



Research Article

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Greek-Albanian Relations, the Past, the Present and the Future

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Abstract

Greek-Albanian relations can be considered as a complex relation, but at the same time with the highest potential for success in the region compared to the relations that Greece has established with the other immediate neighbours in the Balkans. These relations has passed through a continues fruition developments and sometimes with hindering situations that are deeply rooted in the history of the two nations. This can be noticed from some fundamental historical moments such as the creation of the Modern Greek state and the Albanian state, which have a constant influence in the way how current relationships are setup. It can be considered as an interdependent, vital and vibrant relation built upon a complexity of challenges, ready to generate new challenges and imposed balances, at least in the historical perspective. Greece and Albania share a similar history in many aspects, but at the same time, there are unifying and distinguishing aspects between the two countries and nations, like everywhere in the Balkans; history mostly divides nations rather than unites them. Referring to the historic ground of this relation, in this paper we will reveal the key factors that bear the heavy lift off the past, which prevails rather than the desire to have a better future.

Keywords: Greece, Albania, Foreign Policy, bilateral issues, NATO, Integration, EU

1. Introduction

A past that deeply affects the core of the existence between the two countries and is strongly associated with contradiction and misunderstanding that mix together the curse of the borders, the human tragedy, faith, doubt, and uncertainty are a clear indication for the prevailing will of the two nations, to put feelings ahead of logic as an alternative to policy making. An historical relation that has proven that peace is hard to be achieved and the will for clashes is always welcomed; a relation that is hard to be defined, that is able to quickly reveal the best and the worst in the spur of the moment by experiencing thrilling emotions. In a symbolic manor I could define the Albanian-Greek relationship as a "fustanela," where you can find endless sides, and by just a spin, the fustanela reveals its whole figure, and moreover it is considered that the "fustanela" is a common dress which also divides the Albanians with the Greeks. (*Fustanela is a traditional dress for men, similar to the Scottish kilt, used by Albanians, later also by Greeks and other Balkan nations. In Albania, fustanela has been the official Royal Guard uniform and continues to be used by polyphonic groups, while in Greece a short type of fustanela continues to be used by ceremonial military units such as Evzones*). Often, in the jargon of the villages of southern Albania, there is a meaningful truth that says: "Albanians consider Greeks as the first affinities in line", but apparently this "marriage" has proven to be as difficult as that the detachment is simply impossible.

In addition, it is appropriate to highlight some historical sides of "fustanela", especially those related to the modern history of the two countries, which are the bases of the Greek-Albanian

relationship, such as: the contribution of Albanians to the independence of Greece, the Conference of Ambassadors of London in 1913, "Northern Epirus", the status of the Greek minority in Albania, the Cham issue, World War II, the Law of War and the Maritime Agreement. The great common denominator of all these contributive events is the fact that they bare the high potential to serve as dividing factors, rather than cohesive ones. These milestone events are interconnected, which make it unique, but difficult to unfold without being provided with a full picture of crucial historical moments. A special place in this relationship is the human factor on each side of the borders, as in Greece there are three layers of Albanians, that of Byzantine Greece or the Arbërs of Peloponnese, which undergo the Hellenization; the second layer dates after the London Conference from Arta to Preveza, but also the part from Follorina to Kostur, as well as the third one related to the Albanians emigration to Greece in the 1990s. (Meta, 2002). In Albania, the Greek minority in the south of the country has a special place and is highly outspoken and often very influential factor in the bilateral relations.

With the declaration of Independence of the Albanian State on November 28, 1912, Greece faced a difficult reality, keeping in mind the fact that during this period the country has been in a very successful territorial expansion. The Greeks major target to associate inside the Modern Greek state the "Northern Epirus" failed to happen when Albania was declared an independent country, however as far as it was not achieved, it turned to be a dream, which would often tempt Greeks in their later history. (Clogg, 2004). With an independent Albanian state, many national objectives of Greece were put into question mark, like; territorial expansion in southern Albania, an area called by the Greeks as "Northern Epirus", the rights of the Greek minority left outside the borders of the Greek state, the exercise of influence in the new state, the influence on the Autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church, and the temporary territorial annexation of some special areas in southern Albania, part of the boundaries of the Greeks expansionist plan of "Megali-Idea". The establishment of the new Albanian state also had the blessing of the "Great Powers" of the time, which, for various reasons decided to have an independent Albania in the Balkans. The same as with every new state emerging from the lost lands of the Ottoman Empire, in regards to Albania, there were taken many decisions in a series of special conferences, which set the boundaries of the new state and the legal status which supported a neutral Albania.

