

DON'T WANT TO LIVE WITH THEM, CAN'T AFFORD TO LIVE WITHOUT THEM: ALBANIAN LABOR MIGRATION IN GREECE

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When speaking about emigration in Europe, Albania makes a striking example. According to reliable estimates, around 900,000 people have left the country in the last 15 years, which represents over one quarter of the population and over 35% of the active work force.¹ In terms of the share of the population, which has left the country, only Moldova can compare with Albania in the whole of Europe. The main difference between the two countries is that a very significant part of the people who left Moldova emigrated to Russia and, in case of women, trafficked for employment in sex industry, also to Turkey and Middle East. In contrast, the emigration flow from Albania is directed almost exclusively to the EU countries. A smaller number of Albanian emigrants, especially after 1995, went also overseas to the USA and Canada and in these cases, we can speak about almost 100% legal emigration of people winning the Green Card lottery program or being accepted as students to various North American universities. Popular destinations for Albanian emigrants in Europe include Germany and Switzerland, although they are much more common for Albanians from former Yugoslavia, and less so for Albanians from Albania proper. The two top destinations for them are undoubtedly Italy and Greece, the obvious reasons being the cultural and geographical proximity.

The following paper will analyze the case of Albanian emigration to Greece, as the Albanian immigrants in Greece make for another striking example. Rarely immigrants from one country represent such a high percent of all immigrants in another country as do Albanians in Greece. According to a 2001 census, there were 797,091 foreign nationals residing legally in Greece. Of this number, 55.6% (443,550) were Albanians. When the estimation about illegal immigration is added to this number, we get an approximation of over a million immigrants in Greece, of which over 600,000 are Albanians. The paper will present the reasons for Albanian mass emigration to Greece, analyze the positive and negative effects of this emigration on Greece and Albania, and discuss the attitudes of Greek society towards the Albanian immigrants.

Waves of Albanian emigration

Ever since achieving its independence in 1912, Albania has been the poorest and most underdeveloped European country. It therefore comes as no surprise that emigration has always been very strong. During the inter-war period, most of the emigrants left for Italy, which was virtually running Albania as its protectorate even before invading and occupying

¹ Barjaba Kosta. "Albania: Looking Beyond Borders." Migration Policy Institute. August 1, 2004.
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=239>

it in 1939. In the first years of the communist rule, following the WWII, the emigration from Albania was mostly political, as many of those associated with the anti-Communist elites, which governed Albania during the war in collaboration with Italy and Germany, fled the country.

When the communist party consolidated its rule over the country, and especially after the 1948 break of all ties with the neighboring Yugoslavia, immigration was forbidden. The iron control of the borders and threat of severe punishment not only for immigrants, but also for their relatives staying behind, virtually cut the emigration flows from Albania. The tide has actually turned and Albania accepted up to 20,000 Chams (one of the ethnic groups, forming the Albanian nation), who were expelled from Greece after WWII. Since the fall of communism, Chams have been returning to the villages of northern Greece, where once they have lived. In order to legalize their status, many have been presenting themselves as Greeks from northern Epirus and adopting Greek names. Many have started legal proceedings to be given back the land and property of their ancestors.²

The third and by far the largest wave of Albanian emigration begun in 1990, when the communist rule started to crumble. In that year, after four decades of self-imposed isolation, the communist government finally granted the Albanian citizens the right to receive a passport and to travel abroad. In July 1990, around 4,500 Albanians broke into various foreign embassies in Tirana, demanding asylum. Before the first democratic elections held in March 1991, more than 50,000 people have left the country.³ By the end of 1992, another 250,000 have followed them. Television pictures of thousands of Albanians, crossing the Adriatic Sea on their way to Italy in rusty boats, barely able to stay afloat, perhaps illustrated best this period of uncontrolled, and perhaps uncontrollable emigration. This initial explosion of emigration somewhat reduced in the following years due to a slight economic improvement and better border control, but despite that, between 1992 and 1997, another 300,000 Albanians left their country.⁴

The crisis of 1997, triggered by the collapse of the pyramid financial schemes, resulted in another mass migration of around 70,000 people in a period of just few months. Gradual stabilization after 1998 again reduced the strength of the emigration flow. This last period from 1998 until today has been characterized by a gradual decrease of the illegal emigration and increase of the legal one.⁵

