

## Albanians

Updated July 2008

### Profile

According to the 2002 census, there were 61,647 Albanians in Serbia. They speak Albanian and most are Muslim. They are concentrated in southern Serbia where they are a majority in two municipalities.

### Historical context

Albanians have traditionally lived in southern Serbia on the border with Kosovo. During and after the 1998-1999 war for Kosovo, Albanians in neighbouring Presevo Valley have faced particular discrimination and intolerance.

### Current issues

Concern is rising about inter-ethnic relations in the southern Presevo Valley, bordering Kosovo. As final status talks over Kosovo have become increasingly contentious over the course of 2007 and Kosovo declared its independence in February 2008, some government officials and negotiators have floated the idea of the province's partition. This has led some in the Presevo Valley's large Albanian community, as well as some Kosovo Albanian officials, to respond that partition of Kosovo would mean that this bordering area, already called 'Eastern Kosovo' by Albanian nationalists, would seek to join the independent state.

Although the situation has improved in recent years, Albanians are victims of hidden discrimination and face high levels of intolerance from the majority. Albanians are excluded from economic participation, in part due to their concentration in the underdeveloped region of southern Serbia, and in part due to discrimination, including targeted dismissal from employment during Milosevic's regime. There are also some problems with access to education, due to a lack of qualified teachers in Albanian and problems with recognition of diplomas from abroad. There is Albanian representation in municipal governments, but Albanians are under-represented in national government and public sector employment. Some positive steps have been taken by the authorities, including concessions on language use, including in court proceedings, and establishment of a multiethnic police force in southern Serbia.