



ALBANIAN GREEK RELATIONS FROM THE EYES OF THE ALBANIAN PUBLIC- PERCEPTIONS 2013

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STIFTUNG

“Albanian Greek relations from the eyes of the Albanian public – perceptions 2013”



Tirana, March 2014

Acknowledgements

The Albanian Institute for International Studies would like to express its gratitude to the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Albania (FES-Tirana)* that supported this project.

Published by: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Office Tirana
Rr. Abdi Toptani
Torre Drin, Kati i 3-të
KutiaPostare 1418
Tiranë, ALBANIA

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Introduction

In his first interview for the important Greek daily, *Kathimerini*, after the June 23 elections, the incoming Prime Minister Edi Rama said that the period of Siberian winter in the relations between Albania and Greece was coming to an end and soon ‘summer’ was on its way.¹ He was referring to the problems that the countries had after not reaching a mutual deal on the Delimitation of the Greek-Albanian Continental Shelf and Maritime Zones or as commonly referred to by Albanian media and public the *sea border issue*. The deal that was prepared between the representatives of the respective governments was deemed unconstitutional in Albania after the Socialist Party itself brought it before court. Then in the pre-election campaign Prime Minister Sali Berisha raised his nationalistic tones alienating the southern neighbor even further. To add on the controversy Albanian immigrants were faced with important obstacle in their traveling back and forth due to the issue of name places, a case in which their children passport bears their birthplace written in official Albanian rather than the internationally recognized place name.²

Tat the time, it was only the last installment in a painstakingly complex and emotional soap opera like relationship that goes on between Albania and Greece, two neighbors in the Balkans which once the famous Albanian writer Ismail Kadare named “*the two oldest people of Europe.*” History has vested their relationship with

1. Interview: Edi Rama. *Kathimerini*, June 30 2013.

2. One example is for a person born in Thessaloniki and in whose passport the birthplace reads: ‘Selanik’ which is the correct version in the Albanian language but not the accepted international version of this city. Other examples include Athina (in Albanian) which should be Athens. Also this applies to the name of the country which internationally reads ‘Greece’ and in Albanian is Greqi.

high dosages of drama, conflict and still numerous human, cultural and economic bonds that keep them together.

Well into this characteristic Balkan style love-hate relationship, Albanians on their side are quite passionate. When Albania won over Greece in a soccer match right after the Greek national team had become European Champions in September of 2004, Albanians celebrated their victory as redemption of what they thought the sufferings that their southern neighbor had inflicted upon them. A decade later most Albanians still think that was the match of the century.

It is therefore necessary to make an effort to capture the perceptions and their implications on policy and discourse by objective research. This study will first try to summarize for a non expert audience the list of main issues that condition that relationship between these two neighboring countries focusing on contemporary debates. A note for the objectives of the report is included before presenting the main conclusions from the national poll carried out in Albania in 2013. A parallel study has been conducted by The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). Comparisons between perceptions were the subject of the two conferences organized in the context of this project and discussed in Tirana and Athens respectively in November and December of 2013. A comparative analysis will be the subject of a forthcoming joint report of AIIS and ELIAMEP.

Glossary of Issues

The variety and complexity of the issues that determine the relations between Greece and Albania and eventually also affect the perceptions that citizens of the two countries have on each other looks like a confusing maze where the pieces of the puzzle are so intrinsically linked to each other. In various times and due to various shifts in context, one issue becomes increasingly more important than others until a new media report or a new incident occurs and the puzzle highlights a different piece. The following is a comprehensive yet not exhaustive list of factors that make up the current agenda of issues between Albania and Greece:

Maritime borders

While maritime borders and control over the Mediterranean Sea have often been at the centre of some countries' disputed,³ Albania and Greece are the protagonists of one of these cases where the border lines of territorial sovereignty and hence economic exploitation in the Ionian Sea are not clearly defined. After two years of negotiations among governments of the two countries, an agreement was reached in April 2009 during a high-profile meeting between visiting Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis and the Albanian counterpart, Sali Berisha. The Agreement for the Delimitation of the Greek-Albanian Continental Shelf and Maritime Zones was formally signed by the respective Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Lulzim Basha and Dora Bakoyannis.⁴

3. Klot, N. (1987). Maritime Boundaries in the Mediterranean Sea: Aspects of Cooperation and Dispute, in Blake, G. H. (ed), *Maritime Boundaries and Ocean Resources*. Pp. 208-226.

4. Hellenic Communication Service. (2009). *Greece, Albania Sign Continental Shelf Pact*. Available at: <http://www.helleniccomserve.com/greecealbaniasign.html>.

The signing of the agreement was followed by different statements of Albanian military and International Law experts in the national media who claimed that the agreement had been subject to irregularity and abusive border delimitation.⁵ The issue also fed the emerging political nationalist voices in Albania with ample rhetorical material to use. Following this public unease, the Albanian Constitutional Court nullified the agreement “due to ‘procedural and substantial violations’ of the constitution and the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)”.⁶ The issue is still pending and was brought up in the recent visit to Tirana of the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Venizelos. Potential oil drill exploration interests by both sides from American and Canadian firms in the waters of the Ionian Sea make the issue even more pertinent.⁷

Migration

Around 700 thousand⁸ Albanian citizens may reside in Greece although official figures vary from one source to another given the fact that a considerable part has resided illegally in Greece. Greece is by far the largest recipient of Albanian migrants who

5. Likmeta, B. (2009). Experts Reject Greek-Albanian Land Grab Claim. *Balkan Insights*. Available at: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/experts-reject-greek-albanian-land-grab-claim>.

6. International Boundary Research Unit (IBRU). (2010). Albanian constitutional court nullifies maritime boundary agreement with Greece. *Durham University*. Available at: https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/news/boundary_news/?itemno=9534&refref=%2Fibru%2Fnews%2F&resubj=Boundary+news%20Headlines.

7. Tirana Times, (2012). [Greece to start oil search near Albanian waters](http://www.tiranatimes.com/news.php?id=9157&cat=1). Available at: <http://www.tiranatimes.com/news.php?id=9157&cat=1>.

8. Albanian Screen (2013). 32.5 % of Albanians living abroad as immigrants: Most of them in Greece. Available at: http://news.albanianscreen.tv/pages/news_detail/56180/ENG.

have gone to great lengths to integrate within Greek society. While Albanians share of immigrants in Greece counts to nearly 60%,⁹ their successful mastering of the language and their traditional working settlement in jobs such as agriculture, construction, domestic works, food industry and other services linked to tourism¹⁰, Albanians have eventually become an important part of the Greek society and Greek economy. Their road to integration has been the hardest one compared to the situation experienced by Albanian immigrants in other countries. In the early 90s, reports of abuse with the immigrants in Greece such as police beatings and the infamous large scale deportation operations “*Fshesa* – (Broom)”¹¹ inflamed Albanians with a sense of outrage and contempt for Greece. While the number of Albanian illegal migrants has decreased accompanied by a broader social integration of them into the Greek society, the current anti-immigrant sentiment in Greece seems to be more oriented towards other immigrant communities, especially those coming from Africa, Asia or the Middle East.

The recent economic crisis in Greece has urged many Albanian families to return home. According to a recent study in Albania, while it is difficult to measure the exact inflows of Albanian migrants, “combining the different partial statistics, it is estimated that in the last 5 years, between 18 to 22% of Albanian

9. Baldwin-Edwards, M. and Kyriakou, G., (2004). Statistical Data on Immigrants in Greece: An Analytic Study of Available Data and Recommendations for Conformity with European Union Standards. Mediterranean Migration Observatory UEHR, Panteion University.

10. Baldwin-Edwards, M. (2004). Albanian Emigration and the Greek Labour Market: economic symbiosis and social ambiguity. *South East Europe Review*. Pp 3-5.

11. International Crisis Group (ICG). (2001). Albania: The State of the Nation 2001. *Balkans Report N°111*. Tirana/Brussels.

migrants in Greece have returned to Albania”.¹² Given this recent trend, Albania is now facing issues of returning migrants social integration, while there is an increase from 2009 of remittances from Greece due to returning migrants withdrawal of their savings from Greek banks.¹³ An important part of the returnees are Albanian migrants of a retiring age as well as those who used to conduct seasonal worker.¹⁴ Although this trend has been constant during the last five years, the Albanian migrant community in Greece still remains one of the largest immigrant community in Greece.

EU integration

Albania’s dream to achieve full EU membership is a national priority that is upheld by both a strong popular support¹⁵ and a commitment at least in public rhetoric by all political parties to adhere with the integration agenda. Greece on the other side has been the host of one of the most important EU events related to enlargement, the 2003 Thessaloniki summit where the commitment to include the Western Balkans countries in the EU family was strongly reassured. Official Greek foreign policy has been pro-enlargement, however Greece sometimes has shown to be an unsurpassable impediment to other countries on a variety of matters, most importantly to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as a result of the name issue. Nevertheless, Greece’s EU membership is a resource for its neighbours EU aspirations.

12. Albanian Centre for Competitiveness and International Trade (ACIT), (2012). *Study on the Economic Impact of the Greek Crisis in Albania*. P.9. Available at: <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1863/USAID%20Study%20on%20Greek%20Crisis.pdf>.

13. Ibid. p ii.

14. Kasimis, C. (2012). *Greece: Illegal Immigration in the Midst of Crisis*. Available at: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=884>.

15. AIIS has been conducting yearly surveys measuring popular support for integration, which has never fallen below 80 percent in national polls. See www.aiis-albania.org.

Along Albania’s path towards EU integration Greece has been an important partner although not always constant in its support. Regarding Albania’s EU candidate status, Greece has expressed its support on different occasions. Accordingly, just before the meeting of the EU Council of Ministers, where the decision about granting Albania the EU candidate status was eventually postponed, the Greek ambassador to Tirana, Leonidas Rokanas, emphasized Greece’s firm support for Albanian’s EU integration.¹⁶ This statement was followed recently by another one that was made this time by the Greek Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Evangelos Venizelos, who reaffirmed Greece support and stated that “Albania should get the candidate status in June”.¹⁷ Greece support on the issue becomes even more important and meaningful, given the fact that the country is holding the EU presidency from the beginning of 2014.

