



ALBANIAN MIGRATION DURING THE PERIOD OF COMMUNISM, BASED ON ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS

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Abstract

The end of the Second World War coincided with massive demographic movements in Europe. Millions of Germans left the land in Central and Eastern Europe, Jews left the places of suffering for safer places, and non-communists fled to escape the violent communist regimes that had just been installed in their countries. There was also a significant exodus from Albania based of economic and political factors. The fate of these millions of displaced people in Europe deeply affected by the war is very difficult. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteed them protection from persecution and denial of citizenship, or the Geneva Convention for Refugees of 1953 guaranteed them the right to repatriation, again, their situation remained very unclear, especially because after capture of the countries of central and eastern Europe by the communists, they resisted repatriation to a large extent, trying to travel to the USA. The migration policies of the USA were determined at that time by the conflicts stemming from the Cold War. Thus, in 1948, an act for the displaced and a special program "for those who fled" offered a peaceful place of residence for those who fled from the communist regimes. The deepening of the east-west conflict and the first years of the cold war, provided sufficient context for another legislative reform in the USA. The Refugee Rescue Law, which in 1953 allowed the admission of 214,000 refugees for 3 years, where almost 70% came from communist countries.

In 1959, some difficult refugees still continued in the camps of Europe. At this moment, the United Nations launched the ambitious project, declaring the year 1959-1960 as the World Refugee Year, aiming at the final closure of the refugee camps in Europe. Based in this context, in this article we have a few exceptions, those who fled Albania belonged precisely to this last category.

Keywords: Communism, refugees, politic and economic immigration, migration factors, migration policies

INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the communist dictatorship in 1944, escaping from Albania was considered treason against the motherland.¹ Based on recently discovered secret documents, which reveal that from 1944 to 1989, 13,692 people escaped from the dictatorial regime in Albania, of which 988 were killed trying to cross the border.² Half of them, or 7,211, had left within the first 15 years of the dictatorship, from 1944 to 1959, and 208 of them were considered war criminals. The report came shortly after the escape of 4,785 people to the western embassies in Tirana, on July 2, 1990. The document also shows about another 800 people, who had gone out of Albania regularly with a passport and visa, but did not had returned to their homeland.

The document mentions an amnesty from 1959, which benefited some of the refugees, as well as the repatriation of only 60 Albanians during the 46 years of communism.³ The report also mentions a large number of escaped Albanians who, according to the State Security, are engaged in hostile activities against Albania. But despite this repeal, which passed the escape from the country not as treason against the homeland, but as an illegal crossing of the border, many Albanians continued to be killed at the border. One of the most scandalous cases was that of Pllumb Pllumbi, a 17-year-old from Shkodra, who was killed trying to cross the border on June 16, 1990, and then walked around the city, tied to a truck with wires open by the State Security. Communism was on its last breath, and even these murders did not prolong its life. From a historical point of view, in 1959, a decree in the form of an amnesty for fugitives from the Albanian state was voted and entered into force, from which 208 people who were classified as

¹ This article, which was included in the law on escapes, was repealed by the decision of the Parliament of Albania on May 8, 1990.

² A highly secret document of the State Security, recently published in Tirana, and dated November 20, 1990, the document bears the signature of the Minister of the Interior at that time, Hekuran Isai, and is addressed to the communist leader Ramiz Alia, in the position of Secretary of the Central Committee of the Labor Party of Albania. In fact, this report is said to have been kept secret from Enver Hoxha himself.

³ Idem. <https://observerkult.com/tronditese-si-i-vrane-komunistet-988-shqiptare-qe-tantuan-te/>

