

# *Political instability and economic crisis have produced population losses in Albania*

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A quick look at the demographic dynamics throughout the history of the Albanian State

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## **Abstract**

*Since the early 1990s, Albania has entered the path of transition from a monist country of Stalinist socialism and a central planning economy to a country of liberal democracy and a free market economy. This journey has produced, in addition to economic and political freedoms for citizens and everything positive that comes from them, also negative phenomena for society. One of the most evident is the significant decline of the resident population in the country. As we will see in this paper, the population decline during the transition years has come as a result of the two most important contributing components to the country's demographic level: (i) external migration; and (ii) lowering the birth rate. While external migration is directly reflected in the decline of the country's resident population, the decline in fertility has an indirect impact because together with the death rate they shape the level of natural population growth. Both of these together, external migration and the level of natural population*

*growth, directly shape the demographic level of the country. This paper observes these two important indicators in a historical dynamic, starting from the 15th century, a time when we can find published information and statistics. In this time context, the paper analyzed the statistics collected in relation to these two demographic indicators, and found that there is a very clear link between the increase in external migration and the decrease in the Synthetic Fertility Index (ISF) with political and economic crises. which the Albanian society has faced during the period under observation. Every time a political instability has been presented, starting from the second half of the 15th century until today, so many times Albanians have left the country. Likewise, the difficult economic situation (i) between the years 1960-1990 of the last century, as a result of the central planning economy, and (ii) the difference between the high economic expectations of the citizens and the actual economic reality in the country along years of transition, have resulted in a steady decline in ISF.*

**Keywords:** *External Migration, Natural Population Growth, Synthetic Fertilization Index (ISF), Demographic Dynamics, Population and Housing Census.*

## **1. Introduction**

One of the biggest concerns of the Albanian society at the end of the third decade of transition is the decrease of the population level in the country. The issue has received much political debate, but has been dealt with very little at the scientific level. This has been the reason that has led us to analyze this phenomenon, hoping to understand more about it, and especially about its causes.

In order to have a more complete and broader perspective and understanding of this very serious social phenomenon, we have not limited ourselves to analyzing it only in the years of transition. On the contrary, this paper has aimed to extend wider in time, since the formation of the Albanian State on November 28, 1912. The paper brings previous statistics, especially regarding the external migration of Albanians of that period, to expand further more the spectrum of information studied.

This paper presents one of the most important elements of a state, such as demography, in its dynamics throughout the history of the existence of the Albanian State. It starts with the demographic dynamics of the period before the Second World War, focusing generally on the massive waves of emigration and the level of the country's population, according to censuses conducted by the occupying armies or the Albanian State itself. Further, it continues with the period

of the communist regime, where it focuses on the demographic level of the country in relation to the governing policies in the service of natural population growth and the dynamics of the Synthetic Fertility Index. This part of the paper also addresses the almost non-existent level of external migration, as a result of state coercion. The paper continues with a description of the demographic dynamics of the transition period, focusing on two main aspects: mass external migration and declining below the ISF population replacement threshold. The paper closes with the presentation of the conclusions reached and its modest recommendations.

This paper has minimalist aspirations, and aims to find some simple truths. He does not intend to 'shock' Albanian society through his findings. Its main purpose is to open a new door for the study of issues related to the relationship between demography and territory, as a field of study in the science of urban planning (planned spatial / territorial and urban developments).

Its greatest public and scientific value is to become part of a wider analysis, which is related to the 'Demographic-territorial model of the country'. To understand how the demographics are distributed throughout the country, we must first understand what happened to the population dynamics of the country, because it is this remaining population that then shapes the demographic-territorial model of the country. Moreover, researchers in the demographic sciences have found a very strong link between external migration and internal migration (Vullnetari, 2012), which is one of the shaping components of the country's demographic-territorial model.

Demographics and territory, as well as the relationship between them, are the 'raw materials' for the development of the fundamental issues of a society and a state. They affect all economic, socio-political models and lifestyle of a nation. Fuga in 2012 would consider demographics and territory as the two greatest treasures of a society, from which all others are formed (Fuga, 2012: 9).

## **2. Waves of external migration before World War II**

Demographic data on the number of resident population for periods earlier than the time of the creation of the Albanian state, November 28, 1912, are missing or scarce (Misja and Misja, 2004). The two main pillars of population dynamics, natural growth and migration, have not been measured, or even if they have been measured their findings have not come to the present day (INSTAT, 2004). Data on natural population growth are not available, while data on external emigration can be found in limited quantity and quality since the second half of the 15th century, when the national hero Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu died (Vullnetari, 2007: 9; King dhe Vullnetari, 2003).

