



Albania: Statistics on blood feuds; state protection and support services available to those affected by blood feuds, including whether individuals have been prosecuted for blood feud-related crimes (2010-2015)

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1. Overview

According to Balkan Insight, a news website covering the Western Balkans region that is published by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), a regional charitable organization network (Balkan Insight n.d.), blood feuds in Albania trace back centuries to the Canon of Lek Dukagjin [also known as the customary law kanun (Sweden 14 June 2013, 4)], a code of conduct which dictates that when someone is killed, the victim's family may take retribution against the person's killer, or by killing a male member of the killer's extended family (Balkan Insight 27 Oct. 2011). Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions defines blood feuds that occur in Albania as "premeditated revenge killing by a member of a murder victim's family, committed to allegedly restore honour lost as a result of the initial killing" (UN 23 Apr. 2013, para. 10). A 2013 report on blood feuds published by Lifos, the Swedish Migration Agency's database for legal and country of origin information (Sweden 31 Mar. 2015), states that families or individuals under threat of a blood feud often isolate themselves in their homes due to fear of retaliation, or to show respect for the victim's family (ibid. 14 June 2013, 4).

2. Statistical Estimates

According to sources, statistics on the number of people affected by blood feuds vary widely (EU Oct. 2014, 46; OSCE Dec. 2014, 6; UK 12 June 2014, 32). Sources further note that there are "deep discrepancies" in the information available on the number of blood feud-related murders (Balkan Insight 3 Apr. 2013; OSCE Dec. 2014, 6), as well as the number of families involved and those isolated by the phenomenon (ibid.).

Sources state that media and civil society organizations estimate that the number of blood feud victims is much higher than figures presented in Albanian government reports (ibid.; Cannon 13 Dec. 2013; Balkan Insight 3 Apr. 2013). Balkan Insight reports that "[l]ocal media and non-governmental organizations refer to dozens of blood-feud killings per year and to hundreds of children living in isolation as a consequence," while "[o]n the other hand, government statistics claim that such killings fell sharply in number over the last decade" (ibid.). According to a letter written by the British Embassy in Tirana to the UK Home Office's Country of Origin Information Service which describes the results of a January 2014 fact-finding mission to northern Albania by the embassy, "NGOs with vested interests in inflated numbers ... claim that more than 1000 families are affected. At the other end, local units of the State Police tend to estimate the lowest numbers" (UK 12 June 2014, 32). The 2013 Swedish Migration Agency's Lifos report states that the statistics of the Albanian authorities on blood feuds "are likely to contain underestimates, but are not radically misleading" (Sweden 14 June 2013, 5).

According to sources, some NGOs in Albania exaggerate the number of blood feud-related victims for their own gain (UK 12 June 2014, 32; Reuters 10 Dec. 2013). In a December 2014 report on Albanian blood feuds, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)'s Presence in Albania indicates that, "some officials express doubts [about] the data provided by NGOs ... due to their [the NGOs'] vested interest in making this issue seem severe and widespread" (OSCE Dec. 2014, 6). According to the British Embassy, "[c]orrupt NGOs and local officials" inappropriately label crimes as blood feuds when this is not the case and notes that "[f]ake 'blood feud' certificates are easily available for a price from both NGOs and local officials" (UK 12 June 2014, 33). According to the OSCE Presence in Albania, "there is no entity, official or otherwise, that has the authority to issue a [blood feud] certificate" (OSCE Dec. 2014, 15). For further information on blood feud certificates and attestation letters, see Response to Information Request ALB104752.

According to the British Embassy, "some local journalists have reportedly accepted money to report a murder as blood feud" (UK 12 June 2014, 33). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Available Statistics for 2010-2015

3.1 Statistics on the Number of Blood Feud-related Murders

Sources report the following statistics for 2011:

According to the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were 16 cases of "premeditated murder for blood feud" and one case of "serious threat for revenge or blood feud" in 2011 (Albania June 2013, 15).