Given the widespread poverty in the communist and post-communist Albania, it comes as no surprise that most of the emigrants headed towards the two nearest EU countries – Italy and Greece. The proximity was not the only reason, however. In 1980s Albania finally entered “the television age” and by 1985, there were about 200,000 TV sets in the country. These TV sets brought Italian TV programs into many Albanian homes, turning Italy into a true dreamland in the minds of numerous Albanians.⁶ By the early 1990s, Italian was the most common foreign language in Albania, and the Italian arts, culture and lifestyle were highly appreciated. Although Greece could not compete with this perception of Italy as a promised land, it had other “advantages.” Very long green border between the two counties is “appropriate” for illegal crossing, and unlike emigration to Italy, which requires the payment of boat transportation, the costs are relatively low. Greeks and Albanians also share a number of cultural and historic characteristics, and the Greek economy, as will be discussed below, to a very large extent relies on the work of illegal immigrants. For these reasons,

² Antonina Zhelyazkova. *Urgent Anthropology. Vol. 2: Albanian Prospects*. IMIR, Sofia, 2003, pp. 205-207.

³ Nicholas C. Pano. “Albania” in *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. Edited by Joseph Held. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, pp. 59-60.

⁴ Kosta. “Albania: Looking Beyond Borders.”

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Pano. “Albania,” p. 48.

Greece became the most popular destination country for hundreds of thousands of Albanians.

Migration policies

During the 1990s, Albania had virtually no migration regulation. The 1995 Migration Act was hardly more than a paper, especially after the 1997 crisis. In 2003, the Albanian government adopted the Labor Migration Act, which defined the government's responsibilities towards emigrants, providing them with information and assistance for the employment possibilities in the destination countries and promoting the emigrants' return to Albania. The government tried to decrease the emigration flow by creating employment possibilities at home, or by signing a number of bilateral seasonal employment agreements with various EU countries.⁷

Huge influx of immigrants into Greece, which was until recently predominantly an emigration country, caught the Greek government unprepared. Despite the awareness that a concrete and comprehensive policy and legal framework were needed for dealing with hundreds of thousands with immigrants, little was done until 1997. In November of that year, two presidential decrees were issued, allowing illegal immigrants to legalize their status by applying for temporary residence permits. However, both the Greek administration and the immigrant community itself were quite unprepared for this change in the legislation, and as a result, less than half of immigrants were actually legalized in this first cycle of regulation (371,000 received a temporary residence permits, but only 212,000 received a work permit also).⁸ The main reasons for the limited success were the difficulties in obtaining the necessary documentation, the lack of desire among bureaucrats to assist the applicants and the fear among the immigrants that they might be expelled when stepping out of the illegality.⁹

The second period of regulation started with the adoption of the new immigration and citizenship law in June 2001. The law enabled a huge step towards legalization of illegal immigrants in Greece, with about 350,000 of them submitting documents. However, it failed to go all the way, with around one third of the immigrant community remaining illegal and consequently vulnerable to exploitation on the labor market.¹⁰ The slow bureaucracy and the lack of necessary infrastructure caused enormous delays in the processing of applications, which lasted for over two years.¹¹ In some cases, after waiting more than one year, immigrants received residence permits, which have already expired. This and a number of other problems pushed the Greek government to adopt amendments to the immigration law.¹²

The amendments of 2002 and 2003 brought about serious changes in the immigration law, marking the beginning of what might be considered a third period of regulation. Two amendment packages seriously eased the bureaucratic hassle migrants had to go through in order to obtain residence permits. In December 2003, the Parliament passed the law "On

⁷ Kosta. "Albania: Looking Beyond Borders."

⁸ Charalambos Kasimis and Kassimi, Chryssa. "Greece: A History of Migration." Migration Policy Institute. June 2004. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?id=228>

⁹ Kalliopi Lykovardi and Petroula, Eleni. "Greece" in *EU and US Approaches to the Management of Immigration*. Brussels/Athens: Migration Policy Group, May 2003, p.1. <http://www.kemo.gr/archive/papers/M.P.G.htm>

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

¹¹ Kasimis and Kassimi. "Greece: A History of Migration."