2. The Status of the Respective Minorities

After the establishment of the Albanian state in 1912, the first issue out of the territorial claims indicating the bilateral relations was the treatment of the Greek minority that remained within the borders of the new Albanian state. Greece claims that Albania has followed an expatriation policy for the Greek minority in Albania, a traditional minority which dates an early settle, but officially recognized by the Albanian state, as a minority in 1922 due to one of the conditions for Albania accession to the League of Nations on December 17, 1920, after Greece's proclamation that this minority in under the threat of assimilation or being merged with the local population (Meta, 2002). Another measure taken by Albania sate was the proclamation of the Autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church in 1929, which would prevent the influence of the Greek church into the Albanian church as well the control of all churches, including those of the Greek minority under the Albanian Orthodox Church, based on the well-known principle of Orthodoxy: "free church in a free state" (Meta, 2002). The proclamation of the Autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church in Berat, the creation of a sacred synod and the drafting of the status, although were conducted according to the well-known orthodoxy practices, KOASH was recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate after seven years of impeding and obstructing factors, where the underlying argument was the lack of ecclesiastical clerics (Meta, 2002).

For the Greek state, the difficulties which were encountered in education constitute another challenge that the Greek ethnic minority faced in Albania. The clashes of the two countries expanded and reached a peak during 1914-1920, as the result of the events of World War I, but the situation was deescalated by the signing of the Kapshtica Protocol of May 28, 1920, where Albania committed itself not to impinge on schools and churches in the minority areas, as well as the pro-Greek community within Albania, until reaching a permanent agreement. Greece committed itself

not to conduct military operations in Albania, at a time when French forces were departing from Korça (Meta, 2002). The clashes aiming to strengthen the Greek influence in southern Albania continued further, when Greece addressed the issue of minority rights to the League of Nations, by engaging them in order to establish an international commission to review Greek claims and at the end of the review a report would be submitted. The United Nations League Report of 1922 concluded that the Hellenic sentiment of the Orthodox population in southern Albania should not be considered as Greek nationalism, and of course this produced a temporary normalization of bilateral relations (Meta, 2002). Greece claims that during 1922-1924 there was a significant decline of Greek minority schools from 360 to 100 and the constitutional amendments of 1933 prohibited Greek schools by law (Tsibiribi, 2004). Following the Greek state's protest in regards of the 1933 decision, Albania was asked by the League of Nations to allow the education for the Greek minority to be developed in their mother tongue, based on the argument that Albania is a member state.

The Albanian state has officially recognized the status of the Greek minority in Albania since 1922, whereas, Greece initially has recognized and then subsequently denied the status of the Albanian minority in Greece, predominantly located in the border areas between the two countries. For a long historical period, there is a great clash between the two countries in regards of the treatment of the respective minorities in the light of the historical developments of the time, in particular the periods of mid-1920 (the Lausanne Treaty), World War II and the division of the world into the main ideological camps, where the borders between Albania and Greece were the meeting point of these two worlds. Democratic changes in Albania in 1990 enhanced the implementation of certain rights for the Greek minority in Albania. Hence, on February 22, 1991, the "OMONIA" (Union), the first political-cultural organization was created, which would represent the Greek ethnic minority. In the 1992 elections, this political formation managed to have 5 MPs in the new Albanian Parliament. The political instability of 1991-1992 in Albania led to the March 22, 1992 elections, upon which it was decided to go to the polls with a new electoral code, which did not allow the creation of political parties on the basis of ethnicity and religion, and as a result, "OMONIA" was not allowed to run into elections as a political party (Tsibiribi, 2004). Advancing the rights of the Greek ethnic minority in Albania has been the major goal of Greece in bilateral relations and often using this minority as a tool to support other bilateral goals with and within Albania.

Greek minority in Albania is officially recognized and respecting their rights derives from the constitution of the country as well as from the conventions where Albania is member, furthermore this constitutes an extra guarantee for Greece. Meanwhile, the former Albanian minority in Greece, whose existence has also been accepted by the representative of Greece in the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, is now no longer part of the Greek nation. Political, historical circumstances and as a result of the repression, followed later by judicial and administrative actions, the Albanian population living in North Greece, the Cham community became subject to collective expulsion from their homes. The London Ambassadors Conference in 1913 came to a conclusion and decided that the Chameria region should be part of the Greek state and a considerable part of the Albanian population would emerge with the Greeks.

The period between the two World Wars is considered very difficult for the Albanians Chams, who faced a strong Hellenization process (mainly those of Orthodox faith) and were placed in a constant pressure during 1923-1925 with the entry into force of the Lausanne Treaty, which prompted the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece. The Chameria region was one of the most affected by the wave of exchanges, and it became a shelter for Greek refugees coming from Asia Minor and the Greeks of Pontus, who settled in the lands and properties of the Albanians that often by force or alienation were asked to leave their properties. (Manda, 2015). To handle with the risk of depopulation of the region of Chameria by Albanians of the Muslim religion, Albania responded through diplomatic engagement by requesting to the League of Nations the establishment of a Mixed Commission, which after the evaluation decided that the Greek citizens (Muslims of Chameria), should be excluded from the exchange practice. Turkey, of course, played an important role, which stated that "the Chams are Muslims, but not Turks, and as such they are not subject of the Lausanne Treaty (Manda, 2015).

