

50

years of diplomatic relations
Switzerland - Albania
1970 - 2020

AMBASSADOR MAÎTRE: OUR TWO COUNTRIES COOPERATE CLOSELY

Switzerland-Albania, 50 Years of Growing Relations and Cooperation

The year 2020 marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Albania. This anniversary presents an excellent opportunity to discuss these 50 years and to shed more light into the history of development of these inter-governmental relations. To this end served also the visit of the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cassis, who held meetings with the high officials in the country. "Half a century ago both our Governments decided that our two countries need to establish relations - in the midst of the Cold War and distrust of that time. 50 years on and we have gone from just having diplomatic relations, to having excellent relations, in diplomacy, humanitarian and development cooperation, economy, culture, sports and increasing people-to-people contacts, including tourism. Switzerland remains committed and determined to stand by Albania and support its efforts towards building effective democratic institutions and towards European integration. Let us also continue and strengthen our multilateral cooperation be it in the field of security or pandemics", said the Swiss foreign minister.

Swiss ambassador in Albania Adrian Maître, looking at the history of the relations between the two countries said: "50 years ago our two countries signed up for formal bilateral diplomatic relations. This happened despite the Iron Curtain and the Cold War of that time, despite the different political systems. I would say it's a major achievement. In the 50 years since then, our two countries have been intensely exchanging, have come closer and are intensively cooperating".

The Swiss Confederation officially recognized Albania in 1922. Seven years later both parties signed the Convention on Establishing Trade Relations.

Minister Ignazio Cassis: Albania is and will continue to be a priority country for Switzerland



Swiss FM Ignazio Cassis (L) in joint press conference with Albanian Acting MEFA Gent Cakaj



Ambassador of Switzerland to Albania, Mr. Adrian Maître

SWISS FOREIGN MINISTER IGNAZIO CASSIS

“

Albania is and will continue to be a priority country for Switzerland. Switzerland encourages Albania to continue its reform efforts. These reforms are important for the Albanian people, they are important for the private sector, and of course they are important for the European integration

”



Hans Keller, First Swiss Ambassador for Albania (1971):
"Economically, Albania is still a humble partner. But even so, this market, as small as it is, should not be neglected. The urge for better living conditions grows stronger year after year. Like everywhere else, Albania will not be stopped".



Mimoza Halimi, General Director, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs
"Since the 70-ies when relations were officially established, developments between our countries have known only a positive trend, in the political, economic, social and cultural aspects"



Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP),
An idea born in Switzerland that boosts economic development in Albania and secures energy for Europe. Switzerland's private sector, diplomacy and international cooperation played an essential role in bringing to life the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) that will supply gas from Azerbaijan to Europe through Greece, Albania, the Adriatic Sea and Italy. This massive project has strong support by the European Union and Albania benefits in several ways.

FIRST RESIDENT AMBASSADOR SPEAKS ABOUT SWITZERLAND'S INITIAL AID TO ALBANIA POST-1990

Gazmend Turdiu: In Bern I Found Reliable Partners

Mimoza Halimi: "Developments between our countries have known only a positive trend, in the political, economic, social and cultural aspects"

In September 1991, after the first pluralist elections of March 1991, the forming of the first pluralist government and the admission of Albania to the CSCE in June 1991, the Swiss Government started to look for adequate facilities to open its first presence in Tirana, and the first mission was opened in 1992. The new Albanian democratic government that came out of the March 1992 elections, decided to open its mission in Bern. This was completed in October 1992 and the first accredited ambassador was Mr. Gazmend Turdiu.

The first Albanian resident ambassador to Bern recounted his first years on the job, while appreciating Swiss officials for their stability and reliability. "I do not understand why Albania had not been cooperating with Switzerland, which was a completely neutral country and had no clear bilateral issues. Switzerland was a country with excellent potential for economic cooperation".

According to him, the aid of the Swiss people started with food aid when the country was faced with grave emergencies, to then continue with equipment.