¹² Vsevolod Samokhvalov. "Greece and Migrants: The Process of Integration." International Center for Black Sea Studies. 2004. http://www.picum.org/BASIC_SOCIAL_RIGHTS/Greece_and_migrants.doc

election expenditures,” where special amendments to the immigration law were introduced in order to facilitate the employment and residence for migrants in Greece.¹³

According to official data, 700,000 resident permits (almost all of them temporarily, for the period of one to two years) were issued between July 2003 and October 2004. Of this number, Albanians who received residence permits in this period were 432,120 (or 61.8%). The reason for a vast majority of permits (80%) was employment. Other more common reasons were family reunion, study, business (company executives) and marriage to an EU national. Family reunion is dominated by Albanians at 80% of the total – well above their recorded presence in the immigrant population of Greece. Albanians are the leading nationality also when given residence for study purposes, although with only 17%.¹⁴

Around 40% of the Albanians, who were included in the census, declared that they have lived in Greece for more than 5 years. Apart from immigrants from the Philippines, Albanians have the largest share of people residing in Greece for such a long period of time.¹⁵ Despite the campaigns for legalization of illegal immigrants, it seems that the Greek government is far from eager to try to terminate the informal labor market completely. The most obvious indication is that work permits issued to immigrants are mostly short term, giving the authorities the possibility of pushing a given immigrant back into the gray zone anytime they consider it appropriate.¹⁶

Influence of migration on the country of origin

Probably the most negative effect emigration has on Albania is brain drain, or as one author described it, “brain waste.”¹⁷ Studies have shown that 74 percent of immigrants in Greece do not work in the areas and positions, which correspond to their level of education. A large number of well educated and high skilled Albanian immigrants work in Greece as construction or agricultural manual laborers. In the period from 1990 to 2003, around 45% of university professors and researchers emigrated, as did a substantial majority of university graduates. This significantly decreased the level of quality of university education and it is not uncommon for young and relatively inexperienced holders of MA degrees from various western European or US universities to be employed as lecturers at the Tirana University.

Among the positive influences, remittances are the most obvious one. The estimated \$780 million have been sent to Albania by Albanians working abroad in 2003, which is more than double than in 1994, when \$378 million have been sent. Most of these remittances enter the country through informal channels, most often carried by a trusted person, due to a widespread distrust in the Albanian banking system.¹⁸ However, while remittances have a definitely positive effect on the life of many Albanians, who would otherwise live in absolute poverty, their effect on the Albanian economy and Albanian society as a whole is limited. Most of the funds sent back home by the Albanians working abroad are spent on

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Statistical Data on Immigrants in Greece: An Analytical Study of Available Data and Recommendations for Conformity with European Union Standards.” Mediterranean Migration Observatory, 2004.
http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/general/IMEPO_Final_Report_English.pdf

¹⁵ Martin Baldwin-Edwards. “Immigration into Greece, 1990-2003: A Southern European Paradigm?”. Presentation made at the European Population forum, Geneva, January 12-14, 2004, p. 8.
http://aei.pitt.edu/archive/00001078/02/UNECE_paperV3-1.pdf

¹⁶ Martin Baldwin-Edwards. “Southern European Labour Markets and Immigration: A Structural and Functional Analysis” in *The Greek Labour Yearbook*. Athens: Panteion University Press, 2001.
http://aei.pitt.edu/archive/00001079/01/MMO_WP5.pdf

¹⁷ Kosta. “Albania: Looking Beyond Borders.”

¹⁸ Kosta. “Albania: Looking Beyond Borders.”

improving the quality of life of one's family and on enlarging old or building new family houses. Rarely is the money invested into opening businesses and creating new jobs. The booming construction business that can be observed all over Albania and especially in the big cities and along the coast is very often driven by dirty money, generated through smuggling, and laundered through construction.

Apart from remittances, the technical knowledge and work experience, obtained abroad by immigrants who returned home, has helped to modernize production. However, due to the limited investment, this "capital" has not been explored sufficiently.

