

**Committee:** H-NATO: Historical North Atlantic Treaty  
Organization  
**Agenda Item:** North Macedonia Ethnic Rivalry (2001-2003)  
**Country:** Albania  
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Prior to the conflict in 2001, relations between the Macedonian majority and ethnic Albanian minority in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) were considered tense, if not explosive. For nearly a decade, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia managed to escape the kind of brutal ethnic conflict in Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo that accompanied the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. However, with its mixed cultural structure contrary to its narrower area compared to other Balkan countries caused the prolonged ethnic tension between the largest minority with a percentage of %22.9 recorded in the June 1994 census, Albanians, and the majority of Macedonians to strike easily.

Some developments that fueled the tension includes: an attempt to open an Albanian university which got halted by police in February 1995, about 250.000 Kosovar Albanian refugees flooding into Macedonia during the height of crisis owing to the conflict in neighboring Kosovo in 1999, the rising Macedonian nationalism, Albanian objection to the preamble of the constitution that made reference to the Macedonian nation claiming that it thereby relegated Albanians to the status of second-class citizens while Macedonians asserted that Albanian majority enjoyed sufficient rights, also fearing an eventual secession or partition and unification with Albania or Kosovo. These situations paved the way for Albanians living in Macedonia to take the hills and clash with the Macedonian government, eventually implying NATO interference.

Although the government of Albania is yet to be a NATO member, the fact that Albanians living in Macedonia is an interest of the government makes the issue an important one. The Albanian diaspora is one of the main factors defining the policy of Albania. In the 1990s, issues revolving around the Albanian community fueled concerns in Albania of destabilization in the new Macedonian state and possible Serbian intervention. The government of Albania has always supported the idea of an independent Macedonia, as it can be seen with Albania being one of the early states to recognise Macedonia in April 1993 through President Sali Berisha. Berisha viewed the existence of an independent Macedonia as important to Albanian interests in keeping apart Greece and Serbia (part of FR Yugoslavia), and to preventing any possible encirclement of Albania. In addition, separatist sentiments among Albanians in Macedonia were dissuaded by Albania in the aim of further stabilizing Macedonia by encouraging solutions with its limited influence. Also, during the early years of Macedonia naming dispute, the government of Albania strongly opposed the Greek suggested name "Slavomacedonia", advocating the independence of Macedonia, also by giving its support to Macedonia through offering its transport and port infrastructure for use against the Greek embargo.

On the contrary, in the aftermath of a summit between President Berisha and Macedonian President Kiro Gligorov held in May 1994, even though Macedonian leadership positively viewed the summit and there were initial moves to enhance relations, the upcoming statements by Macedonian officials indicating that the country would not undertake major changes toward the Albanian minority in order to improve ties with Albania has baffled the relationship between the two countries. Especially after the aforementioned attempt of opening an Albanian university, the government of Albania officially declared that the university situation may incline it to "reconsider" policy regarding its neighbor, since it indicated that one of the most important symbols of Albanians was being constrained.

Since the collapse of Communism in 1990, Albania has extended its responsibilities and position in European and international affairs, supporting and establishing friendly relations with other nations around the world. In accordance, the government of Albania pledges and hopes for mutual solutions for the rights of the minority of Albanians and the independence of Macedonia, overcoming the situation by the values of democracy and freedom. Initially confronting the developments by communication and mediation, solutions for long periods of time shall be implemented, in order to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

## REFERENCES

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