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TO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PNAT PINR CSCE ECON AL GR YO US
SUBJECT: THE ALBANIAN ELECTIONS
ROME ALSO FOR VATICAN, BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEC, VIENNA ALSO FOR
USDEL CSBM, USVIENNA FOR CFE

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT FROM FAX NO. 618, DATED MARCH 20;

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1992, FROM AMERICAN EMBASSY TIRANA, AMBASSADOR RYERSON.

2. SUMMARY. READY OR NOT, ALBANIA WILL HOLD
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON SUNDAY, MARCH 22. THERE ARE NO
OPINION SURVEYS -- NOT EVEN ROUGH ONES -- SO PREDICTIONS
ARE HAZARDOUS. BUT SAMPLINGS OF THE MOOD AROUND TOWN, IN
VILLAGES, ON ROADSIDE MARKETS, IN FOOD LINES, AND AMONG
THE CROWDS OF PEOPLE WHO STAND AROUND ON TIRANA'S STREETS
IS THAT THE SOCIALISTS, AFTER 47 YEARS AND TWO NAME
CHANGES, WILL BE FORCED TO RELINGUISH POWER.

3. IN THE PAST FEW DAYS THERE HAS BEEN A MASSIVE
OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT ALL OVER THE COUNTRY FOR OPPOSITION

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: HANS HOLZAPFEL
DATE/CASE ID: 29 MAY 2002 200100838

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FORCES, LED BY THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY. THE REALITY OF THE ELECTIONS HAS FINALLY REGISTERED WITH ALBANIANS; THEY ARE EXCITED, THEY SENSE VICTORY BY THE OPPOSITION, AND THEY ARE FILLED WITH HOPE AT WHAT THEY BELIEVE WILL BE THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA IN THE HISTORY OF THEIR COUNTRY.

4. SOCIALIST LEADER FATOS NANO HAS RUN AN UNINSPIRED CAMPAIGN OF SMALL RALLIES OF AGED PARTY MEMBERS, MEETINGS WITH "INTELLECTUAL" SUPPORTERS, AND THE OCCASIONAL PHOTO-OP WITH FOREIGN VISITORS. IN STARK CONTRAST, THE DEMOCRATS, UNDER THE INDEFATIGABLE PROF. DR. SALI BERISHA, HAVE BARNSTORMED FROM ONE END OF THE COUNTRY TO THE OTHER. THEIR RALLIES HAVE A PARTY ATMOSPHERE TO THEM, WITH SUPPORTERS ROARING SUPPORT, SHOUTING HATRED FOR THE SOCIALISTS, AND DANCING TO ROCK MUSIC THAT, UNTIL JUST RECENTLY, WAS BANNED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

5. WITH ITS ECONOMY IN SHAMBLES, AND ITS PEOPLE SURVIVING

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ONLY ON FOREIGN ASSISTANCE, ALBANIA FACES AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT ROAD AHEAD, REGARDLESS OF WHICH SIDE IS VICTORIOUS. WHILE THE CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE SOCIALISTS AND OPPOSITION ARE MANY, THE ELECTION BOILS DOWN TO THREE QUESTIONS: (A) WHO CAN LEAD THE FINAL BREAK WITH THE HATED COMMUNIST SYSTEM? (B) WHO CAN INSPIRE ALBANIANS TO BUILD FOR THE FUTURE? AND (C) WHO CAN SECURE FOREIGN INVESTMENT? THE ANSWER, IT SEEMS, FOR MOST ALBANIANS, IS THE DEMOCRATIC-LED OPPOSITION, WHILE MANY BELIEVE A SOCIALIST WIN WOULD TRIGGER ANOTHER EXODUS FROM THE COUNTRY AND SERIOUS, WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE. END SUMMARY.

ALBANIANS WANT TO RETURN TO CALM, BUT NOT THE OLD DAYS

6. ON THE EVE OF ELECTIONS ALBANIANS ARE EXCITED, BUT AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE TIRED OF POLITICS. CHANGES DURING THE LAST YEAR WERE AT FIRST GREETED WITH GREAT INTEREST. ABLE FOR THE FIRST TIME TO WATCH SESSIONS OF PARLIAMENT ON TELEVISION, THEY HAVE SEEN DEMOCRATS PERFORM WELL IN DEBATE, AND SINCE THE CREATION OF THE STABILITY GOVERNMENT IN JUNE, 1991, WELL IN ADMINISTERING CERTAIN CITIES, LIKE KORCE. UNLIKE ONE YEAR AGO, WHEN THE OPPOSITION WAS AN UNKNOWN, UNPROVEN QUANTITY, THIS YEAR PEOPLE KNOW LEADERS LIKE BERISHA TO BE CAPABLE AND HONEST.