Socio-economic effects on the destination country

Measuring the socio-economic effects of the immigrants on Greece is hampered by the lack of any official data on the situation of immigrants in the country. As the study of the Mediterranean Migration Observatory has shown, a number of Ministries (Ministries of Interior, Labor, Education, Public Order and Foreign Affairs) and state services (National Statistical Service and the state social insurance foundation, IKA) have their own partial databases on immigrants, but the communication between them is very poor and so far no attempt has been made to unify this information into one comprehensive database. The most useful and reliable source of information remains the 2001 census. The census data for example show that the highest concentration of immigrants can be found in the Attica region, south-western Greece, some tourist islands and along the border with Albania. The municipality of Athens has the largest share of immigrants among the population – 17 percent (over 130,000 immigrants). The second largest cluster of immigrants lives in Thessaloniki – 27,000, which represents 7% of the city's population.¹⁹

Like most other European countries, Greece has a negative demographic balance, with only 1.3 children born per every woman in 2001. Despite that, the population increased for about 704,000 people between 1991 and 2001. This increase can be almost fully attributed to immigrants. Almost 80% of these immigrants are in the active working age (between 15 and 64), compared to 67.7% of the native population. Within the immigrant community, Albanians are on average the youngest population, and as such, they are of exceptional importance for keeping the Greek social and pension systems above the water.²⁰

The census data show that a large majority of Albanian immigrants work in the construction sector, but they are present in almost all employment sectors, the most popular being agriculture, industry and tourism. In construction, Albanians represent around 27% of all construction workers, and about 75% of all immigrant workers, employed in construction. Regarding the Albanian female immigrants, which constitute 41% of the Albanian immigrant community, a large majority has declared to be employed in the "other" category, which presumably means housework and cleaning. Albanian women are also often employed in agriculture and tourism, the latter again presumably meaning mostly as cleaners in hotels and restaurants.²¹

Albanians, like majority of other immigrants, work in poorly regulated, difficult and underpaid jobs, where often no EU standards for healthy and safe working environment are respected. For these reasons, they rarely find themselves in a direct competition with the native Greeks on the job market. Majority of young Greeks, similarly to their peers in other

¹⁹ "Statistical Data on Immigrants in Greece"

²⁰ Kasimis and Kassimi. "Greece: A History of Migration."

²¹ Baldwin-Edwards. "Immigration into Greece, 1990-2003," pp. 8-9.

southern European countries, tends to delay their entry on the labor market by prolonging their studies. Highly educated, they often prefer unemployment and “waiting on an appropriate position” to accepting a “lower status” job. Thus, despite the relatively high unemployment rate in Greece (nine percent), the labor market is hungry for immigrants, willing to accept badly paid difficult work the native population rejects.²²

In some cases, entire sections of Greek economy depend on immigrant work force. This is especially true for agricultural sector and for a large number of small family businesses, which require cheap, often illegal labor. By paying the lower than realistic wages and paying no social security contributions and taxes for the illegal immigrant workers, numerous businesses manage to stay competitive on the demanding market. The low cost of unskilled or semi-skilled labor compensates for the low productivity and some economists estimate that a large share of Greek economic growth has been achieved through the underpaid work of illegal immigrants.²³

Illegal workers can be dismissed instantly when the employer no longer needs them, and even if the employer fails to pay them what was agreed upon, they have no formal channels through which they could protect their rights.²⁴ Many thus turn to informal or illegal channels. Albanians are especially well known for their inter-communal solidarity and organization. In 2002, International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations IMIR’s team spoke with expressed both envy and admiration about Albanians, whom they described as exceptionally united and resolute. Albanians uphold their interests before the employers, bargain for their wages, and do not tolerate insults and humiliation. One of the Albanian respondents told the team that no employer would dare to cheat an Albanian because he would gather a number of his fellow-countrymen and “the employer would get his due punishment.”²⁵

In strictly economic terms, the large number of Albanian immigrant workers had an undoubtedly positive effect on the Greek economy, though the morality of these effects is more than questionable. However, there have been negative consequences as well. The low salaries Albanians are prepared to work for have pushed away the native workers, especially from certain industrial sectors and construction. The abundance of cheap labor force has also seriously weakened the strength of trade unions, as Albanian workers are rarely involved in them.²⁶

