

## **Albania's search for security 1992 to date**

In this paper we will look at how the Albanian foreign policy has evolved, since 1992 in light of its security concerns. To achieve this we will focus at Albania's foreign policy toward the question of Kosova, Macedonia and Greece. We will be looking at both Democratic and Socialist Party policies.

### **The Foreign Policy of the Democratic-led Government toward Kosova**

In stark contrast with the up to then attitude of the Communist authorities toward the national question, in post-communist Albania the national question became a foreign policy priority. What factors accounted for this dramatic change in Albanian stance? Due to the collapse of communism and democratic transformation that was occurring throughout the former communist block, Albania found itself better placed to support the cause of the ethnic Albanians in Yugoslavia.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the outbreak of Yugoslav wars had a two-fold effect on Tirana. On the one hand, the isolation of Serbia, and its relegation to a pariah status provided a greater diplomatic space for Albania to assist Albanians in Kosova, on the other, it presented an ominous threat from Serbia. If the war spread to Kosova, then Albania would have, ultimately, been dragged into it as well. Such a development would have been catastrophic for Albania whose "armed forces were grossly inadequate for the country's defense"<sup>1</sup> and in addition, was going through one of the most difficult periods in its history. A general situation of turmoil prevailed as the communist system was collapsing and the country was moving toward pluralism. The internal security had been broken and the country was experiencing a severe economic and social dislocation that had reduced Albania to total dependence on foreign assistance.<sup>2</sup> The avoidance of war became the overriding foreign policy objective. The cautious policy adopted by Tirana cannot be primarily attributed to Western and US pressure but to domestic and regional constraints that drastically limited its options.<sup>3</sup> Actually, what provided the US and the Albanian governments with the opportunity to develop a strategy that would prevent the spread of the war southward was the decision of the Albanians in Kosova to organise a non-violent movement.

What we notice from these developments is the convergence of interests between the Albanian state and the Albanians in Kosova. In the past Albania had tried to enhance its security by not focusing on the national question and avoiding any action that would have been perceived as threatening by its neighbours, however, under the new circumstances this foreign policy line could no longer provide security.

The new national security strategy adopted by Albania had become more assertive. While stating that Albania recognised the inviolability of borders thus rejecting the idea of national unification and supporting a peaceful resolution of the problem, it also declared that if Serbia started its ethnic cleansing campaign in Kosova, Albanians would react as one nation which

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<sup>1</sup> Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, Westview Press, 1998, p. 251

<sup>2</sup> Louis Zanga, "Albania Reduced total Dependence on Foreign Food", RFE/RL Research Reports, Vol. 1, No. 8, 21 February 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Zanga, "Albania Afraid of the War over Kosova", RFE/RL Research Reports, Vol. 1, No.46, 20November, 1992.

could lead to a larger Balkan war.<sup>4</sup> This foreign policy stance was meant to serve two goals: to work as a deterrent against the Serbian threat and to urge the US to become more involved in the region.

The Christmas warning announced by President *Bush* in December 1992 and later confirmed by *Clinton* which threatened Serbia with military action if it provoked a war in Kosova was an indication of the shared interests between the US and Albania in preventing the southward spread of the war. In this contexts, Albania and the Albanians provided the US and NATO with an important factor to maintain stability. For Albania, the dose association with the US and Western countries provided the government with the necessary security to focus on the question of the economic transformation. In addition, Albania pursued an active policy at the regional level with the aim of building an anti-Milošević coalition.<sup>5</sup> In these attempts it also tried to differentiate between Montenegro and Serbia. In all these endeavours, Albanian state closely co-ordinated its activities with the Kosova shadow government. This dose co-operation at the institutional level strengthened the firmness of Albanians in Kosova to carry on their resistance in a peaceful way.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the great progress that was made in the inter-Albanian co operation, problems did exist. The relationship between Albania and Kosova, though conducted through institutional channels, had remained confined to two political forces, Democratic Party (DP) and the Democratic League of Kosova (DLK), or even in between two individuals, *Berisha* and *Rugova*, as some would say.<sup>7</sup> DP and DLK did not try to reach out to other political forces in Albania and Kosova in order to establish a wider and open dialogue on the national question.<sup>8</sup> This lack of consensus on the national question proved to be very costly for the Albanians when the crisis broke out. *Rugova* publicly supported *Berisha* and PD policies during national elections and the referendum on the constitution. This attitude undoubtedly increased the already existing gap between *Rugova* and the Socialist Party. Whereas *Berisha*, by strongly supporting *Rugova* and his peaceful policies, and by maintaining contacts only with him, contributed to the marginalisation of the other political figures in Kosova.<sup>9</sup>

