

THE STATE OF ALBANIA

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THE STATE OF ALBANIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Premier Pandeli Majko's new coalition government is slowly consolidating its hold over the administration, though the overall power of the government remains weak after the country was rocked in September by the worst political violence since the uprising of March 1997. Within the cabinet the deputy premier Ilir Meta has emerged as the key power in most decision-making and policy implementation. The new government consists of representatives of the Socialist Party (PS), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Union of Human Rights Party (PBDNj - this party represents the ethnic Greek minority), Democratic Alliance (AD), and the small Agrarian Party (AP). The largest opposition grouping the Democratic Party (DP), led by former president Sali Berisha, does not recognise the legitimacy of the Socialist-led government, is continuing its boycott of parliament and staging street rallies to push for early elections.

The overall security situation remains very poor with most roads prone to armed attack. The recent formation of new armed roads police units to clear out highway robbers is unlikely to have much effect in the near future. Organised crime significantly increased during 1998 - smuggling, and the trafficking of drugs, weapons, illegal immigrants and women is expanding in Albania - an estimated 30,000 Albanian women are currently working as sex workers in Europe¹. Drugs, particularly home-grown cannabis, and to a lesser extent heroin in transit, are becoming an ever increasing problem, with an average of 15 murders per month directly connected with the drugs trade. It is now apparent that a drug culture has penetrated Albanian society. The risk of a "Colombia scenario" with the country becoming a key bridge in the trafficking of drugs, is therefore very real.

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. A new political and national identity is still in the process of formation, whilst the country remains beset by its geographical position in a Balkan peninsular rent by the uncertainties of war and economic collapse. Former President Sali Berisha is becoming increasingly unstable and contemptuous of both internal public and international opinion. Almost daily he issues personal attacks on various members of the governing Socialist Party and also upon foreign diplomats, thereby encouraging the already noticeable trend towards xenophobia that is evident throughout Albania.

The collapse of the many pyramid investment schemes in early 1997, and the anarchic social disorder that accompanied it, led to the downfall of the Berisha regime and the subsequent victory of Fatos Nano's Socialist-led coalition government in June 1997.

¹ *Albanian Human Development Report 1998*, United Nation's Development Programme, p.51

Tens of thousands of Albanians who lost their entire life savings as a result of the pyramid collapse were traumatised by the events of the spring of 1997, the scars of which will remain embedded in the nation's psychic for many years to come. Many Albanians are now suspicious of the motives of foreign involvement in Albanian affairs. According to the Albanian National Intelligence Service, it is widely believed that the pyramids were set up by foreign intelligence agencies in co-operation with Albanian Communist extremists in order to overthrow the democratic government².

A number of Western countries have openly criticised Berisha for hindering the country's democratisation process. The United States expressed concern that the DP led by Berisha, once a strong US ally, was not playing a constructive role. Following the inauguration of Premier Majko's new government, a US State Department statement urged "the Democratic Party and those others continuing to pursue these destructive practices to renounce once and for all calls for violence and instability."³

The new constitution, which was narrowly passed by a referendum on 22 November, produced a weak victory for the government, and consequently there are some tentative grounds for optimism regarding Albania's internal politics. Given the enormous socio-economic problems facing the country, however, the passing of the constitution is unlikely to increase public confidence in Albania's immediate future.

Albania's internal problems are compounded by the threat of Islamic terrorist operations being activated from Albanian territory and the Kosovo crisis, which shows no sign of abating and which threatens to draw Albania inextricably into some form of military confrontation with Yugoslavia. The north-east of the country is now largely under the effective control of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), and it is from here that an increasing number of border skirmishes are taking place between Yugoslav troops and KLA guerrillas.

Tirana, 06 January 1999

² Halit Daci, *Albanian Army and Regime Changes*, The Centre for European Security Studies, 1998, p.66

³ *Albanian Observer*, Vol IV, Issue 10/1998, p.5

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I. THE MAJKO-BERISHA MEETING

Given the bitter polemics of recent months, the sudden and dramatic U-turn by the opposition Democratic Party (DP) towards co-operation with the government, after more than a year of fierce protests and a total boycott of parliament, must be considered as a promising first step towards further dialogue. Prime Minister Pandeli Majko met opposition leader Sali Berisha on 21 December to discuss ways of resolving a hunger strike by around 70 students demanding better government grants and accommodation, which had been supported by Berisha. They also discussed the two most pressing issues in contemporary Albanian politics: the Kosovo crisis and investigations into the assassination in mid-September of Democrat politician Azem Hajdari. The meeting was reportedly mediated by the newly established December 1990 Association made up of former student participants in the 1990 pro-democracy movement which overthrew the communist regime⁴.

