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MINORITIES IN ALBANIA

Introduction

Protection of national minorities and rights and freedoms of people belonging to these categories are part of the international protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms and are of a great importance with regards to stability, democratic security and peace in Europe, aiming at the creation of a climate characterized by tolerance and dialogue, as well as enrichment of every true democratic and pluralist society.

The issue of protection and respect of national minority rights is beyond question a very delicate and complex issue, whose notion developed considerably during the last years by international institutions. Although at the beginning every institution worked on its own, presently OSCE, CE and EU are working together to develop a coherent system to protect national minorities.

The governments are required these days not only to respect ethnic, cultural, language and religious identity of every person belonging to a national minority, but also create necessary conditions offering to these people an opportunity to express, preserve and develop this identity.

Adversaries on notions and nature of rights being recognized to minorities have hindered work to compile international standards, which can regulate their protection. The greatest obstacle is related to elaboration of the definition of “minority” as a notion. The greatest part of existing international texts does not provide a general definition of the term “minority”. Experience indicates that it is difficult to provide a definition, which covers all minority categories, because of complexity of minority groups and difficulty to classify them homogeneously. Only the Additional Protocol of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 1993 attempted to provide a definition of the notion “minority”. This definition includes objective and subjective elements. Elements of objective nature tackle the existence (among the population of a country) of separate

groups with other stable ethnic, religious or language characteristics, numeric importance of this group, their position to other groups of the population; elements of subjective nature consist in the will of minority group members to preserve the particularity of the group. Although the draft of Additional Protocol was not approved by the Council of Ministers of CE, the Parliamentary Assembly calls for legislation (on the part of member states and those who requested membership) in compliance with the articles of this protocol.

Difficulty to provide a general definition of the notion “minority” explains why international documents have avoided this issue and have dealt only with the identification of minorities through ethnic, language, religious and cultural heritage particularities. These criteria were generally used by international organizations to characterize minorities.

The work performed by different international institutions for the protection of minority rights begins with the “International Pact on civil and political rights” of the UN, article 27 of which includes only a concise wording of the obligation that states have to be tolerant and must not obstruct ethnic, language or religious minority rights. After that comes the “Declaration of rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and language minorities” of 14 December 1992, which defined a list of rights for minority people, the commitment of the state to protect the existence of and national, ethnic, religious and language identity of minorities and favour creation of adequate conditions to develop this identity. Although this declaration is not a directive, but only a political document, it constitutes one of the first contemporary documents trying to make a synthesis of international rights situation related to minority rights and as such it still enjoys a great moral authority.

Obviously, most important international documents as far as respect of minority rights is concerned remain “Declaration of Copenhagen” of June 1990 and “Fundamental Convention for the protection of minority rights” of CE, February 1995. Like all other documents of OSCE, the Declaration of Copenhagen binds no state to its implementation, however it is considered presently as “The European Charter of Minorities”, as it includes a number of definitions and protective principles of minorities, on which 35 signing states have reached a political consensus.

Fundamental Convention is relatively a new instrument in the field of international right. It declares a certain number “provision programs” as targets to be reached by the states and being that its provisions are not directly implemented, its execution is firstly achieved by measures taken within the national frame, and secondly through by-lateral agreements.

It underlines a certain number of principles related to promotion of identity of national minorities respecting the law, territorial integrity and sovereignty. Even though these principles might be considered with the minimal law standards, as they were thought to be proposed as models to the states. These on their turn should fill them with their minority characteristics and offer them the possibility to choose complimentary actions to be taken. However, this Convention represents the international instrument of highest level of commitments that states should engage themselves into, to protect and respect minority rights.

Recognition of minorities

Lacking a clear definition of the term “national minority”, it is up to the states to give the status of national minority to groups living in their territory, to assure thus a protective treatment to them. In this situation, Albania bases sets the process of minority rights recognition to the criteria predicted by international agreements and conventions.

According to historical tradition, in Albania are recognized as national minorities those minorities having a common motherland and characteristics like: national identity, the language, customs and tradition, religion etc. This right has been recognized to greek, macedonian and montenegrin minorities.

Roma and Armenian have been recognized and respected as ethnic-linguistic minorities.

The Constitution of the Republic of Albania considers the national minorities an integral part of the Albanian society. It guarantees them full equality before the law and in the exercise of their freedoms and rights, and acknowledges them the right “freely to express, without prohibition or compulsion, their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic belonging” and the right “to preserve and develop them, to study and be taught in their mother tongue, and to unite in organizations and associations for the protection of their interests and identity”.