"It all started with food aid and then continued with more important spare parts and other equipment such as power transformers, which were critical for the Albanian electric corporation, and it was thanks to this aid that Albania was able to successfully overcome the energy crisis of winter 92-93, which was a truly cold year.

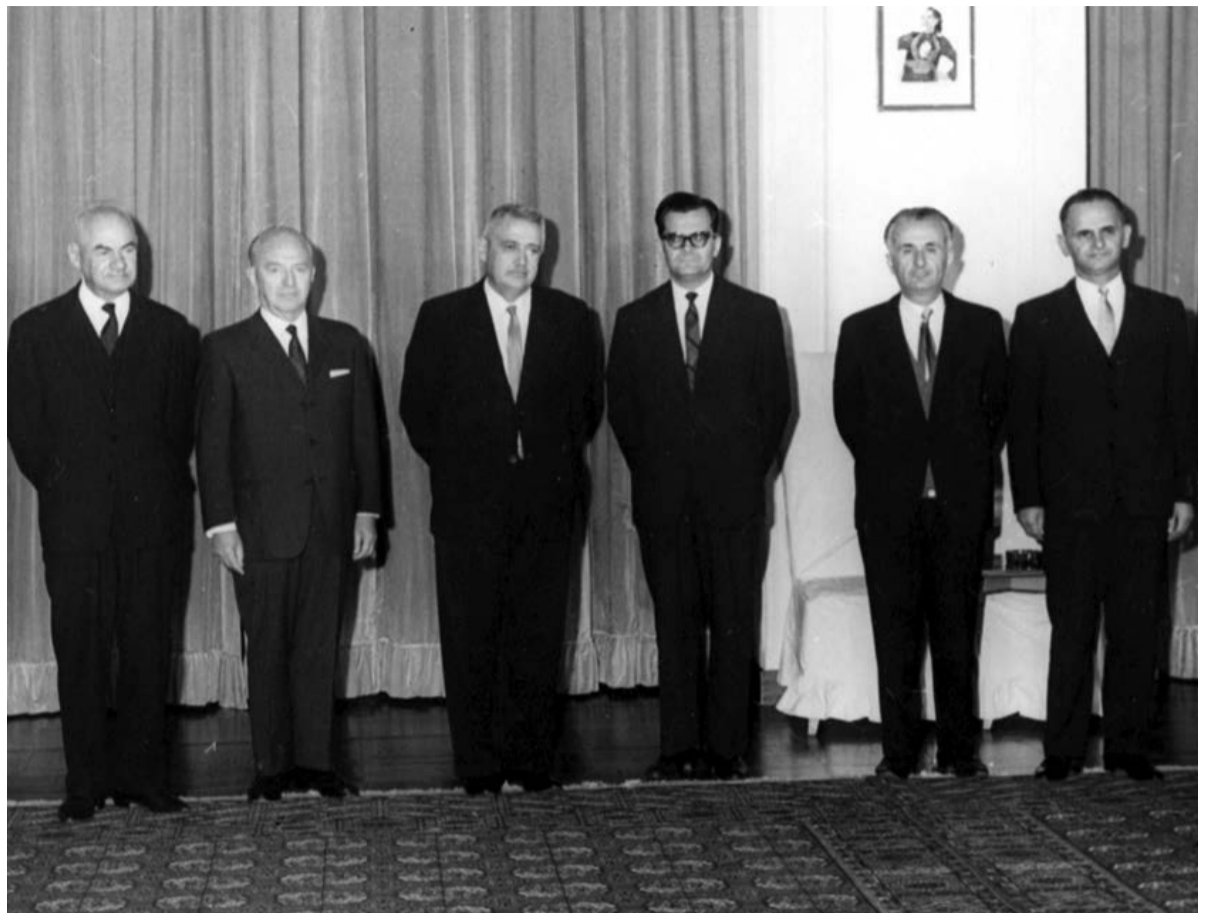
After this initial phase, Swiss aid focused on development programs and two of the most important sectors they focused on were energy and telecommunication. The projects implemented at the time were related to the rehabilitation of the Drin Cascade, which led to more energy generation, and telecommunica-

tions. We all remember well that in 1992 and 1993 it took a number of tries to connect an international call. The Swiss Government made possible the construction of the telephony exchange, and it was State Secretary for Economy Franc Blanchard that made the first inauguration call using this line in October 1994. The project had extraordinary impact on the development of Albania", Mr. Turdiu noted.

