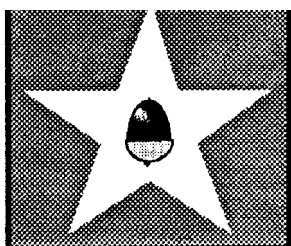


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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Albania 1999-2000

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INTERNAL POLITICS

The Socialist Party (PS)

Albania continues to be led by a coalition known as the Alliance for the State dominated by the Socialist Party (PS), which was elected in 1997. Under the 1998 constitution, Albania is a parliamentary democracy, the government being formed by the party or coalition of parties that has the greatest number of seats in parliament. Parliamentary elections are held every four years, and therefore the next elections are due to be held in 2001.

Throughout 1999, the PS was dominated by conflict between Fatos Nano, who was prime minister from 1997 to 1998, and his successor as prime minister, Pandeli Majko. In October 1999, Nano defeated Majko in the election for the chairmanship of the PS. Majko was replaced as prime minister in late October 1999 by deputy prime minister Ilir Meta. The new prime minister is a supporter of Majko, and is inclined to continue his predecessor's broad approach.

When Meta was appointed prime minister, he said that law and order and fighting corruption were among his main priorities. This is likely to upset many within the PS, including the government, and could therefore cause significant problems for Meta. He was severely criticised by Nano for dismissing deputy foreign minister Ben Blushi in February 2000. The Minister of Local Government, Bashkim Fino, has been accused of running mafia type operations in southern Albania.¹ Meta also dismissed Ylli Bufi as minister of public economy and privatisation, due to dissatisfaction over the pace of privatisation. Bufi was replaced by Zef Preci.

Meta drew up an anticorruption plan in September 1999 when he was deputy prime minister.² The State Audit Commission said in December that it had given Meta more than 40 names of ministers, deputy ministers, department directors and customs officers accused of corruption. The director-general of the Customs Service, Adrian Maci was dismissed in November 1999 for failing to meet revenue targets. As part of the struggle against corruption, the government began publication in October 1999 of an *Information Bulletin*, which publishes details of assets held by ministers, senior civil servants, judges and regional prefects. A law on the civil service came into force in November 1999. It establishes a civil service commission to ensure that appointments are free from political influence and made on merit. Meta enjoys support from the Greek minority party, the Union for the Protection of Human Rights.

The Democratic Party (DP)

The DP remains the main opposition party. It is still finding it hard to come to terms with its loss of power following the pyramid scandal of 1997. The PS appears concerned that former Albanian President and DP leader Sali Berisha may attempt a coup as he allegedly did in September 1998. Berisha held a rally in Tirana in

October 1999 in an attempt to relaunch street protests that the DP had organised in 1997-98 in an attempt to bring down the PS coalition. Berisha advocates boycotting parliament. He still also advocates street protests against the current government. If Berisha is able to generate sufficient discontent with the government by these methods, then an attempted coup along the lines of the attempted coup of September 1998 should not be ruled out. He attempted to persuade all opposition parties to boycott the vote of confidence in the Meta government in November 1999. Zef Bushati of the opposition Christian Democratic Party disagreed with this approach, arguing that the best way to oppose the PS was in parliament.

In 1999, the DP was rent by factionalism between Berisha and Genc Pollo, the former deputy chairman of the DP. Pollo stepped down from the contest to elect a new DP chairman in September 1999, and Berisha was elected chairman on 1 October. Berisha then began removing his opponents in the DP from positions in the parliamentary bodies. In November Pollo formed a dissident group within the DP called Democratic Alternative (DA), which advocates more liberal policies. The DA includes former prime minister Aleksander Meksi and former DP chairman Tritan Shehu. It has clashed with Berisha, including ignoring a demand to boycott a parliamentary session that debated a confidence motion in the Ilir Meta government. In February 2000 the DP leadership removed Pollo and his supporters from the DP parliamentary group.

