

**ALBANIA:
STATE OF THE NATION**

1 March 2000

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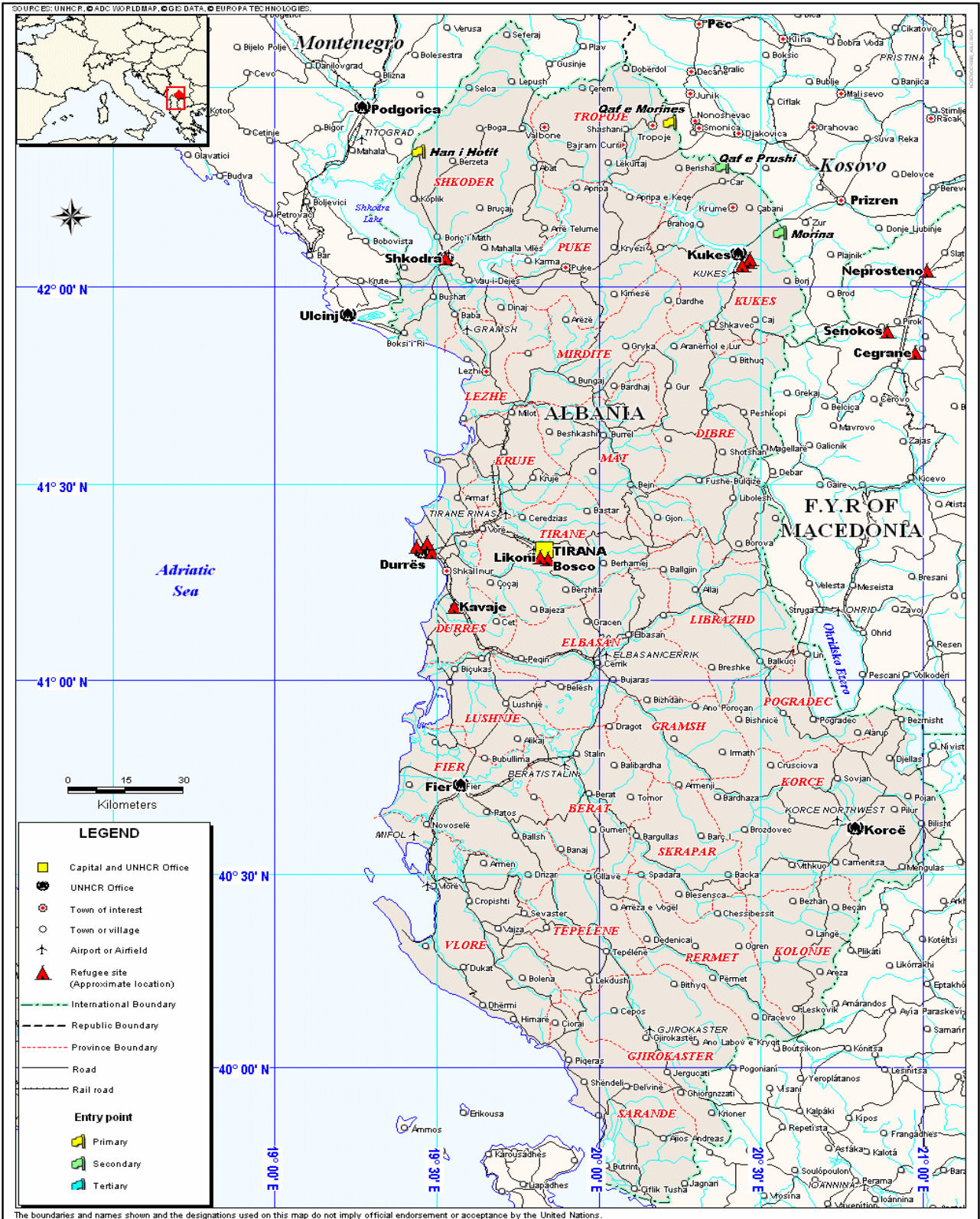
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ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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Map of Albania



Source: UNHCR. www.reliefweb.int/



ALBANIA: STATE OF THE NATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the spring of 1999, more than 450,000 Kosovo Albanian refugees flooded into Albania, many of them forcibly deported by Serb forces in Kosovo. Despite Albania's acute poverty, many Albanians opened their homes to provide shelter to the incoming refugees and the government spared no effort, organising humanitarian relief and putting the entire country at the disposal of NATO. As a result, in the eyes of its people, Albania has secured its position as the spiritual motherland of all ethnic Albanians, and as such expects to play a prominent role in future pan-Albanian aspirations.

In an effort to consolidate the gains made during the last year – namely the 'liberation' of Kosovo from Belgrade's rule – Albanians from both sides of the Kosovo border are endeavouring to weaken the structural division between Albania and Kosovo. The improvement of transportation and communication links is aimed at providing Kosovo with access to an Adriatic sea port, whilst helping to alleviate the chronic unemployment in Albania's northern districts by re-establishing traditional trading links between towns on both sides of the border. Such moves, however, are being interpreted by some of Albania's neighbours as the first steps in the process of creating a Greater Albania. This is strenuously denied by both Albanian and Kosovo Albanian leaders who, despite acknowledging their nation's desire at some point in the future to see a unification of all Albanians into one state, recognise that for the foreseeable future the Albanians of Albania have different and far more pressing issues to address from those in the former Yugoslavia, and vice versa.

In relation to the 'Albanian National Question', however, there remains one more historical resentment to be addressed, that of the Cham Muslim Albanian population expelled from Greece after the Second World War. The Cham issue represents the last real challenge for Albanian nationalists and is likely to be pursued with vigour by the Chams and their numerous supporters from across the Albanian political spectrum. Addressing this issue, which is primarily one of financial compensation rather than territorial aspirations, is important in order to avoid any potential damage it could cause to Albanian-Greek relations should it continue to remain a festering sore between the two Balkan neighbours.

Nine years after the collapse of Communism, Albania is still seriously hampered by the intense hostility between its two dominant political groupings – the ruling Socialist-led government and the main opposition Democratic Party (DP). The re-election of former President, Sali Berisha as leader of the DP and of the man he imprisoned, Fatos Nano, as leader of the Socialist Party (SP) has ensured that Albanian politics remains repetitiously divisive and confrontational.

Meanwhile, the country is beset by problems flowing from chronically weak state institutions and rampant levels of crime and corruption, which have left the majority of Albanians demoralised and apathetic towards the very concept of democracy. Despite the recent clampdown on localised criminal gangs, the Albanian authorities remain incapable of combating the steady growth of organised crime, which appears to be consolidating its activities in the country's capital and two main ports, Vlore and Durrës. This is clearly a phenomenon which is linked with and dependent upon a network of organised crime in all Albania's neighbouring countries. Albania has become the springboard into Western Europe for the illegal trafficking of people and drugs. In the absence of real progress in tackling the problems associated with rampant criminality and weak state institutions, Albania's continued internal stability is far from guaranteed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The international community's financial assistance to Albania must continue to be directed primarily at projects which develop technical capacity within Albania's weak state structures.
2. A key priority is strengthening the judiciary, through funding support for salaries and training schemes, and consideration being given to international participation in judicial selection panels.
3. While the creation of a well trained and appropriately-paid Albanian police force should be the priority objective, consideration should be given in the immediate term to expanding the mandate of the Western European Union's (WEU) Multinational Advisory Police Element (MAPE) to allow WEU officers to become active participants in the exercise of policing duties.
4. More resources could usefully be devoted by international donors to the establishment of conflict resolution centres in northern Albania to tackle the issue of blood feuds.
5. The governments of Albania's neighbours – Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Macedonia and Italy – and the administrators of Kosovo should take urgent steps to strengthen their co-operation, in particular in closer border monitoring, in dealing with the problem of illegal immigration through Albania.
6. To improve the longer-term prospects for inter-Balkan co-operation, measures should be adopted to relax visa restrictions for entrepreneurs, publishers, academics and others, whose activities will assist the developments of socio-economic ties between the Balkan countries.

Tirana/London/Brussels, 1 March 2000.



ALBANIA: STATE OF THE NATION

I. INTRODUCTION

During the Kosovo crisis, Albania won international praise for its generous response to the influx of more than 450,000 refugees from Kosovo. Despite remaining largely preoccupied with their own domestic problems throughout most of the crisis, the arrival of the refugees galvanised Albanians into a new sense of national purpose. Shocked by the plight of their ethnic kinsfolk, people collected clothing and food parcels to take to the refugee reception centres, and thousands of families took refugees into their homes. For once Albanians in Albania saw there were some worse off than themselves. As one Tirana resident put it: "We are poor and have own dirty, messy politics, but at least we can go home to our own beds at night."¹

The signing of the Kumanovo agreement in mid June 1999, marked the end of the war in Kosovo, and for Albania, the beginning of the withdrawal of the large international community that had gathered there. International relief agencies, the world's media and the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA)², whose hierarchy had established itself in Tirana during the war, all followed the refugee pattern, leaving as quickly as they had come.

For Albanians, the 'liberation' of Kosovo from Serb control marked a key turning point in the destiny of ethnic Albanians across the Southern Balkans. Although there was general relief when the refugees eventually went back to Kosovo, many people have since felt deflated by the vacuum caused by the withdrawal of world attention. Tirana is now a city with an atmosphere of forlorn emptiness; its inhabitants in a state of anticlimax.