The Cham issue

The Cham issue in very broad strokes refers to the forceful and violent displacement of ethnic Albanian communities from the north of Greece into Albania at the end of World War II. Accused of collaborating with the Nazis many were forced to leave behind their houses and on their way many were killed and abused.¹⁸ Since then this community has been asking for Greece to accept this ethnic cleansing as well as to apologize and recognize the property rights of the displaced Albanians.

16. Tirana Times, (2013). *Albanian-Greek relations: Beyond the status quo*. 8:47. P. 7.

17. Tirana Times. (2014). *Greece to support Albania’s EU integration process*. 9:1. P. 5.

18. For a detailed account of the issue see Vickers, M. (2002). *The Cham Issue: Albanian National & Property Claims in Greece*. *Conflict Studies Research Centre*. G 109.

Although Greece insists that there is no such issue as the Cham issue and therefore refers to it as a “non-issue”,¹⁹ in Albania the political consideration over the Cham question are increasing. This cause now is being advocated by the different political forces representing this community, the largest of which is the party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU). Recently PDIU known in popular parlance as the *Party of the Chams* gained five (5) seats in Parliament, a significant presence. PDIU has been referring in the past four years to the compilation and ratification by the parliament of a Cham Resolution which will address the Cham issue and the Cham population’s demands.²⁰ The attitude of Greece towards the issue angers more than only the members of the Cham community. Attempts by Greek police to block Albanian media from filming and recording in the northwestern Greek villages where some Albanian speaking communities still persist have caused quite a stir in Albania.²¹

The Orthodox Church

The communist regime forbade all manifestations and celebrations of religious character in Albania, setting a historical precedent of a policy of atheism. However, most believers in Albania continued to profess their faith in a quiet and private

19. Ibid.

20. Panorama [online]. (2012). *Zbardhet rezoluta came: te kthehen pronat 10 miliard euro* [The Cham resolution comes to light: 10 million euro of property to be returned]. Available at: <http://www.panorama.com.al/2012/12/10/rezoluta-came-sot-ne-kuvend/>.

21. One journalist who did a TV show on Albanian speaking villages in Greece, Marin Mema (a public figure well known in Albania), was not allowed to enter Greece anymore and was declared *persona non grata*. <http://www.shqiptarja.com/media/2710/gazetari-i-top-channel-marin-mema-shpallet-non-grata-ne-greqi-112930.html>, 19/09/2012. In another Top Chanel documentary ‘Shqip’ on Chameria, footage was shown of Greek police harassing the journalists and asking them not to film while following them with a police car.

manner. Upon the regime change religion was reinstated as a basic human right. The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, one of the three traditional religious denominations, since the early 90s has been headed by a Greek: Archbishop Anastasios Janullatos.²² The lack of experienced and sufficiently knowledgeable Albanian figures that could carry on such a duty was presented as a first argument for the election of a non-Albanian citizens to the head of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, but later on the argument lost ground to the perception that is time for the Orthodox Church to be headed by an Albanian.²³

Religion and politics were confronted once again in 2013 with the incident of the church in Permet (city in south Albania) which was taken over by the state after a court decision claiming it as public property.²⁴ This was met with a note of protest by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs²⁵ which raised many eyebrows in Albania and became an argument in favor of those who claim that Greece yields undue influence in the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania.

22. Archbishop Anastasios Janullatos came to be heading the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania since 1992. This position was preceded by the Patriarchal Exarch in Albania carried by him from January 1991 until June 1992.

23. An ever present debate in Albania it resurfaces periodically in the press, see for example “ At Nikolla Marku: Her are my conflicts with Janullatos- an open letter to American Ambassador Arvizu” <http://www.gazetametropol.com/at-nikolla-marku-ja-konfliktet-e-mia-me-janullatosin/>

24. Top Channel (2013). *Police takes building in Permet*, Available at: <http://www.top-channel.tv/english/artikull.php?id=9793>.

25. Korologou, M. (2013). *Albanians Pull Down Bell Tower in Përmet*. Available at: <http://eu.greekreporter.com/2013/08/17/albanians-pull-down-bell-tower-in-permet/>.

Greek Minority and its political parties

The Greek minority is the biggest minority in Albania, compared to the other minority groups and it is situated in southern Albania. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of people that constitute this community as different figures are presented. Thus in early 2000, the Albanian government would report a number of 60,000 to 70,000, while the Greek government reported 200,000 to 400,000 people.²⁶ The Greek minority in Albania and especially the extent of its social and political rights has been a crucial component of the Albanian-Greek relations and often at the centre of disputes. While some studies emphasize the relative good relations between the Greek minority and the Albanian majority in southern Albania, these studies do also emphasize the negative instrumentalisation of ethnicity for political gains by both sides, or the external pressure exercised upon it in certain periods, especially during elections.²⁷

Since the fall of communism, there have been several political parties in the Albanian political arena that claimed to represent the interests of the Greek minority. Traditionally, the Greek minority has been politically organized through Omonia (Greek: Unity) and represented by the Union for Human Rights (PBDNJ) which has been constantly present in the parliament and often also in the executive. Another party is the Greek Ethnic Minority Party (M.E.G.A), which was created as a result of the lack of consensus among the minority leaders. The tendency for party splits and schism has also affected these parties while they were trying to align themselves left or right

26. International Crisis Group (ICG). (2001). Albania: The State of the Nation 2001. *Balkans Report N°111*. Tirana/Brussels.

27. For different account see: Human Rights Watch (1995). *Albania: The Greek Minority*, 7:4; and Barjarba, K. (2004): Migration and Ethnicity in Albania: Synergies and Interdependencies, in: *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 11:1 (summer/fall 2004), pp. 231-9.

in striving to become part of winning coalitions.²⁸ Often Albanian citizens perceive these parties as tools at the hand of politicians in Athens and media contributes in solidifying these assumptions.

One ugly example of the ethnic tensions being mingled in party and local politics every time is the case of the bilingual community in Himara where “winning elections” has almost become concomitant with ethnic victories.²⁹ The participation of busloads of Greeks sent to Himara during local elections campaigns and associated incidents with burnt flags also contribute to an atmosphere of ethnic dispute. In the latest installment of this drama, the ultra-right Golden Dawn party had sent activist to establish a branch in Himara provoking a harsh reaction from Albanians.³⁰

Greek soldiers’ graveyards

Albania and Greece from 2008 have an agreement for the former to undertake diggings to find the Greek fallen soldiers during the Greek-Italian war, which partly took place on Albanian territory, and further built memorial cemeteries in their memory.³¹ However,

28. Imeri, A. (2013). IBNA Special/2013 elections, Greek minority in Albania divided between SP and DP. *Independent Balkan News Agency*. Available at: <http://www.balkaneu.com/ibna-special2013-elections-greek-minority-albania-divided-sp-dp/>.

29. Barjarba, K. (2004): Migration and Ethnicity in Albania: Synergies and Interdependencies, in: *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 11:1 (summer/fall 2004), pp. 231-9, <http://www.watsoninstitute.org/bjwa/archive/11.1/Essays/Barjarba.pdf> [6/21/2013].

30. Independent Balkan News Agency (2013). “Golden Dawn” in Himara, Police of Valona: Several Greek and Albanian nationals under investigation for national hatred. Available at: <http://www.balkaneu.com/golden-dawn-himara-police-valona-greek-albanian-nationals-investigation-national-hatred/>.

31. Papapostolou, A. (2010). President of Albania, orders the construction of cemeteries for Greek Soldiers. Independent Balkan News Agency. *Greek Reporter*. Available at: <http://eu.greekreporter.com/2010/04/15/president-of-albania-orders-the-construction-of-cemeteries-for-greek-soldiers/>.

there are no official figures about the exact or approximate number of the soldiers that fell in Albanian soil. The only number given so far is that of the Greek government reporting 12,000 soldiers, a number that has been considered excessive in the Albanian public opinion.³² Furthermore, less agreeable have been for the public opinion the number of the military cemeteries sites which has been proposed as high as 669 and in selected cases their location. More importantly, sometimes incidents have occurred in existing cemeteries where the digging or searches were taking place. Within this controversy for example, the head of the Omonia association in Korca was accused of abusing with the old graveyard of a village while building the memorial to the fallen Greek soldiers. The legal case is still going on.³³

Population census and Greek pensions

Rhetoric flared up again on the eve of the 2011 population census in Albania on whether questions on ethnicity and religion should be included in the general questionnaire. The main issue discussed was whether Albanian citizens of Albanian ethnicity would identify themselves as Greek in the census in order to be able to be classified as part of the Greek minority and thus benefit from Greek pensions issued by the Greek state. There were also concerns from the PDIU about the fulfillment of an agenda of Greek politics.³⁴

32. Infoarkiv, (2014). *Zbulohet pakti për varrezat, Greqia: Janë 12 mijë ushtarë të vrarë në Shqipëri*. Available at: <http://infoarkiva.com/lajme/artikull/iden/175083/titulli/Zbulohet-pakti-per-varrezat-Greqia-Jane-12-mije-ushtare-te-vrare-ne-Shqiperi>.

33. Gazeta Idea (2013). *Pas shpalljes te pafajshem te Naum Dishos, prokuroria apelon vendimin*. Available at: <http://www.gazetaidea.com/pas-shpalljes-te-pafajshem-te-naum-dishos-prokuroria-apelon-vendimin/>.

34. Agjencia Kombetare e Lajmeve NOA (2012). *PDIU: Endrra e Athines: deklarimi I rreme I shqiptareve si greke*. Available at: <http://www.noa.al/artikull/censusi-pdiu-endrrat-e-athines-zyrtare-deklarimi-i-rreme-i-shqiptareve-si-greke/169108.html>.

The political party that gained considerable political capital from such a discussion was the Red and Black Alliance whose leader had previously tackled the issue of court name and citizenship changes.³⁵ Following such discussions and concerns, the question appeared as optional in the final questionnaire.

