

UNDERSTANDING THE UNKNOWN: EXPLORING THE BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN GREECE AND ALBANIA AND ITS EFFECT ON THE ALBANIAN PROSPECT FOR EU MEMBERSHIP

Alexandros ZYKA

MSc, University of Piraeus, Department of International and European Studies, Greece

OCID : <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4609-9541> ROR ID: <https://ror.org/02qs84g94>

Abstract: One of the most interesting and unexplored-aspects of the Balkan peninsula is how Greece and Albania view of each other and how does this affect the Albanian attempt to join the European Union. Without a doubt, Greece and Albania in the recent years began to have closer relations, due to the fall of communism in 1991, and the mass migration of Albanians to Greece that followed. The presence of the national Greek minority in Albania, however, not only affected-and still do-their bilateral relations, but also, they are connected to the EU Enlargement. Taking all these into consideration, the purpose of this paper is to examine and to track the connection between all these aspects. The introductory part will attempt to present the relations between Albanians and Greeks since the Berlin Congress of 1878 and the formation of Albanian state in 1912. The exact number of Greeks in Albania is still unknown, because not only the former Ottoman rule didn't count its subjects by nationality, rather than religion. This didn't change until the Second World War and the prevail of the Albanian communists, who tried to organize the Albanian society in modern terms. After the fall of communism in 1991, the mass migration from Albania-which included a huge number of Greeks-had an important impact between the two countries

due to the fact that they tried to re-establish their bilateral relations in the new post-cold war terms. The limitations though that are implemented by the Albanian government in the remaining Greeks, are observed by the Greek government and as a result it puts restrictions to the Albanian prospect of joining the EU.

Keywords: Greece, Albania, European Union, integration

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Introduction

After the eruption of the Greek revolution of 1821 and the formation of the Greek state, Greece tried to find a new path not only towards the Greeks who remained in the Ottoman Empire, but also to revise its relationship with the other Balkan ethnic groups. Throughout the rest of the 19th century and during the national awakening of the rest of the Balkan peoples, Greece had mixed relations with its neighbors, either more friendly (Serbia) or more hostile (Bulgaria). Without any doubt, the one ethnic group that Greece did not have a complete view and still does not in some aspects-are the Albanians. Just as the Greek state tries to find an understanding on what the Albanians claim to be, the purpose of this paper is to present the evolution of the relations between Greece and Albania, not only as ethnic groups but also as nation-states.

Consequently, the purpose of this article is to make an attempt to show the complexity of the relations between Greece and Albania on the one hand. On the other hand, it will attempt to present that EU membership for Albania can be of utter importance to further increase not only the (geo)political stability of the region but also to uncover a new path for cooperation between two possible EU-member states, since Greece is a full EU member and one of the founding countries of the Euro currency.

By using secondary bibliographic sources, this article aims to present the historical claims made by both sides, how they were stated throughout the decades, and how they were affected by the specific political circumstances -the political instability of Albania in the first years of its existence, the unresolved peace of the Interwar period, the rhetoric used by both sides in the Cold War with the different political implications for both countries and the new path that they have to create since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989-91. To put it into perspective, this paper aims to present a more inclusive presentation of the relations between Greece and Albania, whilst noting the importance of the EU ascension to solve the existing issues among them.

Bearing this into mind, this article will first show how the Albanian national movement slowly evolved and became one of the youngest ones in the mid-19th century. Was it due to modern-day Albania's geography? Was it due to its multi-religious population? Secondly, it will present how the bilateral relations of Albania and Greece evolved, firstly on the communal level (since Albania was under Ottoman rule) and throughout the 20th century. It will show how the wishful thinking of the beginning of the century that talked about a dual Greco-Albanian state, quickly moved towards mutual suspicion during the inter-war period, and once more a repeat of this firstly with a more co-operative feeling up until the end of the Greek Civil War. A small back and forth continued until the military dictatorship that was established in Greece decided to fully resume diplomatic relations with Tirana in 1971, but this resumption came to a halt in 1974 due to the major crisis that emerged from the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus. With the back-and-forth still going after this, in 1981 the relations were put on a different perspective, as the new socialist government of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement(PASOK) in Greece wanted to improve relations with Albania. This positive period ended with the fall of communism in 1989-91, and the new democratic powers that emerged, mostly had former communists who still were carrying on the older prejudices for Greece, thus retaining this rather unstable status-but peaceful nonetheless-of the relations between Greece and Albania.

