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FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6051
USMISSION USVIENNA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
USEU BRUSSELS
USLO SKOPJE

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 05 TIRANA 003376

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/SE, AND DRL

BUDAPEST AND USVIENNA FOR USDEL CSCE

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AL
SUBJECT: THE FAILURE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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REF: TIRANA 03244 S

1. [REDACTED] - ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

2. IN A NOVEMBER 6 REFERENDUM, ALBANIAN VOTERS REJECTED A DRAFT CONSTITUTION DESPITE A MASSIVE GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN WHEREIN PRESIDENT BERISHA INVESTED HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE. ACCORDING TO OUR CONTACTS IN THE VARIOUS PARTIES, ALBANIANS REJECTED THE DRAFT

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: FRANK H. PEREZ
DATE/CASE ID: 21 NOV 2001 200100881

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PRIMARILY AS A PROTEST OVER DISAPPOINTMENT IN "QUALITY OF LIFE" ISSUES, IN DIRECT REACTION TO THE EFFECTS OF TWO YEARS OF PAINFUL ECONOMIC REFORMS.

3. ALSO IMPORTANT, THEY STRESSED THAT VOTERS REACTED NEGATIVELY TO THE GOVERNMENT'S HIGH-HANDED PRO-CONSTITUTION MEDIA CAMPAIGN, THE OVERLY INCESTUOUS RELATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, AND THE PERCEPTION OF WIDESPREAD GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION. FINALLY, SOURCES SAY THE PEOPLE VOTED "NO" TO A DRAFT DOCUMENT THEY NEITHER UNDERSTOOD NOR HAD SUFFICIENT TIME TO MASTER. THEY WERE EASILY SWAYED BY OPPOSITION CLAIMS THAT THE DRAFT GAVE THE PRESIDENT TOO MUCH POWER.

4. THERE WERE ALSO REGIONAL DISTINCTIONS, WITH VOTERS IN THE SOUTH, WHERE THE HIGHEST PROPORTION OF "NO" VOTES WERE CAST, WORRIED THAT GREEK OPPOSITION TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLE DEALING WITH RELIGION WOULD

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JEOPARDIZE THEIR CHANCES TO EMIGRATE AND WORK IN GREECE.

5. AS A RESULT OF THIS UPSET, THE GOA WILL, IN THE SHORT TERM,

IN THE LONGER TERM, GOA ACCEPTANCE OF THE RESULTS AND FORBEARANCE FROM FRAUD, COUPLED WITH THEIR ANTICIPATED CORRECTIVE ACTIONS, SHOW A RELATIVELY SOPHISTICATED LEVEL OF DEMOCRATIZATION THAT SHOULD EVENTUALLY CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASED POLITICAL PLURALISM AND FAVOR OUR OVERALL HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIZATION GOALS. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

PART ONE: THE RESULTS

IT'S OFFICIAL - THE "NO'S" HAVE IT

6. THE REFERENDUM COMMISSION ANNOUNCED THE OFFICIAL RESULTS OF THE NOVEMBER 6 VOTE ON THE CONSTITUTION ON NOVEMBER 11. THE "NO" VOTE WAS 53.9 PERCENT AGAINST A 41.7 "YES" VOTE. SPOILED BALLOTS MADE UP THE DIFFERENCE. ALTHOUGH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS NOTED SEVERAL IRREGULARITIES AT VARIOUS POLLING PLACES ON THE DAY OF THE PLEBISCITE AND WERE CRITICAL OF THE WAY VOTING LISTS WERE FORMULATED AND PUBLICIZED, NEITHER THE GOVERNMENT NOR THE OPPOSITION HAS SERIOUSLY QUESTIONED THE VALIDITY OF THE OUTCOME.

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7. A BREAKDOWN OF THE VOTING IN ALBANIA'S 37 DISTRICTS SHOWS A CLEAR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH. THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION RECEIVED THE LEAST SUPPORT IN THE SOUTH, WITH 25 PERCENT OR FEWER OF THE VOTES IN THE THREE DISTRICTS WITH HEAVY ETHNIC GREEK POPULATION - SARANDA, GJIROKASTER, AND DELVINA. OF THE NINE DISTRICTS WHERE OVER 50 PERCENT VOTED FOR THE DRAFT, ALL BUT ONE ARE IN TIRANA OR TO THE NORTH. DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEPUTY

SAID MANY SOUTHERNERS, BOTH ETHNIC GREEK AND ALBANIAN, WERE AFRAID THAT ACCEPTANCE OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION WOULD IRRITATE GREECE AND JEOPARDIZE THEIR ABILITY TO EMIGRATE AND WORK SOUTH OF THE BORDER. OTHER COMMENTATORS SAID THAT SOUTHERNERS, TRADITIONALLY MORE URBAN AND EDUCATED, WERE PUT-OFF BY BERISHA'S HARD SELL. THE LESS SOPHISTICATED NORTHERNERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, WERE MORE FAVORABLE TO BERISHA, HIMSELF A NORTHERNER WHO HAS EMPLOYED MANY FELLOW NORTHERNERS IN HIS GOVERNMENT.

