

# ALBANIA

ZNK Concerns

Research Unit

USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

May 2021



# Presentation Roadmap

- History and Overview
- Government, Political Parties, Conflict, Corruption
- Police Misconduct, State Intelligence, Military
- Ethnic Minorities
- Blood Feuds
- LGBTI
- Organized Crime and Trafficking
- Resources



North Atlantic Ocean

North Sea

Celtic Sea

Bay of Biscay

Mediterranean Sea

RUSSIA

ORKNEY ISLANDS

HEBRIDES

UNITED KINGDOM

IRELAND

KINGDOM

FRANCE

GERMANY

ITALY

ROME

DENMARK

COPENHAGEN

Stockholm

NETHERLANDS

GERMANY

POLAND

WARSAW

ŁÓDŹ

WROCLAW

KRAKÓW

PRAGUE

CZECH REPUBLIC

BRNO

VIENNA

AUSTRIA

BRATISLAVA

HUNGARY

BUDAPEST

LIJUBLJANA

SLOVENIA

ZAGREB

VIENNA

AUSTRIA

BRATISLAVA

HUNGARY



# Demographics

## Ethnicity:

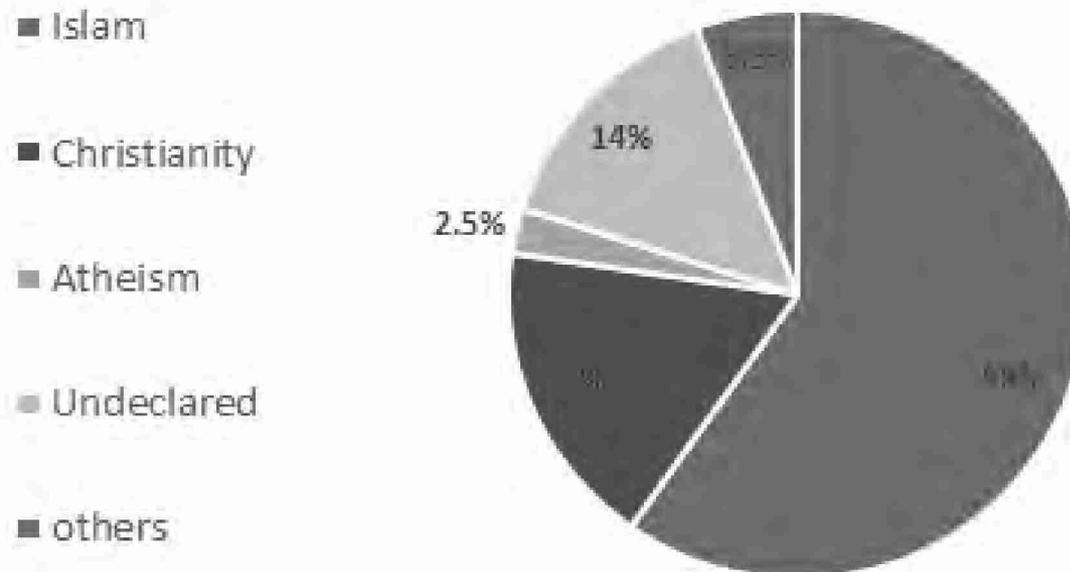
- Albanian 82.6%
- Greek 0.9%
- Other 1% (including Vlach, Romani, Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Egyptian)
- Unspecified 15.5%

## Languages:

- Albanian 98.8% (official - derived from Tosk dialect)
- Greek 0.5%
- Other 0.6% (including Macedonian, Romani, Vlach, Turkish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian)
- Unspecified 0.1%

# Religion

Suppressed during Communist period  
Nationalism instead of religious differences



# History



**1912** Rebels declared independence from the Ottoman Empire

**1939** Seized by fascist Italy in World War II



# History

<b>1946</b>	Albania declared a People's Republic (January)
<b>1955</b>	Albania joined the Warsaw Treaty Organization (w/Soviet Union)
<b>1968</b>	Albania left Warsaw Treaty Organization; "cultural revolution"
<b>1985</b>	Enver Hoxha died; succeeded by Ramiz Alia



# Communist Period

- Enver Hoxha Marxist dictatorship (1944-1991)
- More than 30,000 sent to labor camps and internment areas
- 18,000 imprisoned for political reasons
- 6,000 were executed, many without trial
- 23 prisons and 48 concentration camps in the small country (including infamous Spac Prison – forced labor, torture)
- More than 4,000 still missing (many thought to have been buried in mass graves) – open issue
- HRW: “Surviving victims of communist-era persecution have largely been recognized and compensated”
- HRW: “Since 1991, the approach of all governments, Socialist and Democratic, has been ‘calibrated not to irritate the old guard’”

# History



**1991**

**Democratic Party of Albania (DP)** formed  
First free election held (March)

**1992**

The new opposition won the elections. Alia resigned as president, **Sali Berisha (DP)** became the first non-Communist president of Albania since 1945  
Efforts to move to market system; high inflation, unemployment, mass plant closures and rampant criminal activity  
Thousands of Albanians fled to Greece and Italy.

# History

1997

Government-sponsored **pyramid investment schemes** began to collapse (January).

Port city of Vlorë fell into rebel hands (February) (Gangs)

USD450-million-worth of weapons stolen from army garrisons.

EU deployed 7,000-strong Operation Alba to Albania (**Civil War?**)

The opposition Forum for Democracy pressured Berisha's government to resign; interim government led by Bashkim Fino (March).

Election on June 29 and run-off election in July declared "free and fair"; **Fatos Nano** became prime minister and **Rexhep Mejdani** president (SP).



# History

**1998** Violence and disorder erupted in Shkodër by rebel elements, including police (January-February). DP leader **Azem Hajdari** assassinated; Fatos Nano resigned as prime minister (September). Then-president Rexhepi Mejdani appointed Pandeli Majko prime minister (October). New constitution approved in a referendum (November).



# History

**2004**

Two mass anti-Nano demonstrations were held in Tirana by Berisha (DP) and his allies. One turned violent, with a failed attempt to storm the government building (February).

**2011**

Three protesters shot dead in anti-government demonstration (January).  
Two Albanian officials shot and wounded ahead of local elections (April).  
Local elections disputed (May).

