



International Boundary Study

No. 113 - August 18, 1971

Albania – Greece Boundary

(Country Codes: AL-GR)

**The Geographer
Office of the Geographer
Bureau of Intelligence and Research**

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ALBANIA – GREECE BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Albania–Greece boundary, about 175 miles in length, is demarcated by boundary pillars. The entire boundary is comprised of about 17 miles on water and 158 miles on land. Beginning in Lake Prespa at the tripoint with Yugoslavia, the boundary trends southwestward primarily along the crest of mountains until it reaches the Corfu Strait (Stenon Kerkiras) opposite the city of Kerkira (Corfu) on Nisos Kerkira (Corfu Island).

II. GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

The Albania–Greece boundary area, like the rugged and irregular topography characteristic of Alpine mountains, reflects the highly complex political geography that is a distinction of the Balkan Peninsula. The very word "Balkanize" has come to designate the cutting up of an area into a jumble of political entities.

In ancient times the boundary area was inhabited by Illyrians, who are believed to be the precursors of the Albanians. The Hellenes, later, occupied much of the Aegean Peninsula to the south, especially the maritime locations. In the first century of the Christian era, the boundary area was a part of the Roman Empire, and prospered due to the proximity of the highly developed land route known as the Via Egnatia (along the Skumbi River Valley) between Rome and Byzantium. This historic route from Rome along the Appian Way to Brindisi across the narrows of the Adriatic (Strait of Otranto) was a key strategic and commercial link for many centuries.

For about a thousand years, until the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in the fourteenth century, the boundary area was enmeshed in a power struggle by local Slavic, Bulgar, Albanian, and other ethnic groupings in competition with imperial Byzantine authority headquartered at Constantinople. Sheltered in their mountain fastness, the Albanians have preserved to a remarkable degree their identity and language, despite successive invasions of Celts, Romans, Goths, Slavs, Bulgars, and Turks.

A. Ottoman Times

During the successive centuries from the late fourteenth to 1913, the Albanian area was ruled in varying degree by Ottoman Turkey. At the time of the Turkish conquests, the Skumbi River running from east to west marked a historic division between north and south, separating the Latin Catholic Northern Albanians known as Ghegs and Orthodox southerners called Tosks. The same distinction also was reflected earlier in the division between areas of Roman (Latin) and Byzantine (Greek) influence.

Under Ottoman rule the Albanian area was not governed directly; rather, Turkish supremacy was maintained by a traditional policy of "divide and rule," and of

encouragement of rivalry among petty military chiefs. Although Muslim Albanians were privileged, their identity was based on creed; Albanian nationality was not recognized as such. In 1865, in order to stem rebellions and to prevent feudal chiefs from challenging the Sultan's authority, the area was divided into the Vilayets (or Provinces) of Scutari, Monastir, Yanina, and Kosovo, each with its own Vali, or governor, and garrison. This broad area of the four Vilayets, which also included many Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, and other Balkan ethnic groups, was later to become part of the territorial claims of the Albanian nationalists. It also comprised lands which the Balkan countries and the Great Powers fought over in the Balkan Wars and World War I.

B. Rising Nationalism

Agitation for liberation erupted in the Balkans early in the 19th century. The Greek War of Independence which began in 1821 ended with the formal recognition by the Ottoman Sultan of the independence of Greece in the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. Albanians gave significant support to the Greek struggle. Great-Power intervention was also important to Greek success. The London Convention of May 7, 1832, confirmed an independent Kingdom of Greece (under the protection of Great Britain, France, and Russia) and delimited its boundaries to include the entire Peloponnesus and a northern boundary extending from the Gulf of Volos on the Aegean Sea westward to the Gulf of Ambracia (Amvrakikos).

The Albania–Greece boundary area assumed importance as part of Greek claims for Epirus in the Congress of Berlin in 1878 at the close of the Russo–Turkish War. Great-Power interests, especially Great Britain's fear of growing Russian influence in the Balkans, outweighed the demands of the Greek, Albanian, Serbian, and other nationalists. Greece received only a promise for improvement of its boundaries; in 1881 Greece acquired most of Thessaly and a part of Epirus, thereby extending its boundary in the northwest to the Arachtos (Arakhtos) river.