Lastly, the article will present shortly Albania's path toward its ascension/accession to the European Union and how Greece has assisted Albania to achieving this goal. It will present the obstacles Albania has to overcome, not only internally-by reforming its judiciary system and fighting corruption at its roots-but also on improving relations with Greece, by removing any legal-or other-setbacks that the Greeks of Albania face.

The period of co-existence before the 19th century

Trying to describe Albania as a country is not a rather difficult task. Located in the Southeastern part of Europe more precise in the Balkan Peninsula-and being at the same time mountainous and has a large coastline. At first glance, it seems that Albania, by this description alone, looks like Greece, one of her closest neighbors. Naturally, this is not the case as the Albanian society has its own unique characteristics. One of them is the tribal organization, as the Albanians can be divided into two distinct tribes: the Ghegs and the Tosks, with the first being located in the northern parts of the country and the latter in the southern parts.

Another unique characteristic of the Albanian people is the multi-religious character of it by encompassing different religions and denominations. The south i.e. has a large Orthodox Christian majority, with the north having a relatively high percentage of Roman Catholics whilst the Muslims-as a relative religious majority of the country are scattered throughout Albania (Gawrych, 2006). Ultimately, this societal division had an important impact on the Albanian national awakening, due to the fact that the Muslim community were highly prominent in the Ottoman administration, with the most well-known example being the Köprülü family, which “gave” a large number of Grand Viziers (the most famous one being Mehmed Köprülü Pasha) (Ristelhueber, 2005).

Despite all these facts, the Albanian national consciousness was on the rise at the end of the 19th century, thanks to some scholars who attempted to create a written Albanian language, among them being Naum Veqilharxhi (néé Bredhi) and Konstadin Kristoforidhi. Veqilharxhi left the Vilayet of Yanya at an early age for Wallachia and got meddled in nationalistic ideas there, by participating in the local revolt of 1821 and after the revolt he attempted to create a new Albanian alphabet. From this new alphabet, Veqilharxhi prompted to defend the “Albanian diaspora”. Kristoforidhi on the other hand, did not participate in any armed conflicts, but he also believed that by developing his native language he would preserve the Albanian people and culture. Having this as his aim, he also wrote a book named *Dictionary of the Albanian Language* by travelling to the four Albanian vilayets to gather the necessary material. These written attempts, however, are not the only things that these scholars share. One important aspect of any Balkan scholar of this time was the graduation from a Greek-speaking educational institution, due to the fact that the Greek language was the official language of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, thus a lingua franca amongst the Balkans. Both Veqilharxhi and Kristoforidhi as well as Ismail Qemali- were graduates of the Zossimaia Gymnasium in Yanya (Ioannina), since it was located in the region of Epirus (Gawrych, 2006).

The fact that the Albanian intelligentsia were educated in Greek schools is not that strange as it was the same with the Bulgarian intelligentsia as well-but rather demonstrates a reality of the time. This reality being the co-existence for many centuries between the Greeks and the Albanians in the lands of Epirus. The tensions, however, that raised in the 19th century, meant that both communities claimed Epirus for their national causes. Albanians on the one hand, claimed that they have the ancient Illyrians, who inhabited the-modern day Albanian-lands, as their own ancestors. They also claimed that the Greeks beyond the cities of Arta and Grevena did not live in these areas. On the other hand, Greeks claim that river Shkumbin is the border-natural and national-between the two peoples and the peoples who migrated from the Albanian areas to modern day Greece in the 14th century actually became Greeks since they were assimilated throughout all these years of coexistence. This claim however created the false impression that the Albanians were some sort of “second-class” Greeks, since they became Christians and spoke Greek alongside their native language (Divani, 2010).