war criminals were excluded at that time. In fact, it seems that this decree was not believed, because only 60 people were repatriated during the entire period 44-91.⁴ It seems that the fugitives were right, because the "fugitive" stigma was removed only in about 190 years. For others, and their families, State Security established a strict regime of surveillance and repression. About 13,600 people were counted as fugitives in the state security reports from 1944 to 1990, not counting those who fled through embassies. Of these, about 4,784 are women and children. They dominated here during the years 1945 and 1948. About 998 others died or were killed by the regime in this effort. There are more departures from Gjirokastra 1399, Shkodra 924, Saranda 859, Korca 729, Kukesi 777, Vlora 436, Dibra 520, Tropoja 402, and then Tirana with 333, Erseka 214, Pogradeci 178, Puka 184, Durres 161, while around 4785 left the embassies, with the first wave on July 2, 1990.⁵ Further, the state began to issue passports and allow people to leave Albania, through mass exodus, which are in fact the most powerful images of the denunciation of an inhumane system. This history may seem distant to many of us, if we do not connect it directly with the history of people. The fact is that there are many of them who live today and still have many questions for which they seek answers: about their fates, for the stigma "Runaway", or for being put in a "bag" as being implicated with the invaders in the 2nd world war. The truth is that only 200 of them were listed as collaborators. Such was the story of Mrija, she has been established for years in New York and the files of the Security for the characters of this saga are being revealed⁶. Her rare story begins when she was 5 years old, she left the ancient lands in the mountains where her father was the chieftain of one of the clans, leaving her tower in flames and her father who tragically burned inside. of family and gender did not match the way the communist leadership of the time thought about life and progress. Their way of life and patriarchy, which did not bend even to the Ottoman conqueror, put them in a life-or-death confrontation with the "persecution forces", or with the only alternative: leaving the country without returning, for what they could. Mrija today tells about "And the Walls Have Ears" a rare story due to isolation and distance, although her home is a piece of Albania in the USA, in the cultural concept, even today. That of wandering without a homeland for more than 10 years in the camps of Europe, until settling in America⁷, that of pain for the loss of loved ones, separation from family, from ancient lands. Like Mrija, from the USA, Belgium, Egypt, Italy, etc., we have encountered traces of the suffering of the denial of the

⁴ Denied by the Regime: Prisons, Detention system and Forced Labor in Albania 1945-1990. (n.d.). Institute of History, AIDSSH. ISKK.

⁵ The data were taken from the report on emigration to Albania, compiled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1990.

⁶ The data were taken from the report on emigration to Albania, compiled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1990.

⁷ Tepelene Camp, Survivors' Testimony. (2018). Tirana: AIDSSH.

homeland, the anxiety of the persecution of the family left behind, who were interned in forced labor camps or in the fields of Myzeqe, suffering all the time. The stigma of "enemy of the people" or "agent of a foreign state" since the family belongs to a "refugee".⁸ Often times, and today, they face the lack of access to the register of civil status, citizenship, housing, property or personal belongings. The need to understand their own destiny as well as to be well-understood in a nation to which they belong, with more commitment and desire. The need to recognize the attempts and sacrifices of their families for freedom and national rights, in the way they thought. Using the data of the State Security reports on political emigration, we are presented with this dimension and dynamics of political emigration over the years.

ALBANIAN POLITICAL EMIGRATION AND EFFORTS FOR THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN ALBANIA

Albanian migration before 1945 is characterized by flows of population movement within and across borders. Migration before 1945 was characterized by economic factors (eg persons migrating as seasonal workers, traders, religious missionaries) and political factors (persons conscripted and those who joined the armed forces in various wars in the Balkan region). Vullnetari, a researcher of Albanian immigration issues, makes a detailed review of the early mass migration of Albanians mainly to Italy (Sicily and South Italy in 1444-1468) and Greece (the islands of Euboea, Hydra and the territories near them) during the 14th centuries and XV. Some of the factors that led to mass population movements are related to Ottoman rule and resistance to its occupation. This resistance has led to Albanians leaving their country and settling in the north (Dalmatian coast) and south (Greece).⁹ In addition, poverty, low living standards mainly in rural areas, exploitation of farmers, heavy taxation system, almost non-existent health and education system, wars and long Ottoman occupation, all together explain the waves of mass migration during these years.¹⁰ During the years 1468-1506, it is estimated that 200,000 Albanians left the country, which is a quarter of the entire population at that time.¹¹ Opponents of the Ottoman regime and political activists during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, fearing persecution and oppression, caused a significant number of migrants to leave the country and seek refuge in neighboring countries as well as elsewhere of Western Europe, the United States of America, Argentina and Australia.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Vullnetari, J. (2007). Albanian Migration and Development: Review of today's times (Albanian Migration and Development: State of the Art Review). IMISCOE document.