Threats To Internal Stability

The most serious threats to internal stability in Albania are:

- **Organised Crime**

The Albanian government has sought to build up the police forces since 1997 in order to suppress armed gangs. In September 1999 the national police chief Veli Mytari stated that all major gangs operating in Albania had been eliminated.³ The WEU's Multinational Advisory Police Element (MAPE) has provided 144 policemen from various countries to help train the Albanian police.⁴ The opposition DP claims that the PS Ministry of Public Order has instead set up death squads to eliminate criminals instead of bringing them to justice. However, more than 100 police officers have been murdered in the last three years, and the Minister of Public Order Spartak Poci has complained that the courts are undermining the work of the police. The French interior ministry is carrying out a special programme of training for special and rapid intervention forces and the German interior ministry has granted \$400,000 for logistic support for three police commissariats in Shkoder, Puke and Malesi e Madhe. Greece has granted \$180,000 for policing the Gjirokaster region.⁵

- **Drug Trafficking**

Albania is now a major conduit into Western Europe for drugs. Narcotics arrive in Albania from Turkey and Macedonia and are then smuggled on into Western Europe via Italy. It is suspected that officials in the Ministry of Public Order are involved in drug smuggling, which obviously undermines attempts to clamp down on the problem.

- **Illegal Immigration**

Albania is also a conduit point for illegal immigrants seeking to enter Western Europe. Large numbers of Albanians wish to leave Albania and the temptation to use gangs who transport illegal immigrants to Italy is high. The Italian authorities intercepted more than 20,000 persons attempting to enter Italy from Albania in 1998. Many Turkish and Iraqi Kurds make use of Albania as an entry point into Western Europe.

THE ECONOMY⁶

The GDP grew about 8 per cent in 1999, and similar growth is forecast for 2000. The influx of refugees from Kosovo during Operation Allied Force actually benefited the economy as it injected demand. The Kosovan refugees (equivalent to 15% of the Albanian population) stimulated agricultural production and construction work. However unemployment increased from 235,000 in 1998 to 240,000 in 1999. The year on year inflation rate in the second half of 1999 was negative. Privatisation has moved very slowly. In 2000 it is expected that the Savings Bank of Albania, Albkrom and more than 50 small and medium enterprises will be privatised. Albania's balance of payments and foreign currency reserves are strong, and the budget deficit is within its permitted ceiling. France blocked Albania's entry into the World Trade Organisation in October 1999, due to a dispute with the USA. The US supports Albanian membership, and the US Senate passed in November 1999 an amendment that would extend normal trade relations to Albania, subject to corresponding enactment by the House of Representatives. The EU has reduced some tariffs on Albanian exports such as agricultural products, textiles and clothing. In January the IMF disbursed \$13 million of the ESAF² loan of \$60 million; \$29 million has already been disbursed. Foreign Direct Investment levels remain low at just above \$40 million or about 2% of GDP.

FOREIGN POLICY

The strategic goal of Albanian foreign policy remains unchanged. Albania desires to become fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures and processes - political, economic and military. Consequently, she seeks full membership of the EU and NATO as strategic objectives. Albania's full backing for Operation Allied Force in 1999 has led to her feel that her integration into the Euro-Atlantic community should be accelerated. On 12 June 1999 then prime minister Pandeli Majko told NATO military attaches in Tirana that Albania now felt itself an equal partner with NATO states following the conflict with Yugoslavia.⁷ The implication of this remark is that Albania will desire closer cooperation with NATO. At the same meeting defence minister Luis Hajdaraga assessed the cooperation with the NATO countries, and especially the cooperation with USA, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy, as an experience which would carry forward Albanian military integration into NATO structures. He said that "the Albanian army will cooperate with NATO structures and this will guarantee the integrity of Albania, and guarantee peace and security in the Balkans."⁸ Close cooperation with NATO through the Partnership for Peace programme forms the cornerstone of Albania's relationship with NATO.⁹ The USA has donated \$1million in supplies and promises another \$2.3 million for communications equipment and training. AFOR now numbers less than 1500.

