

**Secretariat of the  
Conference on Security and  
Co-operation in Europe  
PRAGUE**

CSCE Communication No. 251 + 251/Add.1  
Prague, 23 September 1993

**RELEASE OF DOCUMENT**

Letter from the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania and the reply of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania to this letter

Upon the decision of the 23rd Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials on 22 September 1993, the above mentioned letter, dated 10 September 1993, and the reply to this letter, dated 17 September 1993, are made public.

Address:	Telephone:	Telefax:	Telex:
Prague Office of the CSCE Secretariat Thunovská 12, Malá Strana 110 00 PRAGUE 1	+ 42-2-2431 10 69 (4 lines)	+42-2-2431 06 29 2431 10 75	121 614 CSCEC  Internet E-mail: CSCEPRAG@EARN.CVUT.CZ

---

**C S C E**  
High Commissioner  
on National Minorities

His Excellency  
Mr. Alfred Serreqi  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
of Albania

Reference:  
1051/93/L

The Hague,  
10 September 1993

Dear Mr Minister,

During the visits I made to Albania this summer at the invitation of President Berisha, I was able to make an extensive study of the situation of the Greek minority in your country. In this connection, I should like to express my appreciation for the way the Albanian Government has helped me in performing my mission, not only by its willingness to provide information about the position of the Government, but also by facilitating unrestricted contacts with organisations and personalities belonging to the Greek minority.

When referring to concerns of the Greek Government about the position of the Greek minority in Albania, President Berisha has repeatedly expressed his concern about the position of the Albanian minority in Greece. When I was in Athens, on 24 August 1993, consulting the Greek Government on its views regarding the position of the Greek minority in Albania, I mentioned this concern. The position of the Greek Government is, however, that, though they are Albanian migrant workers in Greece, there is no Albanian minority as such.

Before formulating my conclusions and recommendations, I will try to summarize the views and policies of the Albanian Government concerning the Greek minority as they have been explained to me by President Berisha, yourself and several of your colleagues. I think it is preferable to do this, because the explanations of your Government contain a number of important assurances.

My summary of the views of the Albanian Government concerning both the factual situation of the Greek minority and the policies it intends to follow in dealing with this minority is divided into the following twelve points:

1. The Government is determined to implement fully all of the provisions of the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document.
2. The governmental policy towards the Greek minority is determined by Article 26 of the Charter of Fundamental Freedoms and Human Rights, which is a separate chapter of the Law "On Principal Constitutional Provisions" of the Republic of Albania. Article 26 says: "Individuals belonging to minorities shall enjoy, with no discrimination and in equality before the law, the fundamental human rights and freedoms. They may freely express, preserve and develop their own ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity, teach and

be taught in their mother tongue, and associate in organisations and societies to protect their interests and identity. Nationality shall be determined on the basis of accepted international norms.

3. The Albanian Government is determined to further develop and strengthen the democratic political system, including full respect for human rights and the rule of law, as questions relating to national minorities can only be satisfactorily resolved in such a framework, as stated in para. 30 of the Copenhagen Document.

4. Persons belonging to the Greek minority have full freedom to express themselves in the Greek language as is shown, for instance, by the existence of three Greek-language newspapers in Albania.

5. In accordance with para. 32 of the Copenhagen Document, persons belonging to the Greek minority have the right freely to express, preserve and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. In this context, they have the right to establish and maintain organisations or associations for this purpose (para 32.6).

6. Members of the Greek minority have ample opportunities to take part in the political life of Albania. In the elections of 1992 the Party for the Protection of Human Rights put forward candidates from the Greek minority and two deputies of this party were elected. In addition, in the Parliament there are four deputies from this minority belonging to the Socialist and Democratic Parties respectively. Statistics shows that from the Greek minority there are 13 chairmen of communes, 59 commune council members, 32 city councillors, 53 district councillors. The chairmen of the districts of Gjirokastra, Saranda and Delvina and the mayor of Saranda are of Greek origin.

7. The Government's statistics shows that there are a total of 81 schools with 4545 pupils from the Greek minority. Legislation, which would allow parents from the Greek minority to start private schools anywhere in Albania, is under preparation.

8. The State will open two Greek secondary schools, one in the district of Gjirokastra and one in the district of Saranda, provided that the necessary contingent of pupils is guaranteed. A new branch of the Gjirokastra University providing 4-year courses to prepare teachers in the Greek language will be opened on 1 October 1993. Furthermore, the printing house in Gjirokastra has undertaken to print nine textbooks for instruction in the Greek language.

9. Persons belonging to the Greek minority can serve as priests in the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. In conducting religious services priests are free to use the Greek language. The property of the Church, confiscated during the communist regime, either has already been restituted, will be restituted, or will be compensated.