# Government Structure

- Parliamentary republic
- National Assembly (unicameral) with 140 members (4-year terms)
- Government can be formed if a party or a coalition of parties gathers at least **71 seats**
- President elected by National Assembly (5-year term) – foreign relations, commander in chief
- Prime Minister endorsed by President, confirmed by Assembly

# Political Landscape

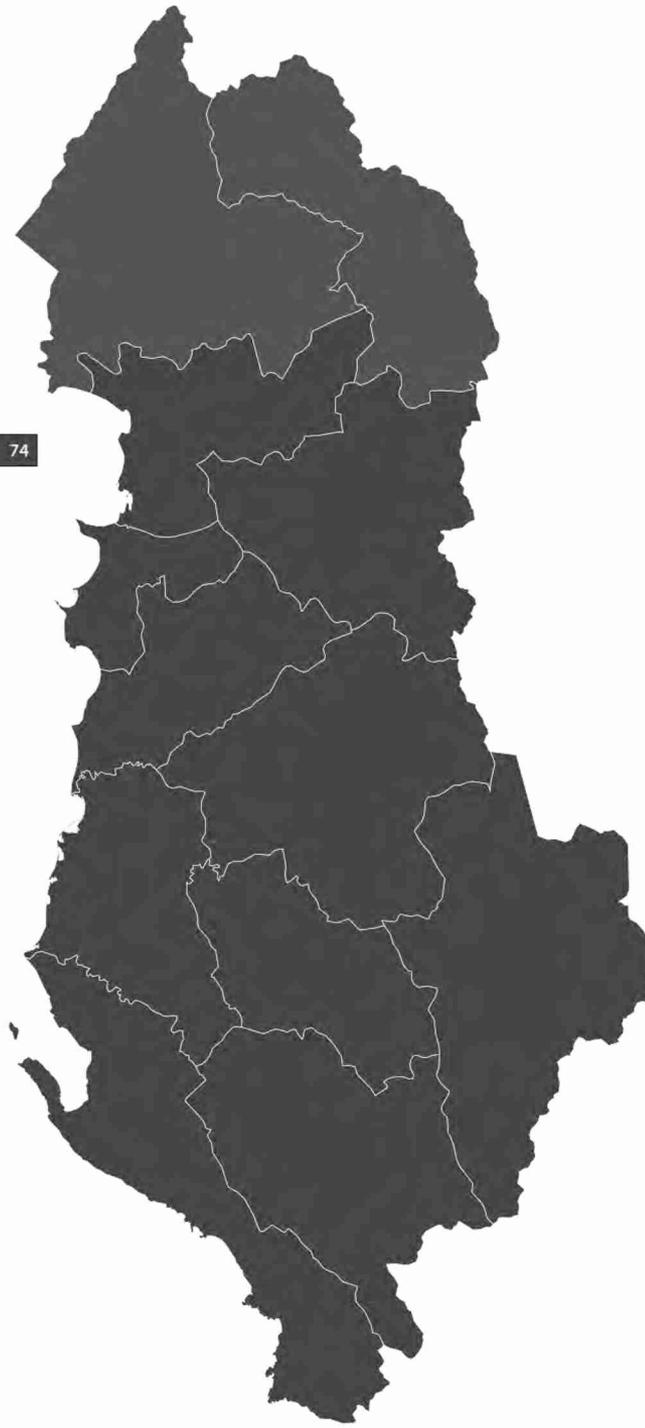
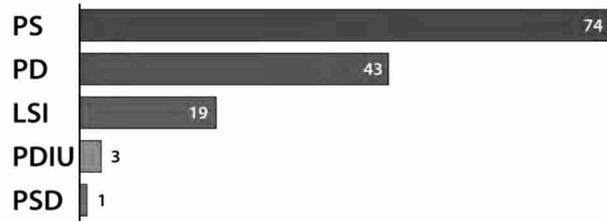
- April 25, 2021 parliamentary election
- Socialist Party of Albania (SP) won 74 of 140 seats – retained power
- Opposition coalition: Democratic Party of Albania (DP) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) failed to gain majority - stage regular anti-government protests in Tirana with other disgruntled groups
- Current President: Ilir Meta (LSI) – since April 2017
- Current Prime Minister: Edi Rama (SP)

# Political Landscape

- 2019 municipal elections boycotted by DP and LSI, resulting in complete takeover of all mayor positions by the SP-led European Albania coalition (SP gained absolute control over central and local government on 23% turnout with allegations of voter intimidation and vote buying)
- SP's unilaterally adopted amendments to the electoral code in October 2020 (damages opposition parties in elections, polarizing, delay EU accession talks)