Internally and externally Berisha is widely regarded as the main cause of the grave political tensions and lack of stability in Albania. The start of the dialogue between Majko and Berisha has therefore been acclaimed by international observers as an extremely positive and sorely needed first step towards healing the deep political wounds that scar Albanian politics. It is also widely hoped that the meeting will lead to national reconciliation, as well as the end of the DP boycott of the parliamentary process, and the normal functioning of democratic institutions in the country.

Despite the optimism within international circles, there is some degree of Albanian opposition to the Majko-Berisha meeting, which many say has been given an exaggerated significance. The meeting came as a complete surprise to most of the country's politicians and analysts, as just a day before the Democrats had threatened renewed protests demanding the resignation of the government and new elections. The government has accused Berisha of masterminding the coup attempt last September following Azem Hajdari's death and parliament subsequently lifted his immunity from prosecution, but no attempt has been made so far to arrest him.

News of the meeting was greeted with calls of betrayal by those on the right of the DP, as well as hard-liners from Socialist Party (SP) ranks. The following morning some 450 DP supporters gathered in an angry mood outside Tirana's DP headquarters to demand an explanation for the meeting. Despite attempts all morning by top DP officials to explain to the DP radicals that the meeting did not signify a deviation from DP policy, it was only the intervention of Berisha himself later that afternoon which managed to appease the militants. The meeting has also divided Socialist opinion with some voicing their general approval, whilst others criticise Premier Majko for agreeing to meet with Berisha without consulting the SP chairmanship and other members of the government beforehand. Some Socialists interpret Berisha's call to meet Majko as an olive

⁴ *Albania Daily News*, 953, 23 December 1998

branch towards a possible political truce to open the DP's way to return to parliament. Spartak Braho, vice chairman of the parliament's judicial committee, has advised the majority to back a legal motion in Parliament to relieve Berisha of all charges of having organised the attempted coup in September. "Berisha, considering his difficult political, moral and juridical position in the Albanian and international arena, made a step for which he undoubtedly wants something in return to make further progress," said Braho implying that restoring Berisha's parliamentary immunity might make the Democrats lift their parliamentary boycott⁵.

Such is the level of political tension, however, that both Democrats and Socialists remain deeply suspicious of each others motives for entering any form of dialogue. Many opponents of Berisha see the former president's gesture to meet Majko as merely a cynical move to stop himself being arrested for organising the September unrest. They argue that if Berisha really meant to embrace democratic principles then he would immediately call on the DP to end their boycott of parliament. On the contrary, however, although Berisha said that his party favoured dialogue with the ruling Socialists, he has so far ruled out any end to the parliamentary boycott. According to the independent daily "*Shekulli*", Berisha exploited the meeting with Majko to further his political interests, claiming that the former president will use the meeting as ammunition against any future judicial process by claiming "Look, as soon as I start the dialogue, they answer with threats to imprison me...I am always for dialogue, whereas they are against it" etc⁶. Nevertheless, on the whole the meeting must be viewed as the beginning of a new chapter in diffusing the acute political tensions in Albania and perhaps as a sign of a political maturity tentatively beginning to develop on all sides.

II. KOSOVO

There appears to be little prospect of any meaningful negotiated settlement between the Yugoslav government and the more radical elements of the KLA, who are actively gearing up for renewed conflict. The Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) regards the latest international peace plan for Kosovo as yet another guise for keeping Kosovo permanently inside Serbia, and are therefore preparing for an inevitable long drawn out military campaign to achieve total independence. It is thus widely believed by most observers that the war will begin again in earnest when the weather permits after the spring thaw. The security vacuum inside Albania has given the KLA a relatively free hand to operate throughout the country. Despite the killings by Serb forces of an estimated 36 guerrillas on 14 December 1998, KLA members are constantly moving to and fro across the Albanian-Yugoslav border without incident.