The law of war

Unclear and tangled in a myriad of *myth-meets-fact* background, the law of war also stands out as a question that Albanians will often discuss in conversation about Greece’s stance towards Albania. An issue which is mostly bureaucratic yet highly symbolical for Albanians, the law of war was officially removed by the Greek government in 1987³⁶ yet it was not rendered null by the Greek parliament. Greece and Albania simultaneously hold a bilateral Treaty of friendship and Cooperation since 1996. There have been several calls from Albanian diplomats to bring full closure to the issue in order to send a positive signal for the improvement of the relations.³⁷

35. Infoarkiv (2011). Refuzohet deklarimi i etnise dhe fese. Available at: <http://infoarkiva.com/lajme/artikull/iden/1047111914/titulli/Refuzohet-deklarimi-i-etnise-dhe-fese>.

36. Evangelos Venizelos (Foreign Affairs Minister of Greece), Press statement on official visit to Tirana, 15 October 2013.

37. See current Foreign Affairs Minister Ditmir Bushati’s request at “Albania and Greece: tension about the Chams” <http://top-channel.tv/artikull.php?id=265607> and former minister Edmond Panariti request at: “Albania Asks Greece to Declare War Finally Over” <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-calls-on-greece-to-abolish-war-declaration>. Also, Albanian President Nishani’s statement is available here: <http://www.balkaneu.com/war-peace-albanian-grek-relations/>. For a more comprehensive account on the issue see Vickers, M. (2002). The Cham Issue: Albanian National & Property Claims in Greece. *Conflict Studies Research Centre*. G 109.

Recognition of Kosovo

Greece, along with Spain, Romania, Slovakia and Cyprus are the EU member states that do not recognize Kosovo as an independent state. While Greece’s decision not to recognize Kosovo, has often been explained by the good Greek-Serbian relations, Greece’s broader consideration of the region and its stability; its own fears related to northern Cyprus claims; the broader issue of Albanian nationalism, the “Great Albania” and other concerns related to political considerations in the Balkans,³⁸ could give a broader account of the driving motives of the current Greek position towards Kosovo’s independence. Although Greece does not recognize Kosovo, the country has been supporting the Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue,³⁹ has special provision for the Kosovars willing to visit the country, there is an emerging economic cooperation⁴⁰, and furthermore Greece has been present in regional meetings where Kosovo was present on a governmental level.

When it comes to Albanian-Greek relations, the issue of Kosovo has not been central, although still important. While Albania has been actively lobbying for countries to recognize Kosovo as an independent state; the delicate and yet agenda-full relations with Greece have moved the issue of Kosovo in a second plan. On the other side, Greece has in different occasions related Greece stances towards Kosovo with its relations with Albania rather than

38. A comprehensive account on the Greek stances in relation to Kosovo since the war in 1999 is provided by Armakolas, I. and Karabairis, A. (2012). “Greece – Kosovo: A complex relationship”, in *Kosovo Calling* (International Conference to Launch Position Papers on Kosovo’s Relation with EU and Regional Non-recognising Countries). Pp. 91-119.

39. Ministry of Foreign Affairs [Greece] (2014). Kosovo*: Political relations. Available at: <http://www.mfa.gr/en/blog/greece-bilateral-relations/kosovo/>.

40. Ministry of Economic Development [Republic of Kosovo] (2013). Beqaj: Businesses, a promoter of Kosovo – Greece relations. Available at: <http://mzhe.rks-gov.net/?page=2,42,660>.

with Serbia. Former Greek Ambassador to Tirana, Mallias, during his speech on a conference organized by the Albanian Institute for International Studies, ELIAMEP and the Embassy of the Hellenic Republic, he stated that “it would also be a good thing if Greece looked out for its own interests beyond the framework determined by Belgrade” while further assessing that “it is also certain that in the past few years, positions expressed by the Albanian media have negatively impacted Greek policies and public opinion and have played a hindering role in the policies of Greece towards Kosovo”.⁴¹ Recently, Albanian president Nishani explicitly asked his Greek counterpart to recognize Kosovo during president Papoulias’ last visit to Tirana.⁴²

41. “Greece and Albania : The framework and terms for a NEW DEAL “ by Ambassador (ad honorem) Alexandros Mallias, Speech, Conference by the Albanian Institute for International Studies, ELIAMEP and the Embassy of the Hellenic Republic (TIRANA, March,27 2012)

42. B92 (2013). Albania “wants Greece to recognize Kosovo”. Available at: http://www.b92.net/eng/news/region.php?yyyy=2013&mm=11&dd=05&nav_id=88240.

Objective of the survey study

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the contemporary perceptions that the Albanian citizens residing in Albania have on Greek people, on the Greek state policies and on Greece’s relation to Albania in general. These perceptions themselves have been shaped by several factors. First and foremost they have been shaped by the political rhetoric of Albanian politicians and their interactions with Greek counterparts. They have been shaped by the media coverage, interpretation and analysis of the different issues that have occurred and have involved both countries and people from these countries. But most of all they have been shaped by direct interaction due to immigration. Even those Albanians that have not been immigrants to Greece have had relatives and close friends who have been or are still living there. Last but not least perceptions have also been shaped by the historical existence of Greek minority communities especially in the south of Albania which have coexisted peacefully throughout the years.

Perceptions also respond to heightened rhetoric and media in that they become less nuanced and generally more aggressive. In repeated surveys of the Albanian Institute for International Studies, when citizens were asked about any country representing a threat to Albania their usual answer was to pick Serbia. However after nationalistic politicians in Albania began to point out Greece as a problem to the territorial integrity of Albania, citizens were affected. In the polls conducted in the last year, AIIS has noticed that the majority of Albanian citizens who believe that there is a threat to Albania name it Greece. In 2011, out of the entire sample 18 percent of citizens believed that the security of Albania was under threat and out of them 47.9 percent believed that threat to

be posed by Greece while 51.6 percent said it was by Serbia⁴³, while in 2013 “out of the third of the sample that point out a threat for Albania , the majority 55.8 percent believe that this threat is posed by Greece and 24.3 percent think the threat is Serbia. The other mentioned countries are of low or zero statistical relevance.”⁴⁴

The Albanian Institute for International Studies recognizing the need to measure the pulse of citizens has carried out national survey with a representative sample in order to identify the public opinion perceptions, evaluations, concerns and expectations about the future of the relationship between these two countries as well as to identify the issues that affect this relation and the factors that build up the perception of it in the public eyes. Doing so, AIIS presents a set of valuable data for policy makers to pinpoint and address specific issues according to their importance and relevance all awhile combining them with necessary contextualization.

43. “Albania twenty years after: people on state and democracy”, AIIS: Tirana 2011, pg 76.

44. “The state of democracy in Albania before the 2013 elections”, AIIS; Tirana 2013.

Executive Summary

Overall evaluations

While the majority of Albanian believe that the relations between Greece and Albania are just normal, there is a symmetry in the two groups that consider the relations in a good and bad shape, with respectively more than a quarter of the answers each.

Albanians seem to believe that governments of Albania and Greece enjoy a better relationship with each other than do the respective people of each state. While 52 percent of Albanians believe relations between Greek and Albanian government are normal only 42 percent say the same about the relations between Greeks and Albanians themselves. Similarly while only 15 percent of citizens believe that the relation between governments is bad or very bad the numbers who think that relation between people are in a bad shape grows up to 28 percent, close to a third of the sample.

An overwhelming majority of 76 percent in Albania believe that the relations with Greece are of considerable importance. The portion of those who attach no importance to this relation is very small, only 5 percent with the rest opting for some lesser degree of importance.

Albanian believe in large numbers, 41 percent of the sample, that relations with Greece have not changed much in the last decade compared to previous time periods. However a considerable 35 percent believe these relations have improved while 22 percent believe that have instead deteriorated. They are very optimistic that these relations in the future will improve, an option mentioned by 44 percent of the sample compared to 37 percent

who think that they will stay more or less the same. However one in ten citizens says that the relations will actually become worse in the future.

Important issues

There seem to be three Achilles heels in the relation between Greece and Albania according to the public opinion of Albanian citizens, and much of what will happen to the respectively relations between the countries will depend on the progress achieved in addressing or even acknowledging those: first and foremost the border issue with the all-too important maritime border determination agreement, second the Cham question which is still not acknowledged to be even an issue by the Greek side and finally the treatment of Albanian migrants living in large numbers in the southern neighboring country. These are followed by issues of the presence of the Greek minority in Albania and the political parties and developments that relate to it as well as to the heading of the Albanian orthodox Church by the Greek Archbishop Janullatos, a hot topic always in Albanian media and political rhetoric.

Almost half of Albanians mention that the priority number one issue if that of borders, with 49 percent of the answers. The second issues mostly cited is the Cham issue, with 29 percent, which has gotten significant scores also being mentioned as priority issue number with 21 percent and number 3 by 27 percent

Influence or threat

The overwhelming majority of Albanians name the United States of America as the country with most influence on Albania leaving only

2 percent of people that believe Greece has been the one yielding more influence. Almost one in five Albanians believe that Greece constitutes the largest threat to Albania’s security.

Half of the questioned sample believes that the Albanian government should pay the outmost attention and effort to develop the relations with Greece.

The majority of those asked, 53 percent, believe that the relations between Albanian and the Greek minority community in Albania have been and are still good or even very good. A strong group of almost 40 percent qualifies the relations as normal and only a very small group of 6 percent thinks the relations have problems.

Albanians in overwhelming numbers believe their government is doing a good job as far as respecting the minority rights according to settled international standards. Although some degree of division is present the tendency of the Albanian public is to think that Greece exerts influence in Albania through the Orthodox Church and even more so through the political parties that represents the Greek minority.

One people believe that Greece is still at war at least legally with Albania than those who say the contrary. Almost all Albanians think that the failure to resolve the Cham issue is a very large obstacle in the path of the normalization of Greek-Albanian relations.

People are very divided over the issue of whether Greek people support Albania in its European integration path while they curiously observe that they don’t think the Greek government is helping with this particular issue. Most Albanians do not know about the signed Treaty of Friendship between the two countries while a majority paradoxically believes the two countries have been at war with each other in the past.