After the death of Skanderbeg and the fall of Kruja to the Ottoman Empire, many Catholics, including the family of George Kastriot and his warriors who had resisted the Ottoman occupation, fled the country mainly to Italy but also to Greece and the Dalmatian coast (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003). This migration was considered a 'religious migration', as Catholic Albanians left as a result of the Muslim occupation of the Ottoman Empire (Vullnetari, 2007: 9; King dhe Vullnetari, 20003). Referring to the Vullnetari "It is estimated that about 200,000 Albanians left their homes during the period 1468-1506" (Vullnetari, 2007: 9). According to her, this figure made up about a quarter of the population, and therefore can be considered an exodus of biblical proportions. This ratio is similar to that of today's Albanian emigrants abroad until 2004 (Vullnetari, 2007)

After the Ottoman occupation, the lands inhabited by Albanians would be included in the territories under the control of the Ottoman Empire for about 500 years. From this period comes the Albanian word 'kurbet' which King dhe Vullnetari in 2003 would consider as a slight change of the Turkish word 'gurbet' which carries the same meaning, and refers to a trip around the world, to foreign lands, generally to work (King dhe Vullneti, 2003: 18). King dhe Vullnetari in 2003 would present that "The biggest waves of Albanian migration have occurred around the most important historical and political events of the country" (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003: 21).

In the period of the occupation of Albania by the Ottoman Empire, during the 15th-17th centuries there was a mass emigration of Albanians and referred to Vullnetari in 2007, Italy and Greece were the places where Albanians of this period migrated and established their settlements, in the years 1444, 1464, 1468 (Vullnetari, 2007: 14). If we refer to INSTAT in 2004 "In the 15th-17th centuries as a result of the occupation of Albania by the Turkish [Ottoman Empire], there was a mass emigration of Albanians across the coast, to Italy" (INSTAT, 2004: 9).

In Italy they joined several small Albanian communities that had previously settled in those territories and were originalized by fighters who had gone to Italy to "Fight for the House of Aragon, three or four decades ago" (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003: 21). This historically important Albanian diaspora would be isolated in Southern Italy and Sicily, would be called 'Arbëresh' and would create 49 towns and villages in these territories (King and Vullnetari, 2003; Vullnetari, 2007). They would preserve their language and traditions for five centuries, to the present day, while it is thought that this emigration would end in the first half of the 18th century. Many Albanians of this generation, along with other Italians would leave in the early 20th century for the United States (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003).

Another important wave of external migration for Albanians was introduced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Wars (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003; Vullnetari, 2007). The influx of Serbs in those Albanian lands, which today is called Kosovo, was one of the most important reasons for the departure of Albanians from their lands. This period represents a mass exodus of Albanians beginning in Turkey, Runami and Egypt, later in Greece, Bulgaria and Russia and finally in France, America and Australia (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003: 21). According to the Vullnetari, the end of the 19th century opened a new space for the migration of Albanians, which was Turkey where in 1928 there were 250-300 thousand Albanians, of which 60 thousand in Istanbul alone (Vullnetari, 2007: 15).

But even later, during the first half of the 20th century, this phenomenon returned to the lives of Albanians, and was expressed in three waves of international emigration (INSTAT 2004: 9; Vullnetari, 2007: 8-20).

The first wave extends through the years 1912 and 1923, which belong to the time after the declaration of Independence of the country. The decline of the agricultural economy, which was the main economy of the country due to the First World War and the lack of industry or other productive economies, caused 21 thousand Albanian families to leave their homeland (INSTAT, 2004: 9).

The second wave extends during the years 1923-1939, and comes as a result of the economic backwardness and political uncertainty of this time space. In this period, 110 thousand Albanians left Albania (INSTAT, 2004). To be underlined is the fact that in the 1920s the migration of Albanians changed form, from an individual migration for employment, as it was in the first wave, to the model of family departure. After returning from the 'kurbet' many migrants left again taking their families with them, and sometimes the whole village. The increased migration of this period went especially to the United States, where in 1981 there were about 70 thousand Albanians who had migrated in this period (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003: 21).

Whereas, the third wave belongs to the years 1939-1945, which forced 19 thousand people to leave the homeland, most of whom were opponents of the communist authorities who were coming and stabilizing in power (INSTAT, 2004: 9; Vullnetari, 2007, 2012). These belonged mostly to the Legality Party and the National Front Party, two anti-communist political parties that would be persecuted by the communists who came to power in 1944. The stabilized communist regime in power would close national borders, and as a result many few Albanians would be able to 'cross to the other side', until the 1990s (King dhe Vullnetari, 2003: 24; INSTAT, 2004: 9).