C. The Balkan Wars and World War I

Political and territorial changes quickened in the years preceding World War I. Within Turkey there was increasing demand for government reforms, much of which had been suppressed since the Sultan's foil of the "Midhat Pasha" Constitution of 1876.

In July 1908 the Young Turk Revolt, whose leadership centered in Thessaloniki (Saloniki), occurred. Albanians and Greeks, like other peoples (Millet) throughout the vast Ottoman empire, were first elated at the promise of the Young Turk Movement, which was actively supported by Albanians. Later, non-Turks became disillusioned.

On October 5, 1908, Bulgaria proclaimed independence. On October 7th, Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina and immediately the intensity of Balkan intrigue and Great-Power competition heightened. During the summer of 1912, secret treaties among the Balkan Allies committed them to drive Turkey out of the Balkans. These arrangements

were made while Turkey was at war (1911–1912) with Italy (then a member of the Triple Alliance). The entire Albanian area was included in the territory which the Balkan Allies expected to conquer from Turkey. On October 8, 1912, Montenegro attacked the Vilayet of Scutari. The Montenegrin forces subsequently joined the Serbian army and reached the Adriatic coast occupying Alessio (Lesh) and Durazzo (Durrës) on November 30. From the south, the Greek Army overran Thessaly and Epirus and captured Janina. A Greek fleet was bombarding Valona on December 3, the day armistice was concluded at the dictation of the Great Powers. Shortly after peace negotiations convened on December 16, Austria, rather than allow Albania to be partitioned between the Slav states in the north and Greece on the south, thereby giving Serbia an outlet on the Adriatic, induced the Great Powers to recognize the principle of an autonomous Albania.

D. The Present Boundary

Under the Treaty of London, May 30, 1913, ending the First Balkan War, the settlement of the status of the new Albania and the delineation of its boundaries were reserved for future decisions of the Great Powers, who were faced with unraveling the competing claims of the victorious Greeks, Serbs, and Montenegrins from that of the national rights of the Albanian people. Agreement, in principle, on the Albanian frontiers was reached by the Conference of Ambassadors in London during the summer of 1913. The South Albanian Frontier Commission completed its work on the Albania–Greece boundary in December 1913. A definitive settlement and final fixing of the boundary on the ground was delayed by World War I.

The Conference of Ambassadors on November 9, 1921, under the jurisdiction of the Paris Peace Conference, confirmed, with certain modifications, the boundary as determined by the Conference of Ambassadors in London in 1913. An International Boundary Commission composed of France, Great Britain, and Italy commenced demarcation in 1922, completing its work in 1925. The final instrument (l'Act final) of demarcation was signed by Great Britain, France, Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia at Paris on July 30, 1926.

III. ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

The following is a translation of the official French text of the present boundary (based on the 1913 London accord) as described by the International Boundary Commission in 1925, Commission internationale de delimitation des frontieres de l' Albanie, and accepted by Greece and Albania.

From the common point of the three states, Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia, located southwest of Veliki Grad Island in Lake Prespa, the boundary runs, following the meridian, toward the summit called Vissaronivie, point 1214, on the south shore of the lake.

From there, in a generally southwesterly direction, it follows the line of the watershed between Lake Prespa on the west and the Doskohagla ravine on the east, passing by points 1344 and 1434.

Thence, it shifts direction to the southeast, following the watershed between the above-mentioned ravine on the Greek side and the basin where the village of Tseria is located on the Albanian side, passing by points 1152, 1155, and 1139.

At point 1139, it crosses the road between Zvesda, in Albanian territory, and Reumbi, in Greek territory. It then follows the watershed between the depressions where Horovo and Grajdani, two villages that remain in Greece, are located, and the depressions where Tseria and Rakitska, two villages that remain in Albania, are located; it reaches the Vroatseria crest, passing by points 1409 and 1312, then by the Golina summit, point 1403, and continues past the two 1321 points at Tepane.