Albanians want to take credit for the economic development of Greece claiming that they have contributed to it while they also acknowledge that Greece has helped Albania as well during the transition.

Similar groups of 44 percent each, think relations between Albania and Greece on the economic field are good/very good and normal. A large share of the public, 40 percent, think the benefits of this relationship have been mutual while the others have a more skewed perceptions that Greece has benefited more or even exclusively from the economic interaction with Albania. A tenth of the sample believes that Albania has actually been the largest benefiting party.

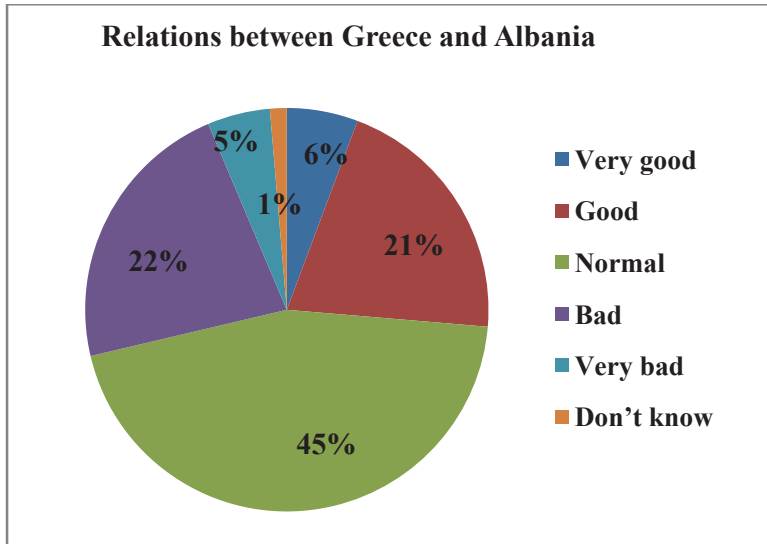
The Albanian public demonstrates a high degree of awareness towards the economic and financial crisis in Greece expressing its evaluation of the crisis impact over the situation of Albanians immigrants three, the level of remittances and even the position of Greek businesses in Albania as negative.

Living together

Albanians have a high degree of direct experiences and knowledge about Greece given that 57 percent of them have visited Greece at least once and more than a quarter of those asked only in this poll have actually lived and worked in Greece for considerable amounts of time (equal or more than 2 years). Most of those who have lived in Greece describe their experience with fellow Greeks as normal or even good with smaller numbers reporting problems during their stay. Half of the respondents asked in this survey have close family and friend currently residing in Greece, a testimony of the need for strengthening normal relations in the two countries.

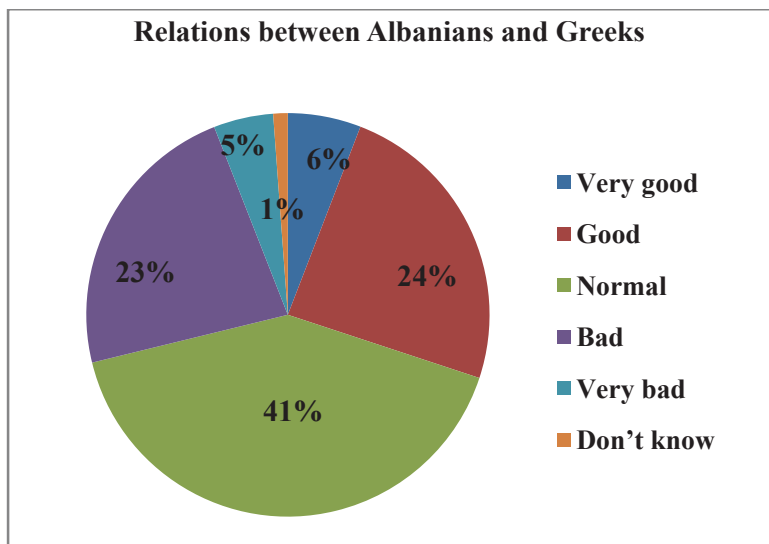
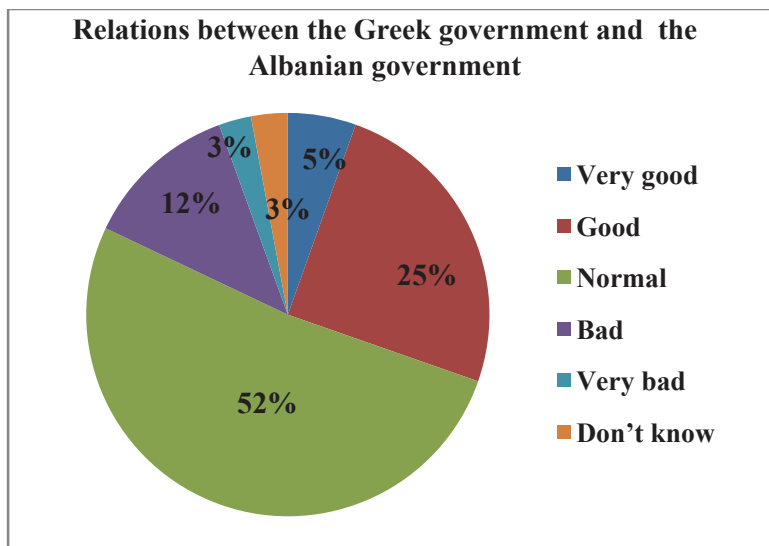
Findings and Analysis

The overall evaluation of relations between Albania and Greece yields the following results: 45 percent of the citizens believe that these relations are normal. 22 percent believe they are in a bad shape and a small group of 5 percent say that they are in a very bad shape. Similarly 27 percent believe the relations are in a good or even very good divided respectively between 21 and 6 percent.

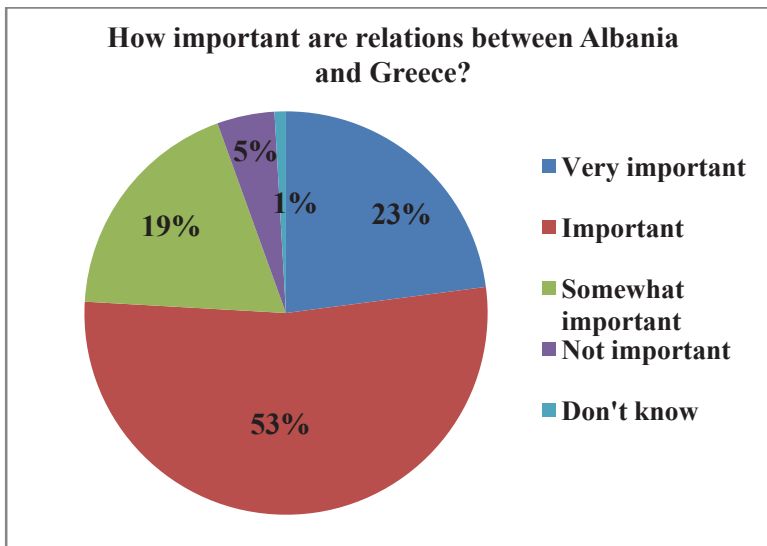


The same symmetry with however interesting results is preserved when citizens are asked a bit more specifically about the relations between the respective Albanian and Greek governments. A larger majority of 52 percent respond that the relations are normal in this case. Even more so 27 percent believe these relations are good or very good with the numbers of those that see bad relations in lower ranks. Indeed only 12 percent say that the relations between governments are bad and only an insignificant 3 percent believe they are very bad.

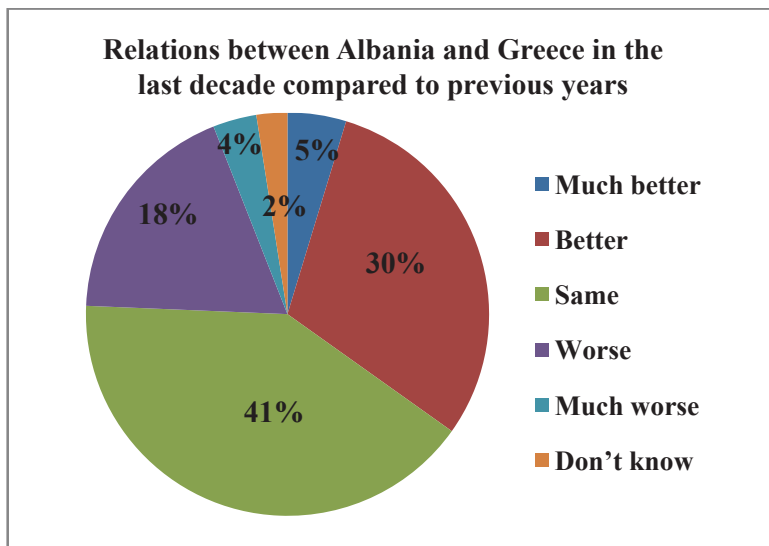
These figures become even more telling when compared with the following question on the relations between the respective people hence Albanians and Greeks.



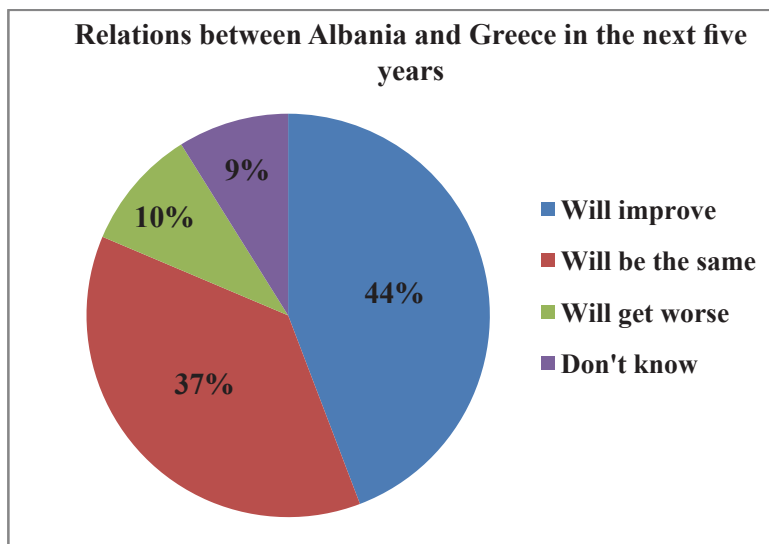
In this case only 41 percent believe the relations are normal, signaling a ten point decrease compared to the evaluation given to the governments’ relation. More people in this case believe the relations between the two people are bad or even very bad, a total of 27 percent. On the other side 30 percent believe the relations are either good or very good. There seems to be a discrepancy in the perception of citizens with them believing that the relation between the Albanian people and the Greek people is worse than the relation between respective governments.