In March 1928, the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a memorandum to the chargé

d'affaires of Greece in Tirana, highlighting Tirana's concern about the harsh measures undertaken by the Greek authorities against the Chams and expressing Tirana's protest for non-recognizing them as a national minority (Archive of MFA, 2002). The Greek authorities replied: "The Albanian government has no right to interfere in the domestic affairs of another country. The Chams were Greek citizens and Albania's engagement as a protective state was a disregard for the basic elements of Greece's sovereign rights". (Puto, 2011). Though there was a commitment of the local Cham families, to escape this strong wave of exchanges, still the Hellenization process was accompanied by a severe drama for the Albanian Chams. With the beginning of the Italian-Greek War on October 15, 1940, Albanian population of Chameria responded to the general state of military mobilization in Greece, by expressing the combat readiness to fight in the Greek army formations in the war against Italy, which had previously invaded Albania as well. For the Greek authorities, the loyalty of a Muslim population could not be estimated therefore under these circumstances, Greek military strategists decided not to include the Chams in the combat formations, leaving them to serve in the rear forces background, mainly doing physical labor in the non-combating units. Those who refused to obey and accept the positions were sent for exile to the Aegean islands and a small part of them did not return back. Greece under the framework of the political, judicial and military measures, which were taken to cope with the war, following the request made by the Metaksa Government, decided to enforce the state of war with Italy and Albania by decree no. 2636/1940 on November 10, 1940, "The designation of Italy and Albania as enemy States and seizure of enemy assets", (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece, Athens, 1940), as well as law no. 2637/1940, "On Amending and Supplementing Provisions related to the Provision of War Organization and Mandatory Laws", (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece, Athens, 1940), which will be further elaborated below as the hardest issues of bilateral relations with an historical background (Krisafi, 2014).

The situation created by the war, followed by the arrival of the German invasion, as well as the domestic political events in Greece, coupled with the separation of the Greek resistance into two camps, led to high domestic tension. The paramilitary groups operating in Chameria and Epirus, during 1944-1945, carried out violent expulsion of the Cham Albanians. Through the use of force and paramilitary techniques, about 30,000 Chams, mostly Muslims, left from their homes and moved in Albania, and a handful of them died. The act of deportation of Cham Albanians by force from their homes constitutes a dramatic chapter in bilateral relations especially for Albania, as a country directly affected by this act. Albania was about to be faced with the humanitarian catastrophe of coping with the influx of expelled civilians from their shelter, medical help, and integration into the society. The deportation act of the Cham Albanians from Greece was commented by the Greek authorities, that they were part of the Nazi army in the war against Greece, and committed acts of sabotage in favor of the enemy forces. Immediately following the deportation, Greece undertook several legal steps, adopting Law no. 533 in 1945, on the establishment of a Special Court, which would judge the collaborators of Nazism. Article 2 of the above mentioned law provided that, on the basis of the dangerousness of the acts committed, the court could also decide to confiscate the assets of the defendants. Based on the activity of this court, they were sentenced to prison in 1947, 1930 Cham Albanians, Greek citizens, and 179 others later that year.

The establishment of the Special Court was later accompanied by other legal actions, which led to the construction of a legal hub for Greece, which secured other than penetration, confiscation of property and their inability to return back to Greece. What makes the Cham issue difficult to be resolved between the two countries is collective treatment of this community as guilty in complicity and the whole community suffered the fate of 2109 convicted from the Special Court. Based on the Greek concept of the nation, Greece took care of embracing and adopting Hellenism for the remaining Albanian Orthodox community of Chameria that remained in Greece, whom as a consequence intensively withdrew from their ethnic and national identity to a new identity based on the religious affiliation. The way that Albanians of Chameria were treated by the Greek state whom are as well Greek citizens, is in full contradiction to the Severa Treaty of the League of Nations signed by Greece, which under the provisions of Article 2 of this treaty, Greece is obliged to undertake and provide full protection of life and freedom to all its citizens without distinction of birth,

race or religion, and Article 8, which foresees fair and equal political treatment, the establishment of an appropriate electoral system for minorities and the freedom of religion (Puto, 2011). In the Contrary to all the international acts, but forced by the circumstances, in 1953 Tirana granted the Albanian citizenship to the Albanians of Chameria that arrived in Albania during 1944-1945, whom are as well Greek citizens (Meta, 2002).