It also predicts a particular status for international instruments, which Albania has signed. Article 121 and 122 foresee that each international agreement ratified by the Parliament is part of the domestic legislation. They are directly implemented, unless the cases when it is required to do so through ratification. International agreements are superior to domestic legislation not in compliance with them as well as standards approved by an international organization. If an agreement request direct implementation, in case of conflict they are superior to domestic legislation.

Albania signed framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities in 29.06.1995. It was ratified by the Assembly of the Republic of Albania by the Law 8496, dated 3.06.1999 and after depositing the ratification documents in 28. 09.1999 it entered in force in 01.01 2000.

After the ratification, this Convention is part of the domestic legislation and constitutes a guarantee for the protection of minority rights in Albania.

Situation of national minorities in Albania up to 2001

The above explanations assist us in understanding that during 1945-1990, demographic phenomena as well as economic and political developments in the country affected national minority demography. Numbering of national minorities

was affected by several factors like: (i) marriages of a number of ethnic persons with Albanian nationality and vice versa (ii) isolated population for 45 years (iii) prohibition of practice of religious activities for 23 years (1967-1990), (iv) high demographic development of Albanian population compared to minority groups, (v) geographical spreading and settlement mainly near neighboring countries of their ethnic origin. Obviously we must not forget to mention political pragmatism, i.e. wishful party membership, the only political party in the country, which led the Albanian society to ensure a better economic and social status, or compensate up to a certain degree social origin (biography) of “bourgeois, private or commercial” status of the families and support during communist regime in Albania after the Second World War. Presently it results difficult to measure these and other factors. Combination of these lasts to information of former regime, mainly opinions or surveys unpracticed by any other public institution of the time, leave space to subjectivity in interpretation.

This new economic, political and social frame must be the basis for the interpretation of movement of different groups of population, being massive or not. Thus, with the termination of Albanian political system during 1991-1992, many persons (mainly of Albanian nationality) migrated especially towards Greece and Italy and later on to other countries like Germany, France, and USA. Greek government facilitated migration of persons belonging to Greek minority. Thus, the number of people belonging to Greek minority in Albania did not increase.

Albanian population, with regards to ethnic point of view, may be generally considered as very homogeneous, with only 2% (during the whole period following the 2nd WW in 1990), Greeks, Macedonians, Aromanians, Montenegrins, etc.

As far as ethnic-linguistic minorities are concerned, Roma and Aromanian, no accurate documents confirm their percentage. These two minorities have been recognised in Albania as ethnic-linguistic minorities with their language and culture. They enjoy all rights too preserve and develop their culture, learn their language and organize themselves in associations.

Roma

The statistical data with regards to the number of Roma living in Albania do not exist, because a census was not conducted for them.

The national Strategy “For the Improvement of Living Conditions of Roma Minority” approved by the Albanian Government in September 2003 is the only document that provides data regarding the Roma population living in Albania.

The arrival of Roma people to Albania is assumed to date back to nearly the 15th century with the Ottoman occupation. The Roma people have settled mostly in Central and Southern Albania, because of the mild climate of these regions. They consist of four main tribes: Kallbuxhinj (Tirana, Elbasani, Pogradeci, Korça, Bilishti, Gjirokastra, Saranda); Meçkare (Lushnja, Fieri, Vlora); Kurtofet - scattered; Cergaret - nomads. In general they have large families.

Until the 1960s, the Roma of Albania led a nomadic life. According to seasons, they moved from one region to another. This way of living created problems for the

regime in power, because it could leave these people out of control. For these reasons, beginning from the 1960s, the authorities of that time started to concentrate the Roma in agricultural enterprises, forcing them to be employed, while in the cities they were worked mostly in parks maintaining enterprise or in public services.

Aromanians

Among the ethnic-linguistic minorities in Albania are also the Aromanians. The Albanian territories in set spaces and times have felt the growth of the population by Aromanian nomads. This peopling has been manifested in different forms, both in the aspect of time and in the mode of living. From the time aspect, the populating with Aromanians is considered as an ancient populating, perhaps around the 6th century, and a later populating, that perhaps of the start of the past century.

Over the two phases of the populating time process, the Aromanians emerged as a livestock nomadic population, which, later, through a gradual stabilization, engaged in other economic activities, in agriculture, and in the cities, they went in for craftsmanship.

Ancient Aromanian population settled in the rural areas of Myzeqe of Fier and Vlora, in Frasher of Permet, in Moker of Pogradec, in Kolonja etc., as well as in some cities such as in Korça, Berat, Tirana, Elbasan and Durres.