The KLA has recently transferred its field of operations from the district of Tropoja and Bajram Curri to the remote north-eastern towns of Kukes and Krume in the more inaccessible region of Has. This area has traditionally had far

⁵ *Albania Daily News*, 958, 31 December 1998

⁶ *Shekulli*, 23 December 1998

stronger socio-economic links with Kosovo than Tirana. The important Kosovar town of Prizren is less than an hour's drive from Kukes along a flat road, compared with a tortuous and extremely hazardous eight-hour journey across the mountains to Tirana. The local population have strong family ties with their kinsfolk over the border in Kosovo, and as a consequence of the present conflict, the population of Has has been increasingly radicalised in favour of the KLA's independence drive. Better experienced military leaders and far more sophisticated weapons, which include sniper rifles and laser-guided anti-tank weapons are now moving into the Has region.

Discretion is the new KLA watchword. The geographical isolation of the Has district ensures protection for the hundreds of KLA guerrillas regrouping, training and planning their new strategy away from the prying eyes of government border guards, Albanian and foreign journalists, and the OSCE and EU border monitors. Throughout the months of December, January and February this part of Albania is virtually cut off from the rest of the country. The tiny unpaved tracks that masquerade as roads are buried under layers of snow. The KLA can therefore be assured that until the spring thaw begins at the end of March, they will remain undisturbed and can rely on the support of the local population to make sure that their operations are not hindered by any outside interference. A greater number of snow drifts blocking roads into the Has district has occurred this winter. This is not due, however, solely to harsher weather conditions than usual but KLA members are purposefully blocking certain roads to ensure more privacy and to define the area of Has that they need to secure and control to ensure their base for the launch of the predicted spring offensive.

Despite several occasions since May 1998 when Serb shellfire has been directed onto Albanian territory, the Albanian army has hesitated to return fire. Yugoslav authorities claim that a total of 16 border incidents have occurred since the OSCE verification mission arrived in Kosovo in October 1998. On 19 December Yugoslav soldiers crossed from Kosovo into Albania and fired into the village of Zharke. There were no casualties. Two days later the Albanian Interior Ministry said Yugoslav troops opened fire on an Albanian military unit near Tropoja. The entire Albanian border region has witnessed increased tension following the December 14 shooting of 36 KLA guerrillas by Yugoslav forces who claimed the KLA men were smuggling arms into Kosovo.

The Albanian government is anxious to avoid any confrontation with the large number of Serbian troops dug in just a few hundred metres across the border. There is a conspicuous absence of any Albanian military hardware along the border. Tirana has neither the military forces nor the political consensus or willpower necessary to monitor the border effectively. Physically it would be an impossibility to seal the border. NATO estimates that it would take 60,000 troops, yet the Albanian army has only around 11,000 troops, and these are very marginally trained and equipped. It would also be political suicide for the government to be seen to be cracking down on KLA activity anywhere in Albania. In the interests of "National Solidarity" the Tirana authorities are forced to turn a blind eye to the activities of Kosovar insurgents in Albania.

III. CRIME AND THE GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION

State authority has declined sharply since the violent uprising of 1997, which sparked rampant increases in crime and overall aggression. The primary factors behind this trend have been the arming of civilians and anarchy created by the weakening of state institutions. In general much of Albania is still virtually out of the control of the police, who along with the general public, are clearly fearful of the myriad of local mafia groups that operate throughout the country. During the 1997 uprising, the police failed to protect state and institutions as well as the general public. Since then the whole rule of law has effectively been put in question. The opposition and its supporters refuse to recognise the law. Local mayors, rather than the government (many of them hostile to the government in Tirana), control the police. There is widespread disillusionment at the absence of a fully-functional national police force, the prosecution office's inability to conduct prompt and fair investigation of crimes and the widespread imposition of financial penalties. Many of those arrested in connection with criminal activities have named high government officials and members of parliament as being involved. Following their arrest, a number of criminals claim to have worked for various ministers or politicians, a fact which invariably leads them to be released because the police do not wish to confront any powerful official. Also many criminals simply buy their way out of prison.

One of the key problems is the vague and ill-defined role of the police. The post-war Albanian Police Force was set up after 1948 under the Soviet model as a centralised, armed, militarised force, and since then, virtually nothing has changed. Crime control is traditionally only one function of the police force in Albania - the primary emphasis has been on political and administrative functions to ensure the enforcement of state ideology. The only significant change in post-communist policing in Albania has been in numerical strength. From 1992-3 there was a 300 per cent increase in police numbers.