3. Issues Inherited from the Past

One of the issues associated with World War II in the so called Albanian front for Greece has to do with the Greek military fallen in the Albanian territory, in the fight against Italy. Respect for the Greek military fallen in Albania during World War II is subject to the intergovernmental agreement reached between the two Ministries of Defense on 9 February 2009, "*On the search, exhumation, identification and burial of the Greek military fallen in action in Albania during the Italian - Greek war of 1940-1941 and cemetery construction on the territory of the Republic of Albania for their burial*". The agreement foresees the construction of two monumental cemeteries in Këlcyrë near Përmet and in Bularat near Gjirokastra, for the Greek militaries fallen in action in Albania. The Greek's request, to build a cemetery for the fallen militaries in Albania, is an old one, it dates back in 1973, but Tirana in those years resisted the pressure to build a cemetery within Albanian territory. Following the reestablishment of the diplomatic relations with Albania, the Greek authorities, instantaneously and continually became interested in the remains of Greek militaries fallen in Albania during the Italian-Greek war. The initial request was only to dig for the remains of Greek militaries fallen in the Albanian soil. On August 28, 1973, the Greek ambassador to Tirana, during an official meeting at the Albanian MFA, demanded the establishment of a cemetery in memory to the Greek militaries fallen in Albania (Archive of MFA, 1973).

This request was repeated again in 1975, demanding that the cemetery had to be established in the area which had the highest number of militaries fallen in action. In 1976, the Greek authorities demand the Albania authorities to establish some cemeteries in memory of the Greek fallen militaries, and in 1977, for the first time Athens presented the number of 12,000 Greek militaries fallen in Albanian soil, this was presented as an obligation by the Greek authorities to establish cemeteries in their respect, in memory and honor of their relatives in Greece. (Archive of MFA, 1976). Meanwhile, the Albanian authorities had confirmed up to that time, 691 graves of Greek militaries fallen in Albanian territory. The request of the Greeks was reiterated again in 1978 and 1982. The Albanian authorities' position regarding such cases was based on the fact that "Albania does not have any practice of building cemeteries in the Albanian territory for the foreign armies soldiers" (Newspaper "Tema"). Nevertheless, the Albanian authorities have always expressed the readiness to help the Greek authorities to find the human remains and transfer them all to Greece. In 1984, under special care of Tirana's leadership, an inter-ministerial working group was set up to find, exhume, and deliver to the Greek authorities the human remains of the Greek militaries fallen in Albania, during the Italian-Greek war of 1940-1941. The task of the working group was to verify specially the Greek pretended number of 12,000 fallen militaries and to take all the necessary measures to hand over the remains that would be found. Albania engaged 7 institutions in this program, as well as the mayors of Përmet, Tepelena, Saranda, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Pogradec, Korca, Skrapar, Kolonjë and Berat (Archive of MFA, year 1983).

During the visit of the Greece's Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias in Albania in 1984, he stated that "the Greek government is concerned about this issue and also the public opinion, so those remains should be found, gathered and send to Greece, and build up a cemetery for them in the Greek soil". Papoulias promised to send data from the Greek Army Institute, which would help on finding the human remains, but indeed this information was not sent from Athens. On the memo dated November 8, 1985, the Albanian Ministry of the Local Economy reported that a total of 2250 graves of Greek militaries were found in the Albanian territory, and subsequently this Ministry had drafted plans for each tomb, in order to collect the human remains (Archive of MFA, year 1985). Albanians also asked the Greeks to prepare the procedures to be followed for their withdrawal. The oblivion of the Greek authorities was conceived by Tirana as a politically oriented. Athens demanded that the cemetery should be established in Albania. But this demand, in the

consideration of the Albanian MFA, was evaluated as part of the Greek authorities plan to perpetuate the liberation of the so-called Northern Epirus and to commemorate it by organizing ceremonies in those cemeteries (Newspaper "Tema").

The Albanian authorities constantly insisted on giving the founded remains back to Greece, but both sides continued to support their standpoint on the issue in 1986. This issue was also brought back in the talks between Albania's Foreign Minister Reiz Malile and Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, in Tirana on November 17, 1987. Papoulias presented the idea of setting up a joint commission to discuss on what could be done about the remains of the Greek militaries fallen in Albania. Albanian Foreign Minister Reiz Malile replied: "We respect your militaries fallen in the struggle against fascism, as we respect our soldiers fallen against fascism, in the joint war against the same enemy. We are fully committed to assist on finding them and send them back home with the utmost respect, when it is the best convenient time for you to do it" (Archive of MFA, year 1987).

The first Greek data's on fallen militaries arrived in Tirana in 1989, but a year later the Greek authorities changed the position and went back to the idea that they previously had. Still the Greeks wanted to build up a cemetery in Albania, in an area that would be the most convenient for the Albanians, but the Albanian authorities once again replied that they had never pursued the practice of building cemeteries for foreign armies within the Albanian territory. With the political changes that took place in Albania after 1990, Athens reached a positive step on these issue and they took the upper hand on Tirana on this matter and specifically with the agreement signed between the two countries, which marked an important moment for Tirana: the ratification from Athens of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, as well as Greece's good will to conclude the ratification procedures for Albania's NATO Membership Protocol on February 17, 2009 (Newspaper "Tema").