# 2017

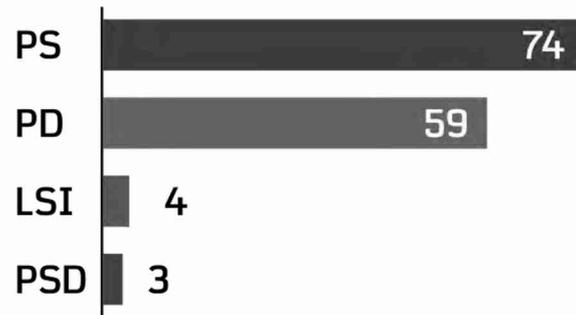
## General election



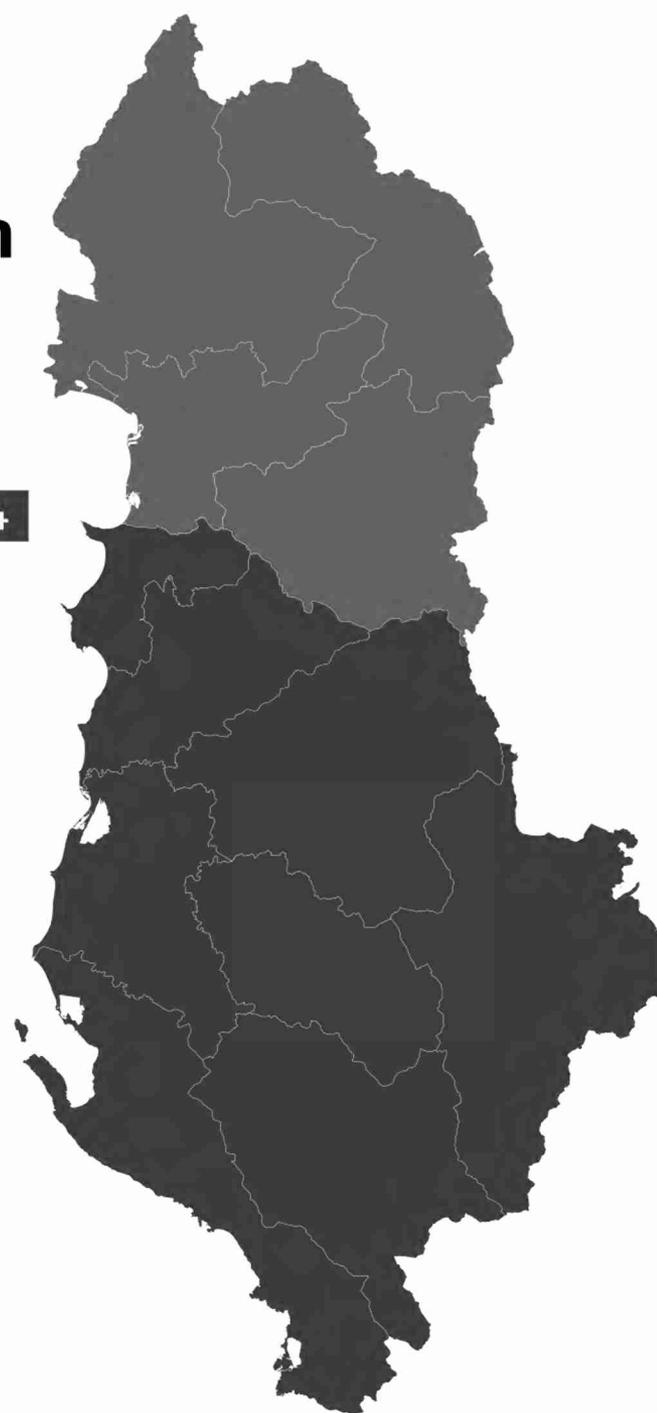
Turnout:  
**46.8%**

# 2021

## General election



Turnout:  
**46.29%**



# Socialist Party of Albania (SP)

- Center-left, social democratic
- Pro-European
- 1991: Legal successor to the Party of Labor of Albania (PLA), which was once the Communist Party of Albania
- 1991-2005: **Fatos Nano** chairman (reform Communist)
- Led by Prime Minister **Edi Rama** since 2005



# Socialist Party of Albania (SP)

- First took power in 1997 (collapse of the pyramid-style funds)
- 2001 won 73 seats, held power
- 2005 lost power to DP
- 2009 65 seats, minority (accused the government, and the DP in particular, of electoral corruption, called for a recount, and boycotted the National Assembly for several months)
- 2013: Headed the Alliance for a European Albania, aka Rilindje (Renaissance); won 84 seats with Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI); Edi Rama became Prime Minister
- 2017 won 74 seats
- 2021 won 74 seats



# Socialist Party of Albania (SP)

## Membership:

- Eligibility: All citizens of the Republic of Albania and all Albanian citizens outside the country as well as foreign individuals residing, which have reached age 16 and accept the Program and the Statute of the Socialist Party
- Written request for membership (day which the individual submits the application, is the day of his/her acceptance in the party)
- Right to participate in the activities of the party
- Right to select and be selected in governing bodies
- Right to nominate and be nominated



# Socialist Party of Albania (SP)

## Youth Wing:



- Euro-Socialist Youth Forum of Albania (FRESSH) formed January 1992
- First center-left mass youth organization in Albania to adhere to the International Union of the Socialist Youth (IUSY) and later to the Young European Socialists (YES)
- Pool for recruiting party leadership and an influential support in terms of mass mobilization of voters in electoral campaigns

# Democratic Party of Albania (DP)



- Main opposition party
- Center-right, conservative
- Pro-European
- Led by **Lulzim Basha**
- Founded in 1991 following student demonstrations that brought down the communist regime
- Focus on rejuvenating the economy and moving Albania forward on its path towards EU accession

# Democratic Party of Albania (DP)

- First took power in 1992 (**Sali Berisha**), lost 1997
- 2005 won 56 seats and ruled with coalition
- 2009 won 68 seats and ruled with coalition
- 2013 43 seats, lost control
- 2019 boycott
- 2021 59 seats; joined with LSI in pre-election coalition



# Democratic Party of Albania (DP)



- Considered confrontational, though some temperance due to U.S./E.U. pressure
- Lulzim Basha accused former Prime Minister Fatos Nano of masterminding multiple murders and assassination attempts on opposition politicians

# Democratic Party of Albania (DP)

## Membership:

- Age 15
- Not enrolled as a member in another political party or organization which is not declared as a partner with DP
- Written application (to section of party near applicant's residence, branch or sub-branch, or headquarters)
- Annual fee (if not paid for two years in a row may cause loss of membership)
- Creates right to attend meetings, elections, and all DP activities
- Can elect or be elected to leadership, and nominate and be nominated for candidacy



# Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)

- Center-left, social democratic
- Pro-European
- “Kingmaker”
- Formed from a split with the Socialist Party in September 2004 (disagreement about the re-election of Fatos Nano)
- Founded by President **Ilir Meta** (current President) (party now led by his wife, Monika Kryemadhi)
- Allegations of corruption



# Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)



- 2009 won 4 seats, joined DP (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Economy, Minister of Health)
- 2013 won 16 seats, part of winning coalition with SP
- 2017 won 19 seats, but SP majority put LSI in opposition
- 2021 won 4 seats after joining with DP (seen as unlikely partners)

# Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)

- 2021: “Though officially impartial, President Ilir Meta has turned into a firebrand government opponent, accusing Rama of concentrating all legislative, administrative and judicial powers in his hands and running a “kleptocratic regime” that has bungled pandemic response and delayed the country’s EU integration.”



# Social-Democratic Party (PSD)

- Center-left, social democratic

- Minor party

- **Willing to join coalitions with SP**



**PSD**  
Partia SOCIALDEMOKRATE  
E SHQIPËRISË

- Led by Skënder Gjinushi, a former Chairman of the Parliament of Albania (1997-2001) and Minister of Education (1987–1991)
- Formerly led by controversial businessman Tom Doshi, a former Socialist Party member who was banned from entering the U.S. due to allegations of corruption

# Social-Democratic Party (PSD)

- 1992 won 7 seats, held through 2001
- 2001 won 4 seats
- 2005 won 7 seats
- 2009 and 2013 won no seats
- 2017 won 1 seat
- 2021 won 3 seats



**PSD**  
Partia SOCIALDEMOKRATE  
E SHQIPËRISË

# Union for Human Rights Party (PBDNJ)

- Represents the ethnic Greek minority
- Formed 1992 (offspring of Omonoia)
- **Ally of the SP, but has joined DP**
- Led since founding by Vasil Melo; Vangjel Dule since Melo's death in 2002
- 1997 won 3 seats
- 2005 won 2 seats
- 2009 won 1 seat



# Party for Justice, Integration and Unity (PDIU)



- Nationalist, right-wing
- Founded 2011
- 2013 won 5 seats (SP coalition)
- 2017 won 3 seats
- 2021 won no seats (DP coalition)