IV. DRUGS

Albania has become the epicentre of a new Golden Triangle that has formed in south-eastern Europe for the transit and production of drugs. On 24 December 1998 Macedonian customs officials seized more than a tonne of marijuana worth an estimated 1.5 million US dollars concealed aboard a truck on the Greek border. The haul, the country's biggest ever, had been brought into Macedonia by mule from neighbouring Albania. It had been bound for the Netherlands when officials seized it. In several southern cities such as Vlora, Fier and Saranda there are now cocaine refining laboratories. Along with increasing production, drug use among Albanians has begun to rise. According to official figures, Albania today has 10,000 drug addicts⁷. Syndicates use Albanian ports to transport narcotics to Italy. Marijuana is cultivated in numerous sites throughout southern Albania, and to a lesser extent around Shkoder.

⁷ *Albanian Human Development Report 1998*, United Nation's Development Programme, p.43

The cultivation of marijuana began initially in 1991 in several villages around the towns of Fier and Vlora. A year later, the number of farmers planting the seeds grew. The farmers sold their seeds at incredibly high prices. Just five cannabis seeds sold then for 2,500 lek (\$175) - the price of a kilo today. Despite the risks of arrest and imprisonment, by 1993 Albanian farmers started to trade marijuana themselves in Greece often realising up to 359 US dollars per kilo. By 1994 every refugee going to Greece was a potential courier. At the same time the Italians became interested in Albanian cannabis. Italian traffickers used motor boats to cross from Otranto and later brought pressing and packaging equipment as well as laboratories for processing cannabis from Italy to Albania⁸. The state's inability to intervene, to credit or secure a market for agricultural production, led the authorities to ignore hundreds of acres of land planted with Cannabis Sativa instead of wheat.

There have been some feeble attempts to stop the cannabis trade. In 1995 the police destroyed around 100,000 plants in Fier and Vlora, an act which led to armed clashes between farmers and police. Since then the police have only made sporadic moves to prosecute farmers growing marijuana, but they are easily bought off by bribes and gifts of the plant itself to sell on. In some villages the local police themselves have planted Cannabis. A growing number of Albanians are becoming involved in the narcotics trade as farmers, traders, couriers and motorboat owners. There are sizeable profits to be made in a region otherwise devoid of industry, and due to the lack of any other source of income, the prosperity that the drugs trade brings is regarded locally a stabilising factor.

V. COLLECTION OF WEAPONS

A serious factor contributing to worsening social relations is the large number of weapons still in civilian hands since army depots were looted in the spring of 1997. According to the Ministry of Defence, 656,000 weapons of various types were looted from army depots in March 1997, together with 1.5 million rounds of ammunition, 3.5 million hand grenades and one million land mines. Despite much discussion, however, attempts so far to disarm the population have proved fruitless. By the end of 1998, an estimated 97,000 weapons (excluding mines and ammunition) had been retrieved but many of these are very old rifles handed in to the authorities, whilst the owner holds on to newer looted models.

The majority of Albanians believe that there is a very strong likelihood of widescale civil unrest breaking out once again, people therefore want to hang on to their weapons for self defence. In April, local police in Puka district began an operation to collect arms looted from army depots. Puka police chief, Arjan Ndoi, said he was not satisfied with the result since only a handful of weapons were retrieved, implying that most of the arms had either been hidden or sold. Ndoi said that the police had abandoned the public campaign of gathering weapons and from now on would opt for surprise police raids in places suspected of

⁸ *Albanian Observer*, Vol IV, Issue 10 1998

hiding weapons⁹. There is a constant demand for weapons, especially from people living in the unprotected and vulnerable villages along the Albanian-Yugoslav border. As a result weapons continue to be stolen. In mid-October 1998 soldiers repelled an armed gang trying to loot a weapons depot in northern Albania.

The lacklustre results of earlier attempts to retrieve weapons demonstrate that no clear strategy exists. Although many models have been discussed - ranging from setting a deadline for the return of the looted weapons to their re-purchase from the people - the only realistic way to disarm the population is to consider the possession of these weapons a crime punishable by law, accompanied by surprise inspections in suspect areas. An important factor, however, which adversely affects the weapons collection effort, is the lack of sufficient financial resources available to support such a massive undertaking. According to calculations from the Ministry of internal Affairs, an effective disarmament project would cost over \$US 10 million. The armed population and the return of public security therefore represent the gravest and most complicated challenges for the Albanian government¹⁰.

