claimed that Albanians descend from the ancient Illyrians, a conglomerate of tribes that settled a vast area from present-day Albania in the south to modern eastern Austria in the north. These nationalists also argue that the modern linguistic area of Albanian is just what is left from a far larger Illyrian culture that fell victim primarily to the onslaught of the Slavs beginning in the sixth century AD. The modern Albanian state adopted this theory and promulgated it through schools and the mass media, particularly after 1945. It serves Albanians as a key argument in

defending their national and territorial aspirations against competing claims, principally from Serbian and Greek nationalists. The Illyrian theory has become state dogma, and emotions still run high when it is questioned.

In historiography, however, the question of from where the Albanians originate has been asked since the seventeenth century. The first major scholar who studied the Albanian language was the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In the eighteenth century, the Swedish scholar Johann Thunmann developed the idea of an Illyrian–Albanian continuity. Also, in the eighteenth century, a competing theory evolved: the idea that the Albanians were not autochthonous, but rather immigrants from outside the region. The most fantastical assumption connected the Albanians to the homonymous people in the Caucasus (*Alwank*), but this theory has long since been rejected by linguists. Taken far more seriously is the idea that the Albanians are Thracian in origin. The Thracians were the counterparts of the Illyrians in the eastern Balkans, a conglomerate of tribes, and as in the case of the Illyrians, almost nothing has been left of their language, with the exceptions of place-names and anthroponyms. Theories establishing connections between the Albanians and the Illyrians or Thracians remain highly speculative for the simple reason that there is almost no empirical evidence that verifies them, or, for that matter, invalidates them. Recently, a third hypothesis has been put forward – namely, that Albanian derives from a third old Balkan language.

Studying place-names and the ways they were adopted in language is a far less problematic way of delimitating the linguistic area of Albanian in antiquity. This kind of



1.2 Roman amphitheater, Durrës, 2c AD

evidence is related to the analysis of zoological and botanical vocabulary, which provides precious insight into the natural environment of the Albanians. Albanians encountered place-names on the Adriatic coast between 150 BC in the north (Ulcinj/Alb. Ulqin, It. Dulcigno, Shkodër/Srb. Skadar/It. Scutari, Lezhë/It. Alessio), AD 400 in central Albania (Durrës) and AD 700–800 in southern central Albania (Shkumbin river).

To encounter means that they had heard of these towns and this river and had integrated these names into their language, but it does not necessarily imply that they had already settled in these areas. Conversely, linguistic research has made it very probable that early Slav settlers (sixth/seventh century AD) borrowed from speakers of ancient Albanian the names of many central towns in the inner Balkans (Skopje/Alb. Shkup/Tr. Üsküb and

Štip in North Macedonia, Niš in Serbia), which all were found on important Roman highways along which Slavs advanced to the south. This means that proto-Albanians had settled there before the Slavs.

The Albanian vocabulary is rich in words designating animals and plants in hilly and mountainous areas. On the coast, the maritime vocabulary is borrowed mainly from Latin, while names of animals and plants in the lowlands were adopted from Slav (frog, otter, leech, mud, yew tree, poplar). On the basis of this evidence, in the 1930s the German historian Georg Stadtmüller developed his theory that Albanians must have originally settled far from the coast in the highlands above 2,300 feet. He identified the central Albanian region of Mati as the core area of the Albanians from where they would have spread all over the Balkans. Recently, linguists have emphasized that Kosovo and important parts of western Macedonia also lay rather high and that their fauna and flora correspond to Stadtmüller's evidence. Taking together the still ongoing analysis of toponyms, linguists have reached the conclusion that the original linguistic area of Albanian in late antiquity stretched from present-day northern Albania to present-day southern Serbia and encompassed modern Kosovo and modern North Macedonia.

In this area, linguistic exchange with other Balkan languages was particularly intensive. In the interwar period, linguists discovered similarities not only in vocabulary but also in structure between Albanian, Aromanian, Bulgarian and eastern Serbian dialects. Postponed articles (man-the), the disappearance of the infinitive (which has been preserved in Geg dialects) and its substitution with conjunctive construction, and the fusion of genitive and

dative are some the typical features of what has been called *Balkansprachbund*, or a Balkan language union. For many centuries, speakers of old Balkan (Paleobalkanic) and of Slav languages coexisted and borrowed from each other words and ways of thinking. While Albanians adopted from Slavs important parts of technical vocabulary in agriculture and political organization (harrow, hoe, sickle, court, nobility), it seems that the postponed article was a major Albanian impact on other Balkan languages. Relations between Albanian and Aromanian were particularly close – both linguistic groups settled together in the Latin part of the Balkans. While the Albanians adopted many loanwords from Latin, the Aromanians, descendants of Paleobalkanic groups, were completely Latinized. With the arrival of the Slavs and the destruction of Roman urban culture (sixth–seventh century AD), both Paleobalkanic communities retreated to the highlands and adopted a predominantly pastoral culture and economy. For many centuries, speakers of Albanian and Aromanian shared the same way of life as seminomadic herdsmen in the mountains of the central Balkans. A wealth of common vocabulary, mostly for cattle breeding, attests to the symbiosis of these survivors of Slavic devastation of the lowlands. Their borrowings from Slavic languages help us to understand how the post-Roman Balkan population and Slavs interacted. The Slavs controlled the plains, including their wet lowlands and swamps, they cultivated fields and they set up power institutions.

In the final analysis, it is almost impossible to determine the exact area in which the Albanian language was dominant in premodern times, and from a historical perspective, such an approach is of limited value in any case. Since

antiquity, Albanian has been spoken in a core area in the southwestern Balkans and in a wide zone of overlapping linguistic influences. In the Middle Ages, Albanian migration to Greece and southern Italy enlarged this linguistic area, as did those Albanians who within the Ottoman empire settled in the Morava valley (central Serbia), in Thrace, in Bulgaria and in Egypt, or those Christian Albanians who moved to Wallachia (southern Romania) and present-day Ukraine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the twentieth century, work migration and refugees created important new communities in the United States, in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, as well as in Italy. The history of Albanians therefore cannot be limited to a clearly delimitated space. It is a transterritorial history that encompasses the entire Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean and the Western world. And Albanians shared this history with those linguistic and religious/confessional groups that settled in, or close to, Albanian core lands, including the Romans, Greeks, Slavs, Turks and Roma.

2

The Albanians in the Middle Ages, 500–1500

Roman Breakdown and Albanian Continuity

For most of the medieval period Albanians lived under the umbrella of the Byzantine empire and Orthodox regional states (Bulgaria, Serbia, Despotate of Epirus) that belonged to the Byzantine commonwealth. This commonwealth was immersed in the cultural influence of Byzantium but was politically emancipated from direct Byzantine rule. Those Albanians who lived in the ethnically mixed coastal zone on the southeastern shore of the Adriatic, continued to be connected to a politically and culturally highly complex area. The Middle Ages in this region began with the coming of the Slavs who reached the southeastern Adriatic in the 550s and brought havoc to its late Roman provincial society. The Slavs arrived as small groups of warriors. They owed their military success to the Avars, a warrior confederation from the Steppes which, thanks to Roman prisoners, gained the military skills to overrun Roman fortresses. Byzantium was barely able to keep its main stronghold, the port-fortress of Durrës, and to maintain close contacts to the post-Roman population in its hinterland. Recent excavations have shed new light on the hitherto mostly obscure fate of post-Roman southwestern Balkans.

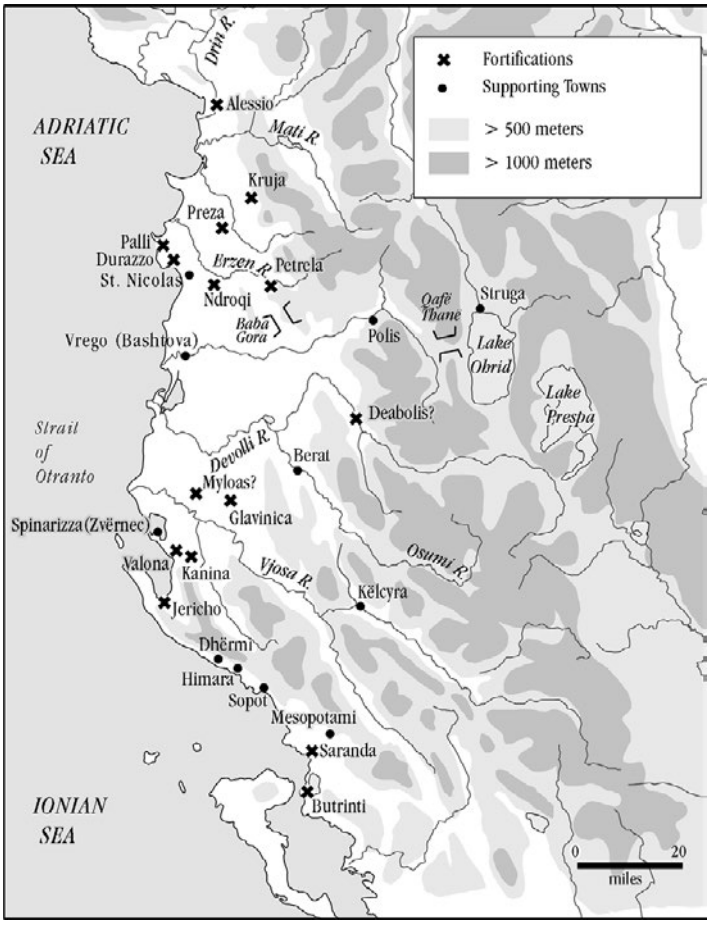
The town of Dalmace, for example, in the inaccessible mountains east of Durrës belonged to a post-Roman

culture that was forced to abandon traditional lowland settlements that fell to the Slavs. However, these mountain refugees reproduced their former settlement on the coast. Dalmace contained several churches, extended cemeteries, and its material culture remained impressive, as evidenced by its rich jewelry. Recent excavations in the castle-town of Lezhë, on a hill dominating the coastal plain north of Durrës, have shown that its inhabitants, like the people of Dalmace, were in close contact with Byzantium. At the same time, they were exposed to the material culture of the various ethnic groups who for some time exerted political power in the Balkan peninsula, as with Germanic or Avar warrior groups in the Early Middle Ages.

Apart from archaeological finds, the Albanian language testifies to the centuries-old contacts Albanians had with different linguistic groups in the Balkans. The close cohabitation with Romance cattle breeders (Aromanians) has already been mentioned. From the sixth century on, Albanians entered into close contact with the speakers of different varieties of the Slav language. Slavic speakers spread in the sixth and seventh centuries to most areas in the Balkans, and the Slavic-speaking territory was far more extensive at that time than it was at the end of the Middle Ages. From southern Greece to present-day southern Romania, Slavic toponyms, replaced in Greece by Greek ones only in the twentieth century, still bear witness to the immigration of Slavs and the foundation of new settlements on post-Roman soil. Since the middle of the sixth century, the Roman provinces of *Epirus vetus*, *Epirus nova* and *Dardania* were subjected to recurrent Slavic attacks.

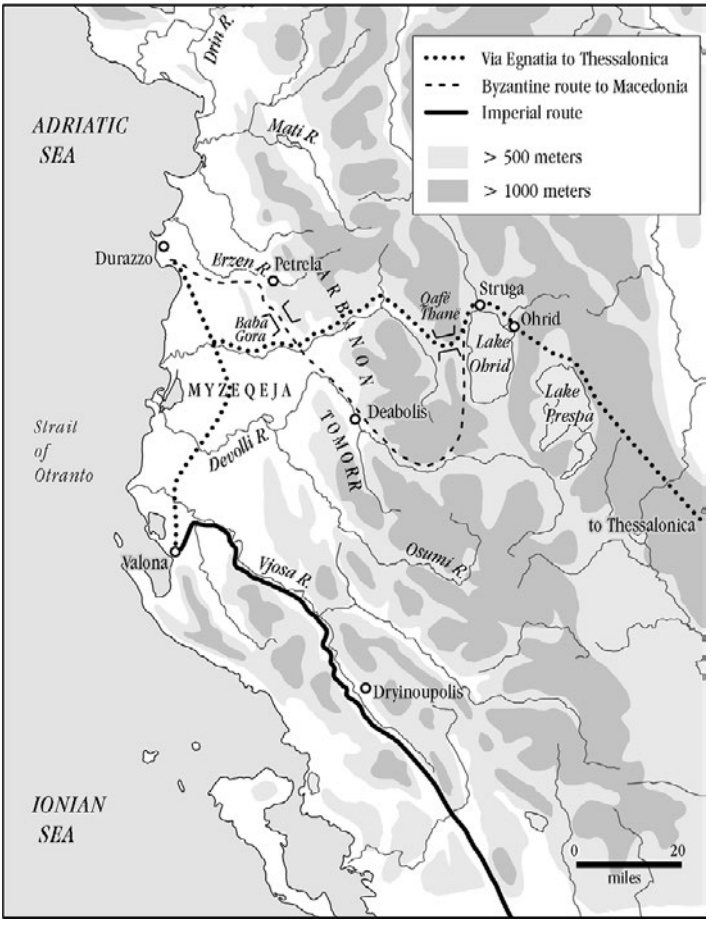
The ruins of late antiquity basilicas and churches still remind us of the catastrophe wrought on the Christian world in the Balkans. Unlike in the western provinces of the Roman empire where much has survived, the coming of the Slavs caused complete disruption. Large estates and most towns in the central Balkans were almost completely plundered. Imperial administration broke down whenever the Roman army retreated. Roman control was reduced to a few lonely outposts on the Adriatic, including Zadar, Raousion/Dubrovnik (both in modern Croatia), and Durrës, the Ionian islands, parts of the eastern Peloponnesus and Salonica, which remained the principal imperial stronghold in the southern Balkans.

What distinguishes the Balkans from other parts of the Roman world is the collapse of church administration controlled by a dense network of Roman bishoprics. While in the west (Roman Italy, Gaul, Spain), the church survived and at least partially succeeded in preserving the Roman heritage, in the Balkans the church disappeared along with the empire. Between the early seventh century and the late ninth century, the interior Balkans were deprived of church administration. Christianity may have survived as a popular tradition on a reduced level, but only the recovery of the Byzantine empire and Byzantine missionary activity brought the Balkans back into the Christian orbit. Because of the lack of written sources, we know very little about the southwestern Balkans in the Early Middle Ages. But archaeology, linguistic evidence and sigillography (the study of seals), which often indicates the administrative functions of their owners, provide important clues.



Map 2.1a Byzantine defensive system in Albania

While older historiography postulated a complete rupture between the late Roman and the early medieval Balkan worlds, archaeological evidence hints at an intensive interchange between coastal areas under Byzantine control and the rural and mountainous hinterland. The autochthonous population was not cut off from the Slavic



Map 2.1b Major Roads in Byzantine Albania

newcomers. Many loanwords from Slavic point to the fields of contact, in particular agriculture, administration and political power (e.g. words for law/Sl. *zakon*, court/Sl. *obor*), lowland plants and animals. A vast Albano-Slavic contact zone emerged that encompassed not only areas close to the modern linguistic frontier, but also what is today southern Albania and parts of northern Albania.

The study of Slavic toponyms that provide the primary evidence of Slavic immigration into the non-Slavic societies of Greece, Albania and Kosovo is still a controversial topic. But even in countries such as Germany and Austria, Slavic toponyms have survived, often in archaic and distorted forms. There are areas that had been temporarily slavicized or at least partially settled by Slavs, and then taken over by other ethnic groups, where pre-Slavic toponyms had been forgotten. That is why Slavic place-names survive in regions where almost no other traces of Slavic presence can be found.

This is also true for many parts of present-day Albania. A particularly high level of Slavic toponyms can be found in southern Albania (40 percent in the area around Gjirokastër, up to 50 percent in the Përmet area), while central Albania (Mati, Mirditë) was obviously less affected by Slavic migrants. These Slavic settlers were assimilated by the Albanians in a long process that has not yet been reconstructed in detail. It seems to have stretched from the High Middle Ages until the sixteenth century. In the early modern period, only in the area close to the Greater Prespa Lake, where Macedonian is still spoken today, and in remote regions, as the mountains of Himara, was Slavic still used or could people who still bore Slavic names be found. But Slavic influence spread in ways other than just through immigration.

Albanians and Early South Slavic Statehood

Post-Roman Albanians lived under several Slavic principalities that emerged slowly in the ruins of the Roman world. The most prominent was the Bulgarian empire,

which expanded to the Adriatic Sea in the ninth century. Even more important was the Bulgarian missionary center in Ohrid/Alb. Ohër/Gr. Achris. In 864/65 the Bulgarians adopted Christianity from Orthodox Byzantium, and the Christian faith was spread by priests using a new language, Church Slavonic, and a new alphabet, Cyrillic. Ohrid developed into a center of Church Slavonic culture where the gospel and the principal texts of Byzantine theology were translated. This culture penetrated deeply into those areas where the Roman church had collapsed some 250 years earlier. One of the apostles of the Slavs, St. Clement, was sent out to present-day southern Albania.

Tsar Simeon (893–927) extended the Bulgarian frontiers to the Shkodër area in northern Albania and Tsar Samuel (997–1014) even succeeded in temporarily controlling Durrës. When Byzantium eventually defeated him, the last pockets of resistance could be found in Albania, in Berat (Belgrad or White town for the Slavs). For centuries, Orthodox Christians in southern and central Albania remained under the influence of Ohrid, which after the Byzantine conquest of Bulgaria (1018) was turned into a center of Orthodox culture in the Greek language. Orthodox believers in Albania venerated regional saints such as St. Clement, St. Naum, St. Angelarius and St. John Vladimir, a local ruler who was murdered by his brother-in-law. In 1380, Charles Thopia, an Albanian nobleman, donated a grave inscription in Greek, Latin and Slavic, one of the most telling examples of the multilinguistic Orthodox culture of the area.

Apart from this Albano-Bulgarian cultural contact zone, Albanians came into close contact with a second group of

Slavic-speakers further north. A new pole of political power, Raška, the nucleus of what was later to become medieval Serbia, emerged in the modern area of Novi Pazar in southwestern Serbia in the ninth century. Closer to the coast, around Lake Shkodër, a second South Slavic principality, Dioclea (or Duklja), expanded into a zone where Albanian was spoken along with Slavic (Old Serbian) and Romance. This area was temporarily conquered by the Bulgarian tsar Simeon, then came once again under Byzantine control, from which it was emancipated in the eleventh century. In 1077, Pope Gregory VII sent a crown to the Prince of Duklja. Raška, under the dynasty of the Nemanjids, shook off Byzantine rule in a slow process that culminated, as in the case of Duklja, in the crowning of the ruler by the pope. By the beginning of the early thirteenth century, Raška encompassed most of present-day Serbia and highland Montenegro. In 1219, the Orthodox church of this Serbian kingdom obtained its jurisdictional autonomy (autocephaly), first based in Žiča, then from 1253 in Pejë/Srb. Peć in Kosovo, and its influence radiated into the eastern part of modern Albania.

Albanians were thus connected to two major Slavic cultural and political poles, a Bulgarian one in the south, from the second half of the ninth century, and a Serbian one with two political centers (Raška and Duklja) mainly from the early eleventh century onward. Particularly in the north, in the modern border zone of Albania and Montenegro, both in the lowlands and in the highlands, contacts became so close that the Croatian medievalist and national activist Milan Šufflay (murdered by the Serbian secret service in 1931) developed the concept of an Albano-Slavic symbiosis in the Middle Ages. This

symbiosis encompassed the shared world of cattle-breeding highlanders and a common urban culture in the densely urbanized area between the Bay of Kotor and the Shkodër region. Šufflay's theory contradicts those nationalist historians who in modern Albania, Kosovo and Serbia project contemporary interethnic tensions into the remote past. In the Middle Ages, Albanians and Slavs (Bulgarians and Serbs) did not constitute competing nations in the modern sense of the word. Linguistic differences were evident, but hundreds of Slavic loanwords in the Albanian language and the steady assimilation of Slavs into modern southern Albania hint rather at a long tradition of cohabitation. Reports of open conflict between Slavs and Albanians simply cannot be found in written sources.

The southwestern Balkans were a border area not only in terms of language but also in terms of religion. In the late Roman empire, the *dioecesis* (large administrative unit) of Illyricum came under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome. In 730 the Byzantine Emperor Leon III reversed that decision, and the western Balkans, or more precisely the few spots that had remained under the administration of Christian bishops, became part of the ecclesiastical realm of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Some 130 years later, Rome and Constantinople began their cultural offensives in the Balkans that aimed at bringing this area into their respective Christian worlds. But it was not only religion that was at stake. Both centers competed for geostrategic influence. Eventually, in the thirteenth century, the two major Slavic states in the Balkans, Bulgaria and Serbia, chose the Orthodox option that accorded them autonomous "national" churches.

According to this system, the heads of the two regional churches acknowledged the Patriarch of Constantinople as the symbolic leader of the Orthodox ecclesiastical world, while in practice they retained full control over their own jurisdictions. Before the early thirteenth century, Bulgaria and Serbia had used Rome to counterbalance Byzantine hegemony in the Balkans. Only when Constantinople was conquered by western crusaders in 1204 and when a Latin (Catholic) empire was created virtually on their doorsteps did the two Balkan states side with Byzantium, which was politically so weakened that it no longer constituted a threat to Balkan Slavic political autonomy.

Most Albanians lived in the multilingual Orthodox Balkan commonwealth. The Roman church held some outposts in northern Albania and in the mining towns in Bosnia and Kosovo where in the Late Middle Ages German (Saxon) miners and merchants from Dubrovnik formed small Catholic communities with mostly Albanian priests. The overwhelming majority of Albanians, however, came under the jurisdiction of one of the two principal Orthodox churches in the Balkans. They included the Serbian archbishopric of Žiča and later of Peć (from 1346 a patriarchate) in Kosovo, and the autocephalous (autonomous) archbishopric of Ohrid whose realm encompassed southern and central Albania and embraced Bulgarian ecclesiastical traditions in the Greek and Slavonic languages.

On the Fringes of the Byzantine World

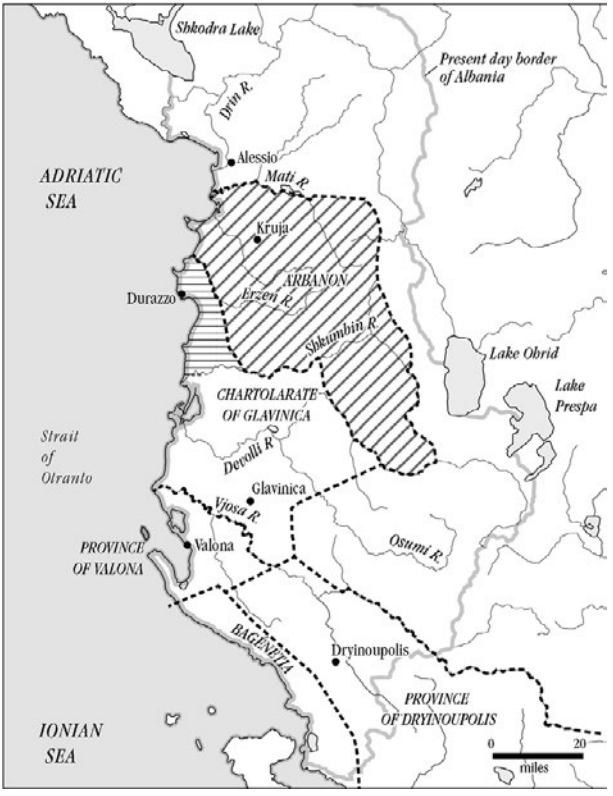
The western periphery of the Byzantine empire was continuously exposed to the influence of the Roman church

and to the expansionist plans of primarily southern Italian powers. In 1071 Norman warriors conquered the Byzantine stronghold of Bari in Apulia and soon began to attack the opposite coast of the Adriatic in the area of Durrës. In the wake of the First Crusade (1095), Norman attacks intensified, and in the twelfth century, Normans twice, in 1147 and 1185, penetrated deep into the Byzantine Balkans. In the eleventh century, a second Adriatic power became involved with Byzantine lands on the Adriatic: Venice, which helped the empire repulse Norman attacks and used this opportunity to strengthen its commercial position in the southern Adriatic. For Venice, open navigation in the Adriatic was vital, and it was Venetian state policy to avoid allowing both shores to be controlled by the same power. The Straits of Otranto, which at its narrowest point between Otranto and the Albanian port of Vlorë measures only 50 miles, was to remain one of the most sensitive strategic areas of the Mediterranean well into the twentieth century.

It was in the context of the Byzantine presence in Apulia that Albanians are mentioned for the first time in Byzantine sources, described as mercenaries serving in southern Italy. This is not a mere coincidence, since for centuries Albanians would serve as soldiers far distant from the historical region of Albania. And southern Italy had exercised a decisive influence on Albanians since Roman times, not only by exporting political and military power, administrative models, religion and language, but also by accepting migrants from Albania and more generally Albanians from the Balkans who came in large numbers mainly in the fifteenth century. Albanians appear in written sources for a second time in the context of the

Byzantine–Norman clashes when a *komeskortes* (a count of the court) of the Albanians helped to defend Durrës, whose hinterland was called *Arbanon*. *Arbanon* constituted a military district between the port of Vlorë in the south, the castle of Petrelë (south of Tirana) and the eastern Albanian region of Dibër. Regional power structures and local strongmen on which Byzantium relied only seldom can be found in the scarce written sources. Only when the imperial central administration was weakened did these local leaders began to play a more visible role, as with a certain Progon around 1190, when the area around Durrës was organized into the province of Durrës and Arbanon. After 1204, in the turmoil following the conquest of Constantinople, Progon's son Demetrios assumed the title "by the grace of God, *panhypersevastos* (a Byzantine court title) and great lord." In circa 1210 he married a Serbian princess and thus helped to begin a trans-ethnic kinship network of Orthodox Balkan noblemen. Demetrios's principality was rather short lived and soon became part of the principality of Epirus, a more stable successor state of Byzantium. Albanian communist historiography saw in Progon's and Demetrios's Arbanon the nucleus of a medieval Albanian national state. In fact, Arbanon was nothing more than a Byzantine district under a local officeholder who was able to maneuver politically for a few of years.

Arbanon was a political offshoot of the Orthodox Byzantine world in the Balkans. However, the area increasingly came under the influence of the Catholic Adriatic world, represented by Rome, Venice and the Kingdom of Sicily. This Catholic Adriatic world did not consist of only military and economic power. Despite



Map 2.2 Albania in 1210

Leon III's decision, the Catholic church maintained its archbishoprics and bishoprics along the eastern coast of the Adriatic, creating a Catholic zone that merged into an area of overlapping cultural influence in modern central Albania. In the Middle Ages, both Orthodox and Catholic clergymen reigned as archbishops in Durrës, depending on the political strength or weakness of Byzantium and its southern Italian neighbors. When in 1392 Venice took power in Durrës, the pendulum eventually swung in favor

of the Catholic church, at least until the Ottoman conquest of the port in 1501. For centuries, central Albania constituted an area where Catholic and Orthodox churches and cultural influence met. This had significant consequences for local strongmen. To change religious allegiance as a function of political loyalty was not uncommon, nor was it unusual for Albanian noblemen to switch between confessions several times. Blurred confessional borders reflected the high degree of political instability.

This instability was exacerbated by the Fourth Crusade of 1204, which saw the conquest of Constantinople by Latin (western European) crusaders and Venetians, and the formation of several successor states in the Balkans that struggled against one another for power. The instability was further exacerbated by intervention from Italy and, from the 1350s onward, raids into the Balkans by the Ottomans and Turkish marcher lords, warrior nobles who protected and expanded the frontiers of the Ottoman empire. Only when the Ottomans completed their conquest of the Balkans ca. 1500 did the political situation once again stabilize under the umbrella of a powerful empire. In the three centuries between 1204 and 1500, the political history of the areas inhabited by Albanians is extremely complex and fragmented. Several regional powers competed for supremacy in the southwestern Balkans.

After 1204, Venice occupied Durrës, but soon lost it to the principality of Epirus. This principality (later called the Despotate of Epirus) was founded by the Dukas-Komnenos, a Byzantine family of imperial origin. In what is modern central and southern Albania, they were challenged by the Hohenstaufen Kings of Sicily until 1266,

and then by the Anjou. The latter created a Kingdom of Albania in 1272, as sort of a bridgehead for a general attack against Constantinople. The Anjou, as with other external rulers in the area, built their shaky power system on the support of local noble families that have now emerged from the sources in a more recognizable form, and included the Muzaki, Araniti, Skura, Blinishti, Gropa and the Thopia who combined Byzantine, south Italian and sometimes Balkan Slavic influences at their petty courts. Notwithstanding their status as vassals, they managed to keep control over local society. Culturally they shifted between confessions and the languages of imperial and royal chanceries (Greek, Latin, Slavonic). They pursued a successful pragmatic policy that allowed them to quickly switch sides if advantages could be had. Local strongmen and external forces that compete for influence by distributing money, material help and honors to the former – this combination characterizes patterns of power in the western Balkans to the present day.

Medieval Migrations: *Arvanites* and *Arbëresh*

From the 1280s onward, the Serbian kingdom penetrated slowly into central Albania, but this expansion did not result in a linguistic Serbization of Albania. As with the Anjou, the Serbs relied on local noblemen, the Serbian crown prince established an apanage at the castle of Dagno (modern Vau i Dejës/Srb. Danj, east of Shkodër), and it was from northern Albania that, in the 1330s, the Serbian King Stefan Dušan (1308–1355) began his rapid, but not very sustainable, conquest of most of the Balkans. Under his tsardom, Stefan elevated himself from

king to Emperor of the Serbs and Greeks in 1346. Albanian warriors, noblemen and cattle breeders accompanied Serbian armies marching southward into Epirus, Thessaly and Macedonia. Serbian expansion facilitated a migration movement that began at the end of the thirteenth century and whose origins (famine, overpopulation, internal strife) are still obscure. This migration saw thousands of Albanians move southward into Greece. From the 1280s to the 1460s, large regions including Thessaly, Boeotia, Attika and Morea (Peloponnesus) along with Epirus had their ethnic character changed. Albanian migration was organized primarily in the context of clans of warriors and herdsmen. In the early fourteenth century, observers in Thessaly were shocked by the instability that Albanians caused with their constant raids. "God sent this pestilence to our country of Vlachia" (Thessaly). However, ca. 1400, regional rulers in Athens and Morea (Peloponnese), including despot Theodore I, brother of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II, were glad to invite Albanian settlers into their lands, which had been severely depopulated by waves of plague and wars.

As a result of this massive movement of peoples in the second half of the fifteenth century, Albanians constituted one-third of the population of Morea, while in Lokris, a region in central Greece, they actually made up the majority. Boeotia, Attika and the nearby islands of Poros, Spetses and Hydra were also colonized by Albanians. These Albanians, known as *Arvanites*, kept their language, in some cases to the present day. Since they were Orthodox Christians, they integrated rather easily into preexisting structures; they differed from the Greek population mainly by their economic activities as cattle breeders and peasants

who concentrated on cereal cultivation. They lived in smaller kinship-based villages than their Greek neighbors whose villages were much bigger and whose agriculture was much more sophisticated and diverse. In the fifteenth century, Albanians in Morea actively resisted the Ottoman advance and thereby came into conflict with local Greek despots (princes) from the Byzantine dynasty of Palaiologoi who repeatedly tried to appease the Ottomans and even called them in to subdue the Albanians. After the final conquest of Morea (1460), thousands of Albanians migrated from the Peloponnesus to southern Italy (Sicily, Calabria, Apulia) where they settled in tightly knit communities. Together with refugees from Albania proper they formed a new community, the *Arbëresh* or Italo-Albanians, a distinct ethnic-linguistic group that still exists today. Because of their Orthodox (and later Uniate) religion and the fact that their settlements were found in remote mountain areas, they rarely intermingled with Catholic Italians and kept their language, their customs and their culture of memory. In their folk songs, Morea is often invoked as a lost homeland.

The Urban Culture of Adriatic Albania

While the hinterland of the Adriatic coast was the world of local noblemen under the umbrella of Byzantium, the Kingdom of Naples or the Serbian crown, the towns, especially those in northern Albania, belonged structurally to a different cultural sphere, Adriatic urban communes. A particularly dense urban network developed around Shkodër in the north in the High Middle Ages. Some of the cities, such as Lezhë, Shkodër, Ulcinj, and Kotor/Alb.

Kotorr/It. Cattaro, had ancient roots, while other mostly smaller towns emerged in the Middle Ages. This area was characterized by the predominance of the Catholic church and Latin written culture, and by political and administrative institutions that the area shared with the wider Adriatic world, namely urban citizenship, communal law (statutes) and communal councils. The Statutes of Shkodër, a sophisticated document outlining self-rule, were likely codified at the beginning of the fourteenth century as a part of a process of codification of urban law that had begun a century earlier in Dalmatia. The oldest of these statutes were those of the island of Korčula in southern Dalmatia, which maintained close commercial contacts with Albania. The world of Albanian communes fully participated in the common institutional, legal, commercial and cultural world of the Adriatic. Drisht/It. Drivasto/Srb. Drivast, a mountain fortress some 6 miles east of Shkodër, developed into a major center of Latin culture; its school trained Catholic priests who served in Dalmatia and the mining towns of the central Balkans, including Novo Brdo in Kosovo. The coastal towns of northern Albania participated fully in the Adriatic trade network, and its citizens migrated freely between Venice and Dalmatia. In the fifteenth century, Shkodër and Drisht developed into centers of Catholic humanist culture, which by 1480 had been destroyed by the Ottoman conquest. Most Drivastines were slaughtered in 1478, while the famous humanist, Marinus Barletius from Shkodër, wrote his biography of the Albanian hero Skanderbeg in his Venetian exile. The Drisht native Paul Angelus, Catholic archbishop of Durrës, one of the

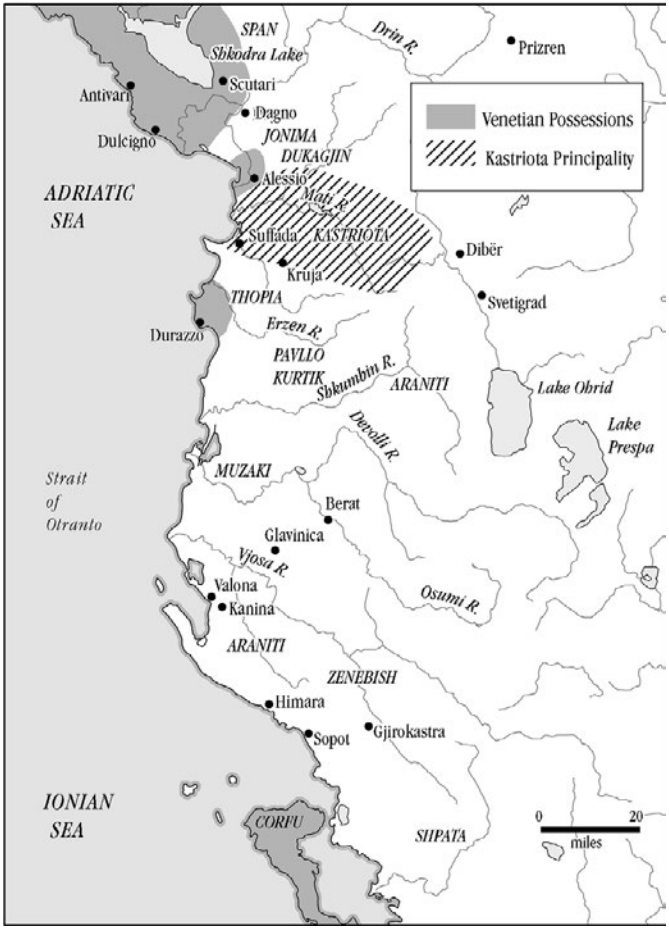
staunchest supporters of Skanderbeg, convoked a provincial synod in 1462 that allowed baptism to be performed in the vernacular in case of a war emergency. And so originated an Albanian baptism formula, the first recorded full sentence in Albanian.

A Fragmented Post-Byzantine Political World

When Serbian tsar Stefan Dušan died in 1355, his short nine-year empire quickly dissolved into a multitude of regional lordships. In this context, numerous local and regional noble families took over power in the southwestern Balkans. Lords of Albanian, Slav, Greek and Italian origin merged into a kinship network that was truly multiethnic and encompassed the southwestern and central Balkans; it was held together by the common Orthodox faith and a common allegiance to the Byzantine commonwealth, the recognition of the Byzantine Emperor as symbolic source of legitimacy and of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as the supreme institution of the Orthodox ecclesiastical world. Parallel to this common Orthodox frame of identity, contemporaries were aware of ethnic difference and ethnic mixture. The late fourteenth-century Chronicle of Ioannina/Alb. Janina/Tr. Yanya, a prose history of Ioannina, describes a man named Bongois as *Servalvanitovulgarovlachos*, or a man of Serbian, Albanian, Bulgarian and Aromanian (Vlach) origin, which thus points to the bewildering ethnic and linguistic complexity of the region. Most noble families used chanceries that issued documents in Greek, Slavonic and Latin, but not in Albanian, however, which remained exclusively a spoken language.

Among the more notable families that emerged in the 1370s was the Balsha or Balšić family with a power base in central and northern Albania. Balsha II was one of the few Balkan lords who dared to oppose the Ottomans in a pitched battle. He fell in 1385, and his death opened the way to the Adriatic coast for the Ottomans. His brother George II Stracimirović, on the other hand, facilitated the Ottoman attack on Bosnia, which eventually led to the famous battle of Kosovo on June 28, 1389. George II had called for Ottoman support in his feud with the Bosnian King Tvrtko I, who had defeated an Ottoman contingent in 1388. This stirred the wrath of Sultan Murad I, who marched against Bosnia and its Serbian allies in 1389. George II was also a major actor in bringing Venice into Albanian affairs. Following the battle of Kosovo, the Ottomans increased pressure on the Albanian lords on the Adriatic coast who implored Venice to help secure their lordships. In 1392, Venice took control of Durrës, which had been offered by its ruler George Thopia. Thopia belonged to an old regional dynasty in central Albania; his father, Charles, had assumed the pompous title of a Duke of Durrës. Further to the south in Epirus, the leading Albanian families who had migrated there, in particular the Spata and the Zenebish, challenged the regional political elites, mostly a mixture of Byzantine, Serbian and Italian families. The two major towns of Ioannina and Arta were at stake. As in the north, regional lords called in the Ottomans for support, which increasingly destabilized the area. In order to secure his position, Yakub Spata converted to Islam, thereby setting the precedent for many other regional lords who hoped to save their

possessions during times of Ottoman expansion. In the early fifteenth century, such a step was still not a guarantee of political survival: in 1416, Spata was executed by his contemporary Carlo I Tocco, who belonged to a dynasty which originated in southern Italy.



Map 2.3 Albania in the early fifteenth century

A Century and a Half of Ottoman Attacks

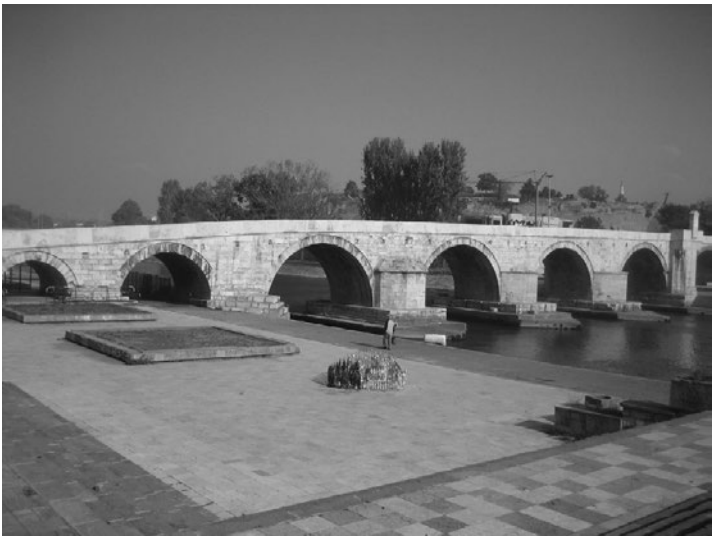
The Ottoman conquest marks a deep division in Albanian history. The conquest did not, however, result from a single military assault that led to defeat and immediate submission. Rather, the conquest was a protracted process that began in the 1380s, lasted for more than 120 years and came to an end only ca. 1500. It was also not a simple case of Asian invaders and regional resistance. Actors and agencies were much more complex and usually interwoven. It is important to note that in the first century of the conquest, regional lords were faced mostly with Ottoman marcher lord dynasties rather than with the sultans themselves. Several of these marcher lords such as Evrenos and his dynasty, who were likely descendants of a Catalan mercenary in Byzantine service, or Köse Mihal and his Mihaloğlu family, Orthodox Greeks from Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor, were of Christian origin, and contacts between them and Christian lords were eased by shared languages (Greek, Slavic) and a shared mentality.

In the Albanian case, the conversion to Islam of Albanian noblemen from almost all the important families, including the Muzaki, Zenebish, Dukagjin, Kastriota and the Araniti, turned the conquest into a conflict between regional actors. The early Ottoman power system, until ca. 1450, was polycentric, and in several phases (1366–1377 and 1402–1413), the marcher lords acted virtually independently of the sultan. Late fifteenth-century Ottoman court chronicles attempted to downplay the relative weakness of early sultans and the decisive role played by the marcher lords in the early phase of conquest. But it was the marcher lords who established Ottoman rule in the Balkans. They commanded

substantial armed forces, but in the eyes of the Christian lords they seemed less dangerous and more controllable than the sultans. That is why Christian lords everywhere in the Balkans so often called in Ottoman support in their internal feuds. Ottoman support did not mean an intervention of the sultan himself, but of marcher lords and their regional followers. In most cases, the conquest started with marcher lords participating in regional strife. Contemporaries were aware of the destabilizing effect of this practice. The anonymous chronicle of the Tocco family that ruled in Epirus in the first half of the fifteenth century complained: "The Turks love division between Christians."

The marcher lords were the spearhead of the Ottoman expansion, and in 1385 they reached the Adriatic Sea. In 1392, Pasha Yığıt conquered Skopje and created a marcher lordship that launched attacks against Serbia, Bosnia and Albania.

In Thessaly, Turahan and his descendants formed a second marcher lordship that expanded westward to Epirus and southward to Morea. Both marcher lord dynasties installed their followers in frontier castles, and these captains undertook constant raids into Christian territories. Borders remained fluid and there were actually two major spaces: land under full Ottoman control, that is, control by the marcher lords, and territories exposed to their raids. It usually took decades before full sultanic rule was established. In the meantime, the marcher lords depleted Christian territories of men and livestock. The slave trade was a major incentive for Ottoman raids. As it filled the Ottoman slave market, it weakened the demographic base and the capacity of Balkan Christian societies to resist.



2.1 15c AD Ottoman bridge, Skopje

By ca. 1400, there was no regional force that could stop the Ottoman raiders. The regional princes in Byzantium, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Wallachia, in general the whole of the post-Byzantine Aegean world, were deeply and bitterly divided. In the Adriatic, the Kingdom of Naples suffered from internal instability. Venice, on the other hand, used this regional instability to expand its systems of port towns in the eastern Adriatic. By 1358 it had been pushed out of Dalmatia by the Kingdom of Hungary. By taking possession of Albanian coastal towns or fortresses close to the sea, including Durrës in 1392, Lezhë in 1393 and Shkodër in 1396, always at the invitation of local rulers, Venice reestablished naval control in the southern Adriatic and prepared the ground for the reconquest of Dalmatia, which it completed in 1420. Venice had no interest in the hinterland; it pursued a

maritime strategy aiming at securing sea routes and the infrastructure of Venetian Levant trade. It did not pursue a strategy of conquest; the integration of Albanian towns was a response to concrete challenges, principally the immediate danger of Ottoman conquest. Once in power, Venice tried to cooperate with local urban and rural elites and to integrate them into the Venetian economic and administrative system, which by 1420 encompassed the entire area between Lezhë in the south and Kotor in the north, while Durrës in central Albania constituted an isolated outpost, surrounded by malarial marshlands. Venetian Albania emerged, not as an overseas colony but as a community of interests.

Venetian interests overlapped with those of regional urban elites. Both belonged to a common legal and constitutional culture. They shared the same institutions, including urban communities with their citizenship and councils as representative bodies, and statutes of codified local urban law. Venetian served as a lingua franca in Levant trade, and northern Albania was predominantly Catholic. But Venetian rule in northern Albania was repeatedly challenged, by local noblemen such as the Balsha, who hoped to reclaim their former territories, by the Serbian despot (prince) Stefan Lazarević (c. 1377–1427), who aimed at opening a window to the Adriatic sea, by the Duke of Hercegovina, Stefan Vukčić (1404–1466), by George Kastriota Skanderbeg (1405–1468), who dreamed of broadening the powerbase of his uprising against the Ottomans, and by the Dukagjin dynasty, who controlled the mountains of central Albania. These challenges to Venice underline the strategic and economic importance of the north Albanian lowlands

from which grain, timber and wine were transported to Venice, while caravans carried salt to the cattle breeders of those parts of the central Balkans that did not possess salt mines.

Whenever possible, Venice tried to avoid direct confrontation with the Ottomans. Nevertheless, on several occasions Albania became a theater of war between the leading continental and the most important maritime powers in the Balkans. From 1423 to 1430 and between 1463 and 1479, the Ottomans and the Venetians and their respective local and regional allies fought over the control of the southern Adriatic and the Straits of Otranto.

Direct Ottoman rule was established rather early in the southwestern Balkans under Sultan Bayezid I (c.1360–1403), and regions in present-day southern Albania (Përmet, Korçë) were administrated directly by the sultan. In 1417/18, the Ottomans created the *Sancak-i Arvanid*, a major territorial unit centered in Gjirokastër, stretching from the river Mati in central Albania down to the mountains opposite Corfu. The *sancak* (literally, banner) was under the control of the marcher dynasty of Evrenos. In this *sancak*, the first Ottoman *tahrir defter* or tax register, which is still preserved, was drafted in 1431/32. This meant that the Ottomans had implemented the *timar* system in which the state assigned taxes from one or several villages to armed cavalry (*sipahis*), who in return served in the Ottoman army, or more precisely in the units of a marcher lord.

By 1430, the historical region of Albania had been firmly divided between a sphere under direct or indirect rule of Venice in the north and direct Ottoman rule in the south. But it was precisely the introduction of a direct

sultanic administration, including tax collection and the Ottoman legal system, that provoked the first of many uprisings which confronted the Ottomans until their eventual removal from Albania in 1912. Local and regional Albanian elites accepted a vague suzerainty of kings, emperors and sultans as long as the latter did not interfere in local affairs and force local communities under their direct control. Only following several attempts were the marcher lords of Skopje and Thessaly successful in subduing rebels led by Araniti Komino and Ivan Kastriota in central Albania, and Depe Zenebish in southern Albania (1436). Ivan Kastriota was killed by the sultan in 1437.

Albania, however, had not been pacified. While the first major uprising remained a regional phenomenon, which had not received support from the outside, this situation changed a few years later. In 1439, the union between the Roman and the Orthodox church was proclaimed in Florence, and Pope Eugenius IV immediately engaged in the organization of a crusade aimed at driving the Ottomans out of Europe. A major alliance was formed between enemies and rivals of the Ottomans in Europe and in Anatolia. Included were Hungary and Poland, at that time under the same dynasty, Burgundy, and Venice. In the Balkans, the dethroned Serbian despot George Branković and Ottoman officers of Christian background joined in, as did the Anatolian principality of Karaman. Together the alliance hoped to encircle the Ottomans and weaken them from within.

Among the Ottoman officers, Iskender, son of Ivan Kastriota, played a major role. Born George Kastriota, he was brought up in the Orthodox environment of Dibër

(Slavic Debar), a mountain area near the Black Drin, currently the border area between Albania and North Macedonia, which was then inhabited by Albanians, Slavs and Vlachs (Aromanians). George's father Ivan had married a Serbian noblewoman, likely from the Branković dynasty, which ruled in Kosovo and later in the Serbian despotate (principality). Ivan was devoutly Orthodox, having donated a tower in the Serbian monastery Hilandar on Mount Athos in Greece, which, as a result, became known as the Albanian tower. His son Reposh died at Hilandar as an Orthodox monk. Following Bayezid I's defeat by the Mongols in 1402, Ottoman rule in the Balkans came under strain, allowing Ivan to gain control over a territory that stretched from the Black Drin to the Adriatic Sea. As with other noblemen, access to the sea was highly coveted since it enabled him to benefit from trade with Dubrovnik and Venice. Because of his resistance against the marcher lords, he was compelled to send his son George as a hostage to the Ottoman court, a technique often employed by the Ottomans in an attempt to control unruly locals. Likely under the influence of dervishes, George converted to Islam and was eventually appointed governor of the central Albanian fortress of Krujë. Because of personal conflicts with Ottoman officers, he was soon removed from Albania.

He displayed extraordinary talents as a warrior and as a military leader participating in numerous Ottoman campaigns in Serbia, Wallachia and Transylvania. His exploits earned him the surname Iskenderbey (or Skanderbeg), lord Alexander, a reference to Alexander the Great that was intended as a symbol of military prowess. But because of his father's murder, Skanderbeg turned on the



2.2 Skanderbeg, 1405 1468

Ottomans. In 1454, he sent envoys to Rome who explained to the pope that Skanderbeg wanted to exact revenge and had already become involved in the murder of an Ottoman prince.

When a Hungarian crusader army under John Hunyadi (1407–1456) advanced deep into the central Balkans in late 1443, Ottoman rule broke down in many areas where Christian lords took up arms, including in Morea (Peloponnese), Albania and Serbia. Skanderbeg secured the support of some Albanian noblemen and his father's followers and took Krujë by surprise.

In 1444, however, the crusaders were defeated at Varna, and the Christian uprisings collapsed, except that of

Skanderbeg. He waged a guerrilla war against the Ottomans, in this case again a combination of local and regional forces, until 1468. Skanderbeg's principal enemies were the marcher lords, Albanian noblemen who had converted to Islam, and former followers of his father who, for personal reasons, had joined the Ottoman camp. One of his most tenacious adversaries, Balaban, was a disgruntled farmer who had been in Ivan Kastriota's service. Skanderbeg's position was fragile from the beginning. He faced opposition from Albanian noble families who looked down on the Kastriota as mere newcomers in the world of Balkan aristocracy. The Dukagjin family, which controlled the mountains of central Albania, resisted his attempts to broaden his power base by integrating the military and economic resources of regional lords. When the sultan marched against Krujë in 1450, the loose coalition of Albanian lords Skanderbeg had assembled broke apart. Skanderbeg's position was further complicated by the second battle of Kosovo in November 1448. In a last attempt to confront the Ottomans, John Hunyadi penetrated deep into the central Balkans but was utterly defeated. Although it is unclear if he intended to join forces with Skanderbeg in any case, no other Christian army would appear on the plains of Kosovo until 1689. Hunyadi's defeat allowed the Ottomans to increase their pressure on Skanderbeg whose political isolation increased as well. Having barely survived the siege of Krujë, in 1451 Skanderbeg accepted the suzerainty of the King of Naples, Alfons V of Aragon, who like so many Neapolitan kings before him dreamed of expanding his rule in the Balkans. In 1455, Skanderbeg and a Neapolitan expeditionary corps were routed at the

gates of Berat in south-central Albania. Although Skanderbeg received substantial aid from Naples, his vassalage dragged him into the secular conflict between Venice and Naples in the southern Adriatic. In 1448, Skanderbeg failed to take control of Venetian northern Albania, where Albanian townspeople pushed his mountain warriors back. In the 1450s and 1460s, Skanderbeg increasingly suffered from the proxy war of the Italian powers on Albanian soil. In the late 1450s, Skanderbeg held control of the mountain areas of Mati and Dibër. During periods of Ottoman attack, this area was reduced to the barely accessible highlands. In the fall and winter, when the Ottomans retreated, his realm encompassed parts of the lowlands. Skanderbeg relied on approximately 2,000 warriors, predominantly herdsmen and petty noblemen. Most Albanian noblemen had defected, and the coastal lowlands under Ottoman and Venetian control had never joined his uprising. He had, however, internationalized his rebellion and secured support from Naples and the pope while the merchant Republic of Dubrovnik provided him with banking services, arms and engineers.

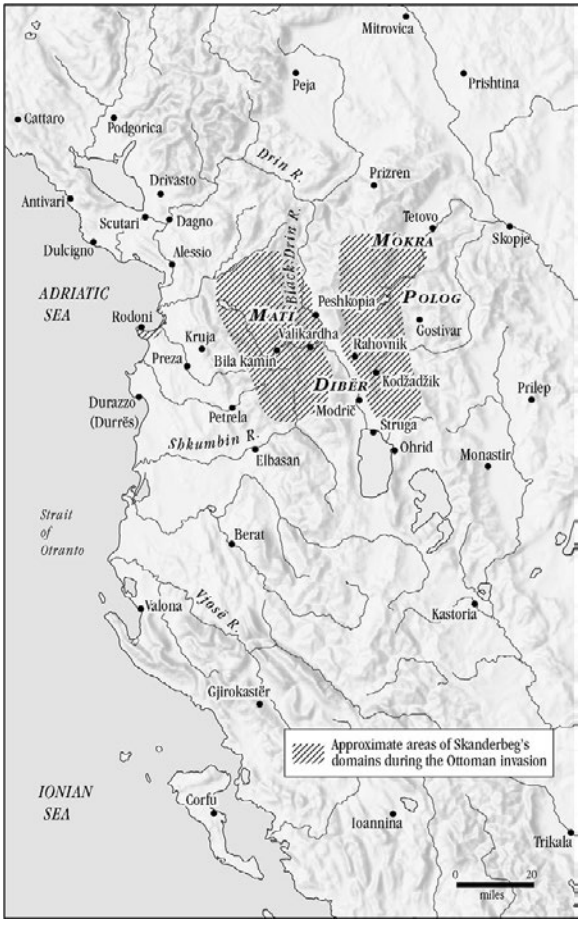
In Albania, the regional Catholic church became his most loyal supporter, and in 1464, Pope Pius II prepared a crusade under Skanderbeg who would be crowned king of Albania.

But the pope died, the crusade did not materialize and Skanderbeg was forced to face the onslaught of Sultan Mehmed II alone. In 1466 and 1467, Ottoman armies devastated the rebellious mountain areas, penetrating deep into remote and almost inaccessible regions, killing men and livestock and destroying the demographic and



2.3 Skanderbeg's fortress of Rodoni, 15c AD

economic base of the uprising. Skanderbeg died in 1468, by which point his resistance had virtually collapsed in the havoc the Ottomans wrought on his followers. In Mati and Dibër, between two-thirds and three-quarters of the population was killed or abducted into slavery. Despite this catastrophe, Skanderbeg is still remembered as the ideal warrior and hero of Christianity against Islam. He was an important military leader with a clear political vision – the establishment of an Albanian principality and eventually a kingdom in the southwestern Balkans, as an anti-Ottoman outpost of Catholic Europe. His leadership and his personal courage are attested to by contemporaries, and in the face of military defeat he was often the proverbial last man to leave the battlefield. He remains the principal Albanian national hero, and his statues, busts and likeness can be found in every city, town and village in



Map 2.4 Skanderbeg's domains

contemporary Albania and Kosovo, as well as in most ethnic Albanian homes.

The Ottoman conquest was completed eleven years after Skanderbeg's death. In 1479, Venice, which fought its war independently of Skanderbeg, was forced to capitulate and cede Shkodër to the Ottomans. This town

and its Rosafa fortress had become famous throughout Europe because of its resistance against two Ottoman sieges in 1474 and 1478. The former was celebrated by Marinus Barletius in a treatise written in elegant humanist Latin. Following the defeat of Venice, the Shkodrans were given the option of emigration to Venice or staying and converting to Islam. They unanimously chose the former. Venice established a refugee office for widows or orphans who were provided with pensions, dowries and employment in the Venetian fleet. Many Albanians settled in Venetian northern Italy and continued their war against the Ottomans in special units of light cavalry, the so-called *stradioti*. By the end of the fifteenth century, central and northern Albania had been devastated by decades of Ottoman raids and major sultanic campaigns. Its flourishing Catholic culture had lost its urban base and retreated into the mountains. Thousands of lowlanders sought shelter in the highlands, and a pastoral economy and a new tribal system emerged. The Ottoman conquest profoundly affected people in areas under the control of Skanderbeg and Venice, while the south was spared the destruction. This structural division between north and south under Ottoman rule would have a lasting impact in the centuries to come.