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Barjaba, K. (2004). Albania: Looking Beyond Borders (Albania: Looking Beyond Borders) take from the Migration Information Resource at: <http://www.migrationinformation.org>.

The change of borders as a result of the treaties during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) was another reason for the forced migration that affected the Albanians, causing internal displacement of people from the south to the coastal regions¹² and crossing borders and settling in Turkey (the case of Chameria) and North America. Internal movements that occurred within coastal regions and cities drew people from surrounding areas. Internal migration was characterized by two dimensions: rural-rural and rural-urban movement¹³. Tirta, another researcher, underlined that the southern and southeastern parts of Albania have been more affected by migration, although statistics from the North were rare and difficult to obtain.¹⁴ It is estimated that between 1923-1925 over 100,000 Albanians emigrated abroad, which corresponds to 13% of the total population in 1945.¹⁵ According to INSTAT,¹⁶ 110,000 Albanians left the country during the years 1923-1939 mainly due to economic and political instability. Furthermore, 19,000 Albanians left the country during the period 1940-1945 due to opposing views with the ruling communist party at the time. In conclusion, the migration of Albanians before 1945 was complex and influenced by a combination of political and economic factors. The massive waves of migration led to a significant reduction of the population and created some of the elements that are still found today in the migration situation in Albania, such as different migration routes and internal population movements. Understanding early Albanian migration can help understand the origins of recent migration and explain and predict the current trajectory of Albanian migration today.

POLITICAL MIGRATION IN ALBANIA

The period from 1944 to 1990 is a segment of the thousand-year history of our people, but in terms of the dynamics of development and the events it includes, it is one of its most important periods. When the communist leadership came to power, it followed a policy that had nothing to do with democratic governance, instead it was an open dictatorship against all groups and individuals who were not support for the communist party. She, within a short time, eliminated through executions and imprisonments the entire Albanian opposition, the senior

¹² Bërsholi, A. (2000). General population censuses in Albania: Historical overview (Censuses in Albania: A Historical Perspective). Tirana: Academy of Sciences, Center of Studies Geographic.

¹³ Carletto, G., Davis, B., Stampini, M., & Zezza, A. (2004). Internal movement and migration international in Albania (Internal Mobility and International Migration in Albania). Rome: FAO, ESA, Study 04-13.

¹⁴ Tirta, M. (1999). Migrations of Albanians, internal and external (the 1940s - the 40s of the century XX). Albanian Ethnography, 18.

¹⁵ United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Albania (2000). Human development report for Albania 2000 (Albanian Human Development Report 2000). Tirana: UNDP Albania.

¹⁶ INSTAT (2004a). Migration in Albania in 2001. Tirana: Institute of Statistics.

leaders of the Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim clergy, forcibly expropriated the owners, set up forced labor camps everywhere, creating a situation of insecurity and fear in the country. Despite the hermetic isolation of the country from the Western world and the absence of a free press, the deplorable state of our country had become known around the world.

"We here in America," said Charles Jackson, chairman of the "Free Europe" Committee on the Albanian radio show "Free Europe" in 1951, "we are aware of your suffering; even we say with sadness that we are fully aware of the terror that struck your country. The acts of terrorism committed by Enver Hoxha's regime, Stalin's puppet, we know very well. The United States is no longer indifferent, and the American people are aware of the responsibility and burden they have."¹⁷

The senior leaders of the American state, from time to time appealed to the Albanian people to throw away the communist captivity and have tried to sensitize their governments and people to save the Albanian people from the communist rule. Senator Charles Kersten, in a resolution addressed to the US Senate in 1953, on the Albanian issue, writes: "As soon as Enver Hoxha's government took power, first by force and then with falsified elections, it suppressed every opposition with arrests, imprisonments and shootings. It is using brutal methods to eradicate all human and national feelings, it has robbed private property, it has enslaved farmers and workers in state farms and factories, it has interned men, women, children, old people and young people in concentration camps in order to completely eradicate the Albanian race and its culture".¹⁸

