

ALBANIA

Epirote Greeks

Activity: 1990-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- The first evidence for separatist mobilization we could find is in 1990, when the Democratic Union of the Greek Ethnic Minority in Albania (OMONOIA) was formed in 1990. We therefore peg the start date of the movement at 1990. OMONOIA has remained active in politics since (Kosleti 2012; Minahan 1996, 2002; MAR; UNPO).
- In 1992, the Unity for Human Rights Party was founded. The party is primarily focused on minority rights, with particular focus on the Greek minority. Until 2009, the party made claims for autonomy, but it has since distanced itself from this goal and focused on other kinds of minority rights (Tzimas 2009). The party has held seats in parliamentary elections (ESO 2013).
- In 2010, members of OMONOIA and Unity for Human Rights Party founded the Greek Minority for the Future party (MEGA/EEMM). EEMM has made claims for self-determination and autonomy for the Greek minority (see Landsford 2021: 25; MEGA-EEMM 2021). [start date: 1990; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- Upon its formation the Democratic Union of the Greek Ethnic Minority in Albania (OMONOIA) demanded autonomy for Northern Epirus. This is confirmed by various sources such as Minahan (2002), Pettifer (2001) and Lastarria-Cornhiel and Wheeler (1998).
- According to Pettifer (2001: 12), in April 1992 the chairman of OMONIA wrote an open letter to the Greek Prime Minister requesting Greek support for the establishment of an autonomous region in southern Albania. Both the Greek and the Albanian government rejected this proposal.
- OMONIA continued to make claims for internal autonomy (Zacharis 2021). Other parties in Albania including Unity for Human Rights Party and the Greek Minority for the Future have also made claims for autonomy (see above).
- There have also been claims for secession and a merger with Greece; however, these claims were made mainly by Greeks in Greece and, in particular, by members of the Greek Orthodox Church (Lastarria-Cornhiel & Wheeler 1998; Hart & Budina 1995). Therefore, autonomy is coded as the dominant claim throughout. [1990-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

NA

Irredentist claims

- While there have been claims for a merger with Greece, these emerged mainly from Greece and especially members of the Greek Orthodox Church (Hart & Budina 1995). We are here concerned with claims made in Albania itself. [no irredentist claims]

Claimed territory

- The Epirote self-determination movement has claimed Northern Epirus, which entails the departments of Gjirokaster, Kolonje, Korce, Pemet, Saranda, Skrapar, Tepelene, Himare and the Southern Districts of Vlore in Albania (Minahan 2002: 577). These regions also roughly match the Autonomous Republic of Northern Epirus, which declared its independence following the Balkan Wars in 1914. We code this claim based on the Global Administrative Areas database (GADM 2019).

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We find only one report of separatist violence: in April 1994 militants of the Omonia party killed two soldiers in an attack on an army post. Since there were fewer than 25 deaths, we do not consider this violence to be LVIOLSD, hence the movement's NVIOLSD classification. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- Epirus, having been declared a republic in 200 BC, was included in the Roman Empire and later was part of the Byzantine Empire as a Hellenized principality. The Epirote State was reinstated in 1204 when the Byzantine Empire collapsed. The expanding Ottoman Empire annexed Epirus in a campaign between 1430 and 1440. A majority of Albanians gradually converted to Islam in order to receive preferential treatment and to keep ownership over their lands. When the Turks were expelled in the late eighteenth century, an independent Epirote state was installed but the southern part was soon overtaken by the Greeks (Minahan 2002; Minorities at Risk Project).
- When the Ottoman Empire disintegrated and Albania declared itself independent, Greek irredentists tried to annex (North) Epirus in southern Albania into a "Greater Greece". In December 1913, however, the Protocol of Florence gave Albania its present boundaries and ceded the northern part of Epirus to Albania. Only half a year later, after Epirus had declared itself independent, the Great Powers signed the Protocol of Corfu. The agreement recognized the territory as Greek after which it was occupied by Greece. However, in the light of increasing Italian and French pressure, Greece had to withdraw in 1916 and the territory was eventually ceded back to Albania as required by the 1921 Paris Conference which annulled the Protocol of Corfu and validated the 1913 borders (Minahan 2002; Minorities at Risk Project; Minority Rights Group International; Pettifer 2001).
- Despite initial promises of autonomy, the interwar period saw assimilationist policies by the Albanian governments that included the forcible closure of Greek schools in 1933/1934 and discriminatory measures against Greek Orthodox monasteries. The Second World War again saw cycles of Italian, Greek and German occupation of Epirus. After the war, however, the pre-war borders were reinstated (Minahan 2002; Minorities at Risk Project; Pettifer 2001).
- The Greek minority was no specific target of discrimination under the communist regime. Nevertheless, the Greeks, who partly lived in officially-recognized Greek minority zones, suffered from violations of human rights and were affected by the government's attempt to homogenize the society by restricting religious, linguistic, educational and cultural rights. So when in 1967 the government eradicated organized religion and all religious institutions were closed, the existence of Christian Orthodox population officially denied and many Orthodox churches destroyed, the Epirote Greeks, whose religion is inseparable from their identity, were hit particularly hard (Minahan 2002; Minorities at Risk Project; Minority Rights Group International). With the death of Enver Hoxha in April 1985 came a relaxation of repression of

religions. The ban on religious observance (article 37 of the 1976 constitution) was revoked in spring 1989 and Greek churches were soon reopened (Pettifer 2001: 10). We code a (prior) cultural rights concession in 1989 due to these “early achievements in the immediate aftermath of communism’s collapse.” [1989: cultural rights concession]

Concessions and restrictions

- In the 1996 Treaty of Friendship between Albania and Greece, the Albanian government recognized its obligation to respect minority rights. The Albanian government claimed that it would provide opportunities for the ethnic Greeks "to be educated in their native language and to move freely wherever it is good for them". Pursuant to this agreement, Greek language schools and a Greek-language faculty as a branch of Gjirokaster University were opened (Minorities at Risk Project; Vickers 2010). [1996: cultural rights concession]
- In 2017, new legislation permitted bilingual street signs in specific southern regions (Law 96/107 ‘Regarding the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in Albanian Democracy’). [2017: cultural rights concession]
- In some cases, police forces subsequently removed the bilingual signs, which led to complaints from ethnic Greeks (see MEGA-EEMM 2019). We do not code a restriction because the removals were not government policy.

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Epirote Greeks
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Greeks
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	33902000

Power access

- We draw on EPR. [1990-2020: powerless]

Group size

- We draw on EPR. [0.08]

Regional concentration

- GeoEPR and MAR code the Epirote Greeks as concentrated. However, both sources do not require that the group makes up an absolute majority of their regional base. According to Minahan (2002: 577), the Epirote Greeks make up only 36% of Northern Epirus, with 47% Albanians, 15% Aromanians, and 2% Macedonians. We found no alternatively defined territory in which Greeks would form a majority. Note: A minority of the Greeks lives in officially recognized Greek minority zones that were established by the Communist regime. [not concentrated]

Kin

- EPR codes ethnic kin in Greece (Greeks), Cyprus (Greek Cypriots), and Lebanon (Greek Orthodox). MAR mentions the Greeks in Macedonia as the second largest kin group behind the Greeks in Greece. [kin in neighboring country]

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