### **3. Demographic level, according to censuses developed, before the Second World War**

In Albania, the first attempts at population censuses were made by foreign warring and occupying powers during the First World War (Bërxfholi, 2000; Pandelejmoni, 2019). The first of them is the attempt of the Austro-Hungarian army for the northwestern and central part of Albania, in 1918 (Pandelejmoni, 2019: 44-46). The results of this partial census tell us that this territory included a population of 524 thousand inhabitants (Pandelejmoni, 2019: 49; Misja and Misja, 2004).

Such censuses were also developed by the French army for the cities under their administration, which include Korça, Devolli, Kolonjë and Skrapar, a territory which was inhabited by 122,331 inhabitants in 1918 (Pandelejmoni, 2019: 54). Also, the Italian army conducted a census for the territory under their control, according to which the population went to about 170 thousand inhabitants (Pandelejmoni, 2019: 54). In its entirety, referring to the three partial censuses, Albania of 1918 was populated by about 800 thousand inhabitants.

More accurate data on the number of population for the entire territory of the country come to us from the censuses developed by the Albanian governments. The first Albanian state census was conducted in September 1923 (INSTAT, 2014: 21), the results of which show that Albania this year was inhabited by 803,959 inhabitants (Pandelejmoni, 2019), but different documents give different figures. Misja and Misja, referring to a document of 1928, introduce us that in 1926 another measurement was conducted which presented that the population of the country was 828,693 inhabitants (Misja and Misja, 2004).

The second general population and housing census was conducted in May 1930, which showed that the total population was 833,850 inhabitants (INSTAT, 2014). It turns out that during this seven-year period, 1923-1930, in Albania there has been an increase in population with 29,897 inhabitants, which means that in each year, the average natural increase was 4,270 inhabitants (Bërxfholi, 2000: 14-16).

Through Pandelejmoni we are introduced to another census conducted in December 1938 (Pandelejmoni, 2019). According to the data found by Pandelejmoni, it results that the population of Albania in 1930 was 1,003,097 inhabitants, while that of 1938 is presented to be 1,128,143 inhabitants (Pandelejmoni, 2019: 80). Which means that the population of Albania during these 8 years has increased by 125,046 inhabitants or by 15,600 inhabitants every year. These dynamics of the Albanian population during the years 1912-1945 come as a result of the natural population growth (INSTAT, 2014: 17) and the external migration of this period (INSTAT, 2014).

Natural increase was based on a level of fertility, which according to INSTAT in 2014 “remained high until the 1960s”, and mortality that “began to decline since the 1930s” (INSTAT, 2014: 17). The high level of fertility has been a distinctive feature of the Albanian population before the Second World War, compared to other countries. This would be noticed by INSTAT in 2014, which would say “In the late 1940s, when many countries in Europe had long since entered their fertility transition, the Synthetic Fertility Index (ISF) in the country was about 6, the highest among European countries. “ (INSTAT, 2014: 41).

#### **4. Demographic growth during the years of the communist regime**

Under the communist regime, during the years 1945-1990, the country's population grew significantly for the two main currents of population growth. First, it was external migration which was strictly prohibited by the communist regime (Vullnetari, 2012: 62; King, 2010), and second, the high level of fertility in the country (INSTAT, 2014: 17). One of the key demographic aspects, longevity, would have its significance for demographic growth in this historical period. Between 1950 and 1989, life expectancy at birth increased from 51.9 to 67.9 years for men and from 51.3 to 73.9 years for women (INSTAT, 2014: 21). This factor would greatly affect the level of population growth in the decades of the communist regime, and resulted in a decrease in the mortality rate, a process that had begun in the 1930s (INSTAT, 2014: 17).

But the main contributor to the natural growth of the population came from the high level of fertility (Hoxha, 2017: 95-87), which was a demographic phenomenon inherited from later periods that would continue as such until the 1960s ( INSTAT, 2014: 41). The communist regime pursued strong policies to maintain and strengthen this phenomenon throughout the years of its activity. In the sense of this political approach “On October 10, 1950, the Presidium of the People's Assembly issued a decree on the assistance of mothers with many children and single mothers, with the aim of encouraging the birth of as many children as possible” (Hoxha, 2017: 85). This phenomenon would be presented by INSTAT in 2014 when it underlined that “Throughout that period, the government aimed to use all its resources and promote the continuous growth of the population.” (INSTAT, 2014: 41).

The government's contribution to mothers with many children came in two forms, the first being the immediate support given only once for each birth after the third child, and the permanent support given each month after the birth of the fourth child. Both types of assistance were provided progressively, for the fourth birth the payment was higher than for the third birth, for the fifth birth it was higher than for the fourth birth, and so on (Hoxha, 2017: 85- 86).