This prompted the execution of the secret service's plan to overthrow the communist regime in Albania, which relied on Albanian political emigration. With the end of the war, most of the political opponents of the communist regime, among them politicians who had served in the administration of the occupation period or at the head of the right-wing political forces, to escape persecution and physical elimination, emigrated abroad, facing dangers from the long journey through the mountains and numerous ambushes by armed groups. There are no exact data on the number of political emigrants who left after the end of the war, but it is estimated that around 1,500 people left, of which 800 left via Ulcinj and Tivar for Italy, 500 followed the German troops on the Shkoder road. -Podgorica-Sarajevo-Zagreb-Vienna and 200 others who were in the mountains of the south, distributed in small groups, crossed into Greece.¹⁹

¹⁷ Dosti, H. "A life for the National issue", Tirana 2008, pg. 259

¹⁸ Idem, pg. 276

¹⁹ Musta, A. work cited, pg. 67

The Foreign Ministry of Albania in 1975 calculated Albanian political emigration at 10-12 thousand people.²⁰ The political emigrants did not leave their homeland simply to save their lives, but also to make an organized resistance to the communist regime and to ensure the support of the allies for its overthrow. "The invasion of Albania by the communists and the departure of the Allies from our land," said Mid'hat Frashëri, president of the "Free Albania" committee, on September 6, 1949, "forced many Albanians to take the path of exile, not to moved away from the communist danger, than to continue their activity and not to cut relations with the liberal powers of the West, with which they had been in contact in Albania as well".²¹ What united all the individuals and all the different groups and currents of Albanian political immigrants was the anti-communist attitude. So regardless of the divergences that existed between groups and individuals, when the opportunity arose to contribute to the issue of overthrowing communism, despite the great risks that existed, the political emigrants cooperated and showed themselves ready to give their contribution. Efforts to reorganize the old anti-communist parties, the National Front and Legality, and the organization of new groups began in 1945. On December 31, 1945, the Second Congress of the National Front took place in Regio Emilia, Italy,²² which adapted its program and charter to the new situation created after the War. In 1946, the Independent National Front organization was created in Italy, and then several other groups according to clans and provinces. Even the Legality party consisted of two currents, Ahmet Zogu supported by the old and Abaz Kupa with the young. During 1948, several circumstances were created that convinced the secret services of America, Great Britain and neighboring countries to intervene in Cyprus, therefore it was necessary to overcome the divisions of political emigration in the name of an important mission. "At this time, America, Great Britain, as well as Italy and Greece, intervened to unite the political emigration in a single organization."²³ The National Front accepted in principle the union with other parties, but had reservations about the Independent National Front, due to the inclusion in it of some people who had been collaborators with the Italians and the monarchists and had principled contradictions related to the form of the regime. In a meeting of Mr. Hasan Dosti and Mr. Stavri Skëndo with Mr. Mc Kison and Mr. Campbell on April 27, 1949, they ask American officials to support the National Front because it is "the only one that is sincerely democratic and deserves American help. but Mr. Campbell said that the Department, of course, is interested in the well-being of

²⁰ History of the Albanian People, volume IV, 1939-1990. Bot. of the Academy of Sciences, Tirana 2008, pg. 270

²¹ Dosti, H. work cited, pg. 259

²² History of the Albanian People, volume IV, 1939-1990. Bot. of the Academy of Sciences, Tirana 2008, pg. 270

²³ History of the Albanian People, volume IV, 1939-1990. Bot. of the Academy of Sciences, Tirana 2008, pg. 270

the Albanian people and considers the current regime unrepresentative, however, it cannot officially support the activities of a group of especially immigrants".²⁴