3

The Albanians under Ottoman Rule: The Classic Period of *Arnavutluk*, 1500–1800

Ottomanization

The Ottoman conquest and subsequent Ottoman rule profoundly changed Albanian society. Ottomanization and the Islamization of the majority of Albanians are key elements of this process, which stretched over several centuries. A history of Ottoman Albania will help us understand why the Albanians, who had offered the Ottomans determined resistance, became the most Islamized people in the Balkans. Indeed, particularly from the mid-seventeenth century on, a majority of Albanians converted to Sunni Islam, and Albanians can be considered, along with Muslim Bosnians, the pillar of Ottoman rule in the imperial peripheries on the Adriatic and in central Europe. Albanian and Bosnian Muslims kept the Christian majority population in the Ottoman Balkans in check and filled the ranks of those Ottoman armies that for centuries attempted to conquer east central Europe. Following the failed second Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 when Habsburg troops counterattacked on the Pannonian plain and eventually stormed the castle of Buda (contemporary Budapest) in 1688, they were faced with Muslim defenders who were primarily Albanian. Albanian Muslims rose to the highest ranks in the army and the administration of the Ottoman empire,



3.1 18c AD Ottoman bridge Ura e Mesit

dozens of Muslim Albanians were appointed as Grand Viziers (or prime ministers) and Albanians manned Ottoman garrisons from central Europe to the Ottoman province of Yemen. For many Balkan Christians, Muslim Albanians, or *Arnavud* in Ottoman Turkish, became a synonym for Ottoman religious segregation, and structural discrimination against Christians in the Ottoman empire.

The question of why so many Albanians converted to Islam and the role played by this predominantly Sunni Muslim nation in Europe has been a central question of identity debate in modern Albania since the end of the nineteenth century. In communist Albania and communist Yugoslavia, most research was tainted by ideological prejudices, the roots of which went back to the Albanian national movement in the nineteenth century. Nationalist activists attempted to legitimize the existence of a predominantly Muslim nation in Europe by constructing a

specific Albanian version of a European Islam. The principal elements of this narrative included the idea of a superficial Islamization, or the notion that Albanians only adopted the outer forms of Islam. This narrative suggests that most Albanians became followers of dervish orders whose mystical practices – according to this narrative – differed essentially from Sunni Islam, the dominant religion of the Ottoman empire. The argument includes the narrative of a general religious indifference on the part of Albanians who put national loyalty over religious affiliation, and the insistence that many Muslim Albanians were so-called Crypto-Christians, or people who embraced Islam because of fiscal and government pressure, behaved as Muslims in public spaces and were treated as such by government officials but continued to be Christians in the privacy of family life. According to this scenario, Albanians are not true Muslims, their Islam is particular and European and must therefore to be clearly distinguished from a barbarian, Asian, Turkish Sunni Islam.

While this theory has been developed since the end of the nineteenth century by Albanian nationalist activists, many of whom were followers of the dervish order of Bektashi or Christians, a coherent Sunni counternarrative was not articulated until 1975 by Hasan Kaleshi. Kaleshi, a scholar from Yugoslav Kosovo, argued that the Ottoman conquest and ensuing Islamization did not wreak havoc on the Albanians, but on the contrary saved them from imminent Slavization or Hellenization by the Orthodox churches of Peć, Ohrid and Constantinople. According to Kaleshi, conversion of the majority to Sunni Islam and integration into the Ottoman imperial

system guaranteed the survival of the Albanians as a distinct ethnic group. In his view, Sunni Albanians formed not only the numerical majority, but the true core of the Albanian nation. Kaleshi's thesis was at the time of its publication in striking contrast to the policy of communist Albania where in 1967 all religions were declared illegal and then violently suppressed by the government. For communists in Albania, Sunni Islam was the embodiment of Oriental backwardness, and Kaleshi's thesis a blatant challenge to the ideology of Albanianism, i.e. the idea that Albanians were held together by a common language and a common past and that nothing could endanger national unity more than religious diversity.

As we will see, following the collapse of communism in 1991, many Albanians, often out of curiosity, showed a keen interest in religion, and representatives of Islamic countries from Turkey to Saudi Arabia, along with numerous Christian churches, initiated intensive missionary programs. In this context, a new generation of Sunni Muslims emerged, some of them trained or supported by Islamic countries, who challenged the consensus of Albanianism, criticized the cultural and political Westernization of Albania and demanded a cultural reorientation back to Islam and the *Umma*, the Sunni Islamic world. Today, this orientation is outspoken and visible, and a Turkophile faction supports the Islamist government of Recep Tayyib Erdoğan and its Neo-Ottomanist foreign policy. However, most Albanians with a Sunni background still emphasize Albania's European roots and reject the idea of a resurrected Ottoman sphere in the Balkans.

It is against this highly complex and ideologically loaded background that the history of Ottoman Albania

must be told. Islamization can only be understood on the basis of a broader analysis of state institutions, property rights, justice and the complicated interplay between the lowlands and the highlands. After the end of widespread Christian resistance in around 1480, the empire organized *Arnavutluk* (as regions of the Ottoman empire predominantly inhabited by Albanians will be called in this and the following chapter) and adjacent areas with a significant Albanian population into several provinces: the *sancaks* of Shkodër in the northwest, Dukagjin (the mountain area of central Albania), Prizren (mostly western Kosovo), Vushtrri/Srb. Vučitrn (Kosovo), Elbasan (central Albania), Skopje (central Macedonia), Vlorë (southern Albania), Ioannina (Epirus) and Bitola (southwestern Macedonia). Over time, the territorial configuration of Ottoman administration was changed many times, and *Arnavutluk* gradually stabilized under Ottoman rule.

Islam was the essential marker of belonging to the ruling elite of the Ottoman empire. The empire categorized its subjects according to the time-honored tradition of Islamic states that divided its people into Muslims and people belonging to other "book-religions," such as Christians and Jews. This implied a structural discrimination against the latter in justice, society and daily life. Discrimination was visible and palpable; although there were areas of cohabitation, the power relationship remained unequal. Christians depended on good-will and on personal relationships with Ottoman officials, often established through bribery. But there was never a legal guarantee for favors obtained by Christians, especially if they contravened Islamic religious law. The arbitrariness of Muslim rule was the general experience of

Ottoman Christians until the fall of the empire in 1923. One need only recall that in 1915/16 the Ottoman empire carried out a planned genocide of its Christian (Armenian, Greek and Assyrian) population in Anatolia, resulting in approximately 1.5 million victims.

Unlike in the eastern Balkans, principally Thrace and Bulgaria, which witnessed mass immigration of sedentary and seminomadic Muslim Turks from Anatolia, Ottoman Albania was predominantly ruled by ethnic Albanians for more than four centuries. The Ottoman ruling class of *Arnavutluk* was composed of pre-conquest regional and local elites and social newcomers who, after conversion to Islam, rose in rank because of their administrative and military skills. Several regional strongmen and their dynasties survived the conquest because of their rapid Islamization, and their example was quickly emulated by local leaders who integrated into the *timar* system. The army and the administration therefore constituted important milieus for conversions and of converts. For those Albanians who took advantage of this path, conversion was less a religious act than a demonstration of political allegiance and loyalty to the ruling dynasty. In the fifteenth century, a minority of *timar*-holders were still Christian. Following the Ottoman conquest of Syria and Egypt in 1517, the empire increasingly adopted a Sunni Muslim political identity that was further engrained by the violent confrontation with Shiite Iran at the same time. This had an impact on *timar*-holders in the Balkans who were transformed into a group of Muslim elites. Around 1500 Muslim regional marcher dynasties lost their grip on their ancestral lands and were deployed in distant provinces of the empire.

The Ottoman state structure was designed to satisfy the needs of an ever-expanding empire and its military apparatus. This military system included the janissaries, an elite infantry unit of approximately 8,000 men, which proved to be a decisive instrument during and following the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. Created in the second half of the fourteenth century by an initial recruit of Christian war captives and subsequently through what was called the *devşirme* system, the janissaries were composed of Christian boys who had been forcibly recruited, converted to Islam and then trained in special premises. These Islamized Christians played an essential role in successful Ottoman warfare against Christian states. From the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, this elite unit was garrisoned in major towns in the Balkans, and janissaries intermarried with local economic elites, bazaar traders and artisans. Because of their privileges and social prestige, service in the janissary corps became so attractive that Balkan Muslims even looked to enroll their sons in this unit.

The second pillar of the military system consisted of *timar*-holders who served as armed cavalry. Large sections of the local population, among them many Christians, benefited from tax exemption in exchange for service in auxiliary units, such as local security forces (*voynuk*, *martolos*), or as guardsmen of passes (*derbendci*). Workers in mines, rice fields or salt pans were equally privileged. Along with Muslim clergymen (*ulema*), these military and paramilitary units formed the group of *askeri* (soldiers) while all others, Christians and Muslims, who stood outside the military apparatus belonged to the *reaya* (literally flock, i.e. taxpayers). Muslims and Christians

were thus to be found in both categories, the privileged *askeri* and *reaya*. In principle, Muslim and Christian *reaya* paid the same taxes, but Christians were further obliged to pay a special capitation (*cizye*) tax and a land-tax of the Christians, called *ispence*, which was significantly higher than that paid by the Muslims. As the group closest to imperial power, the *askeri*, particularly *timar*-holders, often made up the nucleus of local and regional converts.

In theory, the sultan was the sole landowner throughout his empire. While large estates (*has*) paid direct taxes to the sultan, important tracts of land were distributed to high-level imperial dignitaries as so-called *zeamet* in exchange for military service. By the early sixteenth century, the regional marcher lords had disappeared and been replaced by a tighter form of dependency on the sultan. The sultan reserved for himself customs from Adriatic ports, including Vlorë, Durrës, Lezhë and Shkodër, and taxes on salt and cattle. *Timar*-holders did not juridically own land but only enjoyed the income from households allotted to them by the sultan. Although *timar* sinecures could not be legally inherited, in many cases they were handed down to the descendants of *timariots*. And their actual influence as representatives of the sultanic system in the villages gave them considerable informal power.

Legal Pluralism

The Ottoman system of justice was characterized by legal pluralism: society was organized (and divided) along religious lines. Orthodox, Armenians and Jews enjoyed autonomy in civil rights cases as long as no Muslim was involved in the trial. These communities were defined by



MAP 3.1 Southeastern Europe in 1570

religious affiliation and were therefore administrated by their respective clergy. The Orthodox were thus administered by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Court cases involving Muslims were settled on the basis of Islamic religious law (*şeriat*) and sultanic law (*kanun*). Mixed cases involving Muslims and Christians were brought before a

Muslim judge (*kadı*). Islamic religious law structurally discriminated against Christians, and in the Ottoman Balkans not a few Christians converted to Islam in order to improve their legal position vis-à-vis Muslim litigants.

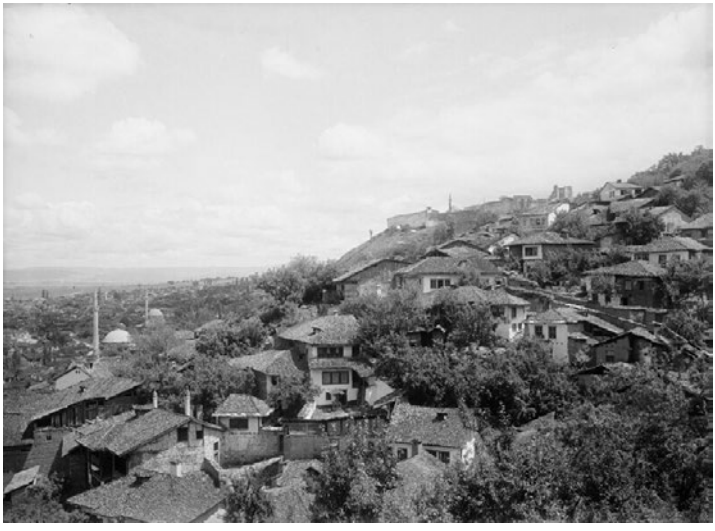
Apart from written law, oral legal traditions (*örf*) played a significant role, particularly in remote mountain areas where imperial authorities were not permanently represented. This was true for the extended mountain zone that constitutes the backbone of *Arnavutluk*. Several regional systems of oral law emerged; they were handed down from generation to generation, and it was only beginning in the late nineteenth century that they were codified, mostly by Catholic clergymen and scholars. The best-known tradition is related to Leka Dukagjin (d. 1481), a contemporary and fierce rival of Skanderbeg. The *Kanun* (not to be confused with the imperial written law) of Leka Dukagjin prevailed in the mountains of north central Albania, while in central Albania Skanderbeg's *Kanun* was in use; highlanders of the south Albanian highlands followed the *Kanun* of Labëria (a southern Albanian region). Oral law regulated legal life in a stateless, but hardly lawless, and isolated mountain society. Often inaccurately reduced to the concept of blood feud and revenge, it offered orientation and rules that helped to avoid or settle conflicts in the absence of state justice. Personal honor and its defense constituted the basis of oral law that identified various transgressions against this code: disarming, beating or insulting a man, accusing someone of a lie, insulting or abducting his wife and disrespect for or abuse of hospitality all resulted in sanctions.

According to the *Kanun* of Leka, all adult male relatives of a perpetrator were held liable for his misdeeds,

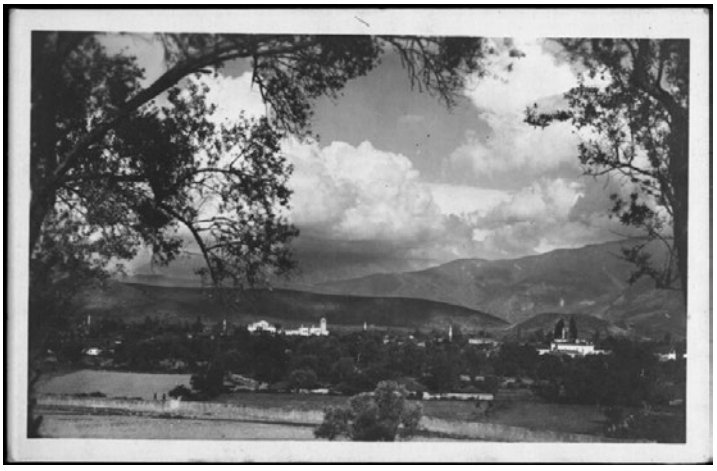
while women and children could under no circumstances be involved in blood revenge. The *Kanun* also outlined the methods for the regulation of blood revenge by the mediation of priests or respected men; generally, conflicts were settled by imposing a fine. Only in very rare cases was severe punishment – the death penalty or the destruction of houses – applied. The *Kanun* facilitated mobility in the mountains, since it obliged hosts to guarantee the safety of travelers to whom they had offered and had to offer shelter. The concept of *mik* (friend, from Latin *amicus*) created bonds that were not based on kinship ties. Oral law, despite the harshness of some measures, was thus not an indication of chaos and arbitrariness, but quite the opposite – it brought order where the empire failed.

This legal pluralism of state and common law did not mean a clear-cut division between different legal systems and concepts. They sometimes overlapped. The spatial demarcation between written and oral law depended on the strength of the imperial authorities. It would be erroneous to assume that state institutions strengthened their position vis-à-vis the highlanders over time. At the beginning of the twentieth century, customary law was still prominent, and it even expanded into the lowlands where the modernizing Ottoman empire was faced with Albanian calls for a general application of the oral *Kanun*, which at that point was interpreted as an expression of Albanian national legal thinking and a key element of Albanian national identity. Oral law thus descended into the plains. The full triumph of oral law over the written imperial law took place, almost paradoxically, at the end of Ottoman rule in *Arnavutluk*.

This legal pluralism points to another basic feature of Ottoman rule in the southwestern Balkans, the distinction between the highlands and the lowlands. Imperial rule was concentrated along major communication lines, and on plains and in valleys. The Ottomans controlled *Arnavutluk* from a series of major fortresses and urban centers. In northern Albania, Shkodër, where the Catholic town population had been exchanged for Muslim settlers following the mass migration of 1479, continued to control lowland society and the economy. A major caravan route passing through Shkodër linked the Adriatic with Kosovo and its imperial hub at Prizren. In fourteenth-century Serbian-ruled Kosovo, Prizren had already played an important role in politics and religion, and it was in Prizren that Serbian tsar Stefan Dušan (d. 1355) was buried.



3.2 Ottoman Prizren



3.3 Ottoman Elbasan

The Shkodër–Prizren route passed through the north Albanian highlands, a uniquely important and particularly vulnerable line of communication. Further south, the Via Egnatia maintained its importance; security was considerably enhanced by the fortifications at Elbasan. Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446 and 1451–1481) constructed this imposing fortress town in a matter of weeks in 1466 and it quickly developed into the key imperial military and urban stronghold in central *Arnavutluk*.

Ohrid, on the shores of Lake Ohrid, and Bitola, on the plains of Pelagonia, secured Ottoman rule along the Via Egnatia. In the Vardar valley, where Albanian and South Slavic elements overlapped, Skopje (or *Üsküb* in Ottoman Turkish) had been a major military and administrative center since its conquest in 1392. In the south of *Arnavutluk* (ancient Epirus), Vlorë and Ioannina constituted pillars of the imperial system.

Imperial Elites

These major towns served as imperial hubs, not only in terms of administrative and military control, but also in terms of imperial culture: this meant Islam and, at least partially, the Ottoman language. While Bitola, Skopje and Prizren were cities that came under the influence of Ottoman court culture, urban centers west of the mountain chain that divided *Arnavutluk* were much less affected by this dimension of the imperial system, and the knowledge of Turkish among Muslims was far more limited. This distinction coincided, in a long-term perspective, with different degrees of Sunni Islamization of Albanians. In the eighteenth century, Islamization was almost complete in the east, while in the Adriatic region of *Arnavutluk*, particularly in areas with a relatively dense urban network as around Shkodër and in southern Albania, Christianity, Catholic and Orthodox, remained visible and, especially in the case of the Orthodox, influential in an urban surrounding. However, these towns, too, were gradually transformed into typical centers of Ottoman imperial culture. Ottoman towns were divided into small quarters or larger neighborhoods (*mahalle*) usually grouped around a church, a mosque or a synagogue. Religious division was thus an integral part of the urban scene. With the exception of the market, a public sphere where people from different religions could meet was lacking, and much of social life took place behind the walls that usually surrounded houses.

Religious foundations (*vakıf*) were a driving force behind Ottoman urbanization. Most important dignitaries and regional strongmen donated significant portions of their wealth to these foundations whose property could



3.4 Ottoman cemetery at Kavaja

be neither taxed nor confiscated and was thus out of reach of a voracious imperial fiscal system. Usually, donors became managers of their own foundations and thereby secured the economic position of their descendants. At the same time, Islamic traditions required foundations to offer charity and sponsor religious education. As a result, *vakıf* founders and managers built not only mosques, *medreses* and *mektebs* (Islamic religious schools), public bathhouses (*hamams*), covered market halls (*bedesten*), lodges (*hans*) and soup kitchens (*imaret*), but also public structures such as bridges or fountains.

Ranking imperial dignitaries from *Arnavutluk* demonstrated to their fellow countrymen how successfully they had served the empire. Indeed, in the sixteenth century a new type of imperial servant had replaced the marcher lord dynasties, men who owed everything to the sultan and were ready to serve in the far east and southeast of the

empire, in the Caucasus or in Egypt. An example is the case of Koca Sinan Pasha, born in the highland of Luma (near the modern border of Albania and Kosovo), an area known for its warriors and brigands. Koca Sinan conquered Georgia in 1580 and then commanded Ottoman troops there. He built a mosque in Cairo but did not forget his homeland in *Arnavutluk*. He transformed Kaçanik, a large village at a strategically extremely important mountain pass linking Kosovo to Skopje, into a small *vakıf* empire with a mosque, a soup kitchen, a school and two lodges. He employed a vast entourage of administrators, accountants, teachers, imams, muezzins and bakers. Along with dignitaries who originated in *Arnavutluk*, there were other high-level officials from other parts of the Balkans who created their foundations in the western part of the empire. Kukli bey (d. 1555), Ottoman governor of Shkodër and Prizren, invested his war booty in several endowments in an area that covered the northern part of *Arnavutluk* between Shkodër and Tetovo (in Ottoman Turkish *Kalkandelen*) and especially in Prizren where he built three *karavansarays* and a mosque.

In the seventeenth century, a new type of strongman emerged – truly empire-wide careerists were now being replaced by men whose power was rooted in regional and local areas. This resulted from a deep crisis in the Ottoman fiscal system that, under the strain of constant warfare against Iran, the Habsburg empire and Venice, was forced to decentralize into a form of tax farming. Tax farmers soon became de facto rulers of those areas where they collected taxes since they benefited from different forms of dependency that emerged from the outsourcing

of central state power. The new tax farmers gained control over people who could not pay their taxes, people who took credits from tax farmers and people who sought favor with tax farmers to avoid paying taxes. Tax farmers recruited these men as the armed followers they needed to control the territory whose taxes they were entitled to collect. Although private landownership continued to be prohibited and only the usufruct of land distributed by the sultan could be used, local strongmen circumvented this regulation using various strategies. They appropriated cleared land, deserted villages and summer pasturages, or they acted as middlemen between *timar*-holders and peasants. Rising fiscal pressure in the seventeenth century forced peasants to cede their hereditary right to cultivate public land to local strongmen. As so-called *ayans*, tax farmers increasingly exercised de facto state authority over large regions, and since they handed this power down to their descendants, local and regional dynasties emerged that officially recognized the sultan, but this system clearly weakened effective imperial power. In Albanian history, however, this phenomenon was quite common. Indeed, with few exceptions, imperial rule became superficial and relied on the recognition of a prestigious, but distant, imperial center by regional strongmen who jealously defended their autonomy on the ground.

Tax farmers and Ottoman-style towns were typical phenomena of seventeenth-century lowland *Arnavutluk* where ties with the imperial center in Istanbul had been gradually weakened. The imperial presence in the highlands was, at that time, mostly on a formal level. Highland society had been deeply affected by the extreme violence of the conquest. Indeed, highland patterns that are still today



3.5 Ottoman Erseka

wrongly perceived as typical for all Albanians evolved in response to the extreme shock of mass destruction, mass killings and flight from the lowlands where the warfare had been concentrated. While in the fifteenth century thousands of Albanians had fled to southern and northern Italy, many lowland farmers in northern Albania retreated to the nearby mountains, the Greater Mountain area (Malësia e Madhe). There they adapted their economy and social organization to the new ecological environment – cattle breeding instead of grain farming, formation of kinship-based groups of armed herdsmen instead of farm families, demarcation and armed defense of pastureland, instead of village-based distribution of arable land.

Highland Societies

Refugees who fled to the mountains reacted to the Ottoman conquest by establishing a tribal system.

Tribes look to an often mythical common ancestor; they are based on a patrilineal kinship system, which means that kinship is based on the male line. All males are considered to be relatives, and there is no distinction between different degrees of kinship. This system produced a large number of relatives who stood together to defend the kin group. In a stateless mountain society, only groups with a significant number of armed men whose loyalty was beyond any doubt could survive in the fierce competition over pastureland and water. Physical survival was at stake when herdsmen and their animals were denied access to these basic resources. Tribes were therefore patrilineal-kinship-based groups with a clearly defined territory. Exogamy, i.e. the obligation to marry outside of one's own kin group, was a basic rule of tribes. Brides therefore had to come from outside the tribe. To preserve exogamy as strictly as possible, men kept an oral memory of kin relations. When anthropologists interviewed tribal elders around 1900, they could retrace the complete genealogy of their tribe back to the period around 1500, i.e. when tribes emerged after the Ottoman onslaught. In northern Albania, tribes (in Albanian *fis*) shared a highland culture with tribes in neighboring Montenegro, despite religious and linguistic differences: Albanian tribes were either Catholic or Muslim and spoke Albanian, while Montenegrin tribes were Orthodox and spoke Slavic. Kinship ties, however, proved to be much more important than the identity patterns of lowlanders, such as religion. The tribe of Kuçi/Kuči, for example, was even divided into three branches, Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox, and into two languages (Albanian and Slavic), but their members kept the memory of a common ancestry.

Tribes also shared the common values of a heroic male culture in which warriors and successful cattle thieves were glorified in songs and epic tradition. It is not by chance that emblematic works of modern literature both in Montenegro and in Albania are epics that tell the stories of tribal warriors and their exploits – the Mountain Wreath (*Gorski vijenac*) by the Montenegrin Orthodox Prince-Bishop Petar Petrović Njegoš (first published in 1847 in Vienna – there was no printing press in Montenegro at that time) and the Highland Lute (*Lahuta e Malcis*, published in 1937) by the Franciscan Gjergj Fishta, both put the mountain warrior at the center of the national heroic imagination. It is no accident that both authors were clergymen. In a society of illiterate tribal herdsmen, priests were the only men with access to higher education and therefore the only ones who could transpose oral tradition into a (highly literary) written form.

Many foreign travelers and journalists, from the nineteenth century to the present day, have described Albanians as a whole as a tribal society. This is inaccurate. Most Albanians live in the lowlands and they and their forefathers never belonged to a tribe. And even those who lived and are still living in the highlands do not share the same system of kinship-based organization. The tribal system of *fis* as described above actually existed only in northern Albania. Since the Ottoman authorities were unable to conduct a census in the mountains until the very end of their rule, it was the Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities of the First World War who in 1918 first counted the number of male members of the north Albanian tribes. They distinguished between

different types: in the Greater Mountain area, around 50,000 men belonged to *fis* including the Kelmendi, Krasniqi, Shala and Shoshi. Such bigger *fis* were divided into smaller kin groups (in the case of the Kelmendi, the clans of Vukli, Boga, Nikçi and Selca). The Kelmendi controlled a tribal area of 120 square miles with 4,679 men, the Krasniqi 97 square miles with 4,803, while smaller *fis* such as the Toplana, Xhani or Kiri counted only between ca. 250 and 530 men. Clan leaders were usually called *vojvoda*. The heads of household were entitled to take part in tribal meetings (*kuvend*, from Latin *conventus*), and there was structured coordination between the different tribes that competed for space and natural resources.

In the central Albanian highlands (Mirdita, Mati and Luma), the social structure and regional organization differed considerably from that of the Greater Mountain area. People lived in mixed villages, composed of members from different tribes. Luma and Mati were overwhelmingly Muslim, while Mirdita evolved after 1750 as a Catholic tribal confederation under a captain (*kapetan*) who resided in Orosh.

Until the communist takeover in 1944/45, the office of captain was hereditary in the Gjonmarkaj family. The Mirdita confederation was divided into five *bayraks* (Ottoman-Turkish banner, i.e. a mobilization area of mountain warriors) whose members gathered at a *kuvend* (with a maximum of 2,000 participants), which decided important matters such as declarations of war and peace. Between such *kuvends*, a council of *bayraktars* and a body composed of twelve *bayraktars* and the *kapetan* governed the Mirdita. With its explicit Catholic identity, the Mirdita played a peculiar role in a predominantly Sunni



3.6 19c AD Abbey of Orosh, destroyed during the communist period and subsequently rebuilt

environment – the general diffidence of highlanders vis-à-vis lowland imperial authorities and Sunni *ayans* was coupled with a widespread mistrust by Mirditans of Sunni Muslims in general. Therefore, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Mirdita looked repeatedly to Montenegro and Serbia for support, and in 1921 Mirdita leaders declared a short-lived autonomous republic directed against the Albanian national state, which in the eyes of Catholic Mirdita highlanders was controlled by Sunni elites.

Relations between Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia and the Greater Mountain area and Mirdita were traditionally close. Over centuries, highlanders migrated to the lowlands of the central Balkans where since antiquity (proto)Albanians had settled. This migration was driven by poverty and blood feuds and usually encompassed



3.7 Women in Mirdita, 1900

smaller kin groups. When they settled in the lowland, they did not give up *fis* structures and loyalties. However, they never built large tribal areas on the plains; old structures were maintained only at the level of villages or village districts (in Albanian *lagje*). That is why more than a few Kosovo and Macedonian Albanians descend from north and central Albanian tribes, but in their new environment they adapted to lowland social organization and the much stronger presence of state authorities. There were always serious tensions between migrating Catholic highlanders and Ottoman state officials because of the highland tradition of bearing arms, which was in general forbidden to Christians. But while the empire did not attempt to enforce this ban in the highlands, it tried, in vain, to disarm them on the plains. In the mountains, carrying arms was considered to be an essential part of personal honor (but also personal security), while being disarmed meant immediate dishonor and therefore social death. The Ottoman empire preferred to employ armed Catholic highlanders in lowland Kosovo as an auxiliary

police force (so-called *Fandi*, from their land of origin, the *Fani* part of Mirdita). They proved to be particularly loyal to the empire on which they depended exclusively in an environment of an often hostile Sunni population.

A fourth type of tribal organization could once be found in southern Albania, which historically also encompasses parts of ethnically mixed (Greeks, Albanians, Aromanians) Epirus, and the formerly Albanian-speaking micro-region of Souli (a mainland highland range at the latitude of the island of Corfu). People were organized into kinship groups called *fara*, which were then subdivided into *fis* (not to be confused with northern Albanian tribes/*fis*). The concept of a strictly tribal territory was unknown in the south, but southern Albanian *fis* often lived together in specific village districts (*lagje*) or fortified houses. Exogamy in the south was applied to the *fis*, not to the entire *fara*, and was thus far less severe than in the north where marriages within the (northern) tribes would not happen. Although each *fara* recognized a common, often mythical ancestor, he played a much less significant role than did his counterpart in the north. And in the north, as we have seen, kinship was traced back over as many generations as possible (since ca. 1500); in the south, kinship memory often did not extend back to more than four generations.

All these systems, be it in the north or in the south, were patrilineal, though, and all offered their members a kinship-based armed community on which they could absolutely rely and boundaries between the in-group and the out-group that were clearly drawn. Loyalty to one's own kin included suspicion of all those who did not belong to the kin group. Ritual brotherhood and ritual godfatherhood were designed to bridge this abyss

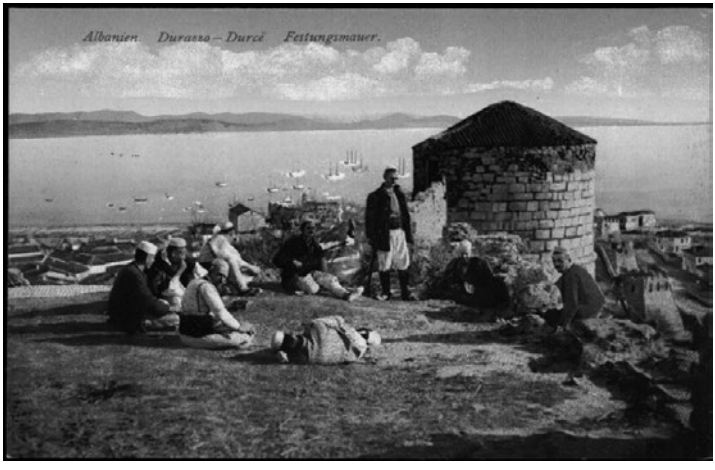
in cases where cooperation and community were needed but kinship ties were lacking.

Kinship systems in *Arnavutluk* were adapted to socio-economic and security questions, as can be demonstrated by the example of Aromanians who cohabited with Albanians in many parts of the southwestern Balkans. Many Aromanians migrated with their cattle between summer pastures in the highlands and winter pastures in the lowlands, usually on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, and in the case of the central Balkans also on the Aegean coast in what is today northern Greece. As a result, the Aromanian communities needed protection over considerable distances. That is why they preferred a bilinear system, which created kinship ties both in the male and the female line. Since exogamy prevented marriages within the kin group, family ties needed to be as extended as possible; therefore, partners had to come from the outside. This bilinear exogamic system enabled the Aromanians to rely on kin-based networks all over the central and southern Balkans. Contrary to the north Albanian *fis*, they were interested in long-distance communication. Both the Albanian tribes in the Greater Mountain area and among the Aromanians developed a social system that ideally fit their economy and security interests. Neither system overlapped spatially; Aromanians cohabited with the *fara* system of southern Albania and did not venture into the well-protected domain of *fis* warriors in the north.

Islam, Catholicism, Orthodoxy

It is against this complex social background that *Arnavutluk*'s equally complex religious changes can be

better understood. Islamization among Albanians was a process that stretched over more than four and half centuries and produced regionally diverse results. By about 1870, the center and the east of *Arnavutluk* was almost completely inhabited by Sunni Muslims, while the Christian population in the east was composed of Orthodox Serbs, Macedo-Bulgarians and Aromanians. This included an area from the region Durrës – Krujë – Mat – Dibër and then expanding to the area that was defined roughly by the line Niš – Kumanovo/Alb. Kumanova – Prilep – Bitola. In the north of this compact Sunni block lay bi-confessional northern Albania with a mixed Sunni and Catholic society; to the south, a tri-confessional society of Orthodox Christians (Albanians, Aromanians, Greeks), Sunni and a considerable community of followers of the Bektashi order, which had grown over time.



3.8 Ottoman Durrës

The Bektashi, and dervish orders in general, are a crucial element for understanding Islamization. In ca. 1350, when Turkish warriors began to conquer the eastern Balkans, they were accompanied by dervish sheikhs who preached *jihad*, or holy war. Since many of the religious practices of dervish orders did not radically differ from popular practices in the Orthodox church, a special milieu developed wherein popular Muslim and Orthodox practices and beliefs overlapped and intermingled. Dervishes were known to preach at Orthodox pilgrimage sites, and many uneducated Orthodox Christians did not clearly distinguish between dervishes and Orthodox monks who, even in their appearance, looked rather similar. Skanderbeg's biographer Marinus Barletius alludes to his hero's conversion into a dervish order. Dervish orders were a driving force behind the Ottoman conquest. Moreover, the multitude of dervish orders (or *tarikat*, which means "ways") led several scholars to postulate a distinction between Orthodox Sunni Islam (Islam of the mosque) and a heterodox dervish Islam (Islam of the *tekke*, i.e. dervish prayer house); however, modern scholarship considers most *tarikat* rather as a mystical expression of Orthodox Sunni Islam. The latter was an instrument of the empire that had installed a Sheikh-ül-Islam as head of the *Ulema* (Sunni learned theologians) which presided over Sunni believers. Dervish orders perform mystical rituals (or *zikr*) in the form of short phrases or prayers, meditation, dances and even trances that varied from order to order. The Halveti dervishes practice a particularly severe ascetism with fasting and seclusion during daylight hours. The Rifa i dervishes became known for practices such as eating glass or piercing their cheeks with spits during

religious trances; Rifa i indeed had one of their centers in Gjakova in western Kosovo and expanded particularly in the eastern part of *Arnavutluk*.

While Halveti spread from Iran to Anatolia and from there to the Balkans where they remained a predominantly Turkish order, the Bektashi gradually developed into a sociocultural phenomenon that even gained political significance, particularly in the nineteenth century, and particularly in southern *Arnavutluk*. Initiated ca. 1240 by Hacı Bektaş Veli in central Anatolia, the Bektashi adopted aspects of Shiism such as the veneration of Muhammed's nephew Ali. Many of their practices, including the consumption of alcohol and the inclusion of women, distinguished them from mainstream Sunni Islam. While most dervish orders remained simply mystical confraternities within the Sunni *Umma* (community), the Bektashi were widely perceived by Sunni Muslims as being at the very periphery of, if not even beyond, the *Umma*.

Bektashi prayer houses and convents spread especially in the southern part of *Arnavutluk* where major *tekkes* were founded in Tetovo in 1569 and in Gjirokastër in 1780. The Bektashi were closely associated with the janissaries and with artisans and merchants and thus were part of a closely knit part of Ottoman urban society, particularly in the western Balkans. When the sultan decided to destroy the janissaries in 1826, the Bektashi were targeted as well. Religion and politics explain why the Bektashi felt a considerable distance vis-à-vis the sultan who was also the caliph, or head of all Sunni believers. Unlike Sunni Albanians who belonged to a potentially worldwide *Umma* in which *Arnavutluk* was just a part of its western periphery, for the Bektashi,

Arnavutluk was a major center of their order. The Bektashi were more open to Orthodox Christians than were Sunni Muslims, and because of their own complex relations with Sunni Muslims, they seemed more accessible to Christians than the latter, who embodied the religious and sociocultural hierarchy of the Ottoman empire.

The strength of dervish orders and particularly the Bektashi offers one explanation for why Islam spread in *Arnavutluk*. But dervish orders were active in most other parts of the Ottoman Balkans where Islamization was much weaker. As we have seen, the immigration of Muslim Turks did not play a major role in this process in the western Balkans. As in Bosnia, Islamization was the result of conversion of locals, not of Turkish colonization as in the eastern Balkans. Why then did so many people convert?

In many Balkan countries with a Muslim minority, converts were (and sometimes still are) perceived either as traitors or as victims of coercion, but the long-term processes were far more complex. Among the first to convert were political elites and members of guilds of craftsmen – the latter were centered in major towns that also served as hubs of imperial rule. Islamization advanced at a comparatively rapid pace in areas marked by massive destruction after decades of warfare. Where people had resisted most strenuously, the social network had been torn apart. In Shkodër and parts of central Albania, those who resisted disappeared, and they were replaced by new people who moved in and proved to be particularly loyal to the empire. Loyalty was expressed through religious allegiance, and this meant conversion to Islam. In the south where people had not joined Skanderbeg's uprising,

Islamization, at least until the seventeenth century, was much more limited.

Although they are both Christian, there is a major difference between the Catholic church in the north and the Orthodox churches in the south and the east of *Arnavutluk*. While the former had actively supported resistance against the Ottomans, the Orthodox church had aligned itself with the new rulers. This can partly be explained by centuries of bitter competition between the two churches – many Orthodox leaders preferred Ottoman Muslim rule to Catholic power. The empire used the Orthodox church as a tool for stabilizing its rule in the predominantly Orthodox Balkans, and it skillfully used the anti-Western feelings of Orthodox elites to immunize them against a possible revival of crusades as in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Neither the Ottomans nor the Patriarchate of Constantinople had any reason for open conflict among themselves. The latter even benefited from Ottoman conquest and the disappearance of Orthodox principalities in Bulgaria and Serbia because it could now reextend its ecclesiastical jurisdiction over areas that had slipped out of its control at the end of the twelfth and the beginning of thirteenth centuries. In 1557, the empire reinstalled the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć in Kosovo as a bulwark against Habsburg and Venetian influence in the western Balkans.

While the Orthodox had their center within the Ottoman empire and while their religious leaders were part of the Ottoman imperial system and under its tight control, Catholics in *Arnavutluk* looked westward to Rome. Their spiritual head, the pope, was the most constant and enduring political enemy of the Ottoman empire who was always

willing to support any kind of anti-Ottoman military action. The Catholic church was therefore, in the eyes of Ottoman officials, a dangerous and subversive organization within the empire and its believers potential allies of the armies of Catholic adversaries. Also, as in Bosnia, the Albanian Catholic secular clergy had suffered considerably during and after the conquest, and the previously dense network of parishes at least partially broke down, mostly in the lowlands. The church was forced to give up major urban centers and retreated to the hills and the mountainous zones. Monasteries there, mostly Franciscan, developed into a true backbone of Catholicism in *Arnavutluk*, as centers of faith and Albanian cultural identity. When at the end of the seventeenth century a major Catholic uprising failed, Ottoman repression drastically further reduced the presence of the Catholic church. The lack of priests, their generally low level of education and the constant harassment of Muslim Ottoman officials weakened the Catholic church, which had difficulties in maintaining the liturgy in remote mountain areas.

With the exception of major administrative centers in the lowlands, Islamization gained real momentum only from the 1640s onward, or ca. 150 years after the end of the long conquest process. Several factors explain why *Arnavutluk*, where the population ca. 1600 had been predominantly Orthodox with Catholic areas in the north and scattered Catholic communities in Kosovo, began to turn widely to Islam, a development that eventually radically altered the religious structure of *Arnavutluk*. In the seventeenth century, the Ottoman empire waged expensive wars against Catholic powers in the Aegean, in the Adriatic and in central Europe. One of the results was a

dramatic increase in taxes, and the main burden was borne by Christian taxpayers. Conversion could save families from ruin; Islamization meant moving into a more privileged fiscal category. The enormous fiscal pressure accompanied by the arbitrary measures of Ottoman officials has been well documented in Catholic sources. The structural discrimination against Christians thus played an important role in conversion. Another important factor was climate change, the so-called Little Ice Age. Under its conditions of scarcity, tax increases became an immediate threat to life, and conversion of overtaxed peasants in worsening environmental conditions constituted an extreme reaction to extreme stress.

But there was another element whose impact has been underestimated by scholars – namely, the rise of Sunni Muslim radicalization through the so-called *Kadızadeli* movement, which began in Istanbul at the end of the sixteenth century and which advocated a return to the original sources of Islam. Partisans of this movement persecuted dervish orders, carried out religious cleansing of religiously mixed quarters and inspired *jihad* against Venice and the Habsburg empire. In 1645, the Ottoman empire attacked Venice, provoking a war that lasted for twenty-five years. Dalmatia and part of the coastal zones of *Arnavutluk* became theaters of war, and the first victories of the Venetian army and its local Catholic and Orthodox auxiliary forces embittered Albanian and Bosnian Sunni Muslims who filled the ranks of regional Ottoman forces.

The situation of Catholics in *Arnavutluk* worsened even further when the Ottomans, once again inspired by *jihad* ideology, attacked Vienna in 1683 where they suffered a

crushing defeat. The Habsburg empire, along with Venice and the Holy See, counterattacked and, for the first time since 1448, a Catholic army marched deep into the central Balkans. This was the signal for a general uprising of Christians in the eastern part of *Arnavutluk* in 1689, led by the Catholic Albanian archbishop of Skopje, Pjetër Bogdani. But Habsburg troops overstretched their lines and were beaten back. The uprising collapsed, and extensive Muslim repression drove thousands of Christians, Catholics and Orthodox alike from Kosovo into Habsburg Hungary. The failure of the uprising relegated the Catholic church to a minor position for almost one and a half centuries and ended its once dominant role in Albanian culture, discussed in more detail below. Sunni wars of conquest had thus provoked a vigorous response on the part of Catholic European powers, and Ottoman defeat shook imperial prestige in *Arnavutluk* to a degree that Christians dared to rise up against the empire. Their failure accelerated Islamization, which was for the first time also enforced. The tribe of Kelmendi, for example, which had played a key role in the uprising, was largely deported from its mountain stronghold.

The catastrophe wrought upon Catholic northern Albania brought about a profound change in Albanian ethnic identity that can be seen by their self-designation. Albanians had been known to their neighbors as *Arvanites* (in Greek), *Raban* (in Slavic), *Albanesi* (in Italian), but never as *Shqiptars*, as they call themselves today. The old name used by their neighbors was linked to the Albanian term *Arbër*, which essentially designates a Christian Albanian and his pre-Ottoman and pre-Islamic culture.

Around 1700, after the violent suppression of Catholic uprisings, the new ethnonym *shqiptar* appears in written sources and gradually replaces *Arbër*, a term that harkened back to the Christian culture of medieval Albania, a world almost completely superseded by the Muslim *Arnavutluk*. It is quite unusual for a major European linguistic group to change its name in the modern era – the Greeks would be a similar case: after 1800 they replaced the traditional *Romios* (Roman, i.e. Byzantine) with *Hellene*.

But this change was the Albanian response to a second wave of Ottoman violence, following the first one in the fifteenth century. Muslim and also Christian Albanians identified with a new self-designation. The term *Shqiptar* (derived from the verb *shqiptoj*, to express oneself in an understandable way) described an Albanian in the context of the Ottoman empire and its predominant Islamic culture; it referred to someone belonging to a linguistic community whose majority had been Islamized. *Arbëria*, the old Catholic Adriatic medieval Albania, had been replaced by *Shqipëria*, the predominantly Sunni periphery of an empire ruled by the sultan-caliph in Istanbul. In the eighteenth century, this process also included the Orthodox south where Christians felt the repercussions of an uninterrupted series of Ottoman defeats against Russia, which increasingly claimed the right to protect the Orthodox subjects in the Ottoman empire. This policy increased Ottoman suspicion toward the Orthodox despite the political loyalty toward the empire demonstrated by the Patriarch of Constantinople, the head of the Orthodox community.

The change of the national self-designation indicates the moment when Islam became the dominant religious and

social force among Albanians. This shift of demographic weight had, as in other formerly Christian societies conquered by Islamic states, a considerable impact on Christians. Many people converted out of economic despair because of fiscal pressure, or judicial despair because of discrimination in Ottoman courts. But as in other parts of the Balkans, many hoped to improve their career opportunities or simply side with the victor. Visitation reports by Catholic clergymen, coordinated by the *Congregatio de Propaganda fide* in Rome since 1622, and reports from European consuls, particularly from the nineteenth century onward, are replete with descriptions of daily discrimination against Christians and their helplessness in cases of legal conflict with Muslims. Catholic highlanders settling in Sunni lowland Kosovo were regularly provoked because of their religion, and blood revenge was the consequence, which made life for Catholic Albanians among Sunni Albanians almost unbearable.

In order to avoid these collisions, many Christians, mostly in the mountain areas of central Albania and the Black Mountains of Skopje (a mountain range on the border of modern North Macedonia and Kosovo), concealed their Christian religion and adopted a Muslim identity in public life. Yet these Crypto-Christians were not particular to *Arnavutluk*, since they could also be found in other parts of the Ottoman empire, including on the Anatolian Black Sea coast. They were a result of Ottoman oppression, which forced some people to hide their beliefs. The Crypto-Christians were the constant object of Catholic visitation reports and are therefore better known to us today than most Orthodox Albanians in the early modern period. As mentioned earlier, the

number and importance of Crypto-Christians has long been exaggerated, particularly by Albanian nationalist activists who consider them as proof of blurred religious boundaries and/or of religious indifference that they conceive of as a typical trait of Albanianness. The reality was more complex. The Catholic church put considerable pressure on Crypto-Christians to openly confess their beliefs. Since the Ottoman empire considered these people to be Muslims and since conversion from Islam to another religion was punished with death, church pressure, mainly in the early nineteenth century, often resulted in tragedy. As late as the 1840s, Crypto-Christians who had publicly exposed themselves as Christians were deported from Kosovo to Anatolia, and even Great Power intervention could not save them from mass death en route.

Islamization came to a definitive end only with the breakdown of the Ottoman imperial system during the first Balkan war in 1912. As a process that stretched over half a millennium, its causes and course cannot be reduced to a simple formula. But the result was that the majority of Albanians became Muslims, the only major linguistic group in the Balkans to do so. Why the Albanians differed in this respect from Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians cannot be easily explained. It is true that there was no church that encompassed all Albanian Christians – but of more importance is the initial role of the Albanians in resistance and uprisings against the Ottomans. This resulted in the profound demographic and cultural shocks of the fifteenth century and of the end of the seventeenth century that almost broke the back of the Catholic church, which since the fifteenth century had actively cultivated the

Albanian language in a written form, as well as Albanian identity. Before the failed uprising of 1689, the Albanian language developed in a Catholic environment through the efforts of Catholic clergymen (its northern Geg variety) into a literary language.

Most early works of this Catholic culture were translations of liturgical and theological works, the first being Gjon Buzuku's translation of a Catholic missal (1555), followed around 1620 by Pjetër Budi's translation of the *Dottrina Cristiana* and the *Rituale Romanum* and by Pjetër Bogdani's *Band of the Prophets*, the first original literary piece in Albanian. In the milieu of Uniate (the union of Catholic and Orthodox churches) *Arbëresh* (Italo-Albanian) culture, Leka Matrënga published in Rome in 1592 a translation of doctrine into the Tosk (southern) dialect of Albanian. Budi and Bogdani were not only seminal writers, but as leading clergymen they were also involved in resistance against Ottoman rule. In addition, another learned clergyman, Frang Bardhi, engaged in a debate with Slavic Catholic scholars concerning Skanderbeg's ethnic origins. In the early seventeenth century, in close contact with Italy and Catholic Dalmatia, Albanian Catholic clergymen developed clear concepts of Albanian history and identity. They conceived of Albania as a Catholic Adriatic European nation, and they hoped to realize the project that Skanderbeg had dreamed of 150 years earlier. Their military failure ended this dream, and the Catholic milieu, demographically and intellectually, was severely weakened.

Until 1600, most Albanians in the east and the south of *Arnavutluk* had belonged to the Orthodox church, which was after 1557 organized in two regional churches, the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć, and the autocephalous

Archbishopric of Ohrid, both connected to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In 1766/67, after failed Orthodox uprisings that the Serbian Patriarch had supported, the two regional churches were abolished by the sultan and forcibly unified with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. These events point to the difficult relations between the Orthodox and the Ottomans. While the Patriarchate of Constantinople generally defended the legitimacy of Ottoman rule, which offered shelter against unwelcome Western influences such as Catholicism, Protestantism and, after 1789, French Jacobinism, regional clergymen often behaved differently. They were far removed from the imperial capital and often operated in a predominantly Orthodox environment. At the western fringe of the empire, Orthodox ecclesiastical leaders repeatedly advocated military cooperation between Orthodox and Catholic powers, mostly in the context of Venetian–Ottoman wars (ca. 1571) or the Spanish–Habsburg projects for uprising around 1600. In 1689, the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević joined the Christian uprising in Kosovo led by Catholic Archbishop Pjetër Bogdani.

Nevertheless, Orthodox–Ottoman relations were more often marked by cohabitation than by confrontation. Under Ottoman protection, Orthodox culture flourished mainly in the southern part of *Arnavutluk*, where from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries many churches and monasteries were founded and Orthodox life was able to develop without the restrictions experienced by Catholic culture in the north. The Dropull valley near Gjirokastër was even called a little Mount Athos (referring to the monastic center of the Orthodox world on the peninsula

of Chalkidiki in northern Greece). In the second half of the eighteenth century, Orthodox church-building activity reached its peak with seventy new churches constructed solely in the Gjirokastër area. This period was marked by intense intra-Orthodox missionary activities on the part of the so-called *Kollyvades*, an Orthodox monastic movement with strong anti-Western and anti-Jewish tendencies that was tolerated by the Ottomans because it contributed to the traditional policy of immunizing Ottoman Orthodox against Western influence. Important preachers also propagated Greek as the only language of Orthodoxy – Albanian was depicted as the language of the Muslims, and in their view religious demarcation should be sharpened by combining language and religion.

In a multi-ethnic Orthodox environment, with Albanians, Greeks and Aromanians, this project failed, and language barriers within this confessional community remained blurred. The blossom of Orthodox culture produced many fine examples of frescos and icons whose painters were in close contact with Orthodox artists in Corfu and Crete, and it reached one of its high points with the establishment of a printing press in Moschopolis/Alb. Voskopoja, an Aromunian town on a remote plateau in contemporary southwestern Albania. In the eighteenth century, Moschopolis developed into a trading center with a network that included Italy and the Habsburg monarchy. Although the printing press published only a few works, it achieved almost mythical status. Printing presses were extremely rare in the Ottoman Balkans, and books for Christians were usually printed in Venice, Rome or, later, in Vienna and Buda (today a part of

Budapest). Because of the significant prestige attached to book culture, Greek, Albanian, Aromanian and Macedo-Bulgarian nationalist activists all claimed the glory of Moschopolis's short-lived press as their own. In 1769, Moschopolis was plundered by Muslim brigands, and part of its Aromanian population moved to Kruševo, another mountain city in nearby Macedonia. Moschopolis remained a pan-balkanic *lieu de mémoire* where an Aromanian multilingual Orthodox trading community linked the mountains of southern *Arnavutluk* with the European world.

Migration from and to *Arnavutluk*

Ottoman *Arnavutluk* was part of a wider Ottoman world, which also meant inclusion into Mediterranean migration processes. Immigration hardly affected *Arnavutluk*, with one important albeit transitory exception: when in 1492, at the end of Spanish Reconquista, many Muslims and Jews moved from Spain to the Ottoman empire, a first wave of migrants settled in the port of Vlorë and later also in mainland Berat. Most Sephardic Jews, however, did not remain in these peripheral towns, but chose to migrate to the major urban centers of the empire such as Salonica and Istanbul.

On the contrary, emigration from *Arnavutluk* to different parts of the Ottoman empire essentially characterized Albanian society and enlarged the spatial frame of Albanian history to the north, east and south. Albanians moved along the main communication lines in the Balkans. Orthodox Albanians migrated along the Via Egnatia and founded new villages in Thrace, in the

Rhodope mountains (today the border area between Greece and Bulgaria) and in eastern Bulgaria where they settled in compact villages communities. When in 1541 the Ottomans completed the final conquest of the Pannonian plain, they invited Balkan Orthodox settlers into Hungary. That is why thousands of Serbs moved into Ottoman Hungary, and settlers from Bulgaria, Macedonia and *Arnavutluk* replaced them in part in what is today central and southern Serbia, excluding Kosovo. In the late eighteenth century, Albanian Orthodox settlers accepted the Russian invitation to populate newly conquered formerly Ottoman regions on the northern Black Sea coast, while following failed uprisings Catholic Albanians emigrated to Venetian Zadar in central Dalmatia. Muslim Albanians settled in various parts of the empire as part of the Ottoman army and administration; Orthodox Albanians, mostly merchants and craftsmen, followed their example. Thus, Istanbul, the imperial capital, was by the beginning of the twentieth century home to probably the largest concentration of an Albanian urban population. Indeed, the Istanbul Albanian community was larger than the largest town in *Arnavutluk* itself.

Work migration also played an essential role; most of it was seasonal or periodic as in the case of seminomadic herdsmen (Aromanians, Albanians and Greeks), but also included migrating artisans. Many mountain villages specialized in and were known for construction workers, and men migrated over long distances to major urban centers such as Edirne, Istanbul or Izmir, and in the nineteenth century to Sofia and Bucharest. Work migration as workers, artisans and herdsmen was thus a shared experience of many people from *Arnavutluk*, especially in the

highlands of the south. Highlanders from the north left their mountains mainly as soldiers, among them Catholics as auxiliary troops fighting in the 1820s against Orthodox insurgents in Greece, while Kosovo Sunni Albanians served extensively as the imperial guard of the sultan around 1900. Albanian–Aromanian Orthodox trading communities emerged in an area that stretched from Alexandria in Egypt to Bucharest, while Sunni Muslims served in garrisons all over the empire. The Albanian world was therefore a wide one, and highlanders fully participated in this process. Although the Albanian mountains were a closed world for outsiders, the highlanders themselves were linked to the outside world by work migration and military service.

4

Ottoman *Arnavutluk* in Crisis, 1800–1912

In Eastern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean, the long nineteenth century ended with the dissolution of multiple empires between 1917 and 1923. Albanian history is an integral part of general Ottoman, Balkan and European history during that crucial period. Commonly, Albanian history during the nineteenth century is presented as a process of national emancipation promoted by an Albanian national movement, with its crowning achievement being the declaration of independence on November 28, 1912. At that moment, the Albanian nation, shaped by the national movement, reentered the family of European nation-states and reentered European culture after the dark winter of 500 years of Ottoman rule.

This interpretation is clear, linear and teleological. But it is only partially accurate. The modern Albanian nation did not create the twentieth-century Albanian nation-state; it was actually the other way around. The state created the nation and its formation, despite significant achievements during the interwar period, gained momentum only after 1945 under the modernizing dictatorship in communist Albania, and in the context of communist nation-building and interethnic tensions in communist Yugoslavia. Historical interest in Albanian nineteenth- and twentieth-century history transcends the mere Albanian case and touches upon questions that still

resonate today: how was it possible that a Sunni Muslim majority community came to accept Christians as equals within a national concept based not on Islam, but on a common language and culture?

