

Hunger strike of former politically persecuted in Tirana- started in September 21, 2012 from 20 former political persecuted during the communist years, is currently continuing with 6 men suffering from severe health problems. The strike began as an opportunity to address economic issues for the categories of former political prisoners, seeking compensation according to 1991, 1993 laws on innocence and status of FPPs; the 2007 Law on financial compensation that entitles former political prisoners to rehabilitation, financial compensation and reintegration for the time spent in prison. Meanwhile 1 Month has passed and strikers are still struggling to receive attention and understanding from state structures.

The current health situation of the 6 remaining strikers urges immediate intervention and specialized health treatment – as human being and torture survivors. They refuse due to police pressure to dissolve the hunger strike: no one would be able to follow the hunger strike, once they will be hospitalized. Despite health situation, they remain firm to their right to urge solution from the state structures.

ARCT urges attention of national and international community to the sufferings of 6 human beings that have spent most of their lives in communist prisons for better life.

ARCT calls for the application and acknowledgement of all international treaties/conventions for the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in the current case of this Hunger Strike.

## **A P E L**

### **NË MBËSHTETJE TË ISH-PËRSEKUTUARVE DHE TË DËNUARVE POLITIKË NË GREVËN E URISË**

Prej më shumë se 1 javë, një grup prej 20 të përndjekurish politikë kanë nisur një grevë urie. Protesta e tyre ka për qëllim përmbushjen e disa kërkesave që lidhen si me statusin e të përdjekurit ashtu dhe me procesin e bllokuar të dëmshpërblimit. Revolta, dëshpërimi dhe lodhja mbizotërojnë në tendën e grevës – një tendë kjo e lënë në haresë nga autoritetet zyrtare në pushtet dhe krejt e neglizhuar nga ana mjeksore, dy shenja të qarta këto të moskokëçarjes së qeverisë për këtë shtresë.

Vizita e Ambasadorit të SHBA, z. Arvizu, dhe ajo e Ambasadorit të Delegacionit të BE në Tiranë, z. Sequi, në tendën e “të harruarve” flet qartë për rëndësinë që merr zgjidhja e problematikës së kësaj shtrese për Shqipërinë. Mbështetja e kërkesave të grevistëve dhe qëndrimi

krah tyre përcon një mesazh të fortë solidariteti lidhur me çështjen e përndjekjes politike: ka ardhur koha që ajo të zgjidhet me seriozitetin që meriton.

Përndjekja politike po i jep një mësim të fortë të gjithë aktorëve kombëtarë dhe ndërkombëtarë në këtë vend: mos-zbatueshmërinë e ligjeve për dekomunistizimin dhe integrimin e viktimave të diktaturës komuniste, siç është Ligji Nr. 7514, datë 30.09.1991 “Për pafajësinë, amnistinë dhe rehabilitimin e ish të dënuarve dhe të përndjekurve politikë” (ndryshuar); e, Ligji Nr. 7748, datë 29.07.1993 “Për statusin e ish të dënuarve dhe të përndjekurve politikë nga regjimi komunist” (ndryshuar), dhe konventat nderkombetare kunder tortures dhe trajtimeve çnjerezore, të ratifikuara nga Shqipëria.

Si pasojë e diktaturës së tejzgjatur jo vetëm u arrit të ndikohej në formimin e “njeriut të ri” komunist, por u orientua gjithashtu edhe drejtimi politik i vendit në vazhdim. Ne, në mënyrë të përsëritur në raportet tona jemi shprehur se “në institucionet shqiptare predominon ende mendësia e peridhës komuniste”.

Greva e fundit është një përgjigje e hidhur e dis-integrimit të kësaj shtrese të diskriminuar, që është lënë në mëshirë të fatit, pa asnjë përkrahje, e keqtrajtuar apo e përdorur politikisht.

Nga rreth 50.000 ish të burgosur e të internuar të cilët u liruan pas vitit 1991, shumica e tyre nuk jeton më. Besohet (pa konfirmim) se rreth 2.000 ish të burgosur politikë janë ende në jetë.

Dënimi i krimit komunist, integrimi i shtresës së të përndjekurve politik në shoqëri, gjetja e eshtrave të rreth 5.000 të ekzekutuarve pa varr, mbeten tregues themelor për cilësinë me të cilën zbatohen standardet demokratike në këtë shtet.

Qendra Shqiptare për Rehabilitimin e Traumës dhe Torturës shpreh solidarizimin dhe alarmin ndaj neglizhencës dhe braktisjes nga ana e autoriteteve shtetërore jo vetëm të këtij grupi, por të klasës së ish të përndjekurve, të dënuarve dhe të internuarve në Shqipëri. Tiranë, 01.10.2012

### **10 Dite Greve, 20 të përndjekurit pa përgjigje**

**Petrit Horjeti** - 26 vjet në burgun e Burrelit- Lindur në Tepelene në 1939, Vendbanimi Tirane, pa pension, beqar dhe I pa strehe.

**Gjergj Ndreca** - 7.5 vjet në burgun e Spaçit dhe Qafe-barit-vendlindja Durrës në 1961, Vendbanimi Tirane I martuar me 4 femije, I papune, I pastrehe

**Fatmir Lloçi** - 7 vjet në burgun e Spaçit- Vendlindja Kukës në 1956, Vendbanimi Tirane I martuar me 3 femije, I papune.

**Kujtim Kaziu** - 10 vjet në burgun e Spaçit- vendlindja Krujë në 1958, vendbanimi Durrës, I martuar me 3 femije, I papune.

**Petrit Lipo** - 18 vjet ne burgun e Burrelit- vendlindja Pogradec ne 1959, Vendbanimi Tirane I martuar me 1 femije, I papune.

**Shpetim Karamuca** - 26 vjet ne burgun e Burrelit dhe Spaçit- Vendlindja Korçe ne 1941, Vendbanimi Tirane. Nje djale. Pa pension, I pastrehe.

**Gazment Hamiti** - 5 vjet ne Qafe- Bari, vendlindja Tirane ne 1959, I martuar me 4 femije, I papune.

**Ramazan Spahiu** - 12 vjet ne burgun e Spaçit, vendlindja Burrel ne 1941, vendbanimi Burrel, beqar pa pension.

**Guxim Kullolli** - 9.5 vjet ne burgun e ne Qafe- Barit, vendlindja Elbasan ne 1960, vendbanimi Elbasan. I martuar 4 femije, I papune.

**Besim Valteri** - 6 vjet burg ne Spaç, vendlindja Burrel ne 1961, Vendbanimi Tirane I martuar me 4 femije, I papune, I pastrehe

**Agim Kollçaku** - 5 vjet ne burgun e ne Qafe- Barit, vendlindja Kavaje ne 1956, Vendbanimi Kavaje I martuar me 2 femije, I pastrehe

**Arif Beu** - 5 vjet ne burgun e Spaçit vendlindja Kavaje ne 1957, Vendbanimi Kavaje I martuar me 3 femije, I papune

**Vllas Koçi** - 13 vjet ne burgun e Spaçit, Vendlindja Vlore ne 1956, vendbanimi Vlore. I martuar me 2 femije, I papune

**Petrit Mukaj** - 5 vjet burg ne Qafe- Barit, Vendlindja Tirane ne 1958, Vendbanimi Tirane, I martuar me 2 femije, I papune

**Maldin Mukaj** - 5 vjet burg ne Qafe- Barit, Vendlindja Tirane ne 1951, I martuar me 3 femije, I papune

**Ylli Gjonçaj** - 5 vjet burg ne Qafe- Barit, Vendlindja Tirane ne 1953, Vendbanimi Tirane, I martuar me 2 femije, I pa strehe

**Perikli Shqevi** - 10 ne burgun e Burrelit dhe Qafe- Barit, Vendlindja Tirane ne 1957, vendbanimi Tirane, I martuar me 2 femije, I papune

**Agron Talo** - 10.5 vjet ne burgun e Qafe- Bari dhe Spaçit, Vendlindja Tirane ne 1958, Vendbanimi Tirane. I divorcuar me 1 femije. I papune.

**Xhemal Zhuri** - 13 vjet ne burgun e Qafe- Bari dhe Spaçit. Vendlindja Tirane ne 1959, Vendbanimi Tirane. I divorcuar me 3 femije.

**Lirak Bejko** - 7.5 vjet burg ne Spaç. vendlindja Tirane ne 1965, Vendbanimi Tirane I martuar me 2 femije, I papune, I pastrehe

### **Outraged, shocked, but also with hope**

The terrible act of Gjergj Ndreca who inflamed himself today in Tirana as a sign of protest against the fact that the government is ignoring the demands of former political prisoners in Albania, is the real indicator of how bad is the situation with human rights in Albania.