The Greco-Albanian relations from the mid-19th century to the end of the Second Balkan War

In the mid-19th century, and especially after the Crimean War, not only the Great Powers of Europe were convinced for the decline of the Ottoman Empire thus raising the question on what will happen with the lost Ottoman lands-but also the Balkan peoples were preparing to take any advantage from it. For the Greeks, the success of the revolution and the presentation of the country's territorial aims- the ‘Megali idea’-by the Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis in 1844 set the tone. Greece managed to expand in 1864 by the annexation of the Ionian Islands, as a “gift” to the new King of Greece, George I from Britain. Right before his coronation in Athens, he negotiated with the British to expand into Thessaly and Epirus, but his request was declined. This set the tone for the future direction for Greece. These plans however were realized by the Albanians who sensed the immediate threat to their own territorial aims, since the Greeks wanted the land of Epirus, the Montenegrins the northern bordering lands and the Serbs a territorial way towards the Adriatic Sea. Despite this mistrust, the Greek side made a last attempt to negotiate with the Albanians in 1877, but it also failed. The basic reason of this failure was the Greek proposal for the creation of a dual Greco-Albanian kingdom, with the Albanians rejecting it, since they aimed to the creation of an independent Albanian state.

Shortly after this attempt, an Albanian delegation sent a memorandum to the Sublime Porte, in order to prevent any partitions, but shortly after, in 1878, the Treaty of San Stefano granted Bulgaria a part of Kosovo. This could not be accepted by the Albanian side, and right before the Congress of San Stefano the Albanian intelligentsia, including Abdyl Frashëri, and many chieftains met in Prizren and formed a League, which declared the national independence of the Albanians and the creation of an autonomous Albanian states from the vilayets of Shkodra, Ioannina, Kosovo and Monastir. Apart from the formation of the League, Albanian and Greek communities in Epirus were fighting hard for their national claims on the land with the Albanians defending the vilayet of Shkodra from the Montenegrin forces. Despite their attempts, the new Congress of Berlin in 1881-which nullified the previous San Stefano treaty-granted Montenegro a portion of the northern Albanian parts and Greece the kaza of Arta and Thessaly and the League of Prizren was dissolved by the Ottomans. In the years between the Berlin Congress and the beginning of the Balkan wars in 1912, both the Greeks and the Albanians remained in a highly tense situation. Since the beginning of the 20th century, they were preparing for any further territorial claims on Epirus. The Greeks were getting armed because they were preparing to fight for their national claims on Ottoman Macedonia against the emerging and rapidly developed Bulgarian insurgents thanks to their Supreme Macedonian Committee in Sofia and its branch on Macedonia, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. The Albanians, on the other hand, had their own National Congress in the city of Manastir in 1908, in which they coded their own language and alphabet, thus enabling them to further strengthen their national unity. The Greeks, however, made one last attempt to get closer with the Albanians and both the Prime Minister of Greece Georgios Theotokis, and the Albanian leader then an Ottoman MP Ismail Qemali agreed to move on to a mutual understanding between the two communities, through the teaching of both Greek and Albanian in schools. The eruption of the Balkan war on October, 1st 1912 by the Balkan alliance, consisting of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro changed the plans. It gave a halt to any cooperation efforts, as the Greeks were fully focused on regaining Epirus and-most importantly-Macedonia with Thessaloniki. After securing both the Macedonian and Epirote fronts, the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos ordered the Greek army to move towards Himara, aiming to use the city as a diplomatic advantage for him. The Albanians did not allow this to happen and on November, 28th 1912, they signed the declaration of their independence in Vlora and elected Qemali by a provisional government as the first Prime Minister. After the war, all the victorious Balkan countries met in London during the war at the same time with the Ambassadorial Congress of the

Great Powers in order to settle the upcoming territorial disputes. Both the Serbs and Montenegrins wanted to dismantle the new Albanian state, whilst Greece claimed the sanjaks of Korça and Gjirokastra and the rest of Vilayet of Ioannina. Austria-Hungary and Italy dismissed all these territorial claims fully supporting the preservation of Albania, as it was an obstacle to the aggressive Serbian plans for an exodus to the Adriatic Sea. In the midst of all these negotiations behind the scenes, the Greek army managed to enter to Ioannina on February, 2nd 1913 heading north, albeit during the negotiations in London, the Balkan Alliance was declined any further territories due to the creation of Albania. The Greeks did not stop and marched through the north, reaching Gjirokastra to the north and Këlcyre to the east, to the dislike of the Great Powers. With the Serbs being granted Kosovo by the Austro-hungarians, Greece was forced to leave from the lands it conquered as it would greatly outrage Albanians, since they lost Kosovo, and would not be able to take the North-eastern Aegean islands. On May, 17th/30th 1913, the Treaty of London recognized the loss of all the former Ottoman lands by the Balkan alliance, whilst a Protocol acknowledged the existence of the Albanian state.