# Christian Democratic Party of Albania (PDK)

- Right-wing center
- Represents Christian minority; draws most of its support from Catholic towns in the north
- Willing to join coalitions with SP
- Led by Skënder Gjinushi, a former Chairman of the Parliament of Albania (1997-2001) and Minister of Education (1987–1991)
- 2013 won 1 seat
- 2017 no seats

# Other Parties

- Movement of Legality Party (ML)
- Republican Party (RP)
- National Front (NF; PBK)
- Liberal Democratic Union (LDU; BLD)
- New Democrat Party (PDr)
- Republican Party (PR)
- Liberal Union Party (PBLD)
- National Front Party (PBKD)
- Movement for Human Rights Party (PLDLN)
- Liberal Party of Democratic Union (PBD)
- Democratic Alliance (AD)
- Christian Democratic League (LDK)
- Agrarian Environmentalist Party (PAA)
- Alliance of Macedonians for European Integration (AMIE)
- Democratic National Front Party (PBKD)
- Legality Movement Party (PLL)
- Republican Party (PR)
- Movement for National Development (LZhK)
- G 99 Party

# Illegal Personal Data Collection

- Constitution of the Republic of Albania, Article 35: no one may be obliged, except when the law requires it, to make public the data connected with his person
- Institution of the People's Advocate states that obtaining and using personal data of citizens by any political party is illegal
- BalkanInsight 2021: “**Exposure of the ruling Socialist Party's vast database on the country's voters**, apparently drawing on data gathered from state institutions”
- Contains the names of **910,000 voters in the Tirana region**, along with personal data, including employment and family background records in what critics call a massive tracking system
- The opposition Democratic Party claims the data included in the database was stolen by the Socialist Party via the government service website E-Albania, where people apply for different services

# Pressuring Voters and Vote Buying?

- BalkanInsight 2018: “The opposition Democratic Party accused . . . the Socialists of vote-buying tactics, offering jobs for votes and using outright violence.”
- BalkanInsight 2021: “Vote buying and voter intimidation are seen as widespread in the poor Elbasan region, which has become a battleground between the parties. The area where [a] fatal clash occurred is known as a poor neighborhood. Buying ID cards from people in poor areas is [a] known tool parties use to deny votes to their rivals.”

# Political Violence?

- 2013: Parliamentary elections - report of poll violence (city of Lac), Democratic Party candidate (Mhill Fufi) was shot, one man killed, others wounded (otherwise “a largely peaceful campaign season”)
- Conflict was over alleged voter bribing

# Political Violence?

- 2014-2018: Did not find direct reports of members of the Socialist Party harming members of the Democratic Party
- On May 13, 2017, **ten thousands of supporters of the opposition Democratic Party (DP) took to the streets of Tirana in protest against Prime Minister Edi Rama's ruling socialist party (SP)**. The opposition is accusing the government of being entangled in organized crime and demands Rama's resignation
- Conflict ended by agreement (EU/US mediation) for "all-party coalition government"

# Political Violence?

- February 2018, Balkan Insight reported on political violence where 20-30 members of the **Justice, Integration and Unity Party (PDIU) attacked Socialist Party officials**
- “Four officials of the Municipality of Dibra in northern Albania were sent to hospital on Wednesday after suffering injuries at the hand of officials from their junior political allies in the PDIU”

# Political Violence?

- 2019: “Most recent opposition protests have ended in violence, with protesters attacking buildings with firecrackers and Molotov bombs, while police responded with teargas and water cannons. However, the amount of firecrackers used on Sunday was unprecedented, and some were very large.”
- “The leader of the main centre-right opposition **Democratic Party**, Lulzim Basha, announced later that the next protest would take place on 8 June, and warned of a further escalation.”

# Political Violence?

- **2021 Election: Local SP politician, Pjerin Xhuvani, murdered in Elbasan** in an armed clash between supporters of DP
- Four others injured, including a police officer
- He had previously been sentenced for corruption, for extracting money from the National Health Insurance Fund using fake prescriptions.
- Supporters of the two main opposing political parties clashed before in Elbasan in February.
- **“Elbasan is notorious for the presence of several organized crime groups and political parties have often accused each other of mobilizing gangs there in their election campaigns.”**
- A few days earlier, a DP activist was injured in the western city of Kavaja, in an incident for which the Democrats blame the governing Socialists.

# Harms Against PDK?

- January 2004, Albania's Prime Minister Fatos Nano sued the PDK's leader, Nikolle Lesi, for libel - Nano's having awarded himself six months' salary for work associated with the privatization of the National Savings Bank of Albania "amounted to corruption" – Lesi fined \$20k (100x Avg. Mo. Salary)
- Prior to Albania's 2005 elections, reports of opposition candidates, including members of the Christian Democratic Party, being "attacked and intimidated"; candidates fired from jobs

# Corruption

- Corruption in Albania is widespread
- Efforts to fight it not effective because reaches highest levels of government
- Transparency International 2020:

## ALBANIA

Score

36/100

Rank

104/180

Score change

 +3 since 2012

# Corruption

## Index of Public Integrity 2019:

	Judicial Independence	
	Rank 113/117	
Country Score	2.61	
World Average	5.41	
Income Group Average	4.69	
Regional Average	4.28	

# Corruption

- Data from the Special Prosecution Office against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) (began December 2019), indicated that in the first 8 months of 2020, there were:
  - 117 criminal proceedings for offenses related to corruption; 119 people suspected
  - 33 requests for trial; 49 defendants sent to court for corruption-related cases
- **Until August 31, 2020, SPAK had registered 3 criminal proceedings based on articles 245 and 260 of the Criminal Code, related to active and passive corruption of high-level officials and local elected officials.**
- The Special Court against Organized Crime and Corruption began work in December 2019

# Corruption

- 2016: Self-declaration forms revealed that at least 10 MPs, split equally between the left and right parties, and 5 SP and DP mayors, had problems in the past with the justice system - arrested, prosecuted, or convicted for various offenses.
- Ongoing vetting process for members of the judiciary led to the dismissal or resignation of numerous judges over unexplained assets.
- Multiple SP members charged with involvement in drug trafficking schemes.