The Albanian leadership also sees the development of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe as essential. On 17 June 1999, President Rexhep Meidani said that:

*I am very optimistic about it. In the last few months the democratic and powerful nations have understood that this region needs rapid economic development. Southeastern Europe will be integrated into the European Union and into the Euro-Atlantic structures.*¹⁰

In 1992 a Trade and Cooperation Agreement was signed between the EU and Albania, and Albania became eligible for funding under the PHARE programme. In 1999 the EU proposed a new Stabilisation and Association Process for five countries of South Eastern Europe, including Albania, and a feasibility study on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement was completed. Over the period 1991-1999, the EU has provided aid to the value of 895.3 million Euros to Albania.¹¹

There is also a strong feeling that Albania should be amply rewarded for her efforts during Operation Allied Force. Following the Sarajevo Balkans Reconstruction Conference in July 1999, Parliamentary Speaker Skender Gjinushi said 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 this conflict.*¹²

Albania thus strongly supports the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe that was agreed upon by the G8 nations and Balkan states in Cologne in June 1999.¹³ The Stability Pact aims at encouraging the development of market economies and representative democracy in South Eastern Europe, along with a high degree of interstate cooperation, which would reduce the significance of international borders. Albania thus pursues a policy aiming at regional cooperation with her neighbours. The foreign ministers of Greece, Albania and Macedonia began a process of regular trilateral summits to discuss means of improving political and economic cooperation. They met in July 1999 on the Greek island of St. Achilles, and a follow-up summit was held in Ohrid and Korca in March 2000.

The development of transport links between the states has been a major objective. In July 1999 Foreign Minister Paskal Milo was interviewed on Albanian TV and discussed various economic projects with Greece, including supplying Albania with gas through a gas pipeline, which will stretch from Algeria via Italy and Albania to Greece. Greece and Albania also approved a joint statement about the construction of what is called the Ionian-Dalmatian axis. This highway will start in northern Greece, in Igoumenitsa; it will then traverse Albania along a vertical line reaching into Montenegro, Croatia and Slovenia, ending up in Trieste.¹⁴ Later in July 1999 Milo said Albania would ask for project support at the Stability Pact founding summit in Sarajevo. He listed the construction of the Durres-Kukes-Pristina road and the modernization of the Albanian ports on the Adriatic, especially that of Durres as major projects.¹⁵ Similar trilateral foreign minister summits are also being held between Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia, the first such summit being held in Sofia in July 1999. A second summit was held in Tirana in March 2000, which discussed the proposed transport corridor no VIII from Brindisi to Sofia via Durres, Tirana, Skopje, then going on to Plovdiv, Burgas and then across the Black Sea to Poti and Batumi.¹⁶

Albania's most important partners in the EU are Italy and Greece. Meta's first trip abroad as prime minister was to Italy in November 1999, when they discussed smuggling and illegal immigration. In December 1999 the Italian labour ministry agreed to allow temporary employment in Italy for 50,000 Albanians. Meta visited Greece in December 1999, and Greek prime minister Costas Simitis promised to grant 40,000 Albanian migrant workers in Albania permanent residence and working permits. Meta has promised to improve educational provision for the Greek minority in southern Albania and desires to increase investment in the Greek populated areas. Meta has urged Greece to recognise the rights to the restitution of their property of the Cham Muslim Albanians who fled Greece in 1944-45, and whose rights were then denied as collaborators with the Nazi German occupation force.¹⁷

Albanian Foreign Policy Scenarios

1. *Albania pro-western: does not challenge the West's line in the Balkans. Therefore no Greater Albania. Accepts borders cannot be changed, seeks close cooperation with her neighbours in accordance with Stability Pact.*

2. *Albania becomes isolationist, disillusioned with West. Neo-Hoxhaism in foreign policy. Not interested in neighbours, therefore no interest in Albanians in neighbouring states and no danger of Greater Albania.*

3. *Anti-western, neo-isolationist, possibly Moslem in orientation, may be more interested in idea of Greater Albania.*

Scenarios 2 and 3 are highly unlikely whilst the current leadership remains in power in Albania. These scenarios are only likely to emerge if the current leadership is replaced in a coup. A post-coup government lacking legitimacy and facing possible isolation and censure by the international community may embark on either scenario 2 or 3.