VI. ISLAM

Although Prime Minister Pandeli Majko has strongly emphasised that there will be no change in Albanian foreign policy regarding Kosovo, Majko has decided to melt the ice in relations between Albania and the Islamic world. In a press statement Majko pointed to his change of policy from that adopted by his predecessor Fatos Nano. Albania's relations with the Islamic world dropped to zero during Nano's term. Albania's membership of the Islamic Conference six years ago, on 2 December 1992, caused fierce polemics amongst Albanian opposition politicians, who attacked Berisha's Democratic Party's decision in favour of membership, arguing that the move attempted to divert Albania from its Euro-Atlantic orientation. After coming to power in June 1997, Nano and Foreign Minister Paskal Milo declared that Tirana favoured only bilateral relations with the Islamic world¹¹.

Although Albanian-Islamic diplomatic and consequently economic relations are set to improve, the present unstable political situation has contributed to the increase of Islamic fundamentalist influence and activity in Albania. At the end of August ten suspected Islamic terrorists were arrested in Tirana during a combined operation by the Albanian Intelligence Service SHIK and an American CIA team in Tirana. The ten, four of Arab nationality, one US citizen and five Kosovo Albanians, were believed to be members of an Islamic branch of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which aimed to send supporters and provide logistics for the KLA. The ten were found with fake documents and papers, weapons and facilities to set up a television station¹².

⁹ *Koha Jone*, 29 April 1998

¹⁰ *Albanian Human Development Report 1998*, United Nation's Development Programme, p.73

¹¹ *Albanian Observer*, Vol IV, Issue 10/1998, p.9

¹² *Albania Daily News*, 26 August 1998

US government agencies have been taking an active role in pursuing individuals described as "Islamic terrorists" in Tirana, Elbasan and northern Albania. There is particular concern about the activities in Albania associated with the Islamic terrorist Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden, who has declared war on America, first entered Albania in 1994 as a member of an official Saudi Arabian delegation. Since then he has apparently established business interests in Albania together with several charitable enterprises, including the funding of various medical clinics. In December 1998, Albanian Secret Service chief, Fatos Klosi, announced that the Albanian authorities had discovered, in several Albanian locations, a network of Islamist terrorists controlled by Bin Laden. Klosi confirmed earlier reports by a French terrorist suspect of Algerian origin that Bin Laden has attempted to send units to fight in Kosovo. Klosi also said that Islamic terrorists have already infiltrated other parts of Europe from Albania as illegal immigrants¹³.

Albania's image as a rouge state, harbouring not only criminal mafia but also Islamic terrorist elements, was enhanced following last August's fatal bomb explosions at two American embassies in East Africa. Several press reports linked the bombs with the extradition of four Islamists from Albania a month prior to the explosions. The four, who were wanted in connection with the killing of 58 tourists in Luxor in November 1997, and had been working in Albanian-Islamic charity organisations, were apprehended by the Albanian Intelligence Service with the co-operation of the US Central Intelligence Agency. In response, Egypt's banned Jihad group immediately warned that it would retaliate against what it claimed was US assistance in the extradition. As a result, the United States temporarily closed its embassy in Tirana as a precaution against a potential terrorist reprisal.

The Albanian authorities have subsequently been investigating the Islamic charity organisations 'The Islamic Inheritance Renaissance' and 'The Al-Haramain Foundation' for whom the four militants worked. Numerous other Islamic charitable and economic organisations operating in Albania are also now being investigated. New legislation has been passed to enforce tighter checks on immigration to halt the infiltration of Islamic fundamentalist cells into Albania.

During the past few years Albania has provided a safe and undisturbed refuge for Islamic terrorists. In September 1993, Egyptian artisans were finishing the restoration of one of Tirana's most prominent mosques. Outside the building furtive Egyptians regarded visitors suspiciously, were reluctant to talk, and tried to discourage anyone from entering the mosque. This was in marked contrast to the traditional warm greeting that non-Muslims receive when visiting mosques in general. Although Egyptian artisans were undoubtedly restoring the mosque, it was also a well known fact that there were several fundamentalists on the run from authorities in Egypt, who were living in Tirana at that time. Similar refugees were also discovered in the Old Market mosque by the author of this report.