Ndreca who has been hospitalized after setting himself on fire to demand quicker payment of compensation for victims of the former communist regime, is 53 years old. He is among a group of some 20 former political prisoners on hunger strike on a street in central Tirana. They are demanding that the government meets its pledges to pay victims of the former regime 2,000 leks (\$18.32; €14.05) per day of imprisonment.

There is a principle upon every other principle that has structured all human rights documents on which the smartest nations base their lives today. It is the rights of each individual to be fulfilled, to be happy, and above all to protect and cultivate dignity. (Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

What happened today in Tirana is painful and deeply upsetting for us all. But it should be embarrassing to the whole politics, and especially for our Prime Minister Sali Berisha. It leaves us all speechless.

There is a famous phrase saying that "The Revolution will not be televised", which does not apply in this case, because through television and macabre images today we started to see a real revolution that will compel us to reflect long and deeply. This should force the government to find real solutions for the former political prisoners, first of all, but for each of us who are fighting to have the opportunity to live with dignity and build our happiness by having equal rights and chances to build our happiness.

If our Prime Minister is able only to give lectures on democracy as a retired scholar (the last speech he did at the Assembly of the Council of Europe), is not able to find a solution, he should urgently give his resignation.

We have welcomed Mr. Sali Berisha whenever he publicly supported our cause.

But we do not want to be considered "the only good news from human rights in Albania", just because the prime minister appeared publicly declaring his pro position towards LGBT, and from the other side he is unable and unwilling to understand women rights; children rights (he goes everyday in a elementary school and give political speeches to the children); elderly people rights; human rights of former political prisoners (Albania voted recently against a resolution in CoE to define the status of political prisoners), etc.

Whenever this country is failing to guarantee the human rights of its entire population, LGBT, who are before being LGBT normal citizens of this country, cannot and will never be happy. We can be an easier target anytime!

## **Albania: Government should honour the rights of former political prisoners**

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL / PUBLIC STATEMENT**

16 October 2012

### **Albania: Government should honour the rights of former political prisoners**

Amnesty International calls on the government of Albania to meet with the Association of Former Politically Persecuted Persons, and to establish a dialogue to promptly address their concerns.

Some 24 former political prisoners have been on hunger strike for over three weeks to protest at the government's delays in providing them with compensation, under a law adopted in 2007. According to the Association, only one-eighth of the compensation due has been paid out since 2007. Many of the former prisoners live in extreme poverty.

In recent days the group has escalated their protest. On 8 October, one of the group, Gjergj Ndreca, set himself on fire. Another striker, Llazi Koçi, was badly burnt. A third, Lirak Bejko, attempted the same act on 10 October. Other former political prisoners have been demonstrating outside the parliament in solidarity with the hunger strikers. Many of those on hunger strike are aged and infirm.

Amnesty International welcomes an initial meeting held last Friday - which took place only after the intervention of the US Embassy and the EU delegation in Albania - between the hunger-strikers, and President Bujar Nishani. However, the Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, has continued to state that the protestors are politically motivated. Amnesty International urges him to urge him to address their concerns and ensure that outstanding reparations are paid promptly.

Under Communist rule between 1944 and 1991, many opponents of the government were targeted for their political opinions and subjected to imprisonment, exile, deprivation of their property or other persecution under. Those imprisoned were also sentenced to forced labour, often in harsh conditions, and received minimal food rations and little medical care. According to the Association of Former Political Prisoners an estimated 5,577 men and 450 women were executed, and tens of thousands of others imprisoned or sent to labour camps. The law provides that the former prisoners receive compensation of €14.30 for each day of their imprisonment.

The Head of the Delegation of the EU in Albania, Ambassador Ettore Sequi, has appealed for dialogue to address the groups' concerns, as well as individual cases which would not be resolved by the 2007 scheme. Three Albanian human rights organizations - the Albanian Helsinki Committee, the Albanian Human Rights Centre and the Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma and Torture – have also called on the Assembly to address issue in the next session, or to call an extraordinary session.

While the former prisoners were released and pardoned 20 years ago, they have not received any other form of reparation from the government. Amnesty International considers that they should be eligible to receive full reparations including restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. Few prisoners, including those who were tortured or subject to other forms of ill-treatment, have received any form of rehabilitation, including psychological support, except that provided by non governmental organizations.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR11/009/2012/en>

### **Sequi: Self-immolation is always a tragedy**

From Shkodra on Friday 2 November, the Head of the EU Delegation in Albania, Ambassador Ettore Sequi, expressed his condolences for the death of the former political prisoner Lirak Bejko.

Following the event the EU Ambassador reiterated the statement of Spokesperson of Commissioner Fule issued at the time of the strike who underlined that their situation should be an immediate priority for all concerned and encouraged calm and constructive dialogue to deal with this issue.

The European Commission called for dialogue between the authorities and the civil society organisations and this dialogue should take place in the framework of democratic institutions and related legislation.

Recalling also a statement of EU Ambassadors and the EU Delegation in Albania the EU Ambassador Sequi called upon the parties "not to exploit this painful human situation for political ends" and "took note of the existence of the compensation plan provided for in the 2007 law and appealed for dialogue to address the individual cases which would not be resolved by this law."

"I believe that self immolation is always a tragedy. I have made my calls and statements through the media to stop self-immolation. I express deep feelings of human sympathy, sadness and

sincere compassion for the loss of the late Lirak Bejko. My thoughts are with the family of the deceased.", said the EU Ambassador.

*Ora News, News 24, Panorama p. 3*

**The European Parliament Foreign Committee discussed the amends proposed for the resolution of Albania. Despite the support for the candidate status if the country fulfils the conditions, the European MPs remain sceptic about the current progress.**

Vassilis Margos, Head of the Unit for Albania at the European Commission: "We believe Albania has indeed made very good progress for this year, in particular in the context of the political agreement of last November, the implementation of which has been on track in the course of the year, and also in a number of other areas of reform, as we have set out in the progress report and in the strategy paper. In this respect I think that we need to give a strong signal to our Albanian friends, a signal of support, and also of encouragement for further reforms.

**Eduard Kukan, Head of Delegation for Balkan at the EU:** "It would be worth to discuss a little bit more what kind of progress exactly has been fairly and objectively achieved in Albania. And I'm not suggesting any final solution, because it's "limited progress" or "progress". Concerning the compromise amends, I agree with that, but I think that the completion is the key verb here, completion of the outstanding key report, and the adoption and implementation. That should be the language, the word that we should use in all paragraphs of this resolution. I agree with the amend about the cooperation between the government and the opposition to improve the political climate, but I want to share with you that myself I still need more hard proof that will help me overcome my scepticism that this is really the situation in Albania. Of course, it will be very important for Albania how it deals with the upcoming elections of next year, and how they will conduct and how will ballot count will proceed and what will be follow-up to these elections. Just two amendments of my own that I would like to keep there. First, this amendment 74 refers to the investigation of the January 21st events. I think that it is important for Albania and its citizens that these events are properly and independently investigated, and a credible judicial procedure is launched. Without doing it, I don't think it would be good for the society of Albania. Second is the amendment 133, which I favoured following the very intense situation when former political prisoners were on strike and two of them set themselves on fire."

**Kristian Vigenin, Bulgarian EMP, S&D:** "It wouldn't be fully fair to blame the opposition for not willing to support these laws, because it is a matter also of the government and the majority to understand the importance of these laws and the steps that have to be taken, so that they can also make the necessary concessions. If those laws are not adopted, obviously the country cannot

hope to achieve the candidate status now. It is possible that they will not achieve the status even if those laws are adopted, but at least there is a good chance. There are already countries that suggest that no move on the candidate status should be made before the elections of next year.”

**Boris Zala, Slovakian EMP, S&D:** "The report makes clear that the conduct of the upcoming Parliamentary elections will be critical to Albania's EU integration process, and of course, an important test of Albania's democratic maturity. Beyond that, Albania faces steep challenges in aligning with EU standards, especially in the rule of law, in the integrity of its judiciary, in the fight against corruption, in the quality of its public administration, in safeguarding human and social rights, or in protecting the environment.