Thence, the boundary crosses the small Prespa Lake in a straight line and runs to a summit of Tserova (1378), thus leaving the village of Trnovo in Greece and the villages of Souets and Zagradets in Albania.

From the Tserova summit, the boundary continues in a straight line in a southeasterly direction to the northern summit of Kosik (point 1549); thence, running obliquely south, it reaches, in a straight line, the southern summit point 1535.

Thence, the boundary line, passing by points 1249 and 1212, runs toward Pletsovits (point 1344), crossing the Florina–Bihlichta road at point 1049 and leaving the villages of Vambeli and Smerdeche in Greece and the villages of Vrnik and Kapechtitsa in Albania.

From Pletsovits, the boundary continues in a generally southerly direction to the confluence of the ravines of Labanitsa and Kostenets, passing by points 1277, 1129 (Grenta), 954, and 852, thus leaving the villages of Labanitsa and Kostenets in Greece.

From this confluence, the boundary line shifts to a generally southwesterly direction, following the thalweg of the ravine of Kostenetz to its confluence with the Vistritsa (point 781), leaving in Greece the village of Krechista and in Albania the villages of Trestenik and Korila.

From the aforementioned confluence, the boundary climbs in the same generally southwesterly direction to the Krostava ridge, intersecting points 903 and 992. Thence, it runs in a straight line to the summit of Tchiouka (point 1108) and from there, following the watershed between the Devoli on the Albanian side and the Vistritsa on the Greek side, it runs to point 1085, then point 1274.

Then it again runs in a straight line, reaching Chinkova (point 1422) and leaving the villages of Novosselo, Chak, Revani, Kalevichta, and Yanoveni in Greece and the villages of Bratchani, Pontchara, and Vidova in Albania.

From Ghinkova, the boundary runs obliquely westward and merges with the watershed between the Belitsa on the Greek side and the Devoli on the Albanian side, passing by points 1364 (Kodra e'Bidos), 1459 (Proi i Hasanit), and 1467 (Vratsa), leaving the villages of Pilkati and Slimnitsa in Greece and the village of Kiouteza in Albania.

From Vratsa, the boundary line straightens, in a southerly direction, without leaving the Devoli–Belitsa watershed, and it reaches, via Tchafa e'Fouches (point 1469), the summit of Badaroche (point 2036).

From Badaroche, the boundary continues to follow the line of the ridge of the Gramos range in a generally southerly direction, passing successively by points 2217 (Goubbel), 2519 (Mt. Tchioukapetsit), 1977, 2167 (Mt. Sarpoun), 2144; by Tchafa e'Badres (point 1772); then by points 1909 (Mt. Guiontchit), 1934 (Golo), 2041 (Mt. Kammenik), 1474 (Vari Lople), 1634 (Mt. Vaches), 1047; then it drops rapidly, passing by points 712 and 644, to the Sarandaporos thalweg, at point 430. The villages of Gramosta, Kionat (Koniades), Izvor, and Kosarska remain in Greece and the villages of Ranova, Guiontchit, Arza, Radati, and Koukesi in Albania.

From point 430, the boundary follows the Sarandaporos thalweg to its confluence with the Voyoussa thalweg, intersecting the Perati Bridge and leaving in Greek territory the villages of Derveni, Pirovitska, and Melissopetra and the villages of Sarandaporos and Perati in Albanian territory.

From the Sarandaporos–Voyoussa confluence, the boundary line continues in a generally westerly direction to point 1407 (Groppes), leaving the village of Dipalitsa in Greece and the village of Messarea in Albania.

From Groppes, the boundary passes, in a generally westerly direction, by the summits of Kourouna (point 1846) and Toumba (point 1956), crossing the Nemerchka range (point 2196), and reaching point 874 at Megavortop, leaving the village of Drimades in Greece and the village of Sopiki in Albania.