Kosovo might be free, but for many Albanians not much has changed nine years on from the collapse of the one-party state. Burdened by 45 years of impoverished isolation, followed by spasms of violent uprisings, anarchic social destruction and political chaos, Albania remains plagued by endemic crime and corruption. Political rivalry is as intense and malicious as ever, the population is

¹ ICG interview, Tirana, May 1999.

² For convenience and familiarity to an international readership the english terminology, Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) is used throughout the report. The Albanian terminology, is Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (UÇK).

still heavily armed, the roads are still impassable and unemployment is growing. The very concept of democracy remains in an embryonic stage. The country's problems appear as intractable as ever with a return to old party politics with the same personalities. The re-election of the two dinosaurs of post-communist Albanian politics – Sali Berisha and Fatos Nano – has confirmed the continued predominance of the old guard in both Albania's major parties. The undisguised hostility between Nano and Berisha has already raised political tensions, and represents another unwelcome distraction from Albania's grave problems.

Despite the recent positive moves by the state against corruption and a slight improvement, albeit only by Albanian standards, in public order, the main problems facing Albania remain the absence of national reconciliation and the reconstruction of functioning state institutions. The overall security situation is still very poor with sporadic violent incidents continuing to undermine the government's efforts to bring internal stability to the country. The presence of 1,800 NATO personnel remains one of the few stabilising factors both domestically and regionally.

In this paper, the International Crisis Group (ICG) examines the impact of the Kosovo crisis on Albania, and assesses the relevance of the redefined 'Albanian national question' – both in terms of new regional initiatives for closer co-operation, and the resurgence of old issues, such as the Cham property rights claim. It tracks the ongoing developments within the domestic setting, and outlines the challenges ahead in the fields of security, law and order and efforts to combat organised crime and illegal immigration.

II. IMPACT OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS IN ALBANIA

Overall, the Kosovo crisis had a number of positive side-effects for Albania. On a practical level, the economy received a much-needed boost, and the country witnessed an unprecedented, if short-lived, surge of national solidarity, with domestic politics for once taking a back seat. Virtually all but the criminal sectors of the Albanian population rallied to offer assistance to the Kosovo Albanian refugees.³

³ Several refugees fell victim to Albanian criminals. For example, at the end of August, three Kosovo Albanians, returning to Kosovo from Switzerland were found murdered and robbed inside a bullet-ridden car near the northern town of Kukes. See also 'Desperate Kosovo refugees are preyed on by smugglers - and worse', *International Herald Tribune*, 25 May 1999. In contrast to this, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania was particularly anxious to offer assistance to the Kosovo Albanian refugees, in order to dispel any notion that the Church might be more sympathetic to fellow Orthodox Serbs than to the predominantly Muslim Kosovo Albanians. During the war in Kosovo, there were several organised attacks upon Orthodox buildings in Albania, which appeared to be aimed at destabilising relations between different religious communities. Three Orthodox churches - the

A. The Economy

According to the Bank of Albania, the Kosovo crisis had a positive effect on the Albanian economy, helping to create a current account surplus of 30 million USD in the second quarter. The influx of nearly half a million refugees, the import of Western food aid to feed them, and the deployment of a substantial NATO military force, helped Albania achieve a surplus in services of up to 80 million USD in the second quarter – 4.6 times greater than in the previous quarter. A bank official told Reuters, "Our evaluations show that during their stay in Albania, the Kosovo population spent considerable hard currency on top of that obtained from foreign aid. The crisis also helped the country 'get visited' by the world's media, international organisations, aid agencies as well as foreign troops, who all bought services in Albania."⁴

The north eastern district of Kukes experienced a decline in official unemployment due to the opening of the country's border with Kosovo. According to the government news agency ATA, the number of registered jobless in the Kukes district fell in 1999 from 6,240 to 5,300. The opening of the border with Kosovo boosted the activities of local companies, and therefore the size of the required labour force.⁵

At the international level, Albania certainly expects substantial rewards for having put the whole country at NATO's disposal, and having proven itself as a loyal and stable ally of the international community. Indeed, in July 1999, as the country eagerly waited for the results of the Sarajevo Balkans Reconstruction Conference, the Speaker of the Parliament, Skender Gjinushi, claimed that, "Albania and Kosovo deserve to be in the centre of this project and the first to get assistance because the Albanians suffered most during the conflict."⁶

There is an obvious danger, however, of complacency being born out of the attention Albania received during the Kosovo crisis. A general lack of progress – as epitomised in the slow pace of economic reform and the preoccupation with internal political conflicts, could lead to Albania's exclusion on these grounds alone from the European Union's Stability Pact. Tirana will have to realise that as

Church of the Assumption, near the village of Delvina, the Church of Christ's Resurrection just outside the town of Saranda, and the Church of St. Geogios in the village of Metohi, also near Saranda were set on fire by unidentified arsonists. All the churches were in the south of the country in the area inhabited by Albania's Greek Orthodox minority. Despite this, the Albanian Orthodox community, numbering some 20 per cent of the population, gave an enthusiastic reception to the refugees. The Church itself responded by establishing a social, development and relief office, which together with ACT (Action by Churches Together) Network implemented a large-scale emergency relief program.

⁴ Reuters, Tirana, 16 September 1999.

⁵ A report from the Ministry of Labour states that the level of unemployment throughout the rest of the country increased during 1999 due to the privatisation of many state-owned enterprises and the migration of people from rural to urban areas. 240,000 people are now registered as unemployed.

⁶ *Albanian Economic Tribune*, 23 July 1999.

the focus of international attention shifts, its preferential status shaped by the crisis will almost certainly continue to wane.

B. Strengthening Community Ties

Arguably the most significant aspect of the crisis was the arrival of some 450,000 Kosovo Albanians in Albania. For the overwhelming majority this was their first ever visit to the 'motherland', which brought the vast majority of the two Albanian communities into contact with each other for the first time in their lives. According to a recent poll, Kosovo refugees displaced to Albania during the conflict say their stay and experiences there have intensified their feelings of kinship and nationhood with their compatriots in Albania.

The overwhelming majority of the refugees were satisfied with the treatment they received in Albania and, despite Albania's lawless reputation, said they felt safe. A farmer from Suva Reka explained: "We have never felt afraid of anything here because we have come to our country and to our brothers, you know it is our blood."⁷ Throughout the poll people instinctively used the words and phrases such as 'brothers', the 'same blood', 'the same family', 'one nation', etc. Nevertheless, many comments were qualified with statements about the deficiencies of Albania's democracy and institutions. Some clearly articulated the need for Albania to put its own house in order. In response to the question: "What kind of relations would you like the Albanians of Kosovo to have with Albania in the future", about 50 per cent of the refugees wanted unification with Albania. Another 25 per cent did not speak about unification but of relations based on closer ties.

Virtually all the refugees saw the future of the two Albanian communities as having more intensified and integrated relations on all levels. However, they did not use the concept 'Greater Albania'.⁸ An analysis of the poll found that 70 per cent said that their opinions of Albania had changed for the better and an overwhelming majority, 89.4 per cent, believed that Albania had a role to play in the future of Kosovo. This opinion was based on the fact that they were fellow nationals with a common history, and as Albania was an internationally recognised state and a UN member, it was therefore bound to be able to play a contributory and creative role.

C. Tirana's Role in Pan-Albanian Aspirations

Albania is now seeking a role as a regional hearth for ethnic Albanians living in neighbouring countries. On a recent visit to Tirana, the vice-chairman of the Kosovo Albanian 'Provisional Government', Mehmet Hajrizi, called on the Albanian government to give a voice to the demands, in this instance for early elections.

⁷ See *Kosovar Refugees in Albania Poll*, British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, September 1999.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Hajrizi told a press conference, "Kosovo is not represented at international organisations, where Albania has done a great job in the past...and I think it should continue to assist Kosovo to achieve prosperity and peace."⁹

Albania's influence over Kosovo, however, is much more symbolic than practical. There is an undeniable sense of wounded pride amongst Albanian officials, who feel they are being sidelined by the West in regards to regional planning. Albanian officials feel neglected by the international community, particularly regarding the future of Kosovo. "We have observed some hesitation to co-operate with us,"¹⁰ Foreign Minister Paskal Milo said during a seminar in Tirana on Balkan security. Milo said the West's disinterest in Albania, "is caused by misunderstanding of a few official statements or from some irresponsible statements" issued by DP leader, Sali Berisha.¹¹ Milo was attempting to distance the Albanian government from Berisha's statements at the beginning of October, which encouraged the notion of an "Albanian Federation" in the Balkans.

Milo may also have been referring to the series of cancelled visits to Albania by top American officials, who cited the continued state of lawlessness in Albania as the apparent cause of their cancellations. On 11 June 1999, Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, decided not to make a stop in Albania following her visit to Macedonia due to security concerns. State Department officials claimed that there was a great deal of 'lawlessness' in Albania, and that the Albanian government was not able to guarantee the security of high-ranking visitors,¹² (she later made a visit in February 2000). Secretary of Defence, William Cohen cancelled his trip to Tirana in July for security reasons. Defence Department sources said the Albania visit was cancelled because of 'a threat on the ground'¹³ related to Islamic militants affiliated to Osama bin Laden. At the end of August, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, cancelled his planned official visit to Tirana, due it was said, to a technical fault in his aircraft. Mr Holbrooke, however, flew to Sarajevo a few hours later on the same plane. President Clinton avoided Albania altogether on his recent trip to the Balkans.

Whilst agreeing that security issues were an obvious factor, several Albanian politicians thought it more likely that the visits were cancelled in protest against the support of the Albanian government for the independence of Kosovo, and for the 'Provisional Government' of Hashim Thaci. The meetings, they explained, could have taken place for just one hour at Tirana airport, which is far from any centre of habitation and could easily have been sealed off.¹⁴

⁹ Albania Daily News, 2 December 1999.