**Nikolaos Chountis, rapporteur for Albania at the EU:** "Let's not think that the situation in Albania has been fully stabilized. Pressure and encouragement must be preserved in this direction. There are conditions that should be fulfilled and reforms that should be reached. All political parties in Albania should work for this purpose. The amendments of Mr. Kukan, which are not included in the compromises, have my entire support. As for amendment 74, I think that there should be an investigation of the January 21st events, **as well as for the amend 133 for the former political prisoners.** I agree that they should be included in the list, although it is not an amendment of compromise”.

The Green MPs raised the concern of waste import and management, especially for the toxic ones. The Dutch EMP Cornelisen considered futile the government supportive amendment of EMP Doris Pack, who wasn't present in the debate.

**Marije Cornelissen, the Green Party:** “Just one question for the EPP. Mr.Kukan, on behalf of Mrs. Pack, said that you are willing to support the implementation of the national plan for the waste management, and I really cannot imagine why that could be, because it is a huge problem in Albania. There's a lot of toxic waste being imported and it is an enormous environmental problem.

**Vasilis Maragos:** "I think that it is important to stress the need to address the issue not only in the context of import, which is only part of the problem, but also in view of ensuring proper implementation of waste management. This is something that we are addressing a lot in the context of our bilateral assistance program with Albania.”

The Foreign Committee foresees the voting of the amends on November 22nd, and the resolution for Albania will be voted in a plenary session in mid December

**The European Committee of Foreign Affairs voted with 61 votes in favour, 1 against and two abstains the draft-resolution for Albania. The European MPs appealed the council to give the candidate status to our country without any further delays, if the key reforms given by the Commission would be fulfilled.**

On the same time, the draft-resolution expresses the concern for the low progress in the judiciary and underlines the importance of a non-corrupted, independent and transparent judiciary. The elections of 2013 are estimated an important test for the maturity of democracy in Albania.

The European MPs appeal all political forces to hold an electoral campaign and free and honest elections, and work together to improve the political climate in the country. The report appeals the Albanian authorities to bring the legislations for the elections, the freedom of meetings, the freedoms of associations and the freedom of media in full accordance with the international standards and fully implement it.

**During the voting, the Foreign Committee also passed the amends of Eduard Kukan for the January 21st trial and the situation of the former political prisoners.** The report prepared by Nikolaos Chountis expresses a deep concern even for the high level of unemployment and the high number of Albanians who live under the poverty limit.

More efforts are needed to fight the discrimination against the Roma community, the LGBT and vulnerable groups of the society. The EP reports are supportive and advisory, but they also criticize some of the key efforts of Albania. This resolution will be voted on December in Strasbourg after the EU Council of Ministers decision for Albania.

(22/11/2012)

European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2012 on Enlargement: policies, criteria and the EU's strategic interests (2012/2025(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular its Articles 2, 21 and 49,
- having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II) (COM(2011)0838/4),

- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of 21-22 June 1993, of the Madrid European Council of 15-16 December 1995, of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003 and of the Brussels European Council of 14-15 December 2006,
- having regard to the Council Conclusions of 5 December 2011 on Enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process,
- having regard to the renewed enlargement consensus adopted by the Council in 2006 and to the consolidated enlargement strategy implemented by the Commission thereafter,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 February 2009 on ‘Five years of an enlarged EU – Economic achievements and challenges’ (COM(2009)0079/3),
- having regard to its resolutions of 13 December 2006 on the Commission's communication on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007[1], of 10 July 2008 on the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper[2], and of 26 November 2009 on the Commission's 2009 enlargement strategy paper concerning the Western Balkan countries, Iceland and Turkey[3], as well as the Commission communications on the Enlargement Strategy of 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on the countries of the Western Balkans, Iceland and Turkey,
- having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Budgets (A7-0274/2012),

A. whereas, in accordance with Article 49 TEU, any European state which respects and remains committed to the promotion of the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, may apply to become a member of the Union; whereas these values are the foundation of the European Union itself and guide its action on the international scene, and must be respected and upheld by all Member States;

B. whereas enlargement has been part of the EU agenda since as early as the 1960s; whereas since the first enlargement in 1973, the EU has grown gradually, its membership rising from the six founding members to the current 27 (soon to be 28); whereas a number of other countries aspire to EU membership, as a guarantee for a secure, democratic and prosperous future;

C. whereas the policy of integration over the past decade has shown that enlargement benefits the EU as a whole and allows it to be better positioned to address global challenges;

D. whereas enlargement has been a successful process for the EU and Europe as a whole, in helping to overcome the divisions of the cold war, contributing to peace, stability and prosperity throughout Europe, enhancing conflict prevention, stimulating reforms and consolidating freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, as well as the development of market economies and socially and ecologically sustainable development;

E. whereas almost twenty years after the Copenhagen European Council of 1993, which affirmed the membership prospects of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and laid down the accession criteria, the moment has come for a re-evaluation of the established related procedures and of enlargement policy as a whole, without prejudice to the ongoing negotiations;

F. whereas the Copenhagen criteria have stood the test of time and remain at the centre of EU enlargement policy; whereas the consolidated enlargement strategy and the new focus on justice and home affairs, the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights are expected to be effective and efficient;

G. whereas the European Parliament, through its annual resolutions on the candidate and potential candidate countries, contributes to improving the transparency and accountability of the enlargement process by echoing the opinions of the European citizens; whereas, following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the role of Parliament has increased thanks to the recognition of co-legislative power, inter alia with regard to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA);

H. whereas the prospect of accession has a significant transformative impact on the political, socio-economic and cultural landscape of the countries wishing to join, and acts as a powerful incentive for pursuing the necessary political, economic and legislative reforms and the strengthening of peace, stability, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations; whereas thanks to this transformative power, enlargement is the essence of the EU's soft power and an important element of its external action;

I. whereas commitment, conditionality and credibility have been situated at the core of the accession process;

J. whereas it is of the utmost importance that Member States continue to fully respect and uphold the accession criteria and fundamental rights, in order to strengthen the credibility and consistency of the enlargement process and avoid any kind of discrimination against potential new members;

K. whereas a commitment to political, economic and legislative reforms is, first and foremost, in the best interests of the candidate and potential candidate countries and their citizens;

L. whereas each country aspiring to EU membership has to be judged on its own merits in fulfilling, implementing and complying with the same set of criteria; whereas the pace of progress in the accession process should be determined by the extent of effective implementation and compliance with the EU accession criteria, as well as fulfilment of the priorities of the

European and Accession Partnership and the negotiating framework; whereas the degree of compliance with the requirements for membership has to be assessed in the most fair and transparent fashion;

M. whereas the enlargement process has a significant impact also on the EU itself, serving as an opportunity to better define its identity, goals, values and policies, and also as a suitable moment to better communicate these to its citizens;

N. whereas, in line with the renewed consensus on enlargement of 2006, this process should be based on consolidation, conditionality and communication, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members; whereas the integration capacity of the EU is a major consideration and a prerequisite for the sustainability of enlargement policy and the overall integration process; whereas this consideration has been a positive incentive for institutional deepening, as demonstrated by the consecutive treaty revisions that have accompanied the different waves of enlargement, extending the functions and activities of the Union;

O. whereas true reconciliation between different nations and peoples, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the establishment of good neighbourly relations between European countries are essential to sustainable peace and stability and contribute substantially to a genuine European integration process, therefore being of key importance to the enlargement process; whereas a number of candidate and potential candidate countries continue to have unresolved issues with their neighbours, and hence all affected parties should work overtly towards the resolution of bilateral tensions; whereas these issues should be resolved prior to accession;

### ***General considerations***

1. Strongly supports the enlargement process and believes that enlargement needs to remain a credible policy, supported by the public both in the EU and in the candidate and potential candidate countries; underlines, therefore, the importance for the EU and the candidate and potential candidate countries of fulfilling all obligations, respecting all commitments and creating the conditions for ensuring the success of future enlargements, inter alia by assisting the countries concerned in their efforts to meet the criteria for EU accession;
2. Acknowledges the benefits of the enlargement and accession process, both for the citizens of the candidate and potential candidate countries and for European citizens;
3. Considers that the Copenhagen criteria continue to constitute a fundamental basis and should remain at the heart of enlargement policy; stresses that full and rigorous compliance with these criteria is imperative, that due attention should be paid to the social implications for the candidate and potential candidate countries, and that the Union's integration capacity must be taken fully into account;
4. Considers that the concept of integration capacity comprises four elements:
  - (i) accession states should contribute to and not impair the ability of the Union to maintain momentum towards the fulfilment of its political objectives;