The main issue left disputed demarcation of the border between Greece and Albania, leaving the matter to the responsibility of the Great Powers in the foreseeable future. At the same time, the Balkan Alliance was dissolved to the distrust of Bulgaria, targeting the newly-conquered Macedonian lands of Greece, starting a second Balkan War in July 1913, with the sides now being the former member of the Balkan Alliance, with the aid of the Ottoman Empire and Romania. Shortly after the start of the war, the Great Powers set up a committee with the purpose of defining the Greco-Albanian border. This committee had the language as its basic national criterion for the border setting, albeit there were bilingual communities of Greeks, Albanians and even some Vlachs. The choice of language as the basic criterion was met with disapproval by Venizelos, since many Albanian-speaking Christians were considered Greeks, as he believed, thus proposing the national-consciousness being the basic criterion for the committee, with language and religion having a secondary role. Thanks to the immense pressure of the Great Powers, Venizelos was forced to abandon his claims on Northern Epirus, fearing the invalidation of the new Greek border and the dispute of the Aegean lands. In the end, the Treaty of Bucharest was signed on August, 13th 1913, ratifying the new borders of the Balkan states, with the Greco-Albanian border being set by the Florence Protocol on December, 17th 1913, granting Saranda, Vlora and Korçë to Albania. This border dispute however would be finally settled after the First World War (Divani, 2010).

The situation from the First World War to the end of the Second World War

The start of the First World War in August 1914 found the Balkan powers ready to revise the borders defined by the previous treaties. The side of Entente lured Greece to enter the war with the Allies by allowing them to capture Northern Epirus. Although the Greek army returned to the areas it held during the Balkan wars, the elections of 1915, the abdication of Prime Minister Venizelos and the choice of the King Constantine II not to align with either side of the war, caused Britain to call Italy to control these lands, thus allowing Italy to enter the war on the side of the Entente in 1915. The situation returned to that of the beginning of war as the Greek king abdicated and Venizelos returned from Thessaloniki in 1917. The Greek and Serbian presence in Albanian lands raised the question whether Albania will disappear, thus creating a massive wave of nationalism throughout the country with the purpose of retaining the country's territorial integrity and independence. The end of the war in 1918 however, found Albania with an unexpected ally in the President of the United States Woodrow Wilson, since he favored the self-determination of the Balkan peoples as mentioned in his Fourteen Points speech. Despite this, the Greeks did not give in to the Allied pressure on abandoning Northern Epirus, as Venizelos was using this as a mean of pressure to his territorial claims to the area. The diplomatic maneuvers during 1918-1920 outraged the new Albanian government, who fought the Italian army present in Albania and hardened its stance towards the Greeks of Albania. In the end, the government managed to force the Italians and the Greek army to abandon the country, much to the disapproval of Venizelos. The Greek Prime Minister did not want to have any conflict with the Entente, since the Treaty of Sèvres was to be agreed and signed and he was planning on getting territories from Thrace and Asia Minor, thus abandoning Northern Epirus, please the Entente. He found an unexpected ally in Albania, because the new government tried not only to rebuild and stabilize the country but to retain its territorial integrity and independence, hence it halted any attacks on the Greeks. Despite the previous conflict between the Italian army and the Albanians, Italy offered itself as a guarantor power for Albania's entry in the League of Nations, which became official on December, 17th 1920.

Once Albania entered the League, it requested international mediation on her issue with Greece about Northern Epirus. Another issue that remained unresolved was the Greco-Albanian border, which practically did not exist during the war. In the end, the Ambassadorsial Congress decided to guarantee the border as defined by the previous Protocol of Florence, which finally became official on July, 30th

1926 with the signing of another protocol in the same city. The main issue there was the split of Çamëria/Epirus, because Albania took Saranda and the Delvina District, whereas Greece had an important muslim population of almost 20.500 Albanian Chams. Greece tried to use these populations as a counterweight in the upcoming negotiations with Turkey in Lausanne, by including them in the exchanging populations. Thanks to the Albanian objection-with the help of Italy the Chams did not leave Greece for Turkey, stating that despite the common religion, they were not Turks. The Cham presence in Greek Epirus was an important counterweight to Greece's plan on Northern Epirus, since the Greek populations there did not leave the area, discouraging Greece from any expansionist policies (Divani, 2010).