¹⁰ UPI, 14 October 1999.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² CNN, 16 July 1999.

¹³ *The New York Times*, 17 July 1999.

¹⁴ ICG interviews, 17 November 1999.

III. THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The Albanian national question, which emerged so dramatically onto the European scene at the beginning of the 1990s, is intrinsically bound up with the indeterminate status of Kosovo and the political future of the ethnic Albanian populations of Montenegro and Macedonia.

Whilst the crisis in Kosovo has focused world attention on Albanian communities throughout the Southern Balkans, the liberation of Kosovo has not, at least not yet, been translated into demands from Tirana, Pristina or Tetova for the creation of a 'Greater Albania'. What does exist is the determination to become regional players politically and the desire to improve the economic basis of Albanian communities in the Southern Balkans. Albanians today are in no mood to compromise over issues concerning their national interests, having drawn the lesson from the Kosovo conflict that, with concerted effort and determination, they can change their own fate.

What then is this 'Greater Albania' that causes such alarm amongst Albania's neighbours?¹⁵ Throughout the Southern Balkans maps are widely circulated of territory that at one time comprised either the empires of past rulers, such as the Serbs and the Bulgarians, or as is the case with the Greeks and the Albanians, territory which is claimed historically to have been predominantly inhabited by people of their particular ethnicity. Those maps issued by nationalist groups in Greece, claim territory as far north as the central Albanian town of Elbasan, while 'Greater Albania', or 'Ethnic Albania' as the Albanians prefer to call it, comprises the territory of present-day Albania together with Kosovo, Western Macedonia, south-eastern Montenegro, and the north-western Epirus region of Greece – known to the Albanians as Chameria. Without delving too far into the past, it is necessary to look briefly at how the Albanian people came to be divided in to these five territories. This may go some way in clarifying what all Albanians refer to as the 'historical injustices' inflicted upon them by depriving them of national unification.

A. The Creation of Albania's Borders

The 'Albanian National Question' first manifested itself at the Congress of Berlin in 1878, where the Great Powers agreed that there was no such thing as an Albanian nation, but rather the Albanians were merely inhabitants of a geographical area. This fateful decision has haunted the Southern Balkans ever since. Although after the Balkan Wars the Powers agreed in principle to support the establishment of Albania as a new political entity, the 1913 Conference of Ambassadors nevertheless awarded the Balkan allies large areas of Albanian-inhabited territory, regardless of its ethnic composition.

¹⁵ For a particularly alarmist view of the dangers of a 'Greater Albania' see, *Greater Albania: Concepts and Possible Studies*, Belgrade, 1998.

Under the Protocol of Florence, most of present-day Kosovo, including the towns of Pec,¹⁶ Prizren, Djakovica and Debar were ceded to Serbia, despite the knowledge that apart from Shkoder these were the only market towns for the north Albanian population. With Greece receiving the southern region of Epirus, or Chameria, the Albanian State was reduced to the central regions together with the town of Shkoder. Neither economic nor cultural nor ethnographic arguments determined the fate of Albania. The Florence Line that decided the frontiers of the new Albanian State satisfied neither the Albanians nor their Balkan neighbours. Serbia was deprived of an Albanian port, Montenegro lost the town of Shkoder, and Greece had to relinquish southern Albania having been deprived of the Saranda district which, she argued, was predominantly Greek and was the natural outlet to the sea for the Greek region north of Janina.

The final border which was eventually established in November 1921 left more than half the Albanian nation outside the Albanian state with almost half a million Albanians included in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and a further 70,000 in Greece, thus creating what became the world's largest irredenta. It is clear from documentary evidence that the Ambassador's Conference was merely an exercise to gain time, a barrier against further war, and that the Powers did not expect the Albanian state to last long - hence the casual, drawn out and haphazard manner in which the frontier was finally arrived at.¹⁷

B. Is there a 'Greater Albania' in the Making?

Against the backdrop of the ongoing conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Albania's current leadership have acknowledged the complexities involving the multiethnic nature of the Southern Balkans and the subsequent threat this poses to the socio-economic and political development of the region. As a result therefore, all but a few extremists have adopted a relatively responsible attitude towards nationalism. Albania's President, Rexhep Meidani, 54, taught physics for four years, from 1977 to 1980, at Pristina University, during which time he developed strong ties with the Kosovo Albanians, witnessing at first hand their difficult relationship with the Belgrade authorities. He remains, however, an ardent opponent of aggressive nationalism and sees an urgent need for reconciliation and economic reconstruction of both Albania and Kosovo in order to weaken nationalism.

Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, whilst calling for closer political and economic ties amongst the Albanians living in the Balkans, insists this would not involve changing borders. Nano believes that ensuring freedom of movement throughout the region is the best way to deflect nationalist calls for establishing a 'Greater

¹⁶ The forms of town names in Kosovo most familiar to an international readership are used throughout the report. For a list of Serbian and Albanian names of these towns, see Appendix.

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the formation of the Albanian state see Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*. London and New York, 1999.

Albania'. He stresses the fact that there is no need to redraw borders but to "make them irrelevant."¹⁸

For all Albanians, the opening up of the border between Albania and Kosovo has the same significance as the fall of the Berlin Wall, in that it has provided the opportunity for both communities to finally come together. The creation of Albania's borders deprived virtually all her peripheral towns of their natural geographical trading outlets. This has been a primary cause of the economic decline and subsequent extreme poverty of these areas. In order therefore to rectify this 'historical injustice', Albanian leaders are instigating a number of socio-economic and political initiatives designed to forge closer links between the two communities.

C. Economic Initiatives

Tirana is fully aware that the economic prosperity of northern Albania depends upon the weakening of the border structure between Albania and Kosovo. The Albanian government is trying to do everything possible to link Albania and Kosovo by road and rail so that the Yugoslav province will not need trade and communication links from Serbia. In August 1999, the then prime minister, Pandeli Majko, asked Albanians to deposit money in a special bank account to help finance the construction of a road to Pristina. The road, starting in the Albanian port of Durrës, will link Tirana and Pristina via the Morina border crossing in northern Albania. Majko also offered the Albanian port of Durrës as Kosovo's port city, so that Kosovo would have a port free of Belgrade's control. Although Majko admitted that the government needed help from its foreign partners to construct the 350-km (218 mile) road, he said the Albanian people had to make the first contributions. Majko said the development of ties between Albania and Kosovo had become a top priority for his government.¹⁹

The Albanian Development Fund has financed the reconstruction of a 6.5-kilometre road linking north eastern Albania with the Kosovo town of Djakovica. The road runs from the town of Kruma to the border crossing at Prushi Pass. Albania hopes that its impoverished north eastern area will benefit from increased business with Kosovo. At present the border crossing is not viable for the transfer of goods as it can only be used by small cars. The new corridor is expected not only to help Kosovo's economy but also to boost economic activity in northern Albania generally. These areas have been totally isolated, and their development suppressed, since the border divided Albania from Kosovo and Montenegro in 1912.

¹⁸ ICG interview with Fatos Nano, Tirana, 28 November 1999.

¹⁹ Press statement, Prime Minister's Office, 23 August 1999.

Albanian railways (HSH) is nearing completion of a 200 million USD railway to connect the Albanian port of Durrës with the town of Prizren in southern Kosovo. The link will start from the town of Rreshen in the mountains of northern Albania, pass through the valleys of Small Fan and the Black Drin and enter Kosovo from the town of Kukes. Both Albanian and Kosovo Albanian leaders have requested improved road and rail connections with Durrës which hopefully will boost trade from the internal Balkans to the Adriatic. Albania's authorities have also agreed to the request of Kosovo Albanian leader, Hashim Thaci, to allow concessions on Shengjin port, which lies just south of the town of Shkoder.

It is not only government-sponsored initiatives that are being implemented: local people themselves are reactivating traditional links between Albania and Kosovo. The Gorani minority²⁰ in the northern Kukes district has funded by itself the construction of a road to connect their villages with the southern tip of Kosovo, where their ethnic brethren live. People in the Gorani village of Borja have paved the three-kilometre long road to the border and then on to the village of Globocica in Kosovo.

D. Political and Cultural Initiatives

On the political front Albanian leaders have been striving to build a joint forum of Albanian political parties in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. In December, Fatos Nano referred to the possible drafting of a common political calendar between Tirana, Pristina and Tetova that would provide a pan-national integration strategy to integrate all Albanians. According to Nano, the foundations of this initiative were laid out in Tetova by himself and Hashim Thaci, together with the leader of the Macedonian Albanian Democratic Party, Arben Xhaferi. "It will be a movement not in support of a Greater Albania but will serve the great European Albanians," Nano explained.²¹ In recent months, Hashim Thaci also met with President Rexhep Meidani, Premier Ilir Meta, Fatos Nanos, as well as opposition leader Sali Berisha.²² At a press conference Thaci stated that, "These official meetings have been made in the framework of unifying our national political stands towards the international community."²³

²⁰ Goranis are Muslims who speak a language akin to Macedonian and live in a collection of 20 villages, eight of which are in eastern Albania, three in Macedonia, whilst the rest are in Kosovo's south-western tip.

²¹ *Koha Jone*, 1 December 1999.

²² This was the first time that Berisha had received Thaci, and was an implicit acceptance of Thaci's role during the Kosovo conflict, as well as his continuing importance in contemporary Kosovo Albanian politics. In a conciliatory gesture, Berisha has invited Thaci to co-operate with his Democratic Party. Both Nano and Arben Xhaferi, in their meeting in Skopje last December, agreed to give their support to Thaci's party in the forthcoming local and general elections.

