



# Survey

## Albanian-Greek Relations

### Albanian Public Opinion towards Greece and Greeks

Tirana, 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 2024

#### Introduction

The survey on Albanian public opinion towards Greeks, Greece, and Albanian Greek relations was carried out by the *Albanian Center for Good Governance*. It was supported by *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*. The research was conducted from November 1–7, 2024 and covered the entire country. Planned to include a sample of 915 participants, it was completed with 905 individuals who expressed their readiness to answer the questions.

The primary goal was to obtain a comprehensive and inclusive sample by randomly selecting citizens encountered in the streets or at their homes. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, with open and free dialogue between the interviewers and the respondents.

The survey took place in a calm climate, as one of the focal points in the public debate on bilateral relations, the *Beleri issue*, had been resolved.

Findings of the survey highlight the following issues:

#### 1. Assessment of Bilateral Relations between Albania and Greece

The bilateral relations between Albania and Greece appear stable and positive. According to most respondents, the current relationship between the two neighboring countries is considered good or very good (45%), while a significant portion (41%) views them as normal. Only an exceedingly small minority, around 13%, believe these relations are not good.

According to most respondents (77%), maintaining good relations with Greece is considered especially important. Conversely, only a small fraction (9%) does not consider maintaining good relations with Greece to be significant.

Despite occasional challenges in bilateral relations, such as the debate surrounding the "Beleri case," it is observed that relations between the two countries remain stable. The indicators also suggest a positive outlook regarding the future of these relations.

## **2. The "Cham Issue" and its Impact on Albania's Relations with Greece**

Collecting citizens' views on the topic of Chameria, the Chams, and their property, as well as assessing the impact of this issue on Albania's bilateral relations with Greece provided intriguing insights. This subject has occasionally been a point of public and political debate in Albania and is also championed by a political party claiming to represent the interests of this group.

The majority of respondents (73%) indicated that they are aware of the Chams, and their property claims in Greece, while 20% stated they are not informed or familiar with this issue. A small percentage refrained from responding either positively or negatively.

A sizable portion (53%) of those surveyed view this issue as an obstacle to improving relations between the two countries. This perception is particularly evident among respondents over the age of 50.

## **3. The "Northern Epirus" Issue**

In contrast to the awareness and sensitivity surrounding the Cham issue and their property rights in Greece, the topic of "Northern Epirus," does not hold the same level of recognition. Public opinion on this matter is split, with 50% stating they are aware of the "Northern Epirus" issue and 50% indicating they have no knowledge of it.

Albanian public sees the "Northern Epirus" as a territorial claim by Greece and a nationalistic rhetoric advocating the annexation of southern Albania into current Greek territory. This topic has often been a point of contention in the relationship between the two countries. The former Greek political party *Golden Dawn* heavily propagated nationalist rhetoric around "Northern Epirus."

On the other hand, Albanians have not placed significant importance on this issue, viewing it as a relic of nationalism that occasionally resurfaces in parts of the Balkans and Greece.

In conclusion, the Cham and Northern Epirus issues have garnered almost equal attention in the wider Albanian public opinion, though slightly more focus and awareness are directed toward the Cham issue.

## **4. The "Beleri Case"**

At the time this survey was conducted, discussions and debates regarding Fredi Beleri, the former elected mayor of Himara, had subsided. Beleri had recently assumed his new mandate as a Member of the European Parliament, and shortly before the survey began, he was officially in Tirana with a group of MEPs. Prime Minister Edi Rama declined to meet him, although they exchanged remarks indirectly through the media. Some extremists threw eggs and flour at Beleri as he exited one of the official meetings.

Survey data reveal that the judicial saga surrounding Beleri left a mark on public memory. Over 50% of respondents indicated they were aware of the “Beleri case,” with varying levels of detail—some were very informed, while others were less so. Many people had followed the developments that began on May 12, 2023, the day of his arrest on charges of vote-buying in Himara.

Despite the political debates and rhetoric surrounding the case, Albanians do not perceive the “Beleri case” as a significant issue in Albanian Greek relations. Instead, they increasingly regard it as an isolated political incident, unrelated to the overall relationship with the Greek minority in Albania. A majority (52%) of respondents believe that, beyond this case, there are “more important issues” pertaining to the relations between the two countries. Only 17% consider this case “the most important issue” in bilateral relations, while about 30% view it as “an unimportant issue.”