Attitudes of the Greek society towards Albanian immigrants

A number of studies show that Albanians are by far the most disliked non-Greek community in the country and a number of negative stereotypes, fueled by sensationalist media reporting, are directed towards Albanians. Many Greeks are both hostile towards and afraid of Albanians, who are perceived as being deeply involved in the organized crime and are often accused of being the main reason for the raising crime rates in the country. On a number of occasions, politicians or public institutions like police, made statements, which contributed to public perception of Albanians as criminals. Media, despite also giving attention in recent years to the issues like immigration management, economic aspects of

²² Baldwin-Edwards. “Southern European Labour Markets and Immigration.”

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Zhelyazkova. *Albanian Prospects*, pp. 220-221.

²⁶ Maria Vidali. “Living in a Policy Vacuum: The Plight of Albanian Immigrants in Greece.” *Central Europe Review*, Vol 1, No 21, November 15, 1999. <http://www.ce-review.org/99/21/vidali21.html>

immigration and human rights of the immigrants, still in most cases prefer sensationalist and biased approach, stressing the immigrants' criminality.²⁷ Yet, in fact studies show that Albanians are involved in only 4.5% of the crimes, which roughly corresponds to their share of the population.²⁸

Negative attitudes towards Albanians are not something new in Greece – they existed even before the huge influx of Albanian immigrants to the country. A sociological survey, conducted in 1993 was measuring sympathies and antipathies of Greeks towards various nationalities and ethnic groups. According to the survey, the most disliked nation for Greeks were Turks, named by 79.5 percent of the respondents. Albanians came as the close second, with a disapproval rate of 75.5%.²⁹

Majority of Greek respondents, which were interviewed during IMIR's field research stated that the "Albanian immigrants alarmed them, and that the Greek government was responsible for their vast number and their pervasive criminality."³⁰ Respondents in another study expressed their concerns that Albanians might break into their house, robbing or killing them, as well as the fears that Albanians were threatening the cultural and blood purity of the Greek population.³¹

The widespread opinion among Greeks that "all Albanians are criminals" and that they represent a danger has been fueled by several incidents. Among them, three cases of armed Albanians hijacking buses, full of passengers, and demanding ransom and free passage to Albania drew most attention. The incidents occurred in May and July of 1999 and in December 2004. In the first two cases, the hijackers were killed by the police (in one case it was the Albanian police, as the bus was allowed to cross the border into Albania), and in the most recent case, the drama ended through negotiations.³²

The public perception of Albanians as criminals has been on numerous occasions exploited by the Greek government as a bargaining chip in the relations with Albania. Periodically, the Greek side has used violent repatriations of large numbers of Albanian illegal workers to put pressure on Tirana. Such massive deportations of Albanians have occurred in December 1991, June 1993, autumn 1994, August 1996 and July 1999. Deportations of June 1993 occurred as an instant response to the expulsion of a Greek priest from Albania, accused of stirring up the Greek minority in the town of Gjirokastrer and advocating the annexation of Southern Albania to Greece. The crisis deteriorated to the point that Albanian ambassador was recalled from Athens. In April 1994, two Albanian soldiers, patrolling the border, were killed, allegedly by Greek soldiers. Tirana and Athens expelled each other's diplomats, and in Albania, five leader of OMONOIA, political organization of Greek minority in Albania, were arrested on suspicion of being involved in the incident. They were convicted for espionage and illegal arms possession. Athens reacted instantly by expelling more than 100,000 Albanians from Greece in August 1994.

Mass expulsion of Albanians occurred also after the bus hijacking in July 1999 and was obviously aimed both at satisfying the outrage of the Greek public and at demonstrating to Tirana that Greece will use hard policy measures unless Tirana does something to decrease the criminal activity of its citizens.³³

Despite the fact that the negative attitude towards Albanians is often a result of the generally exceptionally strong nationalism among Greeks, they are far from being

²⁷ Lykovardi and Petroula. "Greece."

²⁸ Vidali. "Living in a Policy Vacuum."

²⁹ Quoted in Zhelyazkova. *Albanian Prospects*, p. 198.

³⁰ Zhelyazkova. *Albanian Prospects*, p. 212.