Albanian history is intrinsically interwoven with the shocks the Ottoman empire was suffering from the end of the eighteenth century until the first quarter of the twentieth century and with the different responses an increasingly desperate Ottoman elite offered: Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism and Turkish nationalism combined with Islamism. Albanian history is also interconnected with competing national movements in the Balkans, those of the Greeks, Aromanians, Macedo-Bulgarians and the Serbs. It was influenced by the Great Powers including Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia, and it was further impacted by British and American Protestant missions and the Catholic church. Ottoman Albanian Sunni Muslims shared with the other Ottoman Sunni populations, be they Turks, Slavs, Kurds or Circassians, the experience of a rapidly changing world and of multiple challenges to their privileged position. A brief overview will help us to understand the major phases of this growing disruption and its relation to social and economic change or stagnation.

Arnavutluk and the Oriental Question

The Ottoman empire in the Balkans was on the brink of dissolution at the end of the eighteenth century. Regional strongmen (*ayan*) and their dynasties had gained so much power that they constituted virtually autonomous principalities that not only exerted full control over regional



4.1 Ali Pasha, 1740 1822

societies, but even maintained a form of external relations with European powers, independently of Ottoman central authorities. This phenomenon can be observed on the lower Danube, in Bosnia, in Serbia (with the janissaries as the dominant factor) and in *Arnavutluk*. In the north of *Arnavutluk*, the Bushatlliu family established such a regional *ayanlik*, while in the south Ali Pasha (1740–1822) extended his rule over an area from the Ionian Sea to Thessaly in central Greece.

Ali earned a Europe-wide notoriety because of his contacts with French and British diplomats and travelers including François Pouqueville, William Leake, and most notably Lord Byron. He maintained a lavish court at Ioannina in Epirus where many Greeks entered his service, one of whom even penned an epic poem, the *Alipasiada*, in which he glorified the south Albanian *ayan*.



4.2 Ali Pasha's fortress at Ioannina

Ali had made his career by blackmail, robbery, and later with tax-farming. He built up a private army and was likely the wealthiest cattle owner in the Ottoman Balkans. It was quite near to Ali's domain, in southern Greece, that a major uprising of Orthodox Christians – Greeks, Albanians (*Arvanites*) and Aromanians alike – broke out against the Ottoman empire in 1821. It soon spread to the southern Balkans. Ali, who feared Ottoman central authorities, apparently was in secret contact with the insurgents. The Greek revolution deeply shook *Arnavutluk*. In 1822, Ottoman troops oppressed Ali and his *ayanlık*, and the empire mobilized a substantial force of Muslim and Catholic Albanians to fight against the Orthodox insurgents.

The uprising quickly developed into a full-fledged war for an independent Greek state. It had started as a religious war between Orthodox and Muslims in the

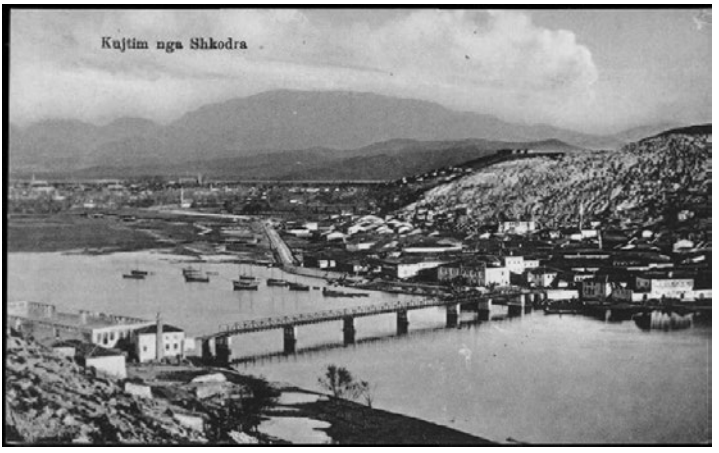
southern Balkans, and many fighters on both sides spoke the same language, Albanian – but language did not matter. The Albanian Orthodox community in southern Greece, the *Arvanites*, descendants of the migrants of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, constituted the military backbone of the struggle for the creation of the first new European national state in the nineteenth century. After years of devastating warfare with the military intervention of Egypt on the side of the sultan, and of Britain, France and particularly Russia on the side of the insurgents, the Ottoman empire was forced to recognize the full sovereignty of a Greek Orthodox national state on former imperial soil (1830). For the first time in Ottoman history, an uprising backed by the Great Powers had led not to mere autonomy (as in the case of the Serbian uprisings of 1804/1815), but to full independence and sovereignty. The new state was placed under an imported European dynasty, the Wittelsbachs from Bavaria, who ruled in Greece under the tutelage of the three interventionist European powers – today one would call this a form of international administration.

The Orthodox insurgents of southern Greece paved the way for other Balkan peoples. In the new Kingdom of Greece, Orthodox Albanians played an important role – but they had a Greek political identity and were gradually Hellenized, a process that has mostly come to an end in the contemporary period. In the wake of this war of Greek independence, several Orthodox intellectuals embarked on projects of Albanian-Greek dictionaries as those prepared by Markos Botsaris/in Albanian Marko Boçari and by the medical doctor of Ali's court Ioannis Vilaras, thus laying the groundwork for cultural

cooperation between Orthodox Greeks and Aromanians, and Orthodox and Bektashi Albanians from the southern part of *Arnavutluk*.

With Serbian autonomy (1815) and Greek independence, two Orthodox states emerged at the European periphery of the Ottoman empire. The self-confidence of Balkan Muslims had been shattered, a process that had begun with Napoleon's successful invasion of Egypt in 1798. A series of Ottoman defeats against Russian armies (1768–1774, 1787–1792, 1806–1812, 1827–1829) further troubled the empire and its Sunni elites. As a reaction to this string of military disasters, the empire embarked on administrative and military reforms. The elimination of the janissaries, who constituted a reform-averse group, the suppression of the *ayan* lordships in the Balkans, among them the Bushatlliu of Shkodër in 1831, and the restoration of centralized rule, were important steps that inaugurated the period of reforms known as the *Tanzimat*, 1839–1876. *Tanzimat* reforms aimed at improving military capacities, adjusting the conservative nature of the empire in general and targeting regional strongmen and communities that were resistant to a state monopoly of power. The Ottoman empire struggled to remain a major player in international politics, as it quickly became little more than an object. It turned into the core of the so-called Eastern Question, or what to do with the Ottoman empire and its territories.

A fundamental challenge this *Tanzimat* reform faced was to overcome the traditional segregation of Christians and Muslims that was typical for Islamic states, and to convince the Muslims to give up their legal, social and symbolic privileges. The reform period was



4.3 Late Ottoman Shkodër

accompanied by an increased influx of western capital and migrants that turned the major Ottoman towns in the wider Aegean area (Salonica, Constantinople and Izmir) into hubs of international trade with significant participation on the part of Ottoman Armenians and Ottoman Greeks. An Ottoman Christian – Orthodox, Armenian, Catholic – merchant and banking elite emerged; not only urban centers in the hinterland, such as Bitola in Macedonia, Plovdiv in Thrace, but also several Bulgarian towns on the slopes of the Balkan Mountains, developed into busy proto-industrial centers producing principally textiles for the reformed Ottoman army.

Arnavutluk was barely affected by these social and economic changes. Only Shkodër and its Catholic merchant community took part in an increasing Adriatic trade and reestablished old ties with Venice and Trieste.

Orthodox entrepreneurship in the south had suffered from the destruction of Moschopolis and from Ali Pasha's

harsh rule. However, Orthodox merchants from the south, particularly from the Korçë area, gradually developed into a trading middle class. They migrated to Ottoman North Africa and to the Ottoman vassal principality of Wallachia (modern southern Romania) where their business communities developed into major centers of Albanianism, promoting the Albanian national idea. In general, increasing nationalist mobilization in the Ottoman central Balkans (*Arnavutluk* and Macedonia) was, apart from major coastal towns, not triggered or accompanied by major socioeconomic change that would have affected large parts of society. Most inhabitants of *Arnavutluk* remained illiterate peasants and herdsmen. They were untouched by modern lines of transportation since the only railway ran along the eastern zone of *Arnavutluk* linking Salonica with Mitrovica and was used mostly for military purposes. When the Ottomans were forced to abandon *Arnavutluk* in 1912, they left not a single mile of asphalt road, no industrial establishments and no modern school system. Agricultural techniques were essentially medieval, most peasants did not even use iron ploughs and, apart from the large estates of influential dynasties such as the Vrioni, Vlora, Vërlaci and Libohova in southwest *Arnavutluk* and of major landowners in the eastern lowlands, the peasant economy was limited to simple subsistence. Neither regional leaders nor central imperial authorities were particularly interested in economic modernization. The empire concentrated on security issues and invested principally in the military and police forces. But even the reformed army proved unable to prevent military defeat and territorial losses, with the exception of an Ottoman victory against Greece in 1897.

The Crimean War of 1853–1856 demonstrated to Muslim Ottomans that western arms and armies were decidedly superior. For the first time since 1453, Christian troops marched on the shores of the Bosporus, this time as Ottoman allies against Russia. As a result of its dependence on the help of western states such as Great Britain and France, the empire was forced to adjust its policy vis-à-vis its Christian subjects. In 1856 a reform edict proclaimed equal treatment for Christians and Muslims in imperial justice. This was a revolutionary step, but outside of Istanbul it remained mostly a dead letter. Regional Sunni elites in the Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and *Arnavutluk*, categorically rejected any idea of Christian emancipation and defended their time-honored superiority vis-à-vis the *gavur* or "nonbelievers." The latter, however, had gained more self-confidence. The regional Orthodox states, Serbia and Greece, were not prepared to accept the territorial status quo, and the increased presence of dominant westerners and their confident behavior toward Muslims revolutionized the identity of many Ottoman Christians. For the first time, they experienced Ottoman Muslims in an inferior position with regard to Christians. Muslims increasingly felt threatened by what they perceived as a world turned upside down.

Muslim fears were confirmed when in 1878 the Congress of Berlin, a conference of the European Great Powers, decided that the Ottoman empire must recognize the independence of its vassal principalities in the Balkans (Montenegro, Serbia and Romania), accept the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the creation of an autonomous principality of Bulgaria, and the

establishment of an autonomous province in Eastern Rumelia (in present-day southeast Bulgaria). And in 1881, the empire was forced to cede Thessaly to Greece. The Congress of Berlin was convened to settle one of the major crises in nineteenth-century European history. In 1875, a revolt of mostly Orthodox peasants against Muslim landholders broke out in Bosnia, and in 1876, Bulgarian Orthodox Christians rose as well. The Bulgarian uprising occurred in the immediate vicinity of the imperial center and in areas close to a dense Turkish Muslim population. It struck at the heart of the empire, which unleashed Muslim irregular troops who brutally repressed the rebellion. Known as the "Bulgarian atrocities," this intense Ottoman repression changed British policy in the Balkans and put an end to the traditional British support for Ottoman territorial integrity. After Serbia and Montenegro had intervened unsuccessfully in 1876, Russia attacked the Ottoman empire in 1877 and with the help of Romanian troops (in spite of Romania still officially being an Ottoman vassal state) defeated the Ottomans and imposed a peace treaty on them that foresaw the creation of a greater Bulgarian state encompassing the central and eastern Balkans. Austria-Hungary and Great Britain now feared Russian dominance in the Balkans and on the straits, and their intervention led to the Congress of Berlin.

As a result of the decisions of this congress, the Ottoman empire lost provinces that it had conquered from the end of the fourteenth century (Bulgaria) to the mid-fifteenth century (Bosnia). It was forced to abandon millions of Muslim subjects. For Balkans Muslims, it had hitherto been inconceivable to live under Christian rule –

around 1700, Muslims had evacuated the Pannonian plain when the latter was reconquered by the armies of the Catholic Habsburg empire. After 1878, thousands of Muslims had to leave the lost provinces and moved either to Anatolia or to what remained of Ottoman possessions in the central Balkans. The Ottoman government settled Albanian Sunni refugees (*muhacır*) from the territories conquered by Serbia, as well as Bosnian Sunnis, and Caucasian Muslims who had left the Russian empire's border areas, mostly in Kosovo. The refugees brought with them their experience of war and violence, and their presence generated tension with the local, Orthodox, Christian population, as well as with local Albanian Sunni Muslims. The empire stirred up religious hatred when it declared *jihad* against Serbia and Montenegro, and in the wake of the 1876/77 war against the two Balkan states Sunni Muslims committed acts of violence against unarmed Orthodox civilians in Kosovo. At the same time, Serbian troops systematically expelled Muslim Albanians from the area between Niš and Vranje (modern southern Serbia). War and the influx of *muhacır* clearly worsened relations between religious communities in the Ottoman empire.

Twenty years later, in 1896, an uprising of Orthodox Greeks broke out on the island of Crete, and in 1897, though completely unprepared for war, Greece attacked the Ottoman empire. Although Greece was quickly defeated, the war once again spread *jihad* ideology across the Sunni community of the empire. Once again, Sunni Muslims in the Balkans nurtured existential fears. It was during this period that the empire began the first phase of mass violence against Armenians (1894–1896)

in Anatolia. Violence in the Balkans and Anatolia was thus closely interrelated.

The Ottoman elite knew that on the regional level they were faced with an increasingly intense identity policy on the part of the young Balkan Christian national states of Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria, which since 1878 were competing over the planned partition of the remaining Ottoman provinces in Europe. In ca. 1900, Ottoman Macedonia, the central part of the Ottoman Balkans that was partially inhabited by (mostly Sunni) Albanians, became the battlefield of the regional Orthodox states. Guerrilla warfare perpetrated by armed bands financed by secret organizations in neighboring countries, the most famous being the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), a failed uprising of Macedonian insurgents in 1903, and the ensuing massive Ottoman repression in which Sunni Albanian irregulars participated, troubled the empire. These events had an equally deep impact on regional Muslim Albanians who were impressed by IMRO's organization and the devotion of its activists.

After an aborted short-lived attempt at constitutionalism in 1876, the Ottoman empire was ruled as a classic autocracy by Sultan Abdül Hamid until 1908. In opposition to this oppressive and corrupt sultanic regime and its obvious failure to contain unrest among Christians in the Balkans and in Anatolia, young Muslim officers, who became known as the Young Turks, established secret organizations, adopting the model of Macedonian and Armenian activists. In 1908, the Young Turks seized power in a coup, and after a brief constitutional honeymoon with the various Christian communities, they

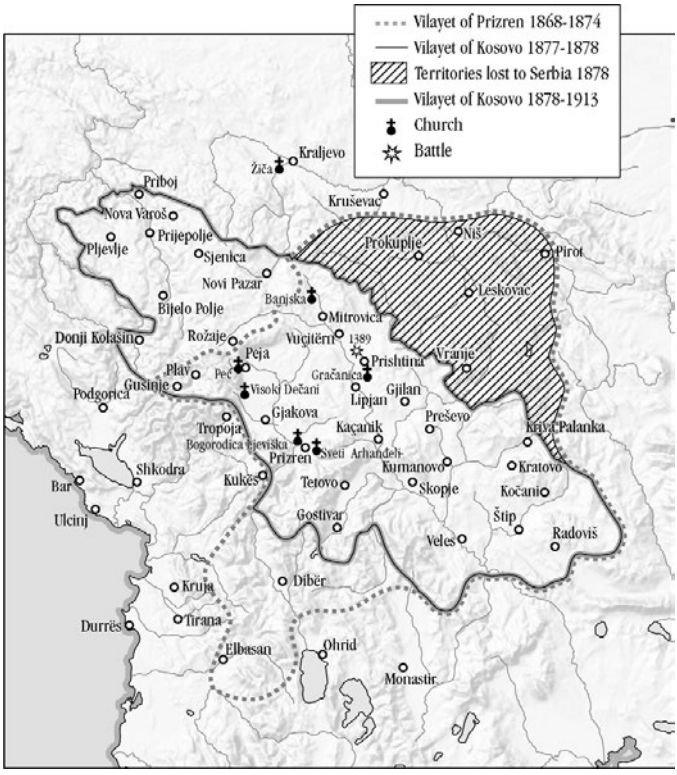
installed a military dictatorship. Despite serious setbacks, including Bulgaria's declaration of independence, and Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Hercegovina, both in1908, as well as Italy's attack on Ottoman Libya in 1911, the new regime survived. But Sunni Muslims in the Balkans feared the complete breakdown of the empire. They were right to be concerned. In October 1912, a coalition of Balkan national states invaded the Ottoman Balkans, and imperial rule broke down within a few weeks. Half a millennium of Ottoman rule had come to a quick and violent end and *Arnavutluk* was overrun by Serbian, Greek and Montenegrin armies. As we will see in reaction to these momentous events, Albanian national activists declared an independent Albanian state, the first modern European national state with a Muslim majority.

In the long nineteenth century, Ottoman leaders were aware that they had to compete for the souls of their mostly Christian Balkan subjects with the new Orthodox national states of the region. The new states offered concepts of identity that appealed to Orthodox Ottoman subjects – a common language and a common faith, as well as a common cultural heritage that were all invoked to detach Ottoman Orthodox subjects from the empire. But what appeared even more seductive was the complete reversal of power relations between Muslims and Christians. In this situation, Ottoman elites had principally two options: either they could try to be politically and socially inclusive with regard to the Christian population, ending centuries of structural discrimination; or they could concentrate on Sunni Islam as a cohesive force to at least stabilize the dominant group. Ottomanism was

the expression of the first option. It was a rather vague ideology that aimed at the inclusion of Christians and Jews, thus emancipating non-Muslims. In the Balkans, half-hearted Ottomanist reformism had since the late 1830s met with stiff resistance from conservative Sunni elites who successfully undermined equal treatment of Christians and Muslims in imperial justice and the inclusion of Christians in the civil state apparatus. But most Christians, being aware of the reform-averse mentality of local Sunni, did not really believe in imperial reforms in any case, especially when regional Orthodox national states had much more to offer.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, under the authoritarian regime of Abdül Hamid, the reformist spirit faded away and was gradually replaced by Pan-Islamism as the cohesive ideology of the empire. The sultan-caliph hoped to rally all Sunnis, and he was ready to use mass violence against Christians in Anatolia whom he considered to be disloyal subjects. A first wave of Armenian massacres was unleashed by the sultan in 1894. In the Balkans, where Great Power diplomats were much more present and European media much more on the alert, particularly following the 1876 humanitarian crisis, Pan-Islamist violence had to be contained.

The Young Turks, made up of Muslim officers from different ethnic backgrounds but originating primarily in the Ottoman Balkans, were driven by the idea of putting a halt to what they perceived as ethnoreligious Christian separatism. Balkan Sunni Turks and Albanians were well represented in this organization. Immediately after the Young Turk coup d'état (1908), the idea of an Ottoman brotherhood across religion and ethnicity seemed to



Map 4.1 Kosovo in the nineteenth century

electrify people, but it quickly failed under the increasingly authoritarian tendencies of the Young Turks themselves, and a new ideology emerged, Pan-Turkism, which was closely linked to Islamism. This aimed at the assimilation of non-Turkish Sunni (including Albanians and Kurds), but it implied ethnic cleansing and eventually genocide (1915/16) for Christians in Anatolia, a region that was defined as the heartland of *Turan*, a new Pan-Turkish world where Turkish and Muslim identity

overlapped. After the coup of the Young Turks, the dominant ideology of the Ottoman ruling elites (and of the elites in the Turkish Republic after 1923) looked to the creation of an ethnically and religiously homogenous Turkish Islamic state.

Arnavutluk between Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism, Turkish Nationalism and Albanian Identity Options

It is against this background that the activities of Albanian nationalist activists can be understood. It is clear that until the catastrophe of the empire in 1912, Sunni Albanians, the overwhelming majority of Albanians, had no reason to seek an Albanian national state outside the empire. They belonged to the dominant group in the empire, they continued to serve in the administration and the army, they enjoyed all the privileges in a religiously segregated society and they were not motivated to accept the *gavur* or "nonbelievers" as equals. Particularly in the eastern part of *Arnavutluk*, Sunnis were virtually absent among the leading thinkers of Albanianness. There are several reasons for this: first, they tended to remain loyal to the sultan-caliph until (and even after) 1912, and second, literacy in predominantly Sunni areas (the central and eastern parts of *Arnavutluk*) was lower than in mixed areas, particularly in the south. Furthermore, the ethnoreligious mix in predominantly Sunni areas did not require a sophisticated debate on Albanian identity. Albanian identity in Kosovo or Macedonia was quite clear: an Albanian was usually a Sunni Muslim, had the right to carry arms, spoke Albanian and respected Albanian customary law. His primary alterity was usually Orthodox,

unarmed, Slav or Aromanian. In this milieu, there was no need for an identity debate since group boundaries were quite evident to everybody. The Albanians' secondary alterity were non-Albanian Muslims, Turks and Slavs; here Albanian customary law defined Albanian identity within the Muslim community. It served as a distinct marker and even if urban Albanians were more integrated into the imperial system, in times of crisis they nevertheless shared the idea that the *Kanun* was the very base of Albanianness. In fact, the rules prescribed by the *Kanun* were practiced on a daily basis, and most Albanians had internalized customary law as an ethnonational marker.

In the tri-confessional southwest and the bi-confessional northwest of *Arnavutluk*, the situation was quite different. First, in the northwest there was almost no linguistic othering, since the overwhelming majority spoke only Albanian; but tensions between Catholics and Sunni Muslims were rather high, the latter being as conservative as the Sunnis in eastern *Arnavutluk* and hardly in favor of Albanian nation-building. Even as late as the 1850s, Muslims had torn down a new Catholic seminary. The situation was even more complex in the south, where the Sunnis were confronted with powerful Bektashi and Orthodox communities, the latter being composed of people speaking Albanian, Aromanian and Greek in various combinations. In the south during the nineteenth century, a middle class of mostly Orthodox traders with a wide network of international relations from Western Europe to Ottoman North Africa had emerged, while a comparable phenomenon developed among mostly Bektashi Muslims serving in the army and the imperial administration.



4.4 Catholic procession at Shiroka

This multireligious situation explains why the religious question mattered so much in the southern part of *Arnavutluk*. While in the east, Albanian and Sunni identity almost completely overlapped (with the exception of Turkicized Muslim Albanians in major towns such as Skopje or Prizren with their strong presence of imperial authorities, and the few Catholics in some parts of Kosovo), Sunni Albanians in the south were confronted not only with non-Albanian Orthodox (Greeks, Aromanians, Bulgarians), but within their linguistic community also with Albanian Orthodox and non-Sunni Bektashi. Alterity therefore was primarily religious, not linguistic, although Muslim and Orthodox Albanians in Macedonia were deeply involved in interethnic tensions within the Orthodox community (Bulgarians, Greeks and Aromanians) and within the strong Young Turk cells. As in the east of *Arnavutluk*, Sunni Muslims originally had

no interest in changing power relations. But in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they learned that those who challenged their privileged position were on the rise. Challengers included foreign powers such as Russia, Austria-Hungary and Italy with their expansionist strategies and their interference in favor of the Orthodox and Catholics (since the end of the seventeenth century, Austria enjoyed a *Kultusprotektorat* [rights of protection] over Catholics in the Ottoman western Balkans), the new Balkan national states with their subversive actions within the empire and, during the *Tanzimat* period until 1876, reformist government circles in Istanbul and their emissaries. The latter were often Polish, Hungarian and German political refugees who after failed revolutions in Europe had fled to the Ottoman realm and had converted to Islam. They dreamed during the *Tanzimat* period of a modernized Ottoman empire as a bulwark against Russia and Austria, the main conservative powers in Europe, and tried to impose European administrative models on regional Sunni elites.

In the context of Albanianism, Sunni Albanians were comparatively short on ideological concepts, but strong in military action. Their political thinking was almost exclusively conservative and religious. And they observed closely the experience of fellow Sunni in the Balkans, from Bosnia to Bulgaria, and of course in the imperial center. In the 1840s, they began formulating a desire for a unified *Arnavutluk* under Sunni dominance within the Ottoman empire, similar to the Bosnian model of a large quasi-autonomous province corresponding to a historical region. Such a model would have strengthened their position against the capital, while securing their privileged position vis-à-vis other communities and satisfying the

traditional interests of Sunni notables at the periphery of the empire, be it in the Balkans or in Anatolia: no taxes, no imperial justice, customary law and full control over regional Christians. Until 1912, this remained the main project of Sunni Albanians in *Arnavutluk*, in 1878, in 1899 and during the Sunni Albanian uprisings in the eastern part of *Arnavutluk* in 1909–1912.

Non-Sunni Albanian nationalist activists tried repeatedly to influence Sunni elites, but did not succeed in convincing larger parts of these elites to join projects for supra-religious Albanian nation-building. Within the Sunni community, different tendencies dominated, including imperial centralists loyal to the Islamist Hamidian regime, regional traditionalists, and partisans of the Young Turks. Only the latter strove for a modernized empire, the former two hoped to undo *Tanzimat* reforms, and regional traditionalists promoted home-rule under Albanian customary law. All these groups supported Sunni supremacy over Christians and were reluctant to endorse an Albanian nation concept based on language and culture. In the years prior to 1912 within the Sunni Albanian community, Turkish nationalism, Ottomanism and Islamism were amalgamated into the idea of an Albanian Muslim community within the Ottoman Empire.

This Islamic orientation became evident at several stages of Albanian political manifestations, initially in 1878 with the creation of the League of Prizren in Kosovo. With the secession of territories settled by mostly Sunni Albanians being imminent, the sultan decided to obstruct the policy of the Berlin Congress by secretly fomenting regional resistance.



4.5 Children in Mitrovica

Since 1876/77, Kosovo Sunni Albanians had been under the pressure of massive territorial loss that had turned Kosovo into a border province, the influx of Sunni Albanian refugees from what had become southern Serbia (the area between Niš and Vranje) and the fear that, as determined in Berlin, Sunni Albanians in the mountain area of Plav and Gucia/Serb. Gusinje would be handed over to Montenegro, where their existence would be threatened. All of these pressures combined to create an explosive atmosphere. Sunni leaders, mostly Albanians and some Slavs (the latter from the *Sancak* of Novi Pazar), gathered to prevent territorial losses and to mount regional defense. The program they composed was based primarily on Islamic religious law (*şeriat*) and loyalty to the sultan. Only gradually did the idea of true

autonomy, embraced by activists from southern *Arnavutluk*, influence the thinking of Sunni leaders. When the movement spiraled out of control as more insistent claims for an autonomous *Arnavutluk* were presented, the sultan cracked down on his creature and dissolved the League (1881).

In 1899, once again in the eastern part of *Arnavutluk*, in Pejë (Kosovo), a second league was proclaimed under the leadership of Haxhi Zeka. In the wake of the Greek-Ottoman war in the Balkans (1897), an Orthodox Greek uprising on Crete and the mass killings of Armenians in Anatolia, this movement was influenced by the Islamist imperial ideology of Sultan Abdül Hamid. The sultan tried to use Sunni Albanians to control his unruly Christian subjects in the Balkans and to assign them the same role he had given the Kurds in Anatolia: non-Turkish Sunni containing the Christian parts of the population. As with the League of Prizren in its initial phase, the League of Pejë was under the tacit control of the Ottoman government.

A third phase of unrest in eastern and parts of central *Arnavutluk* shook the region in the years prior to the first Balkan war (1912). Once again, Sunni Albanians rose for regional autonomy, tax exemption, restriction of their military service to the Balkans (and not in the Arab provinces of the empire) and implementation of customary law. Many local rebellions, however, did not pursue these major political goals, but were mainly directed against government measures or government actions in general; they were usually provoked by attempts on the part of government officials to collect taxes. There was no major Christian Albanian unrest, with the exception of the failed attempts of Mirdita



4.6 Market in Peja

Kapetans to engage in international politics in the wake of the Berlin Congress and a rebellion of highlanders in 1911. Those who dared to take up arms against the Ottoman administration were predominantly Sunni, and their conservative agenda targeting Ottoman reformers, in many ways was in line with the authoritarian Islamist regime of Abdül Hamid. The sultan needed Sunni support to undo reforms that were increasingly imposed on the empire by the European powers, and he acknowledged the strategic importance of a loyal Sunni population close to sensitive border areas adjacent to Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. He endeavored to create strong personal ties with these Sunnis by recruiting Kosovo Albanians as bodyguards, by distributing honors and financial rewards and by tolerating local abuse of power primarily to the disadvantage of Christian (mostly Orthodox) subjects.



4.7 Albanian insurgents, 1902. Image by DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA / Contributor via Getty Images.

Regional Ottoman authorities were faced with widespread lawlessness on the part of Sunni Albanians, who often ignored imperial law and had a unique idea of home rule: loyalty to the sultan in distant Istanbul and full freedom of action on the local level. In this sense, rural *Arnavutluk* did not differ structurally from rural eastern Anatolia. The significant presence of foreign diplomats, the proximity of borders with Great Powers such as

Austria-Hungary and Russia and the rapidly arming neighboring regional states, however, prevented Balkan Sunni leaders from considering acts of mass violence. Nevertheless, insecurity was widespread, and Ottoman Sunni police forces usually turned a blind eye to Sunni perpetrators; as in Anatolia, diplomatic protests on the part European powers hardly deterred local strongmen and even reinforced the sultan's reluctance to improve the legal position of his Christian subjects, a policy that was grist for the mill of Christian autonomists and guerrillas.

Pressure on traditionalist Sunni leaders in *Arnavutluk* increased when in 1908 another group of Sunni reformers, this time radical Young Turks, came to power and decided to impose imperial law and state monopoly on the use of force against all subjects, including Sunnis. Years of armed resistance and violent repression ensued, which severely destabilized particularly the eastern part of *Arnavutluk*. In 1910, an Ottoman punitive military action systemically attacked Albanian family towers (kulla) and penetrated deep into remote areas with mountain artillery. In 1911, in an effort to gain popularity, the sultan himself came to eastern *Arnavutluk* to distribute compensation to homeowners whose property had been destroyed by imperial troops. Nothing better demonstrated the narrowing limits of imperial power. While the sultan still had the backing of traditionalist Sunni Albanians at this point, another group of Sunni Albanians rallied around Hasan bey Prishtina, the only strategic political thinker of eastern *Arnavutluk*, and occupied the Ottoman power center of Skopje in August 1912 – an autonomous *Arnavutluk* under the dominance of Sunni elites from present-day Kosovo and North Macedonia appeared

inevitable. But this move accelerated secret negotiations on the part of the Orthodox national states who feared the emergence of any autonomous Albanian entity would thwart their expansionist goals.

In October 1912, the armies of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece attacked in a joint campaign, and Ottoman resistance in *Arnavutluk* soon collapsed, in part because many Sunni Albanian irregulars refused to serve in the Ottoman army. Years of warfare between Albanian insurgents and Ottoman security forces had severed old bonds of loyalties. Ottoman troops and Albanian irregulars fought the invaders independently, and both were easy prey for the highly motivated and newly equipped armies of the regional neighbor states.

To sum up, the Albanians in the eastern part of *Arnavutluk* (which corresponds roughly to modern Kosovo) played a unique role in what is traditionally described as the Albanian national movement. They possessed military force and were much more willing to rise up against the Ottoman administration than were Albanians in the south. They organized two leagues that are usually portrayed in traditional Albanian historiography as protostates. However, the Albanian cultural movement in the east was extremely weak; there were almost no intellectuals who promoted the Albanian language, education and national idea. The only real exception was the city of Bitola in Macedonia, which was simultaneously a center for Turkish, Greek, Aromanian, Bulgarian and Albanian nationalist activists who monitored each other closely. The majority of Albanian leaders in the east were Sunni, remained loyal to the sultan-caliph almost until the end and were deeply suspicious of

Christians and their goal of constitutional emancipation. Most Sunni Albanians from eastern *Arnavutluk* defended the Ottoman status quo, supported home-rule, Albanian customary law, and the dominant position of Muslims over Christians. Autonomy to them primarily meant a privileged status for Sunni Albanians within the Ottoman empire, and certainly not an independent multi-religious Albanian national state with Orthodox and Catholics as citizens with equal rights or even a dominant position in politics, culture and economy. Within the Sunni milieu, ideological allegiances and loyalties – Islamic, Ottoman and Albanian – often overlapped, and many Sunni Albanians conceived of their nation as a part of a wider Sunni Ottoman community.

National Activists: Trans-territorial Networks

Non-Sunni nationalist activists, or Albanianists, from the Orthodox, Catholic and Bektashi communities, pursued a significantly different agenda. While Sunni risings against imperial authorities occurred within a Sunni context and within the privileged group of the empire, any armed action by non-Sunnis, especially of Christians, could provoke massive reprisals by government officials and Sunni irregulars. The massacres in Bulgaria in 1876 and in Armenia 1894–1896 demonstrated the fate that awaited those who dared to offer opposition against the arbitrary rule of local Sunni strongmen. For Albanian national activists, the situation was even more complex than for their Bulgarian or Armenian counterparts – they needed to include Sunnis into their project for an Albanian nation; it was not possible to build an Albania against

Sunni Albanians who constituted the demographic core group of the envisaged nation.

Albanianism began as an intellectual network of non-Sunni Albanians, people who saw in nation-building the possibility of emancipation. As with Arab nationalism, Christians hoped to overcome their depressed position by radically challenging the Ottoman model of social organization based on religious allegiance with a privileged group and a structurally discriminated other. The nation should serve as a concept that would bridge religious differences and level religion-based, time-honored hierarchies. Non-Sunni Bektashis, even though they were Muslims, shared with Christians a distance from the empire of the sultan-caliph who embodied Sunni dominance in politics and religion.

Where could such ideas evolve in a society whose major administrative centers (Shkodër, Prizren, Bitola, Skopje) were dominated by Sunni Muslims? As with other national activists in the Balkans, Albanianists had their centers outside or at the periphery of the Ottoman empire. And in *Arnavutluk* as in Ottoman Armenia, foreigners, especially Protestant missionaries, the Catholic church and Great Powers (particularly Austria-Hungary and Italy), while pursuing their own particular interests, supported national and cultural activities and helped to distribute propaganda media, mainly newspapers and brochures. In *Arnavutluk*, there was neither a university, nor a tradition of self-organization in associations, nor a public sphere. Widespread illiteracy, and the almost complete lack of roads and railway lines, made modernizing public debate in *Arnavutluk* virtually impossible. At the end of the nineteenth century, Abdül Hamid even

officially banned Albanian as a written language out of fear of the formation of an Albanian national community that would include the important Sunni community, which would have undermined his idea of building a Sunni imperial nation. Spoken Albanian was not considered to be a political danger, but once a language other than the Ottoman Turkish spoken predominantly by Sunni subjects was elevated to the rank of a literary language, dissolution of the Sunni *Umma* (community) was inevitable.

Against this background, intellectuals who hoped to promote Albanian as a literary language and Albanian culture in general waged an uphill fight. Early important impulses were provided, as in the case of other small languages, from Protestant missionaries from the British and Foreign Bible Society who initiated the first translation of the New Testament into Albanian by Vangjel Meksi, printed in 1827. Meksi had served Ali Pasha of Ioannina as physician and was killed in 1823 as a supporter of the Orthodox uprising in Greece. A complete translation of the New Testament and the Gospels was carried out by another group of Protestant missionaries and a learned Albanian, Konstantin Kristoforidhi. On this occasion, the translation was rendered in both the Geg and the Tosk dialects (1869). Kristoforidhi had been introduced to scholarly studies by the Austrian consul Johann Georg von Hahn whom he had taught Albanian. Hahn can be considered the founding father of Albanian studies, and Kristoforidhi one of the first theoreticians of Albanian linguistics. Protestant missionaries also contributed to the foundation of the first Albanian language girls' school in Korçë sponsored by the Qiriazi family (1891).

The cooperation between Kristoforidhi and Hahn points to a second major influence on Albanianism: foreign diplomats, particularly Austrian (and later Austro-Hungarian) consuls who did much to shape not only Albanian studies but also an Albanian national identity. From 1896/97 onward, the Dual Monarchy actively pursued Albanian nation-building through the promotion of a suprareligious identity based on language. This project was intended to prepare the ground for an autonomous or independent Albanian state in the event of the collapse of the Ottoman empire. The Dual Monarchy feared both Serbia and Italy as rivals and was particularly concerned about the prospect of the Serbs gaining access to the Adriatic through *Arnavutluk*.

Apart from Protestant missionaries and foreign consuls, further inspiration for early Albanianists came from the diaspora, mostly Orthodox merchant communities from southern *Arnavutluk*. One of their main centers was Bucharest, the capital of the Ottoman vassal principality of Wallachia, which in the first eight decades of the nineteenth century was a bustling center of Balkan nationalist activists including Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians and Albanians. In this Orthodox environment, Naum Veqilharxhi, who had been socialized into the community of Orthodox anti-Ottoman activists, published a first Albanian alphabet (developed in 1824/25 and published twenty years later). Veqilharxhi was the first to address the thorny question of how to write Albanian from a theoretical point of view. During his period, only few literate Albanians wrote Albanian, and if so, they did it in the alphabet of their religion, Latin among Catholics, Greek among Orthodox and Arabic among Muslims. In the

Ottoman world, alphabets were closely related to religion and they also had a sacral dimension. Veqilharxhi proposed the creation of a completely new alphabet to bridge this religious difference; however, it failed because of its complexity. The alphabet question with its competing options of existing alphabets or the creation of a completely new one was thus opened. It was not addressed in a more coherent manner until 1908.

Albanianists also became active in two traditional diasporic areas of Albanian culture: southern Italy and in southern Greece. Since the fifteenth century, an Albanian cultural consciousness had been cultivated by the Italo-Albanians in Sicily, Calabria and Apulia, well and safely detached from the control of the Ottoman empire. In the nineteenth century, Italo-Albanian intellectuals, were frequently trained at seminaries and often joined the *Risorgimento*, the Italian national movement. Writers such as Girolamo de Rada (1841–1903) cultivated a romantic national literature in the Albanian language. The Italo-Albanians contributed to the formation of a literary network of literate Albanians, mostly in southern *Arnavutluk* and in Greece, and helped to support Italian interests in the southwestern Balkans at the end of the nineteenth century.

In Greece, *Arvanite* intellectuals and politicians looked northward to *Arnavutluk* as a potential area of Greek-led expansion. For several decades, they entertained the idea of an alliance between Greece, with its influential *Arvanite* community, and southern *Arnavutluk*. The idea of a common Pelasgian origin played an important role in this context. The Pelasgi, a mythical people in the ancient Balkans, were invoked as common ancestors of both

Albanians and Greeks. *Arvanite* activists promoted the idea of a constitutional Helleno-Albanian union along the lines of Austria-Hungary, as a form of a south Balkan dual monarchy. This project was not based on a common language, but rather on the idea of a common ethnic origin, a similar mentality and a division between Tosks and Gegs, between the south and north. While south Albanian Tosks would be seen as sharing many commonalities with Orthodox Greeks (and Aromanians as a third, albeit minor, partner in this project), Geg Albanians were perceived as the other who did not and should not belong to this Greco-Albanian nation project. Activists promoting this idea even attempted to win over Bektashi Albanians; Sunnis, however, were left out because they seemed culturally and mentally alien to a political model based in its very essence on the Orthodox faith (such as the Greek state itself).

A very important cultural environment for the promotion of these ideas was Ottoman Epirus, where at the Zosimaia lyceum in Ioannina Orthodox and Muslim Albanians were trained in Greek culture. But it was here that clashes between young Greek and Albanian activists arose. Challenged by the idea of a cultural superiority and chronological priority of Hellenism, young Albanian intellectuals developed the idea that their own language predated Greek and they began promoting a distinct Albanian identity concept that transformed the former Pelasgian theory into the concept of a direct Pelasgian-Albanian continuity, excluding the Greeks. Conflicts over historical rights to territory, autochthony, continuity and priority increasingly became central elements of the Albanianist discourse directed against Greek and South Slav claims.

While Greece in this way attempted to get what it perceived to be its share of Ottoman territories in the Balkans, Serbia and Montenegro pursued their own similar policies toward *Arnavutluk*. Montenegro insisted on a shared tribal world in the mountains, and indeed, many north Albanian tribal leaders as well as strongmen from Kosovo maintained close relations with the small princely court in Cetinje, the capital-village of Montenegro. Serbia could not exploit shared social elements such as tribal organization, so instead, it advanced the theory of *Arnautaši*, i.e. that most Sunni Albanians in Kosovo were actually Serbs who had converted to Islam and had been subsequently Albanianized. According to this narrative, Sunni Albanians in eastern *Arnavutluk* were actually Serbs who simply needed to recognize their true origins.

In these strategies, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro relied on social and mental patterns that are often rejected in the traditional self-image of Albanian nationalism: the existence of strong regional identities within *Arnavutluk*, and the cultural closeness of regional populations across religious borders. This closeness did not exclude conflict but mattered more than a fictive loyalty with people who spoke the same language, albeit in rather divergent dialects, but who lived hundreds of kilometers away, behind several chains of nearly insurmountable mountains. In the Serbian and Montenegrin concept, "their" Albanians were Gegs, while Tosks in the south were portrayed by Greeks as Albanian-speaking Greeks. The Greek idea of Gegs as not belonging to the Greco-Albanian project, and the Serbo-Montenegrin image of non-Kosovar Gegs as true Albanians and of Tosks as not belonging to an

Albanian nation can easily be explained by the maximal territorial aspirations of these three countries.

Greece and Serbia, which were up to 1878 the most important Balkan national states (officially Serbia was still a tributary principality of the Ottoman empire), had silently agreed to divide the Ottoman Balkans along the river Shkumbin in central Albania, which constitutes the dialect border between Gegs and Tosks. But there was a clear difference between Greece and Serbia – Serbia had no equivalent to the *Arvanites* in Greece, i.e. a large Orthodox group of Albanian descent, who were a pillar of the (Greek) national state and could build a bridge to Albanians in *Arnavutluk*. While a Serbo-Geg project was never truly elaborated and Montenegrin plans for a common national or state project was never properly articulated, the Albano-Greek double state as a concept had its intellectual and political supporters among both communities and was therefore much more than simply one among many immature national projects.

That concept nevertheless failed not least because of the sophistication of the Albanian and Aromanian Orthodox national and cultural tendencies in the southern part of *Arnavutluk*. Greeks and *Arvanites* took it for granted that Orthodox, notwithstanding their language (Albanian, Aromanian or Greek), would identify as Greeks. Greek foreign policy even developed the narrative that the Greek nation in *Arnavutluk* was not based on language, but on religion and consciousness – as long as people identified as Orthodox, they were automatically Greek. This vision was challenged first by Aromanians and later by Albanian Orthodox activists. From the 1860s onward, an Aromanian network emerged in Ottoman

Macedonia. It was supported by Romania, which regarded Aromanians as fellow Romanians in the central Balkans and began to create a network of schools in Ottoman Macedonia. Despite significant Greek opposition, the Ottoman empire recognized an Aromanian community in 1905. In turn, Aromanian activists influenced Albanian Orthodox both in southern *Arnavutluk* and in Bucharest. They shared anti-Greek feelings and therefore had common ideological positions.

Identity strategies of the non-Greek Orthodox developed in the context of the gradual dissolution of the supranational Orthodox community (*millet*) in the Ottoman empire. Until 1870, the Patriarch of Constantinople had been the single spiritual and civil head of this community. In 1870, the Ottoman empire recognized a Bulgarian national Orthodox church (exarchate). From this point on, other non-Greek Orthodox activists were encouraged to claim their own national churches, too. The Patriarchate fought against this split along ethnic demarcations, but since it was dominated by Istanbul-based Greek clergy and because of its intransigent stance, Orthodox Aromanian and Orthodox Albanian activists gained ground. And this led to a split within the multilingual Orthodox community, a split that ran along lines of social status, wealth, age, family ties and personal interests and divided people in two camps: those supporting the Patriarchate and a Greek identity option, usually wealthier people, and those opting for a new and less religious-related group identity, usually younger men with a lower social status.

The same mechanisms can be observed in the case of Muslims: the older generation, people with positions of

power, were more loyal to traditional concepts of identity than younger men, mostly officers and bureaucrats who through new political models such as Young Turkism tried to boost their careers. Recent research has emphasized that many activists did not simply follow an ethnic logic (which was often actually forged by them) but chose between different political options. Lines of division even ran through families and often depended on very concrete considerations such as government jobs, grants by foreign states (Greece, Romania), business interests, education or migration experience (hence the importance of diasporic centers such as Bucharest, Sofia, Alexandria in Egypt or Vienna).

With regard to the non-Slavic Orthodox communities on Ottoman soil, Greece and Romania competed over Aromanians, and Greece tried to win over Orthodox Albanians. At the end of the nineteenth century, the model of an Albano-Hellenic union was replaced on the Greek side by the idea of Pan-Hellenism, i.e. Orthodox Albanians and Aromanians were conceived or portrayed as non-Grecophone Greeks who would easily be linguistically assimilated by a Greek school system. Similar to Turkism in the case of Sunni Albanians, Hellenism had a strong appeal to Orthodox Albanians. Orthodox Albanian activists were not able to obtain their own constitutional status within the Ottoman empire; however, they were able to lay the groundwork for their own church organization with Albanian as the liturgical language. Once again, this major development occurred in the diaspora, this time in Boston driven in part by Fan Noli, who would later play an important political role as well. Driven by economic misery and political violence in the Ottoman

Balkans, Orthodox Albanians, along with Orthodox from Ottoman Macedonia, began to emigrate to the United States. It was far away from the Balkans that Albanian Orthodox would lay the foundation for their emancipation from the Greek-controlled Patriarchate of Constantinople. An autocephalous Albanian Orthodox church would not be officially founded until 1929 and would have to wait until 1937 to be officially recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

While Turkish, Greek, Romanian, Serbian and Montenegrin influence on Albanian national activists has attracted considerable scholarly interest, Bulgaria as an actor and as role model is often overlooked. The youngest national state in the Balkans, created in 1878, Bulgaria developed a highly ambitious regional policy and supported underground organizations in Macedonia that became institutional role models for Young Turks and Albanians. In the southeastern part of *Arnavutluk*, Albanians (Sunni, Bektashi and Orthodox) shared a common space with Orthodox Macedo-Bulgarians (speakers of western Bulgarian dialects in Macedonia). Ties were particularly close within the Orthodox community, and Albanian Orthodox began to migrate to Sofia, the capital of the new Bulgarian state. Cultural closeness was expressed by some Orthodox Albanians from the mixed Albanian-Bulgarian area in western Macedonia by using the Bulgarian Cyrillic alphabet for their Albanian publications. However, a much more powerful connection between the Bulgarian state and Albanians evolved on the eve of the Balkan wars (1912/1913). Sunni Muslims in *Arnavutluk* and Macedonia felt threatened by Greece and Serbia and were looking for allies. That

is why they approached Macedo-Bulgarian activists who had the same political enemies. This, and not common political goals, was the basis for considerable cooperation between Sunni Muslim leaders mainly from Kosovo and IMRO activists. After Macedonia had been partitioned in 1912 between Serbia and Greece, and when in 1913 a Bulgarian attack on these two neighbors failed, Albanians and Bulgarians joined forces to fight against the new territorial order. The alliance only failed when in 1915 Bulgaria occupied the contested area together with the Central Powers and pursued an oppressive strategy of Bulgarization. Sofia even dreamed of installing a Bulgarian prince as king of Albania.

While Orthodox Albanians were exposed to the competing identity policies of Balkan national states, Catholic Albanians in the northwest of *Arnavutluk* had been since around 1700 under the diplomatic protection of the Habsburg Monarchy, which also offered financial support. Yet with the foundation of an Italian national state in 1861, Italy attempted to expand its zone of influence on the eastern shore of the southwestern Adriatic. Italo-Albanians and the fact that Italian was the usual literary language of Catholic Albanians facilitated this strategy. Italy and Austria-Hungary competed over hegemony in the Adriatic in general, and although they were officially allies (from 1881), the competition between them intensified at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In order to contain Italian influence and Serbian expansionist aspirations to the Adriatic shore, Austria-Hungary became one of the principal sponsors of Albanian national activists in terms of resources and intellectual impact. It recognized that the

Albanian Catholics, contrary to Albanian Orthodox, were not that much of a driving force behind Albanianism – regionalism and diffidence toward Sunni Albanians were deeply rooted; it was only toward the end of the nineteenth century that Catholic intellectuals, mostly clergymen, engaged more actively in Albanianist discourses.

While the Franciscan order had since the early modern period cultivated the Albanian language and Catholic Albanian identity with strong references to pre-Ottoman times, the Jesuits joined Albanianist activities later and rather reluctantly. However, it was a Catholic Albanian in high-level Ottoman state service (he died as Ottoman governor in Lebanon in 1892), Pashko Vasa (1825–1892), who coined the phrase "The religion of the Albanian is Albanianism." This phrase would later become famous since it expressed the suprareligious identity model of nationalist activists and of the modern Albanian state. During Vasa's lifetime, however, it was more a dream or a goal than reality. Vasa's life was atypical for Catholic cultural elites in *Arnavutluk*: neither was he a clergyman nor did he spend his life in the Shkodër area. In 1848/1849, he participated in the northern Italian uprisings against Austrian rule; he then served as secretary to the Ottoman diplomatic mission in London and later in the Ottoman administration of Bosnia. Vasa belonged to the network of learned Albanianists such as Kristoforidhi, and like many nationalist activists of his generation, he spent most of his life outside *Arnavutluk*. It was, as noted, at the turn of the twentieth century that Catholics became more active in a truly Albanianist sense, and not just as defendants of their specific confessional milieu.

Among the Muslims, the driving force behind Albanianism were predominantly the Bektashi, whose structural distance from the sultan-caliph and whose political marginalization after 1826 have already been mentioned. Important figures of the Albanianist movement such as the Frashëri brothers – Abdyl, Naim and Sami – once again demonstrate the general rule of multiple allegiances. While Orthodox activists moved between Greek, Romanian/Aromanian and Albanian traditions and identity options, the Frashëri promoted Albanianism and at the same time contributed to general Ottoman culture. All three brothers had been trained at Zosimaia high school in Ioannina where they had learned Ancient Greek, Latin and French, but they were also fluent in the classical languages of Ottoman culture (Arab, Persian, Ottoman-Turkish). Sami Frashëri (1850–1904) was the founding president of an Istanbul-based society dedicated to the printing of books in the Albanian language in 1879, an organization whose importance for the development of Albanian as a literary language can hardly be exaggerated. He created an individual alphabet for the Albanian language (mostly using the Latin script) and published the most influential program of Albanianism, *Albania, What It Was, What It Is and What It Ought to Be*. At the same time, however, he was a prolific writer in Ottoman Turkish, author of several dictionaries and a Turkish encyclopedia.

His brother Abdyl (1839–1892) was an active politician, who, as a member of the League of Prizren in 1878, defended Albanian territorial interests in southern *Arnavutluk* against Greek aspirations. In 1880/1881 he radicalized the program of the league and demanded full-fledged autonomy for *Arnavutluk*, a step that contributed to the violent repression of the league by the sultan

in 1881. The third brother, Naim (1846–1900), served in the Ottoman education ministry and contributed significantly to the opening of the first secular Albanian-language school in Korçë (1887) and to the publication of Albanianist media, despite severe official restrictions. In addition, he was the major Bektashi poet of the Albanianist network and wrote an epic *History of Scanderbeg* (1898). Like his brother Abdyl, he was a polyglot writer and also published poems in Ottoman-Turkish, Greek and Persian.

As non-Sunni Muslims with Shiite tendencies (especially the veneration of the triad Allah-Muhammed-Ali, Muhammed's nephew), Bektashi widely promoted the idea of an Albanian, non-Turkish Islam and displayed a particular openness for cooperation with Albanian Christians. In their milieu, the conviction of Muslim superiority over Christians was far less common and far less pronounced than within the Sunni community. But as in the case of other religious communities, the Bektashi were far from being a homogenous block. While several intellectual Bektashi and spiritual leaders (*baba*) played an active role in Albanianism, others remained more passive. Expanding Bektashi circles were faced with the growing Sunnitization of imperial politics. Concentrated in the south of *Arnavutluk*, Albanianist Bektashi gradually became a distinct political and cultural group linked to the Tosk part of the emerging Albanian nation.

In all of the various strands of Albanianism, religious affiliation and religious institutions (churches, monasteries and monastic orders, dervish orders and *tekkes*) were central to the formation of Albanian national discourses. They were also all intertwined with imperial identity strategies and evolving national options in the Balkans as

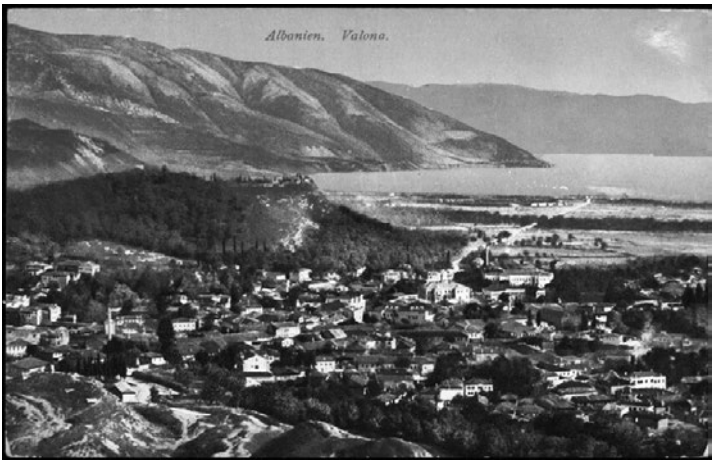
well as with Great Power influence. Albanianism emerged in the wider Ottoman world, and most of its intellectual leaders made careers outside *Arnavutluk* as imperial officials or, as in the case of Orthodox activists, as merchants, within or outside the imperial borders. Micro-regional networks, personal loyalties and personal choices were essential and often more important than language or common origin, as is often claimed in Albanianist writings and the official line of communist and post-communist historiography. Albanianist media (which was not officially tolerated by the Ottoman authorities until 1908, and often met with semi-official opposition even until 1912) circulated almost exclusively among a handful of literate activists in *Arnavutluk*. Their main ideas were spread, for example, by Bektashi *tekkes* or by activist Muslim landowner (beys) and Catholic priests.

With the exception of the Korçë school, there was no educational system that was exclusively devoted to Albanianism. This can easily be explained because of the extensive Ottoman state repression against an Albanian school system and because of a similar position taken by the Greek-dominated Orthodox church against an Albanian cultural movement within the Orthodox community. The intellectual network of Albanianism had no single leader, and there was not even a clearly recognizable leading group. It was as regional, regionalist, confessionalist and trans-territorial as Albanian-speaking society in general, although in literate elite circles, mainly in the Romanian and North American diaspora, confessional allegiance tended to be gradually replaced by modern national loyalties. Most illiterate Sunni Muslims remained untouched by the sophisticated Albanianist discourses of

Bektashi and Orthodox activists. They tended to concentrate on armed uprisings against Ottoman reformers during the *Tanzimat* period and during the Young Turk regime, as well as against territorial loss and the expansionist policies of Balkan Christian national states.

A crucial moment for cultural Albanianism prior to the Balkan wars was the (partial) solution of the thorny alphabet question. At the turn of the twentieth century, Albanian was written in alphabets related to religious affiliation (Arabic, Greek, Latin) and in a number of newly created "national" systems whose circulation was rather limited and whose implementation faced serious technical difficulties (printing presses, telegraph system). Franz Baron Nopcsa, a Hungarian baron, scholar, adventurer and certainly one of the most informed observers of *Arnavutluk*, remarked around 1900 that there would soon be more alphabets than literate Albanians. Immediately after the Young Turk putsch in 1908, a number of Albanianist clubs were founded, printing presses began to publish in Albanian and dozens of Albanian schools were opened by activists – which demonstrates that despite government repression Albanianist networks had developed and were ready to engage in coherent political action once the restrictions had been lifted.

The Albanian Club of Monastir (Bitola), a hotspot of Balkan nationalisms, took a leading role and convened a conference in November 1908 to settle the alphabet issue. Regionalist and religious interests were strong, and Ottoman officials mobilized the Sunni clergy against the introduction of the Latin alphabet. There were also still many supporters of the Istanbul alphabet designed by Sami Frashëri. Following much debate, the conference, which



4.8 Late Ottoman Vlorë

was attended by Muslim and Christian Albanian national activists, opted for two alphabets, the Latin and the Istanbul. The Young Turks reacted by actively pushing the Arabic alphabet, and the alphabet question remained a bone of contention until the breakdown of the empire four years later. Nevertheless, the Monastir Conference had paved the way for the full adoption of the Latin alphabet by the Albanian national state and thus by the first predominantly Muslim nation in the world. The Young Turks whose political heirs in the Turkish Republic were set to follow this example two decades later, had fully understood the immense significance of this decision. The political and cultural leaders of Albanianism sent a strong message to Albanians and to the European world: Albanians were a European people, and Albanian Muslims did not want to separate from a multireligious independent *Arnavutluk* in the case of an Ottoman collapse. In 1908, few recognized just how soon that collapse would happen.