# Police Misconduct

- DOS for 2020: Allegations that police and prison guards sometimes beat and abused suspects and prisoners, usually in police stations
- Allegations involved use of excessive force at the time of or immediately following apprehension (arrest and interrogation)
- Mistreatment during transport or initial questioning, apparently to extract a confession, obtain information, or as punishment
- Slaps; punches; kicks; blows with a hard object; excessively tight handcuffing

# Police Misconduct

- 2020: Excessive force killing for COVID curfew violation, protests, then teargas and some officers/journalists minorly injured (officer arrested and investigation commenced)

# Police Misconduct

- 2020: Service for Internal Affairs and Complaints (SIAC) investigated 1,016 corruption complaints
- Most alleged a failure to act, violation of standard operating procedures, abuse of office, arbitrary action, police bias, unfair fines, and passive corruption
- SIAC referred to the prosecution 202 cases involving 299 officials
- Office of the Ombudsman also processed complaints against police officers, mainly concerning problems with arrests and detentions
- Inequitable enforcement due to personal associations, political or criminal connections, deficient infrastructure, lack of equipment, and inadequate supervision

# State Intelligence Service

- National Intelligence Service (Sherbimi Informative Kombetare, **ShIK**), aka National Informative Service, was formed in July 1991 and replaced communist Albania's **Sigurimi** security police
- In 1999, the ShIK was restructured and renamed the Department of National Security (DSK) but the Constitutional Court changed the name to the State Intelligence Service (Shërbimit Informativ Shqiptar; **SHISH**), with the local media continuing to refer to it as the ShIK
- Under Prime Minister

# State Intelligence Service

## State Intelligence Service duties:

- Collect information from abroad for the purposes of national security
- Undertake intelligence activity for purposes of the protection of integrity, independence and constitutional order
- Collect information in regard to terrorist activity, production and trafficking of narcotics, in regard to production of weapons of mass destruction as well as crimes against the environment
- Collect information in regard to organized crime that endangers the national security

# State Intelligence Service

SHISH informs and reports to:

- The President of the Republic
- The Prime Minister of Albania
- Speaker of the Assembly
- Chairman of the Parliamentary Security Committee
- Other Ministries and governmental agencies, when necessary and deemed appropriate.

# State Intelligence Service

- **November 2002:** DP asserted that SHISH had unlawfully spied on its leaders and was involved in the killing of Azem Hajdari (1998)

# State Intelligence Service

Illegal surveillance?

- **2014:** Claims that SHISH agents were spying on the country's police force
- December 2, 2013 letter from the Counter-Intelligence Director of SHISH ordered all agency branches across the country to identify high-ranking state police officials who had been involved in illegal activities
- Accusations that it went beyond SHISH's mandate, was illegal, amounted to abuse of power, and was spurred by opposition DP MPs' efforts against new appointments in the police force

# Military Service

- The Albanian military consists of land, naval and air forces
- Part of NATO as of April 2009
- Ended conscription in 2010
- Voluntary recruitment age is 18
- [Albanian army website](#) has an English-language section with information on its structure and configuration

# Non-Government Armed Groups

- The Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosovo (FARK) – Albanian Kosovars, some training in Northern Albania in late 1990s (see TRIG report)
- Various armed groups during 1997 civil war

# Ethnic Minorities

- Ethnic minorities having a kin-state in the Balkan region (Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosniak and Aromunian)
- Two cultural-lingual minorities (Roma and Egyptian)
- Greeks are the most numerous, primarily concentrated in Southern Albania

# Ethnic Minorities

- Some **Roma and Balkan-Egyptians** are reported to face marginalization and discrimination in access to housing, employment, health care, education, social assistance such as unemployment benefits and participation in political life
- Some Roma and Egyptian parents find it hard to register the births of children because they themselves are without legally-documented places of residence
- Forced evictions

# Ethnic Minorities

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015:

- October 14, 2014 the inhabitants of the **Greek minority village Dervitsani Argyrokastro attacked by Albanians**
- Reaction against large flag depicting a map of so-called "Greater Albania", which includes territories from neighboring states, especially from Greece
- "Greeks should leave, here is Albania", "We will burn you."

# Ethnic Minorities

2018: **Greek activist killed** by Albanian forces:

- Konstantinos Katsifas: 35-year-old ethnic Greek activist (flags); born in northern Epirus' village of Burat (Vouliarates), close to the Greek-Albanian border
- "Oxi" Day revelry (Greeks rejected Mussolini ultimatum in 1940)
- Albanian special forces shot/killed him near his village, claiming he fired on them

# Blood Feuds: History

- Gjakmarrya (aka gyakmarrja, gyakmarrya, gjakmarrja)
- System of reciprocal honor killings
- Centuries old: customary law Kanun of Lek Dukagjin (1410 – 1481) – “Blood is never lost”
- Outlawed during the Communist regime of Enver Hoxha, but revived 1991, especially in remote north

# Blood Feuds: Structure

- Victim's closest male relative is obliged to kill the murderer of his family member
- Individual subordinate to group, honor paramount
- Property/land disputes; human trafficking; personal honor (provocations, jealousy; masculinity); car accidents; work problems; debt; fear of vendetta
- Isolation in home is a key feature (killer and family)
- Threats (one or many)
- Time span
- Negotiation
- Restitution

# Blood Feuds: Changes

- Associated with older, rural population
- Younger generation less likely to participate (emigration, study abroad, internal migration to urban centers)
- Individualism overtaking collective responsibility
- But Kanun still invoked as basis for murder (social transaction instead of tradition)
- “80% is criminal and not related to customary law”
- Women, children, clergy now targets

# Blood Feuds: Revenge?

- Hakmarrja = revenge
- Blood feud is long term process, threatens those marginally involved in dispute
- Revenge more immediate (eg. organized crime)
- Violence as dispute resolution due to lack of faith in police/judiciary

# Blood Feuds: Murders

## Reported murders (Police/Operazione Colomba)

- 2013: 3/7
  - 2014: 1/4
  - 2015: 0/2
  - 2016: 1/6
- 
- Police/Prosecutors considered reliable numbers
  - Media/NGOs have interest in overreporting
  - Underreporting due to avoidance of authorities?
  - Mostly in remote, mountainous north



# Blood Feuds: Confined Families

Regional Police Directorate in Shkodër reported on region in 2016:

- Shkodër municipality (61 confined families)
- Vau i Dejës municipality (3 confined families)
- Malësi e Madhe municipality (4 confined families)
- Fushë-Arrëz and Pukë municipalities (0 confined families).

“[S]ome of these 68 families have gone abroad or have moved inside Albania”.

# Blood Feuds: Protection?

- Criminal Code
- Police efforts to monitor and intervene, but lack of faith and complaints on effectiveness
- Prosecutions and reopened cases
- Reports of bribery (\$6k to reduce sentence 1 year)

# Blood Feuds: Law

- Criminal Code of Albania does not provide a legal definition of a blood feud
- Penal Code Article 78/a: murder committed due to blood feud shall be punished by not less than 30 years or life imprisonment
- Penal Code Article 83a: serious threat of retaliation or blood revenge to cause someone to be locked up at home shall be punished by three years' imprisonment
- Law requires local education authorities to implement education programs for children identified as being confined in connection with a blood feud.