The Aromanian population settled in the city of Voskopoja, in village Shipcke, which lies in the mountainous zone of Voskopoja. With the ruin of the city of Voskopoja, the Aromanian people left and settled in Manastir, and partly in other cities of Albania.

The country's peopling with later Aromanians was inhabited by people coming from the high plateaus of Pindus in Greece. This group of people is known in Albania under the name "kucovlachs" or "sarakaçane". Until 1950, this population retained its nomad livestock character and its stabilization is linked with the so-called "completion of the socialist cooperation of agriculture" under the communist dictatorship in Albania.

After this period, the movement of Aromanian population in Albania and its entire demographic evolution was subjected to the demographic and social-economic laws, like all the population of the country, in which it was completely integrated.

The data for the number of the Aromanian minority in Albania appeared for the first time in the 1950 census. In this census, the Aromanian population counts for 2381 inhabitants. While in the 1955 census, the number of the Aromanian population was 4249. In the later censuses no data were produced regarding the number of the Aromanians in Albania, while in 1989 census the number is 782 inhabitants.

The information on characteristics of national minorities Albanian population were collected for the first time through the census of 1945; at a later period this question was asked even during the census of 1950, but the number of foreigners and national minorities was smaller than the one registered by the census of 1945. This situation had an historical explanation deriving from the return of many Italians, Yugoslav who came to Albania during the War. For this reason, the statistics under analysis to comprehend numeric situation of national minorities commence with the year 1950.

In the practice of censuses in Albania, when the surveyor confirmed obvious non-compliance of the question and answer received related age, residence (mainly permanent resident's) relation to head of family as well as the degree of form filling, requested verification of several documents forwarded by people under survey. This instruction was given from statistical offices to census commissions. The official document certifying holder's citizenship and identity is the Ministry of Interior issued the Identity Card in Albania at the beginning of 80. Its last replacement was performed after Albania's proclamation "Socialist Republic", by the Constitution of 1976. It was based on the Fundamental Register of Citizens and included these elements: Name, Last name, father's name and mother's name, date of birth, place of birth, residence and nationality.

In Albania, every baby born alive and of joint nationality, the civil status offices temporarily wrote in the certificate one of them, usually the father's nationality, receiving a declaration of the parents as well. If parents did not reach an agreement on this issue, than the head of the local power took a decision on the child's nationality. In any case the child officially had this nationality. When he reached 18 he enjoyed the right to choose between the two nationalities of his parents.

According to Governmental Decree of January 1988, the information gathered by the census of population and households, families, revenues, equipment etc, following the direct declaration and technique complimentary documents issued by Statistical Directory for methodological objectives. Individual and personal data were divided into demographic, educational, labour or unemployment, social-professional and economic activity information. These data were certified through the Identity Card, declaration of employment issued by the Firm. Types of nationalities required with the census of 1989 were respectively, Albanian, Greek, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Italian, Romanian, Czech, Bulgarian, other Former Yugoslav Republics, and other (Russian etc) nationalities.

Table 1. Statistics on national minorities during censuses

Census Years	Population	Population of other than Albanian nationality	% of minorities
1950	1,218,945	35,201	2,9 %
1955	1,391,499	47,227	3,4%
1960	1,626,315	44,570	2,7%
1969	2,068,155	Not gathered	
1979	2,590,600	54,687	2,1%
1989	3,182,417	64,816	2,01%
2001	3,069,275	Not gathered	

Table 2. Distribution of ethnic and linguistic national minorities according to kind

Non Albanian nationality according to censuses years					
	1950	1955	1960*	1979**	1989
Total	35,201	47,227	44,570	54,687	64,816
Greek	28,996	35,345	37,282	49,307	58,758
Macedonian	2,273	3,431	4,235	4,097	4,697
Serbian-					
Montenegrin	893	1,613	...	66	100
Aromanian	1,876	4,249	782
Others	1,163	2,589	3,053	1,217	479

*) In 1960 are not collected particular information on Macedonian, Serbian and Montenegrin nationalities.

They were considered of Yugoslav nationality.

***) In the census of 1960 and 1979 information was not gathered on Aromanian ethno-linguistic minorities.

As it may be observed by information gathered by the censuses, the percentage of non- Albanian population is low and it fluctuates between 3,5 % to 2 %. Among the non-Albanian population, the national minority prevailing is the Greek minority constituting almost 85% of the total figure occupied by national minorities. Even the census of 1989, presents this situation on national minorities in Albania.