³¹ Vidali. "Living in a Policy Vacuum."

³² "Greek Albanians' Woes Fester." *BBC News*. December 16, 2004.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4101469.stm>

³³ Vidali. "Living in a Policy Vacuum."

completely baseless. The exceptionally weak and ineffective state of Albania, which came on the edge of collapsing in 1991 and 1997, was a natural habitat for overwhelming growth of the organized crime. As trans-border crime, including smuggling of arms and illegal drugs, and human trafficking, is among the most prosperous branches of the criminal industry, tentacles of the Albanian “octopus” could not fail to engulf Greece as well. Greece has been one of the major destinations for Albanian human traffickers, with girls as young as ten bought or kidnapped from their families and forced to prostitute in Greece. There have been also cases of Albanian babies being trafficked to Greece for illegal adoptions.³⁴ Of course, it would be inaccurate to blame the rising crime rate in Greece in the recent years solely on Albanians. Greek and Albanian mafias have formed so-called “Brotherhoods” and as elsewhere in the Balkans, general ethnic distrust or even hatred is contrasted with a perfect inter-ethnic cooperation between various criminal organizations. The very profitable business of producing fake visas and passports or selling stolen visas and passport is also largely dominated by the native Greek mafia.³⁵

The two communities, the Albanian and the Greek, live virtually in two separate worlds. Albanians work for Greeks and this is practically the only interaction between the two groups. A number of Albanian respondents IMIR’s team talked with complained that the most difficult things for them are solitude and isolation.³⁶ When members of one community do cross the line separating them, the result is usually confrontation, sometimes with fatal consequences. Such was the case in 2004 when groups of Albanian immigrants were attacked after coming out on the streets to celebrate the victory of the Albanian national football team over Greece in the World Cup qualifications. One man was stabbed to death and several others were injured.³⁷ Less violent, but equally telling example of Greek attitude towards Albanians was the occurrence in the village of Lapa on the Peloponnese. Each year, the day when Greece entered the WWII is marked by a parade, in which the brightest pupil from the local school carries the national flag. In the village of Lapa, the brightest pupil was an Albanian girl. Statistically, this is hardly surprising, since in some schools, immigrant children represent already 40% of the enrolled children. The reaction to the event was, nevertheless, extremely negative. The girl was forced to step down as a flag-bearer after protest from parents and other pupils, who claimed that “this was a Greek celebration and only a Greek could be carrying the flag.”³⁸

What is striking is that IMIR’s team encountered exceptionally negative attitude towards the Albanians even among those Greeks, who are of Albanian origin. Arvanitis are ethnic group of Albanian descent. According to Greek historians, they were an Albanian speaking Christian population, which was hired by Venetians as sailors in the 14th century to fight against the Ottomans. Arvanitis have long since abandoned Albanian language for Greek and integrated fully into the Greek ethnos. Arvanitis respondents IMIR’s team spoke with talked about Albanians with disgust, saying that “they have flooded Greece,” that “they were not good people” and that they “steal, beat and kill.” Some were afraid that Greeks might start to identify them, Arvanitis, with Albanians and their condemnable behavior, and as a result start to reject them.³⁹

³⁴ For more on organized crime in Albania, see *Partners in Crime: The Risks of Symbiosis between the Security Sector and Organized Crime in Southeast Europe*. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy, 2004, pp. 87-94. <http://www.csd.bg/fileSrc.php?id=525>

³⁵ Vidali. “Living in a Policy Vacuum.”

³⁶ Zhelyazkova. *Albanian Prospects*, p. 217.

³⁷ “Greek Albanians' Woes Fester.”

³⁸ “Greek Albanians' Woes Fester.”; Baldwin-Edwards. “Immigration into Greece, 1990-2003,” p. 11.

³⁹ Zhelyazkova. *Albanian Prospects*, pp. 209-213.