A full majority of 53 percent vests the relations between Albania and Greece with the due significance saying that they are “important.” 23 percent believe these relations to be very important. 19 percent say that they carry little importance while only 5 percent believe that these relations carry no significance whatsoever.



Comparing the relations between the two countries from earlier periods to the ones that have existed these last decade, the majority of Albanian citizens seem to believe that not much has



changed with 41 percent saying that they have been the same. However a considerable part of 35 percent believe that in the last decades relations have improved in various degrees, with only 22 percent saying that there has been deterioration.

As for the expectations for the future, Albanians remain optimists. 44 percent of the citizens say that the relations between Greece and Albania will definitely improve in the future while 37 percent think that they will remain more or less the same. Only one in ten citizens believes that the relation will worsen and a similar 9 percent of the sample does not answer this question.

Important issues and order of relevance

Asked to identify and rank according to their importance the issues that factor very heavily in the relation between the two countries Albanian citizens pick three main problems to be addressed: the borders issue, the Cam issue and the treatment of Albanian migrants in Greece. These are followed by issues that concern the Greek minority in Albania as well as the Presence of Archbishop Janullatos As the Head of the Orthodox Church.

The most frequently cited priority issue number 1 that affects the relations between Greece and Albania is the issue of borders. This public perception has been heavily influenced by the recent media coverage that the maritime border agreement (defining respective sea borders) received, an agreement signed by Bakojanis and Basha and which was deemed unconstitutional and hence rendered null in Albania by the Constitutional Court. The narrative terms in which this issue was portrayed included keywords such as “betrayal” “treason”, “selling of the sea”, “stealing of the sea”, etc. The retired Army general that denounced the agreement for being illegal, Myslym Pashaj, was

chosen the most influential person of the year by a television poll. ⁴⁵

Options	Picked as priority issue nr 1	Picked as priority issue nr 2	Picked as priority issue nr 3
Border issues	46%	19%	20%
Greek minority	10%	25%	12%
Çam Issue	21%	29%	27%
Presence of Archbishop Janullatos As the Head of the Orthodox Church	2%	7%	9%
Treatment of Albania migrants in Greece	19%	19%	30%

The context in which the Greek minority in Albania is mentioned has less to do with their traditional presence especially in southern communities and more to do with their representation by political forces, their alleged connection with Greek politicians and the issue of Greek pensions. Indeed the answers provided to another question reflect very well that Albanians estimate the simple daily relations between Greek minority and other Albanian citizens as optimal.

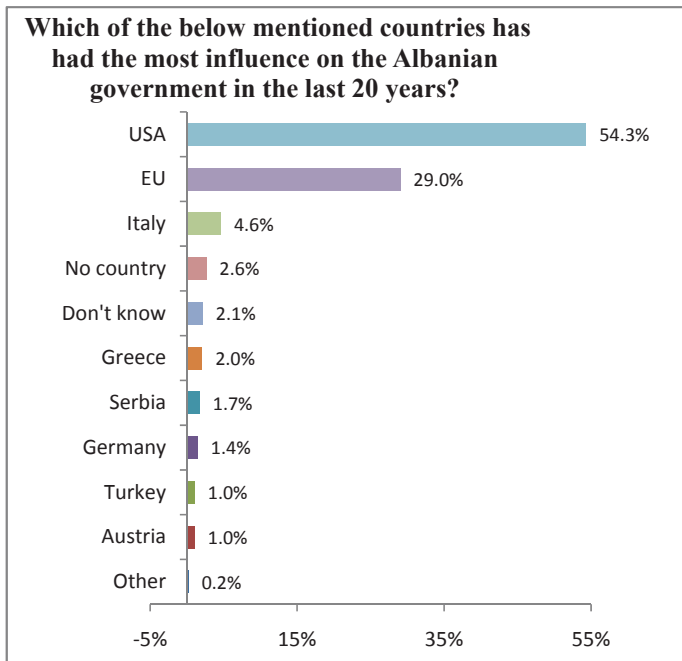
One could convincingly argue that the issue of treatment of migrants in Greece would have had more prominence should the survey had been conducted in the 90s. Although many problems are present nowadays, the Albanian migrants have managed to complete a rather successful process of integration leading thus to fewer incidents and less tension with their host country in general. This has also been reflected back to public opinion.

Out of sporadic answers given for other issues, very few of them mention the law of war or trade exchanges between the two countries.

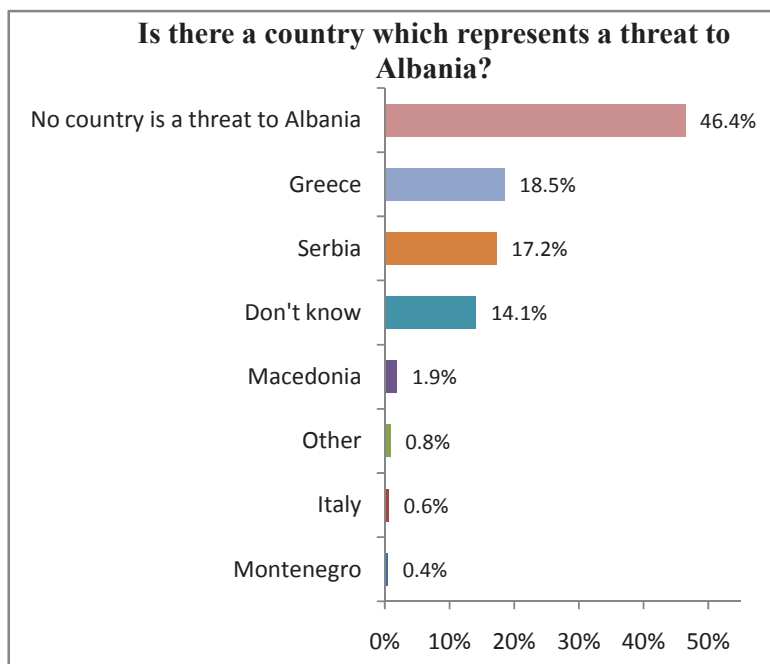
45. Top Channel: 2010. See also “ Why Albanians picked Myslym Pashaj as the person of the year” <http://www.people.al/pse-shqiptaret-zgjedhen-myslim-pashen-personazhi-i-vitit-2010.html>

Setting the relations in a comparative context, Albanians do not believe that the influence exerted by Greece on their country is substantial. Indeed asked of the country which has had influence on Albania in the last two decades more than half of the respondents, 54.3 percent identify the most influential country to be the United States of America followed by 29 percent that identify the EU as the one exerting most influence. Almost 5 percent of the answers pick up Italy as country with great influence in Albania and only 2 percent believe the most influential one has been Greece.

This result should not be mistaken as a denial of influence whatsoever. As it is revealed by others answers Albanians believe that Greece does exert influence on Albania through minority political parties, the Orthodox Church head, etc. However, they believe that compared to other countries or entities such as USA or the EU this influence is smaller.



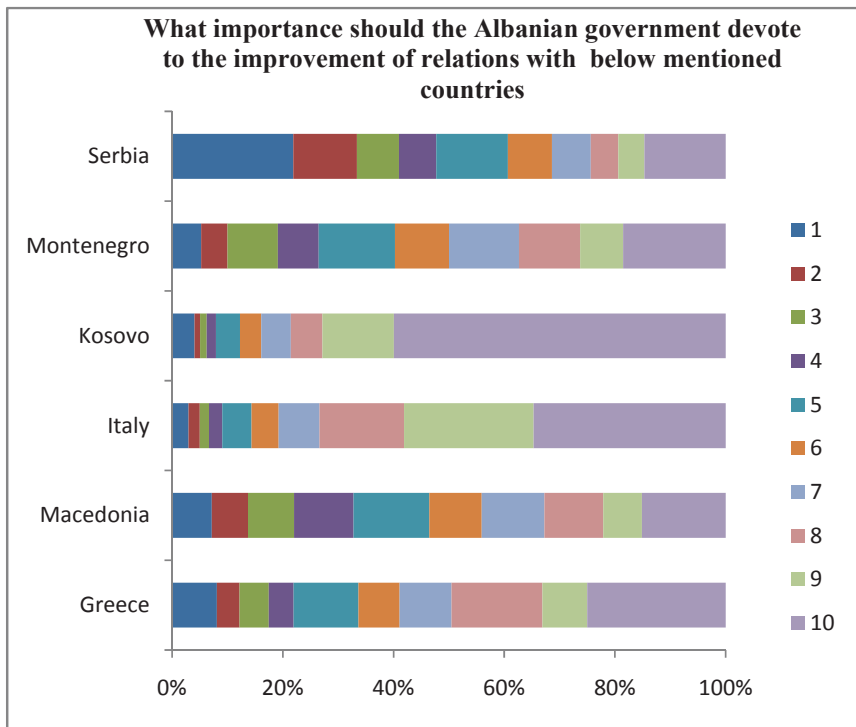
A different panorama is given by answers that are given in relation to identifying threats. Although almost half of the respondents feel safe and do not believe that any country represents a threat to Albania out of the 54.6 percent that feel such a threat, the largest subgroup believes that the threat is indeed Greece. 18.5 percent of the citizens picked Greece as the country that represents a threat to Albania followed by 17 percent who pick Serbia and 14 percent do not have an answer. A very small group of 2 percent pick the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (commonly referred in Albania as simply Macedonia) to be such a threat.