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7. BUT, AS THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY (ALREADY THE POOREST IN EUROPE) DETERIORATED EVEN FURTHER, AND LAWLESSNESS AND DISORDER INCREASED (ESPECIALLY IN LARGE CITIES AND TOWNS) ALBANIANS BEGAN TO DEMAND RESULTS, NOT RHETORIC. THE DECLINE IN AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF SUCH SERVICES AS

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TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION, ELECTRICITY, AND WATER SUPPLIES, AND THE EXPLOSION IN UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME, ARE PERCEIVED, AT LEAST BY MOST CITY-DWELLERS, TO BE THE RESULT OF SOCIALIST MALFEASANCE AND HAVE LED TO A TOTAL LOSS OF FAITH IN THEIR ADMINISTRATION.

HOXHA HAUNTS SOCIALISTS - OPPOSITION PLAGUED BY INFIGHTING

8. THE SOCIALIST PARTY HAS TRIED TO DOWNPLAY ITS IMAGE AS THE SUCCESSOR TO THE PARTY OF LABOR AND 47 YEARS OF CRIMES PERPETRATED BY ITS LEADERS, CHIEF BEING THE LATE DICTATOR ENVER HOXHA AND HIS "REFORMIST" SUCCESSOR, AND CURRENT PRESIDENT, RAMIZ ALIA. ALIA HAS BEEN SILENT AND INCONSPICUOUS SINCE HIS REPORTED HEALTH PROBLEMS IN JANUARY. BUT, HE IS WIDELY PERCEIVED TO BE CALLING SOME OF THE SHOTS FROM BEHIND THE SCENES. SOME OPPOSITION POLITICIANS HAVE MADE HIM THE FOCUS OF THEIR ATTACKS, DEMANDING THAT HE RESIGN AND FACE TRIAL AFTER ELECTIONS. CROWDS AT DEMOCRATIC PARTY RALLIES OFTEN CHANT "WE WANT AN ALBANIA WITHOUT RAMIZ ALIA."

9. SOCIALIST PARTY CHAIRMAN FATOS NANO HAS PUT IN A DISMAL CAMPAIGN PERFORMANCE. NANO, A "REFORMIST" COMMUNIST, IS SEEN AS AN INEFFECTUAL LEADER WHO CANNOT MAKE MAJOR DECISIONS ON HIS OWN; HE IS PORTRAYED COMICALLY IN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS AS A PUPPET OF ALIA. INDEED, NANO DOES NOT APPEAL TO THE AVERAGE ALBANIANS AS A STRONG, DETERMINED LEADER WHO CAN INSPIRE WITH RHETORIC. DURING THE CAMPAIGN, TELEVISION COVERAGE OF HIS APPEARANCES AT RALLIES AND MEETINGS HAS NOT BEEN FLATTERING. NANO IS A

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CANDIDATE FOR A PARLIAMENTARY SEAT FROM THE SOCIALIST STRONGHOLD OF KUCOVA (FORMERLY THE CITY OF STALIN), SO THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT HE WILL BE RE-ELECTED. BUT, HE IS

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NOT A LEADER OF "NATIONAL" STATURE.

10. THE DEMOCRATS' STANDARD BEARER, PROF. DR. SALI BERISHA, IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE - CHARISMATIC, ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WELL WITH ANY GROUP FROM ANY STRATA OF SOCIETY, WITH A KEEN SENSE OF JUDGMENT. IT WAS BERISHA WHO, AGAINST THE ADVICE OF MANY OTHER DEMOCRATIC AND OPPOSITION PARTY OFFICIALS, DECIDED IN DECEMBER 1991, TO WITHDRAW DEMOCRATIC MINISTERS FROM THE "STABILITY" GOVERNMENT, A MOVE WHICH SET INTO MOTION DEVELOPMENTS LEADING TO THESE ELECTIONS. BERISHA HAS RUN A TIRELESS CAMPAIGN, STUMPING IN EVERY REGION OF THE COUNTRY. HE IS UNQUESTIONABLY PREFERRED AS A NATIONAL LEADER TO BOTH NANO AND ALIA.

