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## Normalization of Relations with the People's Republic of Albania: A Slow Process

As bilateral relations between the United States and other East European countries have been steadily improving over the past few years, the question has been asked whether and when normalization of United States relations with Albania may be expected.<sup>1</sup> The forward movement in United States relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC)—a steady ally of Albania—has added to speculation about possible progress towards normalizing United States relations with the smallest of Communist mavericks. The dynamics of the world and European political scenes would appear to be moving both countries in this direction. Despite forthcoming indications by the United States, however, there is no evidence suggesting that Albania is ready to consider resumption of relations any time soon.

### Albania

#### *Some Basic Facts*<sup>2</sup>

The People's Republic of Albania is a small country, similar in size and shape to Vermont, covering an area of some 11,000 square miles. It has a population estimated at 2.3 million people, with an estimated (1969) average age of 18.3 years and an annual population growth rate of three percent. It borders Yugoslavia and Greece and has a coastline one point of which lies only forty-five miles across the Strait of Otranto from the heel of the Italian peninsula. Albania lacks abundant agricultural resources but has significant mineral deposits of chromium, copper, iron and nickel. It perennially runs a substantial foreign trade deficit. The People's Republic of China is its major trading partner, accounting for an estimated seventy percent of the total. Most of the

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<sup>1</sup>See Washburn, *The People's Republic of Albania: Shall We Now Enter An Era of Negotiation with It After Twenty-five Years of Confrontation?*, 6 THE INTERNATIONAL LAWYER 718 (1972).

<sup>2</sup>For further background information, see BACKGROUND NOTES ALBANIA, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, publication no. 8217 (December 1973). See also Pano, THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1968), and Prifti, *Albania's Expanding Horizons*, 21 PROBLEMS OF COMMUNISM 30 (January-February 1972).

remaining trade is with Eastern Europe. There is none with the Soviet Union. Trade with the United States is negligible.<sup>3</sup>

### *People's Republic of China: The Main Ally*

For more than a decade the PRC has been Albania's principal supporter. When Albania faced a serious slowdown in trade as a result of the break with the Soviet Union, it found willing assistance from the PRC, the leaders of which were having their own feud with the Soviet Union. Since 1962, Albania has been the PRC's model ally and has received vital economic assistance to help meet its trade deficit and carry forward its program of industrialization and development. The PRC has also supplied military assistance to Albania. For its part, Albania for many years sponsored in the United Nations General Assembly the so-called "Albanian" resolution, seeking admission of the People's Republic of China into the Organization. With the achievement of this objective in 1971, however, Albania has lost what used to be the most visible means of demonstrating support for its major ally. Recently, the PRC's moves toward improved relations with the United States have been regarded by Albania's leaders with some misgiving and are likely to have engendered some feeling in Tirana that it might not be wise to put all its diplomatic eggs in the Peking basket.

### *Emerging from Diplomatic Isolation*

Since the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Albania has embarked on a course of broadening diplomatic contacts with the non-communist world, including Western Europe. By July 1974 it maintained diplomatic relations with sixty-one countries. This included relations with Greece, which were resumed in 1971 after a thirty-year hiatus, and Yugoslavia, with which relations were raised to the Ambassadorial level the same year.<sup>4</sup> Improvement in relations with these two neighboring countries, which earlier had been severely strained, as well as progress in moving toward relations with other countries in Europe and elsewhere, indicate that the Albanian leadership seeks to normalize relations with other countries where conditions are favorable. However, many of the recently established ties are with countries with which

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<sup>3</sup>In 1972 United States exports to and imports from Albania amounted to, respectively, \$217,000 and \$470,000. The principal export items were wheat (\$32,000) and cattle hides (\$131,000). The main import item was sage (\$437,000). See *Trade of the United States with the Communist Areas in Eastern Europe and Asia, 1970-72*. OVERSEAS BUSINESS REPORTS, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, July 1973.