PART II
STATE AND NATION CONSTRUCTION

5

Arnavutluk to Albania: The Triumph of Albanianism, 1912–1924

With the increase in international tension leading up to the brutal wars of the twentieth century, Albanians were once again overwhelmed by events beyond their control. As had happened so often in the past, they were again acted upon – occasionally they were able to influence their own destiny but for the most part it was others, international actors, European powers, the United States or the Balkan states, which were instrumental in their fate. The result was untold hardship, suffering and death as rebellion, repression and war laid waste to the land. But in the midst of this carnage, there was also a new beginning as an independent state, albeit with significantly restricted frontiers. And the chaotic early years of independence were an indication that the process of both nation and state construction would be long and difficult. Still, some steps toward a fragile unity were taken.

The Balkan Wars

As we have seen, the Albanian national movement blossomed among a small section of the predominately Orthodox, Bektashi and Catholic educated elite, and slowly grew. Similar movements in other Balkan lands had by the turn of the twentieth century matured into

popular movements that encouraged politicians to seek territorial expansion, generally at the expense of the Ottoman empire. The turmoil in the empire caused by the Young Turks revolt saw a redoubling of those efforts. States like Bulgaria and Austria-Hungary, which held Ottoman territory without clear title, hoped to solidify those gains, while states like Serbia, Montenegro and Greece, which coveted Ottoman territory, looked for the opportunity to seize what they could. The turmoil in *Arnavutluk* beginning in 1909 added new urgency as the Balkan states were both alarmed and encouraged by the Albanian uprisings. On the one hand, there was a fear that the Albanians would succeed in uniting within the empire, making it more difficult to peel off pieces of *Arnavutluk*. On the other hand, the Balkan states were encouraged by the seeming inability of the Ottoman empire to quell the Albanian uprisings and by the relatively quick Italian seizure of Ottoman Libya in 1911.

Encouraged by Russia, which, following its 1905 defeat in a war against Japan, had turned its attentions back to the Balkans, Serbia and Bulgaria, soon to be joined by Greece and Montenegro, formed the Balkan league with the intention of driving the Ottomans from the Balkan peninsula. As Sunni Albanians continued their rising, by September 1912 much of what would soon become Albania and all of Kosovo was in the hands of the insurgents. As the Ottomans continued their policy of oppression and concessions, Montenegro attacked *Arnavutluk* and Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece soon joined the assault, sparking the first Balkan war.

While the Albanian nationalist movement and the Young Turks revolt had dampened the traditionally pro-

Ottoman attitude of many enlightened Albanians, most nevertheless continued to support the Ottomans. Among the common people, most fought alongside the Ottomans as well, in part out of loyalty and in part out of the traditional fear of the Serbs and the Greeks, fear that the Ottomans did much to exploit. But Serbian armies marched toward Durrës and their ultimate goal of an outlet to the Adriatic Sea, and joined the Montenegrin siege of Shkodër, leaving defeated Turkish units and piles of Albanian corpses in their wake. The Greeks meanwhile marched north and laid siege to Ioannina, and landed troops at Himara where the Greek mayor had organized a revolt against the empire.

As the tide of the war began turning against the Ottomans, some Albanian fighters abandoned the battlefield and headed home to defend their own territories against the invaders. Although the war with Italy over Libya had ended, the Ottomans were unable to send many of the troops used in that campaign to the Balkans as a result of a Greek blockade, the fear of Russian moves in the Caucasus and an Arab revolt. As a result, they were able to muster no more than a poorly organized force of about 320,000 troops that faced a combined league force of some 700,000. Outnumbered and outgunned, the Ottomans were forced to sign an armistice at the beginning of December 1912, at which point all Ottoman territories in Europe, with the exception of Istanbul, Adrianople, Shkodër and Ioannina, were in league hands. The latter two were occupied by Albanian irregular forces.

Albanian nationalists saw the Ottoman defeats as both an opportunity and a challenge. Ottoman reversals in a

way strengthen their arguments in favor of increased autonomy, but the reality quickly dawned that without extensive diplomatic support, not only would *Arnavutluk* be conquered but it would likely be annexed by Serbia, Montenegro and Greece. Some Albanian nationalists had anticipated this outcome, and while they realized that Albanians were perhaps not ready for independence, they saw the Ottoman collapse as a clear sign that an autonomous Albania within the Ottoman empire was no longer an option. One of these prominent nationalists was Ismail Qemali bey Vlora (1844–1919), the scion of a powerful Sunni family from Vlorë, who is still considered patriarch or father of the nation in Albania today. As with Skanderbeg himself, Ismail Qemali lent his name to streets, schools and towns, and his visage can be found on postage stamps and bank notes.

Following an extensive education in his family home, where Ismail Qemali learned Turkish, Italian, German and French, like the Frashëri brothers he began his formal training at Zosimaia high school in Ioannina. Then, like the sons of many noble families, he moved to Istanbul to study law, followed by a career in imperial service. Although a Sunni Muslim, he married an Orthodox Greek, and at least one Albanian socialist historian sees this as evidence of Qemali challenging what he described as the Islamic and obscurantist Turkish environment. Be that as it may, he rose to become a powerful Ottoman official, serving consecutively as governor of Gallipoli, Beirut and Tripoli. But he eventually soured on the growing authoritarianism of Abdül Hamid and lived abroad for some eight years, during which he spent much time in the company of Albanian intellectuals

and nationalists in Geneva, Rome, Paris, London and elsewhere. He returned to Istanbul following the Young Turks revolt and entered parliament as an opponent of the new centralization policies and supporter of regional autonomy.

An Independent Albania

Once it became clear that the empire was no longer viable, Qemali turned his focus to his homeland and worked tirelessly to obtain some foreign support, without which he realized an Albania could not survive. Fearing that the Balkan allies would overrun *Arnavutluk*, Qemali traveled to Romania to gain the support of the important diaspora there, and then on to Vienna and Budapest to solicit Austro-Hungarian support for an independent Albania. Having secured that support, in November 1912 Qemali returned to Vlorë, where his son had summoned delegates to a national congress. Despite the fact that most of *Arnavutluk* was now under occupation, thirty-seven delegates, mostly from the center and the south, assembled on November 28, raised the double-headed black eagle flag of Skanderbeg and declared Albanian independence.

The assembled notables began the construction of a state. A provisional government was hastily put together, with Qemali as president and a cabinet composed of two Catholics, three Orthodox and five Muslims. The congress also formed a senate of eighteen members as well as a national militia. Qemali immediately appealed to the powers for protection from external and internal enemies. Few outside of Vlorë paid much attention to these

developments, and when they did, they were mostly in opposition. Internally, the new government faced opposition from the Turkish army near Vlorë, Esad Pasha Toptani (1863–1920), a Sunni feudal lord from the Tirana area who commanded part of the Turkish army in the north, and northern tribes, who were concerned about centralization and Tosk dominance.

External forces, in the meantime, presented an even more dangerous obstacle to the survival of the new state. Not surprisingly, the Balkan states that were engaged in an expensive struggle against Turkey paid no heed to the declaration and continued to consider *Arnavutluk* to be part of European Turkey and acted accordingly. Both Montenegro and Serbia continued their advance into Albanian territory, playing the old game of inciting the fiercely independent tribes against any attempt at centralization and against each other in order to take advantage of the ensuring chaos.

As we have seen, the Ottomans sued for peace, and at the beginning of December 1912 an armistice was signed bringing the first Balkan war to an end. This enabled the Albanians to present their case at the Conference of Ambassadors representing the Great Powers, which was convened in London in December 1912 to attempt a general settlement following the war. The principal support for the Albanian cause at the conference came from Austria-Hungary, whose policy had always been to deny Serbia access to the Adriatic, and, somewhat less enthusiastically, from Italy, which also feared Serbian and Greek expansion and continued its rivalry with Austria-Hungary. Italy proposed that the region be left under nominal Turkish sovereignty, while Austria-Hungary

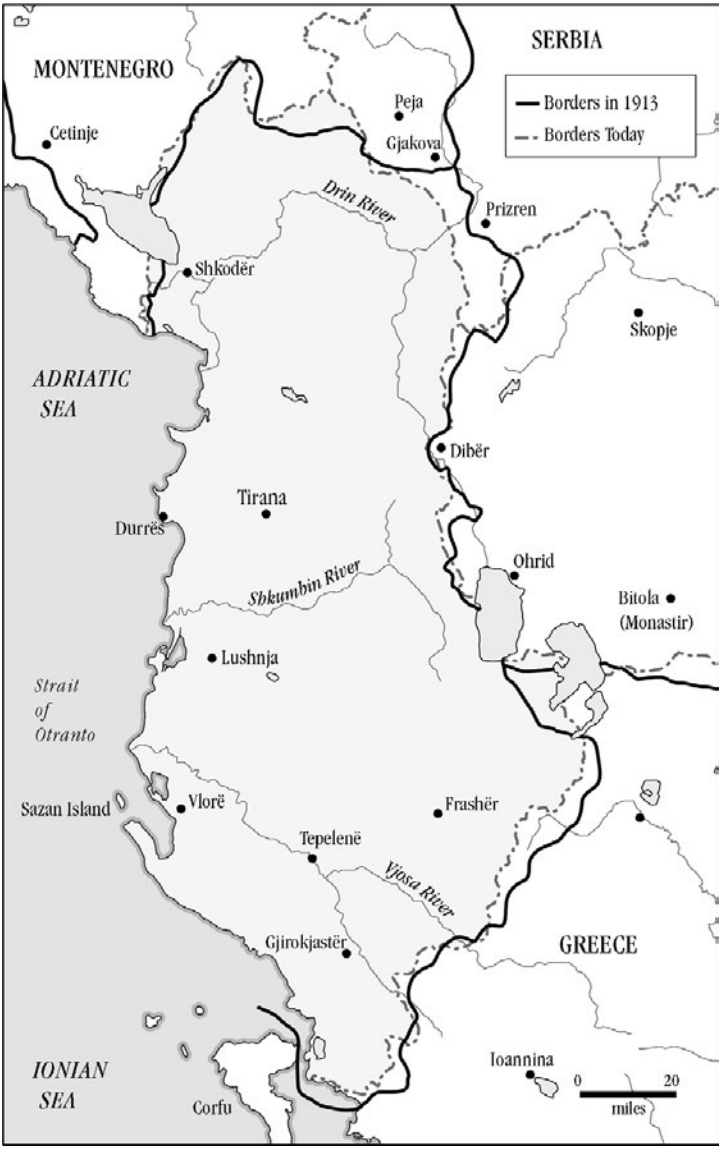
hoped to create an independent and greater Albania that would include peripheral regions containing not only Albanians but other nationalities as well.

Because of the strenuous opposition from Russia and the Balkan states, the conference accepted a compromise proposal recognizing the independence of Albania but deferring the questions of frontiers until 1913, when the initial borders were finally delineated. The entire plain of Kosovo was awarded to the Serbs, as were the important towns of Pejë, Gjakovë, Prizren and Dibër, traditional market towns for the northern Albanian tribes. The northern tribes of Hoti and Gruda, much of the Kelmendi territory, as well as Plava and Gucia were handed over to the Montenegrins. In the meantime, the Montenegrin army, led by King Nicholas, had besieged Shkodër, defended by a Turkish army led by Esad Pasha, after he had arranged for the assassination of the Turkish commander. Esad Pasha, who was not unjustly accused of selling Shkodër to the Montenegrins, marched out of the city on April 23, 1913, with his garrison, their guns and Montenegrin support for his political ambitions in the new Albania, including recognizing him as the prince of Albania under the sovereignty of the sultan. Following his withdrawal, he established himself in his ancestral home in central Albania and constructed the so-called senate of central Albania with himself as president, refusing to recognize the provisional government of Ismail Qemali.

King Nicholas was ultimately persuaded to abandon Shkodër following the payment of a substantial bribe provided by the powers. In the south, Greece received, among other areas, the large southern region of Epirus

while European Turkey was reduced to Istanbul and the surrounding territory. The precise delineation of all these new frontiers was to be carried out by commissions constructed by the powers, but the result of all of this was that more than half of the predominately Albanian-speaking territory and over 40 percent of the Albanian population were excluded from the new state. Following a short second Balkan war fought over the spoils, the Turks gained back some lost territory in Thrace but were forced to formally give up all rights to Albania. After some 500 years, the last Ottoman troops left Albania in June 1913.

In terms of the construction of a government for the new state, the Conference of Ambassadors proclaimed Albania to be "an autonomous principality sovereign and hereditary by order of primogeniture under the guaranty of the six powers," initially under the protection of the sultan. But when the Ottomans lost Macedonia, the new Albania was completely cut off from the empire, leaving independence as the only viable option. The management of the new state's civil administration and budget was vested in an international control commission composed of an Albanian delegate and delegates from the six powers until a prince could be found. A new gendarmerie was to be organized by Dutch officers. The control commission drafted an organic constitution that provided for the country's neutrality guaranteed under the protection of the Great Powers, set up an executive council of four ministers responsible to the sovereign and called for a legislative national assembly to include ex officio the heads of the Sunni, Catholic, Orthodox and Bektashi communities.



Map 5.1 Albania in 1913

Wilhelm of Wied

The selection of a prince for the new state proved to be an arduous task. At the heart of the problem was the question of whether the new Albania was to be oriented to the east or the west. The Turks argued that Albania could only survive as a vassal state of the Ottoman empire and therefore urged the acceptance of a member of the imperial Ottoman dynasty. But the powers ultimately entrusted Austria-Hungary and Italy with the selection of a prince. Ismail Qemali appealed to the powers for a quick decision on a prince fearing that his government would not last long under the pressure from Esad whose forces had begun to challenge those of the provisional government. In November 1913, the powers informed Ismail Qemali that they had chosen the Protestant Prince Wilhelm of Wied (1876–1945), the third son of Wilhelm, Prince of Wied, and Mary, Princess of Holland, nephew of Queen Elizabeth of Romania and grand-nephew of Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany. As in the case of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, a German was chosen, based on the assumption that Germany was somewhat less interested in the Balkans then were the other Great Powers. The fact that Wied was a Protestant was also considered an advantage in that none of Albania's existing religions was seen to be favored. Ismail Qemali himself would play no role in the new regime as he became ensnared in a Young Turk plot to restore Ottoman sovereignty over Albania. Recognizing that his position had become untenable, Qemali resigned, with the proviso that Esad Pasha would withdraw as well. Qemali left Albania and died in exile in 1919. Esad ultimately resigned as well, but only after he

managed to convince the powers to allow him to lead the Albanian deputation to offer Wilhelm the throne in February 1914.

Although apparently with reluctance, Wilhelm accepted the post without becoming fully aware of what he had done. He apparently had never really been interested in the throne but was persuaded to accept by his ambitious wife as well as by his aunt and uncle. Queen Elizabeth and King Charles of Romania convinced him that the task was not an impossibility despite the prince's complete lack of knowledge of the Balkans – he had to be shown Albania on a map. The prince was a simple man, primarily a soldier, a man with a high sense of honor and duty who had no concept of or experience with diplomacy and intrigue, particularly in the Balkan context. As a result, he was incapable of holding his own against the flock of opportunists who hoped to take advantage of his limited abilities.



5.1 Prince Wilhelm of Wied, and Princess Sophie

Foremost among the latter was Esad Pasha, who had transferred his stronghold in Durrës, which the prince designated as his capital. Esad obviously saw this as a rare opportunity to assume the role of the power behind the throne and was indeed appointed to the powerful positions of minister of war and minister of the interior in Wied's government, nominally led by Turhan Pasha Përmeti, another former high-level Ottoman bureaucrat. Esad hoped to dominate the cabinet with his large force of retainers while at the same time emasculating his rivals by using the authority of the prince. He saw as a potential threat Ahmet Zogu (1895–1961), Muslim chief of the Mati tribe who controlled one of the largest fighting forces in Albania – namely, his fiercely loyal Mati tribesmen. Because Zogu had refused to help against Ismail Qemali, Esad was convinced that Zogu, a distant relative, constituted one of the major obstacles on the road to complete dominance of Albania, one that he would either have to control or remove.

In pursuit of this end, Esad attempted to have Zogu arrested as the young chieftain came down from Mati to pay his respects to the prince and present his proposals for the convocation of a national assembly. Wied intervened and Zogu returned to Mati with his familial feelings for Esad undoubtedly considerably diminished. Once back in his mountain fastness, Zogu resolved to turn on the government. He came to the conclusion that the prince would not last long under any circumstances and that Esad would quickly step in and attempt to assume power. This would not be the last time he changed his mind. Indeed, Zogu's outstanding quality and the force that drove him on was a relentless ambition ably seconded by

a lack of consistency that determined the tortuous but logical deviations necessitated by his steady opportunism. This lack of concern for political scruples had already found him fighting for and against the Serbs, Turks, Austro-Hungarians, Prince Wied and Esad Pasha. Only with the Italians had he been consistent – he never fought for them.

Esad soon found himself in considerable difficulty. He had not only overstepped his bounds, but he had also overestimated his support. The prince was finally convinced that Esad was a liability. Esad was accused of fomenting insurrection and diverting military supplies in a plot to overthrow Wilhelm, prompting the prince to plan for his arrest. The prince had to move carefully, however, since Durrës was still one of Esad's strongholds and, as with most prominent Albanians, Esad traveled with an armed retinue at all times. Deciding on the direct approach, on the night of May 19 a battery was placed in the garden of the palace and trained on the residence of the minister of war and interior whose house was within 300 yards of the palace. The officer commanding the guns called for Esad to surrender. Once it became clear that the minister was making preparations to resist, which included sending a dispatch to nearly loyal tribesmen, the prince's men fired three shells, one exploding in the bedroom. Realizing that the prince had the capacity to blow the house to pieces, Esad prudently surrendered.

He was thereupon escorted out of the country, although his departure did not have the desired effect; political chaos did not subside. Quite the contrary was the case; the insurrection that Esad had in part instigated dragged on unabated. It began as an expression of



5.2 Esad Pasha, 1875 1920

Muslim grievances that included the loss of their dominant role in Albanian society. With the protection of the empire now gone, the time-honored hierarchy in Albania slowly disintegrated. The insurgents, who had been stirred up against the Christian prince, raised the Ottoman flag and were joined by some peasants who were alienated by Wied's reliance on the conservative landowners. Under Haxhi Qamili, who headed a *tekke* in Tirana, the Muslim insurgents surrounded Durrës to face the prince who was able to rely on only a small number of gendarmes, Dutch officers provided by the control commission and some 700 Catholic Mirdita and Malissori tribesmen. The insurrection was taking on the character of a Muslim revolt against Christians and the insurgents

set themselves up in the village of Tirana, where they established a rudimentary revolutionary government.

Albania during the First World War

The prince was set to flight at the end of May 1914 and although he returned, what prestige he had was significantly damaged. Still, upon his return he led forces against the insurgents, but he was able to hold out only until September. He had little support either inside or outside of Albania. Of the many powers that had guaranteed their support, only Romania, because of family ties, and Austria-Hungary, because it suited its policy, remained faithful. Although with the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914, the Austrians, too, abandoned Albania to its fate. An astute British observer, Edith Durham, commented that while Wied may have been incompetent, only a man of unusual force of character and intimate knowledge of the land could have made headway against the powers combined against him. Before that could happen, Albania was yet again overwhelmed by war.

With the onset of the war, the gendarmerie and its Dutch officers left to join their respective armies. The control commission melted away and the insurgents took Durrës, flying the Turkish flag. A group of insurgent leaders under Mustafa Ndroqi and others created a makeshift senate and declared that the sovereignty of the sultan was restored. Turkish would again be the official language, and the throne of Albania was offered to Prince Burhaneddine, the favorite son of the deposed Abdül Hamid. But all of this came to little – the authority of these new rulers was limited.

With foreign administrators gone, what little stability they had provided left with them. Albania's new boundaries were set in theory but not in practice, so with the coming of the First World War Albania was overrun by seven armies, including the Serbs, Montenegrins, Greeks and Bulgarians, who remained for a short time, and the Italians, French and Austria-Hungary, who remained for a longer period. Albania became everyone's battleground. For lack of a recognized central authority, chaos continued with each region of the country acting on its own behalf, throwing in its lot with whoever was there and whoever could offer the most at any given time. In the chaos, Greek forces had advanced deep into Albania and hoped to annex portions of southern Albania containing Greek minorities. Central Albania was in the hands of Muslim insurgents. Kosovo experienced untold suffering as a result of brutal fighting between Serbs and Kosovar Albanians. Atrocities were legion.

Esad, with Italian and Serbian military support, took advantage of the collapse of the Wied regime and was able to take Durrës and, after threatening to shoot every member of the senate, was proclaimed president and commander-in-chief, appointing Mustafa Ndroqi as vice president. He immediately declared war on Austria-Hungary. In June 1915, the Serbs took much of central Albania, solidifying Esad's position. But when the Austrians and the Bulgarians, who had entered on the side of the central powers in October 1914, drove the Serbs out of Albania in January 1916, Esad was forced to flee as well. The Serbs endured the horrors of a bloody winter retreat over the mountains to the Adriatic, which left as many as 100,000 dead.

Esad made his way to Salonika, where he was recognized by the French commander as president of the Albanian republic. Here, he and his 500 men contributed to the allied war effort on several occasions, although Esad was viewed with distrust and some humor, with his uniform and myriad medals that made him look like a general in anybody's army. He was assassinated in Paris in 1920 by a young Albanian nationalist, who would himself later be assassinated. By 1917, Austria controlled much of northern and central Albania, essentially two-thirds of country, with the French entrenched in Korçë. Italy, which had seized control of Vlorë in December 1914, took some of the center and in 1917 pushed the Greeks out of much of the south. From June 1917 until the end of the war, Italy controlled most Albanian territory, having unilaterally proclaimed a protectorate over Albania.

While the end of the war in 1918 brought the end of most of the hostilities, band activity in Albania continued unabated and the very survival of the foundling state became an issue. With their only protector, Austria-Hungary, defeated and dismembered, the Albanians had few to argue their case at the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920), which met to sort out the momentous changes that the war had brought. A new provisional government had been organized in Durrës in 1918 by Mehmet Konica (1881–1948), a Bektashi former Ottoman diplomat and at that point one of the central figures in the Albanian national movement. He chose Turhan Pasha Përmeti (1846–1927), known for being pro-Italian, as prime minister in order to placate the Italians who had replaced the Austrians. The primary concern of this regime was to save the country from



5.3 Italians in Vlorë during the First World War

partition, similar to the principal goal of Albania's original government constructed in 1912. But its influence was minimal, leaving Albania's fate once more principally in the hands of the surrounding states and the remaining Great Powers.

Italy and Greece, while on the winning side, suffered significantly during the war, and fragile governments needed something to placate a restless and exhausted population. Albanian lands seemed a compensation of sorts, and as with the situation following the Balkan wars, it became spoils. After initially opposing each other's

ambitions, Greece and Italy finally signed the Tittoni-Venizelos agreements, which recognized each other's claims. Greece would hold Korçë and Gjirokastër in exchange for Italy holding Vlorë and maintaining control over most of the rest of the country. The agreement was accepted by the British and French, who had more important interests elsewhere. The Serbs were still in possession of some of the north, and with the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (called Yugoslavia from 1929) their position was strengthened with their principal adversary Austria-Hungary gone, and one of their principal protectors, France, in ascendance.

This Tittoni-Venizelos agreement would likely have prevailed and Albania would have been so divided were it not for the staunch position of US President Woodrow Wilson and his fourteen-point guidelines, one of which was self-determination for former subjects of the defeated empires, based principally on language. A plethora of Albanian delegations descended on the peace conference, including Esad Pasha, who presented himself as the Albanian president, while various Albanian diaspora groups, most notably from the United States, also sent missions. Although none was to be officially recognized, the most prominent delegation came from the Durrës provisional government led by Turhan Pasha and Mehmed Konica, and represented all four Albanian religious communities. The Albanian delegations all presented extravagant claims. While they had little influence, Wilson's intervention saw that Albania would survive as a state – making him a hero in Albania and cementing Albanian-US relations. The new state would

have to wait for another Conference of Ambassadors to reaffirm its 1913 frontiers, with some minor adjustments.

The Congress of Lushnjë

The Turhan Pasha government, meanwhile, commanded little respect in Albania, and failed to gain international recognition because it was essentially controlled by the Italians who, in exchange for their sponsorship, received valuable oil and asphalt concessions. Groups of landowners and clan leaders increasingly recognized that the provisional government was little more than a puppet, and that the Great Powers at the Paris Peace Conference could not be relied on to follow through on promises to create Balkan boundaries based on the principle of national self-determination. In became clear to many that trusting in the Great Powers was to believe in a broken reed – Albanians must rely on themselves alone to achieve real independence and territorial integrity.

Acting on these concerns, a congress of all "true nationalists," which included many who saw Italy as a threat and some who had defected from the Turhan Pasha government, was convened at Lushnjë, southeast of Durrës, in January 1920 to organize an independent temporary government to deal with the threat posed by foreign troops on Albanian soil. Fifty-six delegates from across the country, including some from areas outside the state, convened with the goal of replacing the provisional government in Durrës, putting together a new administration of patriots, and then holding a general election for a national legislative assembly that would draw up a new constitution. The Italians, who had more than their share of internal

difficulties, did not intervene, but members of Durrës government ordered their prefect in Lushnjë to prevent the meeting. However, the two companies of militia sent to disrupt the meeting refused to do so. The congress, under the presidency of Sulejman bey Delvina (1884–1932), but dominated principally by Ahmet Zogu, and Aqif Pasha Elbasani, a Bektashi from central Albania, adopted the so-called Lushnjë statutes.

This congress would prove to be a second declaration of independence and one of the most important developments in the foundation of the new state. The ambitious goals of those who called the congress included finding a solution to the basic question of what kind of government Albania would adopt. A series of resolutions were passed, including sending a note to the powers against the partitioning of Albania, and a protest to the Italian parliament concerning the continued occupation of Albanian lands. A general *besa*, or truce, was reaffirmed, and the contentious issue of where the new capital would be located was addressed. Tirana, a town of 17,000, was chosen as the provisional capital for a number of reasons. The town was inland, away from borders and foreign influence, there were good transport links to Durrës, but critically it was close to the territories controlled by Zogu, who with his armed retainer served as something of a protector for the congress.

The crucial question of the type of state Albania would become was addressed. The organic constitution of 1914, which had created the principality under Prince Wilhelm of Wied, was reaffirmed. But the statutes declared the principality in abeyance, resulting from the conviction that the prince had hopelessly compromised himself by

fighting in the German army during the war. It was believed that as a result, many of the powers would object to his return and that even if he returned, he would once again become the powerless axis of unlimited intrigue. Since the constitution had never been abrogated or suspended and Wied had never formally abdicated, the congress invested limited executive power in a supreme council of regency, made up of four persons, one representing each of Albania's principal religions, with Aqif Elbasani representing the Bektashi. Once chosen, this body saw to the appointment of a prime minister, Sulejman bey Delvina, a nine-member cabinet, as well as a thirty-seven-member senate which was to be entrusted with parliamentary powers until a general election could be held.

In reality, however, because of an easily manipulated electoral college system, the senate was made up entirely of creatures of those few landowners, tribal leaders and patriots who had called the congress. The first prime minister, Sulejman bey Delvina, served as a figurehead while the real power rested with cabinet positions that had been divided among the participants based on the firepower each could muster. That this modified principality system was flawed and did not conform to the realities of Albanian political life seems to have escaped only the few. Indeed, most of those who supported its construction at Lushnjë considered it little more than an expedient to facilitate a temporary truce. Mehmed Konica was appointed foreign minister, and Zogu assumed the portfolio of minister of the interior, effectively the second spot in the cabinet. As minister of the interior, Zogu took control of the police and gendarmerie and became



5.4 Ahmet Zogu, 1895 1961

commander-in-chief of the Albanian armed forces, although there was little in the way of an organized force at the time, other than his own retainers of some 2,000 men.

The statutes also saw to the construction of a single chamber of seventy-nine deputies to be elected by a unique electoral system that, although it might have seemed democratic, left the power in the hands of the few leaders who had organized the system. The entire chamber, then, consisted of the nominees of the leaders of the congress who could count on the perfect obedience of the deputies without having to be concerned that the latter would even contemplate consulting their

constituents before following their instructions. The new government quickly turned to its primary function, the dispersal of foreign troops on Albanian soil. The government had little at its disposal – a modest contingent commanded by foreign officers, as well as Zogu's tribe.

Foreign Threats to Albanian Territory

Zogu moved rapidly and with his meager forces took Shkodër in the north after the interallied occupation of the city ended in March 1920. The Serbs apparently planned to occupy the city but were forestalled by the quick action of Zogu. Shortly thereafter, the government settled part of the southern problem by signing a temporary protocol with Greece calling for the status quo to be preserved and postponing a permanent agreement for another time. Still, Albanian territory was occupied by the Yugoslavs in the north and west, the Greeks in the south and the Italians in much of the rest of the country. Italy was considered the most immediate and major problem principally because of the military resources at its disposal, which included as many as 30,000 troops and some 200 guns. Against this force, the Albanians were to raise a considerably smaller contingent of some 5,000 commanded by Italian, French, former Austro-Hungarian and Turkish officers. This force was, however, supplemented by Zogu's tribesmen, so was of some concern to the Italians. As a result, principally of domestic Italian difficulties, the Italian high command felt it best to withdraw all of its troops to Vlorë, which it hoped to retain because of the strategic importance that the city possessed in relation to the Adriatic.

The Albanian provisional government was not satisfied and requested that the Italians continue their evacuation while Albanian irregulars, under the orders of Zogu, took up positions surrounding the city, and fighting ensued. The Italian navy fired on Albanian forces, massing along the outer defenses of Vlorë. Before long, much to the chagrin of the Italians, the citizens of Vlorë began harassing Italian troops. The Italian government immediately complained to Tirana. Hoping that a compromise might still be reached, the Albanian government disclaimed responsibility for the guerrillas and the increasingly hostile attitude of the citizens of Vlorë. The government added that since it did not have control of the administration of the region, it could not be held responsible for what occurred in that area. The government asked to be given control over the administration in exchange for ensuring order. At the same time, the government was aiding the insurgents with what meager supplies and equipment were available.

Under normal circumstances, the Italian military could have held out against the Albanians indefinitely, but international pressure and internal Italian affairs finally decided the situation in favor of the Albanians. Not only were the Italians faced with demoralized troops who were becoming easy prey for leftist agitators, but also strong protests from the large Albanian diaspora in Italy caused the government considerable difficulty. The uncompromising attitude of President Wilson, who refused to support any Italian move in Albania, added to these difficulties. Italian Prime Minister G. Giolitti would have preferred to retain Vlorë to compensate for the suffering endured and blood shed by Italy during the war. But Italian troops in

Vlorë were ridden with malaria and were becoming ever more susceptible to communist agitation. Leftist-organized railway and dock strikes in Italy prevented the government from resupplying Italian troops in Albania while soldiers refused to board troopships at Bari and Brindisi. Giolitti was left with no alternative but to negotiate, and in August 1920 an agreement was reached. In exchange for the Island of Sazan at the entrance to the Bay of Vlorë and the temporary occupation of points commanding the bay, Italy agreed to evacuate the city and renounce the 1917 self-proclaimed protectorate. The Italians also extended the new government official recognition, within the frontiers delineated in 1913 by the Conference of Ambassadors and encouraged other states to do the same. The Albanians felt, perhaps for the first time in their history, that their own collective endeavors had helped in some measure to determine their own future by demonstrating that they were no longer prepared to be mere pawns in the political and diplomatic games of more powerful nations. Zogu went so far as to proclaim that the Albanians had defeated a major European power. This myth created a false sense of strength that would eventually do considerable harm in dealings with Italy in the following decades.

Zogu's overconfidence seemed to be demonstrated immediately with his attempt to remove the Yugoslavs. Following the success at Vlorë, Zogu hurled his motley army at the Yugoslavs, who had been allowed by the allies to advance to a strategic line inside the 1913 frontiers, pending the decision of the Conference of Ambassadors, which had reconvened to review its work. The Albanians were initially successful, forcing the Yugoslavs to retreat

beyond the 1913 line. They quickly recovered, however, pushing the Albanians back beyond their original positions, burning Zogu's castle at Burgajet and devastating much of the Drin valley during their advance. Zogu's overconfidence had gotten the better of him, so he resorted to intrigue and diplomacy, opening negotiations with the Yugoslavs while at the same time advising the government to address urgent notes to the powers.

Both tactics were basically successful. Italy and Great Britain asked the Yugoslavs to halt their advance since the question of Albanian boundaries had yet to be decided. In direct negotiation, Zogu used his personal and family connections in Belgrade to assure the Yugoslavs that he would personally work against Kosovo irredentism in exchange for the secession of hostilities. Zogu was being realistic here – the fledgling Albanian state was in no position to challenge Yugoslavia, and had Albania actually been able to annex Kosovo, the inclusion of powerful Geg Kosovar chieftains would only have presented Zogu, and southern Tosk Albanian leaders, with rivals for power. The Yugoslav Foreign Minister Ante Trumbić ultimately agreed to bow to the will of the powers, at least for the time being.

Fearing further difficulties and being aware of the necessity of recognition, the Albanian government applied for admission to the newly formed League of Nations. The government arranged for Pandeli Evangjeli (1858–1949), an Orthodox Christian from Korçë who spent many of his early years in the Albanian community in Bucharest, to support its case. From his base in Paris, Evangjeli send a letter to Geneva arguing that Albania had been declared an independent state by

the Conference of Ambassadors and that this declaration had never been rescinded. Evangjeli further argued that although the work of consolidating its independence had been interrupted by the war, Albania was now ready to resume that task. There was, however, considerable opposition to the admission of Albania, coming principally from the Greeks and the Yugoslavs. Their representatives argued that postponement should be approved because of the unsettled frontiers, the questionable stability of the government, and because the government was not widely recognized, either in Albania or abroad. Despite these arguments, Albania was finally admitted as a full member in December 1920, due largely to the South African delegate, Lord Robert Cecil, who argued that the existence of the state was obvious and that it clearly desired to fulfill its international obligations. Admission to the league was an important achievement; it won the government some prestige at home and brought rapid international recognition from abroad. It also made Albania eligible for loans from the league itself and from member states, without which internal stability could not be achieved.

Domestic Political Instability

Once the outside threat was gone, the principality system rapidly came apart due primarily to one of its greatest flaws – it contained no provisions for the arbitration of old animosities. Ultimately, it appears that each chieftain or landowner was willing to continue paying homage to Western ideals of democracy by observing the parliamentary methods of opposition only as long as success by

these means was anticipated. Once it became clear that all could not lead, political compromises designed to avert violence began to break down. Albania was shaken by coups and upheavals motivated primarily by the refusal on the part of the tribes to bend to central authority. The reality of politics in these early years after the war came down to what it had always been during the Ottoman period – individual personalities and raw power based ultimately on the number of guns a leader could muster.

The governmental system as it worked out in practice was a combination of the principality constructed by the Great Powers in 1912, and traditional autocracy. There were of course immediate internal struggles. The political struggle within the assembly and within part of the country concerned, to a certain extent, a struggle between the old and new orders, with Bishop Fan Noli (1882–1965), who had arrived in Albania from the United States and subsequently served as chair of the Albanian delegation to the League of Nations. The bishop, who would become the force behind the creation of an autocephalous Albanian Orthodox church, emerged as the representative of liberalism, modernization and westernization. On the surface, then, we have a battle between near-feudal landlords and tribal leaders on the one hand and an Albanian variant of liberalism on the other in the context of traditional religious and regional rivalry. But there were also struggles within the loose groupings. Among the liberals, the extent of reform was an issue, as was the form of government. Supporters of monarchism and republicanism were to be found in both camps. Some forces were leftist, while others were merely liberal, hoping for stronger ties with Great Britain, France and the

United States. Others hoped that Italy would emerge as Albania's benefactor.

In early 1921, at least the broad outlines of a political system were established and therefore elections were called for a new national council or parliament to replace the unelected officials put in place by the Lushnjë congress. While Albania's first elections were intended to be for a constituent assembly and not a parliament, voting for the former was postponed pending final delimitation of borders. In preparation for the election, in December 1920 the unelected parliament passed an electoral system that left power firmly in the hands of those who had designed the system, the clans and the traditional landowning aristocracy. While perhaps the only practical system at the time, voting was to be indirect and conducted in two rounds. This system made the voter something of a spectator in the process, and indirect voting, at least in the Albanian case, was ripe for corruption. It was especially despised by the country's emerging liberal elements for being inherently undemocratic and serving the interests of the landowners. Under this system, the first election, held between February and March 1921, elected a chamber that opened on April 5, 1921. The new deputies were divided almost evenly between the two principal political groupings at the time, the popular and progressive parties. The Popular Party represented both liberal and conservative political poles, as evidenced by the fact that both Noli and Zogu were members, but both generally supported reform and the development of a state along modern lines. The Progressive Party represented some of the tribal leaders and the beys of central Albania where large landowners dominated.

It was in this atmosphere that Zogu was to demonstrate his remarkable talent for intrigue and violence. Zogu used his accumulated military and political capital as early as November 1920 to engineer the fall of the Delvina government, hoping to advance his own position in the ensuing crisis. But Zogu had perhaps been too successful militarily, and the frightened regents turned to Ilias bey Vrioni, a major landowner from central Albania. In response, Zogu helped to form a vague political grouping called "the clique." Although it is difficult to determine who was involved in this group at any given time, since there did not seem to be any particular criteria for membership and since the kaleidoscopic combinations, unions and disintegrations are rather difficult to follow, the purpose of the group seemed clear enough. It was basically opposed to those in power, whoever they happened to be, and its primary aim was the acquisition of power and wealth for its own members by any means available. Although the organization itself foundered on the rock of the Kosovo issue – the dispute being whether to push for irredentism immediately or wait for some stability in Albania, with Zogu supporting the latter position – Zogu managed to hold enough of the group together to destroy the Vrioni government. But Zogu, with his reduced clique, was forced to settle for a military command in a regime headed by Pandeli Evangjeli. Evangjeli survived a scant two months before he was required to resign by the regent Aqif Pasha, who sent a body of armed men to Evangjeli's bedroom in the Hotel International, awakening him with the muzzles of their guns. The prime minister prudently resigned and fled the capital on horseback. Aqif Pasha arbitrarily appointed Hasan Prishtina,

former president of the Kosovo committee, as prime minister to replace him.

Zogu, who had been off campaigning against insurgent tribes in the north, marched on the capital, deposing Hasan Prishtina, who served as prime minister for a mere five days, and Aqif Pasha, and established a puppet prime minister while further consolidating his own support. The exiled Kosovar chieftains still objected to Zogu's lack of enthusiasm for irredentism, and the small Western-educated intelligentsia feared Zogu as an unscrupulous, undereducated mountaineer prone to despotism. Zogu was left with only the feudal beys of the center and the south and the remaining northern chieftains to whom he could appeal. His first move in this direction was to sign a marriage contract to marry the daughter of Shevqet bey Vërlaci (1877–1946), who, although something of a dandy, was of considerable importance because of his wealth. With regard to the chieftains, Zogu resorted to the time-honored tradition of "peace money," a method used by Austria, Serbia and Montenegro to influence the clans. Chieftains of major tribes were accorded the rank of colonel in the army and paid on a regular basis. Each month, large groups of heavily armed highlanders would descend on the capital and collect their gold on warrants issued by the war department. These payments appeared in the budget as army allowances, since, technically at least, the chiefs were being paid to maintain a certain number of irregular troops in reserve at the expense of the government.

In reality, the chieftains were being paid simply to refrain from attacking the government. In return for their gold, the tribal leaders declared recurrent *besas*. In

addition, the chiefs took an oath to Zogu personally, rather than to the country, a concept that was still basically foreign to most northern leaders. Zogu was recognized as an over-chieftain and the chiefs subsequently looked to him personally for their money. The system had many disadvantages. Zogu was often put in a position in which he was required to arbitrate between two tribes, gaining the enmity of at least one. Still, the system became one of the mainstays of Zogu's long rule.

In the short term, however, Zogu's relationship with the chieftains caused him considerable difficulty. While the official bribery of the "peace money" system was successful in many areas, the Kosovars in exile and domestic irredentists could not be so easily bought. To deal with these recalcitrant elements, Zogu introduced several innovative policies. One was the collection of weapons from those tribes he felt he could not rely on. It was a bold move. The importance of guns to the mountaineers cannot be underestimated since they represented their means of livelihood on the one hand and freedom, honor and the only protection against personal and foreign enemies on the other. A rifle was part of a mountaineer's dress. While this policy would eventually show promise, in 1922 it was partially responsible for one of the many armed revolts as insurgents marched on the capital. While the entire government fled to Elbasan to the south, Zogu, demonstrating considerable personal courage, remained to defend Tirana with only his personal retainer. He would certainly have been overwhelmed were it not for the personal intervention of the British minister Harry Eyres, who convinced some of the rebels to withdraw. Zogu constructed a military court and speedily dispatched

some thirty-two of the rebel leaders, bringing down on his head many blood feuds.

Zogu as Prime Minister

The government of Xhafer bey Ypi, who had replaced Vërlaci, was reconstituted with Zogu remaining the power behind the throne. Ypi, a Bektashi, was perhaps a poor choice and his reappointment was a demonstration of one of Zogu's great personal failings – his inability to objectively judge his followers, and his penchant for rewarding loyalty long after it had demonstrated serious incompetence. Ypi, though loyal, was a man of very limited intelligence who was overly suspicious and a bad judge of character. He was unable to hold his cabinet together and generally had no knowledge of what was going on in his ministries, nor did he seem to care. He shied away from work and did not bother to take the time to discover the facts before he made a decision. Consequently, his decisions were hasty, impulsive and invariably misdirected. By December, the government had ceased even to command the fear of the people, which it had so carefully nurtured through repression, terrorism and even torture. Zogu hoped to avoid a serious crisis by personally assuming control of the government. On December 16, 1922, at the age of twenty-seven, Zogu replaced Ypi as prime minister while retaining the crucial position of minister of the interior. With the exception of a six-month period in 1924, Zogu would remain the leading figure in Albania, in one capacity or another, until his ouster by Mussolini in 1939.

Zogu seemed well suited for his new role. He knew Albania and the Balkans and had some experience with

the world beyond. Until 1906, his education was limited to an occasional conversation with a Muslim cleric from Mati. At that point, he was sent to a Turkish cadet school in Bitola some eighty miles away, which introduced the young mountaineer to a rather mixed Balkan population. With the death of his father, likely in 1908, Zogu, then only thirteen, was sent to Istanbul, the teeming capital of the empire with a population of over one million. There he was introduced to a global population. Zogu attended the Galatasaray Lyceum for notables during the early years of the Young Turk regime. Although he had some sympathy for the Young Turks and their modernization push, his stay at the lyceum was cut short by a revolt against the Young Turks and their centralization policy that required his presence at the head of his tribe.

During the First World War, Zogu became fully involved in political intrigue and marginally involved in military maneuvers. Although not always consistent in his policies, for the most part he supported Austria-Hungary because of its support for a large independent Albania. But by 1916, the Austrians became suspicious and decided to remove Zogu from the scene. Expecting to make some use of him following the war, they commissioned him a colonel and invited him to Vienna to receive a decoration and participate in the festivities that accompanied the coronation of the new emperor, Karl. Once there, they made it clear that he was a guest of the government for the duration of the war. Zogu, the dashing, young, handsome, rather mysterious colonel from the mountains of the Balkans, made good use of his time in Vienna, acquainting himself with European society and culture, with the conduct of western political systems, as well as

with Austro-Hungarian women. He added these new experiences to his training in Albanian politics, tempered by Young Turk modernization and tribal intrigue. In Vienna, he also learned to respect outward constitutionality and matters of form in politics. Zogu's time in Vienna contributed substantially to the political duality of western constitutionalism combined with Ottoman and tribal authoritarianism with which he would operate in the future.

Zogu had learned a great deal in his first two years of participation in Albanian national politics. His ability at intrigue was superior, his military prowess, in terms of strategy and in terms of attracting supporters, was established. Indeed, it was clear that he was one of just a few Albanians competent enough to play a role at the national level. The problems he faced were the same as those Albania had faced in 1920. While the various tribal groups and landowning beys had clawed at one another from 1920 to 1922, all of Albania's problems had simply been obscured. Once the dust had settled, these difficulties became much more visible.

Zogu's motivation as the new head of government, as it was to remain until his ouster by Mussolini, was that of an opportunist – Zogu was principally concerned with remaining in power. But that, of course, required some unity and stability. So, not for the first time and not for the last, Zogu's and Albania's needs seemed to coincide. This conferred on Zogu the legitimacy of a nationalist, something of which he would become an ever more ardent proponent, as it became clear that the survival of his power base depended on it. During his tenure as prime minister, which lasted about one year – a remarkable

achievement itself under the circumstances – he hoped to continue the process of power consolidation, stability and unity.

His strategy included steps toward the nationalization of Albania's religions organized on the principles of laity of the state, religious freedom, equality among religions and the recognition of three "national churches" (Islam, Orthodox, Catholic). While we have noted cooperation among the intellectuals of the various faiths in the construction of many of Albania's first regimes, as Harry Eyres, the astute first British minister to Albania, noted, the majority of Muslims in Albania continued to be imbued with feelings of superiority toward Christians, and Christians continued to feel dominated. Still, religion as a set of doctrines of political activism never played a major role in modern Albanian history, principally because the state successfully marginalized religion and, for a time, suppressed it entirely.

Zogu and many of Albania's religious leadership saw the influence of foreigners on Albanian religious communities as well as centuries of religious antagonism as blocks to unity. Some Orthodox leaders led by Fan Noli were the first to move, and in 1922, encouraged by the government, convened a congress in Berat composed of various delegates chosen in no organized fashion. The congress unanimously adopted a resolution that declared the Albanian Orthodox church to be autocephalous, ruled that Albanian instead of Greek should be used for liturgical purposes and constructed a council headed by Rev. Vasil Marko, one of Noli's aides, to control the church and appoint bishops to an Albanian synod. The congress also appealed to Patriarch Meletios in Istanbul to legalize

the severance, although Albanian Orthodox would have to wait for some fifteen years before the patriarch agreed to do so. The Bektashi also acted in 1922, when delegates from the *tekkes* broke with the supreme Bektash. This initial step at separation was complemented in 1925 when Mustafa Kemal closed the order forcing its leadership out of the Turkish republic. It settled in Albania, declaring the order's official separation from the Sunni community, and was recognized as an autonomous Muslim order by government decree in 1929.

Even the conservatives in the Sunni community reluctantly agreed that reforms were necessary; if Albanian society was to prosper, they would either have to become involved in the state or become irrelevant. At a congress in Tirana in 1923, enthusiastically encouraged by Zogu, they agreed to break with the caliphate that Mustafa Kemal had separated from the sultanate in 1922, in conjunction with the abolition of the sultanate. The congress declared the Sunni community independent and declared that allegiance to Albania would now be its principal secular focus. To emphasize this separation and the new national character of the church, the conference also rearranged some of the traditional rituals of the church, including prayer, which was now to be performed while standing. Both the mandatory use of the veil by women in public and polygamy, which was rarely practiced in any case, were condemned. In early 1924, the Turkish government abolished the caliphate itself, and the last caliph Abdülmecid II and the deposed last Ottoman Sheikh ül-Islam were sent into exile.

Zogu also saw the Statutes of Lushnjë as an obstacle to stability and began to call for their revision. It was clear to

all that Zogu's goal here was the construction of a somewhat more authoritarian system to end the political chaos that reigned in Albania. The principality had by this point been completely overwhelmed by Albania's Ottoman heritage. The administration was overburdened with officials who had little or nothing to do but to oversee the massive corruption that had continued from Turkish times. Albania's first governments had been intolerant, oppressive and violent and were accused and were most likely guilty of numerous assassinations and attempted assassinations. All of this frightened investors and international bodies without which Albania would never be able to lift itself out of its economic morass. Zogu hoped to serve his own quest for power and provide for some stability in the state by either scrapping the system entirely or at least reorganizing it along more authoritarian lines – something that might have been more appropriate for Albania in the 1920s.

In the meantime, however, he felt obliged to conform to the guidelines established at Lushnjë. The parliament, which had convened in April 1921, remained outside the political battle emerging. After all, a parliament was intended to come after a constituent assembly, not before. Legislative achievements were meager, no substantive investments were attracted and no loans were offered – as parliament remained hopelessly stalled by conflict between the popular and progressive parties.

In the summer of 1923, elections for a constituent assembly were finally called after having been postponed repeatedly. Again, these elections were designed ostensibly to decide the fundamental question of the state structure. The first round of voting was to take place in

September, and the second round in December. The constituent assembly would both function as a parliament and draft a new constitution to replace the Lushnjë statutes. The type of government, republic or monarchy was a central question. After fulfilling this agenda, the assembly was expected to resign before new elections were held for a regular parliament. Seeing these rules as a substantial disadvantage, Noli and the progressives attempted to do away with indirect voting and hoped to impose a new electoral law to replace the December 1920 regulations, which stipulated that voting was to be held in two rounds. Noli and the progressives felt that this might be the only way to halt what they saw as Zogu's march to dictatorship. They argued that direct voting was more democratic and would result in a more representative assembly that could then move to do away with corruption in the second round. The progressives also wanted to broaden the franchise to include women and neutralize the army and the gendarmerie as political forces. But Zogu and his supporters opposed all of these democratic innovations, no concessions were made and the proposed new electoral law was defeated in a parliamentary vote.

The election campaign was fierce, with Zogu pushing for discipline and stability while Noli preached westernization, democratization and modernization. There were claims of electoral fraud by the opposition, but the major problem seems to have been outside funding. Zogu probably benefited from Greek, Yugoslav and Italian money, while Noli was funded by Vatra, the Pan-Albanian association in the United States. But in general, the outcome of the election appeared to be an accurate representation of Albania's political climate – neither political group

secured a majority. After the second round of voting on December 27, of the 102 seats in the assembly, the opposition took 49 seats, and Zogu took 44. But because Zogu was able to gain the support of some of the remaining independents, he was able to retain his position as prime minister. The assembly which convened on January 21, 1924, went on to act solely as a regular parliament and neglected the mandate for a new constitutional order. Before the new assembly could take any significant steps toward stability, however, Albania was again faced with a series of crises.

Zogu's goal of political centralization had the effect of uniting and galvanizing the opposition – nothing more easily united Albanians in opposition than an attempt to remove regional or personal independence. Those who actively opposed Zogu included the Kosovars, who still did not appreciate his lack of enthusiasm for an aggressive policy toward Yugoslavia, and a growing number of his one-time allies. Local army commanders and police officials turned against Zogu, creating a cabinet crisis. Zogu played for time by accepting a curious compromise. Zogu retained his position of prime minister but relinquished the critical interior ministry and was forced to broaden his cabinet to include some of his enemies. The position of minister of the interior, and here is the curious feature of the agreement, was rotated on a weekly basis with each member of the cabinet assuming the post for seven days. While this was meant to be only a temporary measure until national elections a few months away, the natural result of this was that the entire tenure of each successive minister of the interior was spent in dismissing officials appointed by his immediate predecessor.

Zogu's situation was further complicated when he himself narrowly escaped assassination. On February 24, 1924, as he was walking up the steps of parliament, he was shot several times by Beqir Valteri, a supporter of one of Zogu's political rivals. Zogu, wounded in the hand and thigh, staggered into parliament, gun in hand, and made it to the government bench. The scene in parliament was understandably tense; most of the deputies seemed to recognize the danger of an open gunfight since everyone present was armed. Shooting continued in the fore hall between Valteri and the followers of Zogu. Valteri then locked himself in the bathroom and commenced singing patriotic songs as he shot through the doors. After the assailant was finally subdued, Zogu from his bench announced in a loud voice, "Gentlemen, this is not the first time this sort of thing has happened. I ask my friends to leave it alone and deal with it afterwards." Zogu had possibly prevented wholesale carnage within the assembly hall.

The Revolution of 1924

Zogu was temporarily sidelined, in part because he needed to recover and in part because Albanian blood feud custom required that he not leave his house until the outrage was avenged. Under the circumstances, Zogu felt it best to relinquish his post as prime minister, after convincing the regents to appoint his prospective father-in-law, Shevqet Vërlaci, to take his place. But the government was unstable and unable to address Albania's myriad problems effectively. Discontent in both the north and the south grew. This unrest was fanned by the

irredentists, who hoped to eventually replace Zogu with someone more concerned with unifying Albania and Kosovo. All of this growing opposition to Zogu was brought together by the murder of Avni Rustemi in April, 1924. Rustemi, who had assassinated Esad Pasha in 1920, was blamed by Zogu for the attempt on his life in February. Zogu was likely responsible for the murder.

Since Rustemi had been a leader of Bishop Fan Noli's party, now referred to simply as the Opposition Party, Noli's followers withdrew from parliament, declaring that no opposition deputy was safe in Tirana. Military and gendarmerie commanders, as well as some of the principal northern chieftains, joined Noli and the opposition and declared open revolt. The government declared general mobilization on June 1 but soon found that there were few left to mobilize. The prime minister resigned and of the four members of the council of regency, one resigned and three fled. Most of the government fled to Italy. Once again, Zogu was the last to remain, hoping to recreate the conditions that had allowed him to come to power in 1922, but it was too late. On the afternoon of June 9, Zogu called on the citizens of Tirana for support, but it soon became clear that they would not die for Zogu. As the 7,000 troops commanded by the insurgents closed in on Tirana, Zogu with his retainers withdrew. Following some light fighting between Zogu's force and the troops of several northern chieftains, Zogu was obliged to withdraw into Yugoslavia.

While Zogu was in Belgrade, Fan Noli organized a government that was composed of elements from the army, some of the liberal beys, the progressives and some Shkodrans, including the prominent Catholic politician



5.5 Fan Noli, 1882–1965

Luigj Gurakuqi, who assumed the crucial role of finance minister. This new government produced an idealistic program for radical land reform along western lines, alarming Albania's great landowners. Post–Second World War Albanian communists would portray Noli as Alexander Kerensky, the Russian reformer and democratic, who soon fell to the Bolsheviks. The landlords need not have worried, however, since Noli's reforms were never implemented. The only tangible results of Noli's plans were the alienation of the peasants, who had their hopes raised and dashed, and the alienation of the landlords who were given an idea of what Noli would have done, had he been able. Fan Noli's lack of experience drove him to compound his mistakes. He allowed his virulence against his former opponents to carry him away to the extent that he instituted a political court to exact punishment. More significantly, he failed to legalize his regime with elections.

These mistakes helped to deprive him of the two elements without which the institution of such a radical program was impossible, foreign recognition and financial aid, and of course domestic political support. While some European states viewed Noli as a left-wing revolutionary who flirted with recognizing the Soviet Union, the rest were just annoyed with his critical, almost badgering speeches at the League of Nations, where he unsuccessfully attempted to procure foreign aid. This failure, and the fact that he spent some months abroad in his quest for aid, made his already difficult domestic situation even more precarious. It became clear very quickly that those who had participated in his coup had nothing but their shared dislike and envy of Zogu in common. Noli was likely the only confirmed republican in his government and his policies were far too radical for most. Continuing economic hardship turned Albanians against the government as it had turned them against the previous government. In the midst of all of this, Noli spent his evenings with his first love, his books and music. He was soon faced with defections from his government and armed revolt in the countryside. While Zogu had been able to slowly reduce random violence and the blood feud, under Noli both returned with a vengeance. Press reports indicated almost daily cases of highway robbery or murder. Kidnapping of officials for ransom became common. Albania had essentially returned to conditions that had existed during the last decades of the Turkish administration.