Strong co-operation that developed between Albania and Kosova notwithstanding, Tirana was in no position to assist the Albanians in Kosova to achieve their independence. By supporting the *Ghandian* policies of *Rugova*, Albania had clearly indicated that its principle concern was the prevention of conflict. The endorsement of Kosova statehood would have exacerbated regional tensions and threatened the Albania's security. Therefore, Albania declared that it would accept a solution that provided not less than the rights Albanians enjoyed under 1974 constitution. This stande of the Albanian government was adopted immediately after coming to power of *Berisha* in March 1992.<sup>10</sup>

Until late 1996, Albanian foreign policy remained unchanged. It continued to support *Rugova's* peaceful policy and it urged the US and Western countries to exercise pressure on Belgrade to initiate negotiation with Prishtina and restore autonomy so as to defuse tensions in the region. However, the political realities that had shaped Albania's foreign policy in the

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<sup>4</sup> Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, p. 251

<sup>5</sup> EE/1588/BBC World Summary, 12 January, 1993

<sup>6</sup> Baze, *Shqipëria dhe Lufta në Kosovë*, p. 28

<sup>7</sup> Fabian Schmidt, "Balancing the Power Triangle", *Transition*, 26 May, 1995, p.39, Louis Zanga, "The Question of Kosovar Sovereignty", RFE/RL Research Reports, Vol. 1, No.43, 30 October, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Socialist Party Calls for a Round Table of Albanian and Kosovo Parties on Kosova, "Koha Jone" Lezhe, 8 June 1994, pp. 3-4. BBC Monitoring Service, 21 June 1994.

<sup>9</sup> Baze, *Shqipëria dhe Lufta në Kosovë*, p.39

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, "Albania: Restore Autonomy to Kosova Albanian Leader Urges, Reuters, 31 August, 1992.

early 1990s had changed significantly; exclusion of Kosova from the peace negotiations in Dayton marked a serious setback to the efforts of *Rugova* and *Berisha* to bring about a settlement. In the wake of the Dayton Agreement the importance of Albania's regional role decreased as the fighting in Bosnia ended and the threat of a spill over to the neighbouring countries subsided,<sup>11</sup> while the position of Belgrade was strengthened since its support was deemed crucial for the peace accord in Bosnia.

In addition, the international image of Albania was tarnished after the controversial elections of May 1996. Albanian government came under international pressure and the relations with the US, which had been remarkable until then, deteriorated significantly.<sup>12</sup> During all this period, Tirana's policy toward Kosova continued to remain unchanged. It was only after the start of the opposition protests in Belgrade that we noticed a change. *Berisha* called on the Albanians of Kosova to stage peaceful protests in support of the Serbian Opposition arguing that the democratisation of Serbia was important for the resolution of the Kosova question.<sup>13</sup> The novelty of this stand consisted of two things. In contrast to the previous cautious policy of Albania this was a bold move. Secondly, for the first time *Berisha* was openly challenging *Rugova's* position, which maintained that the protests were an internal Serbian affair, and that there was no difference between *Milosevic* and the opposition. The rift between *Berisha* and *Rugova* became clear as the press in Kosova started attacking *Berisha*.<sup>14</sup> Whether the move of *Berisha* marked the beginning of a more assertive policy by Albania is difficult to say due to the outbreak of the crisis in Albania.

## Albania's Foreign Policy toward Macedonia

Although the disintegration of Yugoslavia further fragmented the Albanians in the Balkans, the establishment of an independent Macedonian state was in the interest of Albania and the Albanians in general. The decision of Macedonia not to remain in rump Yugoslavia weakened Serb regional standing and separated Greece and Serbia. In addition, both countries shared similar interests. They were being squeezed by the Greek-Serb axis and could offset some of the pressure by developing close economic and political ties.<sup>15</sup> Due to these considerations Tirana strongly supported Macedonia's stability and independence, and urged the Albanians of Macedonia to work toward this end. While Albania showed interest in the welfare of the ethnic Albanians the issue was not the main factor shaping bilateral relations. As we trace the development of Albanian-Macedonian relations, we notice that the overriding security concern – stability of Macedonia – prevailed over other concerns.<sup>16</sup> Tirana (and the Kosovar leadership) did not support the move of the Albanians in Macedonia for territorial autonomy afraid that this would trigger Serbian intervention.

During *Gligorov's* visit to Albania in June 1992 *Berisha* supported the Albanians' demand for constituent nation's status in Macedonia, and linked the recognition of Macedonia with the latter's respect for Albanians rights there. Following the meeting, the economic relations between the two countries intensified. The transportation of oil through Albania was made possible and in December *Berisha* and *Gligorov* met again on the occasion of the opening of

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<sup>11</sup> Baze, *Shqipëria dhe Lufta në Kosovë*, p.29

<sup>12</sup> Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, p.315

<sup>13</sup> Albania: Foreign Minister says Kosovo issue... ATA news agency, Tirane, 28 December 1996

<sup>14</sup> Baze, *Shqipëria dhe Lufta në Kosovë*, p.51

<sup>15</sup> Vasil Turpovski, "The Balkan Crisis and the Republic of Macedonia", in Danopolous and Messas (eds.), *Crises in the Balkans*, Boulder Colo: Westview Press, 1997, pp. 141-43.