- (ii) the institutional framework of the Union should be able to deliver efficient and effective government;
- (iii) the financial resources of the Union should be sufficient to meet the challenges of economic and social cohesion and of the Union's common policies;
- (iv) a comprehensive communication strategy should be in place to inform public opinion concerning the implications of enlargement;

5. Stresses, however, that the Union is responsible for improving its integration capacity in the process of considering the legitimate European aspirations of candidate, potential candidate or potential applicant countries;

6. Points out that the EU continues to be attractive, also because of its unique combination of economic dynamism with a social model, and regrets that this social dimension has been largely neglected in the enlargement process; invites the Commission to address this issue, especially in the framework of Chapter 19 (Social Policy and Employment), to foster positive social transformation in the future EU Member States and to pay due attention to social justice;

7. Reminds that the *acquis* in the social field includes minimum standards in areas such as labour law, equal treatment of women and men, health and safety at work and anti-discrimination, and that the EU Treaties confirm commitment to the European Social Charter of 1961 and the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers of 1989, while the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights also contains a number of fundamental social rights; stresses that failure to comply with the EU's common basic social standards constitutes a form of social dumping, which is detrimental to European enterprises and workers and would effectively prevent a candidate state from participating in the single market; points out that social partners and in particular trade unions need targeted EU assistance in order to reinforce their capacities;

8. Is of the view that the set of accession criteria should be adequately translated into clear, specific and measurable objectives in the IPA in order to clearly demonstrate the link between Union-funded policies in the enlargement countries and progress in meeting the general accession criteria;

9. Recognises the need for the economies of accession countries to develop in the same direction as those of EU Member States in order to facilitate alignment; encourages the accession countries, accordingly, to formulate feasible and country-specific targets for each of the EU 2020 headline targets for a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy;

10. Draws attention to the importance of the Madrid criteria (defined by the Madrid European Council of December 1995), which emphasised the ability of candidate countries to put EU rules and procedures into effect; also takes the view that the principle of strict conditionality requires that the progress of a candidate and/or potential candidate country in adopting and implementing reforms be effectively assessed on the basis of a clear set of criteria at every stage of the process, and that countries wishing to join the EU should be able to proceed from one stage to the next only once all the conditions have been met at each stage; stresses that, in order to enhance the

credibility and effectiveness of the enlargement strategy, the Copenhagen criteria must be fully respected and complied with by Member States as well, in order to avoid requiring applicant countries to meet higher standards than those applying in some EU Member States; stresses the importance of defining the different stages more clearly, setting transparent and fair benchmarks throughout the process that translate the general membership criteria into concrete steps towards accession, and measuring whether the necessary requirements have been met, as well as of avoiding fixing or promising an accession date if negotiations have not yet been finalised; stresses that it should also be clear that a benchmark, once attained, should be sustained and that backsliding should elicit an appropriate response on the part of those setting the benchmarks;

11. Stresses that the objective of the accession process is full EU membership;

12. Calls on the Commission to maintain and further intensify its monitoring of progress in the accession process, as well as its assistance to candidate and potential candidate countries, so as to ensure that they achieve a high degree of preparedness which will benefit both them and the EU;

13. Believes that, in order to maintain the credibility of the enlargement process, the EU's integration capacity should be evaluated at an early stage and should be properly reflected in the Commission's 'opinion' for each potential candidate state, outlining the major concerns in this regard and the possible ways to overcome them; is of the view that a comprehensive impact assessment should then follow; in this context, emphasises that a successful enlargement process requires that the EU should maintain the capacity to act, to develop, to take decisions democratically and efficiently, to have financial resources to support economic and social cohesion, and to pursue its political objectives;

### ***Enlargement policies***

14. Welcomes the new negotiating approach for future negotiating frameworks, which prioritises issues related to the judiciary and fundamental rights, as well as to justice and home affairs; agrees that these should be tackled early in the accession process and that as a rule Chapters 23 and 24 should be opened accordingly on the basis of action plans, as they require the establishment of convincing track records; calls on the Commission to report to Parliament regularly on progress in these areas, and for the monthly pre-accession reports of the EU delegations to be available to the members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs upon request; notes, however, that this focus on the areas in question should not be to the detriment of the efforts and progress made in the other areas outlined in the individual enlargement agendas of the candidate and potential candidate countries;

15. Considers it important to give adequate priority within enlargement policy to the building of an efficient, independent and impartial judicial system and a transparent democratic political system that can strengthen the rule of law; underlines, at the same time, the importance of all forms of freedom of expression and the need to ensure freedom of the media in law and in practice, as well as to effectively fight corruption and organised crime;

16. Stresses that visa liberalisation is a good example of EU conditionality combining political and technical criteria with a desirable goal and tangible benefits; welcomes and supports, therefore, the efforts of the Commission and those of interested countries in this field;

17. Calls on the Commission to simplify the administration procedure and reduce the administrative burden for the IPA funding, with the aim of making it more accessible to and enhancing the participation of smaller and non-centralised civil organisations, trade unions and other beneficiaries;

18. Encourages greater participation by civil society, non-state actors and social partners, both from the candidate countries and the Member States, in the accession process; urges the Commission to keep up a continuous dialogue with them; calls on the candidate and potential candidate countries to ensure their involvement at all stages; stresses that civil society can work as an important engine of approximation with the EU, create bottom-up pressure for the advancement of the European agenda, improve the transparency of the process and strengthen public support for accession; stresses the importance of adequate financial support, inter alia via the Civil Society Facility, especially in order to enhance civil society's capacities to monitor the implementation of the acquis; stresses the importance of cooperation between European civil society organisations and their counterparts in the candidate and potential candidate countries;

19. Strongly emphasises the need to enhance administrative capacities and human resources in order to make them capable of transposing, implementing and enforcing the acquis; takes the view that processes in the framework of enlargement should not be merely 'technical', and stresses the need to make the screening process more connected to the realities on the ground; calls on the Commission, therefore, to involve NGOs, trade unions and major stakeholders, as appropriate, in this exercise;

20. Calls, in recognition of the important role that social dialogue plays in EU decision-making, for greater emphasis on strengthening the capacities of social partners and the role of social dialogue within the enlargement process; asks, furthermore, for more attention to be paid to developing enforcement mechanisms such as labour inspection so as to protect workers and ensure respect for their social rights and health and safety standards, as well as combating exploitation, especially of undeclared workers;

21. Calls for greater engagement of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in the enlargement process; highlights its role in transmitting good practices to candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as in rallying civil society behind the cause of European integration in the EU; supports the further strengthening of dialogue between civil society organisations in the EU and the enlargement countries, and encourages greater cooperation between the EESC, the Commission and the European Parliament;

22. Recalls that achieving sustainable economic recovery is a major challenge for most enlargement countries, and underlines the need to promote smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy; calls for more support for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), given their critical role for socioeconomic progress in all enlargement countries, and urges the Commission to insist on priority reforms that create a favourable

regulatory environment for innovative and high-potential SMEs; stresses, at the same time, the need for continued attention to the issues of a growing informal sector, high unemployment, and the integration of the most vulnerable members of society;

23. Believes strongly in the need to promote a climate of tolerance and mutual respect, good neighbourly relations and regional and crossborder cooperation, as prerequisites for stability and as means of facilitating genuine and lasting reconciliation; considers that the prosecution of war crimes, the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic, cultural and religious communities, the protection of minorities and respect for human rights, as well as the reintegration and return of refugees and displaced persons, must remain essential elements of the EU accession process in regions with a history of conflict; in this respect, encourages the candidate and potential candidate countries that have yet to ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to do so; suggests that in such cases the promotion of the teaching and learning of each other's history, language and cultural heritage during and after the accession process would facilitate mutual understanding and contribute to historical reconciliation;

24. Is of the opinion that gender equality and anti-discrimination should be given further priority within enlargement policy; stresses that equality between men and women is a fundamental right, a core value of the EU, and a key principle of its external action, as well as holding great potential for the achievement of the Europe 2020 objectives by contributing to growth and full employment; encourages, therefore, women's participation in the accession process, and underlines the importance of mainstreaming gender equality policies; stresses that discrimination on all and any grounds is prohibited and that the EU assessments should include the rights of the LGBT community and the integration of minorities in political, social and economic life;

25. Calls on the Commission to involve enlargement countries in its initiatives aiming at social inclusion, such as the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies , to better mobilise the IPA to this end, and to urge enlargement countries, through the mechanism of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAAP), to realise these goals; also calls on the enlargement countries to actively participate in the Decade for Roma Inclusion and to guarantee the fundamental rights of Roma, improve their social and economic position and ensure their access to housing;

