

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO: ROOTS OF INSTABILITY

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Both Albania and Kosovo are extremely unstable at the moment. For Albania, stability in the long-term is a realistic possibility, but the prospects for stability in Kosovo in the foreseeable future are far less promising. Instability in either country directly affects the broader Balkan region. Along with its security concerns, Canada also has humanitarian and human rights interests in Albania and Kosovo.

The uprising of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo coupled with the Serbian military action there seriously affects developments inside Albania. However, as it has become clear during the course of the 21st century, the interests of the Albanian nation and the Albanian state rarely coincide.

ALBANIA

Background to Instability

Albania proclaimed independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1912. During the ensuing three decades, Albania made limited progress economically and politically. By 1925, Albania had fallen into a stagnant form of authoritarianism. When the Communist Party (later re-named the Party of Labour) took control of Albania in 1944, it executed or imprisoned all voices of opposition. Two years later, the Communist Party introduced a Stalinist-style centrally-planned economy, nationalizing all industries, confiscating and redistributing land, and banning private property. In 1978, Albania's long time leader, Enver Hoxha, embraced autarky.

Albania was the last Communist country in Eastern Europe to embark on a path of economic and democratizing reform. On the eve of transition in 1990, Albania's economy was highly centralized and technologically backward with an abnormal concentration of heavy industry. Desperately needed food aid was being delivered by the international community. There was no political opposition and no independent organisations, and the judicial system was typical of communist states.

Albania had its first multi-party elections in March 1991. Deteriorating economic circumstances coupled with massive student demonstrations in December 1990 had forced the Communist government to allow the creation of opposition political parties. The elections were relatively free, but not entirely fair. The Albanian Communist Party of Labour, headed by Fatos Nano, won easily. But the economic catastrophe posed severe challenges to the new government and the newly formed independent trade unions went on strike. Between 1989 and 1992, GDP dropped fifty

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