

The Albanian People

Population

The average annual growth rate of the Albanian population for the period 1960–90 was 2.4 percent, or approximately three to four times higher than that of other European countries. Population growth was actively encouraged by the government, which deemed it “essential for the further strengthening and prosperity of socialist society.” Albania had a population of 3,335,000 in July 1991, compared with 2,761,000 in mid-1981 and 1,626,000 in 1960. The most sparsely populated Balkan country until 1965, Albania attained a population density of 111 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1989—the highest in the Balkans. The 1991 growth rate was 1.8 percent.

In 1991 Albania had a birth rate of 24 per 1,000, and its death rate had declined from 14 per 1,000 in 1950 to 5 per 1,000. A concomitant of the reduced death rate was an increase in life expectancy. Official Albanian sources indicated that average life expectancy at birth increased from fifty-three years in 1950 to seventy-two years for males and seventy-nine years for females in 1991. The population was among the most youthful in Europe, with an average age of twenty-seven years, and the fertility rate—2.9 children born per woman—was one of Europe’s highest.

Albania is the only country in Europe with more males than females. The disparity in the male-to-female ratio, which was 1,055:1,000 in 1970, had increased to the point where males accounted for 51.5 percent of the population in 1990. This discrepancy was attributed in part to a higher mortality rate among female infants, caused by neglect and the traditional deference accorded male progeny. Losses in World War II, estimated by the United Nations at 30,000 persons, or 2.5 percent of the population, apparently had little influence on the ratio of males to females.

Ethnicity

Gegs and Tosks

Among ethnic Albanians are two major subgroups: the Gegs, who generally occupy the area north of the Shkumbin River, and the Tosks, most of whom live south of the river. The Gegs account for slightly more than half of the resident Albanian population. Ethnic Albanians are estimated to account for 90 percent of the population.

The Gegs and Tosks use distinct dialects; there are also linguistic variations within subgroups. Well into the twentieth century, ethnic clans exercised extensive local authority, particularly in the



*A beach outside the port town of Durrës
Courtesy Charles Sudetic*

north. Some progress was made during the reign of King Zog I (r. 1928–39), however, toward bringing the clans under government control and eliminating blood feuds.

After taking power in 1944, the communist regime imposed controls intended to eliminate clan rule entirely and waged a continuing struggle against customs and attitudes believed to impede the growth of socialism. Blood feuds were repressed. Party and government leaders, in their effort to develop national, social, and cultural solidarity in a communist society, publicly tended to ignore ethnic differences.

Communist leader Enver Hoxha, first secretary of the Albanian Party of Labor and head of state until his death in 1985, came from the south. He received the bulk of his support during World War II from that area and frequently gave preference to persons and customs of Tosk origin. Most party and government executives were Tosk speakers and of Muslim background. The Gëgs, who had dominated Albanian politics before 1945, were educationally disadvantaged by the adoption of a “standard literary Albanian language” based on the Tosk dialect.

Because of their greater isolation in the mountainous areas of the north, the Gëgs held on to their tribal organization and customs more tenaciously than did the Tosks. As late as the 1920s,

approximately 20 percent of male deaths in some areas of northern Albania were attributable to blood feuds. Under the unwritten tribal codes, whose purview included the regulation of feuds, any blow, as well as many offenses committed against women, called for vengeance. Permitting a girl who had been betrothed in infancy to marry another, for example, could set off a blood feud. The *besa*, a pledge to keep one's word as a solemn obligation, was given in various situations and sometimes included promises to postpone quarrels. A man who killed a fellow tribesman was commonly punished by his neighbors, who customarily would burn his house and destroy his property. As fugitives from their own communities, such persons were often given assistance by others.

A man who failed to carry out the prescribed vengeance against a member of another tribe or that individual's relatives was subjected to ridicule. Insult was considered one of the gravest forms of dishonor, and the upholding of one's honor was the primary duty of a Geg. If the individual carried out the required act of vengeance, he was in turn subject to retribution by the victim's relatives. Women were excluded from the feud, and when a man escorted a woman he too was considered inviolable. In other respects, however, a woman's lot in society generally was one of deprivation and subjugation.

The isolation from influences beyond his community and the constant struggle with nature tended to make the male Geg an ascetic. Traditionally his closest bonds were with members of his clan. Obstinate and proud, the Glegs had proved themselves ruthless and cruel fighters. Visitors from outside the clan generally were suspect, but every traveler was by custom accorded hospitality.

Less isolated by geography and enjoying slightly less limited contact with foreign cultures, Tosks generally were more outspoken and imaginative than Glegs. Contacts with invaders and foreign occupiers had left an influence, and before 1939 some Tosks had traveled to foreign countries to earn money to buy land, or to obtain an education. The clan or tribal system, which by the nineteenth century was far less extensive in the south than in the north, began to disappear after independence was achieved in 1912.

Greeks and Other Minorities

The Greek minority, Albania's largest, has deep roots in the country's two southeasternmost districts, Sarandë and Gjirokastrë, in an area many Greeks call Northern Epirus (see fig. 1). Estimates of the size of the Greek population in 1989 varied from 59,000, or 1 percent of the total (from the official Albanian census), to 266,800, or 8 percent (from data published by the United States

government), to as high as 400,000, or 12 percent (from the “Epirot lobby” of Greeks with family roots in Albania). Greeks were harshly affected by the communist regime’s attempts to homogenize the population through restrictions on the religious, cultural, educational, and linguistic rights of minorities. Internal exile and other population movements served as instruments of policy to dilute concentrations of Greeks and to deprive Greeks of their status as a recognized minority. Despite improvements in Greco-Albanian relations during the late 1980s and a significant increase in cross-border visits, reports of persecution, harassment, and discrimination against Greeks, as well as other minorities, persisted.

Smaller ethnic groups, including Bulgarians, Gypsies, Jews, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Serbs, and Vlachs, altogether account for about 2 percent of the total population. Persons of Macedonian and Bulgarian origin live mostly in the border area near Lake Prespa. The Vlachs, akin to modern Romanians, are most numerous in the Pindus Mountains and in the districts of Fier, Korçë, and Vlorë. A few persons of Serbian and Montenegrin derivation reside around the city of Shkodër. There are small Jewish communities in Tiranë, Vlorë, and Korçë, and Gypsies are scattered throughout the country.