From point 874, it runs southward to Makrikambos (point 1671), following first the Damaskinia ridge, then the Bosovo ridge.

From the Makrikambos, the boundary runs obliquely again westward reaching, via Mt. Ailias and Plaka, point 1487 at Bourato. Then, straightening, it runs in a southerly direction, passing by points 1118, 549, and 406 and crossing the Valley of the Drinos to point 301.

It crosses the Santi Quaranta–Han Kalpaki road at point 339, leaving the villages of Ksirovalto, Bosanico, Gaidohori, Krisodali, Mavropoulo, and Zavroho in Greek territory and those of Glina, Episkopi, Radati, and Kakavia in Albanian territory.

Continuing still in a generally southerly direction, the boundary passes by points 544, 306, 801, 718, 500, and 619, then climbs to the Mourgana summits (points 1806 and 1804), leaving the villages of Arinista, Valtista, and Kastaniani in Greece, and the villages of Ai Nicolas, Katouna, and Kochovitsa in Albania.

From the Mourgana, the boundary shifts to a northwesterly direction following the ridge of the Mourgana–Stougara range, arriving at point 1756.

Thence it takes a generally southwesterly direction, passing by points 1659, 1512 (Vertop), 588, crossing the Pavla valley, and arriving at points 470, 708 (Gelil), 650, 174, 614, and 960 on Mt. Poulia.

In this last segment, the boundary leaves the villages of Tchamandas, Ledizda, Povla, Achouria, and Palamba in Greece and the villages of Leskovetch, Zimnetsi, Perdikari, and Yaniari in Albania.

From point 960 on Mt. Poulia, the boundary line continues in a generally northwesterly direction to point 1050 on Mt. Chenndeli; after which it runs obliquely southward, reaching points 831 and 837 on Mt. Tourli. Then, in a generally northwesterly direction, it reaches Phtelia Bay, intersecting points 666, 854 (Mt. Ligoyani), 135, 171 (Brigues), 161, 387 (Orla), 257 (Tchenqueli), 184 (Thier), 86 (Kallihora), and 8. It thus leaves the villages of Kotska, Liopesi, and Sayada in Greece and the villages of Verva, Konispoli, Mourssi, Zara, and Vrina in Albania.

In the sea segment in Phtelia Bay, the boundary follows a line perpendicular to the general direction of the coast up to the limits of the territorial waters, leaving the small island of Tongo in Albania.

Florence, January 27, 1925

(signed) Medhi Frasheri

(Signed) Lieut. Col. Cr. Avramides

Delegate of the Government of
Albania

Delegate of the Government of
Greece

IV. SUMMARY

The Albania–Greece boundary, 175 miles in length, is comprised of 158 miles on land and 17 miles on water. The entire boundary is demarcated by 178 numbered and intervisible boundary pillars and many other unnumbered markers. Although the boundary area has been a matter of contention for many years, the issues do not relate to the specific alignment of the boundary itself. The boundary should be shown on official maps as an established international boundary.

The boundary is a result of the Balkan Wars and World War I in which Great-Power diplomacy was intimately involved. A possibility of friction persists in the boundary area of southern Albania which Greece calls Northern Epirus. Ethnographic complexity is sharpened by the existence of a minority of Greeks living on the Albanian side as well as some Albanians living in Greece. It is expected, however, that the possibility for dispute over the boundary will remain dormant.

Location of the boundary pillars are shown on Sheets 11–17, 1:50,000 scale, of the International Boundary Commission, 1923–1924. A reasonably accurate representation of the boundary on a medium scale is found on Army Map Service 1:250,000, Series 1501, Sheets NK 34-11 and NJ 34-2; however, the boundary as drawn in the Corfu Channel has no validity. A small scale depiction of the boundary is found on Army Map Service 1:1,000,000 scale, Series 1301, Sheets NK-34 and NJ-34.

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This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by The Geographer, Office of the Geographer, Directorate for Functional Research, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

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