<sup>4</sup>In Europe, Albania has relations with Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria,\* Czechoslovakia,\* Denmark, Finland, France,\* German Democratic Republic,\* Greece,\* Netherlands, Hungary,\* Italy,\* Norway, Poland,\* Romania,\* Switzerland, Sweden, and Yugoslavia.\* Asterisks indicate countries where Albania maintains a resident mission. Albania also has an Embassy in Turkey. It does not have relations with the United Kingdom or with the Federal Republic of Germany.

bilateral relations are no more than peripheral and do not involve the establishment of resident diplomatic representatives.<sup>5</sup>

### *Continuing Polemic with the Soviet Union*

The pattern of improved diplomatic relations is not uniform, however, and there are some notable exceptions. Chief among these are Albanian relations with the Soviet Union.

In 1961 Albania was openly denounced at the twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Diplomatic relations were suspended the same year, and the diplomatic staffs were withdrawn from both capitals. The Soviet Union also evacuated its military installations in Albania. Albania continued as a nominal but non-participating member of the Warsaw Pact but unilaterally withdrew in September of 1968 after the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

There have been recent indications that the Soviet Union would like to improve its relations with Albania. During the past several years the Soviet Union has annually extended an olive branch on the anniversary—November 29—of Albania's celebration of becoming a communist country. In doing so the Soviet leadership has noted the usefulness of Soviet-Albanian normalization. There are obvious reasons why the Soviet Union would find it attractive to draw Albania back into Moscow's orbit. To do so would be a blow to China's prestige in the world communist movement. Further, it would strengthen pro-Soviet forces in Yugoslavia. Also, it might re-open the possibility of access to the old Soviet submarine base at Vlorë (Valona). These Soviet efforts have, however, been harshly rebuffed and Albania has maintained a vitriolic, hostile stance toward the Soviet Union. While this should not necessarily be taken as a sign that the Albanian leadership is unanimous in holding the view that relations with the Soviets are not desirable, it may be assumed that the Soviet interest in normalizing relations will in all likelihood continue to be viewed with deep suspicion and hostility by the current Albanian leadership.

### *Difficulties with the Vatican*

In 1967 Albania abolished all religious institutions and proclaimed itself the "first atheist state in the world."<sup>6</sup> While undoubtedly many Albanians continue to practice their religion in the privacy of their homes, the decision

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<sup>5</sup>In the past few years Albania has established diplomatic relations with Peru (December 1971), Niger (May 1972), Nepal (June 1972), Equatorial Guinea (November 1972), Costa Rica (February 1973), Malta (March 1973), Nigeria (May 1973), Cameroon (July 1973) and Lebanon (May 1974).

<sup>6</sup>Prior to the Second World War, most Albanians had been followers of Islam, a legacy deriving from five hundred years of Turkish rule. A Christian minority of Orthodox and Roman Catholics traces its origins to the missionary activity of the apostles in the first century.

has had a devastating impact on public manifestations of religious life, which have totally disappeared. Naturally, this situation has been deeply troubling to many religious leaders and has led to public expressions of concern including a reproach by the Vatican.<sup>7</sup> This in turn has led to acrimonious Albanian charges of Vatican interference<sup>8</sup> and of Vatican collaboration with fascism and nazism.<sup>9</sup> The depth of anti-religious feeling emanating from Tirana suggests little hope for improvement in relations with the Vatican in the near future.

### *Refusal to Attend European Security Conference*

Albania has also eschewed the opportunity to participate in the Conference on the Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Evidently, whatever considerations may have favored participation in a European conference—where Albania's voice could have been heard on a par with all other participants—distrust of alleged United States-Soviet domination led to the conclusion to stay away. Thus on November 18, 1972, after a lengthy recital of reasons,<sup>10</sup> the Albanian Government responded to a Finnish *pro-memoria*, which invited the Albanian People's Republic to send representatives to the preparatory meeting to commence in Helsinki on November 22, that it was opposed to the convocation of CSCE and would not participate in preparatory consultations. Subsequently, in response to a Finnish memorandum of June 15, 1973, Albania reiterated its opposition to a convocation of CSCE and stated it would not participate.<sup>11</sup> The principal motivation for not participating seems to have come from a conviction that the Conference would be dominated by the superpowers.