While Noli floundered, Zogu was not idle. He quickly put together a military force consisting of his own retainers, loyal tribes, Yugoslav troops and a contingent of White

Russians from Baron Pyotr Wrangel's now-defunct army. By late December 1924, Zogu was marching back to Albania. There was little fighting as Noli's regime collapsed quickly, with the prime minister himself fleeing to Italy with a group of some 500 supporters, taking with them Noli's dreams of a democratic progressive Albania – dreams that were likely premature. His effort was perhaps noble but accomplished little of a positive nature. The obstacles he faced were certainly as formidable as those faced by Wilhelm of Wied. Like Wied, Noli was, in a way, a foreigner attempting to institute a foreign program. As with Wied, Noli provided an important service to his successors by making it clear what they should not do. Zogu captured Tirana in late December 1924 at the head of a force estimated at approximately 8,000.

6

Interwar Albania: The Rise of Authoritarianism, 1925–1939

Once Zogu returned to power, he would not relinquish it until Mussolini destroyed his regime and drove him into exile in 1939. The intervening years were dominated by the chieftain from Mati and his various regimes as he turned Albania into something akin to a political laboratory creating a number of different *Albanias*. Albania's history during the interwar period and Zogu's various successes and failures became one and the same. His personal goals of the maintenance and consolidation of his own power, as well as modernization and Europeanization, again required him to push for unity and stability in Albania. To his admirers he created a state and the beginnings of a nation, to his detractors to kept Albanians in the grip of its feudal, authoritarian past. In some ways he pushed Albania into the twentieth century. But his shortcomings and Albania's limitations left the average Albanian little better off at the end of his rule than they were at the beginning.

Zogu, President of the Republic

Back in Tirana in 1924, Zogu moved quickly to liquidate those who had opposed him, and using the "peace money" system, bought off those who had remained neutral.

The momentary dearth of opposition afforded him the opportunity to construct a government more in line with his own plans and more in step with the realities of Albanian political life. By 1924, Zogu had significant evidence to suggest that the parliamentary principality, which the Great Powers had constructed in 1912, was ill-suited to local conditions. The failure of Fan Noli provided further evidence that not only was the system not working but Albania might actually have been worse off following its imposition. European-oriented parliamentarianism had not only failed to create the basis for stable internal development but had added another dimension, that of politics, to the already alarming level of indigenous violence.

With many of his enemies dead or in exile, Zogu was presented with a unique opportunity to create an autocratic regime. While he had often declared that this was exactly what he would do if given the opportunity, once absolute power lay within his grasp he backed away and accepted qualified authority for several reasons. Zogu believed that Europe would react with hostility to anything but a representative form of government. He also assumed that only if he restrained his desire for unqualified authority could he attract the bureaucrats who had served in the previous regime. He correctly assumed that it would be a serious mistake to alienate anyone with administrative experience. But despite these fears, he knew that in order to survive, significant changes in the structure of the Albanian political system were necessary.

Zogu proceeded with vigor. Aware that he needed to legitimize his position, he reconvened the constituent assembly elected in 1923 – naturally without the

troublesome opposition. Meeting at the end of January 1925, this body replaced most of the Statutes of Lushnjë with a republican constitution that outwardly looked very much like the American version, including a bicameral legislature. Zogu was elected president. The major difference, of course, was that the Albanian version left almost all of the power in the hands of the president, who was elected for seven years and served as both head of government and head of state. He completely controlled the cabinet and senate, which he appointed and dismissed at will. He commanded the armed forces, controlled the administration and had the sole right to initiate changes in the constitution. He also had significant control over the assembly. He was given an unrestricted veto over the laws it passed and was able to dissolve the assembly and call for fresh elections at will, which he could and would influence if necessary. This left only the courts in a position of partial independence, although Zogu did control judicial appointments.

The constituent assembly, clearly on Zogu's initiative, also instructed the president to institute a series of measures meant to aid in the establishment of stability. The 5,000-man army, which had become a hotbed for politicians and had been a major source of opposition to Zogu, was replaced by a smaller, less formal militia. This would allow him, with his Mati retainer, to personally control one of the most powerful military forces in Albania. The constituent assembly also established a decree law that officially was designed to combat treasonable propaganda. The real purpose, however, was to allow Zogu to imprison persons against whom evidence sufficient to satisfy the courts had not been found. This law, by

overriding the ordinary process of justice, gave him greater power than the constitution would allow.

In another move toward stability, Tirana, which had been proclaimed the provisional capital at the Congress of Lushnjë, became the permanent capital. Little more than a large Muslim village of less than 20,000 in 1925, it consisted primarily of a bazaar used for hanging offenders of the peace, four mosques, several barracks and a number of legations. Tirana gave the appearance of a gold rush town in the late nineteenth-century American West, with its saloons, gambling casinos and ever-present guns and gun belts. A rickety Ford motorcar progressing slowly along the muddy, unpaved, unlit streets could well be the only sign of the twentieth century. The buildings of the town were rather unostentatious. Most of them consisted of old shanties interspersed with the occasional small villa belonging to some landowner, many of which were in such a state of disrepair as to give the visitor the impression that the whole town had been recently under shellfire. Two such unassuming buildings, dating back to Turkish times, became the presidential office building and the president's residence in which Zogu, arrayed in his white uniform with gold epaulets, received guests.

There was hope that the new republican structure would facilitate stability as well, but opposition soon began to surface. Some of the rising discontent was motivated by the simple lust for power and some of it was the result of sheer desperation in light of the appalling economic problems faced by much of the population. The first serious threats came from within Zogu's own entourage and extended family, which indicated that Zogu had not yet learned how to attract both responsible and loyal

administrators. Six months after he became president, Zogu was faced with two attempted coups, one engineered by the president of the senate and the minister of finance. This attempt was quickly overcome, followed by the usual violent repression.

The second one was potentially more serious and involved the Yugoslavs and Zogu's brother-in-law Ceno bey Kryeziu, who at the time was the minister of the interior. The Yugoslavs expected something in return for their help in restoring Zogu, and while they had been granted minor territorial adjustments, some in the government in Belgrade wanted a compliant Albania or a new president. Possibly someone like Ceno bey who approved of closer ties to Yugoslavia and eventually found himself on the Yugoslav payroll. In the meantime, Yugoslav military attachés in Tirana intrigued with disgruntled tribal leaders. Zogu was naturally suspicious of Belgrade because of its proximity, and this suspicion fell upon Ceno bey as well who was sent abroad and later assassinated in Prague. Since his assassin was shot dead while on trial for the murder, questions remain as to who was ultimately responsible. Yugoslav-Albanian relations suffered from the episode and would continue to deteriorate.

While these two attempts were put down, they did provoke a number of further assassination attempts and uprisings. The attempts to murder Zogu were instigated primarily by the ever-growing number of exiles who had fled the country as a result of earlier unsuccessful attempts to topple the regime. Many of these people were financed by foreign powers, usually Italy which, under Mussolini, hoped to avenge the humiliation of Vlorë in 1920.

Zogu survived these attempts but became highly security conscious. He became his own prisoner, spending most of his time shut away in his overheated office chain-smoking cigarettes. He received his meals from his mother, who sent them in a guarded locked box from her villa that was situated across from his. On those rare occasions when he did leave his residence, he did so usually in the company of his mother, since the shooting of women in blood feud killings was proscribed, and always with the protection of a detachment of cavalry consisting of men from his own Mati tribe.

But these occasional assassination attempts and minor revolts were not his only problems. In 1926, Zogu faced a widespread revolt financed by Mussolini that constituted the first serious threat to his regime. Rumors began as early as February that émigré groups, primarily in Italy, were plotting to foment a large insurrection during 1926. The conspirators played on the discontent that perpetually existed at the various levels of Albanian society. The more well-to-do Muslims of the south resented their political and social eclipse, and the common people resented Zogu's drafting of labor to build roads, as well as the continuing state of poverty in which they found themselves. Many of the Geg tribesmen – not Zogu's clan or among his allies – resented his attempt to disarm them and to stamp out brigandage. On November 20, 1926, insurgent tribes advanced on Shkodër, driving five companies of government militia before them. Zogu moved quickly, transferring large bodies of militia and supporters from central to northern Albania until he was able to concentrate nearly 10,000 fighters and several batteries of mountain guns against the insurgents. The Geg

chieftains could not compete against Zogu's overwhelming firepower. By December 2, the insurrection had been crushed and the insurgents driven into the hills. This was to be the last major clan uprising in Albania until the Second World War.

Despite the fact that the revolt ended so quickly, Zogu was aware of how serious it had been and moved quickly in an attempt to ensure that it would not happen again. The first priority was to remove the insurgents themselves. He sent his minister of the interior, Musa Juka, to the north to conduct swift and severe reprisals. Juka burned a number of villages and constructed a special police court that engaged in large-scale hanging and imprisonment, even sentencing to death a number of Catholic priests who had confessed to leading revolutionary bands. But Rome interceded for the priests, putting Zogu in a rather awkward position, for if he reprieved the priests who had openly confessed their guilt, he would have been attacked by Muslims who remembered that some years before he had hanged several Muslim clerics for complicity in a revolt. When the British minister added his voice in support of amnesty, Zogu lamented, that he would have dearly liked to hang them. The dilemma was resolved by a typical Zogu compromise – he commuted the sentences of the two guilty priests, but in order to satisfy the domestic demand to hang a priest, Zogu quickly produced one who few knew had been arrested and hanged him.

Social and Economic Challenges

The suppression of the 1926 revolt afforded Zogu some time to attempt to address the unity and stability issue and

take steps toward his goal of a modern European Albania. It was not a simple task. Albania was without many of the necessary preconditions generally associated with unity, including some degree of centralization, religious and linguistic unity, leadership of a self-conscious class and foreign intellectual stimulus. Instead, a combination of indigenous Albanian circumstances and conscious Ottoman policy had succeeded in delaying the rise of a traditional national consciousness necessary for unity. Despite the initial attempts at the nationalization of religion by the regimes of the principality, the process was incomplete. Social and economic disunity was fostered by the coexistence of three conflicting levels of civilization, the mountain clans in the north, the feudal beys in the south and the more educated and urbanized population of the Orthodox and Catholic fringes.

The northern tribesmen remained the least developed, fiercely independent, concerned with their traditional freedoms, with blood feuds and with land and cattle. This was contrasted with the urban north and south where most of the educated and the majority of Albanian commerce could be found. Many of these people were middle class and included some who had either studied or lived abroad. And yet in Albania they were at a distinct disadvantage for being almost unarmed among the armed. So, there were challenges with regard to unity. One bright spot, however, was the fact that Albania had significantly fewer minority issues unlike elsewhere in the Balkan because the Peace of Paris left Albania truncated with more than one-third of its population in Yugoslavia. Of Albania's population of just over 800,000 people, approximately 96 percent were ethnic

Albanians, 2.4 percent Greek, and 1.3 percent Macedonian. The nationality issue was much less serious than in the rest of the Balkans – but irredentism became a major concern, and in some circles remains one today. But this advantage was more than offset by other challenges to stability in Albania.

Equally as serious as the unity issue were Albania's myriad economic challenges. In many ways, Albania was still in the Middle Ages economically. Five centuries of Turkish rule had created none of the necessary bases of modern economic development and, indeed, had retarded such development. In 1922, over 90 percent of the population was engaged either in agriculture or animal husbandry. Given the makeup of the terrain, with approximately 67 percent scrub, woodland and eroded mountain slope, 24 percent forest and 9 percent usable for agriculture, the average Albania lived in a state of extreme poverty.

On the little land available for farming, medieval techniques of crop rotation as well as wooden plows were still widely used. The irrigation system in most parts of the country dated back to the Middle Ages. Approximately 40 percent of the peasants were landless and lived under the *chiflik* system of land tenure, a holdover from Ottoman times that strongly resembled serfdom. Under this system, the Muslim landowner required that the peasant bring his crop to the square of the *chiflik* village where the state tax and seed costs were deducted. The remainder was divided equally between the landowner and the peasant, leaving the peasant about 30 percent of the crop. Since this was generally not enough to live on, the peasant was forced to borrow from the landowner to

feed his family and animals. Although under the *chiflik* system the peasant was nominally free to leave, few were ever out of debt. As a result, Albanian peasants were bound to the land in a deplorable state of ignorance and poverty.

What little was produced rarely reached a wider market because of the primitive transportation system. Proper roads linking the major inland cities and the coast were basically nonexistent. Although some roads had been built by the Austrians and the Italians during the war, they were constructed rapidly for war purposes of rather poor material. Due to climatic conditions and lack of maintenance, even these roads had deteriorated. On the few roads that did exist, wheeled traffic was possible only during the summer months because they were basically mud paths that became impossible in bad weather. With few exceptions, travel was possible only by foot and pack-train. Subsequently, some areas of the country were cut off for months at a time. Some were cut off completely as few bridges remained, most having been blown up during the war or carried away by floods.

In terms of motorized traffic, Albania was completely without it. The country's entire rolling stock in the early 1920s consisted of three miserable old Ford motorcars left behind by an American relief mission. Although the Austrians had constructed a narrow-gauge Decauville railroad from Durrës to Elbasan and from Tirana to Durrës, it had been completely neglected and by 1922 was no longer salvageable. Albania had entirely passed over the railroad age and would not have its first functioning train until after the Second World War. Coastal shipping before the war had been divided

between the Austrians and the Italians, and during the postwar period was controlled exclusively by the latter.

This extremely weak transportation network did a great deal to hamper the development of industry and the extraction of raw materials. In 1922, industry was either nonexistent or of the handicraft variety. What little production did exist was limited to gold and silver filigree work done by skilled artisans, tanning and dying of saddle and shoe leather by a primitive vegetable process, rough tiles and a small amount of heat-treated and sundried bricks. None of these products were exported and little was sold within the country. Most everything that was needed in an Albanian household was produced at home. Flour was ground by hand or by small water-driven mills, and wool was spun at home. Except during periods of insurrection and war, Albanians were able to produce most of their food and 75 percent of the clothes they needed. Aside from the lack of transportation facilities and the weakness of the internal market, industrial development was also plagued by a paucity of raw materials, or at least available raw materials since few statistics existed and few surveys had been done. During the war, the Austrians and Italians had discovered coal, silver, copper, petroleum and bitumen, but exploration ceased as soon as the troops left.

Apart from the issue of lack of unity and economic underdevelopment, Albanians suffered from a unique *Weltanschauung*, a legacy of the Ottoman empire which included a strong distrust of government and the city, coupled with a cleverness employed to cheat the authorities, a practice which was considered not only completely normal but admirable. The average Albanian lived in abject poverty with only rare access to health care and

education and none of the modern conveniences that most Europeans had by the 1920s come to rely on. Even the capital had no electric lights until 1927 and would have to wait for almost another decade for piped water and sewerage. Zogu was aware that these economic problems were a threat to his regime, and he was also aware Albania would not be able to deal with these problems on its own. It desperately needed foreign assistance.

Zogu's second but perhaps even more important priority was to remove the source of much of this disunity and instability, which he correctly assumed had to do with Italian financial support for the ever-increasing Albanian exile community. Rome routinely subsidized Albanian exiles as a means by which to pressure Zogu and to buy some influence should Zogu be killed or overthrown and replaced by one of these exiled leaders. Zogu was also aware that financial support from an interested neighboring power was the only means by which to solve some of Albania's severe economic problems and lead to further political stability. Zogu certainly considered other options; the League of Nations had been approached and was not interested. The League sent a commission that advised Zogu to reduce his military expenditures, a move which he felt would threaten his regime. There was Serbia, but it was a peasant state like Albania and could hardly afford the necessary funds. And the president was loath to owe them more than he did already, given their important aid in restoring him to power.

Turning to Italy for political and economic support was the obvious choice.

Italy was a leading state, shared no borders with Albania, had strategic interests in Albania and was

reasonably financially sound and willing to underwrite and support the small but chaotic Albanian economy. Italy, too, was home to most of Zogu's exiled enemies. In terms of domestic reaction, Zogu realized that he could always fall back on the legend, which became more fantastic with age, that if matters ever reached crisis proportions, the Albanians could easily expel the Italians as they had done in 1920.

Zogu had been negotiating with the Italians since 1924, and in 1925 he had secured a substantial loan from the newly created Society for Economic Development in Albania (SVEA), an Italian government-controlled development company, which was to build an Albanian infrastructure. Zogu, however, resisted a military and political agreement that the Italians wanted until the revolt of 1926, when he found himself in dire need of funds to maintain political support and to mobilize and equip his bands. On November 27, 1926, while the fighting was still in progress, Zogu signed the Pact of Friendship and Security with Italy, which likely netted Zogu a substantial sum and guaranteed the political status quo in Albania in exchange for Albania's foreign policy independence. In the words of the German minister in Albania, Zogu understood that one must kiss the hand that cannot be hanked off.

But this agreement had not gone far enough, and Zogu continued to face political upheavals throughout 1927, encouraging him to sign a Second Pact of Friendship in November 1927. This was a defensive military alliance through which Italy essentially gained control of the Albanian militia forces by becoming both quartermaster and trainer. Still, Zogu received important concessions in

return. Mussolini agreed to stop the financing of and break contact with Zogu's most important exiled enemies, including the Kosovar leader Hasan Prishtina, who would soon be killed. Perhaps even more important for Zogu, the Italians agreed to allow him to assume the throne. To complement the change of regime, Zog asked for a suitable wife from the Italian royal house of Savoy, preferably Princess Giovanna. Although Mussolini initially agreed to this request as well, he soon let it drop since Boris of Bulgaria began courting the princess soon after the agreement was signed. It is doubtful that Mussolini ever brought the matter up with Italian King Vittorio Emmanuele III since the king would likely not have approved, considering Zogu to be little more than a brigand. Regardless of the failed marriage plans, Zogu had received the reward that not only served his vanity but, Zogu was convinced, would help create the political stability he had sought for so long.

Zog, King of the Albanians

That Zogu began laying the groundwork for such a change beginning in 1924 or even earlier was clear to many. His penchant for white uniforms with epaulettes has already been mentioned. This was followed by the wide dissemination of his likeness on stamps and buildings. His name and initials appeared everywhere, including on the side of a mountain above Shkodër. A crucial component in this process was the notion of continuity and here Zogu channeled Skanderbeg. He emphasized the similarities between himself and the Albanian national hero – both had risen from relative obscurity to play a

prominent political role. Zogu publicized a tenuous marriage connection between Skanderbeg's sister and one of Zogu's ancestors. Once he became king, Zogu adopted the helmet of Skanderbeg as the symbol of the nation, with *AZ* superimposed.

With Italian support for the change secured, Zogu, who still believed that such a move would be of critical interest to Europe, began sounding out foreign and domestic opinion and laying the constitutional groundwork. To Zogu's surprise, the Yugoslavs and the British, although neither was particularly enthusiastic, announced rather disingenuously that it was not the habit of their governments to interfere in the internal affairs of other states. From the rest of Europe, Zogu received answers of benevolent disinterest. As with his constant worry about foreign opinion, Zogu was continually concerned about superficial legality. He therefore took great pains to ensure that the change was constitutionally correct. Since parliament could not alter the republican constitution, Zogu convinced its members in June 1928 to pass an organic law providing for their own dissolution and the election of a special constituent assembly.

Zogu also required some local enthusiasm to convince skeptics of the unanimity of his people. His first move in this direction was his acceptance in December 1927 of the title "Savior of the Nation." Next, he decided that the unquestioning support of the cabinet was necessary. Although it is unlikely that any of the members of the government would have opposed him, thereby jeopardizing their positions and perhaps their lives, since the dismissal and reorganization of the government could be done with ease, Zogu manufactured a cabinet crisis

resulting in the resignation of the entire cabinet. Within twenty-four hours a new cabinet was formed that was quickly christened the "Marionette Cabinet" because its members appeared to be merely a collection of puppets in the hands of the president.

The constituent assembly duly met in late August 1928 and as expected unanimously resolved that the illustrious crown of the historical Albanian throne be offered to the Savior of the Nation under the title of Zog I, King of the Albanians. Zogu mostly abandoned his Turkic name of Ahmet, and the "u" from Zogu was dropped. Zog accepted the crown in a short ceremony followed by three days of celebration, during which "spontaneous demonstrations" abounded. Every house in the capital was adorned with the obligatory garland of green while the demonstrations continued. As the three-day period wore on, the organization of these outbursts became more and more obvious while claims of spontaneity became more and more ridiculous.

Foreign reaction, except for that of Italy, was initially somewhat negative, not because of the act itself but because of the title "King of the Albanians." The Yugoslavs, who of course possessed a large Albanian minority in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, interpreted this as a signal for a future irredentist campaign, but extended recognition regardless so as not to play into the hands of the Italians. They did so even before Britain and France. The only serious objection came from Mustafa Kemal of Turkey, who was exasperated with Zog's betrayal of the republican form of government and refused to recognize the regime. Among the common people, those not directly involved, the reaction when it

could be discerned was not surprising. Either they did not react at all because it really did not affect them, or, as the British minister suggests, they were cynically indifferent.

The 1928 monarchical constitution corrected what Zog saw as the flaws of the presidential constitution and left all of the power, not just most of it, in the hands of the chief executive. Although it seemed outwardly democratic, on close examination Zog was given virtually unrestricted legislative, judicial and executive power. While indirect elections continued to be held, political parties were declared illegal, and the parliaments that resulted were made up of place-men who occupied themselves in voluminous debates on issues about which Zog was indifferent. When Zog, who had the exclusive right to initiate legislation, sent something down, parliament would immediately take up the issue, pass the bill unanimously and then quietly fade back into insignificance. Zog's judicial powers were also significantly enhanced. Under the presidency, Zog had been able to control the judiciary only through appointments and intimidation. Now, judicial decisions were pronounced and executed in his name, doing away with what little independence the courts may have had. The primary source of his power, however, came by virtue of his executive prerogatives, which he shared with no one.

He was careful not to create an aristocracy, except for his sisters and their offspring, in part because Albania could not afford to support an aristocracy and in part because he was not interested in the competition. And ultimately, he had none, except perhaps for the Italians who increased their control over Albanian foreign policy, its economy and its army. What Zog created was



6.1 Zog and his family in national dress

essentially a reasonably stable, traditional, nonideological, authoritarian regime in which he even allowed limited political reform provided that his own position was not threatened in the process. While most other Balkan states that adopted a similar form of rule also included certain elements of fascism, Albania did not, primarily because fascism was associated with Italy and Italy quickly developed into Albania's greatest nemesis.

The Kingdom of Zog

So, what did Zog do with his monarchy? During his eleven years as king, his principal concern was for the maintenance of his own power, while building a modern European Albania. As we have seen, he recognized that this was possible only through political and economic stability fostered by some degree of national unity. This realization, and the policies initiated to achieve these

goals, made Zog something of a modern nationalist, if somewhat accidentally, although many would disagree. Because of his opposition to Kosovar irredentism, Zog was condemned then, and in some circles is even now. Zog's attitude toward Kosovo remained pragmatic. He believed that, given Albania's struggle for stability and its limited resources, it was simply foolish to provoke the Yugoslavs. There were, of course, other considerations. From an internal political standpoint, Kosovar irredentism also made little sense for Zog. Many of the northern chieftains, with claims and often holdings in Kosovo, and the Kosovo chieftains themselves were Zog's bitter rivals. The inclusion of their lands and their retainers into the Albanian state would only have threatened Zog's position. But the international arguments were compelling enough. Had Zog pursued an irredentist policy, he would either have faced a Yugoslav invasion or at least have become completely dependent on the Italians for military protection. In either case, Albanian independence and Zog's position would have been jeopardized.

Zog continued to work for internal pacification and unity. With the political obstacles removed by the end of politics as we know it, he could turn his attention elsewhere. We have seen that even prior to acquiring the power of the crown, Zog had initiated the process of integrating the northern tribesmen into the national life of Albania by reducing blood feuds and disarming parts of the population. Because of perpetual financial constraints, many of his initiatives with regard to the creation of a "modern European Albania" tended to be principally symbolic. He insisted on Western dress at some royal social functions. He passed a law forbidding women to



6.2 Zog's sisters in Western dress

conceal their faces. In support of this last move, he sent three of the six sisters on a barnstorming tour of the extreme north of the country where conservative Islam was still strong. The three unmarried princesses arrived unveiled, arrayed in up-to-date Western European dress, with short, tight-fitting skirts and makeup. They spent a week visiting schools, churches, religious shrines, hospitals, marketplaces and ruins, mingling with the people for a good deal of their time there. Despite the conservative patriarchal nature of the society in many of the areas they visited, where women played a decidedly subservient role, the expedition created something of a sensation and was deemed a great success.

Another priority was religion, and here Zog hoped to extend the degree of domestic control of churches, elevate religious leaders who espoused Albanian unity and use the power of the state to remove religion as a divisive factor in Albanian society. We have seen the beginning of nationalization of religion under the principality, which Zogu had encouraged. We have seen Albania's Muslims separate themselves, a process which was essentially required given Mustafa Kemal's enforced secularization in Turkey. While Orthodox and Catholic believers constituted less than 30 percent of the population, because of the nature of the churches, control for Zog proved to be more of a challenge.

With regard to the Orthodox, Zog built on the work of Bishop Fan Noli, who had been responsible for convening a congress in Berat in 1922. As we have seen, the congress declared the Albanian church to be autocephalous and asked the patriarch in Istanbul for official recognition. The patriarch was hesitant, first because Greek influence in Albania would be threatened as a result and second because Albania lacked a proper hierarchy. Once he had come to power, Zog acted forcefully and found two bishops, unfortunately of questionable character and legitimacy, and had them consecrate three new bishops, thereby creating the needed five-man synod. The patriarch, however, refused to grant recognition until April 1937 when some of the more objectionable bishops were removed.

Zog's greatest religious challenge, however, came from Albania's smallest religious community, the Catholics, who were considered the most suspect because of their obvious connection with Italy. Recognizing that total

separation was impossible, Zog chose to try to reduce the church's influence in Albania. As president, he has already taken steps in hopes of reducing the practice of shooting faithless wives, as well as decreasing the influence of the church through the institution of new civil and criminal codes. The codes, which he saw as another important step toward modernism and Europeanization, called for civil marriage and divorce. The Archbishop of Shkodër and the papal nuncio objected strenuously but were told in no uncertain terms that any priest who took his objections too far would soon be provided with a tree with adequate strength to support his weight.

As king, we will see Zog attempt to control the influence of Catholic schools. While the Catholic church in Albania respected Zog's power for the most part, one of the unfortunate results of his somewhat authoritarian approach was to contribute to widespread Catholic collaboration with the Italians following Zog's ouster. It is perhaps ironic that Zog himself would marry a devout Catholic, the Hungarian Countess Geraldine of Apponyi, although only after it was understood that the children of the union would be raised as Muslims.

While Zog's own education can only be described as limited, he understood that one of most important keys to modernization, unity – and therefore stability – rested with the youth of Albania. While much of the older generation could likely never be weaned from tribalism and feudalism, with proper education the youth could construct a new Albania. The development of an adequate educational system became a high priority. When Albania gained its independence, the educational system was in its infancy, in part because of the Ottoman ban on



6.3 King Zog with Queen Geraldine

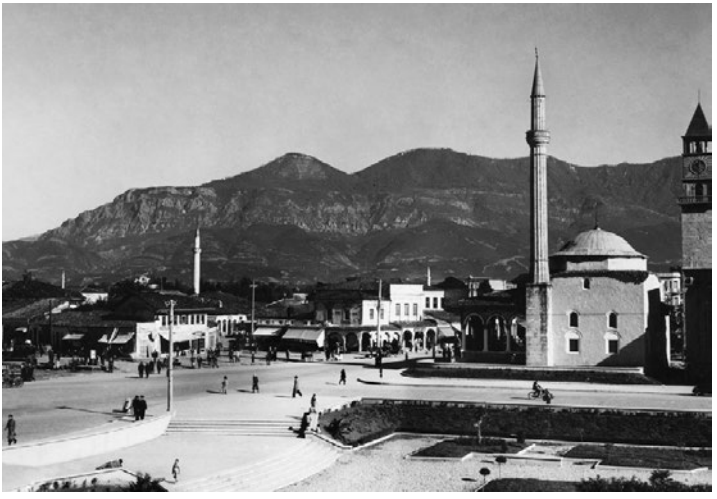
Albanian-language schools. When Zog came to power, even the language was inadequate for literary and educational purposes. The vocabulary was underdeveloped, and the different dialects spoken in the north and south had not yet been merged into a national language. While Zog did not address all of these deficiencies, he did build schools and attempted to establish some state control over those schools run by foreigners. By the time of the Italian invasion in 1939, there were 633 elementary schools and 19 intermediate schools, up from 580 and 13, respectively, in 1930. While Albania would not found its first university until 1957, during the Zog years an increasing number of Albanians were sent abroad for higher education. But since the illiteracy rate in Albania in 1939 remained very high, all of this progress can only be considered a very limited success.

A series of further initiatives afforded Zog even less success, in part because of the increasingly subversive influence of the Italians. Zog attempted to foster unity through the improvement of Albania's rather primitive transportation and communications infrastructure. He acquired loans for the purpose from the Italians, but given the nature of the restrictions on these loans, most of the new roads were built to Italian military specifications. Nevertheless, by 1939 it was increasingly difficult for northern tribes to retreat to their mountain fastness and simply ignore the central government in Tirana. Zog's police and tax collectors were given access to areas of Albania hitherto isolated not only from the rest of Europe but from the rest of Albania as well. Zog also hoped to use the army, which under the monarchy was expanded beyond its militia base, as a means not only to enforce government policy but as a social and cultural melting pot, requiring recruits from different parts of the country to serve together in the same units. This might have been more successful had Italian trainers not subverted a good number of these recruits and turned them into potential collaborators.

Zog's greatest failure, however, was in the economic sphere. That economic development could lead to political and general stability was clear – that Albania's general economic situation changed little during the years of Zog's various regimes is also clear. Grinding poverty was still widespread. Certainly, Zog cannot be saddled with all of the blame for this deplorable situation. The Italians, who by 1939 directed much of Zog's financial policy, were not particularly interested in a prosperous or industrialized Albania, which would of course have reduced Zog's dependence.

Zog could also go only so far with such crucial policies as land reform because of his dependence on the leaders of Albania's traditional society, the chieftains and the great Muslim landowners. As most of the fertile land in the center and the south remained in the hands of a few landowners who kept their peasants in conditions resembling serfdom, there clearly was a pressing need. The government did actually pass an Agrarian Reform Law in 1930, which on paper was to transfer fully one-third of the large estates to the peasants under favorable terms. But the entire reform came to very little, as the implementation of the reform was delayed long enough for the landowners to institute schemes of avoidance, such as parceling out the land to their relatives or turning it over to pastureland, which was exempted from the reforms.

Albania was able to extract substantial sums in grants and loans from the Italians, and although the Italians controlled how most of the money was spent, on the surface it seemed as though they were doing some good for the country. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear the Albanian priorities were rarely considered. The roads the Italians built were constructed not according to the needs of Albanian transportation and communications. As with the bridges, they were built for Italian military purposes, primarily in the direction of the Greek and Yugoslav frontiers. The port of Durrës was expanded to the extent that once it was completed, it was able to handle ships larger than the biggest commercial carriers. Ultimately, of course, it was not in the Italian interest to create a functioning independent economy in Albania. The Italians were more interested in saddling Zog with debt that he could never repay. The Italians



6.4 Tirana, 1930

hoped that through this significant investment Zog would become dependent and compliant.

The Struggle with Rome

But he was rarely compliant. Zog had always believed his own propaganda that he could always take Italian money and yet keep them at bay, and if his relationship with Italy deteriorated to the point of a rupture, the Italians could be thrown into the Adriatic as they had been in 1920. But the Italians would prove to be his undoing; most of the 1930s was dominated by rolling crises in Italo-Albanian relations. The 1930s were difficult worldwide because of the depression, but Albania faced additional difficulties, including weather-related issues destroying most of Albania's grain crop, tariffs and Russian dumping

destroying Albania's meager exports and the collapse of immigrant remittances. At the same time, the SVEA money was finally exhausted, throwing many out of work. The Italians offered another grant but at the cost of a further encroachment on Albania's sovereignty, and Zog was forced to accept it. By 1930, there were already some 2,000 Italians employed in Albania paid by the Italian government, resulting in growing anti-Italianism now evident among all segments of Albanian society, feelings that ranged from dull antipathy to wholesale detestation.

While Zog's rule was never threatened, he recognized that he could not completely ignore trends in public opinion and that some gesture of independence was required. He chose not to renew the five-year 1926 Pact of Tirana that included a guarantee of Zog's own position, something which he now saw as a humiliating admission of weakness. Despite Italian objections, Zog allowed the pact to expire. The Italian reaction was predictable – Rome began to squeeze Zog financially. First it blocked the newly negotiated 1931 loan, then it required accelerated repayment of the SVEA loan and pushed for a customs union, which would have effectively removed any remaining financial independence Albania might have had. These demands only heightened Zog's suspicions of Italian moves. It was at this moment that Zog was convinced by nationalists in his government to take steps toward nationalizing education in Albania. The minister of education argued that foreigners, particularly the Italians, were improperly using their positions as instructors in Albanian schools to politically and culturally influence their students. The minister piqued Zog's interest by claiming that in some instances the Italians went so far as

to replace portraits of Albanian heroes, including Zog's own portrait, with those of Vittorio Emmanuele III and Mussolini.

Zog was convinced to strike a blow for nationalism and allowed the ministry of education to close all private schools. Those affected included all foreign schools, but little effort was made to hide the fact that the Italians were the principal target. Seventeen Catholic schools belonging to Jesuits, Franciscans and Stigmatines, with a total of 2,560 pupils, were abruptly closed. The four excellent Italian technical schools, with a total of 1,000 students, shared the same fate, as did the American technical school in Tirana, as well as minority schools. Had the Albania school system been somewhat stronger, the departure of the foreigners may not have had such a resounding impact. As it was, the entire educational system was thrown into chaos. Zog and his ministers had destroyed the prevailing system without the means or even the slightest hope of replacing it with another.

Foreign reaction was sharp. The Greek minority in southern Albania took their case to the League of Nations, which eventually ruled in favor of the Greeks. But the Italian reaction proved more of a problem. All Italian financial assistance was suspended, and Italian personnel, civil and military, were gradually withdrawn. The Duce, who had recently fired his more conciliatory foreign minister Dino Grandi, decided to escalate the situation and in June 1934 sent an Italian squadron, made up of six cruisers and thirteen destroyers, unannounced to Durrës. At the same time, the Albanian economy effectively ceased to function. Government salaries and pensions were either cut or, like members of parliament,



6.5 Shops in Vlorë, 1930s

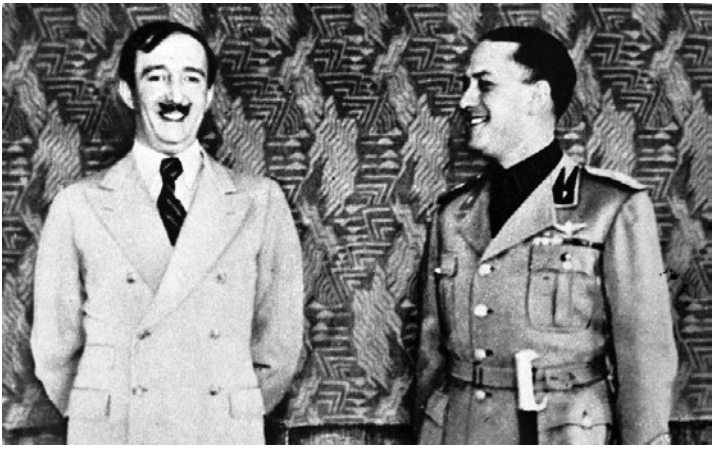
simply went unpaid. Public works in the making were abandoned and contractors were refused payment. Because no one was being paid, the merchant community stopped buying from abroad, retail dealers went bankrupt and credit dried up. Had Albania been a more advanced economic community, a complete breakdown of internal organization would have resulted. Most Albanians, however, were accustomed to poverty – they had seen it all before.

Despite Zog's, and Albania's, obvious and growing desperation, it was Mussolini who was the first to blink. In 1935, he decided on an invasion of Ethiopia, and this new crisis quickly replaced Albania as his principal focus. Now he just wanted an end to uncertainty across the Adriatic. The thaw began with a monetary gift. Zog repaid Mussolini by becoming one of the only League of Nations members not to vote to condemn Italy's African aggression and then promptly refusing to support the

economic sanctions that the League imposed on Italy. A face-saving compromise was worked out allowing Catholic schools to reopen, and the Italians were awarded a long-term concession to enlarge the port at Durrës, clearly looking to the eventual establishment of a naval base there. While the Italians were able to further encroach on Albanian sovereignty, they backed off from their most extreme demands. But for Zog, these new agreements proved to be little more than a temporary reprieve.

The End of Albanian Independence

By 1938, Mussolini's foreign minister (and son-in-law) Count Galeazzo Ciano (1903–1944) had come to the conclusion that Italy would never achieve its goal of complete dominance over Albania while Zog remained on the throne. In a sense, Zog's defense of Albania's independence against the Italians sealed Albania's fate. Ciano, who became somewhat obsessed with the country, argued for an Italian invasion of Albania, employing rank exaggeration and flattery and by playing on Mussolini's fears. The Duce hesitated, always afraid of making major decisions, but then became enraged when the Germans occupied Prague in March 1939. So Zog was eventually offered a final ultimatum that would have completely emasculated the king. He refused. Following an all-too-hasty mobilization, Italian forces invaded Albania on April 7, 1939, with 40,000–50,000 troops supported by some 400 aircraft and dozens of warships. The operation itself was a bungled affair, best described by Filippo Anfuso, Ciano's chief assistant who accompanied the count on his flight over the battle zone for campaign metals. Anfuso noted wryly



6.6 King Zog and Count Ciano

that had the Albanians possessed a well-armed fire brigade they could have driven the Italians back into the Adriatic.

But there was little resistance. The Albanian army, numbering perhaps 8,000, had been thoroughly subverted by Italian trainers and, as a result, was of little use to either side. But there was some heroic defense, particularly at Durrës where the gendarmerie commander Abaz Kupi (1892–1976), along with the aid of some townspeople, resisted the invasion. The defenders beat back the first wave of invaders who were forced to retire to their ships. But the attackers landed again in larger numbers, supported by small tanks and simply overwhelmed Kupi and his defenders, who melted back into the civilian population. The Italians were able to overrun the entire country in a matter of days, held up only occasionally by their own incompetence.

King Zog, following a rather pathetic personal plea to Mussolini, appealed by radio to his subjects to fight the Italians until the last drop of blood was exhausted.



6.7 Retreating Albanian soldiers, Shkodër, 1939

But given the fact that there were fewer than 2,000 radios in the country, his appeal had little impact. Within hours, he fled to Greece with his wife, Geraldine, and their newborn son, Prince Leka, carrying sacks of gold, bribes that Mussolini had provided over the years. After years of sparring with the Italians, it is possible that Zog had simply had enough – the manner of his flight, however, left a rather negative impression. With their country invaded and their king gone, most Albanians resigned themselves to the inevitable.

The evaluations of Zog range from Zog as demon to Zog as national hero. Zog's wife, Queen Geraldine, described him to this author as the twentieth-century Napoleon. Vittorio Emmanuele III, who became king of Albania following Zog's flight, called him a bandit, and French Premier Édouard Daladier saw him as little more

than a gangster. Albanian communist historiography, which tended to view almost everything in black-and-white terms, condemned him roundly as a tyrannical feudal oppressor and ascribed anything positive that happened during his reign to someone else.

The criterion often used to judge politicians is to determine whether or not the people were better off at the end of an administration than they had been at its beginning. On the surface, in a material sense, it would certainly seem as if Albanians were not much better off in 1939 that they had been in 1922. The population was still overwhelmingly peasant oriented, with industry in 1938 accounting for only 4.4 percent of the national income. Agriculture and stock-breeding methods remained primitive as well because what little capital Albania had was not used efficiently. Because of Albania's primitive transportation system and the negative effect this had on agriculture and industry, extensive importing was necessary. Not only did Albania import all of the needed manufactured goods but large quantities of wheat, corn and rice were still being imported to meet the basic needs of the people. Export values still had not exceeded 50 percent of import costs.

Social conditions remained almost as primitive as economic conditions. Impoverished peasants were still ruled over by feudal Muslim landlords. Only a handful of towns, Tirana, Durrës, Shkodër, Vlorë and Korçë, in any way resembled a European city. General living conditions were poor everywhere; the people suffered from a poor diet, making them vulnerable to disease. Public health services were nonexistent, and education was still rudimentary. Women remained repressed in Albania's highly patriarchal society.

But something had been gained, even if often intangible. Zog's most tangible achievement was the establishment of at least limited political stability. He understood that in the construction of his state he could not simply copy political forms, which might have been applicable elsewhere without taking indigenous political realities into consideration. The state Zog constructed provided him with the centralization necessary to forcibly reduce the independence of the highlands and to begin to bring the divergent elements of the country together. The independence that the northern tribes had enjoyed for centuries was to a considerable extent curtailed. By the 1930s the central government was recognized in most parts of the country, allowing Zog's administration to collect taxes and draft recruits for the army, something that would have been considered impossible immediately following the First World War.

Zog's most important contributions, however, were less tangible. He took significant steps in the direction of his stated goals of modernization and Europeanization. He created an environment that was conducive to the growth of an Albanian national consciousness, a process completed by his successors. Ekrem bey Vlora, the Albanian author and diplomat, suggested that out of the chaos of tribes and feudalism, Zog created not just a state, but also a nation. While this may be something of an overstatement, there is some truth here. Zog did construct a state apparatus and a bureaucracy that resulted in centralization and some stability. His resistance to Italian attempts to violate Albanian political sovereignty and territorial integrity demonstrated not only his will to survive but also the level of his own nationalism. His struggle with Italy

provided a focus, even if it was a negative one, for growing nationalist sentiment. Zog also effectively used the symbol of Skenderbeg, and by adopting his helmet as a symbol, Zog managed not only to help found a national ideology but also to extend it to his own person. When Zog came to power, local pride was more important than national identity. While what Zog did may not have created a nation, he certainly facilitated steps in that direction. Those who succeeded him as leaders and resumed the effort of nation-state construction had their task made somewhat simpler as a result of the steps toward the development of broadly based Albanian nationalism for which Zog was responsible.

7

The Second World War and the Establishment of the Communist Regime, 1939–1944

Albania's wartime experience began with the Italian invasion of April 7, 1939, and ended with the German withdrawal in December 1944 and the construction of the communist regime. The intervening five and a half years produced considerable suffering and destruction, which would not soon be forgotten and continues to inform the self-image of Albanians even in the twenty-first century. The war, like the interwar period, produced different *Albanias*, in this case Italian and German, both of which combined imported ideologies with domestic realities. In the process of pursuing their own goals, the Italians, and particularly the Germans, effected a profound transformation and acceleration in social, economic and political change, an irreversible process that doomed the prewar Zogist order and opened the way for the communist regime.

The Construction of an Italian Albania

In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the Italians scrambled to justify their aggressive action as Mussolini worried about foreign reaction. But he need not have been concerned. His allies, like Germany and Hungary, were publicly fully in support of the move. Albania's

Balkan neighbors, although less willing to accept Italy's clumsy lies to justify the invasion, were too frightened to offer open opposition. Only Turkey refused to accept the new situation and continued to grant the usual diplomatic privileges and immunities to the Albanian minister and his staff. In the West, the popular denunciation of the Italian action was widespread and noisy, where the press described the Italian action as a brutal and cynical act of unprovoked aggression. The official response, however, initially proved to be much more muted. The British were afraid of driving the Italians into greater reliance on the Germans and so did not complain too loudly and finally gave de facto and de jure recognition to the Italian invasion. The reaction of the League of Nations was even weaker, doing little more than acknowledging that the invasion had taken place.

Mussolini was delighted by the weak response and began planning further conquests. Still, Zog and the Albanian people were the last victims of appeasement, for the West drew something of a line in the sand at this point. Following the invasion, US President Franklin Roosevelt invited Hitler and Mussolini to guarantee a list of twenty-nine countries, while Britain and France issued guarantees to Greece and Romania. In a sense, then, the invasion of Albania marked an important stage in the process by which a coalition gradually developed to destroy fascism. While it can be argued that the sacrifice of the Albanians was not in vain, the newest subjects of Mussolini's resurrected Roman empire would not have been consoled by the knowledge.

Ciano, who was primarily responsible for the absorption of the newly conquered territory, planned to annex

Albania and create a colony without it appearing to be a colony. He attempted to uphold the fiction that the Albanians themselves initiated the process and found many willing collaborators among the traditional elite. The first step was to create a provisional government headed by Xhafer bey Ypi, a former Albanian prime minister and until recently the chief inspector of the Albanian royal court. Ypi was instructed to send Mussolini a message reaffirming the loyalty of the Albanian people, who confidently awaited the implementation of Ciano's program, which promised order, prosperity, political and social justice within the solemn frame of Fascist liberties. He admitted the incapacity of Albanians to govern themselves and appealed to Mussolini to save the country. Within days, Ypi convened a constituent assembly made up of landowners, tribal leaders and businesspeople, many of whom were distinguished only by their level of servility toward the Italians.

The assembly, following Ciano's plan, announced that as of April 12, "the year 17 of the Fascist Era," the Zog dynasty was deposed, replaced by a close bond between Albania and Italy in the form of a personal union under Vittorio Emmanuel III, who assumed the Albanian throne. A new government, made up mostly of nonentities, was quickly formed under the landowner Shevqet Vërlaci, Zog's onetime intended father-in-law, whom Zog had attempted to assassinate in 1927. Ciano summed up the new Albanian elite by noting in his diary after a reception at the Albanian royal palace that he was "missing eight cigar lighters, a silver case, sixty knives and forks. As a debut on the part of Tirana high society, that's not bad."



7.1 Italian tankette parade in Tirana, 1939

The new 1939 constitution drawn up by the Italians sealed the fate of Albanian independence and was typical of the new order that the European dictators imposed on conquered states. Power was concentrated in the hands of an Italian lieutenant general who reported to Mussolini. The first to serve in that post was Italian Ambassador Francesco Jacomoni (1893–1973), a relatively secondary person whose appointment created the impression in collaborationist circles and among the diplomatic community that Jacomoni was little more than a high commissioner in a conquered territory. To his credit, though, Jacomoni, unlike most Italian officials in Albania, treated the Albanians as backward but not inferior.

The judicial system of Italian Albania was similar to Zog's except legal codes were promulgated that extinguished personal freedoms. The legislative branch, also

similar to its Zogist predecessor and its Italian counterpart, was a sham and the collaborationist government was entirely controlled by the Italian authorities. The small Albanian army, which had demonstrated its insignificance during the invasion, was absorbed into the Italian army. Local government, as under Zog, was essentially controlled by the ministry of the interior. It was only on local and relatively minor matters that Albanians possessed any real decision-making powers.

Apart from the Italian lieutenant general, the two other principal power bases included the Italian military and the newly created Albanian Fascist Party, controlled by an Italian inspector general. The Italian military in Albania remained under the command of General Alfredo Guzzoni, the commander of the invasion force, and was never subjugated to Jaconomi, a situation that was to cause many subsequent problems. The Albanian Fascist Party, the only political party in Albania, provided the third element of what for a time became a three-way power struggle. Although there was an Albanian secretary general, the real power in the party rested with Inspector General Giovanni Giro, a personal friend of Mussolini who had created a series of diplomatic incidents by attempting to construct a youth movement in Albania during the last years of Zog's reign. Perhaps the most important function assigned to the party was propaganda, disseminated through its paper *Fashizmi*, which replaced the few Zogist-era newspapers which were quickly shut down.

The party was also given considerable influence in local administration and ancillary organizations like the Albanian Youth of the Lictor, a fascist youth movement,

university fascists and female fascists. Party membership automatically constituted a voluntary civil militia in traditional black shirts. The rank and file of the party was made up of both Albanians and Italians including government officials, who were encouraged to join. The party was made up of many individuals who joined for personal gain, rather than any sense of doctrinal conviction. Indeed, Albania failed to produce nearly the number of ideological partners for the fascists as did Romania or Croatia. Accustomed to the system of graft and corruption that prevailed under the Ottoman empire and under Zog, many Albanians regarded the Fascist Party as just another chance for the Italians to extract rake-off. Philosophically accepting the occupation of their country, many collaborated without any recognition of the ideological betrayal involved. As we shall see, many would later head for the hills once they realized what their collaboration would mean in the long run.

Italianization continued with an overhaul of Zog's financial structure. A broad-ranging financial agreement established a customs union, which required the Italians to take full responsibility for the Albanian budget. The new education system saw the wholesale dismissal of suspect faculty, the closing of most non-Italian foreign schools and the hurried introduction of new textbooks boasting politically correct historical interpretations. Establishing control over Albania's diverse religious hierarchies was not difficult, with the exception of the Bektashi leadership, which never fully accepted the Italian invasion and remained in opposition. The head of the community was murdered under mysterious circumstances on November 28, 1940. Although no solid

evidence exists, it is likely that the Italians had finally tired of this constant Bektashi opposition and decided at least to remove its leadership.

The remaining religious leadership was easily co-opted. The nominal head of the Sunnis was replaced by a more easily controlled Muslim Committee, and the Sunni community seemed to accept the change with little complaint. Indeed, in a remarkable full-page analysis in one of the new fascist newspapers, a leading Muslim cleric concluded that the terms *fascism* and *Islam* were essentially synonymous. Archbishop Kristofor Kisi, the head of the Albanian Orthodox church, and his three bishops expressed formal approval of the Italian invasion. The Catholic church and many Catholics, not surprisingly, proved to be quite supportive of the invasion as well. Italy brought priests and took their children to seminaries. There were, however, many exceptions, particularly among village priests who had been trained in Albania and proved to be quite nationalistic. The Catholic hierarchy with its two archbishops and four bishops, on the other hand, found it difficult to contain their enthusiasm, and were given immediate tangible evidence of the increased significance of Catholics. The Italians appreciably increased the operating budget of the three principal religious bodies, particularly that of the Catholics. Jacomoni even encouraged a Uniate movement but under Catholic supremacy. While nothing came of this program, its institution helped guarantee the loyalty of the Catholic hierarchy.

Italian Albania, in terms of its structure, proved to be little different from its Zogist predecessor. Like Zog, the Italians ruled with the cooperation of the old feudal aristocracy, made up of the great landowners of the center

and south, with the cooperation of many of the major northern tribal chieftains. Much of this system relied on simple corruption, a system with which the Italians were experienced and comfortable. While Italian Albania was certainly more centralized, the judicial and legislative structure suffered from the same lack of independence as they had under Zog. A miniature Fascist Italy grafted onto a Zogist frame was created. The operation was performed slowly and occasionally with tact. The result was a non-absolutist fascist military dictatorship in the guise of a constitutional monarchy. But convincing Albanians to support it was another matter.

The Italians made considerable efforts to win the hearts and minds of the population. A carrot-and-stick approach was adopted with, at least during the first year, much more emphasis placed on the former. An agreement gave Italians in Albania and Albanians in Italy the same civil and political rights they enjoyed in their own countries. This became possible following the startling discovery by Italian racial experts that the lowly Albanians were actually of Nordic stock, just like the Italians. Ciano, who liked to see himself as the great benefactor of the Albanians, personally saw to the distribution of food, clothing and substantial sums of money, much of which was given directly to the poor. Thousands of Albanian children were sent to summer camps in Italy, hundreds of university scholarships were made available. Italian health and sanitary missions toured the country and made significant improvements. But it was in the areas of long-term economic development where the Italians placed much of their emphasis. It is clear that the Italians did much initial economic good and many Albanians

benefited, particularly merchants and the vast lower classes. With the expansive new road and bridge construction projects, unemployment, a problem under the Zog regime, ceased to be an issue.

The Italian Invasion of Greece

But the Italians believed that they could engender the greatest goodwill by creating a Greater Albania, something that coincided with Italian plans for Balkan conquest. Mussolini defined irredentism as "the little light in the tunnel," the ideal spiritual motive to keep the Albanian nationalist spirit high. Propaganda began during the first week of the occupation, with Ciano arranging for popular demonstrations to demand the return of Kosovo and Çamëria. Ciano decided initially to concentrate on the latter and confront Greece, convincing Mussolini to embark on this disastrous course once Hitler had sent troops into Romania without first consulting the Duce. When the general commanding Italian forces in Albania seemed to show little enthusiasm for the project, he was replaced by General Sebastian Viscount Prasca who did not make the same mistake but did not bother assembling an adequate army for the task. Jacomoni added to Ciano's confidence by reporting on the magnificent spirit of the Albanian fascist militia and their burning desire to fight for the expansion of Albania and the Italian empire. Ciano was convinced that the operation would be "useful and easy." On October 15, 1940, Mussolini summoned a council of war at which Viscount Prasca announced that he had prepared the operation down to the smallest detail, it was now as perfect as humanly possible. He confidently

told Mussolini that he expected to oppose a Greek army of 30,000, approximately 10 percent of the troop concentrations that he would actually face. After an hour and a half, Mussolini concluded that the problem had been examined from every angle and that there was nothing left to be said.

On October 22, Ciano drew up an ultimatum to be presented to Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas, requiring that Greece immediately agree to Italian occupation of some strategic bases. As a further example of carelessness of method, Italian Ambassador Emanuele Grazzi, when asked, was unable to inform Metaxas which strategic bases the Italians had in mind. Metaxas and his government ultimately rejected these demands. On October 28, 1940, with 8 divisions, some 140,000 men, supported by a small contingent of Albanian fascist militiamen, under torrential rain, the Italians invaded Greece. Oddly enough, surprise was on their side. The Greeks did not believe the Italians foolish enough to attack so late in the year.

The hastily prepared invasion force was poorly equipped, poorly trained, poorly supported and led by rank-conscious incompetents. By early November, the Greeks had stopped the Italians and had launched a counteroffensive. Greek troops, better equipped, supplied and motivated, not only drove the Italians out of Greece but soon were in control of fully 25 percent of Albania. The Duce was spared from further humiliation by the weather, which stopped the Greek offensive and created a virtual stalemate. Mussolini blamed his own commanders and the Albanians who, in fact, demonstrated a marked lack of enthusiasm for the war. The Albanian Fascist Party was



7.2 Mussolini at the Greek front, 1941

made up principally of opportunists who expected to benefit materially from their connection with the fascist occupier. When faced with the hard reality of a winter mountain campaign against a determined enemy, Albanian units either deserted or defected in droves. The Italians were only saved when the Germans swiftly invaded and defeated both Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941, delaying their planned invasion of the Soviet Union.

Although it was clear to all that the Italians had been humiliated by the Greeks, they hoped at least partially to redeem their tattered reputation in the eyes of the Albanians by pushing for a favorable territorial settlement

with the Germans hoping to finally create a true "ethnic" Albania. Although Mussolini had hoped for more, the Germans gave him most of Kosovo, without certain areas of Mitrovica, and parts of western Macedonia, while most of Çamëria remained under the control of the military command in Athens. The absorption of Kosovo, with its hundreds of thousands of mostly Muslim Gegs, proceeded with some energy and provided Albania with considerable benefit, particularly agricultural goods and subsoil wealth. Tens of thousands of Serbs were driven out, particularly those brought in by the Yugoslav government between 1918 and 1940 to settle land seized from Albanians who had been forcibly expelled from Kosovo. Albanian schools were opened where none had existed. While the annexation of Kosovo was a popular move among ethnic Albanians in both Kosovo and Albania, it was too late to save the Italians who by 1941 had lost the battle to win the hearts and minds of the Albanians; in fact, the adventure that ultimately brought Greater Albania about – the Italian invasion of Greece – ruined all that the Italians had done in Albania by contributing to the collapse of the relative stability of the early period of Italian occupation. In a way, then, the achievement of Albania's territorial dreams directly coincided with the beginning of the end of the Italians.

Ciano made many mistakes in Albania, not the least of which was assuming that he could win over a majority of Albanians at all. The Albanian attitude toward the Italians in 1939 ranged from indifference to suspicion to passive antipathy to extreme antipathy; by 1940, the latter was the prevailing emotion. The Albanians rarely respected the Italians and with increased repression came fear.