<sup>16</sup> Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, p.239-40.

new border points. These contacts indicated that Albania had de facto recognised Macedonia.<sup>17</sup> De jure recognition was extended immediately after the UN recognition of Macedonia in April 1993, notwithstanding Macedonian authorities failure to address any of the Albanian grievances. Albania's position was reversed because Tirana thought that the recognition of Macedonia would improve the relations between the two countries thus creating the necessary conditions for solving the Status of Albanians in Macedonia.<sup>18</sup> A similar change in policy occurred on the issue of Macedonia's membership in OSCE that had been vetoed by Albania and Greece.

At the end of 1993 the relations between the two countries experienced, for a brief period, deterioration due to the occurrence of two events. Macedonian authorities announced that they had discovered a paramilitary organisation that had connections with Tirana. Considering the Albanian policy toward Kosova and Macedonia, such allegations sounded very absurd. In its policy toward the Kosova question, primary concern of Albania was to avoid a conflict with Serbia. The same thing held true for Macedonia which was illustrated by the continuous call on the Albanians in Macedonia to become a stabilising factor in Macedonia. Moreover, according to this allegations, Albania had decided to create trouble in Macedonia at the end of 1993, after Macedonia had been admitted to the TJN, and also after the US troops had been stationed there, and a number of European countries had established diplomatic relations with Macedonia. Following the incident Albanian Defence Minister and his Macedonian counterpart tried to minimise the importance of the event.

The second event, which was seen as hardening of the Albanian stance toward Macedonia, was Tirana's involvement in the split of the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP).<sup>19</sup> The PDP had been suffering from internal dissent over the strategy to be employed in order to achieve the party's goals. A faction composed of the cabinet and parliament members supported participation in the government as the best way to achieve the Albanians' goals. Whereas the other group, led by *Menduh Thaci* and *Arben Xhaferi*, maintained that participation in government without any progress toward meeting Albanian grievances had weakened the bargaining position of the Albanians. In December 1993 the PDP leadership resigned. Tirana had openly supported *Xhaferi* and *Thaci* section. In the national congress in February 1994 the party split into two. The move by Albania brought about a strong reaction from Skopje. Careful observation of the event and subsequent developments should raise a few questions in one's mind.

The differentiation of political forces in Macedonia by analysts between moderate and radical had been in vogue until the elections of 1998, though such political categories did not always reflect the reality. After the split of PDP, both groups kept the Party's program and statutes.<sup>20</sup> The use of labels, such as nationalist and moderate, benefited the ruling forces in government. Secondly, the event gives the impression as if the key to understanding and controlling developments concerning Albanians outside Albania resides in Tirana. This image has also been reinforced by the way in which Western diplomacy in the region has been conducted. It has focused on Albania and *Berisha* instead of turning their attention to the local Albanian leaders in Macedonia and their grievances.<sup>21</sup> Lastly, was there really a shift in Albania's policy toward Macedonia? In February Greece imposed an embargo on Macedonia.

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<sup>17</sup> Biberaj, "Kosova: The Balkan Powder Keg", p.18.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Austin, "Albania-Macedonian Relations, Confrontation or Co-operation?" RFE/RL Research Reports, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Fabian Schmidt, "From National Consensus to Pluralism", p. 27

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, "From National Consensus to Pluralism" p.27

<sup>21</sup> Isa Blunmi, "The Question of Identity, Diplomacy and Albanians in Macedonia"

That, combined with the UN embargo on Yugoslavia, proved disastrous for the Macedonian economy. At this difficult situation Albania (and Bulgaria) provided Macedonia with alternative trade routes<sup>22</sup> without trying to capitalise on Macedonia's weakness. This clearly illustrated that the overriding security concern of Albania — stability of Macedonia — remained the same.

In May *Berisha* met with *Gligorov* for informal talks. The meeting focused primarily on how to increase economic co-operation between the two countries, and extend communication and transportation links. *Berisha* praised *Gligorov* for the steps taken to enlarge the middle school system, Albanian language media and the decision to hold the population census. The attitude of Albania toward Macedonia did not change even after the incident following the establishment of the Albanian University in Tetova. While Tirana recognised and supported the university, its reaction toward Skopje was restrained.<sup>23</sup>

Although the relations between Macedonian authorities and the Albanians in Macedonia provided considerable room for intervention, Tirana did not exploit it.<sup>24</sup> The stability of Macedonia, not the ethnic ties, was and still is the main factor that has shaped Albanian-Macedonian relations. Fully aware of this<sup>25</sup> and the constraints under which Albanian foreign policy operated due to the Kosovo question and the problematic relationship with Greece, Macedonian authorities did not have to make concessions to Albanians at home in order to maintain relations with Tirana at a satisfactory level. Apart from geostrategic considerations, the attitude of Tirana toward Skopje has also been influenced by the way Tirana perceives the problem of Albanians of Macedonia. For the Albanian political class it is Kosova that constitutes what we know as the Albanian national question, whereas the case of Macedonia is seen as “one of equal rights within the existing state.”<sup>26</sup>

## The policy of the Democratic Government toward Greece

Relations between Tirana and Athens constitute a very important and complex dimension that has always demanded the special attention and energies of the Albanian government. The Albanian public opinion too, as a result of the large number of Albanian emigrant workers in Greece, has been much more interested in this dimension over other foreign policy issues. The relations between the two have also necessitated the intervention of international actors to reduce the tensions.