Table 3: Distribution of national minorities during the census of 1989

Districts	Total	Albanian	Greek	Maced	Mon/Ser	Others
Total	31,824,117	3,117,601	58,758	4,697	100	1,261
1 Berat	176,398	176,324	49	12	2	11
2 Dibër	149,650	149,605	17	20	5	3
3 Durrës	245,499	245,249	192	12	8	38
4 Elbasan	241,950	241,789	131	8	5	17
5 Fier	245,062	244,881	123	9	7	42
6 Gramsh	43,565	43,545	13	3	0	4
7 Gjirokastër	66,373	45,978	19,921	9	4	441
8 Kolonjë	24,781	24,752	20	7	0	2
9 Korçë	215,221	210,515	158	4,361	6	181
10 Krujë	106,852	106,826	17	5	2	2
11 Kukës	101,302	101,267	17	14	2	2
12 Lezhë	62,001	61,978	15	4	0	4
13 Librazhd	71,982	71,927	33	15	2	5
14 Lushnje	134,280	134,209	51	9	3	8
15 Mat	76,674	76,638	22	7	2	5
16 Mirditë	50,447	50,421	16	7	0	3
17 Përmet	39,775	39,330	442	2	0	1
18 Pogradec	71,446	71,386	19	37	2	2
19 Pukë	48,969	48,938	17	5	2	7
20 Sarandë	87,763	50,995	36,531	22	17	203
21 Skrapar	46,503	46,482	16	5	0	0
22 Shkodër	236,289	236,158	53	30	15	33
23 Tepelenë	49,850	49,789	57	3	0	1
24 Tiranë	368,213	367,361	610	79	11	152
25 Tropojë	44,779	44,757	16	4	2	0
26 Vlorë	176,788	176,501	202	8	3	74

Being that the greatest part of the population belonging to national minority in Albania is the Greek minority, which in total occupied 1.85 % of the population in 1989 with 58.758 persons, or 90,6% of national minorities. We will present only few aspects of this population in this year. Population of Greek nationality, in the majority

of cases is established in southern bordering districts (96.1 %): in Gjirokaster, Delvine and Sarande.

This minority constitutes 30.1% of the population in Gjirokaster. In Saranda district (including in administrative division of 1989 even Delvina), the Greek minority occupies 41.6% of the population and is to be found in all communes. However, the Greek minority is spread through out the territory of the country. It is concentrated mostly (not compared to Sarande, Delvine and Gjirokaster) in Tirane, Permet and Vlore. Macedonian minority is mainly concentrated in Korçë, constituting thus roughly 93% of the total figure of this minority existing within the state territory of the Republic of Albania.

Present evaluation on the number of national minorities

Situation presented by the census of April 2001

During the last census of the population and households of April 2001, the question on nationality was not included within the number of identifying questions made to the individuals. Social and economic development in the country and the attitude of the population regarding migration resulted in a different basic form, compared to that of 1989. Political and social changes allowed free movement and without any consequences, within and outside the country. This factor was not the only one affecting the registration form. It was combined with other objective reasons.

Modification of official statistics in the country would not continue to gather information from families or individuals and confirm their status through official documents. It should be based on self-declaration of individuals on questions asked. The new Constitution of the Republic of Albania does not state very clearly whether in case of ethnic issues an individual is asked, self-declare any information or indiscreetness is preserved.

Even from the technical point of view we must stress that this question could not stand alone within the form. I should have been accompanied by other questions related to religious belonging and mother tongue. Presenting a question on religious belonging presented its difficulties. Practice of religious activities for almost 25 years in succession and destruction of religious cults, created secular generations. After the 91-92, the freedom of religious practice caused revival of faith in God, but different from the past, it was very confused and without any clear and defined form. Thus technically, asking a question on religious belonging caused difficulties.

Adding to these factors, “irresponsible functioning” of the Civil Status Offices, which manipulated individual characteristics, including here even nationality, were easily obtained through informal payments, made it very difficult gathering of a qualified information on nationality, religion and mother tongue.

The Central Committee of REPOBA also discussed this issue, during preparatory phase for the census. It decided that the block of questions was included within the identifying information collected for individuals during the census. In compliance with the Framework Convention (Article 3, point 1) On Minority Rights, ratified in 1999, considered that including these questions within a certain group was not an

obligation deriving from it. All these reason together brought us to compile a questionnaire identifying only the nationality.

Presently INSTAT has terminated the general census of population households in April 2001 and all statistical data are available, it is working on 59 typical analytical and synthetic tables on population, families and individual. Information on number of minorities are offered at national level considering these hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1:

National minorities are concentrated mainly in the same areas like in the census of 1989

Hypothesis 2:

Structure of distribution of a certain minority group at national level has not changed.