# Blood Feuds: Relocation?

- Director of the Prosecutor's Office: "the fear can be everywhere"
- Representative of the Albanian Helsinki Committee: "each country is a village" - potential victim not necessarily safe in Albania (extremely extended families can easily get information on the location of other people)
- OSCE: "[T]he blood feud mentality, insofar as it still prevails, does not know any limits of time and place"
- Impact of poverty
- Proof of place of residence for registration for government services (eg. Roma and Balkan-Egyptians)

# Blood Feuds: Attestation Letters

- No official or non-official entity is authorized to issue Blood Feud attestation letters (not recognized by Albanian government)
- Representative of Shkodër Regional Police Directorate confirmed **police offices do not issue attestations or verifications** declaring families have problems with blood feuds. “But every complaint is written down and it is part of the procedure to provide a copy of a complaint.” Telephone complaints are also registered in a special book in the command room and citizens can obtain a copy of any official document at any time.
- **Prosecutor’s Office can issue attestations** to citizens about cases that have been started but **will never state correlation with blood feud**. Facts of an incident are registered: what has happened, who is a victim and who is the perpetrator.

# Blood Feuds: Attestation Letters

- Albanians have obtained documents from NGOs falsely claiming they are in a blood feud situation
- Municipality and police signatures falsified
- Ministry of Interior Affairs has intensified its actions against the practice
- **Prosecutions:** head of the National Assembly of Missionaries for Reconciliation in Durrës (2 years imprisonment); mayor of Postribë town; secretary general of the Association of Missionaries for Peace; heads of the villages of Mes, Boks and Drisht; an elder of the village Shtoj and of Rrethina; seven “citizens”

# Blood Feuds: Fraud

## British Embassy in Tirana (2016):

- The **Albanian press**, hungry for sensation, report murders as blood feud, even in cases of straightforward gangland murders.
- Some local journalists have reportedly accepted money to report a murder as blood feud in order that family members might then use the invented blood feud in an asylum bid.
- Others have simply invented a story, without a dispute having taken place, for the benefit of two families' immigration plans.

# LGBTI+

## Streha LGBTI 2020 Survey:

- 80% of 200 LGBTI surveyed considered leaving Albania because they faced difficulties as an LGBTI person
- One in four struggled to cover their basic needs, such as food, medication, clothes and shelter, without their family's support
- One in four struggled to pay rent during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many having to move back to their families and suffering from increased psychological, verbal, or physical violence
- One in two have experienced psychological violence and bullying
- One in five have been sexually harassed
- 33 cases of physical violence and 16 cases of rape
- 25 blackmailed because of their sexual orientation or gender identity
- 16 fired from jobs
- 7% reported the incidents to the authorities

# LGBTI+

- Widespread discrimination, and biased speech in politics and media
  - In October 2019, MP Kujtim Gjuzi publicly threatened LGBT people on a prime-time political show on RTV Ora. The host also made negative statements.
- LGBTI people were the third most targeted group in hateful online posts. Most of these were comments, even when the original post was unrelated to LGBTI people
- Difficulties in accessing the justice system; “The only way to ensure action and protection from the police is to go to the station accompanied by a member of the one of the LGBTI NGOs.”
- LGBTI activist Xheni Karaj was physically attacked by a doctor and other men on a beach while on holiday with her partner

# LGBTI+

## Transgender:

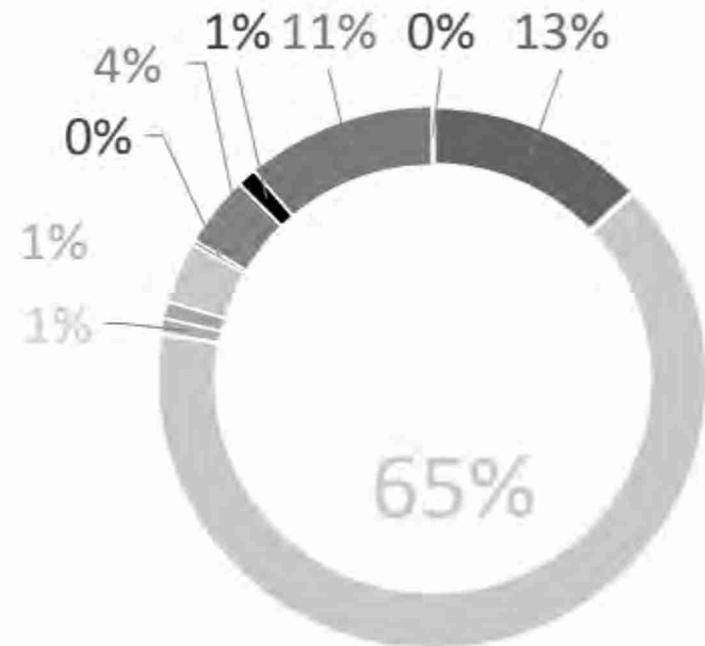
- Discrimination in accessing the rental market
- Discrimination in the prison system (which assigns them to wards based on the gender assigned at birth)
- Discrimination at schools, including bullying (Many trans youth leave school very young)
- Many work as sex workers (criminalized); danger of abuse, harassment, arrest, imprisonment
- Reports of police brutality and discrimination in the street
- No right to change name or gender marker
- No specific services or clinics
- Hormone therapy and sex affirmation procedures not available
- Discrimination or refusal of public health services is commonplace

# LGBTI+

- The Order of Psychologists prohibited its members from performing conversion therapy
- The Ministry of Health banned medical intervention on newborn intersex children
- Albania adopted some laws (2010) protecting LGBTI people from discrimination in employment and education, and hate crime laws inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity
- Protection and cooperation with police on events (Tirana Pride) has been positive. Events have been attended by high-ranking government officials, CSOs, friends, families and supporters.



FIG. 1 Share of persons convicted for selected<sup>6</sup> criminal activities in Albania, by crime type, 2013-2018 (n= 5,775)



- Drug trafficking
- Drug production
- Participation in OCG
- Human trafficking
- Smuggling of migrants
- Cybercrime
- Money laundering
- Firearms trafficking
- Smuggling of goods
- Obstruction of justice by a public official
- Accepting a bribe by a public official

# Organized Crime

- Drug production by far largest number of convictions (cannabis)
- Transit country:
  - Heroin along the Balkan route, i.e., via Turkey, Bulgaria, Northern Macedonia to Italy and other markets in West and Central Europe
  - Cocaine from South America, notably Colombia, to West and Central Europe

# Human Trafficking

**2019**: 96 potential victims and 7 officially-recognized victims identified by the government and NGOs:

- 36 adults; 67 minors
- 80 female; 23 male
- 6 non-Albanian
- 65 were victims of sex trafficking
- 37 were used for forced labor
- One was forced into marriage for the purpose of domestic servitude
- Concerns for underreporting

# Human Trafficking

## Risk Factors:

- Poverty
- Low level of education
- Domestic abuse in the family home
- Physical and mental disabilities
- Children in children's homes or who are homeless

# Human Trafficking

## Risk Factors:

- The Roma and Egyptian populations are more vulnerable to trafficking due to a combination of these factors
- The rural areas of the north offer fewer employment opportunities, making people more vulnerable to traffickers. However, both the south and central areas are affected by trafficking
- Tirana is a transitory area, both for traffickers and potential victims
- “Trafficked women come from all areas of the country and from varied social backgrounds.”

