

The Albanian emigration between Greece and Italy

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During the years of the communist regime, Albania had experienced a demographic dynamics typical for a country that started the transitional process later (Dumani, 2000), with a fast passage to a level of low mortality and low fertility, even if this last one still remains high compared to the level in the other countries of the Balkan region (2,3 childrens per woman in 2001). In this period, the natural dynamics has been the only carrying factor of the demographic evolution, because of a politics of substantial closing of the national frontiers. So migration movements had no impact on population dynamics. On the contrary, the demographic evolution in the nineties and, in specific, the decrease of the population growth rate, is mostly the result of the important emigration that the country has experienced in this period.

The important political, economic and social changes that have occurred in Albania in the early 1990s have been accompanied by large-scale movement of transformation. The political transition from a dictatorial regime to a democratic system was accompanied by an economic transition from a centralized economy to a market economy and by many other changes. The unstable political situation and the complicated economic conditions during the 1990s, led to a number of social consequences that were reflected in almost all aspects of life in Albania, and were accompanied by intense geographic mobility (in the forms of internal and external migration) and by "the wild " urbanization .

In a country like Albania, where an autarchic regime controlled every aspect of daily living, from the social to the economical field, including population movements (internal and international), these changes have generated a period of great depression, high unemployment and the collapse of the health system. All that, accompanied by a feeling of distrust and extreme anxiety regarding the national scene, contributed to the massive emigration of population.

This exodus has mainly interested the young population, producing very important structural changes. According to the evaluations of some researchers (Gjonca, 2000; Dumani, 2000), between 1990 and 1998, approximately 15% of the total population emigrated, 25% of the population in active age, 35% of the labor force, 43% of the employed population.

The destination of these streams has been strongly determined from the geographic and the cultural proximity, in a disorganized process of escape towards "the neighboring" countries like Greece and Italy. The access to the two countries happened by land,

through the border of northern Greece and, by sea, through the 90 km of Adriatic Sea, for Italy. In both cases, the common characteristics of this immigration are the great rapidity and the spatial distribution on these national territories.

Economic geography of Greece seems to be the carrying factor of the distribution of the Albanians, which would seem to be distributed along the axis of Greek economic dynamism. Even in Italy, Albanian immigration would mostly seem to be of "political and economical nature" and would reflect, in meaningful way, the Albanian crisis of last decades.

Frequently, the presence of the Albanian population in the destination countries is illegal and, consequently, it escapes to every statistics. Even in Albania, the substantial lack of controls on migratory flows that often happened in clandestine way (with the famous "scafi" towards Italy and by foot on the mountains towards Greece) cause the fact that the evaluations concerning the population movements are insufficient. Moreover, in many cases, the phenomenon takes the form of seasonal movements, above all in the case of the emigration in Greece. For such reasons, concerning the two most important countries of destination of these streams, we can observe a substantial lack of reliable data for the study of the dimensions and the characteristics of Albanian immigration. This is true, at least, until 2001 for Greece and until the second half of the 1990s for Italy (Bonifazi, 2001, 2003).

Being aware of all these limits, we will try to analyze the phenomenon of Albanian immigration in Italy and in Greece trying to outline convergences and divergences of the distribution models of Albanian immigrants in these two countries. Moving from an analysis of the Albanian demographic situation during the last fifty years, and of the impact of migration movements on the structural changes of the Albanian population, the attention will be concentrated on the main motivations of these movements. We could say, in fact, that the migrations of early 1990s have been mostly motivated from factors of attraction of the destination countries, and instead, the migrations during the economic crisis in 1997, from push factors of the country of origin. Finally, supported by the analyses carried out, we will try to reach to one synthesis between the models of the Albanian emigration in Italy and Greece, on the base of common denominators and specific factors to every one of the two reality of reference.

The data used are mainly from the official statistics sources of the three countries of study (Albania, Greece and Italy), accompanied by data from international organizations which have been differently interested in the study of Albanian migratory phenomenon, returned overbearing to the center of the public attention in 1990s.