Map 7.1 Southern Albania

Too many of the Italians, including the inspector of the Albanian Fascist Party, elements of the Italian middle class, military officers and especially their wives, were unable to disguise their contempt for the Albanians, exhibiting the worst in a colonial mentality. Often Albanian sensibilities were unnecessarily insulted as with the new flag, which not only added a *fascis* on either side of the eagle, looking as if they were about to crush the old symbol. To compound their mistake, Italian designers also added the crown of Savoy with its cross, an affront to Albanian Muslims.

The Italian administration of Albania was not successful. After an initial burst of activity, the Italians settled into disorganization, lack of direction, corruption, interdepartmental infighting and a preference for public relations stunts over real development. Corruption was widespread and reached the highest levels of the administration. Ciano himself became involved, initiating a vast network of corruption, which, when discovered by the Italian police, was hidden even from Mussolini. Ciano's penchant for show reached absurd proportions. When he visited Tirana for a triumphal tour in May 1940, uniformed Albanian girls were trotted out with 100 tennis racquets and 50 fencing masks and foils, but there was no tennis court or teacher, no fencing club and no fencing instructor. The reality was considerably different from Ciano's illusions. In many ways, Albania was soon worse off than it had been under Zog, particularly in economic terms. With the influx of thousands of soldiers and Italian settlers, shortages became a problem but rising prices had the most serious impact. The price of potatoes rose 200 percent, and the price of meat tripled. The Italians dealt

with Albania as a plantation economy, and this ultimately alienated even many of those who had originally been willing to collaborate. But the Italians seemed content and little changed while the Albanians remained quiet.

The Beginning of the Resistance

But the Albanians did not remain quiet for long. Some Italian officials had noticed on their first official visit to Albania that some Albanians, particularly high school students, were overtly hostile. Resistance in the form of non-cooperation and public acts of defiance grew among these students, and among the increasing number of young intellectuals educated abroad who had a stronger sense of national identity than did peasants, or the illiterate tribesmen of the north. The most serious student demonstrations since the invasion were witnessed on Flag Day, November 28, 1939. During the parade in Tirana, older students refused to learn the fascist anthem, and despite being positioned between the police and the military, sang Albanian patriotic songs. This was followed by occasional strikes, the appearance of anti-Italian posters, as well as both symbolic and actual sabotage.

The symbolic variant included the defacement of the portraits of Italian leaders, like the smearing of honey on the chin of the Duce's portrait, giving the impression that Mussolini had a beard of flies. More seriously, industrial sabotage resulted in the destruction of entire galleries of Albania's vital chromium mines, and incidents of armed resistance increased as the occupation wore on. While early anonymous attacks on fascist policemen and officials were barely distinguishable from traditional Albanian

brigandage, soon distinctions began to be made. Early 1940 witnessed a sudden outbreak of robberies and housebreaking, and since this type of crime was not characteristic of Albanians, the motive here might have been political, an attempt to embarrass both the Italians and their puppet Albanian regime.

As early as May 1940, the Italians began to report the operation of sporadic armed bands. Ibrahim Kupi, the brother of Abaz Kupi, as well as the communist Haxhi Lleshi and the band leaders Myslim Peza and Muharrem Bajraktari were some of those mentioned in these early Italian reports as potentially dangerous elements. Although these groups were perhaps not yet fully organized, they were credited with cutting wires, distributing anti-Italians leaflets, committing minor acts of terrorism and the occasional assassination of Italian officials and soldiers. The Italians began to take more serious notice of this problem when an attempt was made on the life of Vittorio Emmanuel III during his official visit to Albania in May 1941.

This growing resistance was encouraged from various quarters. As early as April 1940, officers of the British Secret Intelligence Service (a section of which would become the Special Operation Executive, or SOE) became convinced that Albania was the ideal place to encourage guerrilla warfare in the Balkans and began establishing contact with Albanian patriots in Kosovo and Albania proper, including Abaz Kupi, then in exile is Istanbul, the Kosovar landowners Gani and Said Kryeziu and Mustafa Gjinishi, a member of Albania's small but growing communist movement. These plans were accelerated once the Italians declared war on Great

Britain in June 1940. King Zog, who had settled in London following his ouster, hoped to play a role in encouraging resistance, being aware that this was an opportunity to revive his tarnished reputation and gain the official recognition, which he ardently desired. But Zog was ultimately dropped by the British as a result of Greek pressure and the British assumption that Zog was too unpopular in Albania to rally any significant support. The first British military effort, consisting of a small force led by British officers with a few hundred supporters in Albania, collapsed with the fall of Yugoslavia. The Kryezius were captured by the Italians, Gjinishi managed to work his way south to join his communist colleagues in the Korçë area, and Abaz Kupi made his way to his own area in Krujë and there built up one of the first permanent organized resistance forces in Albania.

By the end of 1941, several permanent organized guerrilla bands were reported to be in operation inside Albania. These first small groups revolved around returned band leaders, such as Abaz Kupi, who developed a nucleus of family members and then slowly spread his influence. Muharrem Bajraktari and Myslim Peza also gained good reputations as early band leaders, both early opponents of Zog who spent considerable time abroad. Peza is the only one of these early group leaders who would develop a close relationship with the communists. Also included in this early group of resistance leaders was the Bektashi cleric Baba Mustafa Martaneshi, who emphasized the anti-Islamic nature of fascist Italy, cooperated with the communists and became one of the most wanted men in Albania. What distinguished this new organized resistance from the earlier individual or small

group activity was objective and impact. These new groups, rather than attacking individual soldiers and cutting an occasional wire, attacked targets of economic importance to the Italians, such as pipelines and mines. Although these acts posed no serious military threat to the Italians, their mere existence and continued growth were matters of concern.

The Italians, initially, seemed genuinely surprised at the growing opposition, given the considerable sums of money they were spending in Albania. Understandably, therefore, the Italians lacked a cohesive policy in response. What emerged was an uneven combination of increasing repression and further concession. Deportation and internments increased, as did draconian decrees and threats published in the controlled press. Italian military intelligence agents created a vast network of informants to discover who was critical of Italian policies. Rumors spread of assassination squads to silence Albanian patriots, and indeed a number of prominent unsolved murders did take place.

But with the whip came new concessions. The unpopular Albanian Fascist Party was reorganized, and the *fascis* and the crown of Savoy were removed from the Albanian flag. The party's official newspaper, *Fashizmi*, which had proven to be a complete failure, was replaced. Vërlaci and his government of reactionary landowners was replaced by the nationalist Mustafa Kruja (1887–1958), who appointed a cabinet of younger elements closer to the intellectuals and the people. Kruja was able to gain some autonomy and arrange the release of a large number of anti-fascist Albanians interned in Italy. But his success proved to be both superficial and temporary. The security

situation deteriorated rapidly. Common crimes continued to increase, and ever larger sections of the country fell to band leaders. Italian incompetence, the failure of the war against Greece, the worsening economic conditions, and the growing resistance movement ensured that the stability of the early days of the occupation was gone forever. Despite this dismal picture, however, the Italians were still fortunate in at least one respect: by the end of 1941, Albania had still not developed a truly national resistance movement. The band leaders were primarily tribal chieftains who could not and would not leave their areas for extended periods. In most cases, they also defended their areas as jealously against one another as they did against the Italians and their Albanian puppets. But this benefit enjoyed by the Italians also proved temporary. With the maturing of the communist movement, something close to a national resistance movement was finally developed.

By the end of 1941, diplomats in Tirana reported that the security situation in Albania was becoming difficult. By the early summer of 1942, they reported anarchy in the open land, with Italian control restricted to the major towns, major roads and military installations. One year later, the occupation system was in tatters, and by August 1943 it had collapsed entirely. A series of events explains these developments, with the most important occurring outside of Albania, involving the general course of the Second World War. But events inside Albania did much to contribute to the Italian collapse. And the most significant was the rise of something close to a national resistance movement dominated by Albanian communists and aided and supplied by British officers.



Map 7.2 Albania in 1941

The Creation of the Albanian Communist Party

The communist movement began slowly in Albania in part because its natural constituency was limited, its ideas were little known and generally alien to many indigenous traditions and Albania was low on the list of Comintern

(Communist International) priorities. A handful of Moscow-trained Albanian communists helped to found a number of cells during the 1930s, but by 1937 the entire movement was limited to four separate squabbling groups with a combined membership of fewer than 200. The movement was barely visible on the national political scene. Of the four groups, the Korçë group generally supported the Comintern line and therefore became the focus of outside organizing. The Korçë group, made up primarily of intellectuals but with a handful of workers, had been active in the small but growing trade union movement and called for resistance against the Italian invaders. By late 1941, apart from some independent communists who had returned from Paris after the German invasion of France, there were now eight separate squabbling groups, two of them considered Trotskyite.

With the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, the impetuous for unity was significantly increased and the Yugoslavs decided to step in. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) was motivated, at least in part, by the trouble it was having setting up cells in Kosovo where distrust of Slavs among the Albanian population was rather high. It is likely that the CPY assumed that the construction of an Albanian party might help in this regard. Following an initial failure, two Yugoslav emissaries, Miladin Popović and Dušan Mugoša, convinced representatives of three of Albania's communist groups to meet with them in Tirana at the beginning of November 1941. After six days, the fifteen Albanian communists present at the meeting elected a provisional central committee of seven and in so doing founded the Albanian Communist Party (ACP).

The central committee included Enver Hoxha (1908–1985), a Sunni Tosk from Gjirokastër who would dominate Albania until his death in 1985. He came from a modest family; his father may have been an imam. He himself attended the French lycée in Korçë and then benefited from one of Zog's scholarship, which allowed him to study at the University of Montpellier in France. Returning to Albania in 1936, he was hired as a substitute teacher at his former lycée and there discovered a small local communist faction of which he became a member. In 1941, he found himself in Tirana participating in anti-Italian demonstrations, which eventually forced him to go underground. Hoxha was apparently brought along to the organizational meeting because he was a Muslim and the rest of the Korçë delegation were Orthodox. Hoxha was not the obvious choice for a commanding role; he was outside of the leadership of the Korçë group. He was probably a compromise candidate. While he had not distinguished himself as a leader, he was respected, educated, well spoken and dedicated – a pleasant, good-looking young man of thirty-three. And Hoxha had a series of natural advantages, including the fact that he was not involved in the internal power struggles among the communists. He also quickly demonstrated a penchant for politics that allowed him to slowly dominate the collective leadership of the committee. In March of 1943, with the help of Popović, he was finally chosen general secretary of the central committee.

The new party set to work to boost membership by direct recruitment and by establishing a program that might attract the average Albanian. It received invaluable help from the Yugoslavs – Mugoša directed recruitment



7.3 Hoxha during the Second World War

while Popović stayed with the leadership to help organize the party and its basic program. That the Yugoslavs provided the pattern to follow for the Albanians is clear, even down to the adoption of the Yugoslav slogan "death to fascism, liberty to the people," as well as the red-starred cap worn by the fighters.

The leadership based the party on traditional Marxism–Leninism and democratic centrism, denouncing both social democracy and Trotskyism. The communist groups were officially dissolved and were replaced by local cells and regional party committees run by a network of local party officials. Membership was open to all who expressed

themselves ready to accept the discipline of the party, with early recruitment targeting young intellectuals and the youth, chiefly high school students, artisans, small shopkeepers and a few labor leaders, as well as a few petty thieves. By January 1942, however, the party had grown to only some 200 members, approximately the same number as claimed to be communists in 1937.

This is perhaps not surprising, given a number of factors. Internal party strife was still a problem, making it necessary, for example, for the leadership to dissolve the Gjirokastër district committee to destroy what the party described as the liquidatory elements who controlled it. Other factors include the restricted nature of the party's natural constituency. In 1939, there were probably no more than 2,000–3,000 people who might be considered intellectuals in the country, and Albania certainly had the smallest middle class in Europe, when considered as a percentage of its population. As for communism's traditional ideological partner, the working class, in 1939, as we have seen, only 4 percent of the national economy could be considered industrial. Both Albania's social and economic order were still essentially semi-feudal. And the party even made its own position more difficult in that many of its more visible advisers were Slavs, who had always aroused suspicion and fear among Albanians.

The party's propaganda de-emphasized social revolution, focusing instead on the national problem, the land problem and resistance to the foreigners and traitors. Often armed with their own pistols, the new communists began attacking collaborators and Italian officials without giving up their jobs or their homes. In May 1942, the

chief of police of Tirana was gunned down. There were a number of attacks on Mustafa Kruja, none of which was successful, although members of his family, including his son, were killed. Perhaps the most spectacular act of sabotage was the interruption of all telephone and telegraph communications in June and July of 1942. In August, the party published the first issue of its paper *Zëri i Popullit* (Voice of the People), which allowed the communists to more widely disseminate, and often exaggerate, their achievements.

But Hoxha, who slowly came to dominate the central committee, had a broader vision, and with a bold stroke moved to create a popular front national resistance movement dominated by the ACP. Hoxha initially opposed the idea, taking Popović's view that such a move would result in sharing scant resources with forces that might eventually oppose the movement. But the Moscow-trained veteran communists, like Mustafa Gjinishi, called for a united front and Hoxha was eventually convinced that such a move had the potential of thrusting him into the limelight, thereby helping him with his goal of creating a communist Albania under his leadership. Accordingly, in September 1942 Hoxha invited the northern chiefs, the landowning beys of the south and some old liberals and republicans who had opposed Zog to a conference at Peza in the south. Only some chiefs attended, leaving the communists as the only organized political party at the meeting. Hoxha demonstrated both his political acumen and his gambling nature by not casting his net too broadly. He refused to accept most of the diverse liberal elements who had become part of Marshal Tito's organization in Yugoslavia. While Hoxha was taking a

significant risk that other strong resistance organizations would not form outside of his control, he refused to burden himself with excess political baggage. As a result, the National Liberation Movement (NLM) founded at Peza was established with a general council of seven communists and seven non-communists including Abaz Kupi, Myslim Peza and Baba Faja. British officers who later observed the working of the group reported that Baba Faja and Myslim Peza were middle-aged, rather old-fashioned, good livers, very heavy drinkers and possessed of considerable personal charm and courage. They were, apparently, at the same time comparatively uneducated, lethargic and somewhat incompetent. Because Kupi basically kept to his own area, the council was not only dominated but also controlled by communists who adopted proposals for the conduct of the war and the construction of an administrative structure as set down by the ACP.

Partisans and the National Front

NLM partisan units were established, supplemented by territorial units as well as irregular self-defense detachments made up of volunteers to protect liberated zones and help supply the partisan units. By the end of 1942, there were an estimated 2,000 partisan fighters, plus a larger number of territorial units and reservists. The units became active enough to provoke the Italians to respond with larger units. These Italian operations rarely found partisan forces and therefore were restricted to conducting punitive reprisals, including the burning of villages during which many civilians were killed. This

counterproductive policy increased the number of homeless, many of whom subsequently swelled the ranks of the partisan forces.

National liberation councils were constructed throughout the country. In those areas under Italian control, they functioned as propaganda agencies, collected materials necessary for the conduct of the war, conducted espionage, organized the economic struggle against Italian companies and sabotaged the accumulation of agricultural products by the fascists. In those areas already liberated by the partisans, once this had become a reality, the councils were to function as the new state. They were responsible for maintaining law and order, developing the local economy, organizing education, culture and the press, settling blood feuds and maintaining readiness for war.

The many liberal nationalists, republicans and beys who had refused to participate in the Peza Conference were concerned by NLM success and understood that unless they demonstrated more active opposition to the invader they would be shut out of power at the end of the war. Accordingly, in November 1942 they organized the National Front (Balli Kombëtar, BK or Ballists) with a program in direct reaction to that of the NLM, although with a greater emphasis on an "ethnic" Albania, a clear reference to the desire to retain Kosovo. While this point attracted the support of many Albanians, the fact that the BK program did not mention who had power, and only vaguely mentioned whom the BK was struggling against, was certainly a disadvantage. In essence, the BK planned to wait for the defeat of the Axis powers before encouraging a national uprising and preserve military strength

for the inevitable conflict with the ACP. Still, there was some BK resistance. The BK was a loose organization that allowed individual commanders considerable freedom to act independently, and some used this freedom to resist. The BK won the support of many members of Kruja's government, as well as broad support among some of the population, including in many villages of southern Albania where the communists had their principal strength.

There were isolated reports from early 1943 of cooperation between the BK and NLM units, but in general relations were hostile although initially confined to a fierce propaganda war. Hoxha was clearly worried about the BK's increasing strength, as well as increasing pressure to come to some arrangement with the BK. In December 1942, the Comintern directed Hoxha to pursue a "popular front" strategy, to come to an agreement with the BK. The British, whose SOE agents returned to Albania after a two-year absence in April 1943 to encourage and help supply the growing resistance, also pushed for an agreement. A fateful meeting between representatives of the NLM and the BK did finally take place at Mukje, a village outside of Tirana, in August 1943, but it came to nothing. The agreement, signed by representatives of the NLM and BK, called for the construction of a new national committee for salvation and support for an "ethnic" Albania – support for Albania's retention of Kosovo. The Yugoslavs were, of course, opposed to any reference to an "ethnic" Albania. Hoxha, who did not attend the meeting and was unaware of what had been agreed to, renounced the agreements, much to the satisfaction of Popović and

Mugoša. With the failure at Mukje, the two groups slowly slipped into civil war.

As both the NLM and the BK expanded, so did resistance, particularly that carried out by the NLM. Recruitment increased following the Allied announcement in December 1942 calling for the reestablishment of Albanian independence and following the battle of Stalingrad, which firmly put the Axis on the defensive. By early 1943, NLM bands were coordinating their efforts for the first time. In March the first partisan battalion, which included three or four bands, was created and in April these new units carried out assaults on Italian troop concentrations at the Selenica mines near Vlorë. In June, by which time the partisans claimed to have 10,000 fighters in 30 partisan bands and 20 battalions, major engagements took place on the Struga-Dibër highway. In July major encounters took place in Përmet in the south, and in August the first partisan brigade, which consisted of 4 or 5 battalions with a total strength of 500 men, was established under the party's ablest commander, Mehmet Shehu (1913–1981). Despite these new organizations, the traditional character of partisan warfare – no frontal attack – was retained until late 1944.

Following a period of willful denial, the Italians slowly began to panic, particularly when incidents in Tirana itself began to increase. Tirana had always constituted something of a safe haven for Italian officials, in particular for those assigned to outlying regions who came to the capital infrequently. By the fall of 1942, this oasis, too, was experiencing open gunfights in the streets. The Italians began grasping for a more effective political and military policy but could do little more than continue the existing policy of

concessions and repression. Rome sent more troops to the point that, at least on paper, the Italians had some 100,000 at their disposal. Of this number, however, close to 17,000 were Albanian troops, 12,000 were GAF *costieri presidiari* (coast guard), 11,000 were *intendenza* (commissariat) and 5,000 were territorial defense. This left little more than 55,000 regular Italian troops, but a secret report noted that half of these were unusable in operations. The military problem was aggravated, so the report continued, by the high degree of unreliability of the Albanian forces. Additional, still ineffective, anti-resistance campaigns were inevitably followed by more reprisals and more recruits for the resistance.

Since the military option seems to have had little of the desired effect, the Italians hoped to placate the Albanians through political tinkering. Jacomoni forced Kruja to resign in January 1943, and replaced him with Eqrem Libohova, who had been Zog's minister of court and had stopped a bullet for the king during an assassination attempt in Vienna in 1931. Jacomoni hoped that Libohova, while totally without scruples, would be able to bring around the southern landowning class, many of whom had been alienated following the appointment of Kruja. But Jacomoni had trouble finding southern landowners to fill Libohova's cabinet. He was finding it necessary to depend too heavily on men from Kosovo (often referred to as "New Albania"), men who had more to lose with an Axis defeat. At this point, Ciano decided that Jacomoni himself had to go, but before this could be affected, Ciano himself was forced to resign. As a consolation, Ciano was offered a list of options, one of which was the position of lieutenant general in Albania. He wrote in

his diary, that he had decisively rejected the governorship of Albania where he would have gone as an executioner and hangman of those people to whom he promised brotherhood and equality. Paternalistic to the end, Ciano, of course, was refusing to take responsibility for a situation caused almost exclusively by his own policies and actions.

Following Ciano's refusal to accept the post, Mussolini appointed General Alberto Pariani as Jacomoni's successor. Pariani had considerable experience in the Balkans and Albania, and even the Germans considered him one of the most competent senior Italian officers. But it was far too late. Pariani could do little more than lurch from crisis to crisis. He ultimately concluded that little could be expected from Albanian collaborators and that repressive measures were all that was left to him. These proved unsuccessful, as they had in the past. By May, the fighting in the south had become more serious, schools were closed and at the end of that month nonessential Italian personnel were being evacuated from Albania. While the Italians were never in danger of being driven out of Albania, the military resources needed to hold Albania left the Italian homeland vulnerable. Finally, the successful Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 resulted in the overthrow of Mussolini and by the beginning of September, the surrender of Italy. In a small way, Albania shares in the credit for the fall of Mussolini and the defeat of Italy.

The German Invasion of Albania

The overthrow of Mussolini and the collapse of Italy forced the Germans to invade and occupy Albania in

September 1943. The Germans had one primary motive, and that was to prevent, with a minimum of troops, an Allied landing in Albania, which had the potential to threaten the German position in Eastern Europe as a whole. But their invasion of Albania was an enterprise for which they were ill prepared. The Germans knew little of Albania in part because throughout the 1930s and the Italian occupation, Mussolini feared that any German interest there was the first step toward replacing the Italians. But the Germans also suffered from a lack of sources of information. Much of what was available in Germany in the 1930s concerning Albania was either superficial or catered to the romantic notion of the Albanians as a vital warrior race, an idea that appealed to those imbued with Nazi racial theory. Hitler himself saw Albania as the last wild corner of Europe, apparently gleaning much of his information from the adventure novels of Karl May.

Nevertheless, the invasion itself, carried out by three divisions of the 21st Corps under General Hubert Lanz, was considerably more rapid and more efficient than the Italian invasion had been. The Germans encountered only minimal resistance from the nine Italian divisions stationed in Albania or from the various resistance groups. The Italians surrendered in such numbers that some were simply turned away by the Germans who lacked facilities to deal with the sheer volume of men. At the end of the war as many as 20,000, often destitute and pitiful, Italian troops were still in Albania.

The partisans and the other resistance groups did benefit somewhat from the chaos. Thousands of Italians surrendered to the partisans, and between 1,500 to 2,200

went so far as to constitute a resistance battalion named after Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist of Albanian origin. The resistance was also able to make off with considerable arms and equipment, although had they acted decisively while the Italians were still in a state of hopeless indecision, they could have gotten much more. The commander of the Italian 9th Army had apparently even expressed a willingness to arm the partisans, but the Germans got to him first. But even with this extra equipment, only the 118th Jäger Division, moving in from the north, encountered any resistance of substance.

The Italian civilian population proved to be less of a problem and was actually quite useful, first to the Germans and then to the Albanians. Indeed, the Germans discovered that the thousands of Italian civilians in Tirana alone were virtually irreplaceable if they hoped to avoid bringing in specialists from Germany. Many important trades were dominated by Italians who constituted most of the auto mechanics, electricians, welders and, perhaps most important, the most effective road builders. Many of these skilled workers were employed by Italians firms that were persuaded by the Germans to remain and work without profit.

Once the *Wehrmacht* was fully in place, the Germans proceeded with their plan to reduce occupation troop strength to no more than two and a half divisions of second-level troops to protect the Adriatic coast and the Straits of Otranto, as well as strategic inland areas including the major towns and, most importantly, the major roads. Like the Italians, the Germans hoped to leave internal security to the Albanians themselves. This goal and the policy to achieve it was broadly laid out by

German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893–1946), who recognized that internal security would require Albanian cooperation and that this cooperation could only be expected if something close to an independent, neutral yet friendly government were constructed. German propaganda announced that they had come to Albania to protect the Albanians from the enemy – here they emphasized the Italians rather than the Allies – and from communism, which was associated with the Russians and the Serbs. The Germans reassured the Albanians that nothing would endanger Albanian independence from Italy emphasizing that the Italians had robbed the Albanians and betrayed the Germans.

The Albanians of Kosovo were the first to cooperate, motivated by Allied promises to return Kosovo to a reconstructed Yugoslavia. German officials rallied local leaders there through the creation of the second League of Prizren, hoping to capitalize on the late nineteenth-century Albanian nationalist organization of the same name. The second league, under the rather ardent Bedri Pejani, had but one principal goal: the protection of Greater Albania. Many Albanian leaders in Çamëria, too, were quick to cooperate with the Germans, since their hopes of becoming part of the enlarged Albania were as dependent on Germany as were the hopes of the Kosovars. But eventually some well-known figures of "Old Albania" came forward to offer their services, often motivated by threats or bribes. Mustafa Kruja and Eqrem Libohova offered their services and were rejected, partly because of their Italian connections and partly because of their failure.

The biggest prize for the Germans was Mehdi bey Frashëri (1872–1963), one of the most respected living

Albanians. His career was long and distinguished; he had served as governor-general of Palestine under the Ottomans, prefect of Berat in 1913 and minister of interior in 1918. During the 1930s, he served as prime minister under Zog, when he constructed a relatively liberal regime made up of many young Germanophiles. After the Italian invasion, he was interned in Italy for having publicly castigated Mussolini for his destruction of Albanian independence. He agreed to cooperate but only if the Germans recognized Albania's full neutrality. The German negotiators finally agreed to recognize Albania's "relative" neutrality and "relative" sovereignty. Frashëri had achieved for Albania a status similar to that of Croatia or Slovakia, the Germans were still clearly in control, but something had been saved.

Hermann Neubacher, the principal German authority in Albania during most of the occupation and a former mayor of Vienna, quickly resurrected the 1928 monarchist constitution but replaced Zog with a council of regency headed by Frashëri. In November, the council of regency established a government under the Kosovar Rexhep Mitrovica (1888–1967). Like Frashëri, Mitrovica boasted a long political career, having taken part in the declaration of independence at Vlorë in 1912. Minister of Education from 1921 to 1923, he was forced to flee Albania following the collapse of the Noli regime after standing with Zog's Kosovar opponents. He returned to Albania after the Italian invasion, joined the BK in 1942 and then was arrested by the Italians in 1943. Mitrovica organized a small cabinet, made up of individuals who had credentials as nationalists, as well as some German or Austrian connections. The Germans had done reasonably well.

They had attracted some significant people, including influential prewar politicians, both pro- and anti-Zog, representatives of the Catholic clergy, representatives of the Geg tribes in the north, some individuals with BK connections and, of course, Kosovar nationalists.

Neubacher recognized how unpopular fascism was in Albania and determined that it would play only a limited role. No Albanian fascist party was required, no domestic labor service was established and, at least until late in the German occupation, the Germans generally refrained from hunting, deporting and exterminating Jews. This allowed the Albanians to hide and protect a considerable number of both Albanian and foreign Jews, for which they have rightly been honored by the Israeli government. Mitrovica was allowed to produce a relatively progressive program that even promised land reform. While little came of this reform, the most effective aspect of German propaganda was the often-repeated assertion that it was the Germans who had liberated Kosovo and that only under German protection could Albania's territorial integrity, within its ethnic borders, be preserved and saved from the evils of communism. In some ways, the Germans were not unsuccessful. The Germans were able to hold Albania with a small number of troops, and during the course of 1944 more troops were transferred out than replaced. And in the end, the German army was able to withdraw from Albania with only moderate losses.

But ultimately, of course, the Germans had to fail. The Mitrovica government gained a degree of acceptance and was certainly taken more seriously than the regimes under the Italians, but those that succeeded his government failed to exert anything more than regional influence.



7.4 Mehdi Frashëri with German officers

Like the Italians, the Germans made mistakes. They failed to understand the needs of the average Albanian. The Germans, like their predecessors, attached themselves to a small Westernized elite of large landowners and beys, many of whom spoke German. Because no more than ten of the tens of thousands of Germans involved in the occupation spoke Albanian, German contact with the locals was severely restricted. Like the Italians, they failed to understand the power of growing nationalism. In terms of internal security, the Germans failed as well. The Germans had initially hoped to mobilize the Albanian nation against the communists by arming and using some principally Kosovar nationalist bands, creating and maintaining an Albanian army and

gendarmerie corps and finally creating an indigenous SS division in Kosovo, the "Skanderbeg" Division. The original enthusiasm for these units quickly died, however, when it became clear that not only were they of questionable value militarily, but in many cases the Albanian units did much to alienate the population as a result of brutality and a tendency to plunder.

And perhaps without intending to, the Germans complicated Albania's economic picture and added considerably to the day-to-day hardship experienced by the average Albanian. The Italians had covered massive deficits, fully one-third of the budget, by simply underwriting the economy. The Germans refused to do this. Unlike the Italians who had maintained their troops almost solely by the importation of food from Italy, the Germans generally lived off of domestic resources. Italians spent much more than they received, whereas the Germans took much more than they contributed and when they withdrew left behind a significant debt.

Economically, the Germans did well by the Albanians; the reverse was rarely the case. Indeed, the domestic economy deteriorated. Unlike the Italians, the Germans provided little employment. The needs of German troops significantly drove up prices. The surplus from Kosovo helped to avert disaster, but even with Kosovo deliveries, there were severe shortages. Exacerbated by poor weather, German policy even caused famine conditions in southern Albania in the spring of 1944. Although the situation in Albania never approached the grim reality of Greece, the difficult circumstances for which the Germans were at least partially to blame eroded Albanian patience and drove increasing numbers into

the ranks of the resistance. And it was the continued growth of this resistance that proved to be the single most important factor explaining the failure of German plans at pacification of the country through the construction of an independent regime with prestige and its own military authority.

Resistance against the Germans

The German invasion had a profound impact on Albanian resistance, the most immediate manifestation of which was a further distancing between the NLM and other groups, as well as the splintering of the NLM itself, a process that began with the failure of the Mukjë agreements. Abaz Kupi effectively left the NLM to found the Legality Movement, which attached itself to King Zog. Kupi established links with the independent nationalist chieftains, the BK, the collaborationist government and the Germans. Kupi's commanders were mostly drawn from former Zogist army officers and officials, and the rank and file included mostly Sunnis not particularly interested in politics but attached by bonds of booty, sentiment and tribal loyalty. Because they were mountaineers, they exhibited a good deal more fighting ability than did the southerners, at least before the NLM began training its units. Kupi's goal was to construct a broadly based nationalistic movement that favored some role for Zog in an ethnic, independent Albania. Ultimately, Kupi cast his net too far and included many individuals who were compromised by both the Italians and the Germans.

Apart from Kupi, northern Albania was the home of a series of other nationalist groups involved in constant

realignment and maneuvering. Some were independent Zogists like the Dibër chieftains. Most followed the traditional policy of frequently changing their position and attempting to ensure their success by placing members of their families in every rival camp. These nationalists, like their counterparts in Greece and Yugoslavia, were shortsighted in terms of both world affairs and the changing realities in Albania. They were unaware that anything but unrelenting opposition to the Germans would doom them in the postwar world. In terms of domestic politics, they attempted to protect a social order that the war was rapidly undermining. Many of the BK leaders, Kupi and the other Geg chieftains constituted the social and political ruling class of the vanishing old order.

To protect this order, Kupi and most of the nationalist chieftains adopted a policy under the Germans that most of the BK had adopted under the Italians: to avoid reprisals and possible destruction, to wait for the defeat of the Axis before encouraging a national rising and to preserve military strength for the inevitable confrontation with the communists. This left the partisans of the NLM, now increasingly dominated by Hoxha and the communists, as the only active resistance force, and it was against the partisans, therefore, that the Germans focused their military efforts.

The Germans had limited goals; they were interested in protecting the coast, the major towns and the major interior lines of communication. They were content to leave the mountains and much of the countryside to the partisans. Indeed, the partisans were of considerable use to the Germans, who used communism as a threat against the nationalists. To ensure that the partisans did not become

too strong, the Germans launched a series of offensives, powerful enough to inflict serious damage on them but not to destroy them completely. The first major campaign, known as the winter campaign, began in November 1943, at which point the resistance picture was as follows: northern Albania and Kosovo were generally quiet; the middle of the country around Tirana was filled with many bands, including those of the BK, Kupi, other nationalists and the partisans, with increasing tension and armed clashes between the BK and the partisan units; while much of southern Albania and the town of Berat were controlled by the partisans. The Germans estimated that the partisans could muster 16,000–18,000 fighters, with the nationalist groups, not as well organized, controlling perhaps 8,000.

Against this background, the Germans in early November launched their winter campaign that set the standard for German operations. Unlike the Italians, the Germans employed smaller columns of 50–150 and, using this strategy, experienced some success. Indeed, in this first series of offensives, the Germans killed 100 "bandits" and captured nearly 2,000. The Germans had effectively shattered the partisans north of the Shkumbin river and momentarily wrecked a growing British military mission in Albania, capturing Brigadier Edmund F. "Trotsky" Davies, the highest-ranking British officer to take part in the resistance struggle.

But the success of the German winter campaign proved to be quite momentary, and the partisans proved to be much more resilient than the Germans or many Albanians had anticipated. Despite German blows, the partisans, with their discipline, energy and clarity of aim, as well as

increasing British military aid, managed a resurgence. The partisan goal of reestablishing an independent Albania under a social system based on equality, which increasingly effective propaganda stressed, was something for which many were willing to sacrifice. Conversely, few were willing to make similar sacrifices for the reestablishment of the old social system under Zog. Partisan morale and discipline had improved as well, partly because of the emphasis put on political and social instruction. When a brigade halted in camp, commanders oversaw military exercises while commissars, the heads of technical sections, organized educational activity and cultural events. Observers credited this educational activity, propaganda, strict discipline and emphasis on moral values with causing often half-hearted recruits to become enthusiastic and with turning peasant volunteers into fighting units with high morale. These peasants made up some 90 percent of partisan ranks that also contained a relatively high percentage (some 9 percent) of women. And the women did more than just tend to the sick and wounded. They were active fighters and, in the process, took a step toward loosening the rigidly patriarchal nature of Albanian society.

With growing strength, the partisans increased their attacks on the Germans as well as on the nationalists. Prior to the German invasion, the partisan–nationalist struggle had been principally confined to propaganda, but Hoxha decided near the end of October 1943 that it was time to destroy the BK militarily. This proved to be more difficult than Hoxha had anticipated. Under pressure from the partisans, with a few exceptions, the BK slipped into further collaboration, with some of its leaders



7.5 Partisan victory parade, Tirana, 1944

attaching themselves to the puppet governments and some of its forces fighting alongside the Germans. By April of 1944, Hoxha had formed the Albanian National Liberation Army, with an estimated strength of 20,000, with 13,000 organized into 12 brigades. With increasing strength, often resulting from German reprisals, and a traditional military organization, partisan fighting capabilities improved, allowing them to resist German drives and take coordinated offensive action.

By the late spring of 1944 the Germans decided that a further campaign was necessary, and in a summer offensive, using first-class units from Greece, the Germans were able to drive the partisans away from the north–south roads in southern Albania, pinning large groups of partisans against the sea. The fighting was quite fierce and was accompanied by considerable atrocity; many

civilians died and many villages were burned. But the partisans again survived and grew in strength. And as an indication of increased partisan sophistication, while the bulk of the partisan forces were being pressured in the south, the first partisan division was able to initiate its own large-scale offensive across the Shkumbin river advancing into central and northern Albania. This operation was directed against both German positions and, essentially for the first time, against the heart of nationalist/Zogist Albania, Mati and Dibër. The appearance of partisans in force in the center and north caused a crisis in the nationalist and Zogist camps and escalated the civil war.

These events were accompanied by a growing crisis in the Mitrovica government. The government was proving incapable of providing basic security or stopping economic deterioration. Although the north and the center of the country were experiencing tolerable conditions, life in much of the south by April 1944 can only be described as desperate. Agriculture was interrupted, with frequent destruction of crops and with many of the men and women at war. Herds were depleted as a result of German, nationalist and partisan confiscation. The BK proved to be particularly obnoxious in this regard, developing what amounted to a vast extortion ring demanding money and food under the pain of death from already hard-pressed peasants in the areas they controlled. To add to the misery, many villages in the Gjirokastër–Korçë area had been destroyed, leaving thousands without shelter. In May, a typhus epidemic ran rampant, with no medicine and with medical personal limited to a few Italian nuns. A similarly desperate medical situation

existed in Kosovo, in part because all of the pharmacists were Serb and had been driven out. Malaria, the traditional scourge of Albania, also spread unchecked in the south. There was no electricity – Gjirokastër was in the dark – and there was little gasoline. The government did nothing, except to continue passing laws that attempted to give the impression of normal conditions and social progress.

The Germans decided that internal pacification carried out by Albanians was no longer possible, and therefore decided simply to divide and control the population through further co-optation of non-communists. Mitrovica was forced out in the middle of June 1944 and a new government was constructed under the Zogist Fiqri Dine, who hoped to unite nationalists and Zogists and, in cooperation with the Germans, drive back the communists. Discussions were held but little came of them, except to further compromise non-communist groups. The Germans gave Kupi some small arms and ammunition, just enough to compromise him but not enough to allow him to either effectively battle the partisans or threaten German positions. While the Dine government experienced some small success in battling the communists, this had more to do with supply shortages than with the strength of the puppet regime. The collaborationist Albanian units, including elements of the SS "Skanderbeg" Division which the Germans had formed mostly from Kosovars, fought badly, while the partisans continued to expand. In August the first division, commanded by Shehu, joined the second division to form the 1st Army Corps, with a growing number of recruits coming from central and northern Albania.

End of the Axis Occupation

The fall of Romania to Soviet forces near the end of August 1944 made it clear that the Germans would soon be gone, thereby dooming the Dine government as well as the German version of an independent Albania. Collaborators were leaving Tirana in large numbers, including the commanders of the puppet government army and gendarmerie. German authority in Albania quickly concentrated in the hands of the SS chief *Gruppenführer* Josef Fitzthum who significantly increased the use of terror, including the burning of villages, the execution of prisoners and the transport of prisoners out of Albania, which had hitherto been prohibited by agreement with the puppet regimes. The image of the friendly occupation protecting the Albanians from their enemies had seemingly outlived its usefulness.

At the beginning of October, the Germans received orders to evacuate Albania through the north, which was held for them by some of the nationalist chieftains, as well as elements of the BK and small groups of Kupi supporters. The last major battle took place in Tirana in October–November 1944. Since the end of August, the capital had acted as a magnet for partisan forces, requiring tightened security. The German army constructed something of a fortress. By October, partisan forces had reached an estimated 40,000, supplied by extensive Allied air drops from Italy. Spearheaded by the first division, Shehu launched an all-out attack on the city at the end of October. As the Germans were not yet ready to leave, the struggle for Tirana proved to be one of the longest and fiercest battles between the Germans and the Albanians during the course of the war. While the

fighting was heavy at times, the Germans were able to march northward, finally withdrawing from Albania at the beginning of December leaving Albania under the control of Hoxha and the partisans.

The communists were ultimately victorious for a number of reasons. They gave direction and leadership to the resistance and offered the only important resistance to the Axis, although they did not defeat them. They developed a political, social and economic program that differed significantly from Zog's failed interwar system. Hoxha was also helped by external events like Allied victories and extensive British supply. Still, despite the official narrative of his regime, Hoxha and his partisans did only very limited damage to the Germans. The partisans were rarely able to hold fixed positions if they threatened German lines of communications or German security in general. The large areas that the partisans controlled by late 1944 were generally areas in which the Germans had little interest. The most important reason for Hoxha's only limited resistance against the Axis had to do with simple strategy – he had more dangerous enemies in the BK, the Zogists and the independent chieftains, and it is here where most of his resources were expended. As a result, more Albanians died fighting one another than died fighting the invaders.

Hoxha launched a propaganda barrage and parallel war against these threats. But Hoxha was not alone in this strategy. His domestic enemies were justly accused of saving their resources and not engaging the Germans. This reluctance stemmed from the fact that the BK, the Zogists and the independent chieftains constituted part of the ruling class of prewar society. They felt that they

could pursue military operations only as long as they could provide adequate protection for their society from enemy reprisals. Failure to ensure this protection would lead to the rejection of these leaders by their own society. Hoxha, on the other hand, had nothing to lose by resistance since enemy reprisals only gained for him thousands of new recruits. The anti-partisan groups, in an effort to protect themselves from Hoxha, were ultimately driven to cooperate with the Germans, effectively removing themselves as contenders for power in postwar Albania.

The Albania that the Germans abandoned to Hoxha had changed considerably. The war brought death, destruction, famine and hardship. The political and social order had been profoundly transformed. When the Germans arrived in 1943, Albania was still firmly in the grasp of the feudal-tribal social and political traditions. The Italians, by relying so heavily on traditional leaders, had enhanced the old structure. It was German policy that did much to destroy traditional Albania. Growing nationalism and resistance slowly engrained the idea that collaboration was un-Albanian. Hoxha and his followers, mostly young Tosks from the south, along with some Macedonians and Aromanians, came to power at the head of a party and army inspired by a militant foreign ideology that rejected and ridiculed the old ways of tribalism and religion. They welcomed the task of building a new Albania.

8

Albania's Stalinist Dictatorship, 1944–1989

For most of its short, turbulent history as an independent state, Albania was dominated by two unique personalities, Ahmet Zogu and Enver Hoxha. Of the two, Hoxha, who headed his country's communist movement for nearly half a century, had the most profound long-term impact, moving Albania from openness to the rest of the socialist world, which brought about rapid economic and social change, evolving into an isolated cage based on a failed doctrine of self-reliance and simple fear. Hoxha created and controlled one of the most repressive and totalitarian of the Eastern European communist regimes, which has been described as a collage of fantasies, or the sort of place that would make surrealists weep for joy.

But if it was a surrealist fantasy, it was a brutal one that Hoxha achieved through his absolute control of the party and the state. He ruthlessly decimated the ranks of his colleagues – no communist regime experienced such repeated purges and decimations. An inevitable by-product of this system was widespread insecurity, verging on paranoia, that mirrored Hoxha's own. The result was the notion of a state continually under siege. Albanians were forced to endure a nightmare of political oppression – a world of secret police, informers, midnight arrests, executions, prisons, labor camps and internal exile. Albania today remains scarred by the physical monuments to Hoxha's extremism including the remains

of tens of thousands of concrete bunkers built in the 1970s to deter Hoxha's ever-increasing list of enemies. More importantly, Albania remains profoundly scarred psychologically by his political and social legacy that has made Albania's transition from Stalinism to a market-oriented democracy the most difficult in all of Eastern Europe.

Foundations of the Stalinist State

We have seen Hoxha help to develop the most effective resistance force in Albania, but his eyes were always on the political prize – the control of Albania after the war. Hoxha's seemingly innate political acumen encouraged him to carefully prepare his regime while the fighting was still underway – indeed it can be argued that this quickly became his principal focus. There are a series of milestones in this somewhat tortuous process including the Peza Conference where, as we have seen, the NLM was founded. This meeting not only made Hoxha a national figure but also began the process of constructing regional and local administrations in the form of councils that did much to spread Hoxha's influence, while at the same time gathering food and clothing for the fighters. Parallel to the NLM meetings, Hoxha convened meetings of the party to strengthen his own internal position within its developing structure.

After receiving Comintern approval, Hoxha called the first national conference of the ACP in March 1943 at Labinot southeast of the capital. The meeting condemned heresy and elected a permanent central committee with Hoxha as first secretary. The conference also called for

the creation of a regular army of national liberation to be controlled by the communists. The general council of the NLM agreed, and Hoxha became the principal political commissar. With each meeting Hoxha solidified his position further.

The next major step, in September 1943, was the second conference of the NLM, also at Labinot, where the tasks and activities of the councils were increased and they were proclaimed to be the "only people's power." In 1944, with the outcome of the war no longer in doubt, Hoxha stepped up his political activity. At the end of May 1944, Hoxha called an NLM congress at Përmet, which elected a new council, invested with executive and legislative power. The council chose a standing committee that acted as a provisional government with Hoxha serving as prime minister and chief of staff of the partisan army. Hoxha was promoted to colonel-general. Several months later in Berat, Hoxha convened what was called the second session of the Congress of Përmet and transformed the anti-fascist national liberation committee into a provisional government with Hoxha himself not only remaining as prime minister and minister of the interior, but becoming foreign minister as well.

Although this was little known either outside or inside Albania at the time, for clearer glimpses of Albania's future it was more important to monitor the internal functioning of the party. At the second plenum in November 1944 in Berat, where Hoxha remained after the NLM session, he was faced with perhaps the first dangerous internal challenge to his leadership. Pro-Yugoslav elements in the Albanian leadership, grouped around Koçi Xoxe (1911–1949), an Orthodox tinsmith of

Macedonian Slav origin, forced Hoxha to allow one of Tito's trusted advisers to take part in politburo discussions. Once he had a seat at the table Colonel Velimir Stojnić ardently pursued Yugoslav aims, which included weakening and possibly removing Hoxha. Tito distrusted Hoxha because of what he saw as Hoxha's bourgeois intellectual background but, more importantly, he hoped to replace him because of his independence. Tito preferred Koçi Xoxe because he was the only worker in the leadership, and because of Xoxe's support for Tito's plan to establish some form of confederal link between Albania and Yugoslavia. The critical factor, of course, was that Xoxe was completely under Tito's control.

Stojnić, along with Xoxe and others in the leadership, criticized Hoxha for sectarianism, for alienating important segments of the population – including non-communist opposition groups, influential members of the bourgeoisie and the churches – all of whom, according to the then current Yugoslav line, should have been brought into the NLM. He was also accused of committing serious crimes within the party, including wanton crimes against his political opponents, and constructing a cult of the personality around himself by taking credit for the achievements of the party. He was forced into a lengthy self-criticism. He survived in part because of the support he had among the partisan fighters, some of whom were members of the politburo, but principally because Shehu had marched into Tirana and Hoxha convinced those assembled to adjourn the meeting so that the party leadership might be feted by the citizens of Tirana on November 28. The topic was allowed to die.

Although Hoxha overcame this challenge, it had a powerful impact. The attack turned the next four years, until Hoxha was able to liquidate his opponents, into a trying time during which his position could never be considered fully secure. Second, and perhaps more important in the long run, Hoxha's experience in the last months of 1944 further encouraged him to jettison that part of him that contained liberal and Western democratic elements and he moved even further toward dictatorship. His rise to power had occurred during a time of struggle – he had maintained his position in late 1944 in light of that struggle. He seems to have decided that to maintain power, he needed to perpetuate the mentality of struggle and to emphasize the notion of enemies everywhere, externally and internally. The Second World War would have to be kept alive, as if it had happened just yesterday. Insecurity, which would become a critical feature of his personal makeup and characterized Hoxha's regime until his death in 1985, can be traced, in part, to the plenum in Berat in November 1944.

The other critical element in Hoxha's ideological makeup, and one that became second only to Stalinism in his policies was nationalism, although the extreme version would only surface later after his break with the Soviet Union and alienation from Eastern Europe in general. Hoxha was faced with the task of rebuilding Albania on the foundation, or what was left of it, laid by Zog. Like Zog, his main goal was essentially predetermined. In its simplest sense, Hoxha's principal task was the creation of a viable independent nation-state and what he colorfully described as the monolithic unity of the Albanian people. Because his goals were often similar to

those of Zog, it is perhaps not surprising that his policy priorities were often similar as well. Despite the violent Stalinist policies and rhetoric Hoxha adopted, he essentially had little choice but to become an accidental nationalist as Zog had been. Indeed, given the narrow base of the communist movement's support in Albania due in part to the fact that there were so few workers, nationalism eventually helped Hoxha maintain power, force unity and progress toward a modern Stalinist state. Hoxha's ideology, then, can be described as traditional Stalinism with an industrialized "modern" state as the goal, later to be supplemented with extreme nationalism and a state-of-siege mentality. This combination would eventually tightly seal Albania from the outside world and create a state and society in many ways similar to what we see in North Korea today.

Hoxha had important advantages in the struggle to create a new Albania. When he came to power, he had a relatively free hand as a result of the traditional right of conquest and by virtue of the growing partisan army. Equally as important, the war had either destroyed or discredited the traditional ruling class in Albania, particularly in the center and the south. Either they had collaborated outright or had at least done little for the resistance. Hoxha also had the example of Zog, which occasionally allowed him to avoid mistakes. To help shape his policies, Hoxha also had the legacy of failed interwar capitalism, the wartime fascist experience and the sometimes manufactured but frequently real specter of foreign and domestic threats.

Hoxha relied on the help of an enthusiastic and young leadership. One of the first Western views of Albania's

new political elite comes from J. E. Jacobs, the head of the US State Department mission in Tirana in 1945. Jacobs had high praise for the abilities of the new political elite in Albania, complementing their considerable energy and the sound planning that they exhibited in constructing the new state. Hoxha's comrades were described as a shrewd, determined group of individuals who clearly hoped to improve the lot of the average Albanian. But Jacobs was willing to be critical of the developing Hoxha regime as well. He noted the fear that the communists inspired, including warnings to certain individuals that they were visiting the houses of US and British officials too often. He commented on the horrible prison conditions and the use of torture. Trials, Jacobs argued, were used for both dispensing real justice against collaborators and as a weapon against political opposition. There were mass executions. While there was perhaps no blood bath as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the moderate opposition was being terrorized by the newly formed secret police under Xoxe. Jacobs also believed that the regime's strong vocal commitment to democratic principles was little more than a sham. He complained that the government instituted a system of voting by show of hands, which of course allowed for intimidation and manipulation until the desired result could be ensured. Jacobs believed that the regime's aims were often at odds with the will and basic instincts of the people.

While Jacobs was often quite critical of the Hoxha regime, he saved much of his criticism for the opposition, for whom he had very few kind words. He defined the opposition to the regime rather narrowly to include merchants, former government officials, army officers, some

clergy (principally among the Catholics and Sunni Muslims), large landowners and other propertied classes who benefited the most from the Italian and German occupation. He argued that this group made up perhaps between 10 and 15 percent of the population and he believed that its opposition to the regime was based not on some form of political principle but rather was dictated entirely by personal advantage and privilege. Free elections did not come into their thinking; indeed, they were even less interested in the establishment of a truly democratic system than were the communists. The opposition simply feared the loss of their traditional dominance and wealth, some of which was built up during the occupation by, among other things, exerting pressure on Albania's few Jews under the pretense of protecting them from the Germans. And now, in 1945, they turned in desperation to the Western Allies to preserve their wealth and position. Jacobs believed that these people, some of whom he contemptuously referred to as "intellectuals," had little respect and little support among the common people. While Jacobs' view is limited principally to what he himself experienced in Tirana, it does provide us with a useful, early, Western perspective of the new regime.

Construction of a Stalinist Albania

Building on the many wartime conferences and plenums, Hoxha's first priority was to rapidly construct an adequate political system, which he did with intelligence and brutality. The initial steps in this direction, as Jacobs suggested, included the physical removal of those forces considered a danger to the construction of the new state,

forces identified only by the somewhat generic term "war criminal." The first special people's tribunal created for this purpose met in December 1944, just weeks after the fall of Tirana, in the crowded Kosovo cinema, which housed the national theater until its destruction in 2020. Some sixty prominent figures stood trial and seventeen, including Hoxha's brother-in-law Bahri Omari, were sentenced to death. Like Stalin, Hoxha was perfectly willing to eliminate members of his own family.

Generally staffed by illiterate peasants, the tribunals became more extreme as it became clear to Hoxha that Western recognition for his regime was not forthcoming. The British and Americans left in 1946 and would not return until 1991, which allowed Hoxha the freedom to effectively combine the terms "war criminal" and "non-communist." Hundreds were killed after public show trials that were attended by jeering spectators. By these means, Hoxha was able to eliminate or silence the remaining elements of the prewar political elite. The general population was, of course, meant to take a lesson from these proceedings – in case they were slow to learn, Hoxha would resort to the rapidly growing security services.

With the enhanced personal security these measures provided, Hoxha moved to the creation of a permanent government. While democracy and free elections had constituted an important part of Hoxha's propaganda, once he assumed power these promises became considerably less important. Like the Yugoslavs, Hoxha created a Democratic Front dominated by communists, which succeeded the NLM in December 1945. Unlike much of the rest of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, however, Albania did not experience a postwar coalition government,

principally because no government in exile had ever been recognized. The first election in 1945 for a constituent assembly saw the Front, aided by the fact that few non-Front candidates were allowed to stand, sweep to power. When the new assembly met in early 1946, it formally abolished the monarchy, proclaimed Albania to be a people's republic within its prewar frontiers and approved a new constitution along Stalinist lines, similar to the one in Yugoslavia. The new government structure allowed Hoxha, already the general secretary of the party and president of the Democratic Front, to become prime minister, foreign minister, defense minister and commander-in-chief. Hoxha possessed considerable power, but it was still shared power, particularly since his rival Xoxe became deputy prime minister and the new minister of the interior, which gave him control of the security services. On the surface, then, by 1946 it seemed as if Hoxha had consolidated his dictatorship, but foreign and domestic intrigue would soon disabuse him of that notion.

While Xoxe and his Yugoslav sponsors had suffered a setback at Berat, they had not abandoned their plan to replace Hoxha with someone more pro-Yugoslav, like Xoxe himself. The process resumed with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid in 1946, which included coordination of economic plans, standardization of monetary systems, a customs union, unification of prices and the introduction of Yugoslav experts into every Albanian government department as well as the army. Hoxha, under significant internal pressure, had turned Albania into a Yugoslav economic satellite and essentially condemned it to permanent dependency. Albania had lost many of the characteristics

of a sovereign state. Relations with Yugoslavia soon grew strained, however, when, among other issues, many in the government became dissatisfied with the value assigned to Albanian goods and about the method by which Albanian investment in joint companies was calculated. Hoxha and others in the leadership hoped that Yugoslav investment, which at its height made up nearly 60 percent of the state budget, would be directed more toward industry. The Yugoslavs, conversely, saw Albania's economic future as that of a producer of agricultural products and raw materials. There was also a growing concern with the fact that Yugoslav advisers and technicians, some 600 at the height of the Yugoslav period, were suspected of sabotage, hoping to embarrass Albanian officials and replace them with pro-Yugoslavs. Further, the Yugoslavs suggested a five-year plan that would have kept Albania economically underdeveloped, as well as a secret treaty protecting Yugoslav interests in Albania in the event of a change of government.

Despite these issues, by early 1948 Xoxe and his supporters appeared to gain the upper hand, and at the eighth plenum of the central committee in February/March 1948 a plan to combine the Albanian and Yugoslav economies and armed forces was approved. Mehmet Shehu was demoted and Hoxha was once again forced to perform self-criticism and endorse the Yugoslav line. While he was able to maintain his post as general-secretary, his position was seriously weakened. He would certainly have ended up in front of one of Xoxe's firing squads had it not been for Stalin and the Soviet–Yugoslav break in June, prompted principally by Tito's increasing independence. The break not only saved Hoxha but preserved Albanian independence as well. Hoxha, as he would throughout his

life, stood with Stalin. He quickly renounced all economic arrangements with the Yugoslavs and initiated violent anti-Yugoslav polemics. Although, like Zog, Hoxha never confronted the Yugoslavs over the denial of national rights of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia. Again, like Zog, for Hoxha the stability of his own regime was much more important than pursuing the national unity issue. His wife Nexhmije Hoxha (1921–2020) was responsible for rewriting history and editing out all of the obsequious references to Tito and the Yugoslavs found in Hoxha's speeches. The period of Albanian–Soviet friendship, which lasted roughly from 1948 to 1961, had begun.



8.1 Stalin statue in Skanderbeg Square, 1950

Consolidation of the Dictatorship

Soon after the break, Xoxe was denounced and blamed for the brutal excesses of the early years, a period that the official party histories would refer to as the dark days of "Xoxism." Xoxe and many of his supporters in the security apparatus where arrested and shot. The directorate of state security (*Drejtoria e Sigurimit të Shtetit*), or Sigurimi, was now brought under the control of Hoxha. The Sigurimi, which was formally established in 1946, had originally employed trusted, often illiterate, former partisans who, lacking professionalism, were often given to excesses. It seems that Xoxe's agents had gone so far as to place virtually the entire party leadership under surveillance. Hoxha was determined to establish firm control of what had become a rogue force.