The one thing Arvanitis, who are devout Christians, cannot forgive Albanians, is their apparent lack of respect for religion. In order to facilitate their integration, a large number of immigrants from Albania has been changing their names with Greek ones and adopting Orthodox Christianity, but only nominally, as a façade. Albanian immigrant respondents admitted that most of them are religiously indifferent and that they convert to Orthodoxy – an act regularly welcomed by the Orthodox clergy – for strictly pragmatic reasons. This makes their adaptation and legalization easier, and for their children, this is a path leading to equal position with the natives on the labor market in the future. The Greek authorities, which have been following the policy of complete Hellenization of the population of Greece since regaining independence, are naturally supportive of this phenomenon. One of the Albanian respondents, who crossed the border in the first wave of emigration in 1991 shared that when they were caught crossing the border, the Greek soldiers wanted them to make the sign of the cross to see who in the group was Orthodox (and therefore “Greek”) and who was not. When the word of this accident spread in Albania, pragmatic Albanians begun instructing each other how to make the sign of the cross in Orthodox way before attempting to cross the border.⁴⁰

Conclusion

From what has been said above, one can easily conclude that most of the Albanian immigrants in Greece have no plans of returning to Albania, but plan to stay in Greece. As one of the respondents described it, “we will always feel nostalgia for Albania, but we plan it like this: permanent residence for our families outside Albania, in a well-organized country, but we will build villas in our native places where we can go back for the holidays.”⁴¹ Some of the Greek scholars IMIR’s team interviewed were well aware of the fact that in a few decades, Albanians might constitute 10 percent of the population of Greece. Sooner or later, they will start claiming political, cultural and educational rights, and they will probably set up a political party, which will protect their interests.⁴² The Greek society, formed and consolidated under the “one nation – one state” slogan, is anything but prepared for this moment. The Greek governments, despite the three regulation campaigns, are reluctant to adopt appropriate and much needed protection and integration policies.

In fact, as Baldwin-Edwards points out, the Greek policy towards immigrants has been highly contradicting. The Greek society is in favor of legalized migration, but at the same time it needs and depends upon illegal workers, which can be manipulated, exploited and expelled if necessary. Both the society and the government fear permanent migration and want to limit it, yet few steps have been taken to enable and legalize seasonal migration. Albanian presence in the Greek economy is strongest in the northern border regions, which are also hotbeds of Greek nationalism and anti-Albanian sentiments. The issue of remittances taken to Albania is another contradiction: most Greeks are displeased with this and view it as “Greek money taken out of the country,” but at the same time, these remittances might one day improve the situation in Albania to the extent that the Albanian immigrant pressure on Greece would be decreased.⁴³ As elsewhere in the peninsula, pragmatism in Greece is no match for nationalism.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 214-215.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 228.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁴³ Martin Baldwin-Edwards. “Albanian Emigration and the Greek Labour Market: Economic Symbiosis and Social Ambiguity” *South-East Europe Review*, I/2004, pp. 51-66.

http://www.boeckler.de/pdf/South_East_Europe_Review_2004_01_baldwin2.pdf

And yet, clear as it is that Greeks do not want Albanians in their country, Greece currently cannot afford economically to do without them. And as far as Albanians themselves are concerned, they are in Greece to stay. Greece is just another Balkan territory they are slowly, gradually, “taking over.” From the 17th century onwards, when they have moved into Kosovo, from which Serbs started to leave, there has not been a single case of Albanians retreating and giving up certain territory on which they have settled. On the contrary, the last four to five centuries have witnessed a gradual, but persistent enlargement of the territory, populated by Albanians. The old Ottoman documents from 17th century wonderfully illustrate the Albanian “territory takeovers.” The documents show how a certain village, in which few Albanians settled, during the lifetime of just two generations turned into an exclusively Albanian populated settlement. Being the oldest nation in the Balkans, as they claim, Albanians have loads of patience. They might seemingly integrate and assimilate perfectly (as the above-mentioned examples of adopting Orthodox religion and Greek names illustrate), but when the time comes, everyone around them is either Albanian or gone.

Of course, to presume that Albanian territorial and national expansion into Greece might have the same success as against the international pariah like Milosevic’s Serbia, or as in a weak and collapsing state of Macedonia, is illusory. However, it is quite safe to presume that in a few decades, a question whether an Albanian pupil can carry a Greek flag on a Greek national holiday will no longer be an issue. In a few decades, the issue will be whether an Albanian pupil in Greece can carry an Albanian flag.