Another crucial point is media coverage of the Beleri case. A clear majority of respondents stated that the case had been extensively covered or reported on by Albanian media, with 45% saying it was covered “a lot” and 16% saying “little.”

For over a year, the Beleri case, aside from debates on minority rights in Albania, was one of the most contentious political topics between the right-wing opposition and the left-wing majority. The government was accused of using double standards in handling the case and of harboring diplomatic motives to provoke tensions with Greece. Prime Minister Rama, known for his “brotherly” relations with Turkey, has often been accused of aligning justice institutions' actions in the Beleri case with Turkey’s influence, which was perceived as a subtle diplomatic gesture towards Ankara.

## **5. Assessment of the Justice System**

Since 2016, Albania has been striving to build a new justice system, utilizing the “vetting” mechanism of judges and prosecutors, aiming for greater effectiveness in delivering justice and combating organized crime and corruption. The handling of the Beleri case can also be viewed from the perspective of this transitional phase of the judiciary.

However, when asked about the independence and impartiality of the justice system without mentioning specific cases, the responses from Albanians still reflect significant skepticism and a lack of trust in the system. Over 41% believe that “justice is neither independent nor impartial,” while only 22% believe it is “both independent and impartial.” The high percentage of responses in the “maybe” category indicates that a large portion of the population is still waiting for concrete actions from the justice system.

Judiciary reform seems to have not always been beneficial to citizens, particularly for those living in rural areas. The government has used legal mechanisms to extend its influence over the administration of justice. For instance, all Albanian citizens are now required to seek justice at the second level (Appellate Court) only in one location—the Court of Appeals in Tirana. In this court, bureaucracy, delays in handling cases, and corruption have increased.

The government rejected proposals from lawyers and experts to provide services by the Appeals Court at the regional level instead of placing it in Tirana. This issue warrants further research to assess how much the new justice system has truly benefited Albanians and whether it continues to remain under political control.

## **6. Additional Evaluations on Albanian Greek Relations**

### **a) The Contribution of Albanian Migrants to Greece's Economy**

Since 1991, thousands of Albanians have migrated to Greece, staying there for short, medium, and long-term periods. Albanian migration waves have affected almost the entire territory of Greece, with men and women of various ages working in all professions and types of jobs.

When asked about the contribution of Albanian migrants to Greece's economic development, 96% of respondents agreed that "Albanian migrants have contributed to the development of Greece's economy." This consensus remains consistent across all the cities where the survey was conducted.

### **b) The Position of the Greek Minority in Albania**

When asked whether they agree that the Albanian government respects the rights of the Greek minority in Albania, the majority of citizens expressed approval. According to 79% of respondents, "the Albanian government respects the rights of the Greek minority in Albania." However, in areas with a slightly higher concentration of Greek minority members, such as in Dervician, Himara, Përmet, and Korça, this percentage is somehow lower. This suggests that, at the local level, there are still demands for better treatment of the Greek minority.

According to the majority of Albanians (78%), the Greek minority in Albania is "not a threat." A small minority, particularly in regions bordering with Greece, is more skeptical. However, overall, the Greek minority in Albania is not viewed as a threat.

### **c) Greece's Assistance to Albania**

An interesting section of the survey focused on evaluating the help that Greece has provided to Albania over the past 20 years. The emergency assistance that Greece offered Albania between 1991 and 2001 was largely related to the opening of its borders to Albanian migrants, allowing them to work and send remittances back to Albania. The economic conditions in Albania have gradually improved since 2000, particularly in 2008 when Greece entered an economic crisis. Small Albanian entrepreneurs left Greece and returned to Albania.

Nevertheless, the economic relations between the two countries have been shaped by the role of Albanian migrants.

In a general assessment of Greece's assistance to Albania over the past 20 years (which includes the accommodation and hospitality of migrants as well as other forms of state aid), most citizens (68%) agree that Greece has helped Albania, while 31% disagree with this statement.

#### **d) Greece's Support to Albania's EU Membership**

The survey reveals an interesting insight into how Albanians perceive the Greek stance on Albania's EU membership path. Despite the positive evaluation of Greece's assistance over the past 20 years, public opinion is evenly split when it comes to assessing whether Greeks want to see Albania join the EU or not.

49.94% of respondents agree with the statement that "Greeks do not want Albania to become a member of the EU," while 50.06% disagree, believing that Greeks are not opposed to Albania's EU membership. This divide in perception clearly indicates a lack of trust, which may need to be addressed through a more initiative-taking approach by Greece in engaging with the media in Albania to better inform the public about Greece's support for Albania's EU integration aspirations.