A number of measures were required for the implementation of the agreement, but no modalities were specified in the agreement, which as a consequence led to difficulties for the Albanian authorities to start the implementation, such as:

- the exact number of the Greek fallen militaries in the Albanian territory. (The Greek authorities have speculated on the number of fallen militaries, initially at 12,000 then 10,000 and later 7,000 but the figures of the Albanian archive sources and documents show rather smaller number; a total of 2250 graves of Greek fallen militaries); (Newspaper "Tema").
- the agreement did not specify the areas where exhumations in Albania had to be carried out, and there was no list of spots accompanied by supporting data, which would prove the safety and authenticity of the fallen militaries. In the bilateral commission, the Greeks have claimed 129 spots, where the fallen militaries are thought to be buried in the Albanian territory and mainly, in the area of Vloera, Saranda, Delvina, Gjirokastra, Tepelena, Përmet, Skrapar, Erseka, Korça, Bilisht, Gramsh and Pogradec;
- the agreement did not clearly define the criteria's on which the identification of fallen militaries would be conducted. But the deal stipulated the establishment of a Joint Commission of Experts from both sides, which would pursue the entire procedure for the location, search, exhumation, identification and burial of Greek militaries fallen in war in Albanian soil during the Greek-Italian war of 1940-1941.

During the meetings of the Joint Committee of Expert, the parties had some differences on certain aspects of the process; Albanian side intentions was to handle it rigorously and professionally, being transparent and clear in the realization of this process in order to correct the gaps created by the agreement, as well as taking into account the historical sensitivities in certain areas. Greek authorities have always requested the initiating of the process, which was in line with the implementation of the bilateral agreement. As the result of the agreed package on resolving bilateral issues, both sides have agreed to start the process on January 22, 2018, and the process has gone smoothly through stricter procedures agreed by the JCE.

4. World War II and the Law of War

On October 15, 1940 Fascist Italy, which previously had invaded Albania a year before, declared

war to Greece and on October 28, through Albanian territory, Italy conducted a military operation to invade Greece. On November 10, 1940, the Greek government of Metaxas requested the Greek King to issue a decree enacting the binding law no. 2636/1940, "The designation of Italy and Albania as enemy States and seizure of enemy assets", (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece, 1940), as well as law no. 2637/1940, "On the Modification and Supplementation of Provisions on the War Organizations and Mandatory Laws", (Government Gazette of the Kingdom of Greece, Athens, 1940). Laws which were activated by a decree on the same day by King George, proclaiming the state of war and the designation of Italy and Albania as enemy states. Officials in Athens referring to the Italian-Greek war accused Albania of being an aggressor state that had militarily attacked Greece. The Greek government at that time submitted to the international organizations the request for re-launching the discussion of territorial claims through the thesis of "war situation" with Albania and the necessity of concluding a peace treaty between the two countries engaged in war (Krisafi, 2014).

This Greek action, according to the Albanian scholars, was a clear effort to internationalize the state of war with Albania. For many decades, enforcing the law of war has been the cause of the political and judicial problems for the two countries, which on the one hand Greek claims that the war declaration by Albania, is difficult to find suitable international legal support according to Tirana, because Verlac's government statement had no legal value, since, after 7 of April 1939 Albania was a country occupied without any legitimate body, with decision-making prerogatives. The so-called Albanian Government and Parliament of the time did not have the minimum of legal attributes to make a decision and to be authenticated for the representation of Albania within or outside the country. Albania had lost its sovereignty and the freedom to act, and had no qualities or international legal capacity to act. Consequently, the country could not formally exercise the rights of the subject to proclaim war or to conclude a peace treaty, because it was missing the "animus belli".

During 1940-1942, Italy declared war to: Greece, Great Britain, France, Yugoslavia, Soviet Union, and USA, but at the end of the war, these countries did not take into consideration the Italian decree no. 194, dated 09.06.1940, and they did not treated Albania as a defeated party, neither impose sanctions on Albanian citizens, apart from Greece. However, we can see the case of Slovakia, occupied by Germany, which declared war on the Soviet Union, but latter at the end of the war, Soviet Union did not treated Slovakia as a defeated party because Slovakia's decision came from a government which was under the invasion. (Puto, 2011). Greece claims that two Albanian battalions participated alongside the Italian troops in the invasion of Greece, but this argument is not in full conformity with the international law, which states that "the forced recruitment of citizens of occupied countries by the occupying forces to be sent in combat operations in other countries, are considered as regular army soldiers of the country they were fighting for and not as soldiers of the countries of their origin". Moreover, the Albanian militaries of the Tomori and Taraboshi battalions were accused by the Italians as deserters and saboteurs and they were extradited in Italian prisons.

