

Albania and Georgia: Their Democratic Transitions

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As part of a continuing effort to develop relationships that enrich our educational programs, the CSS and the Helms School of Government, working with the Albanian Embassy and the Georgian Embassy, arranged a conference to explore recent East European progress in making the transition toward democratic governance. The main conference site was the Albanian Embassy.

The opening presentation was given by Ambassador Aleksander Sallabanda who was appointed Albanian Ambassador to the United States in 2006. Ambassador Sallabanda is a Doctor of Medical Science who previously served as Albania's Deputy Minister of Health. As a former member of the faculty of the University of Tirana, he has a great interest in developing associations with universities and views them as an important step in developing closer relations with the US while also promoting an understanding of Albanian affairs. Ambassador Sallabanda explained Albania's transformation toward democracy and discussed the impact of communist policies on the nation. According to the Ambassador, Albania's experience with totalitarianism has given its leadership and its citizens an appreciation of the merits of a free society.



Ambassador Aleksander Sallabanda is shown above with Liberty University student Jared Murdoch



Agri Verrija, Advisor to Ambassador Sallabanda, is shown here with Christina Noble, Jessica Davidson, and Professor Stephen Bowers, discussed general trends in post-communist Albania and issues relating to Albania's NATO membership acceptance plan. Mr. Verrija is responsible for coordinating our work with the Embassy and, in this connection, will facilitate plans for LU students to serve as interns in the Albanian Embassy in Washington and also in the office of the Albanian Prime Minister in Tirana.



Migena Nuri, a Counselor with the Albanian Embassy, stands on the left with LU students Melissa Allen and Mary Byers. Prior to coming to the Albanian Embassy in the US, Ms. Nuri represented Albanian interests in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Hungary. In her presentation, Ms. Nuri, who is a specialist on economic affairs, discussed key features of the Albanian economy during this period of economic transition. She provided an outline of the progress that Albania has enjoyed in developing a market economy that can interact with the economies of the United States and Western Europe. Ms. Nuri will be responsible for providing information about prospects for Albanian economic exchanges with commercial interests in Virginia. Melissa Allen plans on serving as an intern in the Embassy in 2009.



Above right: Annie Celotto, Helms School graduate and senior staff assistant to Virginia State Delegate Ben Cline, is pictured with Ambassador Sallabanda. Ms. Celotto attended the conference in order to explore opportunities for development of economic partnerships between Virginia and Albania. **Above left:** Ambassador Sallabanda makes a point to Ron Murphy of the Strategic Policies Institute and three LU students. **Left:** Meghan Allen, who plans on serving as an intern in the office of the Albanian Prime Minister in Tirana, is shown here with Agri Verrija in front of the Albanian Embassy.

George Kaladze, who is Counselor in the Georgian Embassy, is pictured here with members of the LU group. Mr. Kaladze discussed Georgia's progress toward NATO membership, its relations with Russia, and the controversy over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.





Above: From left to right, LU students Victoria Little, Chelsey Fortin, Mary Byers, and Jessica Davidson during Mr. Kaladze’s presentation on Georgian policy interests. According to Mr. Kaladze, Georgia has made great progress in forging close ties with the United States and with Western Europe and expects that process to be continued following the Georgian Parliamentary elections in May, 2008.



Left: Dr. Bowers and Ambassador Sallabanda discussed some of the main steps in Albania’s development in both the communist and post-communist periods. These included the communists’ 1967 proclamation of Albania as the world’s first “totally atheistic nation”, distinctive features of the Gheg and the Tosk communities, and Albania’s cultivation of a tolerant cultural climate since the collapse of the communist regime.

As the next step in this work, Ambassador Sallabanda and Georgian Counselor Kaladze have expressed a desire to visit the LU campus in order to make presentations about the development of their nations. Meanwhile, both embassies are taking steps to provide internship opportunities for LU students.