Albanians in Kosovo

Large numbers of ethnic Albanians live outside the country, in Italy, Greece, Turkey, the United States, and especially in Yugoslavia or its former republics (see fig. 4). Estimates based on Yugoslav census data indicated that the number of Albanians in Yugoslavia in 1981 totaled more than 1.7 million, or almost 8 percent of the country’s total population, of which about 70 percent resided in Kosovo, a province of Serbia; 20 percent in Macedonia; and 9 percent in Montenegro. The predominantly Albanian Kosovo had the highest birthrate in Europe and one of the highest in the world: 29.9 per 1,000 in 1987. Persons under twenty-seven years old accounted for 60 percent of Kosovo’s total population, and students—a reservoir of political ferment—over 30 percent. In 1981 only 12 percent of the Albanian population in Kosovo was employed.

Student protests over living conditions in early 1981 led to bloody riots throughout Kosovo, which accelerated the exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins. The number of departures totalled 60,000 between 1981 and 1991. Haunted by the specter of secession, the Serbian government resorted to repressive measures, culminating in the revocation of Kosovo’s autonomous status in July 1990. Hundreds of Albanian activists were tried and imprisoned, and



Figure 4. Distribution of Ethnic Albanians on the Balkan Peninsula, 1992

a campaign was launched to entice Serbs to settle in Kosovo. Serbian authorities suspended publication of the Albanian-language daily *Rilindja*, alleging that it had become a “mouthpiece” of Albanian nationalists. A Serbian-language standard curriculum was introduced for all middle and secondary schools. The action led to protests by thousands of students and parents. As a result of the curriculum’s implementation, many Albanian-language schools had to be closed. At Kosovo’s University of Pristina, student placements were reserved, in disproportion to the population, for ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins—many from outside Kosovo. (Even though a number of these reserved places were not filled in the fall of 1990, Albanian applicants were denied admission to the university.) Discrimination against Albanians seeking employment or housing was rampant.

Languages and Dialects

The Albanian language is spoken by nearly all inhabitants of Albania, as well as by the vast majority of the population of neighboring Kosovo. Greeks, Macedonians, and other ethnic groups in Albania use their ancestral languages, in addition to Albanian, to the extent that this right can be exercised. Ethnic minorities,

according to the testimony of many émigrés, were in the past forbidden to speak their own languages in public.

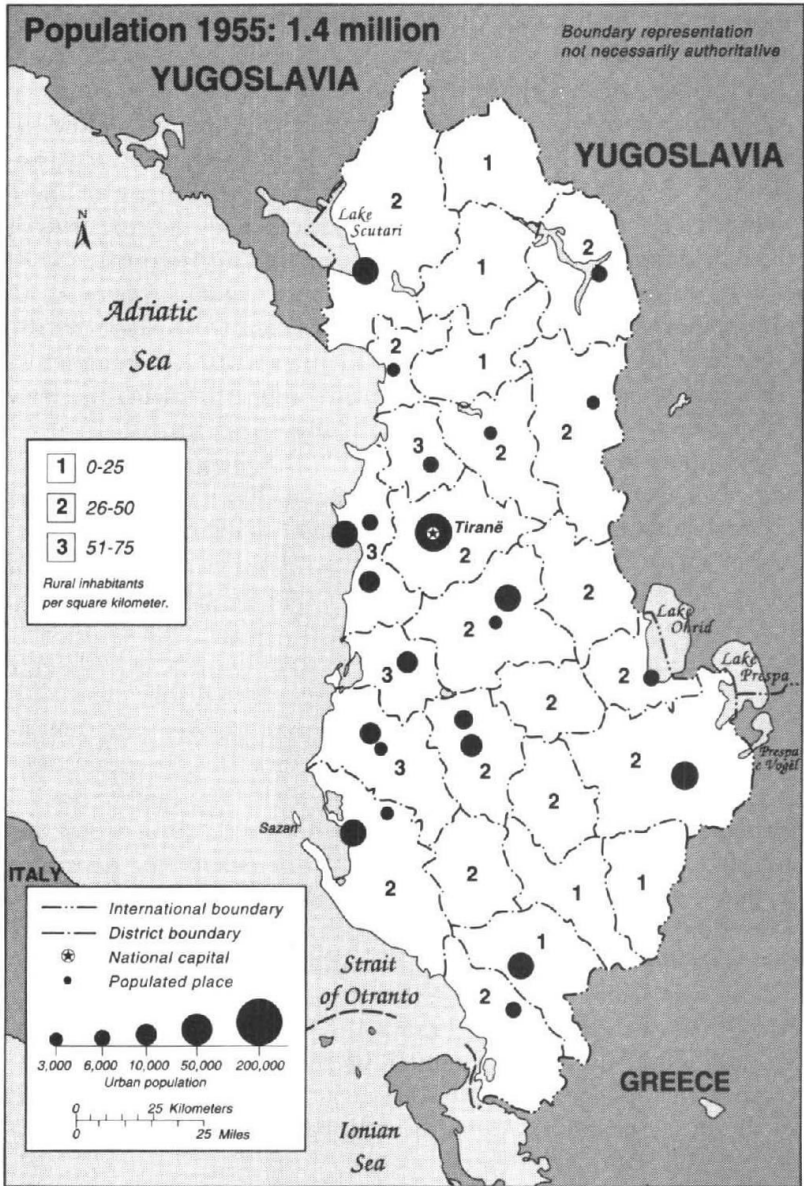
A member of the Indo-European family of languages, modern Albanian is derived from ancient Illyrian and Thracian. Additions and modifications were made as a result of foreign contacts, beginning in the pre-Christian era. The most significant of these changes were the result of Latin influence during the centuries of Roman domination, Italian influences resulting from trade with Venice during the Renaissance, and Italian hegemony over Albania in more recent times. Contributions also were made by the Greeks, Turks, and Slavs. Because the first written documents in Albanian did not appear until the fifteenth century, tracing the early development of the language is difficult.

Beginning in the fifteenth century and continuing over a period of some 450 years, the repressive policies of the Ottoman Empire rulers retarded language development. Writing in Albanian was forbidden, and only the Turkish or Greek languages could be used in schools. Émigré Albanians, particularly those living in Italy, helped keep the written forms of the language alive. Until the nineteenth century, the language was sustained in Turkish-dominated areas largely by verbal communication, including ballads and folk tales.

By the early twentieth century, more than a dozen different alphabets were being used by Albanians. Some were predominantly Latin, Greek, or Turko-Arabic. Many were a mixture of several forms. It was not until 1908 that a standardized orthography was adopted. The Latin-based alphabet of twenty-six letters, approved at that time by a linguistic congress at Monastir (now Bitola, in Macedonia), was made official by a government directive in 1924 and continued to be in use in the early 1990s.