The initiative and encouragement for the unification of the Albanian political emigration came primarily from the Americans and the British through the "Free Europe" committee. The main reason for the support he gave to the creation of a single organization of Albanian political emigration was to cover the conspiratorial activity of the secret services by giving the authorship of subversive actions to the organization of Albanian emigrants. On November 11, 1950, 4 groups of paratroopers left for Albania, a total of 16 people, who were kept in the "Albanie Labor Army Service 4000" company and trained in German camps. The first group of landings consisting of would land in Dibër. The second group, consisting of the second group, would operate in Kruja. The third group consisting, would go down to Kukës and the fourth group consisting of and others would go down to Vlora. The paratroopers flew from Germany to Athens and from there to the Albanian territories. The Albanian state was already in full readiness. Informed by the Soviet secret service, he had announced the mobilization of all security and other structures and the entire people, and it was a futile adventure to jump into Albanian soil for anti-state missions. Thus, within a short time, these groups also ended up in the traps set up by the state security, where some were killed, some were caught and tried, and some were able to leave with great difficulty, falling into the pursuit of the intelligence agencies. Yugoslav and Greek, who imprisoned them for several years until they gained their freedom due to the intervention of the allies. All landing groups composed of Albanian political émigrés, held and trained at various bases in Italy, Greece, Malta, Germany and Yugoslavia failed in their missions.

ECONOMIC FACTORS OF MIGRATION IN ALBANIA BEFORE THE 90s

Migration before 1945 was characterized by economic factors (e.g. persons migrating as seasonal workers, traders, religious missionaries) and political factors (persons conscripted and those who joined the armed forces in various wars in the Balkan region). The volunteer makes a detailed review of the early mass migration of Albanians mainly to Italy (Sicily and Southern Italy in 1444-1468) and Greece (the islands of Euboea, Hydra and the territories near them) during the 14th and 15th centuries. Some of the factors that led to mass population movements relate to Ottoman rule and resistance to its occupation.

This resistance has led to Albanians leaving their country and settling in the north (Dalmatian coast) and south (Greece). In addition, poverty, low living standards mainly in rural

²⁴ Dosti, H. work cited, pg.143

areas, exploitation of farmers, heavy taxation system, almost non-existent health and education system, wars and long Ottoman occupation, all together explain the waves of mass migration during these years.²⁵ During the years 1468-1506, it is estimated that 200,000 Albanians left the country, which is a quarter of the entire population at that time.²⁶ Opponents of the Ottoman regime and political activists during the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, fearing persecution and oppression, caused a significant number of migrants to leave the country and seek refuge in neighboring countries as well as elsewhere of Western Europe, the United States of America, Argentina and Australia. In conclusion, the migration of Albanians before 1945 was complex and influenced by a combination of political and economic factors. The massive waves of migration led to a significant decrease in the population and created some of the elements that are still found today in the migration situation in Albania, such as different migration routes and internal population movements. Understanding early Albanian migration can help understand the origins of recent migration and explain and predict the current trajectory of Albanian migration today. After World War II, Albania experienced major political changes and remained a communist and then a socialist country for more than four decades. In the period 1945 - 1990, international migration was prohibited and the internal movement of the population was strictly controlled and planned. Rural-rural migration prevailed in the first five years, reflecting the agrarian reform of the time and the growth of the urban population in the years 1950-1955. This increase in urban population was related to rural-urban migration and new administrative changes that came from the development of new industries in new urban areas.²⁷

During the 60s, there were many demographic changes at the rural-urban level due to reforms new ones undertaken by the authorities as an effort to preserve the rural population and starting minimum urbanization policy. Efforts to balance the quality of life in urban areas and rural were artificial because the socio-economic indicators of rural areas remained worse than those of urban areas. However, the authorities managed to control rural-urban migration in the 1960s and internal movements were administered and carried out within the same region (intra-regional migration). In the detailed review of Albanian migration, Vullnetari,²⁸ states that most of the internal migrants were young (19-30 years old), male, qualified and semi-qualified. In addition, population censuses in the period 1979 - 1989 show a tendency for women to migrate to urban areas aiming for better education and work, opportunities that existed only in these

²⁵ Vullnetari, J. (2007). Albanian Migration and Development: Review of Today's Times (Albanian)

²⁶ Idem.

²⁷ Barjaba, K. (2004). Albania: Looking Beyond Borders (Albania: Looking Beyond Borders).