This discouragement however gave Albania the opportunity to pressure even more the Greeks in the country by suspending all the Greek-language schools. This decision can easily be explained by the logic of the fifth column that was rather dominant throughout Europe during the inter-war period. Simultaneously, Albeit the rather problematic relations between the two countries, the situation got worse once Italy emerged as the protector of Albania. The official annexation of Albania by Italy in April 1939 put Athens on high alert, since the Greek government desperately avoided any kind of conflict, but on the governmental level it declared its neutrality towards the annexation. This encouraged the Italians to press even harder the Greeks, by sending-Cham agents spreading the Italian propaganda. The Italian aggression became official firstly on April 9th, 1940, by declaring that Albania was in a state of war with Greece, secondly on October 28th 1940 after the rejection by the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas of the Italian ultimatum demanding the Greek capitulation to Italy and lastly on November 10th 1940, by a law that designated Italy and all Italian territory including Albania-as a hostile country. This started the future quarrel on the state of war issue, that still drags on to this day and is used mostly by the Albanian side, since Greece considers it done by a Presidential Decree, which nullified the 1940 law.

Once Greece was conquered by the Italians with some Albanians among their ranks and German forces on April, 20th 1941, it was split into three areas of occupation: German, Italian and Bulgarian. This meant that the Chams of Epirus could be used as security forces to preserve law and order in the area, much to the discontent of the locals. At the same time, in Albania a resistance movement was emerging against the Axis power, organized by the Communist Party of Albania. In 1942, at the Conference of Pezë, the National Liberational Anti-Fascist Front (LANÇ) was created by the communists and their leader, Enver Hoxha.

This cooperation between the Greek and Albanian partisans is confirmed also by the participation and merge of the Greeks of Northern Epirus into LANÇ, which was decided by prominent Greek partisans such as Lefter Talo and Thanas Ziko who gave their names to the “Thanas Ziko” and “Lefter Talo” battalion after the end of the war. Shortly after, the communists prevailed in the struggle against the occupying Axis forces thus being the sole force resisting. In Albania, on May 28th 1944, Hoxha organized a provisional government in Përmet, and later on November, 28th he entered Tirana, thus liberating the country from the Axis powers, and afterwards he won the elections of December 1945 and created the People’s Republic of Albania in January 10th, 1946 (Ntagios, 2015).

The relations after the end of the Second World War

The situation in Greece, however, was really turbulent, due to the strength of the National Liberation Front (EAM) it had because of its vicious struggle against the Germans but also the Greek right-wing forces, such as the Greek Democratic National Army(EDES). On October 18th, 1944, Georgios Papandreou returned to Athens and established a national salvation government with the help of the British, as they were joined by a British Expeditionary Force led by General Scobie. EAM was not pleased with the British presence and, since it enjoyed massive support from the population, it initiated armed skirmishes around Athens on December 4th 1944, in order to install a pro-Soviet government. The Yalta Agreement, however, proved disastrous, as the Soviet Union would not support the Greek communists and led to the subsequent defeat of EAM, which became official on February, 12th 1945 by the signing of the Varkiza Agreement, that led to EAM’s disarmament. The Greek government of Themistoklis Sofoulis proclaimed elections in March 1946 and a referendum on the return of the king, to the displeasure of the Communist Party of Greece(KKE). The Party declared its boycott from the elections, as it feared further repressive measures against it, but in reality it was preparing for the next armed conflict against the Greek government that launched a rather vicious hunt towards the communists (Gallant, 2017).

Once the civil war began in Greece both Yugoslavia and Albania helped with every mean possible the fighting communist forces, by hosting training camps for the armed rebels in Bulkes/Maglić, Yugoslavia and Rubik, Albania. Despite the help that the Albanians and Yugoslavs gave to the Greeks, they could not maintain a unified front, as the Albanians were displeased with the Greeks due to their stance in the Northern Epirus issue, the help continued until 1948. Once the Soviet-Yugoslav split occurred, not only the Yugoslavs stopped aiding the Greek communists by closing the borders (they used the border areas as

safepoints), because they were aligned with Moscow. This gave the Albanians the chance to further strengthen their alliance with the Soviet Union, thus giving the Greek communists another pillar of support. The announcement of the Truman Doctrine by the-then-US President Harry S. Truman in March 1947 completely change the course of the civil war. Since Albania could only provide for the Greeks the necessary weaponry from the port of Durrës, and the Soviet Union did not aid them with any weapons either, the Greek communist army accepted its loss and in October 1949, the civil war officially ended (Ntagios, 2015).