²³ UPI, 12 January 1999.

Meanwhile, plans for the social and cultural integration between the Albanians of the Southern Balkans are gathering pace. Last August Pandeli Majko asked officials in Tirana to draw up plans to unify the education systems of Albania and Kosovo, and to intensify co-operation between the universities of Tirana, Pristina and Tetova.²⁴ Three Tirana universities will soon sign an agreement of co-operation with Pristina University, which will enable an exchange of teaching staff, organising joint research projects, as well as workshops aimed at co-ordinating a unified university curriculum. Moves towards including the education programs of ethnic Albanians in Montenegro are also being discussed.

The Montenegrin Albanians are very keen to see a quick implementation of a unified pan-Albanian education system. According to the President of the Democratic Union of Montenegrin Albanians, Luigj Juncaj, Albanians in Montenegro are not content with their education system. He believes that education is the key to the protection of national rights: "We want the same curriculum for all Albanians in the Balkans. The three subjects language, literature and history are to us the most important because with these subjects you can strengthen knowledge about Albanian culture, heritage and national consciousness."²⁵

The Albanian government has officially repeated its earlier demand to UN officials in Kosovo that it be allowed to open a diplomatic or 'information' office in Pristina. Given that several European countries and the US have already established offices in the Kosovo capital, the Tirana authorities are insisting that the request be granted. The Albanian government has come under increasing pressure from the general public for its failure to open an office in Pristina in order to exert its influence over pan-Albanian issues.

IV. THE CHAM ISSUE

Now that Kosovo has effectively been 'liberated', many Albanians feel that it is time to turn their attentions to that other great national concern – the restitution of property rights of the Cham people. The Chams are the ethnic Albanian, and predominantly Muslim, population of the region of north-eastern Greece known to all Albanians as Chameria – an area of Epirus extending between Butrint and the mouth of the Acheron river, and eastward to the Pindus mountains. The name 'Chameria' comes from the ancient Illyrian name for the Thyamis river, which traversed the territory of the ancient Illyrian tribe of Tesprotes. Chameria was part of the Roman Empire before being conquered by Byzantium. After the Ottoman invasion in the 15th century the mostly Albanian population of northern Chameria – from Konispol to the Gliqi river – converted to Islam, whilst those

²⁴ The Albanian Language University in the western Macedonian town of Tetova, which opened in 1995, is not officially recognised by the Skopje authorities because legally all higher education in the country must be taught in the Macedonian language.

²⁵ ICG interview, Podgorica, September 1998.

living south of the Gliqi down to Preveza Bay remained Orthodox Christians. In 1913 the Ambassador's Conference allotted the Chameria region to Greece, so today only seven Cham villages, centred on the village of Konispol, are in Albania itself.

Between 1921 and 1926, the Greek government set about trying to deport Albanian Muslims from Chameria in order to allot their lands to Greeks who had been deported from Asia Minor during Kemal Ataturk's revolution.²⁶ In an attempt, in 1944, to establish an ethnically pure border region, the Greek government unleashed a campaign in Chameria, which resulted in around 35,000 Chami fleeing to Albania and others to Turkey. The Greek authorities then approved a law sanctioning the expropriation of Cham property, citing the collaboration of their community with the occupying German forces as a main reason for the decision. The law is still in force in Greece. Whatever the truth of this allegation, which has to an extent been supported by some of the British Liaison Officers based with the Greek Resistance movements²⁷, the forced movement of the entire population has left a lingering sense of injustice amongst Albanians in general, which has contributed to continuing poor bilateral relations between Albania and Greece.

The Cham issue has remained dormant with none of the post-war Albanian governments venturing to make it a key issue in relations with its southern neighbour. Today, the issue is seen – as was Kosovo, as one more 'historical injustice' suffered by the Albanian people that has to be corrected. After the collapse of Communism, the Chams in Albania set up the 'Chameria Association' dedicated to the return of their expropriated lands in Greece. The then Greek foreign minister, Karolas Papoulias, said in the summer of 1991 that a bilateral commission should settle these demands. The chances of forming one, however, are very slim since under current Greek law there is no legal means of challenging requisition (or expropriation) of land by the Greek state. In the meantime, the issue has been taken by the Tirana government to the International Court of Justice, in an effort to secure financial compensation for lost Cham property. There has been little progress to date.

Since the end of the Kosovo conflict, support for the Chams has grown ever more vocal. The Chameria Association is successfully wooing support to the Cham cause, and is even working on legal procedures to sue the Greek government at the European Court of Human Rights. The Chams are frustrated and angered by the Greek government's refusal to discuss their demands. During the recent meeting between the new Albanian Premier Ilir Meta and his Greek counterpart Costas Simitis, a controversy arose when Simitis, answering to questions from

²⁶ In 1941 the Cham Leader Daout Hoxha was murdered, allegedly by Greek police and his head displayed around various border villages.

²⁷ For an account of the Chami during World War II, see Nigel Clive, *A Greek Experience: 1943 – 1945*, London, 1985.

journalists at a joint press conference, said that the Greek government considered the Cham issue as a closed chapter.²⁸

Back in Tirana, the opposition DP lost no time entering the fray, accusing Premier Meta of signing an alleged agreement with the Greeks over coverage of the Cham issue in Albanian history books.²⁹ The prevailing perception was that this was a clear attempt to erase the issue from the minds of future Albanian students. At the end of December, the Chairman of the Foreign Parliamentary Committee, Sabri Godo, urged the International Court of Human Rights, as well as the Albanian authorities to work out with Greece a solution to the property rights of the Chams.³⁰ According to a spokesman for the Cham Association in Tirana, the total value of Cham property at the end of the World War II was estimated at 340 million USD, whilst the current market value could reach 2.5 billion USD. The Cham Association wants to see the 60 year old Greek law authorising the confiscation of Cham property to be declared null and void, and the Cham people fully compensated for their loss, thus paving the way for "better and more just relations between Albania and Greece."³¹

On a recent tour of southern Albania, DP leader Sali Berisha threatened to put relations with Greece on hold if it did not comply with two key demands: more cultural rights for the Albanians living in Greece, and the resolution of the property issue of the Cham population expelled from Greece after the Second World War. In a rally in the southern town of Saranda, Berisha told supporters that Greece should open an Albanian language school in the northern Greek town of Filiates, and warned that without a solution to the Cham properties issue relations between the two countries would remain stagnant. He also vowed that a solution to the Cham issue would be a precondition for better relations with Greece if and when his party comes to power.³²

A growing number of Albanians feel that now is the time, in the wake of the world's acknowledgement of the human rights abuses in Kosovo, for the Albanian government to direct the international community's attention to the plight of the Chams. The independent daily *Koha Jone* applauded Premier Meta for bringing up the Cham issue in his discussions with Costas Simitis. The paper concluded that for the first time in the history of Greek-Albanian relations, a Socialist Premier had openly objected to Athens' preferred position of ignoring the whole issue of the Cham's property claims.

²⁸ Albania Daily News, 28 December 1999.

²⁹ Albania Daily News, 28 December 1999.

³⁰ Albania Daily News, 28 December 1999.

³¹ ICG interviews, Tirana, December 1999.

³² Albania Daily News, 18 January 1999.

It seems certain that calls to re-instate the property rights of the Cham population will be a growing concern for official Albanian policy. With the widespread and increasingly indignant support of both left and right in Albania, this is clearly an issue that is not going to go away.

V. ALBANIAN POLITICS: FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER

The controversial elections of May 1996, the collapse of the pyramid banking schemes which brought the country to the brink of civil war in 1997, and the attempted *coup d'etat* in September 1998, have caused Albania to lurch from one crisis directly to another, and stifled the development of democratic pluralism. These events have also formed the backdrop of the continuing bitter hostility between the ruling Socialist-led coalition and the main opposition Democratic Party, led by ex-president Sali Berisha. Mistrust, suspicion and enmity between these two political rivals will likely continue to mar the run up to next year's elections.

A. Background to the Present Crisis

The parliamentary election of May 1996 was conducted amidst a climate of acute tension, manipulation and intimidation by the then governing DP. Although the overwhelming majority of international election monitors agreed that serious irregularities had occurred in the polling process, the DP declared itself the clear victor - ignoring Western diplomatic pleas to re-run the election to stave off mounting popular anger, not only at the conduct of the elections, but also at the increasingly dictatorial and authoritarian rule of President Berisha.

For the next six months civil unrest was stalled only due to the population's belief that instant wealth was achievable by sinking their life savings into fraudulent pyramid investment schemes. The sudden and dramatic collapse of these schemes, and the subsequent violent uprising in the spring of 1997, forced Berisha to face political reality and cave in to Opposition and international demands for new parliamentary elections. Despite vigorous protests, Berisha reluctantly conceded defeat as the Socialists, led by Fatos Nano, won a convincing victory.

Any notion of political reconciliation, however, was put into sharp reverse in September 1998 when, following the assassination of Azem Hajdari, a popular founder member of the DP, an attempted *coup d'etat* by opposition forces plunged the country once more to the brink of civil chaos.³³ The real motive for the coup attempt was the bitter personal feud between Nano and Berisha. Nano,

³³ Azem Hajdari was shot dead by unknown gunmen whilst he was leaving the Democratic Party headquarters on 12 September, 1998. His funeral two days later turned into an attempted *coup d'etat* when DP supporters stormed government building and temporarily occupied the Prime Minister's office and the State Television centre.

a Prime Minister in the first post-Communist government in 1991, was imprisoned by Berisha in 1993 for allegedly misappropriating state funds: he was later freed by supporters during the 1997 uprising that forced Berisha from power.