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GOVERNMENT - SHOCK AND SELF-CRITICISM

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AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
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8. THE GOVERNMENT WAS CLEARLY SHOCKED AND SURPRISED BY THE OUTCOME, AND SPENT THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE VOTE WRINGING ITS COLLECTIVE HANDS IN HOPES THAT THE OFFICIAL RESULTS WOULD SHOW A LESS LOPSIDED "NO" VOTE THAN THE OPPOSITION CLAIMED. (COMMENT. THE FINAL RESULT WAS MUCH CLOSER THAN INITIALLY BELIEVED. END COMMENT.) VARIOUS GOVERNMENT SOURCES PORTRAYED A CABINET AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADERSHIP IN DISARRAY, WITH SOME OF BERISHA'S AIDES CALLING FOR NEW ELECTIONS AND OTHERS MOOTING THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION.

9. BY MIDWEEK AFTER THE VOTE, COOLER HEADS HAD PREVAILED AND THE GOVERNMENT UNDERTOOK A CALMER ANALYSIS OF VOTE'S MEANING AND POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS. GOVERNMENT AND PD LEADERS INITIALLY EXPRESSED TO US THEIR FEELING THAT POPULAR DISCONTENT OVER THE SLOW PACE OF ECONOMIC REFORM WAS LARGELY TO BLAME FOR THE DEFEAT. AFTER FURTHER REFLECTION, THEY BROADENED THE LIST OF FACTORS TO INCLUDE THE INTENSITY OF BERISHA'S PRO-REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN, THE RHETORIC AND SLOGANEERING OF WHICH MAY HAVE REMINDED PEOPLE TOO MUCH OF THE BAD OLD DAYS. "THE PEOPLE DEMOCRATIZED THEMSELVES FASTER THAN WE DID," REMARKED [REDACTED] "THEY REALIZED THAT IT WAS ALRIGHT TO SAY 'NO [REDACTED] SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAD MISCALCULATED IN SEVERAL AREAS. FOR ONE, IT HAD HOPED THAT THE PRO-CONSTITUTION VOTE IN THE LARGER TOWNS, WHERE BERISHA HAD CAMPAIGNED HEAVILY, WOULD COMPENSATE FOR "NO" VOTERS IN THE VILLAGES, WHERE THE SOCIALISTS

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HAD A STRONGER GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION.

SOUTHERNERS: WORRIED ABOUT JOBS IN GREECE, NOT THE
ARCHBISHOP

10. [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD VISITED MANY MINORITY
VILLAGES PRIOR TO THE REFERENDUM. POLOFF ASKED HIM IF
THE MINORITY WAS BOTHERED BY ARTICLE SEVEN OF THE DRAFT
CONSTITUTION, WHEREBY LEADERS OF THE MAJOR RELIGIOUS
GROUPS MUST BE ALBANIA-BORN CITIZENS WITH TWENTY YEARS
RESIDENCE. ACCORDING TO THIS ARTICLE, GREEK-BORN
ORTHODOX ARCHBISHOP JANNULATOS WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP
HIS POSITION AS LEADER OF THE ALBANIAN CHURCH. [REDACTED]
SAID THAT MINORITY MEMBERS DID NOT REALLY CARE WHETHER
ARCHBISHOP JANNULATOS STAYED OR LEFT; THEY WERE MORE
CONCERNED THAT ANYTHING THAT HURT GREEK-ALBANIAN
RELATIONS WOULD JEOPARDIZE THEIR ACCESS TO JOBS SOUTH
OF THE BORDER.

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11. [REDACTED] AN
ETHNIC GREEK, SUPPORTED THIS SENTIMENT, SAYING THAT
SOUTHERNERS IN GENERAL FELT THE GOVERNMENT HAD
MISHANDLED RELATIONS WITH GREECE. HE ADDED, HOWEVER,
THAT ORTHODOX BELIEVERS WERE SPECIFICALLY CONCERNED
WITH THE ARTICLE ON RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THE POTENTIAL
FOR GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS.

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A VOTE AGAINST GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION

12. OUR PD AND GOVERNMENT INTERLOCUTORS DO NOT BELIEVE
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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THE "NO" VOTE WAS A SHOW OF SUPPORT FOR THE OPPOSITION.
THE SOCIALISTS THEMSELVES HAVE CAST THE VOTE IN TERMS
OF PROTEST AGAINST GOVERNMENT INADEQUACIES RATHER THAN
AS AN ENDORSEMENT OF THEMSELVES. HOWEVER, A THEME THAT
HAS SURFACED IN OPPOSITION CRITICISM AS WELL AS PD
SELF-CRITICISM IS THAT OF GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION.
ACCORDING TO NEARLY ALL PARTIES, VOTERS SENT THE
GOVERNMENT A SIGN OF THEIR CONCERN OVER CORRUPTION, AND
THE PERCEPTION OF CORRUPTION, AT ALL LEVELS OF
GOVERNMENT, WHICH IS SEEN TO HAVE INHIBITED PRIVATE
ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND POSSIBLY FOREIGN INVESTMENT. ALL
GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY STATEMENTS ABOUT THE

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REFERENDUM RESULTS STRESS THE NEED TO REDOUBLE THE
FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION.