The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs General Director Ms. Mimoza Halimi noted the positive tendency of the relations between the two countries. "The consistent Swiss policy towards Albania in support of its path to integration, but also the strong financial aid reaching some 300 million Swiss Francs is of important note.

Since the 1970s, when relations were officially established, developments between the two countries have only been positive in the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. High level bilateral visits have increased in number and culminated with the visit of the Albanian Prime Minister to the Swiss Confederation in 2017.

What is also of note in the Swiss approach to our country, is the continuous assistance materialized in strategic documents and well-designed projects. The Swiss cooperation strategy for the 2018 to 2021 period has a total budget of 105 million Swiss Francs which is 50% more than the Swiss strategy for our country during the 2010 to 2013 period. This is a clear indicator of the engagement and the quality of relations in which both of our countries invest. The four main areas of contribution are democratic governance, economic development and employment, health care, urban infrastructure, and energy", Ms. Halimi said.



From the left: Spiro Moisiu, Vice Chairman of the Presidium of the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Albania; Hans Keller, Swiss Ambassador; Haxhi Lleshi, Chairman of the Presidium; Reis Malile, Musin Kroj, Koço Prifti, on Oct 2, 1970, the day of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Albania

THE FOUNDER OF THE SWISS FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION Christian Vögeli, the Story of the Swiss Living in Albania

"I believe that Switzerland and Albania have many things in common"

Christian Vögeli is a founder and entrepreneur. He came to Albania in 1991 and since that time he has supported Albania with concrete and sustainable development projects in the areas of medicine, social services, and education. For his contribution, he was named honorary citizen of the Kryevidh and Peza Communes and was honored with the title "friend of the Durrës regional hospital".

He is the founder of the SFI Foundations (Swiss Foundation for Innovation) and the ERA Foundation (Emergency Response Albania).

Today, the Swiss Foundation for Innovation headquartered in both Switzerland and Albania brings its expertise in the areas of continued education to guarantee quality and support innovation initiatives and projects supporting people in need, especially the Rreze Dielli social services and the ERA life-saving activities.

The ERA Foundation, widely known as Emergency Response Albania or simply as "ERA" provides emergency medical services for any citi-



Christian Vögeli

zen without distinction.

His vision includes the creation of models fitting the context and which will encourage others to pursue their vision and activities.

For many years the issue closest to his heart has been the issue of emergency services. This includes medical emergencies, rescuing people involved in accidents or other disasters. He has witnessed a number of cases that drove his dream and vision, which is for no person involved in an accident to lose the life, if this can be prevented medically. Since 2003, he has been successfully investing in training primary health care medical personnel, and has been doing the same for pre-hospital emergency personnel since 2007. He also founded one of the most specialized centers in

the field in the country: EMS Academy. This is a joint SFI and ERA project.

When asked about his success, Christian mentions his wife Ana and their children. Alma is a psychologist and holds a PhD. Whenever his work is mentioned, Christian says that his wife deserves all the credit for his success. Their son (25) and daughter (21) are also inseparable part of his vision.

"I believe that Switzerland and Albania have many things in common. They are both small countries that did not have the luxury to rule, they have never instigated wars and have on the contrary focused on self-defense, and that is why I see many things in common. And I can go as far as to say that Albania is the Switzerland of the Balkans".