The profound anger which led to the uprising, and the anarchic social disorder that followed, has scarred every facet of Albanian life since and left ordinary people deeply traumatised. Speculation over Berisha's involvement in Hajdari's assassination – and Berisha's own refusal to let the matter rest – have continually focused attention on events surrounding Hajdari's death. All this has served to undermine any other initiatives on which the Government or the Opposition might otherwise have focused.

Hajdari's murder, and the martyrdom status he has since acquired, will therefore hold Albanian politics hostage until his killers are brought to justice. This is proving increasingly difficult, since it now appears almost certain that Hajdari's killers have themselves been killed. The recent spate of killings in the Tropoja district has conveniently eliminated several witnesses to Hajdari's death. On 4 November in Tropoja district, two of the supposed assassins of Hajdari were killed and another wounded. DP supporters persistently claim that members of the then Socialist government of Fatos Nano were responsible for killing Hajdari.

According to the pro-DP daily *Albania*, the killings, as well as others committed in the Tropoja district, were aimed at "liquidating the political authors and assassins of Hajdari. They were being undertaken to hide the involvement in this assassination of senior leaders of the Albanian State and the majority in power." The paper went on to say that the "elimination of the executioners is another direct attempt by police and the government to remove any evidence or witnesses linked to the crime."³⁴

Two brothers of Berisha's former bodyguard, Izet Haxhia, wanted for leading the attempted coup, have openly accused Berisha of being involved in Hajdari's killing and other criminal acts. Isamedin Haxhia, appointed by Berisha as commander of the operation he ordered against insurgents in the city of Vlore during the March 1997 revolts, and whom he blamed for failing to carry out those orders, has published an open letter in the daily *Koha Jone* openly accusing Berisha of organising bloody plans to forcibly crush the March 1997 uprising.

In their statements, the two brothers Ismet and Isamedin who, like Berisha and Hajdari, are from the northern town of Tropoja, did not produce any evidence about the accusations. But the Attorney General Arben Rakipi, said recently that investigations into the 14 September 1998 failed *coup d'etat* were continuing and that the Hajdari case would be resolved in the near future.³⁵ Berisha has so far refused several prosecution summons, claiming he could not co-operate with

³⁴ *Koha Jone*, 14 December 1999.

³⁵ Albania Daily News, 18 December 1999.

what he calls a politically biased prosecution office. Until Haxhia's accusations in *Koha Jone*, Berisha had been accused of being involved in murder, but had not been directly implicated in any specific case.

VI. CHANGES WITHIN THE TWO MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES

A. The Socialist Party

The perpetually volatile nature of Albanian politics has been further polarised by the recent defeat of moderate elements in the two main political parties. In October 1999, Prime Minister and Secretary General of the Socialist Party (SP) Pandeli Majko lost the race for Socialist Party Chairman to Fatos Nano. Nano, who received 295 out of 571 votes from the National Convention delegates, was backed by the older, radical, hard-line elements in the Party, whilst Majko had the support of younger more moderate elements, as well as maintaining international support due mainly to his successful handling of the Kosovo crisis. Majko also enjoyed the support of many urban voters, and those delegates who had secured governmental jobs in the capital. On the other hand, Nano still has much support in rural areas, as well as southern towns such as Fier, Berat, Permet and Gjirokaster, which have a traditionally strong radical Socialist base.

Nano, 47, first became SP leader in 1991 when the ex-Communist party changed its program and statute. He resigned as party leader in January 1999 to begin his campaign to remodel the SP along the lines of the German Social Democratic Party, where the premier and party leader are two separate posts. Although the SP has undoubtedly suffered from the split between supporters of Nano and Majko, the damage done to the party was partly offset by the appointment of Majko's deputy, Ilir Meta, as the new Premier.³⁶ A top priority of the new Meta administration will be to instil confidence amongst the general public in the new government by demonstrating serious political will to combat crime and corruption. The re-emergence, however, of former Premier Bashkim Fino as minister of local government, is likely to prove controversial. In the immediate aftermath of the 1997 uprising and prior to his brief stint as premier, Fino was the mayor of Gjirokaster where he became the overlord of all local political and commercial activity in the south of Albania. He is accused by many of running a mafia-style business network.

³⁶ Thirty-year-old Ilir Meta has a bachelor's degree in economics. In 1996 he became Secretary for Foreign Relations, and was three times elected to Parliament – 1992, 1996 and 1997 – representing his birthplace, the mountainous district of Skrpar, some 120 miles South of Tirana. In October 1998, Meta was appointed the Deputy Prime Minister of Majko's government after Nano's resignation, and was the governmental manager of the 1999 Kosovo crisis.

Meta's appointment was greeted with predictable disdain by the Democrats. In an interview with the daily *Shekulli*, DP Deputy Chairman Jozefina Topalli said that "the DP does not recognise the new Socialist-led leftist government headed by Premier Meta, because it is a follow up cabinet to the four previous failed governments, and discredited and corrupt ministers have been recycled within it."³⁷ Whether Meta's professed aim of giving police reform and law and order top priority is compatible with all members of his cabinet is far from clear. The points in Meta's favour, are that he is possibly tougher than his predecessor and that he has the support of the Greek minority party, the Union for the Protection of Human Rights, as well as the fact that that foreign donors, particularly the 'Friends of Albania' group, hold him in good esteem.³⁸ At a press conference, Meta criticised Albanians for expecting too much from the international community since the fall of communism in 1991, and said they had to take the initiative themselves to build up the country.³⁹

After a year in the political wilderness, Nano has moved quickly to reassert his control over the party, and to make a regional impact. There is no doubt that he is a remodelled man. These days he is noticeably slimmer, drinks less and is more alert and attentive in discussions. He is also far more receptive to other's opinions, having previously been impatient and dismissive.⁴⁰ The 'new Nano' has come as a pleasant surprise to many Albanians. As the independent daily *Shekulli* noted, "Nano is now demonstrating a zeal he has never revealed before. He has turned into a devoted politician and increased contacts with the Socialist Party rank-and-file. By this strategy, he is trying to repair his image."⁴¹ The paper said that he had been helped in part by the *cul-de-sac* in which the DP had recently found itself, and in particular, his old adversary, Sali Berisha. Whilst Nano has to some degree managed to keep his party relatively united, his rival is wasting time and energy making endless replacements within his party and launching accusations and counter-accusations which constantly manufacture more enemies.⁴²

Nevertheless, no matter how liberal and reformist Nano has become he, along with Berisha, are identified in the general public's mind as being responsible for the polarisation of Albanian political life, with its tedious repetition of old arguments and allegations. As one Albanian analyst recently explained, the two main political camps in Albania are still using the same political rhetoric as they were in the early days of 1991: Berisha continues what he calls "the war against communism," whilst the Albanian socialists reply with the "war against Berisha."⁴³

³⁷ *Shekulli*, 4 November 1999.

³⁸ *Eastern Europe*, Vol. 12, No. 21, 5 January 2000.

³⁹ Albania Daily News, 13 November 1999.

⁴⁰ ICG discussions with Fatos Nano during 1997, 1998 and at the National Day reception, Tirana, 28 November 1999.

⁴¹ *Shekulli*, 22 December 1999.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Remzi Lani, *Albania: Nine Years After*, Albania Media Centre, Tirana, December 1999.

In December, Nano became the first Albanian politician since 1948 to visit Montenegro where he attended the Social Democratic Party's (SDP) Congress. SDP leader Zarko Ratcevic explained his concerns about ethnic tension in Montenegro. "Nationalist extremist elements in Montenegro are trying to promote ethnic hate between Montenegrins and Albanians, using, unfortunately, Berisha's irresponsible statement on an Albanian confederation in the Balkans," Ratcevic told Nano.⁴⁴ Ratcevic was referring to a speech of Berisha's which warned that Albanians living throughout the Balkans might unite in a federation if authorities continued to treat them as second class citizens. We are not seeking to change borders, he had told a convention of his Democratic Party in Tirana. But he had said that Albanian minorities in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Greece should not be poorly treated, adding that " If anti-Albanian racism is not halted, one cannot exclude the possibility that Albanians will unite to form a federation of free Albanians in the Balkans as a fundamental condition of survival." Nano attempted to reassure Ratcevic that "Albanians in Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro do not want any border changes."⁴⁵

B. Changes within the Democratic Party

Any factionalisation occurring within the Socialist Party, however, pales into insignificance in comparison to the deeply damaging split within the DP. The previous deputy chairman of the DP, Gence Pollo, 36, who in early September unexpectedly decided to compete with Berisha for the post of party chairman, withdrew from the race a day before the party's Congress, leaving behind grave charges against Berisha, particularly about his questionable business interests. Pollo was, until recently, a close supporter of Berisha, who appointed him his spokesman in 1992 and later his political chancellor.

Following the surprise announcement that Pollo was offering himself as a candidate, his supporters were immediately expelled from the DP's National Council and Pollo himself resigned from all party posts. Of the 693 delegates at the DP convention, 594 predictably voted to re-elect Berisha as party president. Since being ousted from power in 1997, Berisha has reverted to the autocratic one-party style that characterised his term as President of Albania. As a result, the DP has become increasingly isolated and marginalised.