Hypothesis 3:

Evaluation on national minorities is performed on existing population.

During 1992 and 1993, INSTAT in close cooperation with UNFPA (Van Der Pol), u presented an evaluation related to Albanians living abroad up to 1992 (350.000 persons), as well as population projections up to 2010.

Table 4. Population Projections

Years	Total	Males	Females
1989	3.214	1.649	1.565
1990	3.287	1.686	1.6
1995	3.249	1.608	1.641
2000	3.42	1.688	1.732
2001	3.418	1.704	1.713
2005	3.623	1.788	1.835

General registration of population and households of 2001 confirmed that projections performed did not form a sufficient source of information. The number of population present in the country's territory was lower than the one predicted and the number of those migrating was two times higher. Total figure of population in 2001 was 3,069,275, while migration figure was evaluated in 600-700 thousand habitants. Greek minority population is concentrated mainly in the South of Albania, like: Dropull i Poshtem, Dropull i Siperm, Pogon, Dhiver, Aliko, Livadhja, Finiq, Mesopotam, thus in Sarande, Delvine and Gjirokaster. In the above-mentioned districts lived 96.1% of population with Greek nationality. It was evaluated through the census 1989, while population of other nationalities like Macedonians, are mainly settled in the Commune of Ligenas.

The Serbian – Montenegrin are settled mainly in Vrrake. A decrease in the figure of these groups derives from the right to choose residence. It influences the creation of a population, which is free to migrate and decide itself whether to migrate and where. This demographic phenomenon lowered the population of with almost 45%. (The population of three districts got together in 1989 was 154.141 habitants and in 2001 became 99.798 habitants). In these conditions, the decrease of the presence of Greek

minority population in these areas is comprehensible. We must underline the fact that if during the previous census, population of these districts represented 4,8% of the total population figure, presently they represent 3,3% of the total population figure. With regards to Greek minority presence in other districts, evaluation was based on average annual level of growth of population figure in total.

Table 5. Greek minority statistics

Minority districts	Greek Minority		
	Population	Families	Memb/fam.
Total	35,829	9,163	3.9
1 Gjirokaštër	18,668	4,412	4.2
- Com. Dropulli sipërm	8,525	1,986	4.3
- Com. Dropulli poshtëm	7,558	1,733	4.4
- Com. Pogon	907	284	3.2
- Others	1,678	409	4.1
2 Sarandë	11,246	2,671	4.3
- Com. Livadhja	3,393	783	4.3
- Com. Aliko	2,668	653	4.1
- Others	5,185	1,235	4.2
3 Delvinë	3,784	1,581	2.4
- Com. Finiq	735	282	2.6
- Com. Mesopotam	1,320	579	2.3
- Others	1,729	720	2.4
4 Other districts	2,131	499	4.3

With regards to Macedonian minority, the last census indicated that it was mainly concentrated in Korçë and Devoll, especially in the Commune of Liqenas. Surveys of families conducted in 1998 and 2002 witnessed that this minority was not affected by migration factor. This grouping presented in the last census 92.8% of this minority in the country. Assuming that this structure has not changed during these years, Macedonian minority is evaluated to have around 4,148 habitants.

Table 6. Macedonian Minority statistics

District	Macedonian Minority		
	Population	Families	Memb/fam.
Korçë			
Com. Liqenas	4,148	1,063	3.9

Regarding the presence of Montenegrin population in Albania, they are concentrated in the Commune of Gruemire of Malesia e Madhe, basically village Grile (Vrake). The population of this region is 678 habitants.

Ethnic-linguistic minority of Aromanians comprises 992 habitants. The evaluation is based on the population structure of 1989; assuming that annual population growth is 2% per year and that this group of population is not affected by the migration factor. Evaluations performed by INSTAT, reconfirmed by the results on national level produced from LSMS (Living Standard Measurement Survey), are provided hereinafter:

Table7. Statistics on present minorities in Albania

Population	Total	%
Population	3,069,275	100
<i>National Minorities</i>	42,892	1.4
<i>From this:</i>		
<i>Greek</i>	35,829	1.17
<i>Macedonian</i>	4,148	0.14
<i>Montenegrin</i>	678	0.02
<i>Aromanian</i>	992	0.03
<i>Others:</i>	1,245	0.04

Note: This material was prepared from INSTAT in cooperation with Foreign Affairs Ministry,
Direction of Minority