Hans Keller, the Diligent Diplomat Who Established Diplomatic Relations

Opening of legations in 1992 upon the fall of the communist regime

Following events in Czechoslovakia and Albania's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, Swiss representatives optimistically commended this act by transmitting the message to Albanian diplomats. Nonetheless, it was since 1946 that a communist official Tirana showed signs of will to (re)establish diplomatic relations, as proven by a document found in Swiss diplomatic archives which stated that a small number of Swiss citizens lived in Albania at the time, similar to the number of Albanians in Switzerland. As a matter of fact, it took over two decades for both countries to realize how they had wasted time fearing the mentality, balance and ideology, and how it was high time to reestablish normal diplomatic relations. It is rather surprising what Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu later stated on the case, going beyond diplomacy: "Considering Switzerland's neutrality and the lack of "open cases" or contradictions between Albania and Switzerland, unlike other countries, I cannot find a reason as to why diplomatic relations between our two countries were reestablished only in 1970". Ambassador Hans Keller stated:

"Our countries will cooperate on many aspects. We believe that time is ripe to establish relations. The issue of relations between the two countries was set forth in Beijing. We are now ready to launch diplomatic relations and discuss about modalities. We are not going to open an Embassy in Tirana at present, but we definitely will in the not too distant future. Your country's representatives are welcome to Switzerland, and should your government agree, my government will accredit me as an ambassador in Albania".

Under these new conditions, the new Swiss Ambassador in Belgrade, Mr. Hans Keller, the former ambassador in Beijing visited Albania in 1-3 June 1969. At the start of his visit in Albania, Keller stated that his government had put him in charge of holding talks with Albanian authorities regarding relations between the two countries. On 9 July 1970, the Albanian Embassy in Belgrade was visited by the historian and ambassador, Mr. Keller, who informed that the Swiss government was in agreement with establishing diplomatic relations with Albania and exchanging ambassadors. Switzerland would be represented by its

ambassador in Belgrade. The Swiss party hoped that this would further develop trade, technical and scientific cooperation, tourism, etc. The Albanian representative in Belgrade paid a return visit on 16 July. He expressed the Albanian government pleasure to establish diplomatic relations with Switzerland, and as was previously agreed, the two parties decided that they would jointly communicate through written and visual media starting from 20 July 1970. The Albanian party promptly approved ambassador Keller. On 15 November 1970, the Albanian Ambassador in Rome, Mr. Ksenofon Nushi, was accredited to Switzerland. The approval of expressed on 16 December 1970, while credential letters were submitted on 8 October 1971. Ambassador Keller arrived in Albania on 28 September 1970 and stayed for a week. Credentials were submitted on 2 October 1970. Besides Haxhi Leshi, in the capacity of the Chair of the People's Assembly Presidium, Mr. Keller met the Prime Minister, Mehmet Shehu, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Reis Malile, among others. During his visit, the ambassador did not



Hans Keller, the first Swiss Ambassador for Albania during the communist regime

tackle virtually any political issue, rather he was mainly interested in economic issues. He expressed his firm belief on the vast opportunities for trade development, technical and scientific cooperation, culture, sports, and especially tourism advancement.

Overtly expressing his support to Albania, in June 1987, President Pierre Aubert stated that:

"Owing to similarities between our countries, Albania holds a special place in our considerations.

In 1-5 November 1990, the

State Secretary in the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation, Mr. Klaus Jacobi, paid a return visit in Albania following Mr. Sokrat Plaka, deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs' visit in Switzerland in 1987. The visit took place before the Paris meeting among CSCE members, Helsinki II, which Albania aimed at becoming a member of. Jacobi transmitted clear messages to the official Tirana. He commented on relations with Eastern Europe, which a Swiss aid program at the amount of 250 million CHF was created for, by saying that Switzerland focused on the recognition of human rights, political parties pluralism, and market economy.