The Democratic government that emerged after the 1992 elections was very much interested in having good relations with its southern neighbour. Albania was going through a very difficult transition; the economy was in ruins and the country faced serious security threats due to the outbreak of the conflict in Yugoslavia. The immigration of hundreds of thousands of Albanians to Greece relieved some of the transition pains by reducing unemployment and helping the economic recovery through their annual remittances. As the only Balkan country being member of EU and NATO, Greek political support was also important for Albania's integration into the Western institutions. In addition, the danger of the Yugoslav conflict

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<sup>22</sup> Albania: *Berisha* offers facilities to Macedonia to overcome Blockade, BBC Monitoring Service, 23 February, 1994

<sup>23</sup> Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, p.242

<sup>24</sup> Blazevska and Mehmeti, “Steering Through the Regional Troubles“, in *The New Accommodation*

<sup>25</sup> Macedonia: Premier Interviewed on Economic Crisis, Albania. ‘Koha Jone’ Tirana, 3 June 1995, BBC Monitoring Service, 8 June 1995, Quoting Macedonian PM: “Common sense says that it is in Albania's interest for her neighbour to be stable“.

<sup>26</sup> Rubin Barnett, (ed.) *Toward Comprehensive Peace in the Southeastern Europe*, p.76-79

moving to Albanian inhabited territories required that Tirana maintained good relations with neighbouring countries. However, despite this positive disposition of Albania, relations between the two remained problematic until the middle of 1995. The reasons accounting for this state of affairs can be found in the aims of the Greek government toward Albania and the region as well as in the means employed to achieve these goals.

Greek policy in the early 1990s was affected by strong forces of nationalism. Greece tried to establish itself as a leading regional power that could impose its terms on others. To this end it pursued an aggressive foreign policy as illustrated by the measures that it adopted against Macedonia and Albania. Another factor that had a negative impact on bilateral relations and increased Tirana's suspicions was the development of the Greek-Serb axis. The very strong and constant pro-Serb stance of Athens was indicative of different and opposing national interests between Albania and Greece.

The policy of Greece toward Albania is embodied in the phrase:

“Albania's road to Europe goes via Athens“. However, Greece lacked the resources to play this special role. In 1994 trade with Greece composed only 14% of the overall trade relations, while Greek investments only 15% of the total foreign investments in Albania. Italy was ahead of Greece in both of these indicators. Even in terms of the economic aid, Greece was behind Italy, United States and Germany.<sup>27</sup> Although the remittances of the Albanian refugees constitute a significant contribution to the GNP, which enhances Athens' importance, Greece too, benefits a lot from Albania emigrant workers. They provide a cheap labour force and their Greek employers save money by not paying their social security benefits. In addition, the Albanians' savings in Greek banks provide capital for investments in the Greek economy. The economic growth that is witnessed in Northern Greece in the last decade can be attributed, to a large extent, to the cheap Albanian labour force and trade relations between Northern Greek regions and Albania. In addition to economic benefits, Greece has turned the Albanian refugees into a powerful foreign policy instrument, which is used whenever Greece is not pleased with the attitude of the Albanian Government. The deportation of Albanians constitutes the most effective instrument that Greece possesses toward Albania. By returning the refugees Greece not only put pressure on the Albanian economy but also created new cleavages in the Albanian political system. The left-wing Opposition adopted a more conciliatory attitude toward Greece, hoping that it would attract the vote of those families that were directly affected by the deportation policies and tensions between Tirana and Athens. Yet at the same time, such Greek policies have also increased anti-Greek feelings among the Albanian population. Turning again to the issue of Athens' goal that Tirana accepts its positions. Because of different national interests and the general situation of turmoil that existed in the Balkans, Tirana could not fall into the Greek foreign policy line. Contrary to the policies of Athens, Albania recognised Macedonia in early 1993 and during the Greek imposed embargo provided Macedonia with alternative trade routes. Greece was also distressed by the deepening political and military relationship of Albania with United States and Turkey, which narrowed its room to manoeuvre.<sup>28</sup>

The safeguarding of the Greek minority rights constitutes another objective of Greece in Albania. As a mother country, Greece has naturally an interest in the well being of the minority. Greek officials have declared time after time that the improvement of bilateral relations depends on respect for the minority rights. The bilateral disputes between Greece