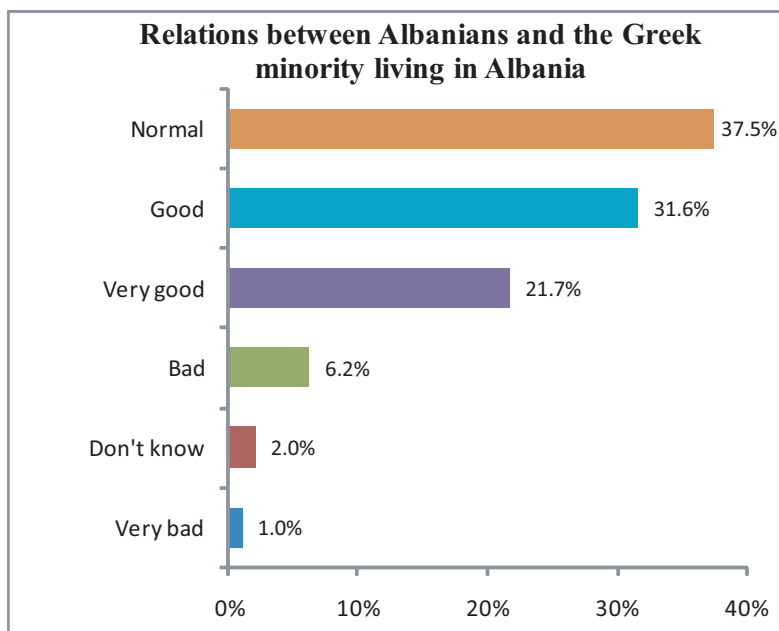
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents no importance at all and 10 represents maximum importance, citizens evaluated the degree of effort and commitment that the Albanian government should dedicate to the relations with each of its neighbor countries. As

the graph shows, the majority of Albanians believe that the utmost importance should be devoted to the relations with Kosovo, followed by Italy and then Greece. In general Albanian citizens are conscious of the importance of Albanian Greek relations and most of their answers fall on the 8-10 range which indicates high degree of importance. Less than a fifth of the sample believe these relations deserve less than average attention (scale 1-4).

Relations with Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia are placed on a second row, with varying degrees of importance associated by citizens.



One important question had as an objective to assess the evaluation that Albanians had of the relationship that has existed between Albanians and the historical Greek minority communities focused in the south of Albania. It is crucial to highlight the fact that more than half of the interviewed citizens believed this relationship has been and continues to be good or very good. A total of 53.3 percent had a positive evaluation of the relation out of which 31.6 percent believe it to be “good” and 21.7 percent “very good”. Moreover 37.5 percent deem the relation as normal and only 7.2 percent believe this relationship has been bad or very bad with the latter representing a statistically invalid group of 1 percent.



Perceptions

Citizens were presented with a series of statements that represent some assertions, either facts or general misconceptions related to the historical as well as current state of relation between the Albanian and Greek government or the respective people in order for them to express their evaluation of the assertions as either true or false. This exercise was done with the objective to pinpoint and highlight the existence as well as the scale of several misconceptions, strong perceptions and judgments that are pervasive in the Albanian public opinion. This eventually would lead to a series of recommendations to dissipate the misconceptions with the purpose of improving the knowledge and perception on each other.

As an explanation to the fact that Albanians judge their relationship with the Greek minority living in Albania as generally good or normal stands the fact that a majority of Albanians are convinced that their government follows and respects the international standards when it comes to the treatment of this minority. Hence percent 78 percent of those asked had this belief while only 9 percent said that the government did not respect the standards. Almost one in ten respondents (12 percent) could not answer whether the assertion was true or false.

Almost half of the citizens asked believe that Greece intervenes in Albania's internal affairs through the Head of the Orthodox Church. 45 percent of the sample said that they believed that some degree of influence and interference is exerted through the Archbishop Janullatos as the head of one of the most traditional Christian denominations in Albania while 32 percent were against this statement believing this to be false. A considerable number of respondents which make up almost a quarter of the sample (23 percent) did not have an opinion on whether this statement was true or false indicating a suspicion or even general confusion about the assertion.

Even more pronounced seems to be the perception among Albanian citizens of Greek interference in Albania through the means of using the Greek minority. Hence this time more than half of the sample, 54 percent of those asked, believe that ‘Greece intervenes in Albania’s internal affairs through the Greek minority’, while only 26 percent think this is not true. Again a large number of respondents 21 percent do not know the answer to the question indicating suspicion or confusion.

One issue that stands in the way of a normal relationship between Albania and Greece and exerts a major influence on Albanian public opinion is that of “The law of war.” Hence despite the fact that the law of war has been abrogated by the Greek government even before the communist regime fell in Albania, albeit not ratified by the Greek parliament, a clear majority of Albanian citizens, 61 percent of Albanians believe that Greece is still in a state of war with Albania. Only 17 percent of respondents say that the two countries are not at war while again a fifth of the sample (22 percent) does not know whether they are or not. It is important to be highlighted that in their daily life Albanians can see that they are not at actual war with a country but this assertion comes directly as a reaction to the highly *mediatized* item of the law of war. The situation becomes even more complex by the low percentage of citizens that are aware of the Treaty of Friendship and Collaboration that exist between the two countries since 1998. Only 36 percent of citizens believe the existence of this Treaty while a similar share of the sample does not know about it at all. Even more so a considerable number of citizens, almost one third of the sample (28 percent) are convinced that such a treaty indeed does not exist.

The evaluation of the war relationship clearly extends to the past with a majority of Albanians saying that Greeks and Albanians indeed have fought against each other, claimed by 54 percent. In the same time it is very interesting that a considerable 36 percent say that Albanians and Greeks never fought against each other while a tenth of the sample does not have information on the issue.

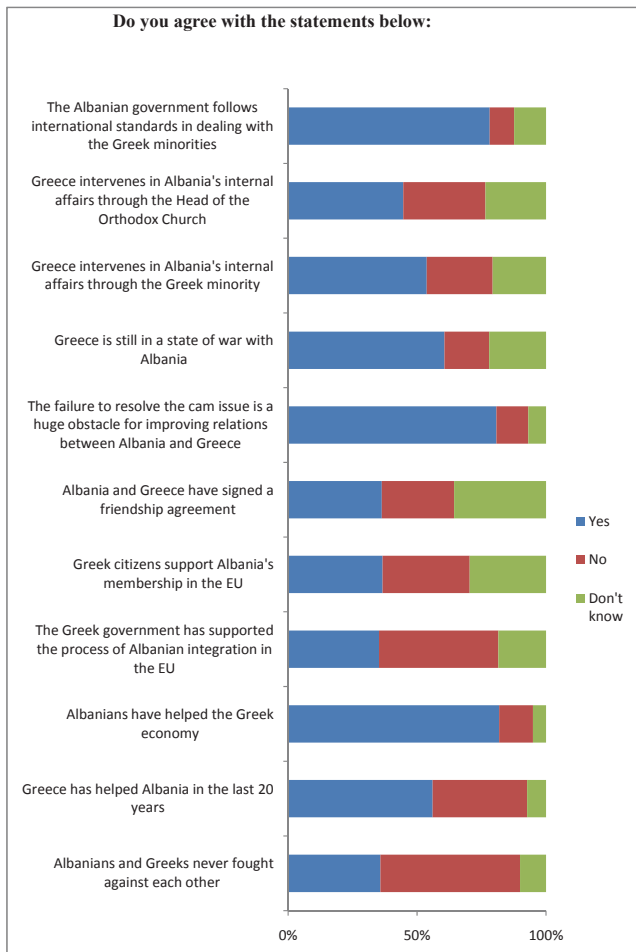
The other big elephant in the room is the Cam issue and the persistence of the Greek side to treat this as a non-issue seems to aggravate the prospects of finding middle ground. In the perception of the overwhelming majority of Albanian citizens, more than 80 percent “the failure to resolve the Cam issue is a huge obstacle for improving relations between Albania and Greece.” Only 12 percent do not believe in this assertion while a minority in this case of 7 percent does not have an opinion.

When it comes to the perspective of Albania’s integration within the European Union, the Albanian public opinion is fragmented and generally skeptical about Greek support. Hence when asked if their fellow citizens in Greece would support the European integration of Albania, Albanians themselves seem divided in almost their equal parts between those who believe in the Greek support, those who are afraid of a negative relation and those who don’t know. With a very small advantage of 37 percent Albanians are hopeful that Greek citizens would support Albanian EU integration while 34 percent believe that Greek citizens do not support this aspiration of Albania. 30 percent is the group that does not have a clear opinion on this matter.

Even grimmer seems to be the perception of whether the Greek government has been of help to Albania in its effort of European integration. In this case a majority of citizens, 46 percent, believe that this has not been the case while 35 percent believe that the Greek government has helped. 18 percent do not know the answer.

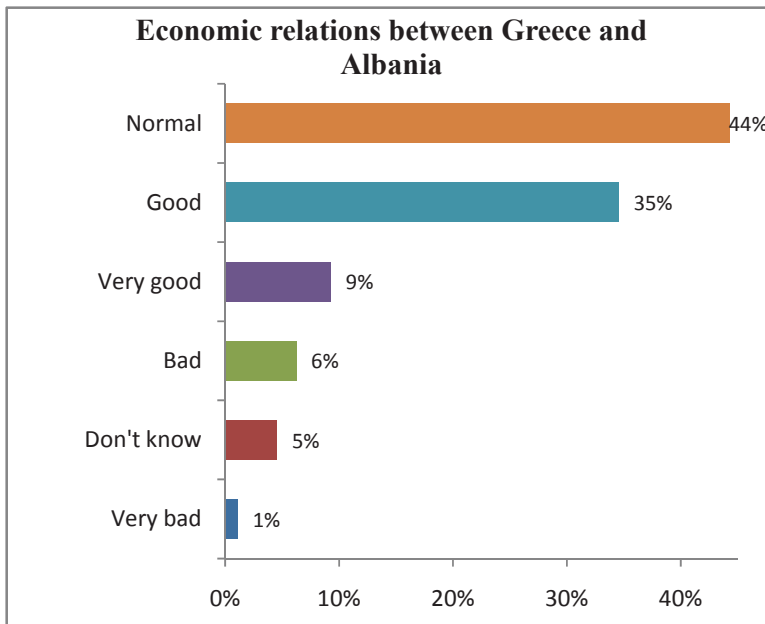
Albanian citizens think very highly of their contribution to the Greek economy with a majority of 82 percent of those asked saying that it is true that Albanians have helped the Greek economy, and only 13 percent saying that this is not true. The evaluation that Albanians have for the contribution of the immigrants in Greece but also of the perceived gain that Greek investment and trade has in Albania is quite significant. Only 5 percent of the sample does not have an opinion on the statement.