Another way that the communist regime followed, to increase the level of fertility were moral incentives. For this purpose in 1950, the order 'Glory to mother' and the medal of 'Mother' were created, while in 1955 the honorary title 'Mother heroine' was created (Hoxha, 2017: 86). This title was given to mothers who had "born, raised and educated well" 10 children or more "with the motivation" in order to reward and encourage the birth, growth and good education of many children." (Hoxha, 2017: 86).

At the same time, in order to encourage births, the government pursued a policy of financial penalization. In 1951 the government issued a decree on the taxation of bachelors, widows without children, and divorce, which obliged these categories of people to pay dues as long as they were not married and had no children. Seven years later, in 1958, this decree was amended to include married couples without children (Hoxha, 2017: 86).

As a result of these policies during the 50s, when most of Europe experienced a further decline in fertility rates, Albania experienced an increase in the average number of children per woman (INSTAT, 2014: 41). The population began to increase significantly as a result of the high fertility rate and in 1955 it reached 61,300 births. This figure was very high compared to 36,683 children born in 1942 (Hoxha, 2017: 86). This phenomenon would be noticed by INSTAT, according to which "Since the 1960s, the ISF [Synthetic Fertilization Index] reached a maximum of almost 7 children per woman" (INSTAT, 2014: 41).

Population growth as a result of the increase in the ISF index would be accompanied by the phenomenon of declining infant mortality. In the period 1950-1970, the number of deaths in children aged 0-4 years constituted approximately half of the total deaths nationally, and only in 1955 the number of deaths for children aged 0-4 years was 12 192 children (Hoxha, 2017: 87). While between 1960 and 1965 the birth rate began to decline, with a drop in the ISF from 6.9 to 5.6 (INSTAT, 2014: 41). However, the infant mortality rate also decreased (Hoxha, 2017), which balanced the decline of the ISF in the indicators of the general population growth.

After the 1970s, the ISF again fell rapidly, which expressed in years would be 5.2 in 1970, 3.6 in 1980 and 3 in 1990 (INSTAT, 2014: 41). The decline in the ISF index was evident despite the government's pro-birth policy and the high degree of control over people's lives. This resulted in the fact that fertility decreased by more than 50 percent during the period 1960-1990 (INSTAT, 2014: 41). Hoxha would not share the same opinion, at least for the period 1960-1980 when he emphasized that "Fertility continued to increase, in 1968 it exceeded the limit of 70,000 births and, with the exception of two years that dropped just below this level, remained above that figure until 1980" (Hoxha, 2017: 86).



Referring again to Hoxha in the period 1960-1980, the total population increased by 1,007,685 people, or 1.6 times. In 1960, for the first time, the annual natural increase of the population exceeded the figure of 50,000 per year (Hoxha, 2017: 87). These differences between INSTAT in 2014 and Hoxha in 2017 can be explained by the phenomenon of infant mortality, which continued to fall in parallel with the fall of the ISF. But even this argument is not very convincing, because Hoxha talks about the increase of abortion cases, which according to him during the period 1960-80 were 209,173 such (Hoxha, 2017: 101). However, the population level would increase significantly during the communist regime at a rate of 2% per year (INSTAT, 2014: 17; Vullnetari, 2007, 2012).

## **5. External migration during the years of the communist regime**

The increase of the population of Albania during the years of the socialist system is also a result of the phenomenon of external migration. During the years 1945-1990, Albania would not experience any wave of population exodus to other countries, similar to previous or later periods (King and Vullnetari, 2003; Vullnetari, 2007; Vullnetari 2012).

As INSTAT would say in 2004 “With the establishment of the communist regime, after the Second World War, emigration from Albania was banned” (INSTAT, 2004: 9). This would prevent the decline of the population in the country due to external migration as is a feature of previous periods (King and Vullnetari, 2003). This phenomenon would be considered by the state ‘national treason’ and would be severely punished by the communist regime (Vullnetari, 2007; Hoxha, 2017). Referring to Idrizi, I., Godole, J. and Xhemalaj, F., in 2018, fleeing abroad “was considered as treason and consequently the most serious crime possible. According to Article 47 of the Criminal Code (1977), escape was punishable by imprisonment of not less than ten years until death. While family members, as a rule, were interned” (Idrizi, I., Godole, J. and Xhemalaj, F., 2018: 97)

As a result, the country showed one of the highest growth rates in post-war Europe, leading to an increase of 1, 218, 000 inhabitants in 1950 to a maximum of 3,182,000 in 1989 (INSTAT, 2014: 17). Referring to the census measurements of the communist regime, we can also determine the rate of population growth by decades, which states: in 1950 Albania was inhabited by 1.2 million inhabitants; in 1960 by 1.6 million inhabitants; in 1970 by 2.1 million inhabitants; in 1980 by almost 2.7 million inhabitants; and in 1990 Albania was inhabited by more than 3.2 million inhabitants (King and Vullnetari, 2003: 13; Kotmilo and Kotmilo, 2017; King, 2010).

