

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 11/03/97

11 February 1997

Further information on EXTRA 16/97 (EUR 11/02 /97 of 6 February 1997) - Fear of ill-treatment/prisoners of conscience (POCs), possible POCs

ALBANIA Vladimir Goxhi, Arben Gega, Stavri Shkëmbi, Gjergji Meta, Ermir Çaçi (18), B. Memushi, Roland Beqiraj, journalist

new names: Benet Koleka, Leon Cika, Spiro Ilo, Hektor Pustani, all journalists
Kastriot Islami, politician

On 10 February there were further violent clashes in the southern town of Vlora between police and demonstrators demanding the return of their money invested in collapsed investment schemes. One demonstrator reportedly died (his assailant has not been identified) after being shot in the back and another died of a heart attack. According to Reuters news agency almost 100 people, including police officers, were injured in clashes in which police and protesters threw stones and rocks at each other and gunshots were fired. There were also clashes in Vlora the day before, in which another protester died from a heart attack - according to hospital sources - although protesters reportedly blamed police for his death. A government proposal to introduce a state of emergency in Vlora is currently being debated by the Albanian parliament. Meanwhile protestors in Vlora have set fire to the offices of the ruling Democratic Party.

On 8 February, police in Tirana used truncheons to disperse crowds gathering in the main square where opposition parties had called a protest rally. Police had banned the rally, citing security risks, but reportedly took no action against a counter-rally by government supporters nearby which had apparently also been banned. Some 15 opposition leaders were detained by police on their way to the square, and were held for about two hours. One of them, Kastriot Islami, a spokesman for the Socialist Party, has alleged that on his way to the square he was attacked by plainclothes police officers who threw him into a car and beat him. He was reportedly seen afterwards with injuries on his forehead. The Interior Ministry has denied the arrest of opposition leaders and said that police had taken Kastriot Islami under protection, after he was attacked by "individuals".

Reuters Television cameraman Leon Cika was reportedly struck on the side of the head with a baton as he filmed a demonstrator being hit by a riot policeman.

Three men in plainclothes reportedly entered the Reuters office in Tirana office, identifying themselves as members of special "security forces" and demanded pictures and television film before being asked to leave.

On the same day, 8 February, a demonstration in Fier was reportedly broken up by police who beat protesters and journalists with wooden sticks. Reuters correspondent Benet Koleka was among those beaten by police who seized his notebook. Spiro Ilo, a cameraman working for Associated Press news agency (AP) was reportedly beaten by uniformed police and plainclothes officers, while an AP photographer, Hektor Pustina, was punched by men in plain clothes, while uniformed police officers reportedly stood by.

President Berisha has ordered an inquiry into alleged police violence and said that the use of force was "unacceptable against politicians and journalists". He insisted that Albanian legislation ensured all citizens the right to protest peacefully and condemned violence against security forces and public property.

Amnesty International is concerned, however, that such investigations tend to be lengthy and inconclusive. In June and July 1996 investigations were officially started into allegations of police violence in connection with national elections in May 1996; over six months later, no police officer has yet been charged or brought to justice (see Amnesty International's report *Albania: Detention and ill-treatment of government opponents - the elections of May 1996*, EUR 11/17/96).

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

- noting reports of violent clashes in Vlora between police and demonstrators in which three people are reported to have died and many others, including police officers, reported injured;
- recognizing the duty of the authorities to maintain law and order, and emphasizing that AI does not condone the use of violence by demonstrators;
- urging, however, that law and order be maintained in a manner that conforms with their international human rights commitments;
- expressing concern about allegations that police beat non-violent demonstrators and journalists in Tirana and Fier on 8 February (cite cases), and urging that instructions be urgently given to police in all districts to desist from violence against all detainees;
- welcoming the President's announcement that an inquiry is to be carried out into these incidents, but urging that such an inquiry be prompt, thorough and impartial;
- urging the release of anyone detained as a result of their non-violent exercise of the right to freedom of assembly or freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

President of Albania

Dr Sali Berisha

Presidenti i Republikës së Shqipërisë

Zyra e Presidencës, Tirana

Republic of Albania

Fax: +355 42 33761 or 355 42 28 420 (Fax/Tel)

Telegrams: President, Tirana, Albania

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Public Order

Mr Halit Shamata

Minister i Rendit Publik, Tirana,

Republic of Albania

Telegrams: Minister i Rendit Publik, Tirana, Republic of Albania

Fax: +355 42 63607 (direct)

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Albanian Helsinki Committee

Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit

Rr Ali Demi, Pall 2, Shk 2, ap 12,

Tirana, Republic of 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 11 March 1997.