26. Takes the view that any acceding state should resolve its main bilateral problems and major disputes with neighbours, particularly those concerning territorial issues, before it can join the Union; recommends strongly that these issues be addressed as early as possible in the accession process, in a constructive and neighbourly spirit and preferably before the opening of accession negotiations, so that the latter are not negatively affected; in this regard, considers it essential to take account of the EU's overall interests, its values, and the obligation to fully comply with the acquis and respect the principles on which the EU itself is founded;

27. Calls on the EU to support efforts to resolve outstanding disputes, including border disputes, before accession; in line with the provisions of international law, the UN Charter and the relevant UN resolutions, as well as the Helsinki Final Act, encourages all parties to disputes whose continuation is likely to impair implementation of the acquis or endanger the preservation of international peace and security to engage constructively in their peaceful resolution and, if

appropriate, in case of not being able to reach a bilateral agreement, to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice or to commit themselves to a binding arbitration mechanism of their choice or else work constructively within an intensive mediation mission; reiterates its call on the Commission and the Council to start developing, in accordance with the EU Treaties, an arbitration mechanism aimed at resolving bilateral and multilateral disputes;

28. Welcomes initiatives such as the positive agenda on Turkey, the high-level accession dialogue with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the structured dialogue on the rule of law with Kosovo<sup>[4]</sup>; welcomes the aim of creating a fresh dynamic in the reform process, while stressing that these initiatives must in no way replace the formal negotiation procedures, but must be fully in line with the negotiating framework;

29. Stresses the need for candidate and potential candidate countries to make improvements in the fields of democracy, human rights, and reconciliation processes, areas which should always be given priority in the enlargement process and reflected in the financial instruments; recalls, in this regard, the importance of financial assistance taking into account the need for to restore cultural heritage sites in conflict areas, bearing in mind the role this has in terms of building confidence and inclusiveness between different ethnic and religious communities;

30. Stresses that EU enlargement policy is an instrument for modernisation, democratisation and stabilisation, and also has the aim of strengthening the EU, both internally and as a global player; calls on the Commission to undertake comprehensive impact assessments whenever it considers new applications for EU membership, and also when it recommends the opening or, in case of fundamentally changed circumstances, the closing of accession negotiations;

31. Supports the Commission's commitment to improving the quality of the accession process by making it more merit-based, benchmark-driven and transparent; takes the view that this will make the process fairer and more objectively measurable, thus further enhancing its credibility; in this context, recommends that the progress reports should be clearer in their assessments; stresses that the benchmarks should not set additional conditions for the candidate and potential candidate countries, but should translate the general membership criteria and the objectives of the EU's pre-accession assistance into concrete steps and results with a view to accession, in full compliance with the negotiating framework;

32. Emphasises the vital importance for the success of the accession process of the fight against corruption and organised crime; calls on the Commission to adopt a new approach to this issue by drawing the attention of the authorities of aspirant countries to individual instances of systemic corruption; calls on the Commission to cooperate closely with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and with the anti-corruption bodies in the countries concerned; stresses that such a new approach would be highly beneficial for the image of the Union among the citizens of the aspirant countries and would potentially facilitate the fight against corruption;

33. Urges the Commission to plan a non-decrease in real terms of overall funding for each beneficiary; notes that this calculation should be made taking into consideration the following:  
a) the ratio of overall programmed IPA assistance to each country's GDP should not decrease in relative terms even if, in real terms, the denominator (GDP) for each beneficiary country has

shown a cumulative increase over the period 2007-2013; b) the number of countries with access to funding through the future instrument is likely to decrease with the accession of Croatia, which would potentially change the comparative redistribution within the pool of funding; c) with the suggested changes to the new Instrument serving to remove differentiation between countries on the basis of their candidacy status, more countries will be able to access funding – hitherto inaccessible to non-candidate countries – earmarked for policy areas focusing on socioeconomic development; recommends, in this context, that no beneficiary be precluded from sufficient and fair access to funding due to limited EU resources, in particular as regards the policy area of institution-building;

34. Recalls the need to accompany EU enlargement with a concerted and more effective and transparent communication policy involving all EU institutions, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and representatives of civil society, with a view to triggering an open and frank debate on the consequences of enlargement, encompassing public opinion in both the EU Member States and the candidate countries; stresses that a communication policy of this kind should also be applied in the candidate countries, in cooperation with all actors;

35. Is of the opinion that, in order to encourage support among EU citizens for further enlargement and the commitment of the citizens of the candidate and potential candidate countries to continuing with reforms, it is crucial to present clear and comprehensive information on the political, socioeconomic and cultural benefits of enlargement; considers it essential, in particular, to explain to the public how enlargement has brought new investment and export opportunities, and how it can contribute to attaining the EU's objectives in terms of promoting conflict prevention, enhancing peaceful conflict resolution, tackling the economic crisis, creating jobs, facilitating the free flow of labour, protecting the environment and enhancing security and safety, while at the same time accelerating the reform agenda, facilitating access to financial resources and subsequently improving living conditions in the enlargement countries for the benefit of all European citizens, as well as reducing social and economic imbalances; stresses the need to target all sectors of society by promoting, inter alia, the inclusion, at secondary school level or the equivalent, of a specific curricular element on the background, objectives and functioning of the European Union as well as its enlargement processes; also stresses the need to target key opinion formers such as journalists, representatives of civil society, and socioeconomic actors and trade unions; is of the view that similar efforts by candidate and potential candidate countries should be encouraged and supported;

### ***Prospects and the EU's strategic interests***

36. Believes strongly that the EU can gain great strategic benefits through enlargement policy; emphasises that EU membership provides stability in the swiftly changing international environment, and that belonging to the European Union continues to offer the perspective of social development and prosperity; is of the opinion that enlargement is a long-term strategic interest of the EU, which cannot necessarily be measured in terms of short-term balance sheets; considers it important to take due account of its substantial and lasting value as representing soft but nevertheless essential power for the EU;

37. Remains fully committed to the prospect of enlargement, and calls on the Member States to maintain the momentum of the enlargement process; stresses its conviction that with the Lisbon Treaty the EU can both pursue its enlargement agenda and maintain the impetus of deeper integration;

38. Recalls that the process is not concluded with the simple transposition of the acquis, and stresses the importance of effective implementation and respect in the long term as regards both the acquis and the Copenhagen criteria; considers that in order to maintain the credibility of the accession conditions, EU Member States should also be assessed for their continued compliance with the EU's fundamental values and the fulfilment of their commitments concerning the functioning of democratic institutions and the rule of law; calls on the Commission to work out a detailed proposal for a monitoring mechanism, building on the provisions of Article 7 TEU and Article 258 TFEU;

39. Recalls that a streamlined, forward-looking enlargement policy could be a valuable strategic tool for the EU's and the region's economic development, and should aim to create budgetary synergies and enhanced coordination between the various measures and types of assistance provided by the EU, Member States and IFIs, as well as with the existing instruments, namely the IPA, by avoiding any potential overlap, duplications or gaps in funding, particularly in the context of a constrained budgetary environment;

40. Notes that the global financial crisis and the difficulties of the eurozone have highlighted the interdependence of national economies, both within and beyond the EU; emphasises, therefore, the importance of further consolidating economic and financial stability and fostering growth, also in the candidate and potential candidate countries; in these difficult circumstances, stresses the need to provide adequate and better-targeted pre-accession financial assistance to candidate and potential candidate countries; notes the Commission's proposal for a new IPA, including increased financial support for the financial perspective 2014-2020; stresses, in this regard, the need to simplify and speed up procedures, as well as to strengthen the administrative capacity of the beneficiary countries, in order to ensure a high level of participation in EU programmes and to enhance absorption capacity; points out that a comprehensive position of the European Parliament on the IPA will be presented in the course of the ordinary legislative procedure; highlights the importance of national fiscal stability and the increased focus at EU level on economic governance; recommends that the question of sound public finances be properly addressed in the accession process;

41. Stresses that the goals of Europe 2020 are built around universal principles which have been a strong driver for economic wellbeing; recommends, therefore, that progress on flagship initiatives be included in the pre-accession dialogue and incentivised with additional funding; considers that a low-carbon growth model merits special attention and should be actively implemented during the enlargement process;

42. Calls for continuous inter-donor dialogue and, where appropriate, the use of suitable structures for aid coordination and management; calls, in this context, for closer examination of the use of innovative financial instruments requiring coordination structures, such as, for example, the Western Balkans Investment Framework, which is complementary to the

administrative structures for the IPA and has the goal of attracting, pooling and channelling support for priority areas; emphasises the financial and policy leverage potential of financing projects using a combination of funds – from the EU, the Member States or the IFIs – in a manner that ensures both strict concordance with best practice in terms of financial management and the coordination of key actors;

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43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, and the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States and of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.