# Human Trafficking

## Recruiting:

- Those recruiting may include family members and others known to the victim
- Online recruitment, grooming, and exploitation have increased across the world during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increase in trafficking for sexual abuse online, including child sexual abuse
- Violence used
- Promises of financial gain, immigration

# Human Trafficking

## Compelled Work:

- Prostitution (Albania and Europe)
- Labor (cultivation of drugs, domestic work)
- Begging
- Criminal activity
- Selling small items on street

# Human Trafficking

## Government Action:

- Dedicated law
- Dedicated task force; mobile units
- National Rapporteur
- National Referral Mechanism (NRM)
- Law enforcement and judiciary training initiatives
- Dedicated prosecutors and courts
- Victim shelters (women only), witness protection, legal aid
- Less support for men creates vulnerability

# Human Trafficking

## Difficulty returning to society:

- Stigma
- Isolation
- Financial hardship and uncertainty
- Sense of physical insecurity
- Subjective fear of being found either by their families or their former traffickers
  
- “Much of Albanian society is governed by a strict code of honor which not only means that trafficked women would have very considerable difficulty in reintegrating into their home areas on return but also will affect their ability to relocate internally.”
  
- Those who have children outside marriage are particularly vulnerable: close relatives may refuse to have the trafficked woman's child return with her and could force her to abandon the child

# Albanians Tied to Gülen School

- Reports reflect that those associated with the Gülen Movement in Albania, particularly Turkish nationals who fled to Albania after the 2016 coup attempt, face Turkish rhetoric and attempts by the Turkish government to have the Albanian government close Gülen schools and extradite Gülenists.
- RAIO Research Unit has not found indications that Albanian authorities have complied with such requests, or that Gülenists in Albania face a pattern of current harms from Turkish operatives or Albanians with allegiance to Turkish President Erdogan.

# EU Finds Albania a Safe Country?

- EU member states have applied “safe country of origin and safe third country concepts” that can create a presumption of ineligibility for asylum cases where the applicant comes from a country predetermined to be safe
- 2015: EC proposed a Regulation establishing an EU common list of safe countries of origin, with Albania in the first phase
- Belgium, France, Netherlands initially rejected including Albania; Ireland and Slovakia still reject
- Rebuttable presumption; not automatic denial but faster process

# RAIO Research Unit Resources

- RU ECN (Albania Country Page coming soon)
- Query Responses
- Document Research Links
- RAIO COI Bank on Teams (coming soon)

# RAIO Research Unit Resources

## Query Responses:

 LLOC Albania Residence Permit 6-2019	...	Albania	LLOC Albania Residence Permit	6/1/2019	Europe and Central Asia
 Albanians tied to Gulen Schools 5-31-2019	...	Albania	Albanians tied to Gulen Schools 5-31-2019	5/31/2019	Europe and Central Asia
 Albania Socialist Party 8-2018	...	Albania	Albania Socialist Party	8/1/2018	Europe and Central Asia
 Albanian Socialist Party harms and corruption 8-2018	...	Albania	Albanian Socialist Party harms and corruption 8-2018	8/1/2018	Europe and Central Asia
 Albania - Government harms to Christian Democratic Party PDK 5-2017	...	Albania	Albania - Government harms to Christian Democratic Party PDK 5-2017	5/1/2017	Europe and Central Asia
 Albania LGBT harms 6-30-2014	...	Albania	Albania LGBT harms	6/30/2014	Europe and

# RAIO COI Bank on Teams

- COI collection available to all RAIO officers
- Word docs hosted on Teams, fully searchable with cites
- Emphasis on vetted COI that is collaborative and responsive to needs
- Changes locked, but anyone can suggest edits, comment, request topics

- Activity (3)
- Chat (5)
- Teams
- Calendar
- Calls
- Files
- ...
- Apps
- Help

### Teams

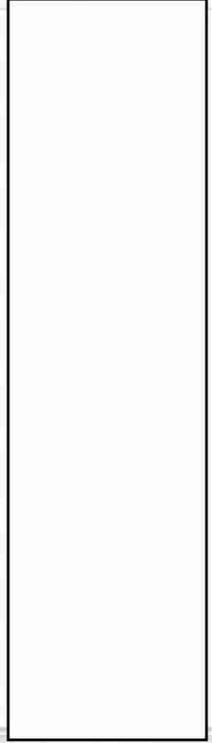
- Pangaea Armed Groups Res...
- Pangaea Daily Log**
- 2 hidden channels
- RC RAIO COI Bank Pilot ...
- General
- Back-ups
- Guidance Documents
- 1 hidden channel
- RT RAIO Training - Mo... 2
- RAIO ...
- General** 1
- RAIO Headquarters
- Tech Tips by IDEA
- Town Halls
- RII COI Bank Detail Appli ...
- Join or create a team

### General

Posts Files Wiki Tracking Tasks +

+ New Upload Sync Copy link Download Add cloud storage All Documents

Kenya.docx	January 13
Mexico.docx	January 13
Mongolia.docx	January 13
Nepal.docx	January 13
Nicaragua.docx	January 13
Nigeria.docx	January 13
Pakistan.docx	January 13
Russia.docx	January 13
Uganda.docx	January 13
Ukraine.docx	January 13
Venezuela.docx	January 13



(b)(6)

Microsoft Teams interface showing a document library in the 'General' channel. A list of documents is displayed, with a large oval highlighting the list and a text box stating '27+ Countries so far'. A redaction box labeled '(b)(6)' covers the right side of the document list.