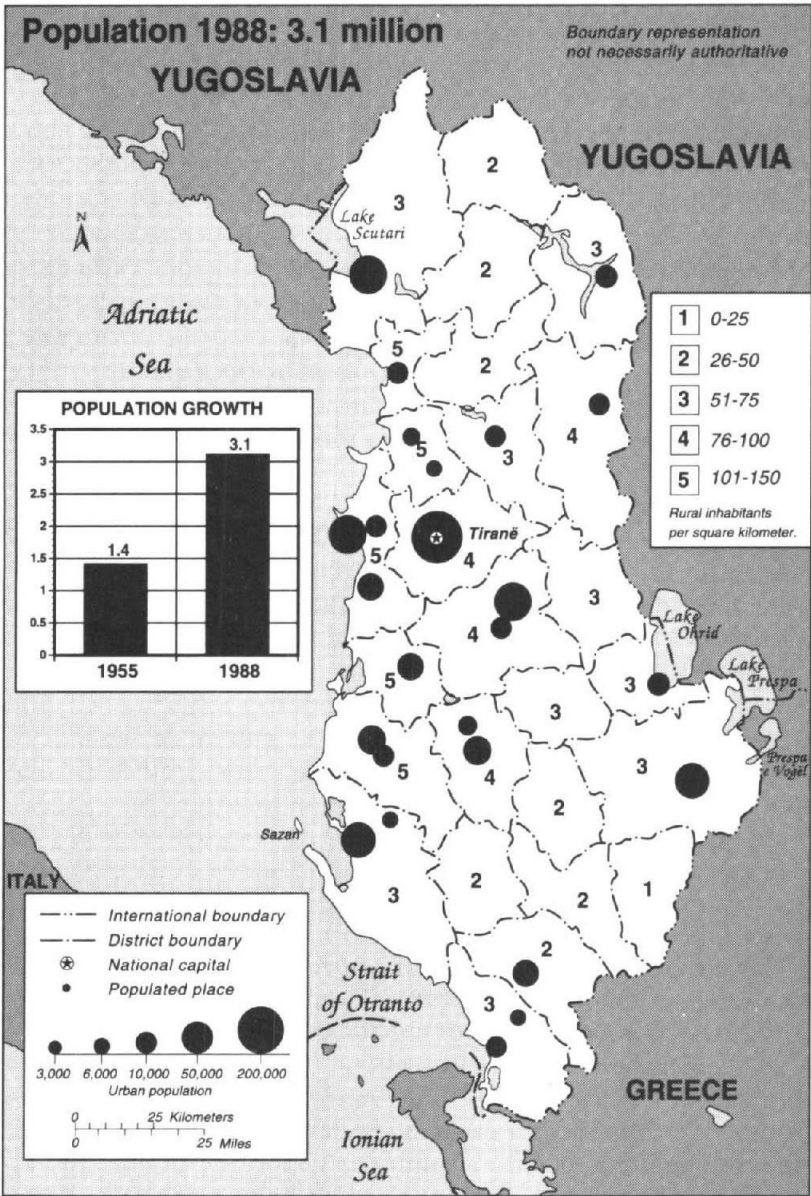
The two principal Albanian dialects are Geg, spoken by about two-thirds of the people, including almost all Albanians in Kosovo, and Tosk, used by the remaining third. Within each dialect, there are subdialects. Despite the variations that have developed in the many isolated communities, Albanians generally communicate well with each other.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the government attempted to establish the dialect of the Elbasan area, which was a mixture of Geg and Tosk, as the official language. The local dialects persisted, however, and writers and even officials continued to use the dialect of their association. After Hoxha acceded to power, the Tosk dialect became the official language of the country. Some scholars saw the imposition of "standard" Albanian as a political scheme to denigrate the Geg dialect and culture.



Source: Based on information from Örjan Sjöberg, *Rural Change and Development in Albania*, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, 60-61.

Figure 5. Population Density by District, 1955



Source: Based on information from Örjan Sjöberg, *Rural Change and Development in Albania*, Boulder, Colorado, 1991, 60-61.

Figure 6. Population Density by District, 1988

Settlement Patterns

In the early 1990s, Albania remained predominantly rural, with about 65 percent of the population living in villages or the countryside. Urban dwellers, whose proportion of the national population had increased from one-fifth to almost one-third between 1950 and 1970, accounted for about 34 percent in the 1980s (see fig. 5; fig. 6). Rural-to-urban migration was contained as a result of the regime's aggressive programs, initiated during the Third Five-Year Plan (1961-65), to restrict urban growth, build up agriculture, and accelerate rural development. (The campaign to improve rural living conditions is best exemplified by the expansion of the electric-power network to every village in the country by the winter of 1970.) The average village grew from about 400 residents in 1955 to nearly 700 in 1980.

The most heavily settled areas are in the western part of the country, in particular the fertile lowlands. In 1987 population density ranged from 30 persons per square kilometer in the eastern district of Kolonjë to 281 persons per square kilometer in the coastal district of Durrës. The proportion of urban dwellers was highest in the districts of Tiranë (67 percent), Durrës (49 percent), and Vlorë (47 percent) (see table 2, Appendix).

Several factors have contributed to the pattern of settlement. Large expanses of mountains and generally rugged terrain complicate construction of land transportation routes. In many areas, large concentrations of people cannot be supported because of poor soil and a lack of water during part of the year. Minerals and other natural resources generally are not readily accessible or are otherwise difficult to exploit.

Of the sixty-six cities and towns in Albania, nine had populations greater than 25,000 in 1987. Tiranë, the capital and largest city, grew from about 60,000 inhabitants in 1945 to 226,000 in 1987, largely because of the expansion of industry and government bureaucracy. Located on the inner margin of the coastal plain, the capital is surrounded by an area of relatively good soil. Tiranë is the country's main political, industrial, educational, and cultural center. Other major towns are Durrës, the principal port, Elbasan, Shkodër, and Vlorë. About 44 percent of all towns had fewer than 5,000 inhabitants in 1987.

Social System

Traditional Social Patterns and Values

The social structure of the country was, until the 1930s, basically tribal in the north and semifeudal in the central and southern

regions. The highlanders of the north retained their medieval pattern of life until well into the twentieth century and were considered the last people in Europe to preserve tribal autonomy. In the central and southern regions, increasing contact with the outside world and invasions and occupations by foreign armies gradually weakened tribal society.