## 6. Decrease in fertility rate in transition years

The population of Albania, in the years of transition, has experienced a significant decrease from 3,182,417 inhabitants in 1989 (INSTAT, 2014) to 2,845,955 inhabitants in 2019 (INSTAT, 2020). This population decline has come from two main factors: first, from the declining fertility rate; and second, as a consequence of international migration. Albania in transition is strongly involved in both of these phenomena (INSTAT, 2004; 2014; 2016-2020).

These factors of population dynamics would be distinguished by INSTAT in 2014 in the study 'Population Projections 2011-2031' where it would underline that "International migration continued and was scattered throughout the country, leading to a continuous decline in the population of Albania, especially in the border areas" and "All regions were involved in a low fertility trend, which no longer guarantees the demographic reproduction of the population in the future" (INSTAT, 2014: 13).

Another demographic problem, which indirectly affects the loss of the population of Albania, especially for the future, is the aging of the population in the years of transition (Vullnetari, 2007, 2010, 2012; INSTAT, 2004, 2014). INSTAT in 2014 would claim that "The combined effects of low birth rates and large-scale departures, mainly of young people, accelerated the aging rate of the population" (INSTAT, 2014: 13).

Referring to INSTAT periodic reports on population assessment during 2011-2020, we note a clear aging process of the population in the country, which has begun to be present in the demographic development of the country during the transition. According to Table 4 'Median age of the population' of the INSTAT report 'Population of Albania' on 1 January 2020, the median age in the last decade has increased rapidly. This indicator by years is presented: in 2011 it is 32.6 years old; in 2012 it is 33.2; in 2013 it goes to 33.7; in 2014 it reaches 34.2 years old; in 2015 he is 34.7 years old; in 2016 35.2 years old; in 2017 at 35.6 years old; in 2018 at 36.1 years old; whereas in 2019 36.7 years old; and in 2020 gold at 37.2 years (INSTAT, 2020).

One of the main contributors to the decrease of the population of Albania in the years of transition is the great decrease of the Synthetic Fertility Index. As we have presented above in this paper, the birth rate has been a characteristic of the Albanian population, especially in the period before the Second World War. This very important demographic phenomenon would continue until the 60s of the last century. But since then and especially "Since the 1990s, fertility has been reduced even more" (INSTAT, 2014: 41), although the average number of children

per woman remained among the highest compared to Europe until the year 2001” (INSTAT, 2014: 19).

According to INSTAT in 2004 “In terms of fertility, the child-to-woman index speaks of a downward trend from 3.3 in 1990 to 2.2 in 2000” (INSTAT, 2004: 32). This phenomenon would be distinguished by INSTAT when it stated that “the synthetic fertility index (ISF) fell at a rapid rate from 6.8 in 1960 to 2.3 in 2001.” (INSTAT, 2014: 19). Which means that because of the historical tradition the population continued to grow, but according to INSTAT in 2014, which referred to the ‘Health and Demographic Survey’ in 2008, “fertility had declined below the replacement level” (INSTAT, 2014: 41).

From this year the birth rate in Albania is significantly lower than the replacement rate, which is the average number of children a woman will have to give birth to replace herself giving birth to a girl who must live to the age of its reproduction. In numerical terms, this indicator would be presented by INSTAT, according to which “Currently the Synthetic Fertility Index (ISF) is equal to 1.67” (INSTAT, 2014: 45).

The ISF indicator would continue to fall rapidly for the following years, and in 2011 it had dropped to the level of 1.6 (INSTAT, 2014: 5). As a result of this demographic phenomenon, the number of births in 2011 was less than half of the births in 1990, or as INSTAT would put it, at the time when we have the latest official direct statistics for this indicator “34,285 births [in 2011] compared to 82,125 births [in 1990]. ” (INSTAT, 2014: 19), or 33,221 in 2015 (INSTAT, 2016) and about 32 thousand in 2016 (INSTAT, 2017).

The decline in the fertility rate can also be distinguished indirectly from the level of natural population growth, which is a direct factor of the population level. If we observe the periodic reports of INSTAT ‘Population of Albania’, we will notice that this indicator has decreased every year, during the third decade of transition, 2010-2020. To bring some examples, in 2017 this indicator decreased by 16.5% compared to 2015 (INSTAT, 2018), in 2018 it decreased by 17.4% compared to 2017 (INSTAT, 2019) and in 2019 decreased by 7.1% compared to a year ago (INSTAT, 2020). The decline of this indicator presents a decline in the level of natural population growth.