Document Name	Date
Kenya.docx	January 13
Mexico.docx	January 13
Mongolia.docx	January 13
Nepal.docx	January 13
Nicaragua.docx	January 13
Nigeria.docx	January 13
Pakistan.docx	January 13
Russia.docx	January 13
Uganda.docx	January 13
Ukraine.docx	January 13
Venezuela.docx	January 13

27+ Countries so far

(b)(6)

# Albania

## Contents

Timeline .....	4
Albania Country Profile .....	6
Ethnic Minorities in Albania .....	9
Romani and Balkan Egyptians .....	10
Gorani .....	11
Aromani/Vlachs .....	11
Greek Minority .....	12
Religious Tolerance in Albania .....	13
Sexual Minorities in Albania .....	14
Legal Framework .....	15
Treatment of Gay by the State .....	16
Bias Motivated Speech and Violence .....	17
Discrimination in Schools .....	17
Discrimination in Employment .....	18
Public Opinion and Attitudes .....	18
Rights and Equal Treatment of Trans People .....	18
Communism in Albania, Historical Perspective .....	19
Blood Feuds .....	20
Impact on Wider Family .....	21
State Protection .....	22
Relocation to Escape a Blood Feud .....	22
Practices of Relocation .....	23
Actions to Mitigate false Blood Feud Claims .....	24
Political System .....	24
Parliamentary Elections .....	24
Political Pluralism and Participation .....	25
2021 Parliamentary Elections, Background and Contenders .....	25
Gender Equality in Albanian Political Spectrum .....	27

Political Parties .....	28
Democratic Party, PD .....	28
Socialist Party, PS .....	31
Socialist Movement for Integration, LSI .....	33
Social Democratic Party (PSD) .....	36
Political Parties Engaging in Violence .....	38
Political Parties Collecting Personal Data .....	43
Treatment of Journalists .....	44
High-Level Corruption .....	44
Police Misconduct .....	45
Domestic Violence in Albania .....	47
Work Permits VS Resident Permit .....	49
Human Trafficking .....	50
Vulnerable Groups .....	51
State Protection .....	52
Procedure to Obtain a Police Report .....	53
Albanians Tied to Gulen Schools .....	53
State Intelligence Service .....	55
US Involvement in Training in Albania .....	58
Albania Armed Forces .....	58
Military Service .....	59
Albania Entry/Exit Procedure .....	59

This document is intended as a repository of publicly accessible resources and quotes that officers have found useful in their adjudications. The content has been reviewed through a collaborative process led by the RAIIO Research Unit, but it does not represent an exhaustive representation of any issue. This document is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum and may only be used in accordance with RAIIO adjudication guidance. For additional information or questions about this or other COI resources, please visit the [RAIO Research Unit ECN page](#) or contact the [RAIO Research Unit](#).

\*\*when someone adds substantial new content, they would need to right click the Table of Contents, click Update Field, then either Update Page Numbers Only (if only adding new sources) or Update Entire Table (if a new section was added)\*\*

\*\*Each section needs to have Heading 1 chosen for the heading, and sub-headings use Heading 2\*\*

## TIMELINE

### A chronology of key events:

- BBC, *Albania Profile Timeline*, March 1, 2018 accessed on \_\_\_\_\_, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17681099>

**1939** - Shortly before the start of World War II, Italy invades. King Zog flees to Greece.

**1940** - Italian army attacks Greece through Albania.

**1941** - Enver Hoxha becomes head of new Albanian Communist Party.

**1943** - German forces invade and occupy Albania following Italian surrender.

**1944** - Germans withdraw after Communist resistance. Enver Hoxha installed as new leader.

**1945** - Tribunals begin against thousands of "war criminals".

**1946** - Purges of non-communists from government positions.

**1948** - Albania breaks ties with Yugoslavia; Soviet Union begins economic aid to Albania.

**1950** - Britain and US back landings by right-wing guerillas, who fail to topple communists.

**1955** - Albania becomes a founding member of the Warsaw Pact.

### Isolationist state

**1961** - Albania allies itself with China, after Soviet Union breaks diplomatic relations over ideological rift.

**1967** - Violent clampdown on religious activity. Albania declared the world's first atheist state.

**1968** - Albania withdraws from Warsaw Pact over Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia.

**1978** - China ends economic and military aid to Albania after relations become strained by China's reconciliation with the US.

**1985** - Hoxha dies, succeeded by Ramiz Alia.

## The Christian Democratic Party of Albania (PDK) Party Leader: Dhimiter Muslia

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Albania, Country of Origin Information, 20 February 2006, accessed on \_\_\_\_\_, available at: <https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=449892>
  - “The Democratic Christian Party of Albania (PDK) is a "right-wing center" party (ATA 22 June 2005) that is led by Nikolle Lesi (ibid.; Europa World Year Book 2005 2005, 470). Established in 1991 (ibid.; ATA 22 June 2005), the PDK draws most of its support from Catholic towns in the North of the country (Political Handbook of the World 2005-2006 Dec. 2005, 17; Political Parties of the World 2005, 9).”
  - “On 2 June 2005, the PDK joined the New Democrat Party (PDn), the Republican Party (PR), the Liberal Union Party (PBLD), the National Front Party (PBKD), the Movement for Human Rights Party (PLDLN), and the Liberal Party of Democratic Union (PBD) to form a coalition named the Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Wellbeing (SeeNews 28 June 2005). The PDK holds two of Albania's 140 parliamentary seats since the country's elections in July 2005 (Angus Reid Consultants 3 July 2005).”
  - “In 2004, the Christian Democratic Party (PDK) supported the Democratic Party's activities to help remove the Socialist Party (PS), led by Fatos Nano (SeeNews 28 June 2005), from power (Rilindja Demokratike 20 Aug. 2004). The "centre-right" Democratic Party (PD) replaced the Nano government after winning the country's July 2005 elections (BBC 22 Jan. 2006).”

## Treatment of Supporters of the Christian Democratic Party (PDK)

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Albania, Country of Origin Information, 20 February 2006, accessed on \_\_\_\_\_, available at: <https://irb.gc.ca/en/country>

# Other Resources

- **Overview: Albania – Internal Affairs**, Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - The Balkans, May 11, 2021
- **Blood Feuds: Country Policy and Information Note Albania: Blood feuds**, UK Home Office, February 2020
- **LGBTI: LGBTI Enlargement Review 2020**, ILGA Europe, pp.7-12, 2020
- **Organized Crime: Measuring Organized Crime in the Western Balkans**, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, pp.62-71, 2020
- **Human Trafficking: Country Policy and Information Note Albania: Human trafficking**, UK Home Office, Feb. 2021
- **Obtaining a Police Report: Procedures to obtain a police report; whether a police report can be obtained from abroad through a proxy; if so, requirements and procedures (2012-September 2015)**, Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa, Aug. 21, 2015

# Contact Information



Researcher for Europe, Central Asia, Afghanistan  
RAIO Research Unit



(b)(6)

[RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:RAIOResearch@uscis.dhs.gov)