Traditionally there have been two major subcultures in the Albanian nation: the Gegs in the north and the Tosks in the south. The Gegs, partly Roman Catholic but mostly Muslim, lived until after World War II in a mountain society characterized by blood feuds and fierce clan and tribal loyalties. The Tosks, whose number included many Muslims as well as Orthodox Christians, were less culturally isolated mainly because of centuries of foreign influence. Because they had come under the rule of the Muslim landed aristocracy, the Tosks had apparently largely lost the spirit of individuality and independence that for centuries characterized the Gegs, especially in the highlands.

Until the end of World War II, society in the north and, to a much lesser extent, in the south, was organized in terms of kinship and descent. The basic unit of society was the extended family, usually composed of a couple, their married sons, the wives and children of the sons, and any unmarried daughters. The extended family formed a single residential and economic entity held together by common ownership of means of production and common interest in the defense of the group. Such families often included scores of persons, and, as late as 1944, some encompassed as many as sixty to seventy persons living in a cluster of huts surrounding the father's house.

Extended families were grouped into clans whose chiefs preserved patriarchal powers over the entire group. The clan chief arranged marriages, assigned tasks, settled disputes, and set the course to be followed concerning essential matters such as blood feuds and politics. Descent was traced from a common ancestor through the male line, and brides usually were chosen from outside the clan. Clans in turn were grouped into tribes.

In the Tosk regions of the south, the extended family was also the most important social unit, although patriarchal authority had been diluted by the feudal conditions usually imposed by the Muslim bey (see Glossary).

Social leadership in the lowlands was concentrated in the hands of the semifeudal local tribal bey and pasha (see Glossary). The region around Tiranë, for example, was controlled by the Zogolli, Toptani, and Vrioni families, all Muslims and all owners of extensive agricultural estates. Ahmed Zogu, subsequently King Zog I,

was from the Zogolli family. Originally pashas ranked slightly higher than beys, but differences gradually diminished and just the term *bey* remained in use. In the northern highlands, the *bajraktar* (see Glossary) was the counterpart of the bey and enjoyed similar hereditary rights to titles and positions.

The Geg clans put great importance on marriage traditions. According to custom, a young man always married a young woman from outside his clan but from within his tribe. In some tribes, marriages between Christians and Muslims were tolerated, but as a rule such unions were frowned upon.

A variety of offenses against women could spark blood feuds. Many females were engaged to marry in their infancy by their parents. If later a woman did not wish to marry the man whom the parents had chosen for her and married another, in all likelihood a blood feud would ensue. Among the Tosks, religious beliefs and customs were more important than clan and tribal traditions in the regulation of marriage.

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

Upon the death of the father, family authority devolved upon his oldest son. The females of the household occupied an inferior position; they were confined at home, treated like servants, and not allowed to eat at the same table with the men. When the time came for sons to set up their own households, all parental property was distributed equally among them. Females owned no property and did not have the right to seek divorce. In northern Albania, the ancient Code of Lek permitted the husband "to beat his wife and to bind her in chains if she defies his words and orders."

Geographical conditions affected Tosk social organization. Southern Albania's accessibility led to its coming much more firmly under Ottoman control. In turn, the Ottoman Empire's rule resulted in the breakup of the large, independent, family landholdings and their replacement by extensive estates owned by powerful Muslims, each with his own retinue, fortresses, and large cohort of tenant peasants to work his lands. These landowners' allegiance to the sultans was secured by the granting of administrative positions either at home or elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire.

The consolidation of the large estates was a continuous process. Landowning beys would entrap peasants into their debt and thus establish themselves as semifeudal patrons of formerly independent villagers. In this way, a large Muslim aristocracy developed in the

south, while the majority of the Tosk peasants assumed the characteristics of an oppressed social class. As late as the 1930s, two-thirds of the best land in central and southern Albania belonged to large landowners.

The tribal society of the Geg highlanders contrasted sharply with that of the passive, oppressed Tosk peasantry, most of whose members lived on the large estates of the beys and were often represented in the political arena by the beys themselves. The Tosk semifeudal society survived in the south well into the twentieth century. After independence was achieved in 1912, however, a small Tosk middle class began to develop. In the early 1920s, that group, finding common interests with the more enlightened beys, played a major role in attempts to create a modern society. But in 1925 Ahmet Zogu curbed Tosk influence and cemented his power in the tribal north by governing through influential tribal and clan chiefs. To secure the loyalty of these chiefs, he placed them on the government payroll and sent several back to their tribes with the military rank of colonel. In 1928 a new constitution declared Albania a kingdom and Zogu the monarch. King Zog I ruled until the Italian invasion in 1939.

Social Structure under Communist Rule

Albania's general class structure at the time of the communist takeover in 1944 consisted of peasants and workers, who made up the lower class, and a small upper class. Representing over 80 percent of the total population, most peasants lived at no better than subsistence level. Nonagricultural workers numbered about 30,000 persons, most of whom worked in the mines and in the small handicraft industries. The upper class, whose capital was invested mostly in trade, commerce, and the Italian industrial concessions, comprised professional people and intellectuals, merchants with small and medium-sized enterprises, moneylenders, and well-to-do artisans. Industrialists also belonged to the upper class, although generally they owned very small industries and workshops.

The clergy of the major religious denominations did not form a distinct social group. Members of the higher clergy typically were upper-class intellectuals; income from the fairly extensive church estates and state subsidies provided them with a comfortable, but not luxurious living. The rank-and-file clerics, however, were of peasant origin, and most of their parishes were as impoverished as the peasant households they served.

A new social order was legally instituted in Albania with the adoption of the first communist constitution in March 1946, which created a "state of workers and laboring peasants" and abolished all

ranks and privileges based on heredity (such as those enjoyed by tribal chiefs and the beys), position, wealth, or cultural standing. According to the constitution, all citizens were equal, regardless of nationality, race, or religion.

Communist spokesmen listed three principal social classes as prevalent in the early years of the regime: the working class, the laboring peasants, and the so-called exploiting class, that is, the landowners in the agricultural economy and the bourgeoisie in trade. The "exploiting class" was liquidated during the early stages of the regime. The bourgeoisie was destroyed by the nationalization of industry, transport, mines, and banks, as well as by the establishment of a state monopoly on foreign commerce and state control over internal trade. The feudal landlords disappeared with the application of the agrarian reforms of 1945-46. These steps were followed by a program of rapid industrialization, whose result was the creation of a substantial working class. A program of agricultural collectivization had as its stated goal the formation of a homogeneous peasant class. Eventually all individual farmers were collectivized, the artisan collectives were converted to state industrial enterprises, the number of private traders was reduced to a minimum, and members of the clergy who avoided imprisonment or execution were sent to work either in industrial plants or agricultural collectives.