Pollo is one of a group of relative moderates within the DP, who want to see a freer exchange of ideas in the party and more liberal policies, and who regard as urgent the need to increase the DP's standing in the eyes of the voters. This group therefore announced on 9 November 1999 the formation of the Democratic Alternative within the party, which seeks to woo rank and file support by challenging the dominant position of Berisha. The rebels have refused to comply with several leadership orders, including a demand to boycott a parliamentary

⁴⁴ UPI, 18 December 1999.

⁴⁵ KLAN Independent Television Network, Tirana, 18 December 1999.

session that gave a vote of confidence to the government of the new Premiere, Ilir Meta. The changes under way within the DP, which sees early elections as the only salvation for the country, could prove a first step towards renewing the party and overcoming the polarisation between the Democrats and Socialists that has characterised political life for most of the past decade.

VII. THE GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION

The international community is pushing the Albanian Government to improve law and order and has stressed that further international aid to Albania will be conditional upon an improved security situation. As a result, the Government has instigated a program of measures to strengthen law and order. Police ranks are gradually being filled with trained personnel. The Police forces have also been active in crackdown operations across the country, in an attempt to wrestle back control from known and specifically targeted armed gangs.

In response, the opposition Democrats have accused the Interior Ministry of setting up death squads, whose aim is to execute criminals rather than have them tried in the courts: "Trained anti-crime teams set up by the government, which are outside police control, are behind the recent murders of a dozen criminal gang members," reported the pro-DP daily, *Albania*. The paper claimed that sources at the Ministry of Public Order and the Intelligence Service agreed that the state had drawn up plans to set up anti-crime squads to eliminate approximately 250 well-known criminals as it was currently impossible to find them guilty of their crimes.⁴⁶

By 14 September 1999 the national police chief, Veli Myftari, was able to publicly announce that the police had finally eliminated or dissolved all the major gangs operating in Albania.⁴⁷ Although Myftari denied police involvement in the physical elimination of several notorious gang leaders, when questioned about the so-called 'death squads' a senior Tirana police officer replied "You have to meet violence with violence."⁴⁸ The rapid and comprehensive crackdown on the armed gangs was, in part, to ensure they could not be used to cause unrest on the anniversary of Azem Hajdari's death. Senior government officials were fearful of a return to the turmoil of September 1998.

On November 3 the Socialist Party daily, *Zeri-i-Popullit* claimed that Sali Berisha had recently decided that he could, in a repetition of the attempted *coup d'etat* in September 1998, overthrow the government of Ilir Meta. The paper accused Berisha of having gathered around him a small contingent of known criminals that

⁴⁶ *Albania*, 10 September 1999.

⁴⁷ Albania Daily News, 14 September 1999.

⁴⁸ ICG interview with various law enforcement personnel, who wish to remain anonymous. Tirana, December 1999.

were prepared to use violence.⁴⁹ The previous Saturday, the police had apparently identified these criminals at a rally Berisha attended in the port city of Durrës. Although the recent crackdown on criminal gangs and illegal immigrant traffickers, initiated by Public Order Minister Spartak Poci, have proved relatively successful, Poci himself suffered an embarrassment when, at the end of December, Greek customs officers caught him travelling in a stolen Mercedes. Poci had been about to start an official visit to Greece when his large black Mercedes was impounded at the Kristallopygi border crossing. With the help of Interpol, Greek customs officers discovered the vehicle had been stolen in Italy at the start of the year and later sold in Albania. The car was impounded and Poci finished his journey in a car lent by his Greek counterpart Michalis Chrysohoidis.

A. Drug Trafficking

The involvement of some of the political classes in criminal activities has provided immunity for criminal gangs throughout the country. Before apprehending a suspected criminal, Albanian police officers are placed in the ridiculous situation of having to stop and consider to which political clan the suspected criminal belongs. This fact is especially relevant to the escalating trade in drugs through Albania. Huge amounts of drugs are now arriving in Albania from Turkey and Macedonia along the route Pogradec-Elbasan-Kavaja-Durrës in Albania, and then on into Western Europe via Bari and Ancona.

A report in *Koha Jone* expressed concern that drug trafficking in Albania was controlled by some senior police officers, who were themselves supported by high level politicians.⁵⁰ The paper claims that measures taken against the drug traffickers have failed since the drug traffickers themselves have the support not only of certain political forces in power, but also of key personnel in the Ministry of Public Order. This creates the improbable scenario where significant police operations against drug trafficking are being led by the drug traffickers themselves.

B. Illegal Immigrant Smuggling

The trafficking of people is also a rapidly expanding business in Albania. Albania is a young country – an estimated 70 per cent of the population is under the age of thirty – and almost all, educated and uneducated alike, wish to leave Albania and work abroad. According to the Centre for Economic and Social Studies, 77 per cent of graduates would like to leave Albania. Day after day, hundreds of Albanians wait outside Western embassies in Tirana in the vain hope of securing a visa enabling them to leave the country. The vast majority are unsuccessful. Many subsequently become prey to the gangs who transport illegal immigrants to Italy. A payment of 1,000 USD buys a place on a speedboat leaving from the

⁴⁹ *Zeri-iPopullit*, 3 November 1999.

⁵⁰ *Koha Jone*, 5 December 1999.

coast around the towns of Vlore and Durrës to an uncertain destination on the other side of the Adriatic Sea. According to Italian officials, at least 173 people died in 1999 trying to cross the Adriatic to Italy.

The Italian authorities intercepted more than 20,000 people attempting to enter Italy from Albania in 1999 and believe tens of thousands more entered undetected.⁵¹ Turkish Kurds, or Iraqi citizens of Kurdish nationality, are increasingly using Albania as a springboard towards Italy and the rest of Western Europe. During the last few months at least 1,900 Kurds have entered Albania illegally either at Rinas airport or the Greek/Albanian border crossing at Kakavia.⁵² The sheer number of Kurds seeking entry into Western Europe has forced the traffickers to bring them into Albania by different routes. On 30 November police detained twelve Kurds carrying false passports and documents in the northern region of Mirdita. They had apparently entered Albania from Kosovo. This is the first time Kurds are using the northern entry border points on their journey to Western Europe via Albania.

The fight against organised crime, alongside the drive against corruption, is to be the top priority of the new Meta government. However, there is a growing sentiment that Albania is being unjustly singled out; At every international or bilateral meeting the cry goes up that Albania must sort out its law and order problem. And so it must, but increasingly Albanians are asking the question: "Why just us? What is Italy doing? What is Turkey or Greece doing to address the problem."⁵³

The Albanian Interior Ministry claims that the majority of foreign illegal migrants, who use Albania as a springboard to cross the Adriatic, come from countries such as Greece, Macedonia and Montenegro. This is backed up by Italian police estimates which show that of about 49,000 illegal immigrants seized along its south-eastern coastline in 1999, only 7,000 were Albanians.⁵⁴ Albania is merely a transit point for this huge clandestine traffic. Before arriving in Albania, they pass through a large number of eastern countries, including, sometimes, member countries of the European Union and NATO.

In a recent editorial, *Zeri-i-Popullit* stated that the Albanian government had made it clear that the question of clandestine traffic and organised crime in general is not just Albania's problem but rather a problem that affects and concerns the whole Southern Balkans region. The paper stated that while in all bilateral meetings, Italian Interior Ministry officials persistently asked Albanian police officials to freeze clandestine traffic on the Albanian side, while not only did most of the illegal emigrants pass through other countries before getting to

⁵¹ Albania Daily News, 18 January 1999.

⁵² Albania Daily News, 3 December 1999.

⁵³ ICG interview with Albanian officials who wished to remain anonymous. Tirana, November 1999.

⁵⁴ Albania Daily News, 12 January 1999.

Albania, but the lion's share of the profits of this trade go to the "super bosses who are centred in the most developed European countries".⁵⁵

But more could certainly be done in Albania itself. While the Albanian police have shown some success in tackling local crime, little progress has been made in apprehending those involved in organised crime. With more than 100 policemen murdered during the last three years, police moral is understandably low.⁵⁶ No matter how professional or responsible the police may be, organised criminality in Albania cannot be comprehensively dealt with unless there is a complete overhaul of the justice system where corruption is deeply rooted. Public Order Minister, Spartak Poci, recently warned that he would resign if President Rexhep Meidani did not put the justice system in order. Poci claimed that the courts were destroying the work of the police, and that there were dozens of cases where judges had released defendants who had been arrested by the police for various crimes.⁵⁷ A sweeping review of the activities of judges and prosecutors is urgently needed.

VIII. WOMEN

The increase in violent crime in Albania has given rise to a number of disturbing social phenomena: most notably a dramatic escalation in the number of blood feud vendettas; a growing number of girls kidnapped or tricked into prostitution; and a worrying decrease in the number of girls continuing their education. The lives of young Albanian women, especially those living in rural districts and towns other than the capital, are overshadowed by the fear of abduction and rape. Stories abound of girls being snatched by armed men, who then ship them to a life of enforced prostitution in Western Europe.

Thousands of girls are not being allowed to continue schooling beyond primary level because their parents fear for their safety and honour. A border monitor working for the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, (OSCE) who is currently completing a study of the issue, noted a typical case of a girl in Pilaf village near the north eastern town of Peshkopi who had finished high school with good grades, yet her family decided not to send her to secondary school because this would have meant a fifteen minute walk to school every day. They were worried that she might be approached and her honour compromised during this daily trip. In another example, a nineteen year-old woman from Muhur village said she had stopped going to school at age fourteen because her parents were worried about the security situation, she was shortly about to embark in an arranged marriage to a man from a neighbouring village.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Zeri-I Popullit*, 12 November 1999.

