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Greek education in the Greek national minority of Northern Epirus during the occupation
(1939-1945)

The Italian occupation of Albania (1939) jeopardised the place of the Greek people as a nation. The aim of both the Italians and the quisling Albanian government was to limit the Greek schools operating in the area of Northern Epirus.

The primary goal of Albanian nationalists was to diminish the few remaining Greek private schools that Greece continued to fund without any obstructions, as well as the religious institutions and any propaganda media in general. The Greek activity caused Tirana to react, through their Ministry of Education that strongly warned local stakeholders (July 1941) not to allow their operation.

The Greek government and the locals of North Epirus themselves were not intimidated by the Albanian-Italian manipulations but rather carried on with their efforts, and indeed the Greek government refrained from suspending the granting of scholarships to Northern Epirus habitants that were studying at religious schools or schools in Bostina, Vella, Ioannina, Athens and elsewhere. This fact provoked again the Albanian Ministry of Education that sought ways of prevention by raising barriers. However, this was an upward trend and the number of students graduating from Greek schools had risen sharply.

In view of the attack against Greece (spring 1941), the Italian occupation forces, fearing the reactions of the Greek people in North Epirus that could act as a fifth column, took drastic measures to expel and displace prominent personalities from Greek-speaking areas, by adopting a relevant decree. Dozens of suspect North Epirus Greeks from Gjirokaster and Korçe were sent to exile to the mainland or even Italy. This decree remained in force throughout the occupation period. Among those exiled were 36 prominent intellectuals, mainly Greek scholars, lawyers, merchants from all Greek-speaking northern regions, etc.

After the Greek army retreated from North Epirus (April 1941), violence, looting, kidnappings and robberies broke out in the area against the unprotected Greek people by groups of irregular armed forces and the Italian army.

Greek schools have closed down again and leading personalities, educators and local government officials, fighting to keep the national spirit alive, such as Spyridon Sekkas, Lefteris Gkouvelis, Pavlos Melos, Lefteris Tallios etc., have been led to Albanian prisons and tortured.

At the end of 1943, the Conference of Greek Scholars was held at Policani, which would express the desire of the Greek minority to use its mother tongue in public administration, everyday life and education. This decision would serve as a deception, to mislead the Greek scholars and refrain from any irredentist efforts and influence of Zervas, since the conference created the misleading impression that the Greek minority was to gain the status it hoped for. Later, however, the Albanian communists furiously condemned the agreement of Memorachi, calling it a work of foreign reaction.