## **Denial of Memory: It is Time for Albania to Confront Its Communist Past**

**by Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi**

Communist dictator Enver Hoxha subjected Albania to forty-five years of one of the most centralized and repressive totalitarian regimes that the world has ever known. At least 100,000 Albanians were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned. Several thousand more were murdered from 1945 until Hoxha died and the regime of his successor, Ramiz Alia, collapsed in 1991. As the Alia regime began to crumble in 1990, the Communist elite fought back. Food and energy supplies dwindled and thousands of Albanians scurried on boats to reach freedom in Italy. The flight was captured on television screens around the world. But when the first democratically elected government of Sali Berisha came to power in 1992, there was no reckoning with life in Albania under communism. The Berisha government was praised by the international community for a bloodless shift from Hoxha's horrific regime to democracy. This praise was rightly deserved, but not the denial of memory that underlay it. Sali Berisha was Enver Hoxha's personal physician. Although he did not personally participate in the surveillance, torture, arrest, imprisonment in unspeakable conditions, and murder of Albanians deemed "enemies of the people" by Hoxha and his henchmen, Berisha and his family lived a privileged life while so many of his fellow citizens were suffering and dying.

Like other Eastern European nations that emerged from fascism under Nazi domination during World War II only to be engulfed by Communism, Albania buried the story of the Holocaust (even though unlike any other nation, the role of Albanians during World War II consisted of saving every Jew who either lived in Albania or sought asylum there[1]). The suppression of the

Holocaust was facilitated by the fact that the majority of European Jewry who survived were psychologically unable to convey the horrors that they had experienced, especially to a public that wanted to forget the war and move on. The same pattern would follow after the fall of communism. In Albania, the history of the Stalinist Communist regime under Enver Hoxha was suppressed, and the majority of survivors were afraid to speak about the atrocities inflicted on them by their own people. Two decades after the fall of communism, Albania has still failed to come to terms with its past.

Reconciling with their emergence from 400 years of Ottoman rule, followed by Nazi occupation during World War II, and then forty-five years of communism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the task of all countries and ethnic groups in the Balkans. In 2012, many countries in Eastern Europe have embarked on an accounting of the Communist era. As Lukasz Kaminski, the president of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance, told *The New York Times* in February 2012,

“In order to defend ourselves in the future against other totalitarian regimes, we have to understand how they worked in the past, like a vaccine. Across Central and Eastern Europe a consensus of silence appears to have ended, one that never muted all criticism and discussion but did muffle voices crying out for a long-awaited reckoning.”[2]

In spite of the ongoing internal debate, Albania unfortunately is not among the former Communist nations engaged in a long-awaited reckoning. There have been no public forms of closure—no trials, no imprisonment of the torturers, no truth commissions—only amnesty for the perpetrators. Opening up the Communist archives is essential to revealing to the world what happened under the Hoxha regime and to bringing long overdue closure for the victims—not to mention laying the groundwork for giving them national recognition and reparations for their suffering.

As the renowned literary figure Ismail Kadare has written in his introduction to Bedri Blloshmi's 2010 account of the murder of his brother Vilson and Genc Leka by the Hoxha regime:

“Communism has fallen in Albania, but not its dust and stench. The snake eggs are still everywhere. They continue to spawn deception, psychological violence, and particularly hatred. They are spread out in the left and right parties, in the small and big ones. They remain vigilant to ensure the historic protection of the fallen dictatorship. They instigate a superficial critique, often at the level of poems and artists, to turn attention away from that which constituted the essence of the system: genuine crime.”[3]

To expose the “genuine crime” requires a confrontation with Albania's Communist past—a confrontation that entails first of all listening to the voices of Enver Hoxha's victims. In what follows are the oral histories of three Albanian Americans (Pellumb Lamaj, Raymond Sejko, and Eqerem Mujo) who managed to survive years of incarceration in the infamous Spaç Prison. ***Resistance to Persecution, Imprisonment, Torture, and Murder: The Story of Pellumb Lamaj***

From 1945 to 1991, some 5,500 men and women were executed, and close to 100,000 sentenced to prison (forty prisons in number) and fifty forced labor and internment camps because they were considered “enemies of the people.” Poet and activist Pellumb Lamaj, who made his way to the United States two years after the fall of communism, would turn out to be one of them. He was twenty years old, when he was sent to the Spaç prison in 1979, where he would spend eleven years of his life.

Pellumb was born on a farm in Clirim, Albania, near the city of Fier, on January 4, 1959. Because there was a concentration of anti-Communist resistance in this region, many families were placed in internment camps. In 1967, when Pellumb was eight years old, his father, who was supporting a family of seven on meager wages, was charged and convicted by a “kangaroo court” for raising his own livestock and trading his cows for milk without permission from the local government.

Earlier, during World War II, members of the Lamaj family and his mother’s family, the Lepenicas, were killed while fighting against the Italian fascists and then the Nazis as members of the “National Front” (*Balli Kombëtare*). In both cases, they were betrayed by Communists. Xhelal Lepenica, Pellumb’s great uncle, was killed during the civil war that erupted in Albania at the conclusion of World War II. After his murder, Albanian Communist forces danced on his grave, burned and destroyed his property, and confiscated all of his material possessions. From then on, the brutal and torturous regime of Enver Hoxha inflicted pain and suffering on the Lamaj and Lepenica families for decades. This intensified after Qemal Lepenica, one of Pellumb’s uncles, fled from Albania in 1951 to Germany. After his father’s conviction and incarceration in 1967, Pellumb, his mother, and siblings were forcibly transferred to a village named Skrofotine, near Vlora. As Pellumb has recounted: “We were placed in the middle of nowhere—my mother with five children. As a boy of 8, subconsciously, I began to understand the meaning of the Communist terror. My father’s incarceration led to the most difficult period in our lives. During this time, my mother was my hero. She was the backbone of the family. At school, the other children would call us *kulak*, which meant ‘enemy of the people.’ When I went home, I would ask my mother, ‘How should I respond to these taunts?’ She said, ‘Tell them that you are proud to be a *kulak* based on your family’s background.’”

When Pellumb Lamaj completed grammar school in 1974, he was the only student prevented from joining the Albanian youth organization because, according to his teacher Armando Kushta, he “had his eyes fixated on the West” and displayed signs of being “a capitalist.” According to Pellumb, “This was Kushta’s attempt to try to dissuade me from entering high school.” (Ironically, after communism began to fall in Albania in 1990, Kushta would be among the first individuals to leave the country and immigrate to the United States.)

Pellumb’s family considered his arrest only a matter of time, since he and his brother refused to collaborate with the secret police, known in Albania as the *Sigurimi*—a refusal that under Hoxha’s regime meant jail time at best, execution at worst. Looking back, Pellumb said that March 1, 1979, is “the day that I will never forget”:

“It is indelibly etched in my mind. That day, the *Sigurimi* arrested me and charged me as an “enemy of the state.” After several months of confinement, I was convicted on the basis of false testimony and sentenced to fifteen years of hard labor at the infamous Spaç Prison. I was one of the youngest prisoners sent to Spaç. To this day, the scars of their torturous regime remain on my body and in my mind.”

Pellumb said that the Spaç Prison was something out of *Dante’s Inferno*. According to him, “Spaç was a black hole at the bottom of a canyon, surrounded by dark and dreary hills. The only time a prisoner could catch a glimpse of the blue sky was at midday. At night, when the lights were turned on and aimed at the security fences to prevent any escape, the sky was streaked with the reflection of the barbed wire.

“Prisoners were divided into groups that worked nonstop in rotating shifts in the mines under the watchful eye of the guards who inflicted punishment—routinely, indiscriminately, and often

brutally. Because we also received barely enough food to survive, many men perished. Every day, when we entered the mines, we felt as if we were marching towards a guillotine, not knowing if we would survive another day.

“The regime stole our youth and dashed all of our hopes and dreams. But I never forgot the words of older prisoners who said that, ‘If you make it out of here, please tell the civilized world that we were martyrs, that we sought freedom from those who took freedom away from us, that we opposed a criminal state ruled with an iron fist by a ruthless tyrant, Enver Hoxha.’”