⁵⁶ Statistics published by the Ministry of Public Order. Tirana, September 1999.

⁵⁷ *Koha Jone*, 12 September 1999.

⁵⁸ ICG interview with Leo Dobbs. Peshkopi, September 1999.

A number of EU member states have expressed alarm at the rise in criminal activities controlled by Albanian gangs. Belgium is now facing a rising tide of young Albanian prostitutes, who have been tricked into paying traffickers up to 5,000 USD to be smuggled into Western Europe. These girls are part of a growing wave of victims of human trafficking that is having a particularly damaging effect upon the lives of Albanian women. A senior Brussels police officer, Christian Van Vassenhoven, estimates that as many as half of the foreign prostitutes who work in Brussels are Albanian.⁵⁹

Eric Van der Sypt, a public prosecutor specialising in the problem of prostitution, told Reuters that "a new phenomenon has emerged of Albanian men selling women from Albania and Belgium. It appears that Albanian criminal groups are establishing links with Bulgarian organisations. Some of the girls are abducted, others have been made false promises of work, but once they get into Italy they are forced to work as prostitutes."⁶⁰ The girls are thus caught in a no win situation between exploiters and the authorities. They have no legal documentation, they are far from their families, and they fear retribution from their pimps and the local authorities should they try and escape.

IX. BLOOD FEUDS

There are two main reasons why district judges and prosecutors let prisoners off – either straightforward bribery or fear of retaliation by the criminal's relatives. Despite efforts by the government to wipe it out, the 15th century code of customs, the Kanun of Lek Dukagjini, has re-appeared throughout northern Albania. The Kanun, which has been handed down orally through generations, lays out a code of "laws" governing marriage, birth, death, hospitality and inheritance, which have traditionally served as the foundation of social behaviour and self-government for the clans of northern Albania. In particular, the Kanun regulates revenge killings in order to stop the total annihilation of families.

The Kanun has been used as a system for administering justice in northern Albania, which historically has remained isolated from central government law. With the collapse of communism in 1991 and the subsequent lack of nationwide law and order, the number of vendetta killings has soared. Today, revenge killings in the name of the Kanun have taken on threatening proportions. A recent survey on the Kanun by the Independent Social Studies Centre, Eureka, expressed concern that many killers were using the rules of the Kanun as a cover to commit ordinary crime. According to the Eureka statistics, over 50 per cent of teenagers polled said that they respected the rules of the Kanun and would be willing to take revenge in the name of the Kanun. The report also highlights the

⁵⁹ Reuters, 15 November 1999.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

fact that thousands of male children are being locked inside their homes because of the fear of revenge (females are exempt from revenge killings).⁶¹

In one sense it could be argued that northern Albanians are resorting to the Kanun in order to fill the law and order vacuum. In most cases, however, it is not the traditional rules of the Kanun that are being applied but rather a self-selected interpretation. In fact it is a means of settling accounts amongst gangs of traffickers, smugglers, and other criminal elements who, in the absence of official law and order, can use the fear, respect and moral justification associated with the Kanun to terrorise local people into a code of silence.

A blood feud can start over any number of causes – an untoward advance to a woman or the killing of a sheep dog. A typical example occurred in mid-December when a father and son gunned down a neighbour who shot their dog. The man was walking his horses back home at night when he was attacked by the dog and, fearing for his life, shot the dog. The dog's owners witnessed the shooting and immediately wreaked revenge with machine guns.⁶² Even drivers responsible for traffic accidents have been killed by their victim's families. The vast majority of contemporary feuds, however, are the result of disputes over land and water rights.

Since the end of the one-party state in 1991, collective ownership of the land has been abolished. This has resulted in a land grab whereby the pre-1944 owners have returned to reclaim their property and forced the "occupiers" to relocate themselves. Conflict has become inevitable due to high population growth, together with an acute shortage of agricultural land and the absence of firm policing. Despite the existence of several blood-feud reconciliation bodies, such as the Tirana-based Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Centre, there has been no concerted and co-ordinated strategy devised to combat this growing and deeply damaging phenomena.

The Kanun is being used to compensate for a weak and corrupt judicial system, as well as the fact that for too long now it has become the accepted tenet that northern Albania is beyond the rule of law, that the government has no jurisdiction in the north, and so the north must rely on its own customary law to provide justice for its citizens. Blood vendettas are particularly rife in and around the town of Shkoder where gangs routinely call at bars in the town to collect "gjoba" or protection money, which if not paid will result in the automatic killing of the bar's owner.

⁶¹ Report by the Independent Social Centre Eureka. Tirana, November 1999.

⁶² Reuters, 17 December 1999.

One such example occurred at the beginning of July 1999 when a dozen men armed with kalashnikov assault rifles called at the Sahati bar in the centre of Shkoder. The bar's owner, Ibrahim Isufi, was waiting for them. In the ensuing shootout, five of the gang members were killed and three of Isufi's relatives were wounded. As a result, Isufi's male relatives are hiding in their homes for an indefinite period, in the hope of escaping the inevitable quest for revenge by the families of the five dead gangsters. Throughout northern Albania, hundreds of men have not stepped outside their homes for months for fear of being murdered. A few have managed to escape abroad but the majority remain trapped indoors, having to rely on their womenfolk to bring in supplies and to work the land, a fact that is severely hampering economic progress. The reintroduction of the Kanun into the lives of the communities of northern Albania must be seen as a serious challenge to the state. Today paperback copies of the Kanun are widely available in Albania, Kosovo and Western Macedonia, and the fact that new translations and interpretations of the Kanun are appearing must be viewed with real concern.

X. CONCLUSION

A. Pan Albanian Aspirations

It has now become increasingly apparent, in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict, that Albania has a significant role to play in providing a national support mechanism for Kosovo Albanians. That role may include Albania lending its diplomatic support on the international scene, or providing a 'nationally sympathetic' platform to discuss differences and grievances between the various Kosovo Albanian and Albanian political factions. Since the end of the conflict, Albania has also become a base for instigating pan-Albanian initiatives on social, cultural and economic grounds.

'The National Question' regarding the future status of Albanians living outside Albania will therefore continue to dominate Albanian foreign policy. Albanians, whether Tosks or Ghegs, Democrats or Socialists, agree upon the fact that Kosovo must be declared independent from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The only discord is on the question of timing and means: with northerners demanding immediate independence, and southerners more likely to accept the notion of Kosovo remaining as a UN protectorate until the rival Kosovo Albanian political factions can guarantee a smooth transition of power following elections.⁶³ Whilst national reconciliation within Albania itself is making very slow progress, the concept of regenerating links between the nation as a whole is gathering momentum.

⁶³ ICG interviews with Albanians in various northern and southern towns. November and December 1999.

This is a distinct and separate process from calling for the geographic unification of the nation. The overwhelming majority of all Albanians agree that the different historical paths taken by the people of Albania as distinct from those from the former Yugoslavia, mean that a certain amount of time has to pass before either group is ready for the difficulties that they themselves, let alone their neighbours, would have to face in trying to unite geographically all the Albanians of the Balkans. Nevertheless, a new political and national identity is still in the process of formation.

Some of Albania's Balkan neighbours are watching these moves with a certain uneasiness, translating as it does for some, most notably Serbia and Greece, into designs for a 'Greater Albania', which would by definition necessitate changing international borders. Albania's current leadership has been at great pains to demonstrate a responsible attitude towards, on the one hand, pan-Albanian goals for various forms of reintegration and, on the other hand, accepting there can be no demands for border changes. Indeed, nowadays the only people willing to talk at length about a 'Greater Albania' are to be found in the offices of the Serbian Renewal Movement and similar establishments in Belgrade.⁶⁴

The Cham issue is now a serious one for Albanian nationalists, who wish to see a major perceived historical injustice corrected. With the Chams supported unanimously by all Albanians of the Southern Balkans and in the larger diaspora, regardless of their political affiliations, it is an issue that has to be addressed. While relations with Greece cannot be allowed to suffer should the Cham question be exploited in the run up to the next parliamentary elections, it is an issue that all Albanian political parties are going to have address in one form or another, or risk being accused of not only letting the Chams down but the nation also. The difficulty is that relations with Greece are perhaps more important than those with any other of Albania's neighbours: Greece has been, after all, a major contributor to the easing of socio-economic, and thereby political, tensions by absorbing up to 400,000 Albanian migrants, whose remittances keep their families afloat.

B. Strengthening Economic Ties

The Tirana authorities are equally keen to promote a weakening of border structures and a corresponding growth in economic and political co-operation with their Greek, Montenegrin and Macedonian neighbours. Commercial links with Greece and Macedonia are constantly expanding, whilst the reopening, after the conflict, of the border with Montenegro was enthusiastically welcomed in Albania's northern town of Shkoder. The sudden closure by the Yugoslav Federal

⁶⁴ On 30 January 2000 the Serbian Renewal Movement warned against the threat of a 'Greater Albania', claiming that the recent visit to Sofia by Kosovo Albanian Leader, Hashim Thaci and Macedonian Albanian leader, Arben Xaferi – who reiterated demands for Kosovo's independence, "clearly indicated that the monstrous idea of creating a Greater Albania was a major threat to the region." Agence France Press, 30 January 2000.

Army of the border again in mid-January 2000 interrupted the burgeoning economic activity of numerous Shkoder traders, who had re-established close business relations with Montenegro. Belgrade's closure of the border was a gesture of disapproval at the prior signing by Tirana and Podgorica of a memorandum of understanding on the strengthening of relations between Albania and Montenegro. The memorandum provides for the opening of two new border crossings and an Albanian-Montenegrin committee to discuss proposals for greater co-operation between the two countries.