In May 1945, the Albanian Presidency of the National Liberation Antifascist Council (in the capacity of the National Assembly until the election) adopted Law no. 61, dated May 17, 1945, which terminates the law of war of Albania against Greece. In post-World War II international conferences, Albania was not considered and was not treated as a defeated state by the member states of the anti-fascist world coalition. On the contrary, with the adherence to the Peace Treaty with Italy, pursuant to the decree of the Presidium of the Albanian People's Assembly no. 480 dated October 9, 1947, Albania was qualified as a party for implementing this treaty. Greece was also part of this treaty that was ratified by decree-law no. 432, dated October 22, 1947, and enforced the Peace Treaty with Italy. Under the treaty, Italy committed itself in respecting the independence and sovereignty of the Albanian state and declared invalid all the acts promulgated by Italy in regards to Albania, including those endorsed by the authority established in Albania during the occupation of 1939-1943 (including acts of Verlac's government). For Albania, Greece's accession to the treaty meant the abolition of the law of war with the *ex-tunc* effects. (Ksenofon Krisafi, 2014). The fact that Italy, in Article 28 of the Peace Treaty with Albania, gave up from the territorial claims over Albania and restores back the island of Sazani proves once again that Albania lost its sovereignty after April

7, 1939. Moreover, Greece had accepted in 1939, to withdraw its *chargé d'affaires* from Tirana as part of the request of fascist Italy after the invasion of Albania. Albania benefited from war reparations provided by Italy as far as Italy lost the war, which proves that Albania was treated as an ally state in World War II.

In case that Albania declared war to Greece under full sovereignty, it would be necessary for the two countries to set a time and place for the exchange of respective diplomatic representatives within a set deadline, and after this deadline, any diplomat or citizen of respective state would be considered as citizens of the enemy state and would be arrested. (Ksenofon Krisafi, 2014). Pursuant to the agreement between the two countries, in Albania there were stationed Greek military units, which in case of war between the respective countries these units would not be stationed in Albania, so as a result the two countries did not applied restrictive measures to possess the property of their respective citizens inside their soil. On May 6, 1971, Albania and Greece re-established diplomatic relations and opened diplomatic missions at the level of embassies. This is an equivalent step *ipso-jure* and *ipso-fact* with the termination of the state of war, however this didn't happened between the two countries. On April 23, 1986, Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou stated in front of the Greek parliament: "Abolition of the abnormal situation of the war with Albania has finally been decided by the government". On August 28, 1987, Secretary General for Press Affairs in the Greek Government, Sotiris Kostopoulos, announced the communication of the Council of Ministers meeting of that day, stating: "The government declares that the characterization of Albania as an enemy state ceases to exist". (Ksenofon Krisafi, 2014). The Albanian authorities officially requested a valid document which sanctioned the legal abrogation of the Royal Decree of November 10, 1940. The Royal decree could be officially abolished by the Greek authorities through another decree signed by the President as the head of state, Prime Minister, Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Finance, to produce the legal effects required by the Albanian side such as the restitution of property and need to be published in the Greek Official Gazette, but this, did not happened.

On March 21, 1996, the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, Good Neighborliness and Security was signed between the two countries, which of course could not be signed in case of war between two states. However, three years later, Albanian Embassy in Athens requested the legal status of the War Law of 1940 form the Greek Foreign Ministry. Greek Foreign Ministry replied to the Albanian Embassy with the verbal note F. 237/269, dated June 28, 1999 and officially announced that: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic presents its compliments to the Embassy of the Republic of Albania, and with the reference to the Embassy, Note No. 131 Prot, dated June 18, 1999, has the honor to inform the esteemed Embassy that the Greek Laws No. 2636/1940 and 4506/1966 are still in force". (Archive of MFA, year 1999). The Greek authorities, after the interest displayed by the Albanian authorities on this diplomatic note, declared that note F. 237/269, dated June 28, 1999 was mistakenly sent, but afterwards the Greek authorities did not act according to the diplomatic practice, and did not send to Tirana a second Note so as to specify the first one. The existence of the Law of War foresees the highest conflict situation between two countries and the lack of recognition of their borders, meanwhile the existence of the treaty of friendship marks the highest level of friendship and cooperation between the two countries. This dual status contradicts the normal functioning principles, because maximum hostility and friendship cannot exist and function at the same time.

It can be stated that Greece's relations with the immediate neighbors Turkey, Bulgaria, FYROM are different from the relations it has with Albania, as the distant and recent history finds more in common with Albania and the Albanians rather than with any other immediate neighbors, without forgetting the fact, that Turkey has consistently presented a real challenge for the Greece's national security, whereas the relations with Bulgaria is related to the bloody history for the Western Thrace, relations with FYROM (according to Greece) on the name issue, are underlying a real threat to territorial claims (Mallias, 2008). Seen from this perspective it is clear that the relations with Albania and the Albanians is not a product of the historical truth and do not present the peoples will of the two countries that have a specific connection in the Balkans. The collapse of the communist regime in Albania brought major political changes and it strongly affected the bilateral relations clearly in favor of Greece. During this time Athens undertook the next diplomatic incursion,

to achieve a set of advantages. The collapse of the communist system in Albania was accompanied by great social, economic wounds, a shock for the whole society, and a great temptation for the functioning of the democratic society. The opening of borders brought the first massive departure of Albanians to the West, and as a result of the geographical proximity, thousands of Albanians entered Greece, and within few years it reached the largest number of foreigners in Greece.