On September 1991, following the first pluralist elections on March 1991, creation of the first pluralist government and membership of Albania to CSCE in June 1991, the Swiss government started looking for appropriate premises to open its legation in Tirana, a process which was finalized in 1992. The new Albanian democratic government, coming from March 1992 elections, decided to open its legation in Bern. The Albanian legation in Bern was established on October 1992 and the first decreed ambassador was Mr. Gazmend Turdiu. This event concluded a long state relations evolution, culminating with the establishment of diplomatic relations, on 20 July 1970, followed by the opening of legations in both capital cities in 1992.

SWISS AMBASSADORS IN ALBANIA

Christian Hauswirth	(1994 -1996)
Thomas Feller	(1996-2000)
Francis Cousin	(2000-2002)
Erich Pircher	(2002-2007)
Yvana Enzler	(2007-2012)
Alexander Wittwer	(2012-2014)
Christoph Graf	(2014-2018)
Adrian Maître	(2018 -)

ALBANIAN AMBASSADORS IN SWITZERLAND

Gazmend Turdiu	(1992-1997)
Vladimir Fanati	(1997-2002)
Leontiev Çuçi	(2002-2006)
Mehmet Elezi	(2006-2013)
Illir Gjoni	(2013 -)

FLORIAN HACKAJ: SWITZERLAND JUST LIKE MY HOME

Elina Duni, Researcher and Performer of Jazz Folk

Albanians living in the Swiss Confederation are well integrated thanks to the freedoms and rights they enjoy in this country. Elina Duni is one of the successful Albanians in Switzerland, whose fame exceeds the country's borders. Elina moved to Geneva in 1992 with her mother. During the years 2004-2008 she studied song and composition at the Hochschule der Künste in Bern, in the jazz department. During this time she created the "Elina Duni Quartet" with Colin Vallon on piano, Patrice Moret on cello and Norbert Pfammatter on drums, a group which presents her return to Albanian musical roots, a combination of Balkan folk songs and jazz. In 2008, her first album "Baresha" (The shepherdess) was released on "Meta Records". In February 2010, the second album "Lume, Lume" was re-released by "Meta Records". The third album "Matanë Malit" (Beyond the mountain) was released in October 2012 by "ECM Records".



Elina Duni



Florian Haçkaj

It is a homage dedicated to Albania, with old Albanian songs beautifully reworked in the jazz genre.

Florian Haçkaj is a successful manager that can make a clear distinction with the other countries he has lived in. "I have lived in three other countries before settling in Switzerland, and I can undoubtedly say that I feel at home in Switzerland", Haçkaj said. "Officially, 258,415 people of Albanian origin are registered in Switzerland, however the unofficial number is believed to be closer to 350,000.



TAP, an Idea Born in Switzerland

Annually some 20 million Swiss francs are provided to Albania as official development assistance by the Swiss government, surpassing 300 million since 1990

Economic relations between Switzerland and Albania have improved gradually, even though the potential is much higher. Switzerland continues to be the country with the highest direct investment in Albania, with an increase of 17.9 percent in 2019. The Trans Adriatic Pipeline from Azerbaijan to Italy with a length of 870 km, which was an idea born and designed in Switzerland, is one of the largest projects not only for Albania, but Europe in general as well.

The Swiss private sector, diplomacy and international cooperation have played an important role in making the Trans Adriatic Pipeline project a reality, which will transport natural gas from Azerbaijan toward Europe through Greece, Albania and Italy. The three-fold engagement on the part of Switzerland gave this project much pull. Initially TAP was conceptualized and designed by the Swiss EGL Group Company, now known as AXPO, in 2003. Swiss diplomatic lobbying supported the project. The Shah Deniz II Consortium finally chose TAP as the winning project.

The TAP Consortium, based in Baar of Switzerland and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) assisted the projects since its inception.

SECO decided to provide Albanian with support in the amount of 6 million Swiss Francs, to develop the capacities required to negotiate and manage an infrastructure project of such magnitude.