Operation Dove (Operazione Colomba), a mission affiliated with the Pope John XXIII Community Association (Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII), an international organization recognized by the Italian government, that is "committed to eradicating causes of poverty and marginalization ... through non-violent action and means" [1] (Pope John XXIII Community Association n.d.a), reports that there were five reported blood feud crimes in 2011 (ibid. Oct. 2014, 11).

Sources report the following statistics for 2012:

The Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that in the first six months of 2012, there were six cases and three convictions involving "premeditated murder for blood feud," and three cases and one conviction involving "serious threat for revenge or blood feud" (Albania June 2013, 15).

According to data obtained by Operation Dove, there were five reported blood feud crimes in 2012 (Pope

John XXIII Community Association Oct. 2014, 11).

A 2013 report by the People's Advocate of Albania [Ombudsman] cited by OSCE Presence in Albania states that five blood feud-related deaths were reported to authorities from 2012 to 2013 (OSCE Dec. 2014, 7).

The same 2013 report by the People's Advocate of Albania [Ombudsman] is cited by Balkan Insight as stating that 98 murders occurred due to "vendettas" from 2001 to 2012 (Balkan Insight 3 Apr. 2013).

Sources report the following statistics for 2013:

The OSCE Presence in Albania report quotes the Chief Prosecutor of Shkoder region as informing the Presence that, in Shkoder, "only three blood feud-related murders were investigated in 2013, and because of problems with evidence and definitions, only one of those cases was actually prosecuted as a blood feud murder" (OSCE Dec. 2014, 7).

Information on the number of blood feud-related murders for 2014 and 2015 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Statistics on the Number of Ongoing or Active Blood Feuds

Sources report the following statistics for 2012:

The OSCE Presence in Albania quotes a 2013 report on blood feuds by the Albanian People's Advocate [Ombudsman] as stating that, according to government data, an estimated 67 families were involved in blood feuds during the 2012-2013 reporting period (OSCE Dec. 2014, 7).

Sources report the following statistics for 2014:

Operation Dove states that, to their knowledge, based on information collected from 2012 to 2014, there are 20 active blood feuds in Shkoder, 1 in Lezhe, 2 in Tirane, and 7 in Tropoje (Pope John XXIII Community Association Oct. 2014, 11).

Citing data collected from regional prosecutors, the British Embassy in Tirana reported the number of families involved in active blood feuds as follows:

Lezhe Region: 50-75 families comprising up to 390 people; "whereas the police said that families were more likely to be involved in 'general fighting' rather than any activity related to blood feud, and that only 9 of these can genuinely be classified as a blood feud;"

Shkoder Region: 60 families, comprising 145 people;

Kukes: The Deputy Mayor reported 1 family active in a feud while the police claimed zero; the Chair of the Regional Council claimed that up to 180 families across Kukes may be involved in blood feuds (UK 12 June 2014, 32).

The OSCE Presence in Albania quotes the Shkoder Prosecution Office as stating that in June 2014, there were 196 families involved in blood feuds in Shkoder (OSCE Dec. 2014, 9).

Information on the number of blood feuds currently active in 2015 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.3 Statistics on the Number of Individuals Living in Isolation Due to Blood Feuds

Sources report the following statistics for 2012:

Operation Dove, citing Albanian police statistics from approximately 2012, indicates that the number of families who were living in isolation by region was as follows:

Shkoder region: 48 families, including 93 males, of which 21 were children and 2 students;

Kukes region: 13 families, including 16 individuals, of which 6 were women and 7 children;

Lezhe region: 4 families, including 4 men;

Tirane region: 1 family, including 1 individual; and

Durres region: 1 family, including one man, one woman and three children (Pope John XXIII Community Association Oct. 2014, 11-12).

Sources report the following statistics for 2013:

According to the Albanian People's Advocate, as cited by the OSCE Presence in Albania, there were 154 individuals confined to their homes in 2013, of which 33 were children (OSCE Dec. 2014, 9).

According to Balkan Insight and information provided by the General Directorate of the State Police to the UN Human Rights Council, the number of families living in isolation due to blood feuds in April 2013 was between 67 (UN 23 Apr. 2013, para. 13) and 69 families (Balkan Insight 3 Apr. 2013). According to Balkan Insight, the majority of the families were located in the northern region of Shkoder (ibid.). According to sources, these isolated families included 33 children who were unable to attend school because of blood feuds (ibid.; UN 23 Apr. 2013, para. 13), 23 of whom were in Shkoder (ibid.).

