

Albania still bears the traces

[Parts of the World](#), [European Union](#)



Albania, one of Europe's smallest and isolated countries is also one of the most ancient countries in Europe. Yet its beauty and splendor, its rich natural resources and its extraordinary tradition of hospitality are just few of the many reasons why the outside world should be interested in this country (Konitza 10).

Albania still bears the traces of its turbulent past, a history that has been the story of a never-ending succession of invasion and defense, of subjection and revolt. At one time or another, Greeks and Romans, Goths and Byzantines, Serbs and Bulgars, Sicilians

and Venetians, Normans and Turks have poured into the country and held it for varying periods (Hamm 3).

Many historians believed that the people of Albania descended from a non-Slavic, non-Turkic group of tribes known as Illyrians, who arrived in the Balkans around 2000 BC. The modern Albanians can still be distinguished from Ghegs (northern tribes) and Tosks (southern tribes). After falling under Roman authority in 165 BC, Albania was controlled nearly continuously by a succession of foreign powers such as the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century which made the first recorded reference to a land known as Albania and its people.

The Ottoman Empire also ruled Albania from 1385-1912 and it was during this time that much of the populations were converted to Islam. There were revolts made against the Ottoman, the most famous was led by Gjergj Kastrioti Skenderbeg which eventually became Albania's national hero. But efforts failed as the Ottomans eventually reasserted their dominance.

The hundred of years of Ottoman rule weakened during the early 20th century as Albanian nationalism heightened. This eventually ended with the conclusion of the First Balkan War, and the Vlore Proclamation of Independence on November 28, 1912.

When the Second World War broke, Albania was occupied by different countries. First by Italy (1939-43) and then by Germany (1943-44). After the war, Communism ruled Albania for forty years through the Communist Party leader Enver Hoxha.

During this time, Albania adhered to a strict Stalinist philosophy through a combination of ruthlessness and strategic alliances and most of the population was subjected to purges, shortages, repression of civil and political rights, a total ban on religious observance, and increased isolation. In 1991, Communism fell and the Albanian society struggled to overcome its historical isolation and underdevelopment by seeking closer ties with the West in order to improve economic conditions.

During this time the basic democratic reforms, including a multi-party system was introduced. Albania's fragile democratic structures were strengthened by democrats, then socialists; from presidential to parliamentary which eventually ushered in a new period of political stability, making possible significant progress in democratic and economic reforms, rule of law initiatives, and the development of Albania's relations with its neighbors and the United States. (Frasheri 25).

The Albanian. com website mentioned that Albania adopted the Parliamentary democratic type of government with executive branch; the

President of the Republic (chief of state), the Prime Minister (head of the government), Council of Ministries (appointed by the President); the legislative branch-Peoples Assembly (a unicameral type, 140 seats) and the Judicial branch (the Supreme court and all other). Its police and security forces have shown effectiveness.

Each security or police organization--the Sigurimi, the Frontier Guards, and the People's Police--constituted a separate directorate within the ministry; each had a larger proportion of personnel who were party members than the armed forces because of the need for political reliability. Albania's relations with the outside world are mainly concerned with preservation of its territorial integrity and independence.

Albania maintains generally good relations with its foreign neighbors such as Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Italy and Greece It also enjoys friendly and cooperative bilateral relations with the U. S as Pro-U. S. sentiment is widespread among the population. The strength of the government is supported with its Armed forces which includes ground forces, air and air defense forces, and naval forces and comprised about 48, 000 active-duty and 155, 000 reserve personnel.

According to the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, Albania's economy is considered the poorest in Europe. This is maybe due to the fact that Albania has been isolated and underdeveloped for centuries. Economists estimated the gross domestic product per capita at about US\$450 in 1990.

Latest figures (2005) shows 5.5% Real GDP growth with an inflation rate of 2.4% and unemployment rate by 14.2%. Despite significant progress in the twentieth century, Albania still lagged far behind the other European nations economically. The economic policy insisted on rigid centralization and forced industrialization despite Albania's small size and lack of skilled workers, able administrators, and farmers capable of producing key raw materials and enough grain to feed the population.

Albania has abundant literate workforce but unemployed and unskilled workers but few jobs are available in the country. Because of this, thousands of desperate Albanians fled abroad seeking jobs because of the wretched standard of living and limited economic opportunity at home.

The social structure of the country was basically tribal until the 1930s but increasing contact with the outside world and invasions and occupations by foreign armies had gradually weakened tribal society. Traditionally there have been two major cultures in the Albanian nation: the Glegs in the north and the Tosks in the south.

The Glegs, partly Roman Catholic but mostly Muslim, lived until after World War II in a mountain society characterized by blood feuds and fierce clan and tribal loyalties. The Tosks, whose number included many Muslims as well as Orthodox Christians, were less culturally isolated mainly because of centuries of foreign influence.

Kinship and tribal affiliations, a common spoken language, and enduring folk customs provided continuity and a sense of community. Foreign influence was inevitable, however. Additions and modifications to the language were

made as a result of Latin, Greek, Slavic, and Turkish contacts. Lacking an organized religion as part of their Illyrian heritage, Albanians adopted the Muslim, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic faiths brought to them by their conquerors.

In Albania, the basic unit of society was the extended family, usually composed of a couple, their married sons, the wives and children of the sons, and any unmarried daughters.

The extended family formed a single residential and economic entity held together by common ownership of means of production and common interest in the defense of the group. Such families often included scores of persons, and, as late as 1944, some encompassed as many as sixty to seventy persons living in a cluster of huts surrounding the father's house.

For centuries, the family was the basic unit of the country's social structure. To a great extent, the privacy of the family supplanted that of the state. Children were brought up to respect their elders and, above all, their father, whose word was law within the confines of his family (Marmullaku 82-85).

Whether it is in the past or present, ancient or modern, young or old, Muslim or Christian, rich or poor, north or south, urban or rural, monarchist or socialist: the extremes of Albanian society are vivid and its tensions palpable.

Albania is more like a framework, a stable structure of rigid poles positioned in space -and linked together by flexible cables. The cables are stressed but, barring catastrophe, they will not snap. Albania, a land that is very beautiful, is still struggling to leave its communist past and the almost eternal post

communism transition behind and find the right route to economical, political, and social stability and prosperity.

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