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<sup>27</sup> Mero Baze, Kthim Grek, Eurolindja, Tirane, 1995, p.76

<sup>28</sup> Elez Biberaj, Albania in Transition, p. 242

and Albania have always had, at least as officially stated reason, the maltreatment of the Greek minority. A brief look at the Albanian history shows that, unlike other Balkan countries, minorities in Albania have not experienced periods of repression, forced assimilation or ethnic cleansing. Two main factors account for this positive legacy. As a result of the small size of the minorities, even the Greek minority that is more visible is estimated at around 100.000<sup>29</sup> constituting dose to 3% of the population, minorities are not perceived by the Albanians as a threat to their control over the state. Second, inter-ethnic tolerance in Albania is directly connected to inter-religious tolerance of which Albania provides a unique example not only in the Balkans but even beyond. Greek minority is fully integrated in the Albanian political, economic and social life, as it is confirmed also in the communication between the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Albanian government.<sup>30</sup> Considering Albania's weak position vis-à-vis Greece; its quest for integration in the Western Institutions; and its efforts to internationalise the Kosova issue, Albania could not afford, even if it wanted, to pursue policies other than those that further integrated the Greek minority. Hence the concern for Greek minority in Albania has turned into a foreign policy instrument that Greece uses to bring pressure on the Albanian government similar to the one that we mentioned above: the deportation of Albanian refugees. The Albanians' concern with the Greek demands on behalf of the Greek minority is that they have in the past - but also certain statements in the 1990s raised similar concerns - been associated with irredentist aims of Greece toward southern Albania or Northern Epirus as Greeks call it. Greece has always considered the acquisition of South Albania as part of the fulfilment of the Megali Idea. During the Balkan Wars, First and Second World War Greece has tried to capture South Albania. However, in each case the post-war settlement did not change the Albanian-Greek border that was decided in the Protocol of Firenze in December 1913. Since 1940 Greece has been in a State of War with Albania following Italy's attack against Greece from Albania, though Albania then was no longer a sovereign country. Paradoxically the state of war between Albania and Greece continues to exist. International law experts say that the decision of Mr. *Papandreou's* Socialist government in 1987 to lift the state of war against Albania is not juridical enough to invalidate the state of war because Greek parliament has never approved the act.<sup>31</sup> The border issue between Greece and Albania should have been covered by the Helsinki Final Act on the inviolability of borders in Europe. Nevertheless, the lack of border pyramid between Greece and Albania testifies to the fact that Greece does not

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<sup>29</sup> There exists a huge discrepancy between the official Albanian estimates around 60,000 – 70,000 and the Greek ones ranging from 300,000 to 400,000. Albanians, but also many regional analysts, assert that the inflated Greek numbers result from the fact that Greeks equate religion with ethnicity, thus counting as Greeks also those that are Greek Orthodox by religion. The US CIA estimates in its World Fact Books for the Greek minority in Albania is at 100,000. Calculations on the size of the Greek minority are also done based on the number of votes cast for the party Union for Human Rights (The Greek Minority Party). In the parliamentary elections of March 1992 it received 48,923 votes or 2.9 percent of the total votes. Voter turnout was 90 percent. The estimates for the size of Greek minority, which are calculated from two different sources provide the following results: around 120,000 (Robert Austin, Kjell Engelbrekt, Duncan Perry, "Albania's Greek Minority", RFE/RL Research Reports, Vol. 3, No. 11, 18 March 1994, p.20) and between 100,000 – 140,000 persons (Greek Helsinki Monitor, "Greeks of Albania and Albanians in Greece", September 1994, p.19). Although there are problems associated with the above calculation (not all the voters of Union for Human Rights are Greek and ethnic Greeks do vote for other parties), one thing becomes clear that the numbers claimed by Greeks 300,000 – 400,000 people are not real. According to some independent sources in Tirana the numbers range from 80,000 to 100,000 Greeks. The 100,000 figure is taken with a wide margin. Thus if we take the 100,000 as an approximate estimate for the Greek minority, then it should compose dose to 3 percent of the total population.

<sup>30</sup> CSCE HCNM — Albania letters at <http://www.riga.lv/minelres/albania>

<sup>31</sup> Remzi Lani, "Albania-Greece: Intrigue and Love", SouthEast European Information Network, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 1 February 2000.

officially recognise the border with Albania. Greek policy toward Albania in the 1990s further increased Albanians fears regarding the ultimate aims of its southern neighbour. Athens has allowed the fierce anti-Albanian propaganda that is aired from the radio stations in Northern Greece by the Panhellenic Union of Northern Epirus Struggle, which calls for autonomy and secession of Northern Epirus (Southern Albania). Greece has tried, and succeeded to some extent, to bring the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church under the control of the Greek Orthodox Church. The Greek Orthodox Exarch *Anastasios Yanullatos* has been declared as the new Archbishop by the Patriarch in Istanbul, though this is against the statuses of the Autocephalous Albanian church. The Greek Orthodox Church is known for its ultra nationalist attitudes toward the Greek minority and Southern Albania.