Islamic influence in northern and central Albania has grown significantly since the reintroduction of religion into Albanian society in 1991 following the ban imposed in 1967 on all forms of religious worship. Money has poured in from Islamic countries to build badly needed schools, hospitals and clinics.(Roman

¹³ *Albanian Daily News*, 2 December 1998, see also *The Sunday Times*, 29 November 1998

Catholic, Greek Orthodox and various Christian organisations have also been active spiritually and economically throughout Albania since 1991. An estimated 70 per cent of the Albanian population profess to come from a Muslim background, whilst 20 per cent follow the Greek Orthodox Church and the remaining 10 per cent are Roman Catholic. Over the border in former Yugoslavia, 90 per cent of the 3 million Albanians are Muslim, the remainder are Catholic.) Unlike the other religious groups that flocked to Albania during this period, the Islamic representatives were intent on fostering an economic as well as a spiritual and cultural base in the country. It was then that major new constructions of mosques (and churches) began in earnest throughout Albania.

Since 1991 both Christian and Muslim organisations have continued to expand their missionary work. The number of foreign Muslims living in Albania has increased and bus loads of children regularly travel to Islamic schools in Istanbul. Islamic organisations have also helped to fund the expenses of a growing number of Albanians wishing to make the trip to Mecca. Most Islamic initiatives in Albania continue to be in useful, productive medical and educational fields.

The Committee of Eastern Europe Muslim Youth, in co-ordination with the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, are active in the Albanian countryside, and groups of Saudi-trained Kosovar and Macedonian-Albanian activists, fluent in Arabic and well-versed in the Koran are to be found in some of the remotest Albanian villages. The campaign is aimed at re-establishing Islam amongst Albania's Muslims by touring the country to explain the basic concepts of the religion and to distribute literature about Islam. For the young with little hope of finding employment, any distraction from their hopeless situation has received a certain amount of attention. Generally, however, the Albanian population has remained largely secular.

It remains to be seen if the separation of state and religion can be maintained in Albania. In general, Albanians of Muslim heritage have shown little sign of mass revival but with committed individuals beginning to undertake Islamic studies abroad this situation may change when they return.

VII. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH RAPID URBANISATION

As a result of internal population shifts, a conflict had arisen between people's freedom of movement and the economy's ability to support such movement. Today Albania faces major problems of overpopulation and rapid urbanisation, which in turn present Europe with an escalating problem of illegal Albanian immigration. The capital Tirana has grown by 30 per cent since 1990, whilst the infrastructure to support this growth has not changed at all. In 1997 the registered population of Tirana according to the municipality was 568,758, accounting for 18 per cent of the country's total population. As long as the government and local authorities do not work to improve the infrastructure and integrate the newcomers, the overpopulation issue will persist, continuing to present grave social problems and encourage persistent emigration. An estimated 40 per cent of Albania's population aged 19 - 40 has emigrated since 1990. Greece is currently hosting 350-400,000 emigrants, while Italy hosts 100-

150,000¹⁴. Several thousand more are to found in Western European countries and the United States.

Emigration has been a response not only to the obvious economic needs for development but also to political social tensions in the country. Emigration has increased dramatically since the spring of 1997 when emigration evolved from a clandestine practice into a forced emigration of displaced people in the wake of social tumult and the loss of security. Albania's current situation, tempered by the need for revitalisation and a serious lack of internal resources, will fuel the current trend for the foreseeable future¹⁵.

Internal pressure on the government to curb the growth of Tirana's shanty suburbs has steadily increased. During the last few years, thousands of families from the impoverished north-eastern highlands have migrated south to Tirana in search of land for settlement on the outskirts of the capital. Although some northerners have succeeded in the anarchic small-time trading that prevails around the capital, the majority have sunk into increasing poverty. Large families are often cramped into tiny wooden shacks with tar-paper roofs, without running water or sewerage, or at best with shallow, ineffective cesspits. The risk of cholera, such as the epidemic in 1996 which killed 34 people, and other infectious diseases is ever-present.