In May 1984, there was an uprising at the Qafe-Bari Prison. Three prisoners were executed and others were sentenced to twenty-five years, some of whom were then brought to Spaç, tortured, and thrown into solitary confinement. When they were released into the camp days later, their bodies were scarred and their clothes caked with blood. Especially because some of the men had been Pellumb’s friends in the past, he started to help them with bits of food and clothing. Witnessing this, the collaborators and the jailers, called the “Red Guards,” immediately reported Pellumb to the chief of the secret police. Soon after, he was handcuffed and taken to the chief’s office.

“He started screaming that he would teach me a lesson I would never forget. He ordered the Red Guards to take me into a room near his office, where they tortured me for hours. They attacked me with sticks, their boots, and wooden bats until I lost consciousness. When I finally opened my eyes, a doctor in a white coat was peering over me, checking my pulse, and giving me an injection. He told the chief of police to stop the torture, because my pulse was too weak. I was lying on a cement floor in a pool of blood, unable to move. My left hand was broken and bleeding, and the big toe on my left foot had been crushed.

“The torture had begun in the morning, and I guessed that it was the middle of the night, when they tossed me into a cell. I would spend a month in solitary confinement before they sent me back to the camp. When I arrived in the camp, all the prisoners saw the scars on my hands and feet, and everyone realized that I had been tortured because I had helped my fellow inmates. I was proud that I had, and I told the chief that, ‘One day you will be brought to justice for your crimes.’ But, unfortunately, justice is sometimes only a dream. Many of the men who were responsible for decades of persecution, torture, and murder in Albania are living lives of privilege and wielding power in a corrupt government. There was no ‘Nuremburg trial’ for the Albanian Communists who tried to destroy their own people, and the West has chosen to ignore their crimes.”

In August 1990, Pellumb Lamaj was released from prison—in his words, “symbolically soon after the collapse of the Berlin Wall.” Two years later, he received an opportunity to come to the United States. About this, he reflected, “I was fortunate because there was no room for me in Albania. The same people that had persecuted me and others, including the chief of police, remained in power.”

Pellumb never forgot the fate of his family, his fellow prisoners at Spaç, and those who perished under the Hoxha regime: “For the past twenty years,” he said, “I have pursued justice through every media outlet that I have been able to reach to expose the poison and the torturous regime that engulfed Albania and extended its tentacles to all Albanian lands in Eastern Europe.”

### ***Hoxha Purges His Rivals: The Destruction of the Sejko Family***

Born in 1922 in Konispol, Teme Sejko joined the Communist Party during World War II while fighting with the partisans. After Albania was liberated from Nazi occupation in November 1944, Teme studied at the military academy in Moscow. He would return again from 1955 to

1957, as he rose to the rank of rear admiral and commanded the Albanian naval forces in Vlora. In short, he was part of the Communist regime during the first phase of Enver Hoxha's rule.

In the late 1950s, Hoxha began to shift his alliances away from Marshal Tito's Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. When the rift between the Soviet Union and Maoist China took place in 1961, Hoxha sided with Mao, and he and his closest allies initiated purges to eliminate rivals. Teme Sejko was one of the people they targeted. So were his brothers, because they were perceived as having political views that threatened Hoxha. On the morning of July 28, 1960, Teme went to work as usual, only to find himself arrested and charged with "participating in a conspiracy involving Yugoslavia, Greece, and the United States." His family never saw him again. For a year he was incarcerated, while the regime prepared a show trial against him and several other officials. On May 27, 1961, Teme was convicted of being "an enemy of the people" and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. But just three days later, his skull was broken and he was strangled to death with a cord.

When Teme was arrested, so was his brother, Taho, a journalist who had also fought with the partisans during World War II. In 1956, at a meeting of the Communist Party of Tirana, he had criticized the growing disparity between the living standards that the Communist elite enjoyed in Albania and the poverty-stricken majority. Taho Sejko immediately lost his job and was transferred to a clerical position in a factory in Shkodra. Although Taho was not executed along with Teme in May 1961, he was imprisoned and tortured in an attempt to force him to publicly embrace the Hoxha regime. Taho refused to capitulate, and in March 1962, he was secretly convicted and shot to death. His family, including his mother, were expelled from Tirana and relocated to Shkodra, after being told that Taho had gone mad in prison and had been confined to a state mental hospital.

In 1963, three years after the Hoxha regime arrested Teme and Taho, their brother Sulo was jailed. He was tortured, and later his body was found at the bottom of a well. Their sister, Merushe Sejko-Plaku, was interned in a camp from 1963 to 1968; then she was banished from 1968 to 1974, only to be interned again for ten years—from 1974 to 1984. Her husband, Rexho Plaku, was a wealthy man who had led the group of partisans in World War II that Teme, Taho, and Sulo had joined. But shortly after the war, he was jailed by the Hoxha regime, and he would spend thirty-two years in prison.

Teme's son, Rajmond Sejko, ultimately the only one in the family to survive, described the deplorable conditions in which he and his mother, Shpresa, and brother, Sokol, were forced to live once his father was branded as an "enemy of the people." He said that:

"The same military court martial that condemned my father, on the same day condemned my mother, my eleven-year-old brother, and me (I was thirteen) to a five-year period of internment, known as 'internal exile.' We were forced to relocate to a remote and very poor hamlet called Otlak outside of the town of Berat, which was home to only 100 people, including 20 internees. We lived in a small one-room hut, with a dirt floor, thatched walls, and a plastic roof. There was no heat or running water. We had to walk for one hour to get drinking water; we washed our bodies and our clothing with water drawn from irrigation canals; and, instead of a toilet, we had a roofless outhouse. We were confined to Otlak, and needed advance permission from local authorities to travel, even to see a doctor. At least twice a day we had to report to the village security officer.

"My mother and I worked long hours six days a week in the fields, starting at 5:00 a.m. in the summer and 7:00 a.m. in the winter. During the five years that we were interned, no relative or

friend dared contact us, including my mother's brother, Engjell, who lived only ten miles away. Much later, in 1975, Uncle Engjell's Russian wife would be arrested and jailed for five years, simply because she was overheard telling 'political jokes.'

"When our internment finally ended in June 1966, I was eighteen years old. My mother, brother, and I moved into the town of Berat, but we continued to be isolated and stigmatized. In 1967, I was conscripted into the army and assigned to a troop that consisted only of the sons of condemned parents. All of us received the worst assignments. For two years, I did hard labor on an army farm until my discharge in 1969."

Rajmond thought that he and his family were finally free in 1970, especially because that year the Hoxha government permitted a tiny bit of liberalization, including the right to see Italian and Yugoslavian television. The latter showed how poor and undeveloped Albania was compared to the Albanians living just on the other side of its borders. When people began to call for change, the government retaliated. In December 1972, they cut off all access to television; they attacked a festival devoted to traditional Albanian music (calling it decadent); and they began a series of purges and arrests of "liberals," which included all former political internees and prisoners. Rajmond's brother, Sokol, was among them. After being fired from his job in a factory in Berat, he was arrested in 1973, tortured in prison by a "specialist in torture" named Ali Xhunga, put on trial in January 1974 on charges of "terrorism, sabotage, spreading anti-government propaganda, and participating in organized crime," and then executed in March of that year after false witnesses lined up by the government testified against him. He was only twenty-four years old. "To this day," Rajmond said, "it haunts me to think of the suffering my brother endured."

With Sokol's death, Rajmond said that their mother, Shpresa Sejko, was devastated. Towards the end of 1974, she wrote a statement, accusing the government of killing her husband and her youngest son, and distributed it to her neighbors. On February 19, 1975, police arrived at the Sejko's home to round up Shpresa and also Rajmond. Rajmond, who was at home alone, was immediately brought to the police station. His mother was in Fier visiting the widow of Tahir Demi, who had been killed along with Teme Sejko. After questioning, Rajmond was released to locate his mother. But by the time he reached Fier, Shpresa was headed back to Berat. And by the time he returned to Berat, he found her lifeless body on the ground under a sheet in front of their house. She had been shot by local officials who were declaring her death "a suicide."

Rajmond was taken into custody, and a security official proceeded to interrogate him for an hour. Himci demanded that Rajmond admit to coercing his mother to commit suicide. When he refused, the official brought in others from the Ministry of the Interior, including one who in 1974 had pressured Rajmond and his mother to testify against Sokol. They interrogated Rajmond from 5:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m., focusing on the statement that his mother had written against the government.

