

UNCLASSIFIED

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ALBANIA

ISSUE

The last country in Europe seeking to maintain intact the principles of Marxism-Leninism, Albania has probably the worst reputation for human rights on the European continent. Information about this issue is sparse, however, given the secretiveness of the regime of President Ramiz Alia. According to the Albanian government, a series of reforms is currently being implemented.

BACKGROUND

Despite the winds of change that have shaken Eastern Europe in recent months, the Albanian Communist Party has managed to keep on course with applied Marxism. Only with its rejection by nearly all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has attention gradually shifted to the most orthodox of these regimes. In July 1990, more than 4,500 Albanians, who had taken refuge in foreign embassies in Tirana for weeks, fled Albania, thereby reminding world opinion of the difficult conditions under which Albanians live.

Until the announcements, in July and November 1990, of certain measures intended to open up Albanian society, the human rights situation in Albania was considered the most deplorable in Europe. Freedom of movement, of expression and of religion were flouted, while capital punishment applied to political crimes, among others. Section 55 of the Criminal Code was used against anyone who was guilty, in the eyes of the State, of "fascist, anti-democratic, religious, warlike or anti-socialist propaganda." It applied to those who publicly criticized Albanian policy. Passports and exit visas were available only to a small segment of the population that the government trusted. "Fleeing the country," according to paragraph 11 of section 47 of the criminal code, was a crime punishable by at least 10 years in prison or even by death. Some people who attempted to leave the country without permission were apparently shot down when they tried to cross the frontier.

On the eve of a visit by the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Albanian government announced last May the re-establishment of religious freedom, decreed a relaxation of the criminal code (reducing the number of crimes liable to the death penalty from 34 to 11), created a ministry of justice and promised all Albanians the right to obtain a passport for travel abroad. At the same time, Tirana announced its intention to join the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The flight of thousands of Albanians through certain embassies in Tirana showed that some were not satisfied with these measures. Additional reforms were announced in November 1990 as Albania reiterated its desire to join the CSCE. The Albanian Parliament then decided to rewrite the country's constitution and to adopt an electoral law authorizing voting by secret ballot and multi-candidate elections. "Independent" candidates will henceforth be able to contest