Most of the Albanian emigrants to Greece were illegal and they become subject to the Greek security authorities and sometimes they become the testing ground of the bilateral relations. These new factor strongly shaped the bilateral relations, and Greece used this momentum to undertake the next diplomatic incursion for the realization of a number of national objectives. Albanian emigration to Greece has an economical dimension even though often it was regarded as political dimensions, making them vulnerable and using them as a pressure instrument from Athens on reaching political objectives. Using the economic emigration as a political pressure instrument significantly reduced the space to maneuver for Tirana. Albania was facing heavy financial difficulties after the collapse of communism and it was quite hard to operate freely in functioning and implementing the national foreign policy with Greece, by producing extra cost for the emigration, which were the main source of income for the country. The visit of Greek Foreign Minister Papoulias in Albania in 1993 helped to find the mutual understanding and the commitment of the Albanian authorities to fight criminality and prevent illegal immigration entrance to Greece, to guarantee the inviolability of the Greek minority in Albania, and Greece would legalize Albanian emigrants in Greece through issuing "green cards".

The fragility of the Albanian state highlighted the existence of certain irredentist Greek circles, which reinstated the old territorial claims for "Northern Epirus". On April 10, 1994, a Greek commando called "Pirro I", part of the MAVI organization (Front for the Liberation of the Northern Epirus), conducted an armed attack on the Albanian armed forces of the village of Peshkëpia in Gjirokastra inside the Albanian territory. (Newspaper "Telegraph"). This military action ended up by killing an officer and an Albanian soldier. Tirana responded to this organized attack on the Albanian army and territory by raising the issue to the UN Security Council, where Greece was directly accused for arranging the attack from inside the Greek territory by using this commando unit. (Archive of MFA, year 1994).

In the first phase of the outbreak of the situation, Greece treated the situation calmly and without much fuss, but after further tension escalation Greece undertook the "Operation Broom" in a way to put Albania in a difficult position they expelled 150,000 Albanian illegal emigrants from Greece and also Greece voted against the 10-year financial package that the Meksi government had signed with the European Community. Following the first attack on Peshkëpia, the same commando conducted a second assault on March 18, 1995, in another border village of Llongo in Gjirokastra, but this time without casualties. This incident reached the peak of bilateral relations since the end of World War II, a crisis that was very difficult to face without the US direct engagement, because it risked to engaged into war the two countries that now were facing instability on their land borders.

After the detention of commando unit by the Greek military and police forces, an investigation was carried out on both sides of the border, but it revealed that member of military, security and diplomats, were involved in the attack. Greece and Albania worked to normalize the bilateral relations through direct engagement of the United States of America to restore peace in the southern Balkans, at a difficult time when the war in Bosnia and Croatia was ongoing. These incidents testified to the public opinion in Albania, the fact that, when Greece empowered politically, economically, and created favorable international conditions, it stimulated the annexation activity in Albania through the increase of economic and political influence and then, through the stimulation of anarchy and the political clash, managed to introduce military troops within Albania (Meta, 2002).

5. A Forward Looking Perspective

On March 21, 1996, in the framework of the visit of Greece's Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos, in Albania, was signed "The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, Good Neighborliness and Security between The Republic of Albania and the Hellenic Republic"; by both Foreign Minister Theodoros

Pangalos and Alfred Serreqi. (Archive of MFA, year 1996). This document constitutes the first legal basis for bilateral co-operation, and sets out some mechanisms to enable resolving many of the issues inherited from the past as well as the present issues. In addition, this document re-emphasized some of the most important values such as the Helsinki Charter on the inviolability of borders, respect for sovereignty, individual rights, respect for minorities and emigrants, by emphasizing the spirit of the European perspective of both countries. This document was regarded as an innovation the military co-operation between the two countries and the establishment of joint commissions for dealing with existing and the emerging issues. Article 15 of this treaty states that: "Each of the Contracting Parties shall afford the possibility of removing, within its legal framework, obstacles which hinder the restitution of properties of one Party into the territory of the other Party, which in itself constitutes the legal point that connects the abolition of the law of war and the seizure of property conservation for Albania and the right of restitution to the Greek citizens their properties within Albanian territory. This document raised many expectations in Albania, but the events of the year 1997 and the subsequent situation till 2013, was not favorable for discussing this topic of the bilateral agenda. This document could have served to narrow the gap and develop the bilateral relations in a fair and constructive way and it could help in achieving the necessary effects due to the fact that it was signed in a difficult time for the parties, especially for Albania which had been facing a number of important political processes since 1996, and this document did not reflect the current state of affairs. Tirana's request to review this document and to build a new legal framework displays the current state of affairs in Albania. Hence, Albania seeks to play its role in the region and the specific role that Albanians are gaining in the region. For Tirana, a dynamic approach in the region must begin with the increase of the maneuverability space which has been lacking for over 20 years in the relations with Greece, and it will be considered as a way to establish balance and mutual respect through the two countries by building a fair relation.