In the early 1950's, Greece pursued towards a more pragmatic policy towards Albania. Due to the emerging Yugoslav pressure in the Balkans, the coalition government of the Centre moved towards the resume of the diplomatic relations with Tirana as early as 1953. The reason of this attitude was the emerging issue of Yugoslavia completely controlling the Adriatic coast, and thus being much harder to be restrained. Subsequently, Evangelos Averoff stated that Albania had to retain its independence, in order to avoid the above. The new Papagos government in 1952 stated-like with all the previous governments-that Greece would pursue Northern Epirus solely on peaceful means. Albania however was in a difficult situation, because there was a rapprochement between Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia and the US were considering an operation that would topple Hoxha's regime. This operation was planned in 1953 by a coalition of Western powers-including Greece-and a pro-Western Albanian committee, but subsequently it failed due to the Italian support for Albania's independence, despite the ultimatums Greece gave to Albania demanding the respect of the international obligations of the latter to the Greeks of Northern Epirus as agreed in 1913.

After the failure of the operation however, and much to the arisen Italian and Yugoslav intervention, the Greek government realizes that its claim on Northern Epirus was not possible without any Italian and Yugoslav reaction. The first step though, was made by the Albanian government in the summer of 1953, that proposed the re-establishment of the frontier pyramids, through the UN. Greece rejected this proposal, stating that both countries were still in a state of war, leaving the matter to the General Staffs of both countries. The Soviet and Bulgarian opening towards Greece, gave Albania one last chance to pursue the normalization of the bilateral relations, proposing the resumption of them without the signing of a Peace Treaty. The Greeks went to the Americans for advice, with the latter stating that this was up to Athens whether to agree with this or not. The Greek Foreign Ministry suggested the opening of an embassy in Tirana, since there was an Italian and a Yugoslav embassy-with the aim of observing the situation in Northern Epirus-but the US did not agree with it, as they claimed the

memories of the war were still vivid. One major issue too was the problems that the Greek government faced because of its Cyprus policy and the attacks of the opposition parties. In spite of the entry of Albania to the United Nations in December 1955, the two General Staffs could not reach an agreement, thus ending any normalization attempts for the moment (Hatzivassiliou, 2006).

With the political instability that was ongoing in Athens, the Stephanopoulos government wanted to normalize relations with Albania stating that the existing state of war was 'ridiculous'. In 1966, Athens requested France to be an intermediary with Tirana and in March the Greek government was able to achieve the signing of a commercial agreement by the Greek and Albanian Chambers of Commerce in March. This was a very first step, as it was the only post-war agreement yet signed by the two sides, albeit it was not really implemented because of Albania's decline to sign the necessary payments and Pipinelis' support for the claim on Northern Epirus-thus fearing the bring-down of the government because of its small majority on the Parliament (Hatzivassiliou, 2006).

After the death of Joseph Stalin, Albania still continued to have relations with the Soviet Union and had high hopes of incoming Soviet help. The new Soviet General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Nikita Khrushchev however, visited Belgrade in 1956 and met with Tito attempting to re-establish relations once again with Yugoslavia. This development, along with the official Soviet request for the usage of the port of the city of Vlora and the rejection of it by the Albanians, made clear to Hoxha that the alliance with the Soviet Union could not be stand. An important factor to this insecurity was the fact that Albania was a member of the Warsaw Pact, making the country even more insecure to any Soviet pressure. As a result, Albania came in contact with the Communist Party of China in 1956, by sending a delegation to Beijing for the 8th Party Congress. This relation gradually became closer and more cooperative, and they officially declared their alliance in 1966 with the signing of a "Sino-Albanian Declaration". Albania officially left the Warsaw Pact in 1968, after the Prague Spring and the Pact's forces invasion of Czechoslovakia, declaring it as an 'aggressive pact', along with Romania, as Ceausescu was seeking a relative independence from the Soviet Union.