11. BERISHA HAS WORKED THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN TO GET DEMOCRATIC RIVALS AND OTHER OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS TO PUT DIFFERENCES WITH HIM ASIDE AND TO FORGE A COALITION AGAINST THE SOCIALISTS. HE FINALLY ACHIEVED A MEASURE OF PEACE WITHIN HIS PARTY AND EVEN BROKERED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE REPUBLICAN PARTY (HEADED BY DR. SABRI GODO) AND THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PARTY (LED BY PROF. DR. SKENDER GJINUSHI) TO FIELD JOINT CANDIDATES IN 13 ELECTORAL DISTRICTS. SOCIALISTS HAVE PICKED UP ON THE DEMOCRATS' INTRA- AND INTER-PARTY PROBLEMS, AND HAVE TRIED TO USE THEM TO SHOW THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD BE INCAPABLE OF GOVERNING ALBANIA.

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GREEKS RUN OWN CANDIDATES - IN THE END, PEASANTS HOLD
BALANCE

12. THE WILD CARD IN THESE ELECTIONS MAY BE HELD BY THE GREEK MINORITY, CONCENTRATED PRIMARILY IN THE SOUTH OF THE COUNTRY. WHEN OMONIA, THE ORGANIZATION WHICH REPRESENTED GREEKS IN THE 1991 ELECTIONS (AND WON FIVE SEATS IN PARLIAMENT) WAS IN EFFECT DENIED THE RIGHT TO TAKE PART IN THIS YEAR'S CONTESTS, GREEKS FORMED A NEW PARTY, UNITY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. AFTER A ROCKY START AND HAVING SEVERAL CANDIDATES DISQUALIFIED BY THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION, THE NEW GREEK PARTY HAS 29 CANDIDATES UP FOR CONSIDERATION. IT IS LIKELY TO WIN TWO OR THREE SEATS.

13. PEASANTS ACCOUNT FOR 66 PERCENT OF ALBANIA'S

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POPULATION. IN THE 1991 ELECTIONS, RURAL VOTERS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORTED THE COMMUNISTS. THOUGH THEY SPENT LITTLE TIME IN THE COUNTRYSIDE DURING THE LAST ELECTION, THE OPPOSITION HAS TARGETED THE RURAL AREAS DURING THIS CAMPAIGN, SENDING ITS LEADERS TO THE FARMS FROM NORTH TO SOUTH TO EAST IN AN ATTEMPT TO WOO VOTERS. BERISHA HAS BEEN PICTURED REGULARLY ON EVENING TELEVISION NEWS PROGRAMS SPEAKING TO VILLAGE RALLIES.

14. WITHOUT ADEQUATE TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION TO THE COUNTRYSIDE, IT IS HARD TO GAUGE WHAT FARMERS ARE THINKING. THE SOCIALISTS' CLAIM THAT THE DEMOCRATS WOULD TAKE PEASANT LAND AWAY FROM THEM AND RETURN IT TO FORMER-OWNERS, IN MANY CASES, FOREIGNERS, SCARED FARMERS INTO VOTING FOR THEM LAST YEAR.

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15. BUT, THE DEMOCRATS HAVE LED THE DRIVE FOR LAND REFORM AND RE-DISTRIBUTION, AND THE SOCIALISTS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PRODUCE ON THEIR PROMISES OF SEED, FERTILIZER, AND MACHINERY. IN FACT, WHEN THE FARMERS HAD ALREADY SEIZED THE COOPERATIVES, DIVIDED UP THE LAND, EXPROPRIATED THE HERDS, AND CARTED OFF EVEN THE ROOFING MATERIALS OF THE COOPERATIVE STOREHOUSES, NANO COULD NOT EVEN CONVINCE HIS PARTY TO LEGALIZE THE EXISTENCE OF PRIVATE FARMING. WHILE THE SOCIALISTS HAVE TRIED TO SCARE PEASANTS AGAIN WITH EXAGGERATED CLAIMS THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL TURN THEM INTO SERFS AGAIN, DEMOCRATIC ATTENTION DEVOTED TO THE COUNTRYSIDE WILL YIELD A LARGER SHARE OF RURAL VOTES. WHETHER IT WILL BE ENOUGH, NO ONE CAN ACCURATELY PREDICT.