10. Persons belonging to the Greek minority are eligible to join various branches of the public service on the same basis as all the other Albanian citizens. There have not been and there will not be any discriminatory policies, as is shown by the fact that they, are persons belonging to the Greek community in the government, state administration, judiciary and universities. Officers of the Albanian armed services from the Greek minority, who have been dismissed in the framework of the restructuring of the armed forces, are offered by the Minister of Defence to rejoin, provided that they accept service wherever they are needed in Albania.

11. Persons belonging to the Greek minority are free to leave for Greece or any other country without any interference on the part of the Albanian authorities. Greek citizens can visit Albania, including the area where the Greek minority mainly lives, without any visa being required. In accordance with para. 32.4 of the Copenhagen Document, persons belonging to the Greek minority are allowed to establish and maintain unimpeded contacts among themselves within their country as well as contacts across frontiers with citizens of other states with whom they share a common ethnic or national origin, cultural heritage or religious beliefs.

12. The Albanian Government is prepared to give serious consideration to suggestions the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities might wish to make on the implementation of the principles contained in the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

In further communications with your Government, I mentioned the complaint of many members of the Greek minority that outside the so-called compact minority areas where Greek schools do exist there are no possibilities for children of the Greek minority for instruction of their mother tongue or in their mother tongue. I was informed that the legislation on the educational system which is now being prepared, will not only open the opportunity to start private schools, but will also provide for classes in Greek alongside the Albanian ones in areas outside the so-called compact minority areas where the percentage of the Greek population justifies the expectation that there will be a sufficient number of pupils.

Concerning the complaints about the dismissal of officers of Greek origin and the allegations that others were forced to accept lower ranks and lower pay, I received the assurance that there was no policy of discrimination against officers of Greek descent. However, a process of restructuring and reduction of the armed forces has taken place which has made a number of officers redundant. Consequently they had either to resign or to accept a lower rank and consequently lower pay. Officers of Albanian origin had to face the consequences of these measures as well.

Finally, I was assured that Albania intended to respect para. 32 of the Copenhagen Document which states "to belong to a minority is a matter of a person's individual choice and no disadvantage may arise from the exercise of such a choice". In this connection I was also informed that Albania will use the expertise of the Council of Europe in the organisation of the next census in Albania.

Having mentioned the various assurances I have received concerning Albania's minority policy, I will now try to formulate some general conclusions. Let me stress at the outset that in my view continuing progress in the transition from a dictatorship towards a democratic system which is now going on in Albania provides the best guarantees for the legitimate interests of the Greek minority in your country. Para. 30 of the Copenhagen Document clearly defines the linkage between a democratic system and adequate minority protection when it says that the questions relating to the national minorities can only be satisfactorily resolved in a democratic political framework based on the rule of law.

My second observation is that it will take many years to overcome the consequences of the disastrous economic policies of the communist regime which has brought your country to the verge of the abyss. Inevitably this will restrict the possibilities to satisfy a number of demands, especially in the educational and cultural fields, which more prosperous countries would have no difficulty to finance. The minority will have to accept the restrictions which the grave economic and financial situation imposes. On the other hand they have the right to insist that they will never be put at a disadvantage in comparison with the rest of the population. This would constitute a violation of the principle of non-discrimination laid down in the Copenhagen Document which the Albanian Government has promised to implement fully.

Finally, I should like to quote a passage from a document which the Democratic Union of the Greek Ethnic Minority People in Albania (OMONIA) published as recently as May 7 of this year. After having formulated a number of demands, OMONIA states:

"It is greatly to the credit of our peoples that, at a time when fierce ethnic conflicts have burst out in Europe and the Balkans in particular, fraught with far-reaching consequences for their peoples and dangerous for the fates of peace in the Balkans and Europe, they have displayed their culture and maturity and have known to deal with the problems facing them in the democratic and good understanding spirit and by way of dialogue and tolerance".

Since these words were written a number of tensions have arisen. But still I believe that a display of maturity and tolerance and the pursuit of dialogue can lead to mutually satisfactory solutions. I am strengthened in this conviction because persons both of Greek and Albanian origin have assured me that Greeks and Albanians have been living together in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, peace, friendship and harmony for many years.

I now come to my recommendations. They are the following:

1. It is of the greatest importance that your Government will consistently carry out the policies it has outlined to me, and will ensure that the minority will be fully informed about them. Policies aiming at strengthening democratic institutions, implementation of the norms laid down in the Copenhagen Document and improvement of the educational opportunities for the Greek minority will promote interethnic harmony and thus enhance the stability of the country. On the other hand, interethnic harmony could be disturbed by the efforts of

extreme nationalists calling for the unification of southern Albania with Greece. I have noted with satisfaction that both the Greek Government, the Human Rights Party and the Democratic Union of the Greek Ethnic Minority People in Albania (OMONIA) reject these calls.