Albania participated in the framework of the Thessaloniki Agenda as an influential Greek foreign policy mechanism in the region, by benefiting 49,890,000.00 euro from the Hellenic Plan for Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans (Bunse, 2004). Albania's NATO membership was a game changing in the Balkans and moreover for Greece this accession encouraged the implementation of the control strategy that includes the *accelerating VS slowdown* of the European integration process of the countries of the region and the *oversight strategy* that includes the integration and consolidating processes of the countries of the region in all aspects, including those of security. Keeping the countries of the region engaged in European integration processes is part of the Greek *balanced strategy* which enables Greece to have an inward pressure instrument for these countries in the view of achieving Greek strategic objectives through the use of soft power, and the Europeanization of bilateral issues, which lowers the cost of bilateral direct engagement. Greece has an advantage from membership into the Euro-Atlantic structures and this seems to offer the benefit of exercising a Balkan policy, but with the Euro-Integration Terms of References.

Albania's NATO membership for the policy-makers in Athens was a difficult step, but in conditions that FYROM's stumbling block, Greece could not deal with the pressure of NATO members so as to prevent Albania's membership in the alliance, moreover without a strong motivation. After Albania's NATO membership in 2009 and the upcoming of the Greek economic crisis, the Greek axiom-a in the region started to limit, Greece began to prioritize its diplomacy into finding solutions for the economic and financial problems. Greece has always been a key factor for the Balkans integration processes and has always played a role on the fate of the region toward EU, but the crisis imposed Greece a withdrawal from the Balkans by creating an open space for other regional and extra-regional actors. At this time, the suspension provided by the decision of the Constitutional Court of Albania in 2010 regarding the Agreement on the delimitation of the Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and other maritime areas between the two countries played a role on the drastic decline of bilateral relations (Malias, 2018).

6. Conclusions

The Constitutional Court's decision on the 2010 draft agreement and the political rotation in Albania in 2013 brought back in stage, Tirana's demands for the abolition of the Law of War, the handling of

the Cham issue and the clear position of not recognizing the 2010 draft agreement on the delimitation of maritime areas. This game changing from Tirana was not a minor change for Athens, which, after nearly four years of lack of bilateral communication with Tirana, thought to reactivate and advance its political and diplomatic position with Albania. New demands from Tirana and the strong determination to address with Athens, all the bilateral issues inherited from the past, the present issues or those of the future, mean a shift in the new strategic environment deriving from the new reality of bilateral relations between the two countries. The deepening of the economic crisis in Greece led to the fleeing of a great number of Albanian emigrants from Greece to other EU countries, or their return back to Albania. The removal from the theatre of operation of the emigrants as a vivid tool used for more than 20 years between the two countries, it definitely provided Tirana the missing space of manoeuvrability.

Under the current conditions, Greece had to adapt a new realist strategy with Albania, and at the same time it had to present to EU or NATO partners, these inflammation on the bilateral relations as a normal situation. So, Greece sought to reduce the pressure from its northern neighbour including Albania at a time when an emerged difficulty in the relations between Athens-Skopje and also the frozen crisis between Athens-Ankara is always present. This situation with Albania is beyond the normal parameters of Greek foreign policy and the Theodoropoulos doctrine, which provides that: Greece cannot operate in an unfriendly situation with two neighbours at the same time and, moreover, to deal with Turkey in a diplomatic approach it needs to build friendly alliances with all the other immediate neighbours including FYROM and extra-regional allies. In the context of the current changes and the state of play, Greece is interested in reducing the number of problems, and Albania has been and is a front-line of Greek interest in the Balkans.

Greece has the flexibility in its foreign policy, to understand that there is no need to exert constant pressure on Tirana, because after a moment it risks to immunize Tirana, but Greece seeks to put a greater advantage of the psychological nature in front of Albania. Time to time the difficulties in the integration processes and the Europeanization of bilateral issues are encountered, and it is often heard a statement: Greece's way to the Balkans depends on the restoration of the relations with Albania, and Albania's way to EU passes through Athens. It cannot be assumed that Albania is in a superior diplomatic position over Greece, but it can be stated the parties have realized that they are not comfortable in the current position, created in recent years and they are taking all the necessary steps to give oxygen to this vital relation through the recent intense dialogue initiated by the two former Foreign Ministers Bushati and Kotzias.

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(*Fustanela is a traditional dress for men, similar to the Scottish kilt, used by Albanians, later also by Greeks and other Balkan nations. In Albania, fustanela has been the official Royal Guard uniform and continues to be used by polyphonic groups, while in Greece a short type of fustanela continues to be used by ceremonial military units such as Evzones*).
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