²⁸ Bërxfholi, A. (2000). General population censuses in Albania: Historical overview.

areas. As we mentioned above, international movement during the era of socialism was prohibited. However, the borders with the former Yugoslavia and Greece were somewhat permeable in the early and mid-1950s and 1960s. Those who managed to cross the borders were temporarily sent to refugee camps in Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia and later moved to final destinations in Western Europe (such as France, Belgium) and North America (USA). These sporadic "incidents" became more and more difficult and the Albanian authorities strictly controlled the border areas, making crossing the border a difficult and dangerous act. Those caught were charged with treason and punished in many ways, from internal exile to life imprisonment.

CONCLUSIONS

During the communist period, we can say that the state's policies for stopping immigration and leaving the country were some of the most repressive in the world. These movements were called 'escape' or treason and the punishments were extremely harsh - killing at the border during the crossing, imprisonment for up to 10 years or shooting on capture, and deportation of family members in both cases. This coincided with the militarization of borders and the creation of border zones – villages along the land border – where entry was only allowed with special permission from district law enforcement. Consequently, those who were able to leave during this time were very few. On the other hand, movements within the country were restricted through various laws and regulations, together formed a 'counter-migration system'. This system aimed at keeping the increase of the citizen population to a minimum, and keeping the peasant population in rural areas. These measures were related with ideological reasons: control over the population, and economic: less employment and residential opportunities in the city, and the population's 'occupation' with agriculture in the villages. Despite the success it had to some extent, there were also movements outside the legal parameters. This took several forms, two of which were marriage to urban spouses and settlements near cities. This was called 'indirect migration' and suggests that these movements contributed to the formation of peripheral areas with high population density near the cities, such as the agricultural cooperatives near Tirana.²⁹ Tirana, more than any other city, was the focus of these movements - the most preferred destination for a large number of (especially young) Albanians. But the political and socio-economic changes that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s paved the way for mass movements inside and outside the country.

²⁹ Vullnetari, J. and King, R. (2016) From communist 'gulag' to Balkan 'ghetto': Albania and migration policies over the years. [From communist 'gulag' to Balkan 'ghetto': Albania and its migratory policies over the years], *The Endeavor* 26-27: 176–87 published January 2011].

The mindset in policy making must change from considering immigration as 'problem', 'wounds' of 'underdeveloped' societies in treating it as a reality, part normal life of different societies, including the Albanian one, for centuries as well and in today's times. On the other hand, the history of the last decades has shown that the war against 'illegal' immigration will not stop those individuals or families for whom emigration is the only possibility of survival, economic and social progress, or escape from violent political and social environments. And finally, immigrants are key actors in the development of Albania and the host countries both economically and the social-cultural one. The most successful migration policies will be those that really appreciate this contribution in practice.

On the other hand, regarding the clarification of the discovery of the history of thousands of immigrants and their families during the time of communism, other studies will be needed in order to encourage public debate based on documents and facts, with the filter of a strong scientific discipline, and with a European approach, answering these questions: 1. What are the features of the creation of Albanian political immigration during the years 1944-1990; What was the geographical extent of Albanian political emigration; migrant camps in Europe. What are some of the profiles of prominent political and economical immigrants and their activities. What was the activity of Albanian political and economical emigration for the protection of Albanian national interests and their activity to fight the communist regime in Albania. Who were the associations created by the Albanian political emigration and their approach towards communist Albania; How did the Albanian communist state react to Albanian political emigration? How did the Cold War affect the relations of the Albanian state with the Yugoslavs, Greeks and Italians. How the State Security worked with the Albanian emigration and their families in Albania, etc.

For this, archival sources and oral testimonies must be used, which have been collected, according to certain methodologies on a scientific basis, by specialized institutions. In the high numbers of Albanian emigration over the centuries and during the long transition, this appears to be only a fraction. But this fraction is very important for our country. Completely integrated in the host societies, today they represent a strong bridge of communication with the most developed countries and with our allies. They do not stop loving Albania, and being active in different ways to denounce human rights violations in communist Albania.

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