When Rajmond was formally charged a few days later, he was accused of "action in opposition to the government" with a sentence of three to ten years in prison. With that, his first interrogator psychologically and physically tortured Rajmond for eleven consecutive days. After a show trial in May 1975, he was charged with having written and distributed the statement signed by his mother and was sentenced to eight years in prison. After subsisting on a diet of gruel and sleeping on cold concrete floors in jails in Berat and Tirana, shackled and beaten with fists and a wooden club, Rajmond was transferred to Spaç. By then, he had lost forty-four pounds.

### ***“The Worst Prison in Albania”***

Built in 1968, Spaç Prison was located in a desolate stretch of land in the northeast, Merdita region of Albania. Rajmond recalls it as “perhaps the worst prison in Albania,” because the majority of prisoners were worked to death there in copper and pyrite mines:

“In Spaç, I lived in a barracks about five meters by five meters, housing fifty-two men. The building consisted of twelve other rooms of this kind on three floors. We slept on platform bunks stacked three high and lined with thin straw mats, old sheets, and a few threadbare blankets. Because of the overcrowding, lack of ventilation, cigarette smoke, and the gas fumes from the mines that seeped into our clothes and skin, the air was fetid. I remember waking up on my top bunk, my throat clogged and unable to speak. Food consisted mostly of bread, beans, and sometimes milk. Those who worked in the mines got a bit more.” Rajmond worked in the mines from 1975 to 1982. Two years before he arrived at Spaç, there had been a revolt. After it was put down, the four leaders of the uprising were executed and eighty-seven prisoners had their sentences extended for twenty years or more. In the aftermath, greater restrictions were imposed on every prisoner. For example, family visits were restricted to five minutes. During his time at Spaç, Rajmond’s maternal grandmother visited him once a year for six years, each time traveling hours to reach him. Eventually she was too old and infirm to return. Books and language-learning were banned. When Rajmond was caught trying to learn Italian, he was thrown into solitary confinement in freezing temperatures.

### ***Banishment***

Rajmond Sejku was finally released from the Spaç Prison in October 1982, and he returned to Berat to live with his grandparents. He worked as a laborer under the supervision of a foreman who spied on him for the government. A year later, in October 1983, he was secretly condemned to another period of internment, but this time he was banished to the small village of Kutalli for five years, where he lived in primitive conditions. His grandmother joined him there, after his grandfather died in Berat. Rajmond was forced to work on a farm seven days a week and to report to the local officials for questioning two to three times a day. At one point, Vojo Nano, a member of the secret police, tried to recruit him as a spy. Enraged, Rajmond tried to grab Nano by the throat.

In 1985, Enver Hoxha died and his successor, Ramiz Alia, came to power. Three years later, when Rajmond’s banishment was supposed to have ended, it was instead extended for another five years. A year afterwards, in March 1989, the Alia regime tried to return Rajmond to prison once more, when he was denounced by Ali Gega, a Communist party official in Berat. Gega had falsely accused Rajmond of “speaking out against various Albanian government officials.” Hysni Kallmi, a resident of Kutalli, was selected to testify against him at a public hearing, but Rajmond stood up for himself and managed to overcome the effort to re-incarcerate him. Nine months later, as the Communist government was losing its grip on power, it issued a general amnesty for political internees and prisoners. On December 30, 1989, Rajmond was freed. Less than a year later, the regime of Ramiz Alia would fall.

### ***Escape, Exile, and Life in the Camps: The Story of the Mujo Family***

In April 1945, some of Hoxha’s military forces, pulled Bajame Mujo and her children, Egerem, Fatmir, and Nevrus, from their home, set the house ablaze, and took them

to Kruje, where they were herded into a camp with other families. The reason for their capture was that Sefer Mujo, husband and father, along with Sefer's brother, Alo, had resisted the rise to power of Hoxha's Communist regime at the end of World War II. Hoxha and his henchmen hunted down and executed anyone who fought against them. However, a few escaped, and Sefer and Alo were among them. Sefer and Alo made their way to Munich, Germany, where they joined a group of exiles who had formed a battalion and were being trained at a military base under the auspices of the U.S. Army to return to Albania to try to rescue their families and overthrow the Hoxha regime.

For two years, none of the Mujos' friends or relatives knew what had happened to them. Then, in 1947, along with 1,000 other families, they were herded into a camp in Valias outside of Tirana. It consisted of a military barracks, left behind by the Italian forces when they handed over Albania to the German Nazis in 1943. Bunk beds, consisting of wooden planks lined the walls; soldiers were placed at intervals throughout the camp; and it was here that Bajame Mujo and her sons would endure years of suffering. Later they were moved to a nearby brick factory, where, according to Eqerem, they became "slave laborers."

Meanwhile, Sefer and Alo courageously made their way back into Albania. As Eqerem Mujo and his brothers would eventually come to learn, "My father and uncle would go back and forth from Germany to Albania, leading missions to overthrow Hoxha's evil regime. They may have wanted revenge; they definitely wanted peace; but, above all, they wanted their lives and families back."

Under constant physical and mental abuse, and in the daily struggle for food, Eqerem said: "The thought of my father and uncle only fleetingly crossed our minds. But the knowledge that they were intent on rescuing us (which we learned when the news was leaked that their battalion had made their way into Albania and had already retrieved some families) helped to keep me, my mother, and brothers alive. It filled us with hope and joy, and for fleeting moments, we were free."

In 1949, when Eqerem was seven years old, the Mujos were moved to another camp, this time in Tepelena, on Albania's southern coast. According to him, "Conditions were so deplorable that many died and we children spent our days huddled together looking out of the windows as our mothers and fathers formed a line that looked like ants, while they transported the wood that was needed to heat the homes of the Albanian elites."

The Mujos were next moved in 1954 to a farm in Lushnje that "had been turned into a concentration camp." In the years ahead, they would be shifted to the many camps spread throughout Albania. Eqerem and his brothers were eventually allowed to attend high school. But not long after they graduated, someone accused Eqerem of being a spy.

In April 1976, at the age of thirty-four, he was arrested. After eight months of investigation by the authorities, he was tried and sentenced to seven years in prison in Spaç. A year later, his brother Fatmir was also accused of being a spy and was sentenced to six years in the Ballsh Prison in Fier.

When Eqerem and Fatmir were released at the end of 1983, they returned to a farm where their mother and Nevrus had lived a hardscrabble existence during their incarceration. Even so, because their father and uncle had escaped to Germany and were part of the resistance movement, the persecution of the Mujo family continued. Four months after Eqerem and Fatmir left prison, the family was detained and sent back to a camp in Lushnje. They would not taste freedom until the Communist regime fell in 1990.

As soon as the regime fell, Eqerem said, “My family planned our way not only out of the camp, but out of Albania. We crossed the border into Greece and, through many twists and turns, ultimately succeeded in flying to the United States. Landing in New York, we were met by an old man with a smile and tears in his eyes. It was our father, Sefer Mujo, whom we had not seen for forty-eight years. My uncle, Alo, stood by his side. The relief that my brothers experienced that day was overwhelming. Even so, our relief was tempered by the absence of our mother, who had tried to protect us on the long journey only to succumb to breakdown and death just months before.”

***Conclusion:***

The precise number of those who were interned and executed under Enver Hoxha’s dictatorship may never be known. What *is* known is that the failure to confront the cruelty, the fanaticism, and the instruments of terror perpetuated during the Communist era has denied the survivors the healing and the justice that they deserve. It has also left deep scars on the psyche of the Albanian people and prevented Albania from joining a democratic Europe. The time has come for Albania to make sure that the denial of memory does not succeed, to grapple with the unfinished business of the past so that it does not continue to distort the present, and to begin to construct a new and viable future.

**Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi**

**Balkan Affairs Adviser, Albanian American Civic League**

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[1] Cloyes DioGuardi, “Jewish Survival in Albania & the Ethics of ‘Besa’,” *Congress Monthly*, January-February 2006, pp. 7-10. See also *Rescue in Albania* by Harvey Sarner, 1997, originally published by Brunswick Press in Cathedral City, CA, distributed by the Albanian American Foundation, Ossining, NY.

[2] Kaminski, Lukasz, as quoted in “Europe Reckons with Its Legacy of Communism” by Nicholas Kulish, *The New York Times*, February 21, 2012, A section, pp. 1 and 3.

[3] Kadare, Ismail, introduction to *Fabrikimi I Vdekjes: Dosjet e Sigurimit të Genc Lekës e Vilson Blloshmit* by Bedri Blloshmi, (Tirana, Albania: Botimet “Almera”), p. 6.