Aside from the workers and peasants, the only group to which the Tiranë authorities continued to give special attention was the intelligentsia. Usually termed a layer or stratum of the new social order, the intelligentsia was considered by the communist regime to be a special social group because of the country's need for professional, technical, and cultural talent. To justify this special attention, ideologists often quoted Lenin to the effect that "the intelligentsia will remain a special stratum until the communist society reaches its highest development."

The communist regime, however, transformed the social composition of the intelligentsia. From 1944 to 1948, this transformation involved purging a number of Western-educated intellectuals, whom the regime deemed potentially dangerous, as well as some high-level communist intellectuals who were suspected of having anti-Yugoslav or pro-Western sentiments. The remaining intellectuals were "reeducated" and employed in training new personnel for work in industry, government service, and the party bureaucracy. As a rule, the subsequent generation of intellectuals toed the communist party line. A notable exception was Albania's foremost writer, Ismail Kadare, who managed to walk a tightrope between conformity and dissent until his defection to France in 1990.

The theoretical egalitarian social order had little in common with the real class structure that existed in the country until 1991, when the communist party lost its monopoly on power. In fact, there existed different classes and gradations of rank and privilege, beginning with an upper class composed of the party elite, particularly Political Bureau (Politburo) and Central Committee members. In this category were also leaders of the state and mass organizations, and high-ranking officers of the military and internal security forces. Top party officials and their families received special medical care, exclusive housing in a protected compound in Tiranë, free food and liquor, vacation allowances, entertainment subsidies, and many other perquisites. At government expense, they purchased stylish French and Italian clothing, cosmetics, appliances, and vacation homes. An inquiry conducted by Albania's newly formed coalition government in 1991 concluded that "the former party leadership created for itself every opportunity to acquire privileges and enrich itself while the people were deceived by bogus and cynical propaganda about a struggle against privileges, luxury, and inequality."

Just below the Politburo and the Central Committee were the vast party and government bureaucracies, professional people and intellectuals, and managers of state industrial and agricultural enterprises. The top party elite was distinct from the lower party and state functionaries in terms of privileges, influence, authority, and responsibility. The group of lower party and state officials were bound together by the economic privileges and prestige that went with their positions and membership in, or sympathy for, the Albanian Party of Labor, as the communist party was called from 1948 to 1991. These officials all benefited from their association with the regime and enjoyed educational and economic advantages denied the rest of the population. Below this group were the rank-and-file party members, whose leadership role was constitutionally guaranteed. Aside from the prestige they enjoyed as party members, however, their privileges and economic benefits did not differ much from those of the next lower class in the social structure, the workers.

Constituting an estimated 47 percent of the total population in 1985, the working class (which, according to the official classification, included rural dwellers employed by state farms) was created after the communist seizure of power and composed almost wholly of peasants. Although under constant pressure to increase productivity, exceed production norms, and perform "volunteer" labor, workers were entitled to an annual two-week paid vacation. State-subsidized rest houses for this purpose were established at various locations across the country.

The regime's policy of complete agricultural collectivization deprived peasants of their landholdings, except for tiny personal plots, and required them to work on collective farms. Despite government attempts to equalize the wages of peasants and workers, peasant income remained approximately at subsistence level. One or two members of a peasant family would often engage in rural nonagricultural occupations, such as mining or forestry, that offered superior wages and benefits.

Soon after adoption of the constitution of 1946, new laws were implemented regulating marriage and divorce. Marriages had to be contracted before an official of the local People's Council. After 1967, religious wedding ceremonies were forbidden. The minimum age for marriage was set at sixteen for women and eighteen for men. Because marriage was now supposed to be based on the full equality of both spouses, the concept of the father as head of the family, recognized by precommunist civil law and considered essential to Albanian family life, was officially deprived of legitimacy. A husband and wife now had the legal right to choose their own residence and professions. However, marriage to foreigners was prohibited except with the permission of the government.

The new divorce laws were designed to facilitate proceedings. The separation of spouses was made grounds for divorce, and in such cases a court could grant a divorce without considering related facts or the causes of the separation. Either spouse could ask for a divorce on the basis of incompatibility of character, continued misunderstandings, irreconcilable hostility, or for any other reason that disrupted marital relations to the point where cohabitation had become intolerable. Certain crimes committed by the spouse, especially so-called crimes against the state and crimes involving moral turpitude, were also recognized as grounds for divorce. In divorce cases, custody of children was granted to the parent "with better moral and political conditions for the children's proper education."

About 27,400 marriages were contracted in 1987, about 8.9 per 1,000 inhabitants. There were more than 2,500 divorces in the same year, or about 0.8 per 1,000 inhabitants.

Article 41 of the 1976 constitution guaranteed women equal rights with men "in work, pay, holidays, social security, education, in all sociopolitical activity, as well as in the family." About 33 percent of the party's active members in 1988 were women, as well as over 40 percent of those elected to the people's councils. Nearly one-half of the country's students were women. Statistics showed that women accounted for 47 percent of the work force.



*Residential buildings in Tiranë
A construction site in central Tiranë
Courtesy Charles Sudetic*

Despite progress during the communist regime, significant inequalities remained. In 1990 only one full member of the ruling Politburo was a woman. In agriculture the predominantly female work force generally had male supervisors. Women were underrepresented in certain professions, particularly engineering. Furthermore, until 1991, abortions were illegal and women were encouraged to have "as many children as possible," in addition to working outside the home. Some traditional practices, such as the presentation of dowries and arranged marriages, reportedly were condoned by the authorities.

Throughout its existence, the communist regime persisted in its campaign against the patriarchal family system. In the mountainous north, where vestiges of traditional tribal structures were particularly prevalent, the local patriarchs were detained and the property of their clans was appropriated. Patriarchalism, according to party propaganda, was the most dangerous internal challenge to Albanian society.

Religion

Before 1944

One of the major legacies of nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule was the conversion of up to 70 percent of the Albanian population to Islam. Therefore, at independence the country emerged as a predominantly Muslim nation, the only Islamic state in Europe. No census taken by the communist regime after it assumed power in 1944 indicated the religious affiliations of the people. It has been estimated that of a total population of 1,180,500 at the end of World War II, about 826,000 were Muslims, 212,500 were Orthodox, and 142,000 were Roman Catholics. The Muslims were divided into two groups: about 600,000 adherents of the Sunni (see Glossary) branch and more than 220,000 followers of a dervish order known as Bektashi (see Glossary), which was an offshoot of the Shia (see Glossary) branch. Bektashism was regarded as a tolerant Muslim sect that also incorporated elements of paganism and Christianity.