The first serious incident in the Albanian-Greek relations brings together almost all the elements that we mentioned above. In 1993 Albanian authorities deported a Greek clergyman who had been caught disseminating maps that showed half of the Albanian territory within the Greek borders. Athens immediately hit back by expelling tens of thousand of illegal Albanian migrant workers. As the relations deteriorated, in a statement by the Greek Prime Minister *Mitsotakis*, among other demands, drew the parallel between Albanians in Kosova and the Greek minority in Albania. Whatever status Albanians demanded for Albanians in Kosova should be granted also to the Greek minority.<sup>32</sup> Such a statement could only be seen as a manifestation of the Greek Serbian axis, aiming at keeping Albania off balance, thus being unable to pressurise Serbia over the Kosova issue. As a result of this, Albania further increased its political and military co-operation with Turkey. Tirana also pointed to the lack of reciprocity in the bilateral relations. While the Greek minority was fully integrated in the political and social life of Albania, Athens would not agree to address the issue of the Albanian *Cham* minority that had been expelled from Greece by the Greek armed forces at the end of the Second World War. Tirana also demanded the legalisation of the Albanian migrant workers in Greece. Relations with Greece further deteriorated and reached their lowest point in April 1994, after an attack on a conscript training center in which two Albanian soldiers were killed. The Albanian government blamed the attack on Greece and called for the UN Security Council to condemn Greece for state terrorism. While Greece denied the attacks, it did not take any measures to curb the actions of the extremist organization.<sup>33</sup> The Albanian government responded by arresting several members of the Greek organisation *Omonia*, on charges of espionage and illegal possession of weapons. As counter measures Greece not only initiated a massive deportation of Albanian immigrants but also vetoed EU aid to Albania and was able to influence US decision regarding 30 million USD funding, which was put on hold. Release of prisoners and improvement in the status of the Greek minority were put as conditions by Greece to normalise relations with Albania. The Albanian public opinion was divided between those that advocated a strong stance on one hand and the left-wing Opposition that criticised the government for overreacting and damaging bilateral relations. At this point, the US and EU became involved trying to defuse tensions. Following the release of the ethnic Greeks, relations improved considerably. A meeting between Albanian and Greek officials in March 1995 called on mutual assistance aimed at easing polemics and on joint action in rooting out the Organisation that had carried the action (MAVI). In 1996, during the visit of the Greek President, Greece and Albania signed the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, Goodneighborliness and Security. Albanian government was aware of the importance of having good relations with Greece due to economic and political considerations. The improvement of bilateral relations reflected also a different Greek foreign policy toward the Balkans that had initiated with Prime Minister *Costas Simitis*.

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<sup>32</sup> Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition* op. cit., p. 242

<sup>33</sup> Elez Biberaj, p.244

Misperceptions of each other's intentions might have played a role in the escalating feud – Albanians' suspicions that behind Greek demands for minority protection lied irredentist goals – however, unless Greece addresses the *Cham* problem Albanians will not be assured that Athens is genuinely interested in having good relations.

## Albania's Foreign Policy toward Kosova during the Socialist-led Government

Three main factors shaped Albanian foreign policy and account for its shift after Socialist took power. The need of Socialist-led coalition government to strengthen their position domestically. As a result of 1997, crisis the legitimacy of state institutions had been severely damaged, the political scene was characterised by strong polarisation and the economy was in ruins. Against this background, no political force could have maintained power without the support of the West. It is in this context that we should understand *Nano's* policy shift toward Kosovo.

In order to win the West's support, *Nano* presented himself as a moderate force that was charting a new course that was in contrast to the nationalistic policies of *Berisha*.<sup>34</sup> As *Nano* put it in a report to the Parliament "our unwavering will to introduce into Albania Western political ethics and do away one by one with the concepts and the mentalities of the old and savage Balkans and Albanian policy."<sup>35</sup> However, as we have seen, *Berisha* had not pursued nationalist policies; he had maintained good relations with Macedonia even though the later had not addressed any of the Albanian grievances. In the case of Kosovo his primary concern had been to avoid the conflict. Although *Berisha* became a strong advocate of the Kosovo Albanians, he did call for the restoration of autonomy and urged them to make compromises. Thus in order to differentiate his policy from the previous one, *Nano* had to engage in spectacular acts like meeting *Milošević* and abandoning all the principles on which Tirana-Prishtina co-operation was based.<sup>36</sup>

The second factor that shaped Albanian foreign policy was the close relationship that Tirana developed with Athens at the expense of other regional allies. According to many observers, *Nano* was under strong Greek influence.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, what made easier *Nano's* policy shift was the lack of consensus that had existed on the national question. As we noted earlier, the co-operation between Albania and Kosova had developed exclusively between two political forces: DP and DLK. The other political forces were not consulted on the policy that Tirana pursued on the national question. As a result, *Nano* could abandon the previous policy by identifying it with *Berisha*. In addition the continuous support that *Rugova* had given *Berisha* had resulted in estrangement between him and the Socialist Party in Albania. As the events unfolded, it became clear that a kind of alliance had developed between *Nano* and those opposing *Rugova* in Prishtina.