COMMENT: DEMOCRATIC COALITION WINS, BUT SOCIALISTS WON'T GO QUIETLY

16. AS ALBANIANS PREPARE TO VOTE, IT IS CLEAR THAT MOST OF THEM BELIEVE THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY WILL WIN THE ELECTION. THE SOCIALISTS HAVE RUN A SLOPPY CAMPAIGN, DUSTING OFF OLD COMMUNIST PROPOGANDA ABOUT THE UNITED STATES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME TELLING VOTERS THEY ARE THE PARTY BEST ABLE TO SECURE U.S. INVESTMENT IN ALBANIA. NO ONE BELIEVES THE SOCIALISTS WILL WIN. IF THEY ARE DECLARED THE VICTORS BY THEY SOCIALIST/"FORMER COMMUNIST" DOMINATED ELECTION COMMISSION, MANY PREDICT SERIOUS VIOLENCE.

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17. THE COALITION OF NON-COMMUNIST PARTIES WHICH EXPECTS

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TO WIN ON SUNDAY IS UNITED ONLY IN ITS ABHORRENCE OF COMMUNISM AND WHAT IT HAS DONE TO ALBANIA DURING THE PAST BRUTAL HALF CENTURY. THE SCARS ON THE COUNTRY'S LANDSCAPE -- THE MINDLESS HYDRO-ELECTRIC INVESTMENTS, THE DISASTROUS TERRACING OF NOW DENUDED MOUNTAINSIDES, AND, OF COURSE THE UBIQUITOUS BUNKERS, WILL NOT SOON DISAPPEAR, NOR CAN THERE BE ANY REALISTIC HOPE THAT THE PROSPERITY OF GREECE AND ITALY, SO VISIBLE ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD TELEVISION SET, CAN BE QUICKLY IMPORTED.

18. INDEED, THE WINNING PARTY ON SUNDAY COULD WELL BE THE LOSER IF IT ACTS TOO SLOWLY TO ARREST THE FAST DECLINE IN LAW AND ORDER AND LIVING STANDARDS. IN THE PAST NINE MONTHS, ALBANIA HAS ENDURED A PROLONGED PERIOD OF POLITICAL, ECONOMIC -- AND MORAL DRIFT. VIRTUALLY NO ONE IS NOW WORKING. THUS, THE FIRST TASK FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE TO REESTABLISH A SENSE OF LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION TO A PROFOUNDLY DEMORALIZED POPULATION.

19. AS THE VOTERS CONSIDER THE CANDIDATES, THEY WILL FIND NO ONE IN THE SOCIALIST CAMP WHO CAN PLAY SUCH A ROLE. RAMIZ ALIA IS VIEWED AS A RELIC FROM THE PAST WHO WILL QUICKLY DISAPPEAR FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE IN THE WEEKS AHEAD. NOR WOULD FATOS NANO, THE SOCIALIST PARTY CHAIRMAN, LIKELY BE ABLE TO FILL THE ROLE. HIS MOST RECENT APPEARANCE ON TELEVISION, SLUMPED IN A STUFFED CHAIR, READING FROM CARDS IN HIS LAP, DRESSED IN A DULL GREY SUIT, HARDLY CONVEYED THE IMAGE OF A SUCCESSFUL POLITICIAN PREPARING TO LEAD THE COUNTRY.

20. WHILE BERISHA DECLINES TO COMMENT ON HIS OWN PERSONAL

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AMBITIONS, HE IS CLEARLY AFTER THE POST OF PRESIDENT. THE SIZE OF THE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY, AND THE NUMBER OF SEATS OTHER COALITION PARTNERS (REPUBLICANS AND SOCIAL-DEMOCRATS) WIN WILL DETERMINE HOW EASY/DIFFICULT IT WILL BE TO PUT IN PLACE NEEDED REFORMS. MANY BELIEVE THAT THE SOCIALISTS WILL CREATE AS MANY PROBLEMS AS THEY CAN

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BEFORE LEAVING OFFICE, INCLUDING POSSIBLY FOMENTING UNREST
IN THE CITIES WHERE THEY ARE STRONGEST, SUCH AS FIER.
THEY WILL ALSO FIGHT DEMOCRAT ATTEMPTS TO OUST ALIA AND
INSTALL BERISHA AS PRESIDENT.

21. REAL ALBANIAN DEMOCRACY WILL FACE SERIOUS ECONOMIC
CHALLENGES. A SOLID SHOW OF SUPPORT FROM THE U.S. AND
EUROPE SOON AFTER AN OPPOSITION VICTORY WOULD GO A LONG
TOWARD RE-ASSURING ALBANIANS THAT THEY MADE THE RIGHT
CHOICE, AND THAT THE WORLD'S DEMOCRACIES WILL HELP THEM
THROUGH THE DIFFICULT PERIOD OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL
TRANSITION. END COMMENT.
BAKER

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