Christianity was introduced during Roman rule. After the division of the Roman Empire in 395, Albania became politically a part of the Eastern, or Byzantine, Empire, but remained ecclesiastically dependent on Rome. When the final schism occurred in 1054 between the Roman and Eastern churches, the Christians in southern Albania came under the jurisdiction of the ecumenical patriarch in Constantinople (see Glossary), and those in the north came under the purview of the papacy in Rome. This arrangement

*The eighteenth-century mosque
of Ethem Bey on Skanderbeg
Square in the heart of Tiranë
Courtesy Charles Sudetic*



*The mosque of Ethem Bey
(close-up)
Courtesy Charles Sudetic*



prevailed until the Ottoman invasions of the fourteenth century, when the Islamic faith was introduced. The conversion of the people to Islam took many decades.

In the mountainous north, the propagation of Islam was strongly opposed by Roman Catholics. Gradually, however, backwardness, illiteracy, the absence of an educated clergy, and material inducements weakened resistance. Coerced conversions sometimes occurred, especially when foreign Roman Catholic powers, such as the Venetian Republic, were at war with the Ottoman Empire. By the close of the seventeenth century, the Catholics in the north were outnumbered by the Muslims.

After the Ottoman conquest, thousands of Orthodox Christians fled from southern Albania to Sicily and southern Italy, where their descendants, most of whom joined the Uniate Church (see Glossary), still constitute a sizable community. Large-scale forced conversions of the Orthodox Christians who remained in Albania did not occur until the seventeenth century and the Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pressure was put on the Orthodox Christians because the Ottoman Turks considered the members of this group sympathetic to Orthodox Russia. The situation of the Orthodox adherents improved temporarily after the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji (1774), in which Russia was recognized as the protector of the Orthodox followers in the Ottoman Empire. The most effective method employed by the Ottoman Turks in their missionary efforts, especially in the central and southern parts of the country, was the creation of a titled Muslim class of pashas and beys who were endowed with both large estates and extensive political and administrative powers. Through their political and economic influence, these nobles controlled the peasants, large numbers of whom were converted to Islam either through coercion or the promise of economic benefits.

In the period from independence to the communist seizure of power, the Muslim noble class constituted Albania's ruling elite, but this group never interfered with religious freedom, which was sanctioned by the various pre-World War II constitutions. These constitutions had stipulated that the country have no official religion, that all religions be respected, and that their freedom of exercise be assured. These provisions reflected the true feelings of the people who, whether Muslim, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic, were generally tolerant in religious matters.

For generations, religious pragmatism was a distinctive trait of the Albanians. Even after accepting Islam, many people privately remained practicing Christians. As late as 1912, in a large number of villages in the Elbasan area, most men had two names, a

Muslim one for public use and a Christian one for private use. Adherence to ancient pagan beliefs also continued well into the twentieth century, particularly in the northern mountain villages, many of which were devoid of churches and mosques. A Roman Catholic intellectual, Vaso Pashko (1825-92), made the trenchant remark, later co-opted by Enver Hoxha, that “the religion of the Albanians is Albanianism.”

Hoxha's Antireligious Campaign

A dogmatic Stalinist, Hoxha considered religion a divisive force and undertook an active campaign against religious institutions, despite the virtual absence of religious intolerance in Albanian society. The Agrarian Reform Law of August 1945, for example, nationalized most property of religious institutions, including the estates of monasteries, orders, and dioceses. Many clergy and believers were tried, tortured, and executed. All foreign Roman Catholic priests, monks, and nuns were expelled in 1946.

In January 1949, almost three years after the adoption of the first communist constitution, which guaranteed freedom of religion, the government issued a far-reaching Decree on Religious Communities. The law required that religious communities be sanctioned by the state, that they comply with “the laws of the state, law and order, and good customs,” and that they submit all appointments, regulations, and bylaws for approval by the government. Even pastoral letters and parish announcements were subject to the approval of party officials. Religious communities or branches that had their headquarters outside the country, such as the Jesuit and Franciscan orders, were henceforth ordered to terminate their activities in Albania. Religious institutions were forbidden to have anything to do with the education of the young because that had been made the exclusive province of the state. All religious communities were prohibited from owning real estate and from operating philanthropic and welfare institutions and hospitals.

Although there were tactical variations in Hoxha's approach to each of the major denominations, his overarching objective was the eventual destruction of all organized religion in Albania. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the regime achieved control over the Muslim faith by formalizing the split between the Sunni and Bektashi sects, eliminating all leaders who opposed Hoxha's policies, and exploiting those who were more tractable. Steps were also taken to purge all Orthodox clergy who did not yield to the demands of the regime, and to use the church as a means of mobilizing the Orthodox population behind government policies. The Roman Catholic Church, chiefly because it maintained close relations with

the Vatican and was more highly organized than the Muslim and Orthodox faiths, became the principal target of persecution. Between 1945 and 1953, the number of priests was reduced drastically and the number of Roman Catholic churches was decreased from 253 to 100. All Catholics were stigmatized as fascists, although only a minority had collaborated with the Italian occupation authorities during World War II.

The campaign against religion peaked in the 1960s. Inspired by China's Cultural Revolution, Hoxha called for an aggressive cultural-educational struggle against "religious superstition" and assigned the antireligious mission to Albania's students. By May 1967, religious institutions had been forced to relinquish all 2,169 churches, mosques, cloisters, and shrines in Albania, many of which were converted into cultural centers for young people. As the literary monthly *Nendori* reported the event, the youth had thus "created the first atheist nation in the world."

The clergy were publicly vilified and humiliated, their vestments taken and desecrated. Many Muslim mullahs and Orthodox priests buckled under and renounced their "parasitic" past. More than 200 clerics of various faiths were imprisoned, others were forced to seek work in either industry or agriculture, and some were executed or starved to death. The cloister of the Franciscan order in Shkodër was set on fire, which resulted in the death of four elderly monks.

All previous decrees that had officially sanctioned the nominal existence of organized religion were annulled in 1967. Subsequently, the 1976 constitution banned all "fascist, religious, warmongering, antisocialist activity and propaganda," and the penal code of 1977 imposed prison sentences of three to ten years for "religious propaganda and the production, distribution, or storage of religious literature." A new decree that in effect targeted Albanians with Christian names stipulated that citizens whose names did not conform to "the political, ideological, or moral standards of the state" were to change them. It was also decreed that towns and villages with religious names must be renamed. Thus, in the southern areas populated by ethnic Greeks, about ninety towns and places named after Greek Orthodox saints received secular names.