The meeting between *Nano* and *Milošević* during the Crete summit of the Balkan countries very well illustrates the new Albanian foreign policy. In a total policy reversal, Tirana had carried talks with Belgrade on Kosova when only the legitimate leaders of the Kosova Albanians were entitled to carry those talks. Similar to the meeting between Albanian and Yugoslav Foreign Ministers at the UN a month earlier, this meeting had taken place without consultations with the Kosovar Albanian leadership. Since Albania cannot play the role of the

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<sup>34</sup> Baze, *Shqipëria dhe Lufta në Kosovë*, p.55-56

<sup>35</sup> Albania: Premier says solving the Kosova Crisis..., 'Zeri i Popullit', Reuters, 1 April, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> Baze, *Shqipëria dhe Lufta në Kosovë*, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> Biberaj, *Albania in Transition*, p. 341.

mother state, Tirana cannot represent Kosovar Albanians and decide about their fate. For *Nano* the full observation of the human rights in Kosova and the application of democracy were seen as sufficient conditions to initiate a dialogue with Belgrade.<sup>38</sup> *Nano* also called for direct contacts between Prishtina and Belgrade without the presence of a third party. The new policy had obviously changed from being a factor of support for Kosova Albanians to one of pressure. In line with this policy, *Nano* criticised Kosovar parallel institutions saying that they were not a solution; on the contrary, they radicalised the societies that had created them.<sup>39</sup>

The new policy of Tirana was strongly criticised by the Kosovar Albanians which asked the “government in Tirana to give the same support as its predecessor” and reminded it that the “relations between Albania and Kosova is not one of a mother-daughter country.”<sup>40</sup> The contacts between Tirana and Prishtina had almost broken down.

Despite criticisms at home *Nano* had won praise abroad. The Crete meeting had taken place with Athens’s blessing which wanted to rehabilitate *Milošević*.<sup>41</sup> The Western countries, too, had endorsed the meeting and gave their support to *Nano*.<sup>42</sup>

Even after the outbreak of war in Kosova, in March 1998, the government’s attitude remained restrained and ambivalent.<sup>43</sup> While all the political forces in Albania, including the Socialists, joined a massive rally in Tirana in support of Kosova under the motto “one nation, one stand”, the government failed to adopt these as the main building block of its policy. Tirana’s demand for NATO troops to be deployed in the north-eastern border to prevent a spillover into Albania clearly pointed to the lack of this principle. Tirana was trying to insulate itself from the crisis in Kosova. The government failed to formulate a policy of its own to present the Albanian view on Kosova. Rather it played the role of the obedient partner of the West.<sup>44</sup>

As fighting escalated in Kosova, during the May-June period, and the West refused to intervene, *Nano* toughened his rhetoric, as illustrated by one of his declarations that Albania was “on the eve of war“ with Yugoslavia and called for NATO intervention.<sup>45</sup> However, the main driving force behind his policy had not changed. In Crans Montana *Nano* openly opposed independence for Kosova as not being the best way to end the fighting and suggested that the “right solution would be the creation of a democratic framework, be it a local parliament or administration“. His demand did not even match that of the international community that had asked for substantial autonomy. But what was more important than his pronouncement on the future status of Kosova was his attempt to establish himself as the only reliable and indispensable partner of the West. In Crans Montana *Nano* declared that *Rugova* had become a man without any authority, while adding that he had “information that the KLA has the capacity and the authority to be included into a negotiation process“, and that Tirana

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<sup>38</sup> Dena Kyraikiou, Greece: Tirana Belgrade agree to renew ties. Reuters, 4 November, 1997

<sup>39</sup> ENTER news agency, Tirana ,7 February, 1998

<sup>40</sup> Leading ethnic Albanian Party criticises die Albanian premier. ‘Kosova Daily Report‘, Prishtina, 3 November, 1997, BBC Monitoring Service, 05/11/97

<sup>41</sup> Dina Krykidou, Greece: Albania, Belgrade agree to renew ties.