During communist rule, state-subsidised collective farms in the north-east provided work and income for the highlanders. Rigorously enforced restrictions on movement within the country and the inability of Albanians to travel abroad prevented the disenchanting youth from migrating to the cities. The collapse of communism and the lure of potentially high earnings in Tirana or further afield, notably in Greece, has led to a mass exodus from the highlands. The northerners are bitter about the worsening dilapidation of their roads - the only link they have to the outside world. The narrow mountain roads, like that which snakes between Peshkopije and Kukes and on to Bajram Curri, were built either by communist youth brigades in 1947 or by the Italians in the 1930s and have had little repair or general maintenance since 1990. The winters here are extremely harsh and when the snow melts in the spring thaw, great boulders come crashing down the mountainsides creating potholes and causing further landslides. Widespread deforestation has caused faster run-off and more powerful floods which are continually damaging the unmaintained rural road network. Overgrazing caused by the new private herds adds to longstanding erosion problems and the silting up of rivers.

An ambitious projection of Albania's future is the production of a plan by the Tirana municipality for the development of a million-inhabitant conurbation along the Durres-Tirana corridor, and stretching south towards the towns of Kavaja and Rrogozhina. In many ways this may be less of a plan than the rationalisation of contemporary reality if current population movements persist. The salient point is that without massive and immediate investment in the infrastructure, roads and facilities for water supply and sewage disposal will come near to collapse in the Tirana-Durres districts.

¹⁴ *Albanian Human Development Report 1998*, UNDP, p.36

¹⁵ *Albanian Human Development Report 1998*, UNDP, p.37

Agricultural land in Albania, which is in very short supply especially in the north due to the predominantly mountainous terrain, is rapidly being reduced due to construction. Albania already has one of the lowest number of hectares of arable land per capita in Europe. Following the break-up of the collective farm system in 1991, thousands of hectares of land are now occupied by new buildings on the outskirts of the capital and other cities. On both sides of the Tirana-Durres and Tirana-Fushe Kruje roads thousands of houses have been erected on prime agricultural land. The government can do little to stem the migration of northerners to Tirana and the resulting growth of the shanty towns into permanent suburbs. This in turn will exacerbate the already deep divisions between the indigenous inhabitants of Tirana and the northern newcomers. North-south antagonism based on resentment over internal migration are increasing.

Efforts to address infrastructure problems through foreign aid programmes have been undermined by the lack of institutional authority and by ambiguities of surrounding ownership of land. For example at Kapshtitsa to build a new border crossing which had previously been totally refurbished and then trashed in the 1997 uprising, the PHAR purchased surrounding land required to upgrade and expand the site. As soon as work was about to commence, however, someone claimed the land was his. As a result the whole project had to be suspended. Another PHAR project to construct the new highway between Tirana and Durres was suspended during the anarchy of 1997 when virtually all the equipment and Albanian staff disappeared, only to be halted yet again in the unrest in September 1998 when staff were chased off and vehicles and machinery were stolen. Tractors were trashed and new road signs stolen for scrap metal.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the recent attempted coup, the Albanian government faces many new challenges. One of which is the very severe damage to the public relations success over the last year, which sought, with some success, to give an image of Albania, under the new Socialist-led administration, as a progressive and increasingly stable, democratic country. The old stereotypes of violence and social disorder associated with Albania from the 1990-2 'Years of Anarchy' have recurred in international press coverage of recent events. Assassinations of public figures add to the impression of instability and reduce the influence of Albania in the region. As a result, the country will continue to be seen as a higher risk by many foreign investors.

The defining characteristics of social relations in Albania are still conflict and aggression. A contentious political climate, the public's low awareness of the law, the widespread arming of civilians during 1997, the aggressive tone and harsh language of the party press, and the weakness of the judiciary have all played a role in influencing Albanian society. Currently it is far from a state where understanding and tolerance co-exist with public trust in the institutions of

law and justice¹⁶. The current general climate of apathy, lawlessness and the breakdown of state institutions, has led to regional rather than governmental loyalties.

The key challenges facing the new government are to restart economic growth, to restore law and order and to establish sound and stable state institutions. These are daunting tasks but essential if Albania is to end the cycle of economic and political destruction the country has experienced since the collapse of communism in 1991. Aside from the all important national question, which centres upon solving the Kosovo issue, Albania's most pressing needs remain the promotion of social solidarity, demands for institutional stability and the need to attract foreign investment.

