

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 74/96

Arbitrary Detention / Ill-treatment

21 May 1996

ALBANIA

Activists and supporters of opposition parties

In the run-up to national elections on 26 May 1996, there have been numerous reports that members of opposition parties, in particular the Socialist Party (SP) - formerly the Albanian communist party - have been arbitrarily detained and ill-treated by police. These incidents have taken place within the context of a series of measures by the government of the ruling Democratic Party aimed at hindering the activity of opposition parties during the election campaign. Amnesty International fears that this pattern of harassment may worsen in the final approach to the elections.

Opposition activists have been arrested and detained, usually for several hours, but sometimes longer, after pasting up posters or photographs of Fatos Nano, the imprisoned SP leader, or writing slogans on walls. Others have been detained prior to and during election rallies. In some cases they have been beaten and injured by police officers. The following are just some of the incidents that have been reported in the press.

On 21 April 1996, Bilal Semanaj, an SP supporter, was detained at an SP rally in Tirana. This was allegedly the ninth time he had been detained since July 1993 when he took part in a protest demonstration against the imprisonment of Fatos Nano.

On 29 April, SP activists Sotir Meçe, Agim Sulmina, Kristaq Hanxhara and Mehemet Bozi were detained in Elbasan for several hours after police tore down SP posters they had posted up.

On 4 or 5 May, Bashkim Kamberi, a leading activist of another opposition party, the National Unity Party, was arrested at night at his home and held for several hours.

On 6 May, at least seven SP activists were arrested in Kurbin where an SP rally was being held. They were detained for up to 13 hours and several were severely beaten by police, among them Gjëkë Lulashi, Petraq Kumaraku and Marash Marashi. Marash Marashi claimed that police had beaten him about the head, legs and shoulders, with rubber truncheons and when they released him had told him: "Don't let us see you any more at SP meetings."

On 9 May Iliaz Labi, Alfred Dhuli and Aliosha Qamaj, local leaders of the Albanian Eurosocialist Forum were detained in Durrës. Aliosha Qamaj was reportedly ill-treated by police and has filed a complaint, supported by a medical certificate, against two police officers.

On 16 May five members of a third opposition party, the Democratic Alliance Party, were detained in Tirana after a rally. The party alleged that on this occasion a police chief had punched and hit one of them, Ridvan Peshkepja, after he asked why police were searching their cars and not allowing them to leave. Police have denied these allegations.

On 20 May, Saimir Xhuglini, Lame Lamaj and Lulzim Masha, three leading members of the Albanian Eurosocialist Forum, were severely beaten by police in Tirana while they waited for the start of a rally. Some 20 youths who wanted to attend the same rally were reportedly detained by police.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The ruling Democratic Party came to power in Albania in March 1992 and has introduced major legislative and other reforms. While it has justifiably condemned the brutal repression of the previous communist rule in Albania, it has nonetheless itself been intolerant of opposition and criticism. Fatos Nano, SP leader, was arrested in 1993 and in 1994 sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment on charges of embezzlement and falsification of official documents. Amnesty International believes that these charges were not substantiated by the evidence and were politically motivated. The organization has called for his release (News Service 140/95, AI Index: EUR 11/10/95). The leader of the National Unity Party, Idajet Beqiri, has been detained since the end of January 1996 on charges of "genocide" and "crimes against humanity". Amnesty International is concerned that he is not being granted a fair trial in accordance with international standards and believes he may be a prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International has also expressed concern about the prosecution and sometimes imprisonment of a number of opposition and independent journalists in recent years. In June 1995 Amnesty International issued a report on Albania, *Failure to End Police Ill-treatment and Deaths in Custody* (AI Index: EUR 11/04/95), which documented numerous cases in which police had ill-treated detainees, often SP members or others who had criticized or opposed government policies.

A local human rights organization, the Albanian Helsinki Committee has reportedly urged police to keep out of politics and put greater effort into preserving public order. In a published statement it said, "In many towns and villages legal activities..., especially of the opposition, have been hampered."

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Italian, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern about reports of the arbitrary arrest and, sometimes, ill-treatment of opposition activists and supporters in the run-up to national elections;
- referring to some or all of the cases described above, noting that these are just illustrations of what appears to be a pattern of harassment of the opposition;
- pointing out that such incidents violate provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee freedom of expression and association and bans arbitrary detention and torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment;
- urging that police officers and all law-enforcement officials be required to respect Albania's international human rights commitments and that those who fail to do so be duly disciplined or brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:President of Albania

Dr Sali Berisha
President i Republikës
se Shqipërisë
Tirana, Albania

Faxes: +355 42 33761 or +355 42 28 8420

Telegrams: President Berisha, Tirana, Albania

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Public Order

Mr Agron Musaraj

Minister i Rendit Publik

Tirana, Albania

Telegrams: Minister i Rendit Publik, Tirana, Albania**Faxes: +355 42 33607****Salutation: Dear Minister****COPIES TO:**Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dr Alfred Serreqi

Minister i Punëve të Jashtme

Tiranë, Albania

Faxes: +355 42 32971The Albanian Helsinki Committee

Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit

Qendra Nderkombetare e kultures, Dhoma no.35

Bulevardi "Deshmoret e kombit"

Tirana, Albania.

and to diplomatic representatives of Albania accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 June 1996.