Statements made by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis during the Beleri case may have left an impression on ordinary Albanians, many of whom expressed skepticism. The mention of the "veto" to Albania's EU membership bid might be one of the factors influencing this perception.

#### **e) Integration of Children of Albanian Migrants into the Greek Society**

One of the issues addressed in the survey was the integration of children born to Albanian immigrants in Greece into Greek society. Since 1991, thousands of children have been born and raised in Greece as children of Albanian migrants, leading to the natural question of how well they have integrated into the society of their host country.

86% of respondents agreed with the statement that "children of immigrants have fully integrated into Greek society." This evaluation appears to be stable, as about 80% of respondents indicated that they have "a relative or acquaintance in Greece." This suggests that the opinion is based on personal knowledge and confirmed information.

### **7. Economic Relations between the Two Countries**

As two neighboring countries, Albania and Greece have developed stable economic relations since 1992. In this survey, Albanians were asked to evaluate which country they see as the "greater beneficiary," and which is perceived as the "least beneficiary" in these relations. The data reveals that the majority of citizens (45%) believe that both countries have benefited "equally" from their economic relations. However, a significant portion (36%) believes that Greece has benefited more. Only a very small percentage, around 2%, think that "only Albania" has benefited from the economic ties.

Further, the data highlights that Greece has benefited more from the economic ties between the two countries since 1991. 51% of respondents believe that Greece has benefited more, compared to 11% who think Albania has gained more. However, 35% of respondents think that both countries have benefited equally.

### **8. Personal Attitudes towards Greeks in Greece**

This section of the survey aimed at collecting a general opinion on respondents' perception toward Greeks. In cities bordering Greece such as Korça and Saranda, there is a noticeable percentage

(18%) of negative attitudes toward Greeks. The majority of respondents, 46%, have a positive view of Greeks, while 40% hold a neutral stance ("neither positive nor negative"). This neutrality is evident in most cities, but it is notable that the younger age group (18-25 years) exhibits more skepticism toward Greeks.

## **9. Relations with the Greek Minority in Albania**

Around 80% of respondents have expressed that Albanians have "very good" or "good" relations with the Greek minority in Albania. Only 1.2% of respondents rated the relations as "bad." Even in areas with a higher concentration of the Greek minority, such as Dervician, Himara, Saranda, etc., the assessment of relations between Albanians and the Greek minority is very positive. This perception serves as an exemplary indicator of the general climate in which the Greek minority lives and operates in Albania.

It is also worth noting that most respondents, around 75%, do not have any ethnic ties to the Greek community.

## **10. Ties with Albanian Migrants in Greece**

During this research, the focus was also on how many respondents family, friendly, or social ties have with Albanian migrants living in Greece. A large majority (80%) of respondents indicated that they have connections to people who are Albanian migrants in Greece. While the exact nature of these relationships was not specified, most of them considered these individuals as close family members or close friends. Therefore, 80% of the respondents had sufficient knowledge about Greece and their connections to the country through the stories and relationships with their emigrant relatives and friends.

## **11. Negative and Positive Perceptions of Greeks and Greece**

The survey generated interesting data on the negative, positive, true, and false perceptions held by Albanians regarding Greeks and Greece. The questionnaire included several stereotypes ingrained in everyday discourse, as well as those passed on by the media and public opinion, related to the climate of Albanian Greek relations.

**A) *Is it true that Albanians and Greeks have never fought against each other?*** This was a question asked to citizens in the survey. Over 56% of them said it was not true, implying that Albanians and Greeks have fought against each other. On the other hand, 43% of respondents agreed that it was true that Albanians and Greeks had never fought against each other.

**B) *Do you think the Greek government genuinely supports Albania's integration into the EU?*** When asked this, 38% of respondents said it was true, while a majority of 61% stated that this was not true and believed that the Greek government was not genuinely supporting Albania's EU integration.

## **12. Political Orientation**

One of the questions in the survey focused on the political ideologies supported by the respondents. While the general population in Albania may not have a clear distinction between political

ideologies, the responses were still interesting. As seen in the graphic, the two main pillars that respondents gravitate towards are the "Left" (28%) and the "Right" (24%), with their alignment with center-left or center-right concepts still being relatively new. What stands out is the high percentage (37%) of respondents who do not identify with either political side. This also reflects a trend seen in electoral participation, where a large majority either do not vote or, if they do, vote based on existing issues rather than ideological position.

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