<sup>42</sup> Germany: Albania – Kinkel supports Albania’s policy of dialogue with Belgrade, ATA news agency, Tirane, 15 November, 1997, BBC Monitoring Service, 18/11/97, British Foreign Secretary promises Premier continuous support, ATA, 15 December, 1997

<sup>43</sup> IC Group Report: The View From Tirana: The Albanian dimension of die Kosova crisis 10/07/98

<sup>44</sup> Mero Baze, “War in Kosova and Albanian Paralyzes“, Gazeta Albania, 3 June, 1998

<sup>45</sup> Austria: Albania says on the eve of war with Yugoslavia, Reuters 22 June, 1998

was “trying to contact every one possible on the ground with due influence to moderate KLA factions”.<sup>46</sup>

The need to win West’s support in order to shore up his position at home is the main driving force behind *Nano*’s foreign policy. Despite widespread corruption and marginalisation of the opposition the West continued to support the Socialist-led government.<sup>47</sup> Following the violence that was sparked as a result of the assassination of *Azem Hajdari*, a leading Democratic Party figure, *Nano* was forced to resign and was succeeded by *Pandeli Majko*.

The foreign policy pursued by *Majko* changed substantially from his predecessor’s. It became more assertive and increased considerably his support for the Albanians in Kosova.<sup>48</sup> The hardening of his stance has been described as a “return to the Balkan nation’s traditional line on Kosova”. *Majko* clearly stated that “Albania should not embark on the road of giving recipes” and that his government was formulating his policy according to this line.<sup>49</sup> A week from the start of the bombing campaign and as the Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing was underway, *Majko* went as far as saying that “independence is an Option that can be discussed very clearly now”.<sup>50</sup> This was a bold statement considering the fact that NATO members were opposed to independence. The present official policy of the Socialist-led government is that it supports Kosovar Albanians will. In other words the independence of Kosova.

## The Foreign Policy of the Socialist-led Government toward Macedonia

The policy of the Socialist-led government toward Macedonia, similar to the Democratic party’s policy, continued to subordinate the ethnic ties to the security concerns and maintenance of good relations. However, while the main contours of foreign policy remained the same the co Operation between the two countries received a boost, as was indicated by the visit of *Nano* to Skopje and signing of eight agreements in the fields of justice, transportation, economy and finance. Following the outbreak of the war in Kosova in March 1998, the countries increased their co-operation in the security area as well in preventing arms and drug trafficking and illegal border crossings.<sup>51</sup>

The same policy was followed by *Majko*, too, and did not change with the coming to power of a new coalition in Macedonia. The co Operation between Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro increased during the Kosova crisis, as these countries were trying to avoid the destabilising effects of *Milošević*’s policies, and cope with the refugee crisis.

## The Policy of the Socialist led Government toward Greece

The crisis of 1997 changed dramatically Albania’s position and the nature of relationship with Greece. Tirana has accepted in a way the special role that Greece should play in the region. During the 1993-6 period Socialist party’s had been critical of Democratic Party’s

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<sup>46</sup> Elif Koban, Switzerland: Interview – Albania PM urges Balances view on Kosova, Reuters, 26 June, 1998

<sup>47</sup> Daniel McAdams, “Don’t Look Now: Another Albanian Nightmare“, Human Events, 10/16/98, vol.54, issue 39, p.6

<sup>48</sup> Benet Koleka, Albania: Analysis — Albania seen as hardening Kosova stance, Reuters, 22 January, 1999

<sup>49</sup> Albania — Interview. Albanian PM backs Kosova Albanian line, Reuters, 25 October, 1998

<sup>50</sup> Richard Murphy, Albania — Interview. Kosova Independence an option. Reuters 1 April 1999

<sup>51</sup> Co-operation with Macedonia necessary in die context of Kosovo crisis. ATA news agency, Tirane 17 March, 1998

policies toward Greece. In addition there existed contacts between PASOK and Socialist Party since 1993. This closeness was indicated by the permission that was given to *Fatos Nano*, the leader of Socialist Party, in 1997 to hold election rallies in several Greek cities where there are Albanian emigrants. The Greek government had clearly taken sides in Albanian election and as the course of events showed, a deep cleavage had been created in its relations with the Democratic Party. After the Socialist took power, the contacts between the two increased substantially and intensified in all areas. There were frequent visits of Greek officials in Tirana which were reciprocated by Albanian counterparts. Not only in the domestic scene, but also in the foreign one, Greece started to play a much more important role. Greece was asked to play the role of the third party between Kosova and Belgrade. As we mentioned earlier, in the Crete Summit Athens aimed at rehabilitating *Milošević* and including Serbia in the regional initiatives, and succeeded in arranging a meeting between *Milošević* and *Nano*. The meeting was strongly criticised by Kosovar leadership and the Albanian opposition.

Improvement of relations with Athens happened at the expense of those with Italy and Turkey. The Opposition strongly opposed this and accused the government for selling the interests of the country. As examples were given the presence of a Greek military contingent in Albania without any clear mission whose mandate continued to be extended, the grip of Greece on the Albanian economy, and the sluggish progress on the Corridor VIII that was seen as vital for Albania's development. During this period Greece has used the instrument of deportation of Albanian citizens very rarely.

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