Sources report the following statistics for 2014:

According to Spiegel Online, a German news website, "non-governmental organizations estimate that around 1,500 young men around the country are forced to hide in their homes because they are targeted" due to blood feuds (6 June 2014).

According to data provided by the Shkoder Prosecution office, the OSCE Presence in Albania states that in the Shkoder region, there were 14 confined families as of June 2014, with a total of 36 persons living in isolation (OSCE Dec. 2014, 8).

Further information, as well as statistics for 2015, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. State Protection

Sources state that the Albanian Criminal Code was amended to include harsher penalties for individuals who commit murder related to a blood feud (UK 12 June 2014, 33; US 25 June 2015, 3; Reuters 10 Dec. 2013). Sources indicate that the Code was amended in 2013 (ibid.; US 25 June 2015, 3) or 2014 (UK 12 June 2014, 33). The amended Criminal Code provides the following:

Article 78/a Murder for Blood Feud

Intentional homicide for blood feud shall be punishable by imprisonment of not less than thirty years or life imprisonment;

...

Article 83/a [No title in original]

Serious intimidation for revenge or blood feud, against a person in order to have him immobilized within the house is punishable by imprisonment up to three years;

Article 83/b Incitement for Blood Feud

Inciting other persons for revenge or blood feud, when it does not constitute other criminal act[s], is punishable by imprisonment up to three years. (Albania 1995)

According to the US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014, jurisdiction over blood feud cases was transferred from Albania's district courts to "serious crime courts" (US 25 June 2015, 3). According to the British Embassy in Tirana, "police and criminal justice system representatives ... provide a degree of protection to affected families" (UK 12 June 2014, 32). In contrast, Country Reports 2014 quotes the Ombudsman of Albania as stating that "authorities' efforts to protect

families or prevent blood feud killings were insufficient" (US 25 June 2015, 2). Operation Dove similarly reports that "[v]ery often families involved in blood feud[s] complain about ... the widespread corruption, and the workflow of justice processes," explaining that there remains a "lack of certainty of sentenc[ing] for those who committed crime because of blood feud," a "lack of ... appropriate police intervention," and an "inefficiency of a state apparatus guaranteeing the safety of citizens who risk their lives because of reasons linked to blood feud[s]" (Pope John XXIII Community Association Oct. 2014, 17). According to the 2013 Swedish Migration Agency's Lifos report, sources consulted by Lifos for the report

did not share a common view of the Albanian police to handle blood feuds. Some sources acknowledge the progress made by the police in its work, while other sources still identify serious deficiencies with regard to capacity and prevalence of corruption. (Sweden 14 June 2013, 5)

The Swedish Migration Agency report further states that, according to the sources it consulted,

[t]here is a tendency among people involved in blood feuds not to turn to the Albanian authorities for protection. This tendency is reportedly based on a lack of trust in the police, which relates to its capacity, as well as on the typical mechanisms of blood feuds which implicate that police protection does not solve the blood feuds as such. (ibid.)

Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The British Embassy states that police and criminal justice system representatives monitor and record blood feud-related crimes (UK 12 June 2014, 32). The same source also reports that since the new government was elected in September 2013, revised instructions have been given to police officials on how to investigate blood feud-related matters (ibid., 33). The OSCE Presence in Albania report similarly states that the Albanian State Police developed an "operational plan" on the "prevention, identification, and fight against criminal acts of murder for blood feud" in 2012 (OSCE Dec. 2014, 5).

According to the UN Special Rapporteur, in June 2012, the Albanian State Police launched a countrywide database which lists all individuals identified as involved in a blood feud; this includes cases submitted to court and those "not followed up through official channels" (UN 23 Apr. 2013, para. 19). The same source indicates that the database is updated regularly and may be accessed by the State Police, the Prosecutor General's Office, representatives of the court, and the People's Advocate [Ombudsman] (ibid.).