During the second decade of the transition, in the years 2001-2011, the decrease of this indicator would lower Albania from the ranking in the top 10 countries for fertility in Europe, while only four countries in Europe have birth rates of more than 2 children per woman, and they are Turkey, Ireland, Iceland and France. Albania in 2011 has a lower birth rate than some Western European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom and some Northern countries such as Norway, Finland and Sweden (INSTAT, 2014: 48).

To have a clearer picture of how the main fertility indicators are presented in Albania in transition in relation to those of EU member states, we will refer to the sources of the European Union. Referring to the report 'Population statistics at regional level' of Eurostat in 2019, we will note that the overall fertility rate in the EU increased from 1.46 in 2001 to 1.58 in 2015 (Eurostat, 2019). The opposite happens in Albania, if in 2001 this indicator was at 2.3 (INSTAT, 2014: 19), "in 2011 it had dropped to 1.6" (INSTAT, 2014: 5). This is the largest decline compared to all European countries, most of which experienced positive developments in fertility, such as Latvia from 1.22 in 2001 to 1.70 in 2015 (Eurostat, 2019). Other member countries also had an increase in the fertility rate, for example in 2001 France had this indicator 1.96, but in 2019 together with Romania, and the United Kingdom have crossed the population replacement threshold of 2.1 (Eurostat, 2019).

A phenomenon similar to Albania, which has experienced a decline in this indicator "from 6.8 in 1960 to 2.3 in 2001" (INSTAT, 2014: 19), is Ireland, which in 1968 had an overall fertility rate of 3.77, in 2017 this indicator decreased to 1.77 (Eurostat, 2019). According to Eurostat, 5,103,165 babies were born in the European Union in 2015, compared to 5,062,948 in 2001 (Eurostat, 2019), while in Albania the number of babies born in 2015 was 32,715 (INSTAT, 2016), while in the beginning years 1990 were over 60 thousand births per year (INSTAT, 2014).

## **7. Demographic decline along the transition as a result of external migration**

The decline of the population of Albania is also due to the reasons of external migration, which has been continuous and at a significant pace. Albania's post-communist transition has been characterized by a large population movement abroad, in search of better livelihood opportunities (INSTAT, 2014; King and Vullnetari, 2003; King, 2010).

The departures were massive in the first two-three years, and if we want to express it in figures we can say that about 220,000 emigrants left Albania, between 1989 and March 1992 or 300,000 between 1989 and December 1992 (INSTAT, 2004: 34). External migration trends would continue, and they would be directed mainly to neighboring countries, as INSTAT would refer to 1995 "the number of emigrants may have been between 450,000 and 500,000 (3/5 lived in Greece, 1/5 in Italy and 1/5 in Western Europe) ", while "In 2002, about 750,000 lived abroad" (INSTAT, 2004: 34). At the end of the time period for which INSTAT analyzed it can be said that "approximately 710 000 individuals" left Albania only between 1989-2001 (INSTAT, 2004: 36).

This phenomenon would also be noticed by the World Bank in 2007, according to which “In 2001, about 600,000 to 700,000, or one fifth of the local population of Albania, were estimated to live outside the country, mainly in Greece and Italy” (BB, 2007: 2).

The phenomenon of external migration would continue in the second decade of transition. INSTAT, would emphasize that emigration is one of the main reasons for the decrease of the population in Albania in the period between 2001 and 2011 (INSTAT, 2014: 31). If we refer again to INSTAT in 2014, “another 573 thousand more people left the country than entered it” (INSTAT, 2014: 5), for the period 2001-2011. Which means that about 17% of the population of Albania has left the country in this time period (INSTAT, 2014).

These high levels of migration can also be seen if we refer to figure 19, ‘Indirect calculation: Net migration and number of returned migrants, by age group and gender’ and figure 20 ‘Indirect estimate: Age and gender of number of migrants’ ( INSTAT, 2014: 33). According to INSTAT in 2014, which referred to OECD data, the most preferred destination countries for Albanian emigrants are Italy and Greece, followed by the US, the United Kingdom and Germany. A number of 47% of Albanian emigrants live in Italy, making this country the most sought after destination, closely followed by Greece, with 43 percent of Albanian emigrants. In third place, the United States of America is ranked by margin (INSTAT, 2014: 35).