Trans Adriatic Pipeline

An agreement reached between TAP and Albania as a host country, would provide important benefits. Albania benefited 90 million Euro in revenue from taxes and socially responsible activities TAP implemented; 14 million Euro for local communities and environmental investments; 700 thousand Euro for training and vocation education in the gas industry. Bilateral trade is modest in figures. However, it has grown consistently over the last two decades. Currently, some 30 Swiss companies are active in Albania.

THE EARTHQUAKE

The Swiss Confederation stood by the Albanian people after the destructive 26 November 2019 earthquake. "Switzerland stands by Albania after the 26 November 2019 earthquake. The Swiss government promised over EUR 9m to assist Albanian reconstruction efforts. In the framework of this commitment, today's agreement will enable the rehabilitation and improvement of hous-

ing conditions for some 560 families," Swiss Ambassador Adrian Maître said during the signing of the agreement with Reconstruction Minister Arben Ahmetaj.

ECONOMIC RELATIONS OVER THE YEARS

Switzerland has considered Albania as a country with which it could build good trade relations. In March 1962 the Ministry of Trade gave its approval to offer Switzerland trade exchanges in iron, chromium and oil bitumen. This was done to advance efforts to establish diplomatic relations.

Ambassador Keller provided an impetus to the trade relations between the two countries. In March 1971, the Swiss government requested to purchase corn in Albania and im-



"Swissair" present in Albania from 1986

SWITZERLAND AND ALBANIA						
The trade exchanges between Switzerland and Albania are promoted as follows :						
	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976
Import 000/dollars	1.545	3.600	3.100	1.530	2.265	2.245
Export 000/dollars	820	1.051	1.285	3.650	750	1.294
Amount "	2.365	4.651	4.385	5.180	3.115	3.539

Albania-Switzerland trade exchanges, 1971-76

per year and could further grow.

In 1974, "Albtransport" entered into an agreement with the Swiss Airline Company "Swissair", on selling tickets for passengers and goods. In 1979, the parties discussed about several other Swissair planes landing to Tirana, in addition to special planes for Albanian government representatives.

The following years saw an upward trend in terms of trade between the two countries. Such trend is illustrated on the following table, although the increase was less intensive in 1975-1976 than 1974. Nowadays, it remains unclear whether such decline is related to Keller's retirement in March, 1974.

Ambassador Keller is a friend of Albania. Even after his mandate expiry, he visited Albania both as a friend, and as a guide for businessmen who were interested in cooperating with Albania. By the end of August 1978, the Swiss group of trading companies representatives held talks with the delegation of foreign trade and Chamber of Commerce Albanian companies. The meeting was also attended by the former ambassador Keller, who was committed to encouraging trade rela-

tions between the two countries, despite his retirement.

SWISS SUPPORT FOR ALBANIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Little known is the fact that Switzerland is currently one of the main supporters of economic development in Albania. Almost half of the assistance package that the Swiss government provides for Albania belongs to the fields of economic development, employment, infrastructure and energy. The combined contribution in these areas is around 10 million Swiss francs per year, provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). Several assistance projects support Albanian institutions in macro-economic stability, private sector development, and employment growth. This includes contributions and projects on improving tax administration, public debt management, financial programming and statistics, as well as projects that boost the private sector such as improving financial reporting, risk insurance introduction, and investment promotion.

2019 DIRECT INVESTMENTS IN MILLION EUROS

Switzerland	1.534	increase 17.9%
Netherlands	1.243	increase 14.5%
Canada	1.065	increase 12.4%
Italy	829	increase 9.6%
Turkey	622	increase 7.3%
Bulgaria	583	increase 6.8%
Austria	571	increase 6.6%
Greece	566	increase 6.5%
France	314	increase 3.6%

We would like to extend our thanks to Dr. Franziska Zaugg, Prof. Dr. Nevila Nika, Prof. Ass. Dr. Pranvera Teli (Dibra) and the researcher Armand Plaka for their cooperation and preparation of this special publication on the occasion of the 50-year anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Albania.