The benefits were equally important for both sides, as for Albania it meant an even larger military aid and more modern know-how to modernize the country. For China though, the Albanian alliance had more of a diplomatic importance out of all things, because the UN states who recognized the People's Republic of China as the legitimate permanent representative member state of China in the United Nations Security Council, instead of the Republic of China located in

Taiwan. Another important aspect was the ideological alignment of Albania to the Maoist principles of 'cleansing the pure revolutionary society from all the revisionist and bourgeois elements' (Musabelliu, 2019).

Greece, on the other hand, faced sore difficulties as well in the 1950's. Despite the economic boom that the country faced under the government of Konstantinos Karamanlis' National Radical Union (ERE), the strict laws and the climate for leftist politicians were not loosened, even though the government did not do anything to pressure them. The 1960's made these difficulties more massive. To them, we must include the political instability that the country faced due to the Palace's multiple interventions since 1963 when Karamanlis abdicated as Prime Minister, because the Palace did not like his attempt to change Greece's constitution by removing its ability to intervene into the Prime Minister's election. Since 1963 though, the country's governments were in fact ineffective as they had to align with the Palace in order to retain their power, whilst having the majority of the Parliament. This was not possible and created a perpetual political instability, which was exploited by conservative elements of the Greek army, who had some previous plan to stage a coup d'état, achieving this in April 21st 1967. As it can be seen, both countries were more focused on their issues than on resuming relations (Gallant, 2017).

The situation however, changed during the Greek military junta, as it was seeking recognition from every country possible since it was banned from the Council of Europe in 1969, essentially leading to its diplomatic isolation. In Albania, the military regime found a country to use as a diplomatic ally, despite the massive ideological issue between the two. Firstly, they both re-established relations on the level of Chambers of Commerce but the most important thing was the opening of the embassies on both capitals in 1971-the Greek Embassy in Tirana and the Albanian Embassy in Athens. Generally, the bilateral relations were relatively calmly as the Greek military regime was careful not to arouse any problems for the Albanians, as it feared any return to its diplomatic isolation. The Turkish military intervention on Cyprus in 1974 and the eventual collapse of the junta, generally put the Balkans on edge, since a general war on the Balkans was a possibility between Greece and Turkey mostly. Albania was alarmed, since it feared any military operations near its borders, and was aligned with Yugoslavia in order to avoid a new Balkan war, simultaneously condemning the actions of the Turkish military. Regarding the relations with Greece though, once the new government of the New Democracy party under Konstantinos Karamanlis rose to power in November 1974, the new Greek government retained a small channel with the Albanians. Because the Greeks already had left NATO-on the

military level-in 1974 (and would return to the alliance in 1980) and were focused on Greece's ascension to the European Community, they did not give any importance to the relations with Albania, leading to the conservation of the relatively warm relations.

A total shift was taken as the government in Greece changed once again, in 1981, by the rise of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement party (PASOK) under Andreas Papandreou. His friendlier attitude towards not only to the Arab countries, but also to the Eastern Bloc (he was the only Western political leader who visited Poland after the coup of Wojciech Jaruzelski) was a satisfactory development to the Albanians. Their assumptions were correct, as the Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, advocated for the further normalization of the relations with Albania, since he was from Epirus and he wanted to improve the situation for the Greeks of Albania. During the PASOK's government two major events occurred to confirm this positive atmosphere: first, the opening of the border post in Kakavja in 1984 and second, the removal of the 1940 state-of-war by the Greek Parliament. The latter was met with a huge distrust amongst the other parties, since they did not have the same opinion as PASOK because they advocated for the protection of the Greeks of Albania from the "Albanian oppression". An important milestone happened though, as on April 18th 1985, the General Secretary of the Party of Labor of Albania Enver Hoxha passed away at 78 years of age, thus ending his almost 40-year-old rule in the country. His successor Ramiz Alia, did not change anything to the status of the relations but he was rather focusing on the emerging serious economic problems that Albania was facing due to its complete isolation since 1976. At the end of the 1980's, problems were emerging from both sides, as the Albanians were speaking more openly about liberalizing the government by forcing the communists to abdicate, whilst Greece was on the verge of a corruption scandal and the political instability that it brought, as there elections were held in two (!) years from 1989 to 1991. In the end, in Greece a new government, under New Democracy with Konstantinos Mitsotakis as the Prime Minister, came into power and in Albania due to the massive student' protests the communists were forced to hold elections in 1991, in which they won again, but could not stop the massive request for the liberalization of the country. In the end, the communists lost the monopoly of their power, by allowing the formation of other political parties, eventually (by 1992) ending the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (Ntagios, 2015).