It is important to bear in mind the "Belgrade factor" - ie changes in the Serbian leadership in Belgrade:

a. *Milosevic goes and is replaced by a leadership wishing to reach a rapprochement with the international community and end Serbia's isolation. This regime may well accept either the partition of Kosovo, or Kosovo's right to self-determination. If such a situation emerges, then Albania would be likely to continue her current pro-western line.*

b. *Milosevic is replaced by a leadership that either continues his current policy, or intensifies it (ie refuses to cooperate over Kosovo), or seeks partition. Albania would be likely to continue a pro-western policy.*

PAN-ALBANIANISM

Kosovo

The 1999 Kosovo crisis resulted in the arrival of about 450,000 Kosovan refugees. Opinion polls taken of refugees revealed that they felt a sense of kinship and identity with Albanians living in Albania proper. One poll revealed that 50 per cent of refugees wanted unification with Albania, and 89.4 per cent believed that Albania had a role to play in the future of Kosovo.¹⁸

Albania is currently seeking to become a regional focal point for Albanians living in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. Tirana has shown some irritation at being sidelined by the West in the rebuilding of Kosovo. In October 1999 foreign minister Paskal Milo noted that there was "some hesitation to cooperate with us."¹⁹ This may stem from fears that Tirana may be seeking to pursue a Greater Albania policy. However, the Meta government in Tirana is not interested in a Greater Albania or in the redrawing of borders, as it is aware that this would not be accepted by the West.

Tirana does support the eventual independence of Kosovo, but accepts that it must remain under UN rule for the time being. The Albanian government does not support any particular grouping or party in Kosovo, but advocates that all Kosovan Albanian political forces cooperate. In November 1999, the deputy prime minister of the provisional Kosovan government Mehmet Hajrizi visited Albania and was told by President Meidani that Albania no longer saw the Thaci government as the sole representative of Kosovan Albanians.²⁰

The Meta government (like its predecessor) favours closer social, political and economic ties between Albania and Kosovo so that the Albanian-Kosovan border would become completely open and borders would become increasingly less relevant, as they have become in Western Europe. The creation of a system of open borders is one of the key features of the South East European Stability Pact.

Albania has thus undertaken several economic initiatives to promote closer links with Kosovo.²¹ Tirana is seeking to improve road and rail links with Kosovo in order to reduce Kosovo's links with Serbia. In August 1999, the Albanian government asked citizens to deposit money in a special bank account to finance the construction of a highway from Durres-Tirana-Pristina. The former prime minister Pandeli Majko also offered Durres as a free port for Kosovo. The Albanian Development Fund has financed the reconstruction of a road from Kruma in north-eastern Albania to Djakovica in Kosovo. A railway link from Durres to Prizren is also nearing completion.

Politically, Albanian leaders have been seeking to develop closer ties with Albanian political parties in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. In December 1999, Fatos Nano mentioned the possible drafting of a common political calendar between Tirana, Pristina and Tetovo (Macedonia) to provide a pan-national integration strategy between Albanian political parties.²² Nano developed this initiative on a visit to Tetovo with Hashim Thaci and the leader of the Macedonian Albanian Democratic Party Arben Xhafferi.

In August 1999, the then prime minister Pandeli Majko called upon Albanian education officials to draw up plans to unify the Albanian and Kosovan educational systems and to develop closer cooperation between the universities of Tirana,

Pristina and Tetovo.²³ Tirana welcomed the opening of the Albanian University in Macedonia in July 1999. There is also some discussion on developing closer ties with the educational systems of Montenegrin Albanians. The Albanian government is also asking the UN that it be allowed to open an information office in Pristina.

Macedonia

Albania aims at a good bilateral relationship with Macedonia, whilst also developing closer ties with the Albanian community in western Macedonia. Tirana has no desire to seek any change in Macedonia's borders, but in accordance with the Stability Pact, seeks to develop closer ties with all her neighbours. Along with the plans to develop transport links Albania and Macedonia have been discussing the creation of a common energy market in the region. However, Albania protested to Macedonia in October 1999 over the shooting by Macedonian border guards of three Albanians. In November 1999, Meta visited Skopje and announced with his Macedonian counterpart Ljubo Georgievski plans to link the two countries' energy infrastructures, and to sign agreements on telecommunications and free trade.²⁴