2. While recognizing the importance of the provisions regarding persons belonging to national minorities as laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Freedoms and Human Right adopted by the Parliament of Albania in March 1993, I recommend that all these provisions be reflected in legislation to be adopted in future concerning various aspects of the political, social and economic system of the country.

3. I recommend that within the Government's structure a special office for minority questions be created. Such an office could concentrate on finding solutions for concrete problems in minority areas. In general, it seems advisable that the Government, in accordance with para. 33 of the Copenhagen Document, has regular consultations with representatives of the Greek minority, including contacts with organizations of associations of this minority, especially concerning legislation which is of special relevance to it.

4. It is important that the uncertainty manifest in the Greek community concerning the future Government policy in the field of education will come to an end as soon as possible. I therefore recommend to give priority to the legislation on the educational system which is now being prepared.

5. I suggest that the Government, while implementing its stated aim of non-discrimination, also makes it clear that any member of the minority who thinks that he or she is victim of discrimination has the right to initiate complaints in accordance with para. 40.5 of the Copenhagen Document.

6. I would recommend that the Government tries to speed up the process of restitution of, or compensation for, property of the churches which was confiscated during the communist regime.

7. Even though this is not a phenomenon restricted to one specific region, I have noticed that the increase of armed robberies and thefts has led to growing concerns in minority areas. I hope that the police will be able to intensify its efforts to protect the population against these crimes, while avoiding, also in its actions against persons who are suspected of illegally possessing arms, excessive or disproportionate use of force.

In making these recommendations, I have of course been aware that, since the communist regime collapsed in Albania, the Greek minority has regained a measure of freedom unknown for decades. Also I do realize that for the Government the problem of the minority is only one of the many pressing questions which it has to

face. However, I am also firmly convinced that rapid and mutually satisfactory solutions of number of acute minority questions would greatly enhance the chances of Albania to overcome the many other difficult problems it has to face. I would hope, therefore, that your Government will give positive consideration to my recommendations. New developments might however lead to additional suggestions on my part. I am therefore looking forward to a continuing dialogue with your Government.

Once again, I should like to thank you and your Government both for the hospitality you have shown to members of my delegation and myself, and for the help your Government has invariably provided to me on many occasions in my efforts to acquire a thorough knowledge of the various aspects of the minority problem.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

Max van der Stoep  
CSCE High Commissioner  
on National Minorities

---

**REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA**  
**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**THE MINISTER**

Tirana, September 17, 1993

Distinguished Excellency,

May I first express my gratitude to You and high consideration of the mission You undertook to Albania in connection with the situation of the Greek minority. According to my judgement, the significance of Your mission was linked not only with the fact that the treatment of the minority issue is delicate in general, especially in the countries which are in a period of transition on the road to the consolidation of democracy, but also first of all, with the actual moment when Albanian-Greek bilateral relations have sunk to a new low for reasons which are well understood.

Since the beginning of its activity for the country's democratic transformation, the Albanian democratic government attached special importance to minority problems, that is recognition, guarantee and observance of the rights of the minority members. Its fundamental policy in this regard relied on the basic concept that the development and consolidation of the pluralistic democracy the rule of law and respect for human

rights, constitute the best framework in the treatment of minority issues. The aim of our state is and remains respect for the freedoms and rights of the individual, the enhancement of the ethnical identity of minorities, including the Greek minority, which You also refer in Your objective report by saying that "since the fall of the communist regime in Albania, the Greek minority has regained a level of the freedom unknown for decades...".

In our activity as regards minorities, the prevailing feature is the full legal guarantee and ever better meeting of the rights of minority members, recognised in practice from the very start of the democratic process and this expressed in the activity to draw up and endorse a series of laws, as part and parcel of the implementation of the Charter of Human Rights. In this regard, we support and appraise Your recommendations on setting up a special Minority Office in order to speed up the process of returning church property, to look after problems of the safety of the representatives.

**Mr. Van der STOEL**  
**CSCE High Commissioner on**  
**National Minorities, The Hague**

**THE NETHERLANDS**

---

As well as this, considering Your recommendation on educational rights as a just one, I deem it a pleasure to let You know that by decision of the Albanian government, this school year, the Greek minority has been provided with all conditions to attend higher schooling in its mother tongue. The Higher school in Greek language is now functioning in Gjirokaster.

It is understandable that there are also problems, which You point out and as You refer, will take some time to be solved completely because of the difficult economic situation. Disagreements concerning them, have to do with the failure on the part of the Greek minority members to understand our difficult situation which has a bearing on their fulfilment as well as with some interference from outside, which do not help the process of their fulfilment, instead they are source of provocation. I would like to assure You that in their policy towards minorities in the future, too, the Albanian authorities will rely on the most advanced international standards in order to make Albania a model in the treatment of Ethnic problems.

Please, Excellency, accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

[signature]  
Alfred SERREQUI