Eventually it is quite striking that despite negative feelings and strong perceptions a considerable majority of Albanians believe that indeed Greece has helped Albania in the last 20 years. 56 percent of citizens believe that such help is a reality while 37 percent do not think so and 7 percent cannot make up a clear answer. The fact that more than a half of citizens evaluate the Greek assistance as positive in the difficult and decisive years of the Albanian political and economic transition is an important building block of a more constructive relation in the future.



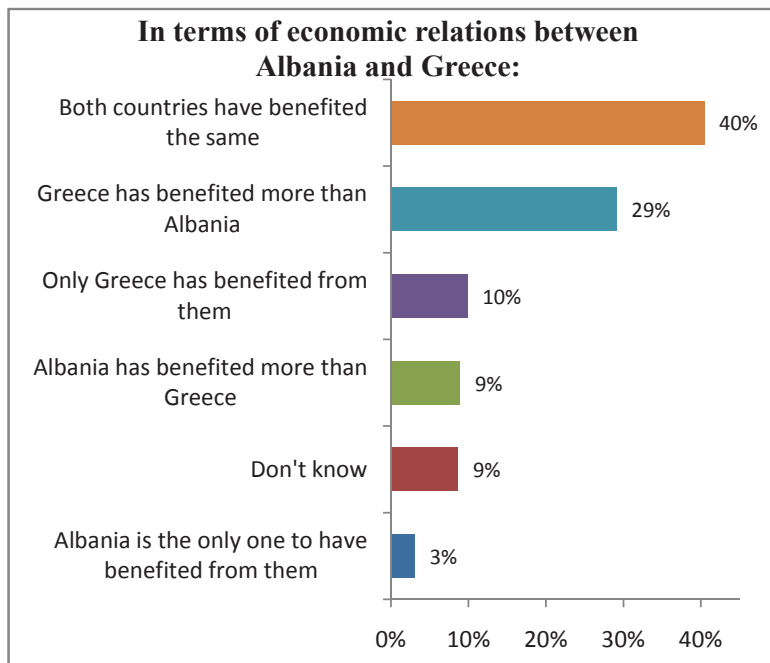
The economy of a relationship

Albanians evaluate the economic relationship between Greece and Albania in rather positive terms with 44 percent deeming this relation as normal and another 44 percent saying that it is in fact good (35 percent) or very good (a smaller group of 9 percent). A small minority of 7 percent think that the relationship is bad while another 5 percent does not know.



However when one digs deeper in the perception and asks citizens to point out those who have benefited the most out of the economic ties the perceptions shows interesting and considerable trends of being skewed. Hence while 40 percent seem to believe that both countries have been more or less equal beneficiaries, 29 percent think that in fact Greece has benefitted more than Albania while an even more aggressive perception is shown by 10 percent, those that believe that the economic ties have benefitted exclusively

Greece. Only 9 percent believe that Albania has benefitted more and an insignificant number, just 3 percent, place Albania as the sole beneficiary. Another 9 percent cannot evaluate the statement and answer that they ‘don’t know’.

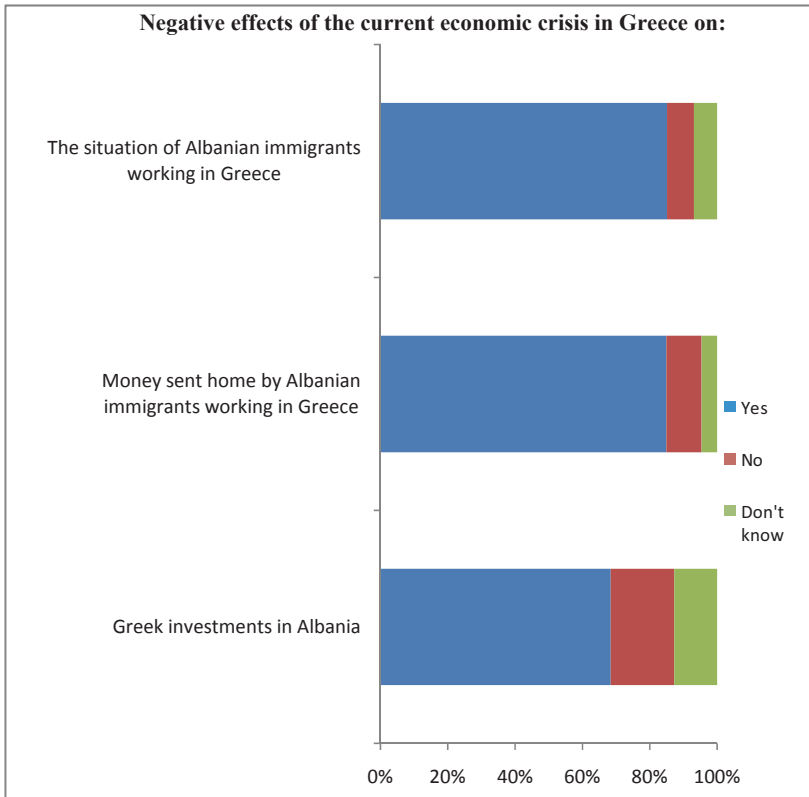


Albanians remain aware of the ramifications that the economic and financial crisis in their southern neighbor has even on the three very important issues: treatment and general situation of immigrants, remittances and Greek investment in Albania. The public opinion in Albania stands united in their judgment of the negative impact that the crisis has had on all three however the negative impact perceived on the Greek investment in Albania seems smaller. Hence 85 percent say that this crisis has indeed had a negative impact on the situation of their fellow Albanians who reside as immigrants in

Greece while only 8 percent do not see such a negative impact.

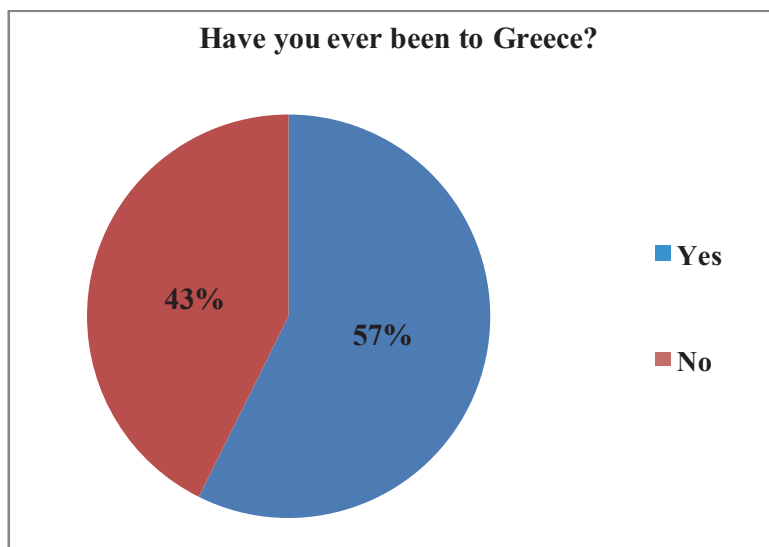
Similarly 85 percent believe that it’s the crisis which has been after the decline in remittance saying that it has had a negative impact on the amount of money sent back home. Only 10 percent say that such an impact on remittances does not exist.

Most importantly, 68 percent of Albanians believe that the crisis has negatively affected the Greek investments in Albania, however here a more considerable share of 19 percent, almost a fifth of the sample, believe that the Greek investment in Albania has not been harmed by the crisis.



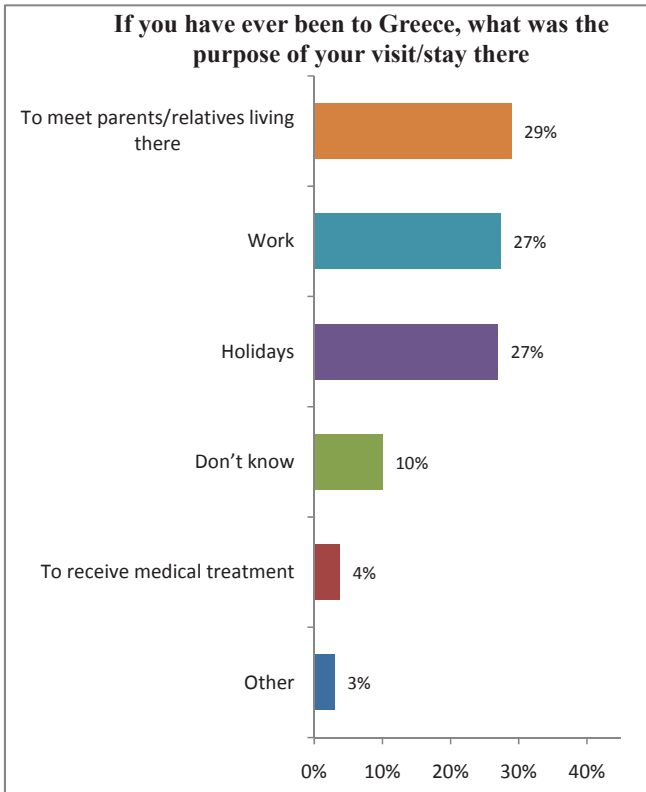
Close contacts

In a series of questions establishing how close are the human contacts and what has come out of the Albanian show a very high degree of close contacts with Greece having been there on a visits with different purposes, having family or finds residing there or even having lived and worked there themselves for years. 57 percent of Albanians have visited Greece at least just once. Only 43 percent of those asked said that they had never been to Greece.