His most trusted comrade, Mehmet Shehu, was duly appointed the next minister of the interior and supervised the Sigurimi. Shehu instilled professionalism in the organization, which simply made its reign of terror more effective. It eventually covered the entire country with a network of informers, employing a significant percentage of the population. By 1990, the Sigurimi had compiled files on some 1 million Albanians. Children were taught to spy on their parents, no one was immune and no one was safe. For those caught in the web, the Sigurimi established and administered prisons and labor camps, two of the most brutal at Spaç and Burrel, where inmates were routinely tortured and denied decent food and medical care. Tens of thousands of Albanians were either imprisoned for political crimes or exiled to remote villages, some of which they were required to build themselves. Similar to the blood feud tradition that still

prevailed among the tribes in the north, the regime followed the principle of collective responsibility. An individual was not condemned alone; the entire family was also held responsible. The regime ultimately executed more than 6,000, most of whom were dumped into secret mass graves, many of which have yet to be discovered.

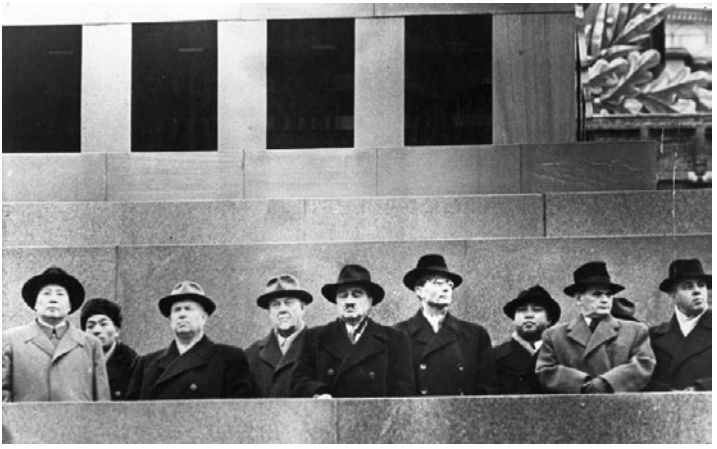
The removal of Xoxe and his associates was accompanied by the first of Hoxha's major purges – with the expulsion of all those considered pro-Yugoslav. While there had been purges in the past, this one was substantial with as many as one-quarter of the members of the ACP either arrested or purged. This milestone event was significant on a series of different levels. It was an indication of the growing level of brutality to which Hoxha was willing to resort to ensure loyalty within the party. In terms of policy, from this point on Hoxha was more or less consistent in his Stalinism and his unreciprocated slavish support for Stalin. Stalin, however, did not always return the favor. Hoxha visited the Soviet Union more than a dozen times and the Soviet leader was always kind but seemed to know little about Albania, and in early 1948 he suggested to the Yugoslavs that they simply take Albania. Tito's envoy Milovan Djilas tells us that Stalin illustrated the point by gathering together the fingers of his right hand and, bringing them to his mouth, he made a motion as if to swallow Albania. This was certainly an indication that he wasn't really that interested in the fate of the small country. Still, Hoxha had survived the most serious threat to his leadership, and Albania moved from being a subsatellite of the Yugoslavs to a full satellite of the Soviets. At Stalin's recommendation, the Albanian leadership renamed the Albanian Communist Party the Party of

Labor of Albania to reflect the large number of peasants in the membership.

Other, less dangerous threats to Hoxha's leadership were more easily overcome. These included continuing anti-communist resistance, particularly in the north, which remained an irritant for years. The national Mountain League uprising under Mark Gjon Markaj, the captain of the Mirdita, and the northern Postriba uprising challenged the regime in 1946. Although both were easily suppressed, the experience further convinced Hoxha that the northern tribal structure needed to be destroyed in order for the new socialist Albania to flourish. These disturbances were quickly followed by a complex plot organized by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Overestimating internal hostility to the regime, the Western intelligence agencies trained and equipped anti-communist Albanians and parachuted them into Albania in small groups with the intent to organize anti-communist forces in Albania and overthrow Hoxha. Potential fighters were recruited among the Albanian émigrés in Greece and Italy by anti-communist leaders and then trained in Malta by British intelligence, which had recruited former SOE personnel for the purpose. The first group was sent into Albania in 1947 and the last in 1952. The entire operation was a disaster and cost the lives of scores of agents. It is generally believed that the infamous double agent Kim Philby, who served as the British intelligence liaison with the CIA, was responsible for dooming the operation by informing Hoxha, through Moscow, of the time and location of most of the attempts to infiltrate agents. Predictably, these hostile acts fed into Hoxha's growing fear of the West.

The last important serious attempt by internal or external forces to remove Hoxha came in 1956 at the height of the de-Stalinization purges that swept Eastern Europe. The death of Stalin in 1953 resulted in a certain liberalization in terms of both foreign and domestic policy in much of the socialist world and the removal of Stalinists. In Albania, the Stalinists endured. The Soviet Union, now under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971), initiated a rapprochement with Yugoslavia, and both the Soviets and the Yugoslavs encouraged Hoxha to rehabilitate Xoxe. Hoxha recognized that he could not reject Stalinism and survive, nor was he inclined to do so. At the third party congress in May 1956, he did begrudgingly accept the Soviet position and agree to establish friendlier relations with Yugoslavia, but he also slowly began moving toward his third protector, Mao Zedong's China, making his first trip there later in 1956. Hoxha clearly saw the danger of de-Stalinization – like Stalin, his leadership position was reinforced by a reign of terror. In defending Stalin and his policies, he was defending himself. Once again, as in 1948, he was saved by events outside of Albania. The Hungarian revolt of 1956, an outcome of de-Stalinization, led to a Soviet invasion of Hungary and a cooling of the Soviet–Yugoslav rapprochement. Hoxha took the opportunity to remove those in the leadership who had opposed him, arguing that they were part of a Titoism plot to remove him.

By 1956, then, Hoxha had essentially consolidated his dictatorship. Hoxha had prevailed and was able to solidify his power for a number of reasons. Certainly, Albania's marginal importance, its often-forbidding domestic topography and its location on the Adriatic were factors. But



8.2 Mao/Khrushchev/Hoxha, Moscow 1957

Hoxha contributed personally and significantly to his own success. His tactics were very effective, and he carried them out with determined ruthlessness. He consolidated his position with blood – perhaps less blood than Tito and probably even Milovan Djilas, one of Tito's vice presidents. But the difference is that Djilas saw the error of his ways and attempted to set Yugoslavia on a more progressive course, and even Tito mellowed. Hoxha's extremism, conversely, increased. Albanians saw some benefits but also paid a heavy price for the consolidation of Hoxha's dictatorship.

Building a Stalinist Economy

While securing his power base, Enver Hoxha applied the same energy and brutality to socioeconomic and cultural development. His goals here were quite similar to his political goals – to build a secure power base for himself,

and to build a strong and independent Albania on a Stalinist model through industrialization, collectivization and upgraded social services. All of this combined would allow him to create the perfect new socialist man, a worker who would be defined by his stable Albanian identity and communist consciousness.

Albania's postwar economic condition had changed little since the 1920s, except, of course, for some Axis construction and considerable destruction caused by the war. As we have seen, the country was still overwhelmingly agricultural, although agriculture and stock-breeding methods remained primitive. Transportation and communications still were arduous. In 1939, there were still no railroads and only approximately 500 miles of roads, most of which were either damaged by the war or in a general state of disrepair. When Hoxha came to power, then, he faced the most difficult internal economic situation in Eastern Europe.

The regime obtained its initial operating expenses from extensive Yugoslav aid, from other foreign aid principally through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration contributions and by confiscating the property from "enemies" by levying a crippling war profits tax on the bigger merchants. To raise further initial capital, the regime initiated forced subscription to internal loans and placed a ban on the exportation of anything of value (gold, jewelry, etc.). This was followed by a policy of extreme centralization, which included nationalization of what little industry there was, and mobilization of all trained people, which included refusing to repatriate some 3,000 Italian craftsmen, engineers, doctors, technicians and skilled workers. Some of these

unfortunates were not allowed to return to Italy until the early 1950s. By 1946, all construction enterprises were nationalized, followed rapidly by textile mills, other small factories and shops, a process which dispersed what was left of the archaic prewar economy and ultimately destroyed the remaining small prewar middle class. While the process of building a new Albania began during the short Yugoslav period, the centralized planning and management, industrialization and collectivization that characterized Stalinism shifted into high gear during the Soviet period. When the Yugoslavs departed in 1948, all that Albania was left with in terms of trained personal were about 500 Italians. The Soviets quickly filled the void with up to 3,000 advisers by 1950.

The first two five-year plans, which ran from 1951 to 1960, foresaw the rapid development of industry and extensive exploitation of the country's natural resources, including oil, chrome, copper, iron, nickel-ore and hydropower. With extensive Soviet aid, the regime was able to achieve a remarkable 20 percent industrial growth rate, although this was possible in part because Albania was beginning from such a low level of industrialization. The Soviet period was a story of machines and the construction of massive industrial complexes, perhaps best symbolized by the Stalin textile complex, or *Kombinat*, built outside the capital and opened in 1951.

By the end of the decade, the workers' village adjacent to this massive monument to modernism housed some 14,000 workers and their families. While living conditions were initially rather squalid and the work day was made longer by political education session and "volunteerism,"



8.3 Enver Hoxha at the *Kombinat* textile complex

the complex became the pride of the nation, not only producing coats and uniforms but also, perhaps more importantly, creating Albanian workers, of which there were very few in the 1950s. One historian has called the complex a microcosm of the country in the 1950s: the boastful party rhetoric, the conspicuous Soviet engineers, the peasant women operating machines, the shoddy sleeping quarters, the inevitable pasta in the crowded cafeteria. While wary of Khrushchev, Hoxha continue to enjoy both Soviet and Eastern Bloc largess, as well as increasing Chinese credits, all of which allowed for not only increased industrialization and but also improved living standards for the average Albanian by the late 1950s.

But tensions with the Soviets developed quickly. We have seen Khrushchev's opening to Yugoslavia and the West. Equally as important was the evolution of Soviet

economic priorities. While Soviet leaders initially backed Hoxha's industrialization plans with enthusiasm, by the late 1950s, the Soviet Union – following the policy of the international socialist division of labor – decided that the entire socialist world would be better off if Albania concentrated its energies on growing fruits and vegetables and catching fish. Even Stalin had encouraged greater emphasis on agriculture, but to Hoxha "modern" meant industrialization.

Agriculture was always something of an afterthought – in the first five-year plan, for example, only 17 percent of investment funds were used for agriculture, despite the fact that this sector employed 70 percent of the working population. Still, vast changes in agriculture were made. Again following Stalinist precepts, the regime introduced a policy of forced collectivization, so brutal that it was halted in 1951 because of the famine that resulted. But the policy was reinstated in the 1960s, and near full collectivization was achieved by 1967. As in the Soviet Union, this policy, even once it was pursued with less brutality, was met with considerable resistance or at least peasant apathy, which resulted in the agricultural sector only achieving approximately 50 percent of its assigned goals in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the regime claims to have achieved self-sufficiency in bread grains by 1976, its goal of meeting all internal food requirements by 1980 was never realized.

The Soviet push for more agriculture in a way came to a head with Khrushchev's visit to Albania in 1959 to lay the cornerstone of the Soviet-financed palace of culture, which still dominates Skanderbeg Square in Tirana. The palace was a major priority for Hoxha, believing that

Tirana, which in the 1950s still looked like a large Muslim village with some fascist-era administrative buildings and an overcrowded Ottoman bazaar, needed a massive parade ground and a large palace of culture. Upon arrival, the Soviet leader was inundated with requests for more money and technical assistance. An irritated Khrushchev complained that the Albanians offered lunch and then promptly demanded all these things, noting that had he known about this he would have brought their own lunch.

Khrushchev was reluctant to spend more and encouraged his hosts to cultivate grapes, oranges, lemons, peanuts, tea and olives. Fruits and vegetables, not oil, were Albania's gold. Hoxha would have none of it, and this economic issue contributed significantly to Albania's break with the Soviet Union, which developed over time but ultimately culminated in Hoxha's dramatic, even theatrical, personal denunciation of Khrushchev in Moscow in 1960. The Soviets promptly canceled contracts and loans, withdrew their advisers and broke diplomatic relations. One the last complications of the split was the fate of the joint Albanian–Soviet Pashaliman submarine base on Sazan island, commanding the bay of Vlorë. The Soviets demanded full control of the base, but the Albanians resisted and ultimately kept four of the twelve submarines stationed there, along with twenty-two auxiliary units, which became the bulk of the Albanian fleet. Khrushchev restricted himself to verbal protests, accusing the Albanians of piracy at the United Nations.

Once again, Albanian history had to be rewritten and Nexhmije had to edit her husband's speeches to remove those references to the Soviet leadership that were no longer operative. But the regime was careful to

distinguish between Khrushchev on the one hand and the Soviet people and the Soviet Union on the other. Khrushchev was accused of revisionism, establishing a personality cult and abandoning the true road to socialism as laid down by Stalin. With brutal monotony, another round of purges inevitably followed. Although Hoxha's position was never seriously threatened at this point, he used now-familiar tactics – he admitted that some mistakes were made but blamed imperialist agents, as he labeled all of those in the party who would serve as scapegoats. Prominent among the latter were Koço Tashko and Liri Belishova. The Harvard-educated Tashko was one of the original Albanian communists sent by the Comintern to create a party in Albania. He was responsible for forming the Korçë group and played a role in bringing a young Hoxha into the communist fold. Tashko was purged from the party and spent nearly two decades in exile and in prison, including ten years in the notorious prison at Burrel. Belishova was a decorated partisan fighter who lost an eye in the liberation struggle, as well as a talented, energetic and dedicated communist who became a member of the politburo. As one of the most prominent women in the leadership and still in her thirties, she likely was the object of some envy in Albania's patriarchal society. A convenient scapegoat because of her extensive connections with the Soviet Union, Belishova was purged from the leadership and the party and spent some thirty years in internal exile, along with her family. She was finally released in 1991. Many others who had been pro-Soviet were also removed from their positions, while some were simply liquidated and replaced by more reliable communists, usually the relatives of Hoxha's closest supporters.

Following this purge, by 1962 of the thirty-one members of the central committee elected at the first full party congress in 1948, only nine survived: fourteen had been killed and eight forced to "retire" from political life. Those who survived were bound together by the traditional ties of clan and family loyalty, as well as by their common complicity in the murderous purges. Among the sixty-one central committee members there were five married couples and no less than twenty persons related to one another as sons-in-law or cousins. They lived together in the leadership block, known simply as the *Blloku*, a tightly controlled neighborhood just West of the main boulevard in Tirana. Similar to Hitler's Berchtesgaden complex, the communist grandees inside enjoyed spacious villas, access to a "party house," an exclusive club for recreation and conversation, and special stores with high-quality foodstuffs and Western clothing. The *Blloku* was heavily guarded but the occupants inside were not safe from the constant purges.

Hoxha required a new principal patron and now embraced China, a move motivated by ideology and economics, allowing Albania to maintain autonomy in domestic and foreign policy. The period of Sino-Albanian friendship, which lasted roughly from 1961 to 1978, saved Stalinism in Albania and further radicalized political, economic and social life. Hoxha was fond of noting that together, the Albanians and the Chinese make up 701 million people. While Beijing was quick to replace Soviet grain shipments, the overall economic effect of the shift to China, however, was quite detrimental. Not only did the regime have to deal with the disruption caused by the abrupt end of Soviet and Eastern European aid, but

the Chinese were willing to replace no more than 20 percent of Soviet credits. The third five-year plan, based on this reduced support, once again emphasized heavy industry. The industrial centerpiece of the Chinese period was the metalworks at Elbasan, known as the "Steel of the Party," which, while an ecological disaster, allowed the Albanians to product large quantities of relatively poor-quality steel. And on October 25, 1970, the "Day of Light," Albania announced that the entire country had access to electricity. Agriculture was again neglected. While reclamation increased the acreage available, erosion and the overuse of chemical fertilizers more than offset the advantage, causing shortages.

But by the early 1970s, China, like Russia under Khrushchev, began its integration into the world community. With Chinese admission to the United Nations in 1971, Albania, which until then had served as Beijing's mouthpiece, lost a significant element of its usefulness. At the same time, China was less willing to continue underwriting large segments of the Albanian economy, arguing that the standard of living in China was lower than that in Albania. Then came a series of foreign policy shocks. The Albanian leadership was alarmed when US President Richard Nixon visited China in 1972 but truly frightened when Mao died in 1976. The new Chinese leadership accelerated its new normalization policy and opened up to the Yugoslavs, forcing the Albanians further into isolation. Although China did not break relations with Albania as the Soviet Union had in 1961, by 1978 China ended economic and military assistance programs to Albania. For the first time, the Albanians were on their own. Hoxha tried to make up



8.4 Worker's parade, May Day, 1976. Image by Sovfoto/Universal Images Group via Getty Images.

the loss of Chinese aid by a combination of a minimal opening to the West and increased self-reliance on Albania's own resources. This was just not enough, and Albania's average annual industrial growth rate began to fall sharply during the seventh five-year plan in the early 1980s.

Indeed, by the early 1980s Albania was in a state of economic crisis. Decrease in the price of chrome, one of Albania's principal exports, was made more difficult by the low productivity of Albanian mines, aging technology and low quality of its raw material. The loss of Chinese aid was exacerbated by drought, which affected both agriculture and the energy sector. Lack of investment in

agriculture, gradual elimination of private property in cooperatives and an expanding population all contributed to a catastrophic drop in agricultural production. Albanians were faced with cuts in water and electricity. Shortages in basic foodstuffs made long lines in front of shops in the early morning a regular part of daily life in Albania in the 1980s. The government answered with various policies including cattle collectivization and maximum self-sufficiency, moves that simply added to the problem. The party demanded further sacrifice from the people, something to which they had by now already become accustomed.

Nevertheless, it is clear that in general Hoxha's economic policies resulted in extensive industrial growth as well as notable infrastructure improvements such as rural electrification and land reclamation – much of the work done by the growing numbers of political prisoners. The highway system expanded significantly, and a 370-mile railroad system was established. The principal port of Durrës was significantly expanded as well.

In the final analysis, however, the regime's economic policies achieved at best only mixed results. Despite the advances, in many respects the five-year plans were failures – often for the same reason they failed elsewhere. The aid that Hoxha extracted from his protectors, particularly that from the Chinese, was often poorly coordinated. As Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia (1925–2011), would admit in 1991, the plans themselves suffered from excessive central planning, bureaucratic administrative management and fetishes about the relations between heavy industry and the production of consumer goods and agriculture. Alia also criticized the extreme

enforcement of the principle of relying on Albania's own resources. Albania needed markets and credit, but a new self-reliance constitution adopted in 1976 banned foreign borrowing. All of this caused increased dissatisfaction and increased repression.

Stalinist social engineering and education were of course key components in the creation of Hoxha's "socialist Albanian man." The regime's economic priorities did much to initiate this process – Hoxha was perpetually concerned that he had a workers' movement with few workers. In 1944, out of 1.1 million inhabitants, there were fewer than 15,000 workers. By the 1980s, while the population had increased to 2.9 million, the number of industrial laborers had increased to about 400,000, or about 30 percent of the workforce. This significant shift also required rapid urbanization, so that by the mid 1980s, Albania was 34 percent urban, up from 15 percent in 1938.

Social and Cultural Initiatives

When Hoxha came to power in 1944, social conditions in Albania were still quite primitive and poverty was endemic. The people suffered from a poor diet, making them vulnerable to diseases including malaria. In addition, education was rudimentary and public health services were essentially nonexistent. Prior to the advent of the communists, 88 percent of Albania's health professionals resided in the bigger towns, serving the health needs of between 15 and 20 percent of the population. The regime was determined to rectify this imbalance and made considerable strides in public health in general. New hospitals

were built, and efforts were made to bring malaria under control by draining some of the swamps in the coastal lowlands. The Italians had made some progress here, but with the aid of prison labor, the communist regime did much more. Health care measures that had been introduced in the 1950s were accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s with more hospitals, maternity homes, clinics and other health centers. Efforts were made to control tuberculosis and syphilis. While a significant disparity remained between what was available in the city and what was available in the countryside, these energetic measures resulted in a drop in the death rate as well as a drop in infant mortality and a corresponding increase in life expectancy. Improvements in health care contributed to the rapid increase in population, so that by 1990 it had risen to 3.25 million, up from a little over 1.1 million in 1945.

Hoxha was aware that the key to the problem of modernization and unity rested with the younger generation. While much of the older generation could clearly never be changed, with proper education and correct cultural influences, the youth could construct the new socialist Albania. As with other aspects of Hoxha's state, this crusade, too, began during the course of the war. When not fighting, the men and women of the partisan movement received instruction, including the basics of reading and writing as well as the ever-present political education.

Once the war was over, education and culture received more serious attention and the major themes developed over time. By the 1960s, extreme reverence was paid to the heroes of Albanian nationalism, whether or not they conformed to Hoxha's Stalinist mold. Much care was

extended to the preservation of national monuments and historic towns and cities, many of which were designated as museum cities. Hoxha insisted that Albania's cultural heritage, folk costumes, folk songs and dances be preserved. Despite this emphasis on history and tradition, the central focal point for education and culture was ideology with an emphasis on the liberation struggle of the Albanians against the Axis invaders during the Second World War. Textbooks, traditional histories, literature for children, general literature, drama and film – all were limited to variations on the same theme. Even Albanian coins depicted the successful armed struggle against fascism. So, while there was a significant increase in cultural activity, it was ideologically directed, leaving no room for spontaneity or creativity. Rigid conformism turned Albania into a dull and barren cultural desert.

Still, the increase in public instruction in the postwar period was impressive. The wartime instruction was augmented after the war with thousands enrolled in night schools where students progressed from elementary classes to secondary education. By 1963, every man and women in the country was obliged to complete eight years of ideologically focused schooling. In 1957, the regime opened its first university, the University of Tirana, which remains the premier educational institution in the country. And like other socialist states, the regime created the Albanian Academy of Sciences in 1972, to serve as the keeper of the grail of Albanian scholarship. One of the distinctly positive side effects of this program was a dramatic improvement in Albania's literacy rate. As we have seen, in 1939 Albania suffered from an astonishingly high 85 percent illiteracy rate. Through a program of

compulsory education, Albania was able to reduce that figure to 30 percent by 1950 and then, at least according to admittedly often flawed statistics, by 1955 illiteracy among adults under the age of forty was eliminated entirely.

The emancipation of women was a traditional theme in communist propaganda and played a central role in Hoxha's rhetoric and often his policies. Out of a population of slightly over a million in 1945, official statistics indicate that there were some 668 women employed in the professions – among them 21 teachers, 2 doctors and no engineers, agronomists or chemists. Only 2.4 percent of secondary school students were female. The regime was convinced that the traditional family structure was at the root of this significant disparity and that, as with industry and agriculture, family life needed to be collectivized since the family was seen as one of the last strongholds of feudalism and bourgeois individualism and ideology.

The 1946 Stalinist constitution in Albania enshrined equality between the sexes. Marriage and divorce were regulated, and couples were required to participate in civil ceremonies before local people's councils. Infant betrothal, common in Albania before the war, was outlawed with severe punishment meted out to those who persisted in the practice. Recognizing that these efforts faced opposition even within his own top leadership, Hoxha initiated a new emancipation campaign in the 1960s that was, at the same time, an attempt to indoctrinate women into the new socialist order, enlist them as fighters for the new order and bring the family under



8.5 Enver Hoxha with his people, 1967

party control. But even with this new emphasis, Hoxha still found it necessary to complain in the 1970s that Albania had a long way to go before real equality in the mind of the average Albanian would complement the legal equality that the new regime had granted women.

Still, Hoxha changed the life of Albanian women in important ways. Equal rights included the virtual requirement of having a job. Women who were the property of their husbands now became the property of the state. In 1960, 26 percent of the registered workforce consisted of women, which by 1981 had risen to 46 percent. Most of these jobs were in the agricultural sector, where 52 percent of all workers were women. But few women found themselves at the higher levels of the party or as directors

of enterprises. Nexhmije Hoxha was arguable the only women to achieve real political influence in Albania's paternalistic society. Women did enjoy improved access to education, however. By 1970, 36 percent of the students at the University of Tirana were women.

On a more personal basis, women experienced considerable change as well. Often for the first time they had access to medical care, child care and education for their children. Although women were required to work, they saw some benefits from doing so. With the introduction of a moneyed economy, they no longer were forced to make everything in the home themselves. They could leave the house and meet with other women. But the downside here was that despite government encouragement to spread the workload, women were rarely exempted from fulfilling every aspect of their traditional role in the home. And, beginning in the 1950s, they were subjected to brutal government pressure to produce more children. The regime adopted the traditional Stalinist dogma that larger families created larger armies and therefore were in the interests of socialism. Contraception was unavailable, abortion was severely restricted and women who bore a large number of children were awarded the dubious distinction of "hero mother."

The regime did, however, become increasingly conservative with regard to sexual mores. Divorce was anathematized, premarital sexual relations were strongly discouraged, homosexuality was made a criminal offense and, like Stalin, Hoxha did not like to see people kissing on the movie screen. But in a simple evaluation, when asked about the benefits of the communist period, a



8.6 Female soldiers, 1968

northern woman replied that during the communist period her husband talked to her, he called her by her name, she could buy bread in stores, she did not have to make everything in the home and her children could go to school. These are practical considerations but describe a situation clearly far from the equality Hoxha tells us he desired.

The fiercest resistance to the emancipation campaign could be found in the traditional north. There, a women's role in society remained restricted by the patriarchal nature of kanun culture. Hoxha hoped to change all of this rapidly but faced considerable difficulty, since in the north his movement was perceived as principally Tosk and as another attempt on the part of a centralizing regime to intrude on the traditional way of life, this time forcing on the tribes a foreign ideology that they

associated with the hated and feared Slavs. That the regime was principally Tosk is certainly the case. Fully three-quarters of the membership of the party was Tosk and the regime cemented Tosk dominance by proclaiming the Tosk dialect the national literary language. Tosk grammar was left almost intact, while the Geg vocabulary was "Toskicized."

This linguistic centralization, too, was resented in the north and opposition simply confirmed Hoxha in his view that many of the tribesmen were traitors and needed to be controlled. Albania's tribal–Ottoman social structure had always embarrassed Hoxha as a visible demonstration of Albania's backwardness. The regime's initial moves against the tribes were carried out with characteristic ruthlessness. Much of the old leadership was removed – imprisoned or executed – and replaced by more compliant leaders, often from families who before the war had possessed a low status. Blood feuds were also targeted and socialist statistics, although often unreliable, indicate that they were entirely eradicated. This was achieved once again by the use of draconian methods. Those who participated in blood feud violence were summarily executed; if property was the issue, it was confiscated by the government. Folklore suggests that in some cases Hoxha ordered the killers to be buried alive in the coffins of their victims. In a way, Hoxha used both the tribal structure and the blood feud to his advantage. With the new compliant tribal leadership, the structure became a means of state control, and the concept of the blood feud was in a sense nationalized – Hoxha emphasized the notion that all Albanians owed blood to the party and that only the party was allowed to carry out revenge killings.

Ideological and Cultural Revolution

While some Balkan dictators seemed to soften with age, Hoxha became more extreme. Some of this was driven from outside Albania. It is perhaps ironic that as Albania became increasingly isolated, Hoxha's internal policies were increasingly influenced by interaction with foreign states. The move toward China further radicalized Hoxha and ushered in a Chinese-style campaign designed to revolutionize all aspects of life in Albania between 1965 through much of 1969. The so-called ideological and cultural revolution was intended – unlike the Chinese equivalent – to enhance central control and cater to nationalist sentiments by establishing continuity between Hoxha's regime and the heroes of Albanian history, who were now celebrated as precursors to Hoxha, the great teacher. The party organized a cult of personality around the person of Hoxha. He was ever present, his picture appeared on major buildings, his name graced the sides of mountains. Official photos showed his avuncular visage, always smiling, often surrounded by children and flowers. All school textbooks included the obligatory Hoxha quote on the subject at hand.

The new revolution also included an attempt to reduce the size and influence of the bureaucracy as well as to send bureaucrats to toil with the workers and peasants. The government made available propaganda photos of Mehmet Shehu riding a tractor as the embodiment of the new slogan "think, work and live like a revolutionary." The number of ministries was reduced from nineteen to thirteen, the most notable change being the abolition of



8.7 Enver on mountainside, above Ottoman fortress at Berat

the ministry of justice. The party argued that the goal of socialist justice had been achieved and that therefore the ministry was simply superfluous.

A greater emphasis was placed on the party's gender equality campaign, and a further strengthening of ideological instruction in the education system was instituted. But by far the most unusual feature of this program was Hoxha's determination to completely destroy organized religion in Albania. Like Zog, he believed that religion constituted a divisive factor in Albanian society and, like all Marxists, he also saw religion as a holdover of the feudal past, a scourge on the people. And like the Ottomans and Zog, he saw the Catholics as the greatest threat because of their potential to serve as a conduit for foreign influence. In Hoxha's eyes, the Catholics were further compromised by their support for the occupiers

during the war and their occasional support for the anti-communist uprisings in the north during the 1940s. As with the conservative northern tribesmen, he depicted Catholics simply as traitors.

Hoxha's suppression of religion in Albania began slowly. His initial moves were meant to curtail any remaining independence that religious communities might have had at the end of the war. As we have seen, he confiscated church land that provided income, to be replaced by an ever-dwindling government subsidy. He also, when possible, replaced the leadership of the communities with committed communists, or those whose loyalty was assured. The Albanian Orthodox archbishop was replaced by a strong supporter of the regime. As with Zog, Hoxha initially was someone less concerned with the Bektashi, some of whom, like Baba Faja Martaneshi, had actively participated in the partisan struggle.

The crusade against religion culminated in a frenzied campaign in 1967. Socialist propaganda has it that the process began as a demand on the part of progressive youth, but the regime was clearly behind it. The government identified and closed 1,536 active mosques, churches, monasteries and *tekkes*, many of which were repurposed as cultural centers, sport facilities, workers' clubs and warehouses. Some icons and valuable books were burned and irreplaceable manuscripts were allowed to decay. Clerics were arrested and many were simply executed, while others were imprisoned. Religious holidays were replaced by secular celebrations dedicated to various laboring professions. The regime issued an order

making it obligatory for both parents and children to assume nonreligious names. Albanian children were henceforth named after geographical features or figures from Albanian mythology, or were given freshly minted names. One of the more unusual examples of the latter was "Marenglen," a combination of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Towns were renamed to remove religious associations. The party triumphantly declared Albania to be the world's first atheist state.

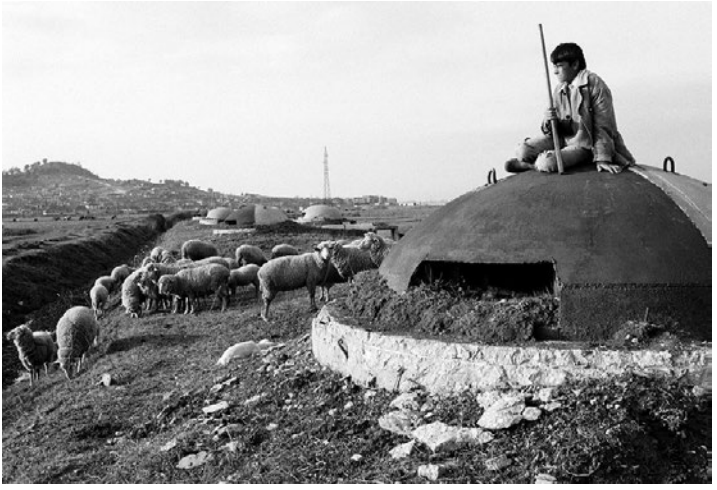
Historians were tasked with reaching deep into the past in an attempt to erase religion from Albanian history, with new theories developed including the notion that the Romans had forced Christianity on the Illyrians, and one emphasizing the labor character of the nineteenth-century nationalist movement. The entire process was accompanied by an intense propaganda campaign that included the opening of an "Atheist Museum" in Shkodër. The cult of religion was replaced with the cult of Skanderbeg and the cult of Albania's greatest product, Hoxha. That religion which survived was driven underground, but because it was practiced by isolated, often undereducated participants, the knowledge of the practice of religion gradually degenerated. The regime's active anti-religion policies did much to produce a secular society in Albania. But both Ramiz Alia and Nexhmije Hoxha told this author that the campaign might ultimately have been the most serious mistake made by the regime.

Since the agreements with China did not include the type of military alliance that had characterized the agreement with the Soviets or that of the Yugoslavs, the party fanned fear of an ever-growing list of enemies, which

ultimately included Greek monarcho-fascists, Italian neo-fascists and Yugoslav and Soviet revisionists, supported by US and British imperialists. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, resulting in Albania's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, enhanced the party's argument. To bolster security against these perceived threats, Hoxha emphasized the concept of the "people's war" – the mobilization of the masses for a struggle against the invader, while at the same time reducing the role of officers in the Albanian army whose authority was assumed by political commissars.

The masses were mobilized for the most fantastic projects, two of which demonstrate the level of Hoxha's extremism. The most bizarre and monstrously wasteful for an impoverished country was the construction of more than 173,000 concrete bunkers, air-raid shelters and other military fortifications of various sizes. While most have since been destroyed, those that remain are employed for such various uses as flowerpots, urinals, small houses and restaurants. They stand as a constant reminder of Hoxha's eccentricities and his siege mentality. This bunker system was augmented by a sort of do-it-yourself air defense system that saw young pioneers (communist youth) fix long spikes to the tops of poles and trees with the intent to impale enemy parachutists attempting to evade the bunker system.

As the Chinese fell into revisionism, Hoxha was forced into a minimal opening to the West in the 1970s and the normalization of diplomatic relations with Greece and Yugoslavia. While Albania generally avoided the social revolution taking place in the West at that point, it could not remain entirely unaffected. Western music could be



8.8 Hoxha era bunkers

heard on Italian radio stations and Western dress and hairstyles could occasionally be seen in Tirana. The seemingly innocuous occasion of a song festival in 1972 set Hoxha on course for one of the greatest of his many murderous purges. Railing against liberal tendencies and the creep of Western ideas into Albanian society, Hoxha first focused his wrath on Todi Lubonja, the director of radio and television, and Fadil Paçrami, a playwright and organizer of the offending song festival. Between 1973 and 1975, the purge was expanded to include a wide range of writers and intellectuals – those who survived competed with one another in their vigorous denunciation of revisionism, liberalism and foreign influence.

The purge soon expanded to include the military and the economic sector. In July 1974, Albania's principal leadership, including Beqir Balluku, defense minister since 1953, chief of staff Petrit Dume and Hito Çako,

the chief of the military's political directorate, were arrested and accused of pitting the army against the party by opposing Hoxha's concept of a "people's army." Found guilty of participating in a coup d'état, they were quickly executed. Some fifty-four other officers as well as hundreds of soldiers were also arrested. This purge also had a profound impact on the economic sector and included the arrest of deputy prime minister Abdyl Këllezi and minister of industry Koço Theodhosi, along with dozens of technical experts. The two ministers were accused of sabotaging the socialist economy and executed. These senior officials were usually replaced by younger party cadres who were unfailingly loyal but whose inexperience did much to further exacerbate already deteriorating economic conditions. In monotonous but deadly fashion, 41 percent of the politburo and nearly half of the members of the central committee of the party were replaced.

This brutal repression and the fact that already abysmally low living standards continued their downward spiral during the 1970s and 1980s caused increasing popular dissatisfaction. But unlike elsewhere in the socialist world, this failed to engender an underground opposition movement in Albania. As the writer Fatos Lubonja, the son of Todi Lubonja, who himself spent seventeen years in Hoxha's notorious labor camp at Spaç, has said that in Albania, dissidents did not exist. There is a difference between a dissident and a victim of the regime. A dissident is someone who has the possibility to enlighten other people, to express opinions, maybe to go to prison but to inspire others to make a choice. While in Albania, he was just a victim which means he did not



8.9 13c AD fortress rebuilt by Ali Pasha at Gjirokastër with US plane, which the communist regime claimed it forced down

inspire others but was instead someone whose experiences instilled fear into others. Most citizens survived mainly by retreating into conformism and apathy, taking something of the paranoia of Hoxha into themselves.

Twilight of the Dictatorship

By the late 1970s, Hoxha was in failing health. Nexhmije has said that his diabetes became evident as early as 1948 and that by the late 1960s he was easily fatigued. His condition was complicated by the fact that, like Zog, he was a heavy smoker, consuming between fifty and sixty cigarettes a day. In 1973, he suffered a serious heart attack. As Hoxha's health deteriorated, Nexhmije

assumed an increasingly prominent role. By the late 1970s, the regime became preoccupied with the question of succession, a process that stands as an apt metaphor for Hoxha's regime as a whole. Hoxha had witnessed the turmoil in the Soviet Union on the death of Stalin and was determined that Albania would be spared such agony. Hoxha was, of course, also hoping to make certain that his hard-line Stalinist policies and his personality cult would be continued.

His assumed successor was Mehmet Shehu, the prime minister and former minister of the interior, who had been Hoxha's closest comrade for some forty years. Despite Shehu's status as a war hero and his extensive experience, he was feared and unpopular. Hoxha, too, may have feared for the fate of his family. As we have seen, Hoxha had always stood on the principle of collective responsibility when purging an opponent – not only was the individual guilty but the entire family had to suffer. Shehu's wife and his own were not on good terms, and on occasion the conflict apparently even involved their respective security and wait staffs. But likely of more importance, by this point Hoxha seems to have decided that Ramiz Alia was better equipped than Shehu to deal with the myriad contemporary problems the country faced. The relationship was further damaged when Shehu gave his son permission to marry someone with a "bad biography," someone whose family had connections with one of Hoxha's enemies.

Hoxha moved quickly against his old comrade. Shehu was bitterly denounced in the politburo meeting of December 17, 1981, and on the next day an astonished public learned that Shehu had become depressed and had

committed suicide, although it is certainly possible that he was simply murdered. Shehu's family, his protégés and his allies were quickly purged, many suffering the same fate as Shehu himself. His wife, Fiqrete Shehu, also a member of the central committee, died of a heart attack in internment, and one of his sons committed suicide by throwing himself onto the electric wires surrounding his prison. And, as with other purges, this one broadened, ultimately claiming the defense minister, Kadri Hazbiu, who had helped Hoxha purge Shehu, health minister Llambi Ziçishti and interior minister Feçor Shehu, who were all shot in 1983. With the execution of Feçor Shehu, Hoxha had eliminated every interior minister since November 1944. But rarely satisfied with just killing someone, Hoxha insisted that Mehmet Shehu be utterly destroyed in a historical sense. In 1982, Hoxha announced that Shehu had been a super agent, having worked for the German Gestapo, and had also worked for Great Britain, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, the United States and the Soviet Union. Shehu was expunged from the frequently rewritten history of Albania's glorious defeat of the Axis during the Second World War.

Having completed his last purge, by 1982 Hoxha began to shift power to his chosen successor, the reliable Ramiz Alia, the party's chief spokesperson on ideology and culture, whose niece was married to Hoxha's eldest son. While Alia strengthened the Hoxha personality cult, it is Alia who would preside over the destruction of orthodox Stalinism in Albania, which had survived virtually intact for thirty-seven years after Stalin's death. Before he could witness his utopia shatter, Hoxha died in April 1985 at the age of seventy-six. His death was a traumatic and



8.10 Socialist realist mosaic on facade of the Museum of History, Tirana, opened in 1981

momentous event for most Albanians. But because of Hoxha's forty-one years in power, more trauma was soon to follow.

Any evaluation of Hoxha must begin with at least a brief look at his complex and contradictory personality. He himself is of little help here. Although he wrote some 7,000 exhausting pages dedicated primarily to himself, what we find in this extraordinary written legacy is more the person he would like to have been and the things he would like to have accomplished. To this day, Hoxha remains something of an enigma, demonstrated at least in part by some of his monikers such as the Red Sultan or the Pharaoh of Socialism. He remains the least researched East European communist leader. He was well read and cultured but almost delighted in his own brutality. He saw the world in completely black-and-white terms – he

completely distorted events and refused to face evidence if it contradicted a position he had already taken. He was a tremendous paradox.

His impact on Albania, however, was less ambiguous and generally negative. Views of Hoxha's legacy vary rather widely, but most historians suggest that Hoxha was responsible for some important achievements. These include improvements in such specific areas as health, education, the position of women and some cultural activities. Hoxha is also credited with some more general achievements, including, despite continued grinding poverty, an increased standard of living and the reduction of the impact of divisive factors on Albanian society, such as regional loyalties and, in particular, religious differences. Hoxha created a secular state on an Albanianist base. These achievements were in part accomplished through the completion of the process of nation-state construction, building on the achievements of King Zog. Hoxha is also often credited with the development of a strong sense of nationalism, which became a focus later in his rule, nationalism fostered in part by his successful maintenance of Albania's independence and territorial integrity. Although Stalinism did not long survive him, nationalism has certainly endured, as has some of the fear that Hoxha instilled for Albania's neighbors and the victimization narrative that dominates much of the history written during the communist period.

Most historians readily concede that much of this was offset by Hoxha's rigid ideological conformity and extreme isolation, as well as his horrific legacy of terror. It seems that even those achievements for which he was given some credit were, at least in part, doomed to be

short lived as a result of his extremism and brutality. Some of the regime's initiatives died of natural causes, like most of the large Soviet and Chinese industrial establishments that now are little more than rusting hulks scarring the landscape. Most of what these monsters produced was of such low quality that there was no interest in them once the captive markets of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China had disappeared. As a result, Albania today, as in the period prior to 1945, imports its manufactured goods and technology from abroad.

Nexhmije Hoxha, like Geraldine with regard to Zog, remained fully supportive of Enver Hoxha and his legacy until her dying day, seeing him principally as a nationalist. She did, however, tell this author that the regime made a major mistake by slavishly following the pattern established by others, particularly the Soviet



8.11 The Pyramid, the former Enver Hoxha Museum, Tirana, opened 1988

Union. This tendency to import systems from abroad and apply them to Albanian conditions seems to have plagued Albania throughout the course of the twentieth century. But Nexhmije ignored the fact that the Enver Hoxha years were a story of personal and elite survival, ruthless power, pitiless repression, regular purges and ideological zealotry – all of which was roundly condemned by Albanians once they were actually given a chance to do so. With the collapse of communism in 1991, Albania was convulsed by a popular rejection of most everything associated with Hoxha and his regime. Albanians violently cast off the various aspects of the regime's ideology and the symbols thereof – beginning with the basic authority of the central government.

9

The Struggle to Establish a Democracy since 1989

When Enver Hoxha was buried with honors next to the socialist realist statue of Mother Albania in the Martyrs' Cemetery in Tirana, the date of his death, April 11, 1985, was omitted from his tombstone. Ramiz Alia, who followed Hoxha as party secretary, was responsible for the omission, arguing that such a man could never die. Unfortunately for Albania, still mired in its transition and heavily influenced by its Stalinist past, Alia may have been right. Certainly the most brutal aspects of the Hoxha regime, including its state-of-siege isolation, its political murders, its prisons, its forced labor camps and the hardships of long internal exile, are gone. But aspects of its intolerant authoritarianism, the general disregard for the well-being of its people and the best interests of the state on the part of the elite, brutal uncompromising politics and lack of a rule of law, have obstructed the path to Albania's broadly articulated goals of establishing a functioning democracy, vibrant market-oriented economy and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The Collapse of Communism

When Ramiz Alia, who also served as head of state from 1982 to 1992, came to power he was immediately faced with increasingly serious economic and social problems.



9.1 Mother Albania at Martyrs' Cemetery, Tirana

These resulted in part from the usual plague of overcentralization, persistent and often inept interference from the center, further complicated by high birth rates, overcrowding in the countryside and increasing unemployment. Albania's economic woes were further exacerbated by inefficient enterprises, mismanaged agriculture, widespread corruption and constant shortages of basic goods. In the midst of this looming disaster, Albania entered the television age with over 200,000 sets by 1985, affording Albanians the opportunity of a glimpse of the outside world via Yugoslav, Greek and Italian stations and adding to the growing disaffection. By the late 1980s, as the repressive aspects of the regime were gradually reduced, alienated segments of society became slightly bolder. Alia, who recognized the growing political, social and economic crisis, did not handle this increasingly complex situation very well. He aspired to be a reforming

communist, and like those elsewhere in Eastern Europe, his response was always reactive, tinkering with the structure when it was already too late.

To his credit, he lessened his reliance on the dreaded Sigurimi, but he was pushed into reforms in fits and starts, which prevented him from developing anything like a cohesive program. Perhaps his biggest problem was his goal, which was to preserve the basis of the Stalinist one-party state while instituting minor technical adjustments. Events, including the expanding revolutions elsewhere in Eastern Europe – in particular the rapid fall and execution of Nicolae Ceauşescu of Romania in December 1989 – stimulated the Albanian leadership to push this grudging minimalist reform further. But the communists slowly lost control as disenchantment among the population found more active expressions including spontaneous strikes and demonstrations, while the government became increasingly reluctant to use its still extensive security apparatus. At the emergency ninth plenum of the party in January 1990, the leadership voiced criticism of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and refused to consider political pluralism, hoping to contain the situation with baby steps in terms of minor economic decentralization.

That this was not working and that a degree of panic was setting in is indicated by the rapid convocation of the tenth plenum in April, which took more dramatic steps. At this important meeting, the party essentially reversed the 1967 degree that had abolished religion in Albania, reinstituted the ministry of justice that Hoxha had dissolved in 1966 and removed the 1976 restriction on foreign investment in Albania. Alia continued to hope that communism could be saved through gradual change, but



9.2 Skanderbeg Square, 1989

as with others like him in Eastern Europe, he underestimated the seriousness of the crisis and was overwhelmed by the momentum of the growing revolt.

By the spring of 1990 with little hope of an economic turnaround, Albania was faced with a slow decline in public discipline. More and more workers, those who were still employed, failed to show up for work. Peasants, who still made up the vast majority of the population, refused to deliver food to the cities and stole state-owned animals. Rage was exhibited as well, as people took revenge on the state through the destruction of state property – including government offices and schools. By July, the regime's very legitimacy was called into question when it was faced with the spectacle of thousands storming Western embassies in Tirana seeking asylum, while thousands more commandeered rusty boats in Durrës harbor and fled to Italy.

The next months saw the development of an increasingly radical, violent and confrontational street culture of a random and anarchic character that could be found in almost all of Albania's cities and towns. The government was further embarrassed when Ismail Kadare, Albania's foremost writer, sought asylum in France in October. The final push toward political pluralism, and with it the eventual end of the regime, came from students, particularly those from Albania's only university in Tirana who, unlike the majority of the intellectuals, were willing to risk open defiance of the government. Alia was concerned enough to send Dr. Sali Berisha (b. 1944), who had been one of the first to openly advocate political pluralism and was assumed, therefore, to have some standing with the students, to act as a mediator. Berisha, a Geg from the north, very skillfully used his role to commandeer and then direct the protests, which by December had finally pushed Alia to give up Europe's last political monopoly and schedule new elections. On December 12, once such a thing had become legal, the Democratic Party (DP), with a rather ill-defined ideology but based generally on democracy, market economy and national reconciliation, was born – with Berisha in a leading role.

But it required two difficult elections, during which the country nearly fell apart, before Alia was finally ousted and the transition could begin. Albania had no experience with pluralist elections and no tradition of political parties on which to draw. The new DP had little organizational experience, minimal external political contacts and severely limited financial resources. On the eve of Albania's first multiparty election in March 1991, the party was not only without a clearly articulated program –

no clear policy on land reform, and vague notions about visas to Europe and admission to the European Community (EC) – it was also without the means to spread these ideas. The party had only eight automobiles. The APL, conversely, despite rapidly deteriorating conditions, had well-entrenched national organizations, control of all radio and television and the support of Albania's conservative peasants who had little in common with the DP leadership and its urban supporters.

In an atmosphere of tense anticipation, the APL won two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Fatos Nano (b. 1952), a young economist and protégé of Nexhmije Hoxha but who seemed to favor the party's new moderate forces, was appointed prime minister. In increasingly difficult circumstances, Nano was responsible for some important achievements, including continuing to open Albania to the world, a policy begun by Alia, and the adoption of a provisional constitution that endorsed political pluralism and freedom of religion, guaranteed human and civil rights and, in a symbolic move, reduced the name of the country to simply the Republic of Albania from the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, the name assigned to the state by the constitution of 1976. The energetic Nano also saw the need for significant changes within the APL itself and he took the opportunity to do so at the tenth party congress in June. Under Nano's guidance, the party renamed itself the Socialist Party (SP). Fatos Nano was elected party president and proclaimed a new program based on the principles advocated by Western European social democratic parties. He declared himself dedicated to a gradual transition to a market economy while strengthening international ties.

As a concrete and symbolic gesture of change, Nano dissolved the dreaded Sigurimi in July.

Despite these significant political changes taking place in Tirana, the country in general simply continued to degenerate into chaos. The security apparatus, particularly the underpaid, demoralized army, continued to disintegrate, basic services collapsed, food production and distribution lagged, both internal and external immigration continued, while violent demonstrations and destruction of property increased. Cities became unsafe, particularly at night. Alia had ordered the removal of the last statue of Stalin in December 1990, which can now be found across the street behind the National Museum of Fine Arts. In February 1991, demonstrators destroyed the larger-than-life-size golden statue of Hoxha in Skanderbeg Square in Tirana, while others repeated the process in smaller towns. The old guard resisted by organizing and arming the so-called Enver Hoxha voluntary activists' union, which along with some elements of the security apparatus organized pro-Hoxha rallies throughout the country and did manage to detain and occasionally torture hundreds of the most outspoken critics of the regime. There appeared to be a threat of civil war.

These conditions were exacerbated by a virtual economic collapse – by mid-1991 only some 25 percent of the state's productive capacity was operational. In May, the already paralyzed government was faced with a nationwide strike, organized by newly independent labor groups. The government appealed for foreign help and received some in the form of Operation Pelican, a coalition of the willing spearheaded by Italy, which was having

trouble coping with the massive influx of refugees. The operation, led by 750 Italian troops, provided up to 90 percent of Albania's basic food needs until the end of December 1993 when the mission was declared complete. While starvation, which had become a tangible threat, was averted, the general decline continued, making it impossible for the Alia/Nano regime to stabilize. In June, soon after the party congress, Nano was replaced by Ylli Bufi and a "government of national stability," which included seven DP ministers. The new government had a very limited mandate, which included attempting to deal with the economic crisis and preparing for new elections which the DP had been demanding since March 1991. The first goal proved beyond the government's capacity, and the internal situation only deteriorated further. A particularly severe winter gripped the country in 1991. There was no fuel – and no real functioning economy. Serious disturbances continued. In December 1991 Bufi was replaced by the more able Vilson Ahmeti, who called together some independent technocrats who did at least adopt a new electoral code and managed to finally schedule new elections for March 1992.

This time, the DP, which had withdrawn from the coalition government in December, had time to prepare, having received both advice and funding from the increasingly active, anti-communist, diaspora. During the campaign, Berisha as always was perhaps too lavish with his promises. Among other things, he suggested that a DP victory would result in a massive influx of foreign aid as well as increased quotas for visas to the West. His platform also called for radical political and economic reform and the restoration of law and order. All of these promises



9.3 Destruction of Hoxha statue, Tirana, 1991

were delivered with Berisha's dynamic campaigning and personal tenacity. In the end, in a generally fair and honest election, the DP won a substantial victory. The party gained over 60 percent of the popular vote, doing well in both urban and rural constituencies. Ramiz Alia resigned in April and the new parliament elected Sali Berisha as Albania's first post-communist president.

President Berisha in Power, 1992–1997

Sali Berisha's task was more than daunting, and he attacked it with energy and uncompromising determination. At least in the initial period, he was able to achieve some far-reaching political, economic and social reforms. Berisha began by rapidly dismantling some aspects of the previous one-party state. He removed communist symbols from the coat of arms and the flag and banned the APL.

Wide-ranging purges were carried out in all of the ministries and remaining security organs.

Early economic and social change was much more profound. The process of privatization began prior to the Berisha presidency but significantly accelerated under the new government which enthusiastically adopted the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) macroeconomic stability package, or the shock therapy approach. This program, which has been blamed for contributing to social collapse elsewhere in Eastern Europe, included rapid privatization, removing restrictions on imports, abandoning price controls and phasing out subsidies to unprofitable or even marginal businesses. These policies, supplemented by nearly $1 billion in foreign assistance (1992–1995) and $350 million in immigrant remittances, did reverse the trend, pushing the GDP into positive numbers again by 1993. But the costs of these programs were heavier than they were elsewhere. First, the economic turnaround was based principally on consumption rather than on manufacturing and agriculture, resulting in a massive foreign trade deficit. The cost to the average Albanian included extensive unemployment and for the tens of thousands who had become dependent on government subsidies and government services, which were cut significantly in line with IMF instructions, even deeper poverty. While some of course thrived, for most the concepts of democracy and a free-market economy became synonymous with insecurity and hardship.

The social changes accompanying this upheaval were also profound. Seemingly overnight, Albanians were released from one of the most restrictive and isolated social structures in Europe. Newfound personal freedoms

were perhaps best exhibited through automobiles, televisions and simple mobility. During the Hoxha years, private automobiles had been outlawed, so that by 1989 there were no more that 200 cars in the entire country. Once the restrictions were lifted, used cars, many of them stolen, were imported by the tens of thousands. By 1992, Albanians were driving 120,000 private vehicles. The lifting of Albania's draconian travel restrictions not only allowed hundreds of thousands to flee abroad, but also resulted in extensive internal migration with entire poverty-stricken northern villages resettling in hastily constructed squalid shanty towns near Tirana and other cities. Even the past was changed, with history cleansed by the new leadership at the Albanian Academy of Sciences that oversaw the production of new textbooks focused on the contribution of the nationalist forces during the Second World War.

Religious freedom was confirmed, and while there was periodic tension, and Berisha's adherence to the Islamic Conference in 1994 raised some concern abroad, religious issues have not reassumed the significance they had in the nineteenth century. Decades of extreme secularization under Hoxha had produced a highly secular society. And because of the lack of qualified priests and imams, even those who had practiced religion in private during the dictatorship did so without a proper understanding of doctrine. The communists had killed the knowledge of religion. But since the 1990s, Albania has experienced a significant increase in religious observance. Faced with social and economic insecurity, much of the population turned or returned to religion, a trend that seems to be increasing. A poll conducted in 2011 indicated that 48.4



9.4 Sali Berisha

percent of those surveyed said that religion was an important part of their lives, up from 32.5 percent in 2006. The census of 2011 saw 56.7 percent identify as Sunni Muslims, 10 percent as Catholics, 6.7 percent as Orthodox, 2 percent as Bektashi and 13.7 percent chose none of the above.

As Zog and Hoxha feared, foreign influence followed in the wake of this increasing religiosity among Albanians. With the collapse of communism, missionaries of many faiths flocked to Albania – a veritable invasion of charities leading to intense rivalry. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states

offered hundreds of scholarships, and the returning students brought with them conservative "Arab" Islam, associated with the stricter Wahhabism. Although their influence is small, by employing the Internet, social media and digital TV the so-called radicals have remained a factor. Their principal rivals are the Turks, who espoused what has been referred to as "European" Islam. With the Turks, there is a political dimension as well, as Ankara pursued what has been termed neo-Ottomanization, an attempt to rebuild influence in those areas that had once been part of the Ottoman empire. But while the Turks competed with the radicals, they split among themselves.

One of the first extensive foreign education initiatives in Albania following the collapse of communism was sponsored by the vast organization of Fetullah Gülen, a Sunni Muslim from Turkey who now lives in the United States. After a falling out with Turkish President Recep Erdoğan, the Gülen organization and the Turkish government competed for the allegiance of the faithful in Albania. The competition for souls also resulted in a religious building boom with new churches and mosques, new Catholic and Orthodox cathedrals in Tirana, culminating in the Turkish government–sponsored construction of the yet-to-be-completed Great Mosque of Tirana, the largest mosque in the Balkans with enough space to accommodate 5,000 worshipers. With its four minarets towering over parliament next door, it looks very much like the great mosques of Istanbul. All of these colossal new religious buildings have dwarfed the small Bektashi *tekkes*, and indeed this form of Islam is struggling against the tide of geopolitical influence that is manifested by these large new religious structures. Ultimately though,

with the government decree outlawing religious political parties, religion has not become a contentious issue in everyday politics and public life.