Albania's tortuous path towards democracy is going to be a far slower process than in other former Communist countries. There exists within the Albanian nation's cultural ethos a very simplistic message - *sa mbaj mua, une do te baj ty* - what you do to me, I will do to you. Hence the leadership of whatever political party that holds office has attempted to discredit the previous regime. It is not only the scars of the Hoxha years that will take decades to heal, but also the crisis of 1997 was too costly in many respects for Albania. It has affected all the political, military, social and economic aspects of life in the country.

¹⁶ *Albania Human Development Report 1998*, United Nations Development Programme, p.8

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Restarting the Political Process

According to the DP leadership the arrest of the killers of opposition MP Azem Hajdari, and the termination of politically-motivated judicial proceedings against members of the DP are the main conditions for the Democrats to return to Parliament. The DP, as the country's largest opposition force, must work as a constructive element in the democratic process, and its leader Sali Berisha will remain a dangerously unpredictable element as long as the threat of arrest hangs over him. In the interests therefore of long-term stability it is advisable to exonerate Berisha for his role in the September coup attempt. This act would undoubtedly serve to diminish political tension. Berisha clearly offered the government the chance of opening dialogue in return for the lifting of charges against his role in last September's coup attempt. His pardoning should be part of the large political bill that needs to be settled in order to diffuse tensions and bring about a new political climate.

Law and Order

The now weak and thinly stretched Albanian police force is to be assisted by 600 EU police officers, at the request of PM Fatos Nano shortly before his resignation last September. The EU force will train Albanian recruits on how to police a democratic society but it will take time. The most important message to be implanted into the new police force is that the police must learn to serve the public not the state as they did under communism. The foundations must be laid for the depoliticisation of the police. Paying the police higher wages is not a sufficient deterrent to corruption and bribery - the police already get twice as much salary as the average worker. The Albanian anti-drugs squad is grossly understaffed with only 35 trained officers. This force needs a massive injection of funds and technical equipment to expand its operations.

Regarding the collection of weapons, one possible solution is the licensing of all weapons. Thus it is to be supposed that law-abiding individuals would make a point of purchasing a license, whereas criminals would not. If the general licensing could be backed up with periodic and spontaneous police raids, then it is to be hoped that in time illegal weapons would gradually be retrieved. Due to the heavy financial cost to the Albanian authorities, this project would have to be financed largely by the international community.

NGOs and Aid Agencies

It has become clear that NGOs are undervalued and their projects the objects of prejudice in domestic politics. At the same time they are strongly supported from abroad by affiliated organisations and by Western governments, which have increased significantly their support for projects in this sector. There are believed to be approximately 850 such organisations registered in Albania. Relationships among NGOs and between NGOs and government, business, media and the Albanian population are weak. NGOs have for the most part

operated independently from one another and from the other sectors of society. As a result, public awareness and trust are not strong¹⁷.

The mediation and assistance of outside institutions continue to be of critical importance for the future of Albania. However, there is an appalling lack of co-operation between the numerous aid agencies and NGOs operating in Albania, which leads to duplication of work and a waste of human and financial resources. This problem can only be addressed by the organisations themselves, whose administrative bodies are well aware of the need to co-operate and liase with each other especially when rampant corruption, combined with such problems as a lack of institutional memory, means that the Albanian Ministries are incapable of absorbing funds offered by foreign donors.

¹⁷ *Albania Human Development Report 1998*, United Nations Development Programme, p.54

APPENDIX

NEW GOVERNMENT LIST

Prime Minister	Pandeli Majko (SP)
Agriculture and Food	Lufter Xhuveli (AP)
Culture, Youth and Sports	Edi Rama (Independent)
Defence	Luan Hajdaraga (SP)
Education and Science	Ethem Ruka (SP)
Finance	Anastas Angjeli (SP)
Foreign Affairs	Paskal Milo (SDP)
Health	Leonard Solis (HRUP)
Information	Musa Ulqini (SP)
Justice	Thimio Kondi (Independent)
Public Order	Petro Koci (SP)
Labour and Social Affairs	Kadri Rrapi (SP)
Local Power	Arben Demeti (DA)
Public Economy and Privatisation	Ylli Bufi (SP)
Public Affairs and Transport	Ingrid Shuli (SDP)
Economic Co-operation and Trade	Ermelinda Meksi (SP)
Institutional Reforms	Arben Imami (DA)