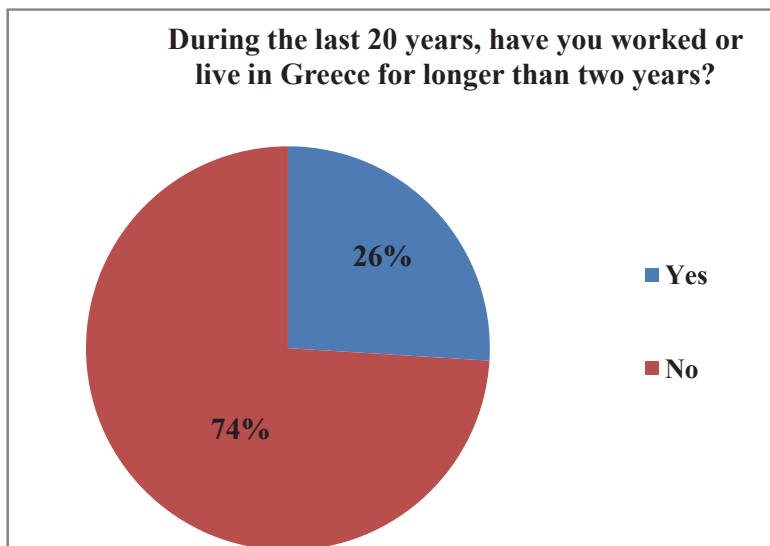


Out of those that have been visiting Greece the majority has done so for the purpose of meeting their family, relatives or friends. Hence 29 percent report the purpose of their visit to be this one. However equally large groups of 27 percent have been there to work or to spend their holidays. A smaller group of 4 percent has been in Greece for medical reasons, to seek treatment in Greek hospitals. A tenth of the sample do not say what has been

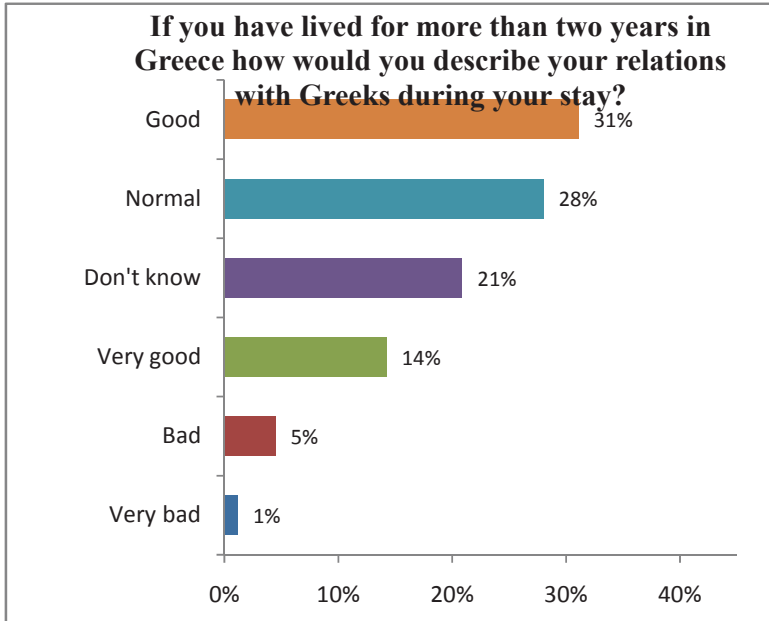
their visit’s purpose.



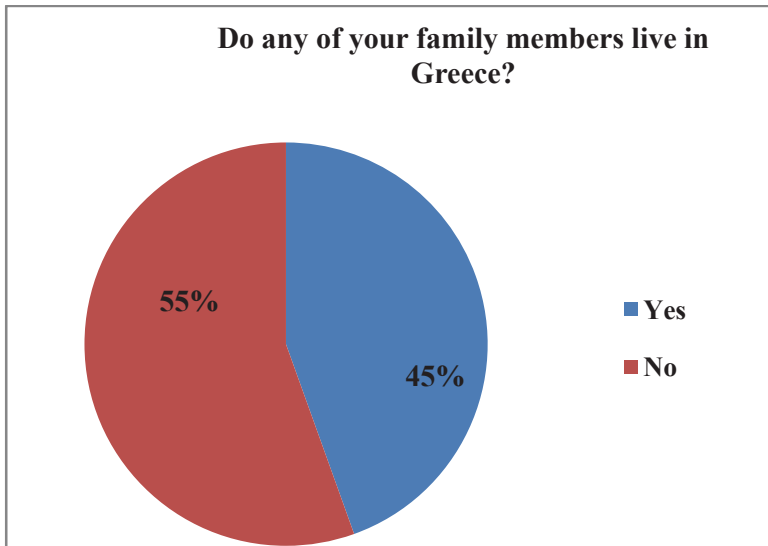
A large group of those interviewed report that they have spent at least two years living and working in Greece in the last two decades that correspond to Albania’s transition period. Hence 26 percent of those interviewed, corresponding to a quarter of the sample, have been or are currently residents in Greece and have worked there. This subgroup has been hence submerged more deeply in the Greek society and their experience is very beneficial to be studied as it reveals perceptions that have been formed also due to their personal contacts and their direct life and not only through indirect influence of peers or media.



Out of this group of citizens that have spent more than 2 years in Greece it is important to note that a majority of them assess their personal experience and their relationship with Greeks during this stay as good or very good in a total of 45 percent. 28 percent say that the relationship was normal while only 6 percent describe the experience of this relationship as bad or very bad. This is another sign of the successful rate of integration of Albanian migrants in Greece as they demonstrate normal or good relations with the Greek citizen. One should keep in mind though that the question does not assess the relationship of immigrants with the Greek institutions such as immigration authorities or Greek police.

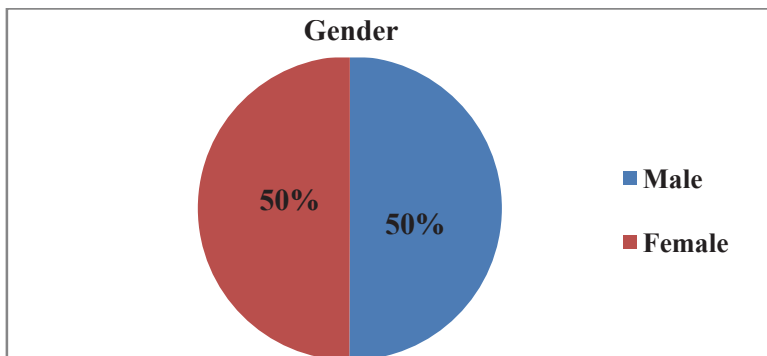


Finally there is a question which is a clear, simple reminder of the close relation between the two people and an even more important reminder of the importance that relation for the Albanian side. Almost half of the respondents of this survey show that at least one of their family members' lives in Greece for the moment with 45 percent answering yes. Even though we should keep in mind that Albanians refer in this case to their extended families (hence cousins, uncles and so forth) the importance and close proximity that is felt to the extended family in the Albanian society is quite similar to that felt towards the core family.

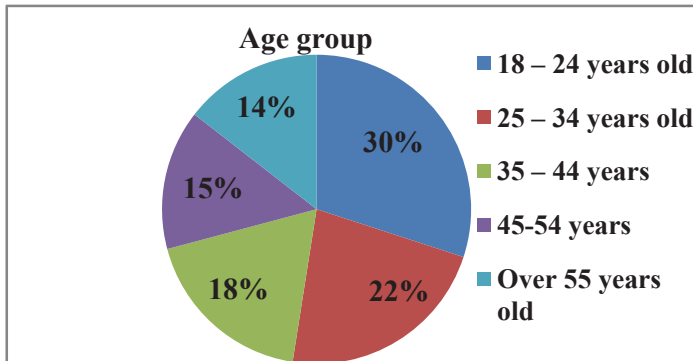


Sample characteristics:

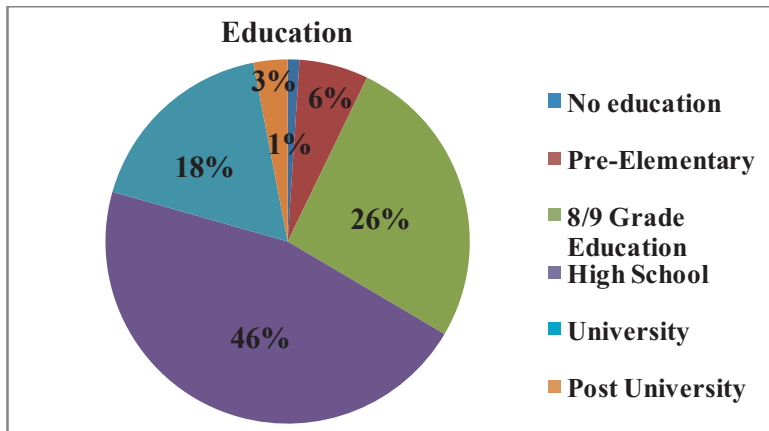
1200 citizens have been interviewed for this survey, divided equally between 50 percent of females and 50 percent of male respondents.



Different age groups are represented in the sample with the majority of respondents falling to the 18-24 youth category. Thirty percent of the respondents are between 18 and 24 years old followed by 22 percent who belong to the 25-34 age bracket. 18 percent are between 35-44 years old while 15 percent are between 45 and 54 years old. The remaining 14 percent of the sample is made up by people above 55 years old.



In terms of education, 46 percent of the sample is composed by people whose education level is up to high-school while 18 percent are university graduates. 3 percent are in the process or have completed graduate studies while 32 percent have either completed just the first level of primary education (4 years) or the first cycle of elementary education (8-9 years).



Considering the employment situation of our respondents, 40 percent of them report to be employed while 15 percent are unemployed. 8 percent of the sample is made of pensioners while 21 percent of students. 17 percent of the respondents are self-employed including in this category housewives.