It is also economic rather than nationalistic considerations that make it imperative to improve communications between Albania and Kosovo. The appalling state of Albania's roads, the majority of which have not been repaired in any form since the mid -1970s, have now deteriorated to a point where they have become a major barrier to the country's development. For the people of Kukës, it is far easier and more economical to drive the short (seven kilometres) distance to the southern Kosovo town of Prizren to trade, than to risk the dangers and appalling discomfort of the nine hour drive to Tirana.

During the Kosovo conflict, thousands of military and humanitarian lorries tore up the already bad road from the port of Durrës to Tirana, the main route from the capital leading northwards. At one point, a stretch of this road on the outskirts of Tirana deteriorated to such an extent that after the frequent heavy rains its potholes were transformed into a series of ever widening mini-lakes, which brought traffic to a total standstill. What would it take to repair seriously potholed stretches of road such as this in conjunction with major and ambitious road programs such as Corridor 8?⁶⁵ If the concept of an "integrated Europe, via an integrated Balkans" – a very popular phrase in Tirana at present – can be advanced through such initiatives, then the need to contemplate changing borders in order to geographically and politically unite all Albanians becomes redundant.

C. Domestic Developments

In marked contrast to the moves to break down national barriers, on the domestic front Albania's internal politics remain divisive and confrontational. Many in the leadership of the DP are unlikely ever to accept the legitimacy of the present Socialist-led government, and will therefore continue to try to undermine it and to disrupt the political process generally. It is now nine years since the end of the one-party state. Yet Albania's subsequent experiments with democracy have proved, in many respects, as traumatic as the years suffered under the communist regime.

⁶⁵ The road known as corridor 8 is foreseen as a land link from the Adriatic to the Black Sea via the main Albanian port of Durrës, to Varna in Bulgaria via the Macedonian capital of Skopje.

As always in Albania, settling accounts with the past plays a large part in the reality of the present, causing the country to remain entrenched in conflictual politics. Profoundly disillusioned by the whole political process and the glaring absence of democracy, the Albanian people have become largely apathetic in matters relating to politics. Currently Albania is far from a state where understanding and tolerance co-exist with public trust in the institutions of law and justice. Unfortunately, the defining characteristics of social relations in Albania are still a lethal combination of conflict and aggression, combined with an entrenched legacy of corruption and nepotism.

Believing that their political class will constantly betray them, Albanians are impatient for change, yet are bewildered as to how to make it happen. The options open to the majority of this disproportionately youthful population are severely limited: either to become a low-paid migrant worker in Greece; an illegal immigrant in Western Europe; or remain unemployed in Albania. Bearing in mind that Albania has had nine cabinets in nine years, even those in the much coveted government-appointed posts see their jobs as temporary in the extreme,⁶⁶ fearful of being replaced immediately once there is a change of government. Consequently, for the short duration of their appointment many try to grab what they can.

In the meantime, criminality offers some a fast track route to the riches and comforts of the West. The present level of organised crime is such that corruption, smuggling and the trafficking of people, drugs and weapons are now amongst the country's major economic activities. This in turn is fostering an ever increasing number of gangland feuds which, in the absence of an effective legal and police system, is causing an escalation of cold-blooded assassinations, thinly disguised and morally justified, as revenge rightfully taken in the name of the traditional laws of the Kanun.

As far as crime in general is concerned, it is clear that Albania is just one small cog in the very large wheel of organised crime. Although Albania is a major launch pad for drugs and illegal migrants into Western Europe, more than two thirds of these migrants are not Albanian and have already been smuggled through several other countries before arriving in Albania. The same is true of the smuggling of drugs, most of which are not of Albanian origin. The Tirana authorities therefore are asking that Western, and particularly EU, pressure be put upon other countries to also tackle the problem. Turkey, Bulgaria and Macedonia in particular must also be subjected to the same degree of scrutiny and pressures to act against organised crime. But Tirana must also put it's own house in order to deal with organised crime: urgent reforms are needed in the police, customs and the judiciary together.

⁶⁶ Witness the recent sacking of the Privatisation Minister Zef Preci.

Albania's most pressing needs remain the establishment of a civic society based on sound and stable state institutions. Yet this depends, for a large part, upon the country's politicians discarding their deep-seated personal animosities in order to concentrate instead on regaining the Albanian people's faith in the democratic process. This would be a sorely needed first step towards healing the deep political wounds that scar Albanian politics and encouraging Albanians to abandon their political loyalties to personalities in favour of loyalties to democratic political institutions. These are daunting but essential tasks if Albania is to end the cycle of economic and political destruction of recent years, and continue its tortuous path towards democracy.

D. Responsibilities of the International Community

International actors – in particular the European Union and the World Bank - must remain engaged and committed to assisting Albania in combating its most urgent problems: organised crime, illegal smuggling and drug trafficking, as well as a whole host of domestic problems, including access to education, which have developed out of weak state institutions. Without this assistance, Albania's problems will continue to be transported outside its own borders.

The international community's financial assistance to Albania – in programs such as the EU Phare initiative, must continue to be directed primarily at projects which develop technical capacity within Albania's weak state structures. Much of what has been achieved in Albania has been undone by the ability of organised crime to penetrate and undermine state institutions. Reversing this trend can only be achieved through implementing donor-funded programs which strengthen the judicial and policing responses to lawlessness and criminality.

A complete re-evaluation of the law enforcement system is urgently needed if an effective response to justice and criminal issues – both domestically and regionally - is to be developed. The anti-crime measures already adopted by the Meta Government last summer must be supported by the international community if they are to have any chance of success, but they are only a beginning. A key priority is strengthening the judiciary. Salaries and training schemes for High Court Judges should be funded under present Council of Europe initiatives, and to improve public confidence in the judiciary generally consideration could be given to the establishment of selection panels of mixed Albanian/EU composition, perhaps with a Chairman from the European Court of Justice.

The low level of competence and training of local police, combined with the restricted terms of reference for the Western European Union's (WEU) Multinational Advisory Police Element (MAPE) – the key international agency active in policing – has resulted in little progress in Albania's effort to combat rampant criminality. The MAPE force, consisting of 150 policemen from a variety of countries, has a very restricted mandate which allows advice to be given yet excludes all enforcement operations. Consideration should be given to the

transformation of that mandate, at least for a defined transitional period, to allow WEU officers to become active participants in the exercise of policing duties. The creation of a well trained and appropriately-paid Albanian police force, trained under existing MAPE structures, should remain the medium term priority, but in the immediate term a major improvement in police effectiveness is very necessary.

Less formal measures can also be extremely helpful in addressing different aspects of the law and order problem. A good investment by the international donors would be more resources to establish conflict resolution centres in northern Albania to tackle the issue of blood feuds. The aim would be for such centres to bring feuding families together, and to develop understanding of alternative methods of dispute resolution. Such an exercise was attempted in February 1995 when a conflict resolution centre was set up by a British anthropologist Antonia Young in the northern city of Shkoder. Unfortunately, this centre, though successful collapsed due to lack of funding.

The problem of illegal immigration from Albania is one that requires a particular effort not just from the Albanian government, but from those in the wider region. Given that Albania is merely the last port of call for illegal immigrants attempting to use Albania as a springboard into Western Europe, measures should be urgently taken to strengthen co-operation between Albania's neighbours – Kosovo, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Macedonia and Italy. Despite the recent strict checks on Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin entering into Albania through Rinas Airport and border crossings with Greece at Kapshtica and Kakavia, illegal immigrants are being smuggled into the country from Kosovo and Macedonia through any number of little known border crossing points. More help for Albania's beleaguered police force is again required, as well as closer monitoring of regional borders.

According to an agreement signed on 11 January 2000 in Rome between the Interior Ministers of Greece, Italy and Albania, any illegal immigrant caught along Italy's shores will be returned and held in Albania. If present trends continue, Albania can expect to shelter an estimated 42,000 foreign illegal immigrants per year - mostly from China, Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh and Turkey – in holding centres, whilst they await repatriation to their countries of origin. Albania will need assistance from the Italian Government, but also from agencies such as UNHCR to maintain reception centres with adequate food, bedding and medical equipment.

Critical to Albania's future in many ways identified in this report is greater inter-Balkan co-operation. One of the numerous practical obstacles to promoting that co-operation is the existence of tough visa requirements between the countries of the region. Measures should be adopted to relax such restrictions for entrepreneurs, publishers, academics and others, whose activities will assist the developments of socio-economic ties between the Balkan countries.

For too much of its recent history, Albania has been isolated from the international mainstream. It is in everyone's interest that it rejoin the international community as a functioning, economically viable, responsible democracy, and sooner rather than later. For that to happen the country has to help itself, but it also needs all the help it can get, from its immediate regional neighbours and from the European Union in particular.

Tirana/London/Brussels, 1 March 2000.

APPENDIX

ACRONYMS AND PLACE NAMES

ACRONYMS

| | |
|-------|--|
| DP | Democratic Party |
| EU | European Union |
| OSCE | Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| PHARE | Pologne Hongrie Assistance et Reconstruction Économique Poland Hungary Economic Reconstruction Assistance |
| SDP | Socialist Democratic Party |
| SP | Socialist Party |
| MAPE | Multinational Advisory Police Element |
| WEU | Western European Union |

PLACE NAMES (Kosovo)

| Serbian | Albanian |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Djakovica | Gjakova |
| Peć | Peja |
| Priština | Prishtinë |
| Prizren | Prizren |