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<sup>7</sup>In his April 1, 1973 address to the people assembled in St. Peter's square, Pope Paul, without mentioning Albania by name, expressed deep concern about a "Church forced to live, rather to survive, in the darkness of fear, suffocated and paralyzed by contrived and oppressive legal restraints." Two days later an editorial in *OSSERVATORE ROMANO* specifically discussed the situation in Albania.

<sup>8</sup>The Albanian radio on April 14, 1973, reported an article appearing that day in *ZERI I POPULLIT* which carried the following passage:

But the Pope and his apparatus, through this campaign, wants to divert the attention and camouflage the undermining diversionist and sabotaging activity the Vatican has carried (out) and is actually carrying out against this country. The facts which speak about the hostile activity of the Vatican against the People's Republic of Albania are numerous. . . .

FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE, Eastern Europe, April 23, 1973, p. B.1.

<sup>9</sup>The article also carried this passage:

Loyal to the old ties with Hitler's and Mussolini's fascists and their agents, now the Vatican is actively working to gather and nourish the Albanian fascists and war criminals and include them under its cassock to bewitch their soul and use them against the Albanian people.

*Ibid.*, p. B.2.

<sup>10</sup>Stating that the principal danger to peace and security in Europe lies in the "expansionist and aggressive policy" of the United States and the Soviet Union and in West German "revanchism," the Albanian response asserted that the United States and the Soviet Union pursued an "aggressive hegemonic policy" toward Europe. See FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE, Eastern Europe, November 21, 1972, p. A.1 ff.

<sup>11</sup>FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE, Eastern Europe, July 2, 1973, p. A.1 ff.

### *Possible Internal Stresses*

Some recent purges, in the context of a strident ideological campaign against internal and external "enemies," indicate the presence of stresses on and within the Albanian leadership.<sup>12</sup> Wholesale changes and dismissals among the leadership of both the youth and writers organizations last year have borne witness to the extraordinary degree of sensitivity of the Albanian authorities to influence from abroad. In particular, the emergence among youth of new political and social attitudes—such as demanding more "liberalization," a more western style of life, including long hair and mini-skirts—seems to have been viewed by the Albanian leaders as a result of "imperialist-revisionist encirclement" of the country. Moreover, they appear to be regarding détente as causing a "fatalist psychology," created by the two superpowers, which calls for increased vigilance and which must be diligently combated.

Thus the continuous campaign against old customs, bureaucracy and religion, which was waged in the late sixties by heavy reliance on nationalist appeals to rally popular support, has been given further impetus by what seems an almost desperate—and what in an age of radio and television must almost surely be losing—attempt to shield Albanians from foreign influences. Foreigners, to the extent they are permitted entry into Albania at all, are under strict control. Even the Chinese technicians present in Albania are said to be kept apart from the population. Travel of Albanian citizens both within and outside Albania is reported to be closely controlled. Only politically reliable persons may travel outside the country. Even though there is no evidence suggesting indigenous subversive or dissident activities, the force and tenor of the effort to curb influences from abroad and to maintain ideological purity convey a broad picture of a leadership mostly on the defensive.

### **United States**

#### *United States Interests*

While the United States and Albania have not enjoyed formal diplomatic relations since 1939, the United States unavoidably has an interest in Albanian developments inasmuch as they affect American interests in the Balkan peninsula and the entire Eastern Mediterranean area. Any change in the balance of power in the Balkans to the detriment of NATO and United States interests in Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean, such as a reintroduction of

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<sup>12</sup>Two Central Committee members of long standing, Fadil Pacrami and Todi Lubonja, were purged in 1973. Pacrami had been President of the People's Assembly (Parliament) and one of the Party's top propagandists. Lubonja had been head of the state radio and television directorate. Pacrami was branded an "enemy of the Party and the people" because he encouraged "alien manifestations" among the youth; Lubonja was accused of being a "right-wing deviationist."

a Soviet military presence in the area, would be likely to have a number of adverse consequences. Not only would Italy and Greece—both members of NATO—very likely view such a development with alarm but it would also be of considerable concern to Yugoslavia, the Kosovo area of which is inhabited mainly by ethnic Albanians. Such developments would not be favorable to the United States.