According to the British Embassy, "[t]he authorities prosecute perpetrators" of blood feud-related crimes (UK 12 June 2014, 32). The 2013 report published by the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that "all feud motivated crimes are detected and perpetrators are punished by the courts" (Albania June 2013, 15). The same source states that in the first 6 months of 2012, 4 out of 9 blood feud-related cases had resulted in convictions, while the other 5 remained pending at the time of the 2013 report (ibid.). The same source notes that no cases were documented during the first third of 2013 (ibid.). Information on the number of blood feud-related cases that were prosecuted in 2014 and 2015 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), in Albania there is a "lack of confidence in the justice system" regarding blood feuds (6 Oct. 2013). According to the UN Special Rapporteur, despite the provisions in the Criminal Code that impose serious penalties for blood feud-related crimes, blood feud killings continue to take place in part because the judiciary in Albania tends to "impose lighter sentences" on perpetrators of blood feud-related homicides (UN 23 Apr. 2013, para. 15). A 2013 article by Reuters quotes the Coordinator of Operation Dove as stating that "the law is good, but not applied," and that he recalled instances of men murdered by rival families after being released from prison (10 Dec. 2013).

5. Support Services

Sources state that faith groups provide reconciliation support to families affected by blood feuds (OSCE Dec. 2014, 14; UK 12 June 2014, 32). According to the British Embassy in Tirana, "[f]aith groups, especially the Catholic Church and local mosques, cooperate inter-denominationally in an effort to

address the problem and to support affected families [with] reconciling conflicts" (ibid.). The OSCE quotes the Mufti of Shkodra, as stating that "the Muftiny works together with two madrasahs (Muslim educational institutions) in promoting forgiveness and reconciliation, with a focus on Muslim values" (Dec. 2014, 14). Spiegel Online further reports that two nuns from Switzerland run a support group for young men affected by blood feuds in Shkoder, which meets twice a week (6 June 2014). Operation Dove, which has held a presence in Albania since 2010 (Pope John XXIII Community Association n.d.b), also facilitates reconciliatory mediation sessions among families in conflict and hosts a "youth group" for young Albanians affected by blood feuds (ibid. 1 Aug. 2015, 3-4).

According to the British Embassy in Tirana, "while facing budgetary constraints, [municipalities] offer social service support, home schooling and medical/psychiatric assistance to victims of blood feud[s]" (UK 12 June 2014, 32). The OSCE Presence in Albania indicates that, as of the 2014 report, a program established in 2007 by the Ministry of Education called "Second Chances" is still functional and allows teachers to visit the homes of children confined due to a blood feud and give them lessons three times a week (OSCE Dec. 2014, 14). According to Reuters, there is also a psychological clinic in Shkoder that "works with children from families locked in by blood feuds" (Reuters 10 Dec. 2013). The clinic is said to be the first of its kind in northern Albania and works to "help children overcome stress and trauma associated with isolation, as well as address attitudes toward violence and aggression by teaching them to express their feelings" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] Operation Dove has maintained a volunteer presence in the districts of Shkoder and Tropoje since 2010 (Pope John XXIII Community Association Oct. 2014, 24). Their volunteers conduct "nonviolent interventions in order to mitigate and overcome the conflicts triggered by blood feuds between families," including conducting visits to those families involved in conflicts and conducting monitoring on blood feuds (ibid. 2,3,12). Operation Dove's October 2014 report is described as a document on the phenomenon of blood feuds written on the basis of their experience working with victims of blood feuds in highly affected areas, in order to to "raise awareness among Albanian and international institutions" (ibid. 1,2).

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Internet sites, including: Albania - Embassy in Ottawa, Ministry of the Interior, People's Advocate Institution, State Police; Albanian Helsinki Committee; Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; British Broadcasting Corporation; eoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; The Globe and Mail; Human Rights in Democracy Centre; Human Rights Watch; Interpol; Journal of Financial Crime; Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences; Metta Center for Nonviolence; The New York Times; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Small Arms Survey; United Nations - RefWorld; United States - Central Intelligence Agency; The Washington Post.

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