The Vullnetari would distinguish four strong external migration flows in this period (Vullnetari, 2007: 31-35). It would define the migration of 1990, as the first influx, which included about 5 thousand Albanians who entered the foreign embassies in Tirana and departed by boat to Italy and by land in Greece, in a total of 20 thousand Albanians (Vullnetari, 2007: 31-32). The second influx, according to the Vullnetari, was 1991 when after the Italian state repatriated about 20,000 migrants who left by boat, Greece became the most preferred place for migration. In this year alone, about 100 thousand Albanians migrated to Greece, while for the period 1991-1992 the figure went to 300 thousand (Vullnetari, 2007: 33).

The third influx is concentrated in the years 1993-1996, which generally continued in Greece where it is estimated that about 90% of the emigrants of this period were concentrated. According to Vullnetari, in the mid-1990s about 400 thousand Albanians had migrated (Vullnetari, 2007: 33). According to her, the 1997 pyramid crisis would bring the third influx of external migration. Initially 10,600 Albanian migrants would be accepted by the Italian state, but then the sinking of a migrant ship would close this practice, and migration would be strengthened towards Greece and other EU countries, such as France, Germany and Belgium, but also towards the United Kingdom and the United States. The fourth flow of migration, according to the Vullnetari, would extend to the years 2000-2007, where the scope of its study ends. According to the Vullnetari in 2012, during the

period 1990-2011, about 1.5 million Albanians left Albania (Vullnetari, 20012: 15).

But the situation of high migration is evident in the following years, according to the INSTAT Annual Report 'Population of Albania, 1 January 2015', it results that the net migration has turned out to be 18,046 people (INSTAT, 2015), and according to the same report of in 2020 this indicator includes 23, 082 inhabitants. Referring to these annual reports, we will see that the same trend has continued until 2019, which was expressed by an average of net migration of 20 thousand migrants, and in total for the whole decade about 200 thousand Albanians left Albania. For many reasons this figure processed from INSTAT data is inaccurate "as there are few incentives for them [migrants] to register their departure with local authorities, [hence] there is no reliable measurement of the number of individuals who have left Albania. " (INSTAT, 2014: 31).

If we refer to the World Bank in 2018 in the annual report 'Regular Economic Report for the Western Balkans' the situation is the same. According to this report, more than 40% of the Albanian population has emigrated during the years of transition and Albania ranks second in the region, after Bosnia-Herzegovina for the highest level of emigration (WB, 2018). What is most troubling, according to this report, is that those who are migrating are qualified and highly educated people, as well as women. As would be noted in the report:

"In some countries, such as Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than 40 percent of the resident population has emigrated. The main destinations of emigrants from the region in 2015 were Austria, Germany, Greece, Italy and Switzerland. Emigrants are mostly of working age and with higher education, while the share of women in the total number of emigrants is increasing more and more" (WB, 2018: 15).

Other studies also present this severe demographic phenomenon, such as the Bank of Albania in 2018 in the study 'Remittances: a support for development', which would emphasize that "Albania after the '90s was dominated by migration cycles, of which can be considered intense, irregular and evolving, as a result of the combined action of economic and political driving factors "(BoA, 2018: 10). According to the Bank of Albania, which studies the phenomenon of migration in reference to remittances sent by migrants to their families, the presence of a migrant population scattered around the world is about 1.2 million inhabitants, which means that it is almost half the population. who currently lives in the country (BoA, 2018: 5).

The high level of emigration can not be accurately determined by statistical measurements of domestic institutions. Many authors have noted this fact, starting with the World Bank in 2007, according to which data provided to its population



missions in 2005 show that most districts report that their population approximates the levels calculated in 2000, before the last census, while underlining that “The total population in 2000 was estimated at 3,961 million while the census brought a large correction of this number, to 3,069 million due to increased immigration.” (BB, 2007: 9).

This phenomenon would be acknowledged by INSTAT itself, according to which “resident Albanians are not systematically registered when they leave the country” (INSTAT, 2014: 31). In this sense, beyond the figures presented above we will try to distinguish it more clearly from the reports of the host countries of this emigration. Referring to the evaluation data ‘Residence permits, statistics for the first permits issued during the year’ Eurostat presents that in 2018 alone a total of 62,500 residence permits were issued to Albanians working and living in the European Union, of which over 50 thousand permits for a period longer than one year, which express about 80% of them. Compared to a year ago, the number of long-term residence permits has increased by 17% (Eurostat, 2019).

According to Eurostat, 15% of other residence permits issued for the first time are issued for a period of 6 to 11 months. While 2280 permits, or about 4% of them, are issued for a period of 3 to 5 months. Countries with the highest number of residence permits issued to Albanians are neighboring countries, such as Italy with 23,147 permits and Greece with 16,936 permits, which represent over 60% of the total permits issued by EU countries (Eurostat, 2019).