The EU aspect to the Greco-Albanian relations

After the fall of communism in 1989 and since the beginning of the 21st century, the EU already considered the Balkans including Albania as a strategic partner. More precisely, after the 11 September hit the *European Security Strategy* was presented by the Council of the EU in 2003. One of its primary objectives was that the EU must be an important factor in the democratization process of the Balkan countries whilst dealing with the organized crime. This has to happen due to the fact that the new threats will not use solely military means, but rather a widespread network of terrorist attacks aiming to create tensions. It also mentioned that the integration process of the acceding states would increase the EU presence in these states, and consequently the democratization process by creating well-governed states (Council of the EU, 2003).

In the 1990's, Albania was connected with the European Union, as Greece was the main partner to the country's development funding. There are many drawbacks however to this, as the situation in Albania was rather unstable and the new democratic government directed towards more national policies, by putting up limitations to the Greeks. Atomic incidents towards Greeks and vice versa, like the 1994 Peshkopi incident in which 3 Albanian soldiers were killed by a Greek nationalist organization, and the 2010 death of a Greek in Himara by Albanian nationalists, jeopardize the positive steps that Albania has made and still makes. Despite all these problems, Greece is one of the closest allies of Albania, since it was one of the first countries that recognized the new democratic government in 1991, it was among the peacekeeping force that went to Albania in 1999, after the collapse of the country's economy due to the pyramid schemes (Antonopoulos, 2022).

Albania started the integration process as early as 2003, shortly after the publication of the European Security Strategy, with the official negotiations beginning in 2009. Since then, Albania has completed a vast number of the Copenhagen criteria, necessary to join the EU, yet some of the criteria are far from being completed with one of them being the reformation of the judicial system and the removal of corruption (Dhamo & Dhamo, 2024). At the moment, the progress of Albania is not as expected, since many electoral frauds are recorded for the last 25 years, i.e. in the elections of 2000 and 2003. Despite these setbacks, Albania managed to get a visa-free status in 2010 for the EU member states, expecting some further steps from Brussels, but excluding Greece's opinion. The only major setback for this Albanian perspective is Greece, because the latter aims to solve any bilateral issues-such as the guaranteed protection of the Greek minority in Albania and the implementation of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on the EU level, including Greece (Mallias, 2025).

Conclusions

Summarizing, Greece and Albania although they border each other and share a rather common past due to the Ottoman conquest, they do not really know each other. On one hand, Greece was not interested to come into contact with the Albanians, due to the “Megali Idea” plan, aiming to take the Albanian lands that the Greeks inhabited. On the other hand, Albanians once they realized the threats they were facing since 1878, thus fighting fiercely for the creation of their own state and since its creation in 1912, fighting for preserving its independence and its territorial integrity.

The two countries did have bilateral relations, but they were rather suspicious as both had populations within each other’s land, thus making it hard to really move forward and normalize their relations. This suspiciousness was ongoing since the official normalization in 1971 with the opening of embassies on both capitals and with a small period of cooperation from the 1940’s until the end of the Greek civil war in 1949. But even though, they managed to normalize their relations, both countries did less to strengthen this process, because the new government of New Democracy that emerged in Greece was more interested in the country’s ascension to the European Community. The course changed once PASOK went into power in 1981, as it was aiming a normalization with all the Eastern Bloc countries, since it advocated for social reforms. Whilst it was continued after Hoxha’s death in 1985, Albania was facing serious economic and political problems, eventually leading to the Communist Party’s collapse in 1991 and proclaiming the new democratic government.

After the fall of communism in 1991, Greece and Albania despite any emerging problems, had on a general level good bilateral relation. The main issue to this is the difficulties that the Albanian government puts to the Greeks of Albania, both on economic and political level. As a result, Greece always connects Albania’s ascension to the European Union, with the improvement of the situation of the Greeks there, along with the criteria that the EU, including the reformation of the judicial system and the fighting of the corruption.

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