Montenegro

Albania also aims at a good bilateral relationship with Montenegro. In common with the major western powers, Albania supports the reformist Montenegrin leadership of President Milo Djukanovic, whilst not overtly encouraging Montenegrin separatism from Yugoslavia. A cooperative relationship with Montenegro would also help isolate the Milosevic regime in Belgrade, another Albanian policy objective. In June 1999, Albanian President Rexhep Meidani said that Kosovo and Montenegro now constituted two new states in a United Europe, where the state borders would simply remain geographic symbols.²⁵ In December 1999, Albania lifted its embargo on the supply of oil to Montenegro, and opened her border with Montenegro in February 2000. In January 2000, the prime ministers of Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro met in Skopje and signed a pact on regional cooperation in relation to the implementation of the Stability Pact. In April 2000, foreign minister Paskal Milo visited Montenegro and signed a memorandum on economic cooperation.²⁶ Tirana is interested in close cooperation with the Djukanovic leadership, and will not allow her aim of closer ties with the Albanian minority in Montenegro (42,000 out of a total population of 600,000) to jeopardise her broader aim of developing close cooperation with Djukanovic.

CONCLUSIONS

Albania is likely to remain relatively stable under the leadership of the PS coalition. This coalition will probably remain in power after the 2001 parliamentary elections. The DP is unlikely to be able to reverse the decline in its fortunes to have a significant chance of defeating the PS in parliamentary elections. Berisha will continue to promote street protests in the hope of forcing the government to call elections. Berisha could attempt a coup if he thought conditions were favourable. The Meta government is likely to attempt to continue its battle against corruption and to toughen law and order, with mixed results. Albania will continue to cooperate closely with the IMF in the field of economic reform.

Albania's foreign policy goal of eventually becoming an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic community remains unchanged. She believes that the success of economic and political reform requires close cooperation with the West. Tirana seeks membership of the EU and NATO and will cooperate closely with these organisations. She will participate fully in the Stability Pact for the same reasons. Alongside this, Tirana is making use of the post-Kosovo conflict situation to develop closer ties with the Albanian communities in Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro, in order to create a sense of unity with all Albanians. There is no interest in seeking any change of borders, as this would alienate Albania from her neighbours, and more importantly the West. Berisha has spoken out in favour of a Greater Albania, but this view is not shared by the current Albanian government.

Albania differs from the West in that she does advocate eventual full independence for Kosovo, but accepts that this is currently not on the agenda. She therefore remains fully supportive of the international community's position on Kosovo as laid out in UN Security Council Resolution 1244. Albania's desire for close ties with the West essentially reflects her dependence on the West. She has no other viable foreign policy option; she does pursue closer ties with Moslem states, but is aware that they offer no real alternative.

Endnotes

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- 1 See Albania: State of the Nation, March 1 2000, p16.
<http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/sbalkans.reports/alb07.htm>
 - 2 See Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Country Report Albania, Q1 2000, p16.
 - 3 Albania: State of the Nation, p19.
 - 4 See <http://www.weu.int> for details of MAPE activities in Albania.
 - 5 EIU Country Report Albania, Q1 2000, p15.
 - 6 For all information in this section see EIU Country Report Albania, Q1 2000.
 - 7 BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) Eastern Europe (EE)/3560, 14 June 1999, B/1.
 - 8 SWB EE/3561, 15 June 1999, B/2.
 - 9 For details of Albania's participation in the Partnership for Peace see George Katsirdakis, 'Albania: A case study in the practical implementation of Partnership for Peace,' NATO Review, Vol 46, No 2, Summer 1998, p22-26.
 - 10 SWB EE/3565, 18 June 1999, B/1.
 - 11 For information on EU and other European aid to Albania, see http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/albania/index.htm, and http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/figures/see_balkans_support_91_99.htm
 - 12 Albania: State of the Nation, p5.
 - 13 See Bodo Hombach, Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, 'The Stability Pact: Breaking New Ground in the Balkans,' NATO Review, Vol 47, No 4, Winter 1999, p20-23.
 - 14 SWB EE/3585, 13 July 1999, B/1.
 - 15 SWB EE/3600, 30 July 1999, B/2.
 - 16 SWB EE/3799, 27 March 2000.
 - 17 Albania: State of the Nation, p12-14.
 - 18 Ibid, p6.
 - 19 Ibid, p7.
 - 20 EIU Country Report Albania, Q1 2000, p18.
 - 21 Albania: State of the Nation, p10.
 - 22 Ibid, p11.
 - 23 Ibid.
 - 24 EIU Country Report Albania, Q1 2000, p18.

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- 25 SWB EE/3573, 29 June 1999, B/1.
26 SWB EE, 27 April 2000.

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