While some of these social changes can be considered at least partially positive, others were decidedly not. Newfound freedom led to a rapid rise in both organized and random crime, in a country that had been relatively free of the petty variety. Albania proved ideal for the rise of international criminal organizations. It was a poor area in a chaotic state surrounded by wealthy countries, with a legacy of clans that provided organization and codes of conduct, and many unemployed former secret policemen with special talents and networks for sale. These new criminal organizations were able to take advantage of the breakdown of the law enforcement system, porous borders, a growing diaspora and migrant labor population that often served as a vehicle. The insecurity in the Balkan region in general – and in particular the collapse of Yugoslavia and the sanctions imposed on what remained – offered unique smuggling opportunities, similar perhaps to the period of prohibition in the United States. Individuals in these brutal organizations maintained their old contacts with the political class to the extent that the state became further ensnared. Violence was further increased by the revival of blood feuds, principally in the north of Albania.

The end of communism also brought in its wake a significantly deteriorated status for Albania's women. While Hoxha, at least in theory, held to the Marxist concept of gender equality, with the beginning of the transition even the fiction of equality disappeared. With the collapse of communism, traditional attitudes and

actions resurfaced, often returning women to the role of chattel. With the coming of significant unemployment, women were always the first to lose their jobs. They found themselves once again confined to the house, producing goods to fulfill many of the family's basic needs. To be sure, the new Albania provided women some benefits, including access to contraception, an easing of abortion and divorce restrictions and enhanced mobility. But much of this was offset by the return of patriarchal predominance, the virtual disappearance of women from politics and new dangers including abduction for purposes of sex trafficking and rape – the latter being ills generally new to Albania.

Still, social and economic trends could be said to be moving in a generally positive direction. The same cannot be said of politics, which remains a major problem. The authoritarian and intolerant nature of Albania's elite precluded the negotiation and compromise that were desperately needed for Albania's new political forces to move steadily in the direction of democracy. Despite his singular courage during the last stages of the old regime, Berisha seemed unable to distance himself from an unhealthy political culture. He ultimately proved to be the poster child of old school politics, with the DP becoming his personal vehicle to increased power. He refused to allow any internal dissent within the party, and when his policies were questioned and the continuation of his presidency challenged, he struck out with everything at his disposal – willing to use violence and willing to undermine Albania's fledgling democracy in the process.

President Berisha's political honeymoon was rather short lived. Although the DP won the local elections of

July 1992, it polled only 43 percent of the vote, down from 65 percent in April. This outcome resulted generally from continuing, even growing, insecurity, popular disappointment with the pace of economic recovery and reform, discord within the ranks of the DP and overconfidence on the part of Berisha. Progressive elements within the party accused him of ignoring socioeconomic problems, of cronyism in order to augment his power base and attempting to mask his failure and growing authoritarianism through settling of old scores and vengeance against former communists.

Much of the criticism was justified. Berisha was increasingly influenced by former political prisoners who were uninterested in the original DP platform of national reconciliation. Although a former low-ranking communist functionary himself, Berisha found revenge against former communists useful in distracting the population. One certainly expected that many former communists would be replaced, but Berisha launched a wholesale purge of the security organs, the ministries and state administrative structures. Since there were not nearly enough qualified DP militants to fill the vacancies, Berisha required the University of Tirana to construct a six-month "how to be a judge or prosecutor" training course that enrolled many who had no legal background whatsoever. Those within the party who objected to this procedure were simply removed. With his new judges in place, Berisha targeted, among others, former politburo members like Alia and Hoxha's widow. Their trials had many of the attributes of traditional communist show trials, including television coverage and young unqualified judges humiliating older defendants. Fatos Nano, too, was

arrested on corruption charges and, in what many observers saw as primarily a political trial, sentenced to twelve years in prison.

As Berisha's authoritarianism intensified, Albania's fledgling new media became a target as well. Given the lack of an underground or dissident press during the Hoxha period upon which to build, the construction of a free press was complex in Albania. With radio and television remaining under state control, Albania's first independent print reporters were challenged by the concept of press responsibility. Press outlets themselves tended to be the mouthpieces of political parties and therefore highly partisan. Employing invective reminiscent of the Hoxha era, much of the press became increasingly critical of Berisha. The president struck back with violence and through his courts. Policemen and thugs, often interchangeable, attacked the offices of the opposition press as well as individual reporters. A restrictive press law was passed in 1993 that instituted high taxes, allowed for heavy fines and imprisonment and did much to cow the press into silence or self-censorship, which in turn encouraged the people to question the value of print media, reducing readership.

With each new election, the president came under greater pressure and, in response, became more authoritarian. By 1994, the Berisha regime had finally readied a new draft constitution that would have further augmented the power of the president. Lacking sufficient support in parliament, Berisha referred the constitution to a popular referendum, but despite extensive manipulation lost by a wide margin. Stunned and angered, the president became even more determined and began planning early for the

upcoming parliamentary elections of May 1996, with which he intended to cement his power.

Albania had degenerated into an illusion of democracy with an isolated authoritarian president, facing no effective parliamentary opposition supported by an overly large, highly politicized security apparatus. While some in the West continued to support him as the road to stability – Italian politicians referred to him as "the good doctor" – the important support of the United States was effectively undermined by the heavily manipulated elections of 1996. With the electoral defeat of 1994 fresh in his mind, in 1996 Berisha was leaving nothing to chance. Preparations began in 1995 with the introduction of the so-called Genocide Law, which barred former top-ranking APL and state officials, as well as communist-era secret police informants, from holding political office until 2002. After selectively releasing files from the security services archives, Berisha was able to disqualify 142 parliamentary nominees, only three of whom were Democrats. A series of other changes in the electoral law also clearly favored the DP.

The campaign itself was reminiscent of communist-era propaganda, with Berisha branding the opposition, whom he accused of terrorism, as the "Red Front" subsidized by Albania's traditional enemies, the Serbs and the Greeks. Security forces and thugs were used to disrupt opposition political meetings and harass and physically attack opposition supporters and candidates and the press. On the day of the election, the situation deteriorated further to the extent that the Socialists withdrew from the election two hours prior to the closing of the polls claiming, with some justification, that the DP was perpetrating a massive fraud.

President Berisha was elated with his victory – the DP now controlled 87 percent of the seats in parliament, was in firm control of the police and the courts and had cowed the media. The principle of the one-party state had been reconstructed. The cost of this victory, however, was enormous. The election was roundly condemned by the United States, the European Union (EU), various human rights organizations like Helsinki Watch and monitoring groups like the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The United States, which until this point had been Berisha's strongest supporter, suggested that the entire election be rerun, while members of the opposition compared the election to a coup. The 1996 election was viewed as a litmus test of Albania's commitment to democracy and speedy reform, and Berisha had failed the test. Despite the progress for which he was responsible, Berisha's domestic and international credibility was badly tarnished by this episode and has yet to fully recover.

The Popular Revolt of 1997

Before the president could even attempt to deal with the outcome of the 1996 election, he did much to create an even more serious crisis that not only eventually swept him away but also caused what could be considered Europe's first successful popular armed uprising since the nineteenth century.

In the existing atmosphere of political tension and stalled social and economic reform, it likely would not have taken much to push Albania over the edge. The crisis began with the collapse of a series of pyramid investment

schemes. In many ways, Albania was ripe for such activity given its cash economy, the large amounts of currency controlled by criminal elements and the considerable immigrant remittances that made up some 15 percent of the GDP. The schemes began rather slowly in the 1990s, but by the summer and fall of 1996, as those who had invested early began realizing massive profits of up to 50 percent a month, they expanded dramatically, ultimately involving 65 to 75 percent of all Albanian families. The funds likely collected at least $1 billion. Many impoverished Albanians sold everything they had, including homes, farms, livestock and personal belongings, fully expecting to live off their investments for the rest of their lives.

The schemes expanded because there were so few areas of legitimate investment in Albania and because scheme managers effectively argued that they had diversified and had essentially become successful investment bankers.



9.5 Protesting the collapse of pyramid schemes, 1997

They also expanded because of the astonishing failure of the leadership on all sides, with both the DP and the SP benefiting directly from specific schemes. Senior government officials ignored IMF warnings, called the schemes good business and attacked those few in the media who were critical.

Inevitably, as pyramids do, the schemes began to falter. As they did so, by January 1997 popular panic set in and protests, which quickly became violent, broke out in Tirana and some southern cities. In Vlorë, Lushnjë and Berat, angry investors attacked and set fire to government buildings, including city halls, courts, police stations, land registry offices and DP offices. The police attempted to curtail this escalating violence but to no avail, as it became increasingly clear that hundreds of thousands faced financial ruin. The situation took a major turn for the worse when the large Gjallica fund collapsed in Vlorë in early February. The Socialist seaport town erupted in violence, and for days Berisha's security forces battled the citizens before having to abandon the town.

The growing unrest spread rapidly to other southern towns where the Socialists were strong, often with the direct involvement of high-ranking SP officials. With this crisis, many Socialists and other party members saw an opportunity to be rid of Berisha. Many who had fled abroad, fearing Berisha's vengeance, returned to help organize the resistance around disaffected former military and secret police officers, people whose experience with the concept of Hoxha's long-practiced militia strategy would confound the government's attempt to restore order by force.

By the beginning of March, spreading unrest had degenerated into full-scale rebellion. On March 2,

Berisha finally proclaimed a state of emergency and issued a shoot to kill order, to be administered by the feared SHIK, the National Informative Service or *Shërbimi Informativ Kombëtar*, the new secret police, which had already arrested hundreds in the capital. On the very next day, in a move condemned by the internationals and both domestic opponents and supporters, Berisha had his now-puppet parliament reelect him to an additional five-year term as president, after which parliament ceased to meet.

Berisha's situation took a decided turn for the worse when the army began to disintegrate. Technically a force of 55,000 with hundreds of armored vehicles, the army proved to be less than useless to Berisha. The president had purged the officer corps, replacing trained personnel with unqualified party militants. This served to further demoralize the troops who already suffered from miserable pay and very poor living conditions. Rather than fire on civilians, soldiers simply went home, abandoning stocked armories. The population, particularly in the south where Hoxha had stockpiled most of his weapons in anticipation of an invasion from Greece, quickly raided the weapons depots, eventually making off with close to one million Kalashnikov assault rifles, with hundreds of millions of rounds of ammunition, tanks and artillery pieces and sophisticated Chinese surface-to-air missiles. While much of the latter was thankfully unusable, almost anyone can fire a Kalashnikov, allowing insurgents to take and hold large southern towns in which banks and government offices were sacked, shops looted and prisons thrown open. Ultimately, every prison in the country was opened, releasing all of Albania's convicted criminals, as well as

those who were considered to be political prisoners including Fatos Nano, whom Berisha quickly pardoned.

The criminals rapidly armed themselves and added to the chaos and terror. By mid-March at least 15,000 Albanians had fled to Italy and an estimated 2,000 had been killed. The country was being ransacked. Nearly every industrial and manufacturing plant was looted and destroyed – even schools and hospitals were not spared. Spartak Ngjela, the minister of justice, announced with considerable candor that all structures of the state had failed and that Albania had descended into a Hobbesian state of nature.

Still, Berisha had been able to hold on to Tirana – in part through SHIK terror whose headquarters was guarded by six tanks. He was also able to maintain control of much of the north, which was less effected by the pyramid schemes. There, ardent supporters had also broken into armories and had sworn to defend the president. As the insurgents began moving on Tirana, a civil war drawn along traditional north–south lines became increasingly likely. The north versus the south dynamic became more pronounced as the crisis progressed and indeed remains a factor to this day. Although Berisha had pledged never to negotiate with "red terrorists," once it became clear to him that he could not rely on foreign military intervention, he was forced into a humiliating compromise with those opposition leaders still at large in Tirana. On March 9, 1997, an agreement was reached that included the construction of a so-called national reconciliation government, the proclamation of a general amnesty for rebels and new parliamentary elections, accompanied by a referendum on the restoration of the

defunct monarchy of King Zog, both of which were scheduled for June. The latter was likely intended by Berisha to deflect at least some attention away from his own failure.

Although significant disorder continued, this political agreement and the arrival of foreign troops helped to avert the threatened civil war and an uneasy standoff ensued. Albania's neighbors, fearful of yet another massive wave of unwelcome refugees, put together Operation Alba, which commenced in April 1997. Finally responding to desperate pleas from Berisha, 6,300 European troops, with the Italians in the lead, dispersed throughout the south and central lowlands on what was billed as a humanitarian mission. Although Alba troops did not intervene in the fighting or attempt to disarm the now heavily armed population, they did create at least a modicum of calm during which another seriously flawed election took place.

Following some procedural agreements, including revision of the "Genocide Law," the vicious and violent campaign led to possibly the least democratic election in post-communist Eastern Europe. The campaign process was marred by bomb attacks and several assassination attempts against Berisha, who at one point was caught in a gun battle that wounded at least eight people. Actual campaigning was impossible for one party or the other in much of the country. There was little debate, with Nano, despite occasional vaguely progressive rhetoric, simply running against Berisha and rather disingenuously promising to compensate pyramid scheme victims. Berisha just ran against the communists. An added feature was the sight of the pretender to the throne, Leka, campaigning

with his small private army. Immediately after learning that the monarchy had been rejected, Leka declared the election to be stolen and attempted an armed uprising. Dressed in fatigues, accessorized with pearl-handled revolvers and grenades, Leka led a group of several hundred armed supporters along the principal boulevard in Tirana. To the surprise of no one, shooting eventually erupted and after one of his militants was killed, the pretender fled back into exile.

Berisha and the DP paid a heavy price for their adherence to the old ways, for their arrogance and incompetence, their intolerance and corruption. Albanians overwhelmingly voted against Berisha as opposed to voting for the SP, which was rewarded with 101 out of 155 seats in parliament. On July 23, President Berisha resigned in disgrace. Despite the appalling example of democracy that produced this result, the international community had no choice but to sign off on the outcome.

Berisha had started with such hope – declaring to a large crowd in 1992, "Hello Europe, we hope we find you well." And Europe had responded. But he had squandered the good will of the international community and the nation with his inability to move past Albania's political culture of authoritarianism and rigidity. Perhaps it was too much to ask of him, or of any Albanian politician so soon after the collapse of Stalinism. But the damage brought on by this failure of leadership was enormous not only to the state and the well-being of the people, but also to the very concept of democracy and a market economy. Albanians who had yet to really experience either found themselves wondering whether these goals were indeed worth achieving.

The Nano Years, 1997–2005

Fatos Nano had walked out of an unguarded cell in the middle of March 1997 and by the end of June he was again prime minister with a powerful mandate – it had been a remarkable political comeback and could have been used to accomplish much needed reform, reconstruction of an economy that had been shattered by the 1997 crisis and national reconciliation. But like Berisha, Nano was a creature of his age and was immersed in Albania's political culture of revenge and authoritarianism. Rather than attempt to diverge from that culture, Fatos Nano in many ways was its embodiment. Nano, who had gained prominence as an economist at the Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies, was considered a dedicated communist. While he was perhaps more open to reform than some of the dinosaurs on the politburo, he had opposed real pluralism and a market economy until the very end of one-party rule. But his native intelligence allowed him to rise quickly in the rapidly disintegrating APL and, as we have seen, he served briefly as prime minister in 1991, while still in his thirties. He surrounded himself with some of the old hard-liners, sidelined many dedicated reformers and left little room for internal party discussion. His rhetoric in the run-up to his second stint as prime minister, like that of Berisha, envisioned meeting the needs of the population, establishing a free-market economy based on fiscal discipline, reducing corruption and enhancing respect for human rights. The reality that Nano created was something quite different.

Nano set his tone early, and, like Berisha's, it tended to be dogmatic, confrontational and, initially at least, focused on the settling of scores. Like Berisha, Nano did

much to undermine the notion of a civil service by initiating a broad-ranging purge of the security apparatus, the judiciary and the state administration, almost all ambassadors and generals. Albania's recent historical past was once again rewritten under the close supervision of all new university rectors and new leadership at the Academy of Sciences. SP militants replaced DP militants. Once the judiciary was secure, Nano ended the ongoing trial of some thirty former communists, dropped the remnants of the "Genocide Law" and arrested prominent DP members from among those who had not fled the country. The prime minister, ignoring many of the reformers and foreshadowing later party splits, quickly constructed a government composed of many from the former communist regime and almost all from the south, not bothering to obtain party approval beforehand.

Nano quickly turned his attention to restoring some semblance of order and was able to calm the south with the help of pro-Socialist criminal bands, who would continue to play an important role in the SP government for years to come. The north was more problematic, but, by the end of November, stability was returning, allowing Nano to focus on other critical issues, often simply continuing the policies of the previous regime. Certainly, slow progress on some issues was registered. Albania continued haltingly toward democratic consolidation, establishing the framework for a market economy, and international integration. Nano proved less oppressive when it came to press freedom and slowly growing civil society organizations.

Privatization continued, with the industrial base and banking system privatized by 2005. This has helped to

at least establish the basic conditions for market-driven competition. Annual economic growth remained at about 5 percent during the SP years due mainly to construction, small businesses and the service sectors, but Albania had of course started from a rather low level in 1991. The Bank of Albania reporting that per capita income reached $2,883 in 2006, but because distribution was extremely uneven, rural poverty remained a major problem with fully a quarter of Albanians living below the poverty line. It is likely that about half of the GDP came from criminal activities, but the large influx of cash tended to keep the lek, Albania's currency, quite stable. Unemployment officially hovered around 15 percent but with the near-subsistence farming in reality was likely higher than 30 percent, exacerbated by underemployment. Foreign direct investment remained minimal and the business climate, restricted by a permanent energy crisis marked by daily disruptions in the supply of electricity and drinking water, serious environmental problems, extensive corruption and a still-developing concept of a rule of law, remained unattractive. With a high internal state debt and negative trade balance, economically Albania did little more than continue to creep forward.

Part of both the cause and effect of this painfully slow level of economic advance was the continuing problem of the brain drain. Although the various crises of course accelerated the process, even during periods of relative stability Albanians continued to flee their country in astonishing numbers. A total of 720,000 Albanians are estimated to have emigrated between 1989 and 2001, representing well over 30 percent of the total population. Naturally, this number included many of the best and the

brightest whose talents were very much needed. The professions, particularly health care and education, suffered. While under the Hoxha regime Albanians had been afforded some basic universal health care, with the collapse, village clinics were often destroyed and the medical personal assigned there often left for Tirana or abroad. Even in the cities, however, there was a significant degeneration of the system. Apart from the shortage of trained personnel and limited resources, the chairman of the parliamentary health committee estimated in 2006 that the level of medical technology was at least forty years behind Albania's Balkan neighbors. He suggested that health care in general was in a state of crisis hobbled by a communist centralized bureaucracy pressured by a rudimentary market economy. This clash of systems resulted in extensive corruption, endangering the health of many.

Education, which had been touted as another success story under Hoxha, suffered from related problems. Apart from the lack of adequately trained personnel and resource problems, education – in particular the field of history – became a political battleground. Central to the struggle was the issue of resistance and collaboration during the Second World War, an era that continues to dominate the national psyche. The war remained something of a leitmotif during the communist period, conferring legitimacy on Hoxha and the party who labeled as traitors all those who failed to participate in partisan resistance. When the DP came to power, personnel and textbooks were replaced, with the new leadership of the Albanian Academy producing a new version of the war intended to make science free of indoctrinated, political party tactics. Instead, science was captured by different



9.6 Children at school, Kurvelesh, 1997

indoctrinated political party tactics and new textbooks were produced reflecting DP reinterpretations of the war. Once the SP came to power, predictably, those books were withdrawn and replaced, moving Albania back to a view of the war somewhat closer to the original APL version. And so it goes – the topic remains a major issue to this day.

Most of the socioeconomic problems of the Nano period were at least exacerbated by the continuation of poisonous, often murderous politics, precipitated by the continuing inability of Albania's elite to distance

themselves from the Hoxhaist past. The tone was set immediately in 1997, when the DP boycotted what Berisha called the new "parliament of Kalashnikovs." Berisha escalated the usual invective by frequently referring to Nano as a criminal and a drug addict, while DP militants often degenerated into terrorist gangs. Following a DP rally, one such gang, consisting of dozens of heavily armed thugs, attacked Shkodër in February 1998, looting and burning the state bank and the university.

Later in 1998, Berisha took one step beyond his noisy obstructionism and attempted a coup. Political tension in Tirana increased during the summer of 1998 and then exploded in September with the assassination of the DP leader Azem Hajdari on September 12, 1998. While there remains considerable confusion concerning who was responsible, the immediate aftermath constituted another serious political crisis. Berisha saw the opportunity and seized it, leading some 2,000 militants, many of them armed, into the streets with Hajdari's coffin, which was used to pound against the doors of Nano's office. One group of demonstrators attacked and occupied the state-run television studios, broadcasting the message that "we have taken over," while others looted central Tirana, shouting, "Death to Nano." The prime minister panicked and fled to Macedonia, leaving President Rexhep Meidani to call in the troops and disperse Berisha's ragtag militia. Following three days of chaos, along with 8 dead and nearly 100 injured, basic order was restored.

Nano's behavior during the crisis, as well as the animosity of President Meidani, who disliked the prime minister's excessive drinking and high-living, undermined

him to the benefit of a young group of reformers within the party. Nano was forced to resign on September 28, 1998, and was replaced by the relatively untainted SP secretary general, Pandeli Majko, a somewhat minor figure who left but scant traces. The thirty-one-year-old new prime minister was not only faced with the continuing challenge of crime, violence and public disorder, but was also forced to deal with the deteriorating situation in Kosovo and Macedonia.

In the midst of these challenges, Majko did manage to oversee the adoption of a new constitution. With no functioning opposition and despite a DP boycott and general obstructionism, and with considerable assistance from internationals and popular input, the new prime minister approved a relatively progressive constitution that vested power in the prime minister and the cabinet, securing its implementation through a national referendum in November 1998. Majko was also in part responsible for Albania's receiving much-needed international approval for its moderate stance and cooperative attitude on the Kosovo war of 1998–1999 and the Macedonian violence of 2001, despite the DP playing the nationalist card and portraying the SP as un-Albanian and pro-Slav. Although these conflicts were not crucial factors in Albanian internal politics, internal instability was further challenged as Albania was inundated with refugees.

The war in Kosovo had turned international in March 1999 when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) began a bombing campaign against Serbian targets in Serbia proper and in Kosovo. The Serbs responded with a well-planned brutal campaign aimed at the expulsion of the entire ethnic Albanian population

from Kosovo, during which thousands were killed. Almost half a million Albanian refugees from Kosovo flooded into Albania, swelling Albania's population by nearly 17 percent in a two-month period. In a state that could barely take care of its own needs, Albanians demonstrated remarkable selflessness, sharing what little they had with the refugees. Under these difficult circumstances, the two Albanian communities in a way were given the opportunity to get to know each other for the first time. Along with extensive foreign assistance, the Majko government was able to avoid what could have become a major humanitarian crisis – and both Nano and Majko were able to avoid war with Serbia. In general, Albania has avoided any serious long-term tensions with its neighbors since 1989.

Despite these successes, the hostile relationship between the two major parties and growing instability at the top of the SP power structure continued to complicate Albania's road forward. In October 1999, Nano, who had maintained the loyalty of a large group of SP deputies, was reelected leader of the SP, defeating Majko, who had hoped to solidify his position. Majko subsequently resigned as prime minister and was replaced by Deputy Prime Minister Ilir Meta (b. 1969), like Majko a former student leader and a leading figure in the "reformist" group. Nano continued to intrigue behind the scenes, forcing the resignation of a number of Meta supporters in the cabinet and blocking the appointment of their successors. Unable to resolve the crisis, an embittered Meta resigned in early 2002 to be replaced by his predecessor Majko. Within days, however, Nano had convinced the SP steering committee to combine the positions of party leader and prime minister, which

effectively forced the resignation of Majko. Nano's return as prime minister began with some promise, as the DP and SP had given in to European pressure and in July 2002 elected a consensus president in Alfred Moisiu, who proved to be quite effective in his limited role. But the period of reconciliation was short lived, and Nano soon returned to monopolizing power in the party and government.

The SP of course also continued to battle the DP in parliament, on those occasions when the DP was not boycotting the body, in the streets and in a series of bitterly contested elections in 2000, 2001 and 2003. These elections, although not as flawed as that of 1996, were accompanied by intimidation, violence and manipulation. Party militants confronted each other in the streets, threatened voters at the polls, while party officials occasionally altered civil registries, and stuffed or stole ballot boxes. These and other problems resulted in frequent re-voting and protracted battles in Albania's politicized courts, delaying the announcement of the results. None of these elections fully measured up to international standards, giving the opposition reason to question not only the legitimacy of the ballots but also that of the governments they produced. Once again, as a result of the enormous energy that these parallel struggles consumed, real progress was slow during the Nano years. While many lived in poverty, criminal organizations acted with impunity, having infiltrated government at every level. Albania gained an unenviable reputation as a haven for traffickers who had turned the state into both a major transit country and a major source country. The police and the courts remained

politicized, inefficient and corrupt. Albania was labeled one of the most corrupt states in the world.

Nano, who seemed comfortable with the status quo, likely would have remained the prime minister had it not been for a major split in his party in 2004. Ilir Meta, who had considered defecting as early as 1996, finally decided that he could no longer work with Nano and organized one of many new parties, the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), just before the parliamentary elections of July 2005. Nano certainly had other disadvantages going into the election. Corruption was growing, his lifestyle increasingly became an issue and he seemed unconcerned as the nation struggled with several tragedies resulting in significant loss of life. And the DP ran an effective, generally professional campaign, emphasizing an anti-corruption, or "clean hands" platform. But many Albanians were still wary of Berisha, and, as is generally the case, Albanians voted against the incumbent SP in favor of the DP. It was the defection of Meta that resulted in the narrow SP defeat and a peaceful transfer of power.

The election itself was, if less flawed than previous elections, not without its challenges, including manipulation, inaccurate voter lists, fraud in the form of multiple voting, widespread vote buying and violence against political activists, and once again it did not meet international standards. The intrusion of crime into the process was, if anything, more pronounced, due principally to the changing nature of crime in Albania. Prior to 2003–2005, violent armed gangs, although often attached to a particular political party, openly challenged the state and its officials. But as state institutions slowly

strengthened and enforcement became more effective, crime was forced to adjust. Armed gangs were replaced by more efficient and nimble criminal networks, which, instead of attacking state institutions, established strong ties with state segments. Organized crime, business and politics became intimately connected in a complicated relationship of exploitation for mutual benefit. Crime provided funding in the form of bribery and campaign support in exchange for the state neutralizing law enforcement through the appointment of corrupted individuals or party militants to positions within the judiciary and security services. Criminal intrusion into elections, including the election of 2005, became widespread, with candidates being able to buy seats in parliament for between $100,000 and $300,000. Voters meanwhile were offered about $4 for a vote and were able to prove that they had voted properly by taking a picture of their ballot with a cell phone camera. By these means, the DP was able to win fifty-six seats outright, which increased to eighty-one with the addition of coalition partners. The SP meanwhile was forced to settle for forty-one seats, a result that encouraged Nano to return to the pleasures of the casinos in Vienna. The position of SP head was assumed by the forty-one-year-old flamboyant and celebrated mayor of Tirana, Edi Rama (b. 1964).

Prime Minister Berisha in Power, 2005–2013

Following the construction of a coalition composed principally of the DP and the right-wing Republican Party, Berisha returned to power on September 3, 2005, this time as prime minister. While there was perhaps no

"new" Sali Berisha, he abjured much of the violence and extremism that had characterized his presidency, encouraged to do so by a strengthening media and increased scrutiny on the part of the internationals. And like the Socialists, the DP was opened to some new and younger people with fresh ideas, and as a result Albania experienced some progress during Berisha's second incarnation. But the success was principally in the international context. Because his government adhered very closely to American foreign policy priorities, particularly with regard to the war on terror, the US government lavished benefits on Berisha. In 2007, during a rather poorly received European tour, George W. Bush became the first US president to visit Albania. Bush was received like a rock star in Albania and Berisha basked in the reflected glory. Bush had roads named for him, a statue was erected and mothers named their newborns in his honor. Even today, many Albanian towns have bars or restaurants named after Bush or his wife, Laura. Bush's visit was followed by an even greater prize, an invitation for Albania to become a member of NATO in 2008. Few objective observers would have concluded that Albania was in any way ready for this responsibility; indeed, it seems clear that the decision was more political than military. But US foreign policy in Albania, as was the case elsewhere, was more interested in stability than democracy and NATO membership was both a reward for Berisha and a step that, it was hoped, would enhance internal stability. For Albania and Berisha it was another indication that Euro-Atlantic integration was continuing apace. The EU in the meantime had signed a Stability and Association Agreement with Albania in 2006, which was

seen as an important initial step forward to eventual candidate status in the EU. After considerable delay, Albania was awarded visa-free travel to Europe in 2010, which predictably led to a flood of asylum seekers. Still, for Berisha this was a significant success.

On the domestic front, Berisha's record was considerably more mixed. Unemployment remained high and the annual budget continued to rely heavily on foreign aid and immigrant remittances. Inefficient small-plot agriculture remained the principal employer, while weak infrastructure, power and water shortages and rampant corruption discouraged much-needed foreign investment. Rather than addressing these serious problems and basic needs, Berisha conserved his energy for the struggle to enhance his power through increased control of ostensibly independent administrative institutions and local government units. He targeted SHISH, the State Intelligence Service or *Shërbimi Informativ Shtetëror*, the successor to SHIK, and the public prosecutor, whose constitutionally mandated term of office had not yet expired and who was investigating senior officials for corruption. Berisha was eventually able to dispatch the recalcitrant general prosecutor, but only after the election of a nonconsensus president, Bamir Topi, in 2007.

Further evidence of increased corruption included a series of high-profile scandals, the most tragic of which was a deadly explosion at a munitions decommissioning plant in the suburbs of Tirana that left 26 dead, 300 injured and some 5,000 structures damaged or destroyed. The incident not only exposed the hiring of children for dangerous work, but also implicated government officials at the highest level, as well as, apparently,

members of Berisha's family. This scandal was quickly followed by another munitions-related scandal in which a twenty-two-year-old American adventurer, Efraim Diveroli, managed to convince the American Pentagon to award him a $300 million contract to supply the Afghan army with munitions. Diveroli then made a deal with Albanian officials to repackage expired Chinese shells from the remnants of Albania's communist-era arsenal and ship them to Afghanistan. Once again, Albanian government officials at the highest levels, as well as a member of Berisha's family, were implicated.

Perhaps the most egregious scandal during Berisha's tenure as prime minister involved his deputy prime minister Ilir Meta. In January 2011, a videotape broadcast on Albanian national television showed Meta asking the minister of the economy to intervene in a power plant concession tender and offering a substantial stake in the enterprise as well as six-figure payment. Meta was charged with the criminal offenses of bribery and abuse of power. The Albanian general prosecutor began an investigation and asked US experts, including FBI specialists, to confirm the authenticity of the videotape. When US experts pronounced the video as authentic, the Albanian Supreme Court excluded the foreign analysis on procedural grounds and hired Albanian "experts" who, despite the fact that they admitted that they had neither the license nor the proper equipment to review the video, concluded that the video could have been manipulated. Meta was unanimously acquitted, returned to politics and was eventually elected president of Albania in 2017.

That this latest outrage struck a nerve is indicated by a massive anti-government demonstration in front of the

prime minister's office in Tirana, involving an estimated 200,000 demonstrators. The situation quickly degenerated into violence, leaving four dead, over 150 injured and scores arrested. Berisha maintained that he was the subject of a coup attempt, orchestrated by Edi Rama and other SP leaders, President Topi, now a thorn in Berisha's side, the chief prosecutor, the head of the secret service and the media. Once again, internationals were required to step in and calm the situation.

Elections continued to be problematic as well. The international community hoped that Albania had finally turned the corner and that the June 2009 parliamentary election would indicate the end of the "transition." Years of intense pressure from the EU and the United States, plus the largest election observer contingent in the history of Albanian elections, created expectations of the election conforming to international standards. Once again, however, the election turned out to be dirty and exhausting. Berisha and Rama accused each other of homosexuality, domestic violence, insanity and fascism. Police attacked newspaper offices, while voter manipulation and violence were widespread.

Berisha narrowly held on to power, but, unlike in the 2005 election when both parties accepted the result, the Socialists refused to recognize the DP victory, charging manipulation, intimidation and fraud, initiating a political crisis from which Albania has yet to fully recover. If anything, the local election of 2011 was even worse. The campaign experienced an increased level of political violence with at least sixty reported violent incidents occurring in the weeks running up to the vote. The vote tabulation process again degenerated into chaos and violence. In the

crucial vote for mayor of Tirana, initial results indicated that the incumbent, Edi Rama, had won. In what was widely considered an illegal move, the government-controlled Central Election Commission (CEC) overturned the result by counting miscast ballots, which in the previous election the commission had declared invalid. The Socialists concluded, with some justification, that the election had simply been stolen.

Berisha found it very difficult to throw off the Hoxha legacy and simply continued down the road toward authoritarianism. In 2012, the now-uncooperative President Topi was replaced by Bujar Nishani, Berisha's minister of the interior. As a long-time DP militant, and certainly no "consensus" candidate, Nishani could be counted on to do Berisha's bidding, and he did not disappoint. Within months he fired both the head the of SHISH – who learned of his dismissal on the radio – and the general prosecutor, bringing both of those institutions, as well as the presidency, under the prime minister's direct control. In March 2013, he took the unusual step of transferring two Supreme Court judges whose terms were about to expire to the more important Constitutional Court. The two were responsible for having halted three major high-profile corruption trials involving allies of the prime minister. This last move was so shocking that it was even opposed by stalwarts of the president's own party.

The EU and the United States condemned these moves, as well as the fact that Berisha was flirting with nationalism in order to undermine a new nationalist political party called the Red and Black Alliance. Berisha's transgressions, accompanied by unrelenting corruption,

continued steps toward authoritarianism, and poisonous politics convinced the EU that Albania was far from ready for candidate status. Much to the disappointment of Berisha and the delight of the Socialists, the EU rejected Albania's request in 2010, 2011 and 2012. The Socialists hammered the prime minister for this and his various domestic failings and prepared for the next election scheduled for 2013.

Socialist prospects received a significant boost in April 2013 when Meta switched his loyalties yet again and joined with Edi Rama, the Socialist leader. Despite Berisha's help in keeping him out of jail in 2011, Meta, ever the survivor, recognized that the prime minister had failed to effectively address most of Albania's principal internal challenges and that Albanian voters had had enough. Unemployment remained high, water and power shortages, particularly outside of the capital, remained a problem, emigration continued to drain Albania's best and brightest and corruption seemed actually to be increasing. Albanians would once again vote against the party in power. The 2013 parliamentary elections were predictably flawed, despite the presence of some 4,400 election observers. All the parties did their best to manipulate the vote. Violence was again a problem and the local office of the good-government NGO Transparency International reported that voter fraud was, if anything, worse than in previous elections, including the selling of votes for money, food and even, in some cases, livestock. Following the usual protracted and problematic vote counting and electoral certification process, Edi Rama and the Socialists, and their Renaissance movement, emerged victorious. With Meta's sixteen deputies,

Rama was effectively able to govern without reference to the opposition DP, now led by Lulzim Basha, who remained, nevertheless, in Berisha's shadow.

Edi Rama and the Albanian "Renaissance"

Edi Rama, the son of a noted sculptor whose work included the large statue of Mother Albania mentioned above, made a mark as an artist and athlete before becoming involved in politics in 1998. While firmly entrenched in the Tirana elite, Rama, however, did not personally have the communist background to deal with, as had most Albanian politicians. This was in part because of his age, and indeed he introduced something of a new spirit of youth, along with a strong emphasis on gender equality, something with which Albania continues to struggle. He had gained international attention as mayor of Tirana from 2000 to 2011 by adding a splash of color to many of the drab communist-era apartment buildings in downtown Tirana. He approached his new task with energy and intelligence and was able to live up to at least some of the high expectations that he encouraged during his campaign.

The new prime minister was certainly aware of the major challenges facing him, principally because they were the same challenges that Berisha was unable to effectively address. Undoubtedly first among them were weak institutions compounded by a lack of a civil service. The creation of any new government in Albania was inevitably still followed by wholesale dismissals, often down to the village policeman, and the hiring of party militants as a reward for service. This was accompanied by



9.7 Edi Rama

endemic corruption, particularly in the judiciary, the security services, education and health care, and the strengthening of the connection between high-level organized crime and politics. The rule of law in Albania remained an unrealized goal.

Rama achieved some real and some symbolic success in confronting these problems. As representative of the latter, he moved against the marijuana-growing village of Lazarat, which had become something of a symbol of Albania's drug industry and an international embarrassment. A small village in the southern hills, lawless Lazarat was controlled by drug barons who had enough control over government officials and the security services to avoid the police entirely for decades. In a three-day operation, in which no one was hurt and Albanian and international media were treated to the sight of special police burning massive piles of cannabis, Rama shut down both

the village and its lucrative business. That cultivation and production were quickly dispersed throughout the country was of no immediate consequence. Rama had his photo opportunity, and the internationals were impressed.

More substantially, Rama targeted at least a few of Albania's corrupt institutions. Over the last few decades, more than fifty private universities have sprung up throughout Albania. Some were attempts at money laundering and most were for-profit businesses luring students with easily obtained degrees. The worst were simple diploma mills that exchanged degrees for money, services – like plumbing and electrical – and even firewood and goats. In 2014, Rama shut down eighteen such institutions and suspended thirteen others. And Rama made strides in the direction of the rule of law, some mundane and others of significance. He took steps to end widespread nonpayment of electricity bills and the flouting of driving codes, which resulted in the jailing of hundreds for relatively minor offenses. Of greater significance were ongoing attempts to stem at least some of the corruption in parliament – where fully one-seventh of the deputies had criminal records – and the judiciary. With encouragement from the US Ambassador Donald Lu, the DP pushed for legislation aimed at decriminalizing parliament and the judiciary, an initiative eventually accepted by the government. Many officials have been forced to resign or have been dismissed as a result of the vetting program that the legislation established. The international community pressured Rama to expand the vetting further and faster. Some electoral reform and local government reorganization was achieved.

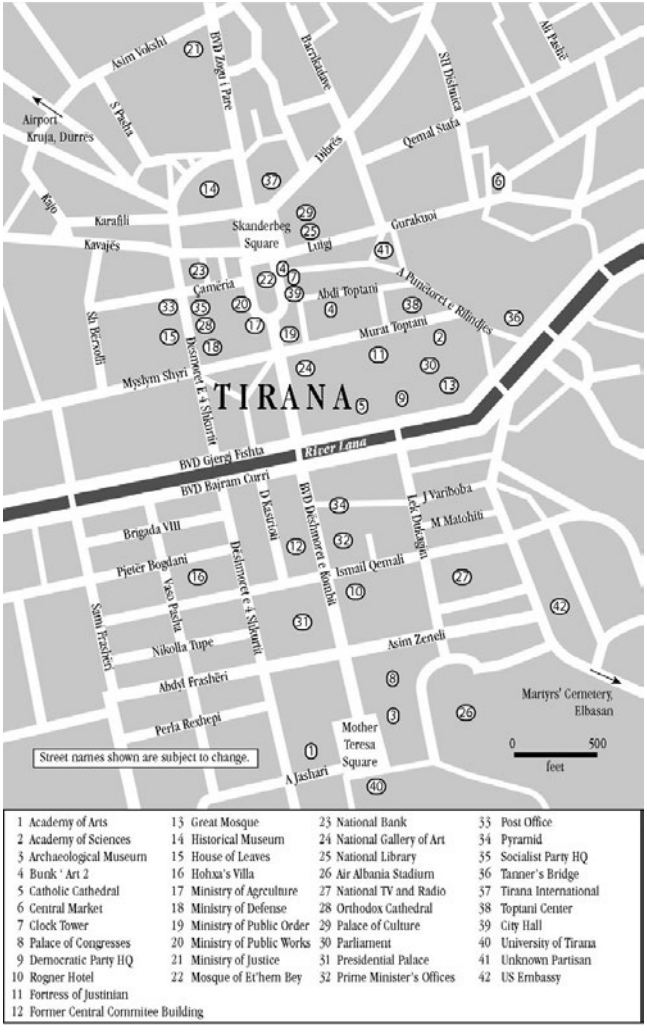
The economy continued to grow at between 3.5 and 4 percent, although wealth polarization increased. In 2014, in light of the above efforts, the EU finally awarded Albania the coveted status of candidate member. This milestone was somewhat mitigated by a delay in the opening of accession talks and the European Commission's announcement in early 2018 that it expected Albania only to be "well advanced" on its European path by 2025.

Rama in the meantime took full advantage of Berisha's institutionalizing of authoritarianism over the years and then further strengthened his position with elections. In the June 2015 local elections, he was able to consolidate Socialist control at the local level when he was victorious in forty-six of the sixty-one Albanian municipalities. Election problems remained with the OSCE concluding that the legal framework could have provided the basis for a democratic election. However, because of the lack of will to implement it effectively and the politicization that pervades the institutions involved with elections in Albania, this was not achieved. But Rama achieved his goal of extensive local control. In 2017, Nishani's term as president was finally up and Rama gave the job to his coalition partner Meta, despite serious misgivings on the part of internationals and yet another "nonconsensus" president. Rama himself had at one point noted that Meta was "the symbol of everything rotten happening in Albania," but political realities will out. Parliament approved Rama's choice, although the DP boycotted the vote.

DP leader Basha also threatened to boycott the parliamentary elections of 2017, demanding the resignation of

the "mafia" Rama government and calling on DP supporters to drag the SP leadership from their offices. Once again, the internationals were required to pull Albanian politics back from the precipice. EU/US-led mediation produced a curious compromise, which, in exchange for DP participation, postponed the election, appointed DP "technical ministers" to administrate alongside SP ministers and made some amendments to the Criminal Code and Law on Political Parties. Since it was too late to form electoral coalitions, all parties ran separately, further exacerbating already deteriorating SP–SMI relations.

The election, predictably, was marred by myriad violations of the electoral code and the law, as well as extensive voter intimidation, vote buying and violence. President-elect Meta became so exasperated with the violence against the SMI that he threatened to arm his supporters. The DP, with its two leaders, Berisha and Basha, overestimated its support and was apparently outspent by the Socialists. Rama emerged with seventy-four seats, allowing him to rule without a coalition and unopposed, again harkening back to the principle of a one-party state. The SMI, now led by Monika Kryemadhi, Meta's wife, moved firmly into the opposition. That Albania could expect more in the way of political theater was indicated by growing chaos in parliament – in December 2017, for example, during an attempt to block a vote on a new temporary general prosecutor, opposition MPs set off a smoke bomb, while fighting erupted both inside and outside of parliament. During the fracas, the president's wife and SMI leader attempted to throw her shoes at the prime minister.



1 Academy of Arts	13 Great Mosque	23 National Bank	33 Post Office
2 Academy of Sciences	14 Historical Museum	24 National Gallery of Art	34 Pyramid
3 Archaeological Museum	15 House of Leaves	25 National Library	35 Socialist Party HQ
4 Bunk ' Art 2	16 Hoxha's Villa	26 Air Albania Stadium	36 Tanner's Bridge
5 Catholic Cathedral	17 Ministry of Agriculture	27 National TV and Radio	37 Tirana International
6 Central Market	18 Ministry of Defense	28 Orthodox Cathedral	38 Toptani Center
7 Clock Tower	19 Ministry of Public Order	29 Palace of Culture	39 City Hall
8 Palace of Congresses	20 Ministry of Public Works	30 Parliament	40 University of Tirana
9 Democratic Party HQ	21 Ministry of Justice	31 Presidential Palace	41 Unknown Partisan
10 Rogner Hotel	22 Mosque of Et'hem Bey	32 Prime Minister's Offices	42 US Embassy
11 Fortress of Justinian			
12 Former Central Committee Building			

Map 9.1 Modern Tirana

With no effective opposition, Rama became more authoritarian and the regime became more corrupt, solidifying its connections with criminal elements. In a sensational case, Saimir Tahiri, Rama's close adviser and

former minister of interior responsible for all police and all anti-drug efforts, was tried as a drug kingpin. Internationals have identified Albania as a key transit country for narcotics distribution, a major money-laundering country and a base of operations for organized crime organizations operating in the United States, Europe, the Middle East and South America. Journalists who exposed this crime and corruption were often intimidated or simply threatened into silence.

The hapless Democrats called for massive anti-government demonstrations in 2018–2019, some of which turned violent. Basha subsequently announced that rather than just boycott parliament, DP MPs would resign their seats and boycott the local elections of June 2019, claiming extensive electoral fraud. Rama carried through with the elections regardless. The runup to election day saw extensive violence, and fearing for their safety Albanians simply ignored the election with voter turnout a paltry 15 percent. Not surprisingly, the Socialists won sixty out of the sixty-one municipalities, although a few of the new mayors were quickly forced to resign once their criminal pasts were exposed. A prominent Albanian-American observer noted that Rama had become decidedly more authoritarian, corrupt, arrogant and less transparent and had instituted a kleptocratic model of governance.

While the Rama administration has not been quite the "Renaissance" it promised to be, it is still clear that in some ways Albania continues to move in a positive direction. Despite the occasional politically inspired surge of nationalism, Albania maintains generally good relations with all of its neighbors. Rama, as with his predecessors,

has consistently followed a responsible foreign policy with regard to the surrounding states. Relations with Macedonia (now North Macedonia) and Montenegro, which both have important ethnic Albanian minorities, have remained constructive and without political incident. New border crossings have been established that have facilitated trade as well as increased contacts between the various Albanian communities. Relations with Montenegro became much warmer following Montenegrin independence in 2006, and Albanian–Macedonian relations took a similar positive turn once the ethnic Albanian community there began to benefit from increased social and cultural equality as a result of the Ohrid Accords.

Relations with Kosovo, particularly since Kosovar independence in 2008, have been quite constructive. While Rama and his predecessors have often presented themselves as champions of Albanian unity in the domestic political context, they have simultaneously cultivated an image of stabilizing politicians vis-á-vis the West, officially opposing a "Greater Albania" or the notion of the unification of Albania with the territories of the former Yugoslavia where Albanian speakers are found. Rama's approach to Kosovo has been in many ways simply an extension of the policy followed by Zog, Hoxha and Albanian leaders since the collapse of communism, prioritizing the maintenance of power and regime stability in Albania over the interests of Kosovo and its citizens. Although Serbian politicians often fuel fears of "Greater Albania," this is usually done in the context of domestic political campaigns in Serbia. Ultimately, there has never been a concrete project for Albanian unification and Kosovar Albanians no longer consider Albania to be their

motherland. Nevertheless, Tirana's insistence on still speaking for all ethnic Albanians has resulted in occasional tension between governments and elites in the Balkans and throughout the Mediterranean world.

Relations with Greece are somewhat more complex and difficult, with an occasional diplomatic row. Issues include a large number of Albanian seasonal and residential workers in Greece, as well as territorial disputes. Albanian nationalists claim the area of northwestern Greece that Albanians refer to as Çamëria from which a mass exodus of Albanian-speaking Çams occurred at the end of the Second World War. These displaced Çams, who make up a substantial minority in Albania, demand the return of their property and compensation. Relations are further complicated by the still-unresolved issue of Greece's declaration of war on Albania during the Second World War, as well as maritime issues. For its part, Greece complains about the treatment of the small Greek minority in southern Albania, and Greek nationalists claim Northern Epirus. Even with these yet-to-be-resolved historical, ethnic and social issues, Albania's relations with Greece have been basically good both during the Rama regime and during those of his post-communist predecessors.

Despite the rise of radical Islam in Albania and elsewhere in the Balkans, Albania's current religious harmony seems not to have been significantly affected, although religion continues to be an issue in contemporary Albania. America's war on terror from 2001 and, to a lesser extent, such events as the construction of the Tirana mosque have heightened a kind of exclusion anxiety that some, in particular certain intellectuals, feel because of Albania's

connection to Islam. The result has been a tendency to rewrite the past and excise Islam in order to project a more Western image, as well as a renewed emphasis on those Albanian heroes who fought Islam to save Europe. For their part, Islamists question the status of Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa as national heroes. Religion remains an important element in Albanian identity, but the state has succeeded in not allowing it to undermine national identity or Albanianism.

Women, particularly in the last decade, have become much more prominent at even the highest levels of politics and government. The principal political parties cooperate on occasion, and one can slowly distinguish policy differences between them. Judicial reform has removed some corrupt judges and prosecutors, but the resulting vacancies have hobbled the functioning of the various courts. Rama's initial COVID-19 pandemic response has generally been lauded, although as with other leaders around the globe he has been accused of using the occasion to further establish authoritarianism and to push through unpopular policies in the hopes that the lockdown will stifle the all-too-frequent anti-government demonstrations. The strategy seemed to work except when the government undermined its own efforts by bulldozing the Italianate National Theater under cover of darkness to make way for a new construction. Numerous demonstrations backed by artists and the opposition ensued.

Still, modernization of most aspects of life continues apace and the lives of at least some of the people, particularly in the cities, are improving. Tirana increasingly gives the appearance of a modern Balkan capital with high-end

hotels, exclusive shopping malls, a sophisticated culture, public art and upscale restaurants and clubs – many of them in the so-called *Blloku*, at the center of which Hoxha's barely used villa still awkwardly sits. This slow but steady progress has been noted by internationals, as evidenced by EU candidate status and the 2020 announcement of the opening of accession talks.

But is it also clear that the old ways, and even the old themes, linger. In August 2020, parliament resounded with shouts of Communist! Ballist! The prime minister had accused the BK of not firing a shot during the Second World War; he accused them of being much more concerned with stealing chickens. Politics can still be described as low-level war, with Albania lurching from one political crisis to the next, delaying the introduction of many needed reforms. The political parties are unable to deal with these crises without international intervention. Authoritarianism, both in politics in general and within political parties, continues to be the rule, with little financial accountability. The election of 2017, the ninth national election, saw less violence and crude ballot stuffing than in the old days, but more intrusion of drug money. The Socialist victory in which they picked up seats – something that had never happened before in Albania with a party seeking a second term in office – speaks more about the power of money than the popularity of the Socialists. The price of politics has significantly increased, with votes now reportedly costing up to €100 and individual mandates up to €10 million.

In April 2021, Albania conducted its tenth parliamentary election since the collapse of communism. Once again, the process was marred by pre-election violence,

the intrusion of criminal organizations, intimidation of voters, and ballot manipulation, as well as significant abuse of state resources. These factors, along with DP missteps, resulted in an unprecedented third mandate, as well as an absolute majority in parliament, for Prime Minister Rama and the SP. The DP refused to recognize the results and attempted to reverse the outcome, but these moves did not alter what would seem to be a descent from some form of competitive authoritarianism into hegemonic authoritarianism in Albania. This is hardly a step forward. There is a fear that the lesson the SP will take from this election is that nothing better is expected of them.

Until 2021, the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index labeled Albania a "hybrid state," between flawed democracy and authoritarianism. Former US Ambassador John Withers, a keen observer of Albanian politics, pointed to a lack of commitment to the idea of democracy. He maintained that some of the political elite use democracy as a club to beat the opposition and once in power undermine democracy in order to strengthen their power base and prolong their regimes. As during the period of Zog and Hoxha, since 1989 Tirana's elite still value maintenance of power above all else. The Albanian political class has yet to be able to replicate a Western liberal democracy, their often-stated goal. Kosovo seems to have come further in this regard, as witnessed by the election of February 2021 when opposition parties immediately recognized the victory of Albin Kurti.

Apart from dysfunctional politics, Albania suffers from a litany of other problems as well. Institutions remain weak and there is little in the way of a professional civil service. Much of the media is still controlled by either political parties or corrupt business interests and reporters

are intimidated and threatened, NGOs are still weak and have little impact. The rule of law is weak. People in the countryside live in misery, faced with abject poverty, unemployment, water and power shortages and no hope that any of this will change soon. The best and brightest continue to flee, and as its population continues to shrink, Albania finds itself facing an increasingly serious demographic crisis. In 2020, the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) reported that approximately 1.7 million Albanians had left the country in the three decades following the collapse of communism, leaving some 2.8 million behind.

These disappointments, too, were noted by domestic and international observers who continue to call for urgent action on electoral and judicial reform, increased attention to government corruption and government connections with organized crime and the strengthening of the rule of law. The legacy of the Hoxha regime, with its history of failed political leadership and the internal weaknesses of post-communist governments, as well as various international forces outside of the state's control have all contributed to Albania's seeming inability to overcome political extremism and achieve the economic, social and political stability needed to convince its citizens that their future lies in Albania as opposed to somewhere abroad.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THE PRINCIPAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP SINCE INDEPENDENCE IN 1912

Provisional Government (1912–1914)

Ismail Qemali – President 1912–1914

Fejzi Alizoti – Chairman of the Central Administration under the International Control Commission January–March 1914

Principality of Albania (1914–1925)

Prince Wilhelm of Wied March–September 1914 (from 1920 High Councils of Regency)

Prime Ministers

Turhan Pasha Përmeti March–September 1914

Esad Pasha Toptani (President of the Senate of Central Albania) 1914–1916

vacant (Albania under foreign occupation) 1916–1918

Turhan Pasha Përmeti 1918–1920

Sulejman Delvina January–November 1920

Ilias Vrioni 1920–1921

Pandeli Evangjeli October–December 1921

Qazim Koculi December 6–December 7, 1921

Hasan Prishtina December 7–December 12, 1921

Idhomene Kosturi December 12–December 24, 1921

Xhafer Ypi 1921–1922

Ahmet Zogu 1922–1924

Shevqet Vërlaci March–May 1924

Ilias Vrioni May–June 1924
Fan Noli June–December 1924
Ilias Vrioni December 1924–January 1925
Ahmet Zogu January 6–January 31, 1925

Albanian Republic (1925–1928)
President Ahmet Zogu 1925–1928

Albanian Kingdom (1928–1939)
King Zog I 1928–1939

Prime Ministers
Kostaq Kota 1928–1930
Pandeli Evangjeli 1930–1935
Mehdi Frashëri 1935–1936
Kostaq Kota 1936–1939

Italian Occupation (1939–1943)
King Vittorio Emmanuele III 1939–1943

Prime Ministers
Shefqet Vërlaci 1939–1941
Mustafa Kruja 1941–1943
Eqrem Libohova January–February 1943
Maliq Bushati February–May 1943
Eqrem Libohova May–September 1943

German Occupation (1943–1944)
High Council of Regency

Prime Ministers
Rexhep Mitrovica 1943–1944
Fiqri Dine July–August 1944
Ibrahim Biçaku September–October 1944

People's (then Socialist) Republic of Albania (1944–1991)

General Secretaries of the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Party (later the Albanian Party of Labor)

Enver Hoxha 1943–1985
Ramiz Alia 1985–1991

Presidents (Chairman of the Presidium)

Omer Nishani 1944–1953
Haxhi Lleshi 1953–1982
Ramiz Alia 1982–1991

Prime Ministers (Chairman of the Council of Ministers)

Enver Hoxha 1944–1954
Mehmet Shehu 1954–1981
Adil Çarçani 1982–1991

Republic of Albania (1991–present)

Presidents
Ramiz Alia 1991–1992
Sali Berisha 1992–1997
Rexhep Meidani 1997–2002
Alfred Moisiu 2002–2007
Bamir Topi 2007–2012
Bujar Nishani 2012–2017
Ilir Meta 2017–term ends 2022

Prime Ministers

Fatos Nano February–June 1991
Ylli Bufi June–December 1991
Vilson Ahmeti 1991–1992
Aleksandër Meksi 1992–1997

Bashkim Fino March–July 1997
Fatos Nano 1997–1998
Pandeli Majko 1998–1999
Ilir Meta 1999–2002
Pandeli Majko February–July 2002
Fatos Nano 2002–2005
Sali Berisha 2005–2013
Edi Rama 2013

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