### *Interests of U.S. Citizens*

Many of the 60,000-80,000 American citizens of Albanian origin who live in the United States have relatives in Albania. The Albanian authorities—in line with their general policy of severely limiting entry of foreigners—have followed a highly restrictive policy of issuing entry visas. As a result, very few Americans have travelled to Albania in recent years. Those who have obtained permission to go have mostly been Americans of Albanian background. Their number, however, is probably not much in excess of two hundred annually.

Absence of diplomatic relations—and even of an arrangement whereby a third country represents United States interests in Albania—has precluded extending normal consular protection to those Americans who do visit Albania. Furthermore, the absence of relations has made it difficult from a practical point of view for United States citizens even to apply for permission to enter. Any American who wishes to do so now must apply in a city where the Albanian Government maintains an Embassy, such as Vienna, Rome, Athens, Belgrade, or Paris.<sup>13</sup>

Another interest of United States citizens is the settlement of claims for property nationalized by the Albanian Government. While precise data are not available, the total figure is not believed to be large.

### *Trade*

As noted above, United States trade with Albania has been negligible. There is room, however, for an increase in trade, following the pattern which has emerged in trade relations between the United States and other East European countries. Nonetheless there would appear to be limits to such an increase due to Albania's narrow capacity in the field of exportable goods.

### *United States Approach*

The United States has increasingly made clear its willingness to move toward normalization of relations with the People's Republic of Albania. In 1970 it stated there was no "indication of change in Albania's attitude toward the

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<sup>13</sup>The delegation of the People's Republic of Albania to the United Nations in New York does not handle visa applications.

United States."<sup>14</sup> The Report of the Secretary of State to the Congress covering 1972<sup>15</sup> noted that the absence of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of Albania stood out as unfinished business in our search for normal relations with all countries regardless of differences. On April 4, 1973, at a dinner at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, then Deputy Secretary of State Rush gave an address on United States policies toward Eastern Europe in which he said:

Only with Albania has there been no visible progress. In light of our expanding ties with all other countries in Eastern Europe it seems anachronistic that Albania should continue to wish to function in such isolation. Albania still speaks of us in the contentious rhetoric of an earlier era. Whether it wishes to resume relations we do not know. If and when it does, it will find us prepared to respond.<sup>16</sup>

### *Albanian Reaction*

There has been no official Albanian reaction to Mr. Rush's remarks, though there is little doubt that the leaders of the Albanian Government are aware of Mr. Rush's statement. While the tone of Albanian statements about the United States has remained strongly hostile, the Albanians have not attacked the former Deputy Secretary of State for his remarks.<sup>17</sup> Also, and in contrast with the policy followed with respect to Soviet properties, the Albanian Government has not moved to take over the American-owned pre-World War II legation building, which is presently leased to the Italian Government and is being used to house its Embassy.

### **Conclusion**

As long as the People's Republic of Albania remains in the throes of its ideological effort against foreign influences and to insure internal orthodoxy, it is unlikely to make any major move to respond to the United States' call for normalization of relations. The Albanian leaders are likely to proceed only very cautiously as they keep a watchful eye on the development of United States relations with the People's Republic of China. Any move toward closer relations with the United States is also likely to be carefully weighed in terms of Albania's relations with Moscow. While for the time being, therefore, significant steps toward normalization of bilateral relations with the United States should not be anticipated, continued progress toward detente in Europe is likely to lead to changed circumstances under which rapprochement of the two countries might become possible, leading eventually to the re-establishment of relations.

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<sup>14</sup>UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY 1969-70, A REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE, Department of State publication no. 8575, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup>UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY 1971, A REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE, Department of State, publication no. 8634, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup>Department of State, publication no. 8699.

<sup>17</sup>Department of State Press Release 98, April 4, 1973.