The countries with the highest number of residence permits after Germany, which ranks third after Italy and Greece, rank the United Kingdom with over 3000 permits issued in the last year, France with 2143, Sweden with over 1500, and Croatia with 1088. More than half of residence permits are issued for family reasons, but in recent years there has also been an increase in residence permits issued for study or employment reasons, which marked an increase of more than 70% compared to with a year ago (Eurostat, 2019).

The above data from Eurostat, in addition to confirming the international migration trend presented by INSTAT statistics, show that Albania will continue to lose population in the future as a result of external migration and the tendency of emigrants to seek longer residence permits, which shows that their intention is not to return to Albania for a long period of time.

To assess external migration during the third decade we turned to Monitor Magazine, which analyzed the issue from INSTAT data. According to Monitor, INSTAT conducted a large emigration survey, with a sample of 20 thousand families, in the period April-July 2019. According to this survey, during the years 2011-2019, 360 thousand people or 13% of the resident population left Albania. in 2011. The biggest concern that comes from the data collected by this survey is the fact that in the last decade the phenomenon of external migration has expanded to the emigration of the whole family.

According to Monitor, which analyzes the data collected by INSTAT “During the last 10 years, 6.6% of families have left the country, a total of 49,500, while in the years 2001-2011 4.4% of units had left” (RM, 2020). This situation is the same as the foreign emigration during the years 1912-1939, which we talked about earlier in this paper. Even in that period, the first phase of migration was individual, while the second was familial (King and Vullnetari, 2003).

From Monitor Magazine we get some more serious statistics, in terms of external migration. Even in this analysis she refers to INSTAT statistics, which she has further processed. According to Monitor, INSTAT used the comparison of two populations, the resident population and that according to the civil registry, and found that in 2020, 1.6 million people live outside Albania (RM, 2021). And if we compare it with 1.08 million that were from the result of the 2011 census (INSTAT, 2004), it turns out that this decade another 600 thousand citizens have left Albania.

## **8. Conclusions and recommendations**

Population loss in the years of transition is not a phenomenon linked in the cause-and-effect chain to the time in which this phenomenon occurred. The history of the period of existence of the Albanian State, but also before, since the 15th century, shows us that this phenomenon has been present in the Albanian society of each historical period.

This very harmful phenomenon for the society, as it is clearly seen in the paper, has been present in all historical periods and is related to political instability and / or economic crises. Since the second half of the 15th century, when the territories inhabited by Albanians fell under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Albanians have fled their lands, to escape the consequences of the political instability of the time or economic crises.

The paper finds and brings historical examples of external migration: of the 15th-17th century, as a result of political instability from the Ottoman occupation of the country; during the years 1912 and 1923, as a result of political instability due to the declaration of Independence of the country and the First World War, as well as the decline of the agricultural economy, which was the main economy of the country, and the lack of industry or other productive economies; which extends during the years 1923-1939, and comes as a result of the economic backwardness and political uncertainty of this time space; which belongs to the years 1939-1945, which came as a result of the Second World War and the political instability that accompanied the establishment of the communist system in Albania.

The paper concludes that even during the communist regime, 1945-1991, Albanian society has reacted to the economic crisis by reducing the fertility rate,

thus affecting the reduced growth of the population. Although external migration has not been numerically influential, due to political austerity, the natural growth rate has declined since the 1960s as a result of the economic crisis brought about by the central planning economy. In this context, it can also be said that, although Albanian society was under strong political repression by the communist regime, the political situation in the country did not undergo any political instability to produce significant external migration.

The strong political instability of the first years of transition, as a result of the fall of the communist regime, would bring about a strong wave of foreign emigration during the years 1990-1992. This external migration would be divided into two waves, according to the respective crises: the first belongs to the fall of the communist system; and the second victory of the Socialists in the elections of 1991. A third, very powerful wave would come after the events of 1997 which produced a high political instability in that period. At this high level of migration, and consequently in reducing the demographic level of the country would greatly affect the economic crisis faced by the country.

The steady decline in population in the three decades of transition, as a result of falling below the replacement level, is argued by the low growth rates of the country, especially in relation to the expectations of the society that is transiting from a planning society. centralized economy towards a free market economy society. In this aspect, external migration has also had an impact, which has removed from Albania the most specific age groups that lead to population growth.

The paper recommends more in-depth studies on this very important topic in terms of social and national development. The paper also recommends the drafting of other studies related to the relationship between demographics and territory, as well as the impact of the model that shapes this relationship with: urban / territorial / spatial situation of the country, and its impact on the urban quality of life of citizens; the social structure and political model of the country; pre-university education and other social infrastructures in the inhabited centers of the country; engineering infrastructures of residential centers; university education; the economic model of the country and the family economies of the citizens, etc.

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