Hoxha's brutal antireligious campaign succeeded in eradicating formal worship, but some Albanians continued to practice their faith clandestinely, risking severe punishment. Individuals caught with Bibles, icons, or other religious objects faced long prison sentences. Parents were afraid to pass on their faith, for fear that their children would tell others. Officials tried to entrap practicing Christians and Muslims during religious fasts, such as Lent and

Ramadan, by distributing dairy products and other forbidden foods in school and at work, and then publicly denouncing those who refused the food. Clergy who conducted secret services were incarcerated; in 1980, a Jesuit priest was sentenced to “life until death” for baptizing his nephew’s newborn twins.

The Revival of Religion

In the 1980s, officials grudgingly began to concede that the campaign against religion had not been entirely successful, and indeed probably was counterproductive. A sociological study revealed that over 95 percent of the country’s young people were choosing spouses of the same religious background, whereas, prior to the antireligious onslaught, marriages between Muslims and Christians were not uncommon. Albania’s government also became more sensitive to the barrage of criticism from the international community. Hoxha’s successor, Ramiz Alia, adopted a relatively tolerant stance toward religious practice, referring to it as “a personal and family matter.” Émigré clergymen were permitted to reenter the country in 1988 and officiate at religious services. Mother Teresa, an ethnic Albanian, visited Tiranë in 1989, where she was received by the foreign minister and by Hoxha’s widow. In December 1990, the ban on religious observance was officially lifted, in time to allow thousands of Christians to attend Christmas services.

Religious leaders estimated that 95 percent of all mosques and churches had been razed or gutted during the years of communist rule. A few had been spared and designated as “cultural monuments.” Others, such as the Roman Catholic cathedral in Shkodër, were converted to sports arenas. The status of the clergy was equally appalling; the number of Roman Catholic priests, for example, had declined from 300 in 1944, when the communists took power, to thirty by early 1992. In 1992 plans were under way to restore the houses of worship, seminaries were being reopened, and several Islamic countries had sent teachers to provide religious instruction to young Albanian Muslims who knew virtually nothing about their religion. “Hoxha destroyed the human soul,” an official of Albania’s new noncommunist government observed, adding, “This will take generations to restore.”

Education

Precommunist Era

As late as 1946, about 85 percent of the people were illiterate, principally because schools using the Albanian language had been practically nonexistent in the country before it became independent

in 1912. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the Ottoman rulers had prohibited use of the Albanian language in schools. Turkish was spoken in the few schools that served the Muslim population, but these institutions were located mainly in cities and large towns. The schools for Orthodox Christian children were under the supervision of the Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarchate. The teachers at these schools usually were recruited from the Orthodox clergy, and the language of instruction was Greek. The first school known to use Albanian in modern times was a Franciscan seminary that opened in 1861 in Shkodër.

From about 1880 to 1910, several Albanian patriots intent on creating a sense of national consciousness founded elementary schools in a few cities and towns, mostly in the south, but these institutions were closed by the Ottoman authorities. The advent of the Young Turks (see Glossary) movement in 1908 motivated the Albanian patriots to intensify their efforts, and in the same year a group of intellectuals met in Monastir to choose an Albanian alphabet. Books written in Albanian before 1908 had used a mixture of alphabets, consisting mostly of combinations of Latin, Greek, and Turkish-Arabic letters.

The participants in the Monastir meeting developed a unified alphabet based on Latin letters. A number of textbooks soon were written in the new alphabet, and Albanian elementary schools opened in various parts of the country. In 1909, to meet the demand for teachers able to teach in the native tongue, a normal school was established in Elbasan. But in 1910, the Young Turks, fearing the emergence of Albanian nationalism, closed all schools that used Albanian as the language of instruction.

Even after Albania became independent, schools were scarce. The unsettled political conditions caused by the Balkan wars and by World War I hindered the development of a unified education system. The foreign occupying powers, however, opened some schools in their respective areas of control, each power offering instruction in its own language. A few of these schools, especially the Italian and French ones, continued to function after World War I and played a significant role in introducing Western educational methods and principles. Particularly important was the National Lycée of Korçë, in which the language of instruction was French.

Soon after the establishment in 1920 of a national government, which included a ministry of education, the foundation was laid for a national education system. Elementary schools were opened in the cities and some of the larger towns, and the Italian and French schools that had opened during World War I were strengthened. In the meantime, two important American schools were founded:



*Unrestored Roman Catholic church converted by the communist regime into an industrial facility and reclaimed in 1991 by local Catholics
Courtesy Charles Sudetic*



*Priest with previously hidden religious artifacts, Shkodër
Courtesy Fred Conrad*

the American Vocational School in Tiranë, established by the American Junior Red Cross in 1921; and the American Agricultural School in Kavajë, sponsored by the Near East Foundation. Several future communist party and government luminaries were educated in the foreign schools: Enver Hoxha graduated from the National Lycée in 1930, and Mehmet Shehu, who would become prime minister, completed studies at the American Vocational School in 1932.

In the 1920s, the period when the foundations of the modern Albanian state were laid, considerable progress was made toward development of a genuinely Albanian education system. In 1933 the Royal Constitution was amended to make the education of citizens an exclusive right of the state. All foreign-language schools, except the American Agricultural School, were either closed or nationalized. This move was intended to stop the rapid spread of schools sponsored directly by the Italian government, especially among Roman Catholics in the north.

The nationalization of schools was followed in 1934 by a far-reaching reorganization of the entire education system. The new system called for compulsory elementary education from the ages of four to fourteen. It also provided for the expansion of secondary schools of various kinds; the establishment of new technical, vocational, and commercial secondary schools; and the acceleration and expansion of teacher training. The obligatory provisions of the 1934 reorganization law were never enforced in rural areas because the peasants needed their children to work in the fields, and because of a lack of schoolhouses, teachers, and means of transportation.

The only minority schools operating in Albania before World War II were those for the Greek minority living in the district of Gjirokastrë. These schools too were closed by the constitutional amendment of 1933, but Greece referred the case to the International Permanent Court of Justice, which forced Albania to reopen them.

Pre-World War II Albania had no university-level education and all advanced studies were pursued abroad. Every year the state granted a limited number of scholarships to deserving high school graduates, who otherwise could not afford to continue their education. But the largest number of university students came from well-to-do families and thus were privately financed. The great majority of the students attended Italian universities because of their proximity and because of the special relationship between the Rome and Tiranë governments. The Italian government itself, following a policy of political, economic, military, and cultural penetration



*Country grade schools
Courtesy Fred Conrad*

of the country, granted a number of scholarships to Albanian students recommended by its legation in Tiranë.

Soon after the Italians occupied Albania in April 1939, the education system came under complete Italian control. Use of the Italian language was made compulsory in all secondary schools, and the fascist ideology and orientation were incorporated into the curricula. After 1941, however, when guerrilla groups began to operate against the Italian forces, the whole education system became paralyzed. Secondary schools became centers of resistance and guerrilla recruitment, and many teachers and students went to the mountains to join resistance groups. By September 1943, when Italy capitulated to the Allies and German troops invaded and occupied Albania, education had come to a complete standstill.

Education under Communist Rule

Upon taking power in late 1944, the communist regime gave high priority to reopening the schools and organizing the whole education system to reflect communist ideology. The regime's objectives for the new school system were to wipe out illiteracy in

the country as soon as possible, to struggle against "bourgeois survivals" in the country's culture, to transmit to Albanian youth the ideas and principles of communism as interpreted by the party, and finally to educate the children of all social classes on the basis of these principles. The 1946 communist constitution made it clear that the regime intended to bring all children under the control of the state. All schools were soon placed under state management.

The 1946 Education Reform Law provided specifically that Marxist-Leninist principles would permeate all school texts. This law also made the struggle against illiteracy a primary objective of the new school system. In September 1949, the government promulgated a law requiring all citizens between the ages of twelve and forty who could not read to attend classes in reading and writing. Courses for illiterate peasants were established by the education sections of the people's councils. The political organs of the armed forces provided parallel courses for illiterate military personnel.

In addition to providing for free seven-year obligatory elementary schooling and four-year secondary education, the 1946 law called for the establishment of a network of vocational, trade, and teacher-training schools to prepare personnel, technicians, and skilled workers for various social, cultural, and economic activities. Another education law adopted in 1948 provided for the further expansion of vocational and professional courses to train skilled and semiskilled workers and to increase the theoretical and professional knowledge of the technicians.

In the 1950s, the school system was given a thorough Soviet orientation in terms both of communist ideological propaganda and central government control. Secondary technical schools were established along the same lines. In 1951 three institutes of higher learning were founded: the Higher Pedagogic Institute, the Higher Polytechnical Institute, and the Higher Agricultural Institute, all patterned on Soviet models. Most textbooks, especially those dealing with scientific and technical matters, were translations of Soviet materials. Courses for teacher preparation were established in which the Russian language, Soviet methods of pedagogy and psychology, and Marxist-Leninist dialectics were taught by Soviet instructors. A team of Soviet educators laid the structural, curricular, and ideological foundations of Enver Hoxha University at Tiranë, which was established in 1957.

By 1960 the system of elementary and secondary education had evolved into an eleven-year program encompassing schools of general education and vocational and professional institutes. The schools of general education consisted of primary grades one to four, intermediate grades five to seven, and secondary grades eight to

eleven. In October 1960, however, as Soviet-Albanian tensions were reaching the breaking point, the Albanian Party of Labor issued a resolution calling for the reorganization of the whole school system. The resolution's real aim was to purge the schools of Soviet influence and rewrite the textbooks. An additional year was added to the eleven-year general education program, and the whole school system was integrated more closely with industry in order to prepare Albanian youth to replace the Soviet specialists, should the latter be withdrawn, as they eventually were in 1961.

A subsequent reform divided the education system into four general categories: preschool, general eight-year program, secondary education, and higher education. The compulsory eight-year program was designed to provide pupils with the elements of ideological, political, moral, aesthetic, physical, and military education. The new system lowered the entrance age for pupils from seven to six, and no longer separated primary and intermediate schools.

Secondary education began with grade nine (usually at age fourteen), and ended with grade twelve. Secondary schools offered four-year general education programs or four-year vocational and professional programs, including industrial, agricultural, pedagogic, trade, arts, and health tracks, among others. Some programs lasted only two years.

The term of study in the institutes of higher education lasted three to five years, and tuition was also free at this level. Provision was made to expand higher education by increasing the number of full-time students, setting up new branches in places where there were no post-secondary institutes, and organizing specialized courses in which those who had completed higher education would be trained to become highly qualified technical and scientific cadres. All full-time graduate students had to serve a probationary period of nine months in industrial production and three months in military training, in addition to the prescribed military training in school.

Adult education was provided in the same sequence as full-time schooling for younger students, with two exceptions. First, the eight-year general education segment was noncompulsory and was compressed into a six-year program that allowed for completion of the first four grades in two years. Second, those who wanted to proceed to higher institutes after completing secondary school had to devote one year to preparatory study instead of engaging in production work, as full-time students did.

Official statistics indicated that the regime made considerable progress in education. Illiteracy had been virtually eliminated by the late 1980s. From a total enrollment of fewer than 60,000 students at all levels in 1939, the number of people in school had grown

to more than 750,000 by 1987; also, there were more than 40,000 teachers in Albania. About 47 percent of all students were female. The proportion of eighth-grade graduates who continued with some type of secondary education increased from 39 percent in 1980 to 73 percent in 1990, with no village reporting a figure lower than 56 percent.

A reorganization plan was announced in 1990 that would extend the compulsory education program from eight to ten years. The following year, however, a major economic and political crisis in Albania, and the ensuing breakdown of public order, plunged the school system into chaos. Widespread vandalism and extreme shortages of textbooks and supplies had a devastating effect on school operations, prompting Italy and other countries to provide material assistance. The minister of education reported in September 1991 that nearly one-third of the 2,500 schools below the university level had been ransacked and fifteen school buildings razed. Many teachers relocated from rural to urban areas, leaving village schools understaffed and swelling the ranks of the unemployed in the cities and towns; about 2,000 teachers fled the country. The highly structured and controlled educational environment that the communist regime had painstakingly cultivated in the course of more than forty-six years was abruptly shattered.

Health and Welfare

Medical Care and Nutrition

The government credited itself with a revolutionary transformation of Albanian health standards. According to official statistics, the incidence of malaria and other debilitating diseases that affected large segments of the population before 1950 had been greatly reduced or eliminated, and average life expectancy had increased about twenty years by 1988 (see Population, this chapter). These successes were attributable primarily to large-scale inoculation programs, the extermination or reduction in number of disease-spreading pests, and a general expansion of health services. In 1987 Albania had about one physician or dentist per 577 inhabitants (compared to one per 8,154 inhabitants in 1950), and one hospital bed per 168 inhabitants (compared to one per 229 inhabitants in 1950). All medical services were free. However, further improvements in health care were obstructed by malnutrition, unsanitary conditions, and a rapidly deteriorating economy.

Although considerably decreased, the infant mortality rate—fifty deaths per 1,000 live births, according to data published by the United States government—was still much higher than that