SOCIALISTS: PEOPLE SENT ALL OF US A MESSAGE

13. AMBASSADOR CALLED NOVEMBER 8 ON SOCIALIST PARTY

CHARACTERIZED THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM AS A WAKE-
UP CALL NOT ONLY FOR BERISHA AND THE GOVERNMENT, BUT
FOR ALL POLITICIANS. HE SAID HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE

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AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
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PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO SEE THROUGH THE GOVERNMENT'S "OLD-STYLE" MEDIA BARRAGE. AMBASSADOR ASKED IF THE SOCIALISTS SAW THE REFERENDUM OUTCOME AS A VOTE AGAINST THE CONSTITUTION OR AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE.

[REDACTED] EMPHASIZED THAT THE VOTE WAS AGAINST A PARTICULAR DRAFT OF THE CONSTITUTION AND THE WAY IT WAS PRESENTED, NOT AGAINST THE IDEA OF A CONSTITUTION. HE ADDED THAT THE VOTE WAS AGAINST BOTH THE DRAFT AND THE GOVERNMENT, NOTING THAT PRIME MINISTER MEKSI HIMSELF HAD OPENED THE GOVERNMENT'S PRO-CONSTITUTION CAMPAIGN BY CHARACTERIZING THE REFERENDUM AS A TEST OF CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT.

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14. AMBASSADOR ASKED IF ECONOMIC CONCERNS HAD BEEN A FACTOR IN THE "NO" VOTE. [REDACTED] STATED THAT ECONOMIC MATTERS WERE INDEED ON PEOPLE'S MINDS. THERE ARE PEOPLE, HE CLAIMED, WHO CANNOT AFFORD BREAD. IN THE LAND-POOR NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY, PEOPLE EKE OUT A LIVING ON 300 SQUARE METERS OF LAND. MINES ARE CLOSED AND MANY PEOPLE ARE LIVING ON MEAGER UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

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CAUTIOUS VICTORS

15. ASKED WHAT THE SOCIALISTS WOULD DO WITH THIS VICTORY, [REDACTED] SAID THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD FIRST DISAVOW THE ANTI-CONSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES THAT LED TO THE REFERENDUM (REFERRING TO THE HASTILY PASSED "LAW ON REFERENDA"). NEXT, PARLIAMENT SHOULD IMMEDIATELY CONSIDER ONE OF THE ALTERNATE DRAFT CONSTITUTIONS

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PROPOSED EARLIER BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION. IF NO AGREEMENT CAN BE REACHED ON A NEW DRAFT, THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD DISSOLVE THE PARLIAMENT AND CALL NEW ELECTIONS. [REDACTED] SAID THAT THE SOCIALISTS WERE NOT CALLING FOR IMMEDIATE EARLY ELECTIONS TO AVOID THE PERCEPTION THAT THEY WERE CRASSLY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A MOMENTARY VICTORY ANYWAY, HE ADDED, THE PS COULD ONLY GET STRONGER OVER TIME AND WOULD BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO COMPETE IN ELECTIONS SIX MONTHS HENCE.

B6

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS: ONCE INSIDERS, NOW OUT

16. DURING AMBASSADOR'S CALL ON THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, [REDACTED] COMPLAINED THAT THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAD SPURNED ITS ONE-TIME

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COALITION PARTNERS AND HAD CHOSEN TO RUN THE GOVERNMENT ALONE. ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] THE GOVERNMENT CHOSE THE "WORST" OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTS; ONE WHICH WAS DESIGNED TO PERPETUATE THE PD IN POWER BY MAINTAINING THE "EXTRAORDINARY" POWERS WHICH, HE SAID, HAD ONLY BEEN PROVISIONALLY ACCORDED TO THE PRESIDENCY TO CARRY ALBANIA THROUGH THE TRANSITION FROM COMMUNISM.

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17. [REDACTED] FELT THE ALBANIAN PEOPLE HAD DISPLAYED GREAT POLITICAL MATURITY BY RECOGNIZING THIS REGRESSIVE TENDENCY TOWARDS ONE PARTY RULE AND VOTING DOWN THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION. HE ADDED THAT DISSATISFACTION WITH THE ECONOMY ALSO PLAYED A PART IN THE PEOPLE'S DECISION. HE SAID HIS SMALL PARTY STOOD TO BENEFIT BY THE POLITICAL SPACE OPENED UP BY THE REFERENDUM RESULT. ASKED BY THE AMBASSADOR IF THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CALL

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[REDACTED]

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EARLY ELECTIONS, [REDACTED] REPLIED IT WAS MORE IMPORTANT TO HAVE A CONSTITUTION FIRST. MEANWHILE, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WOULD TRY TO MAINTAIN THE MOMENTUM OF THEIR REFERENDUM VICTORY.

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ALLIANCE: "BERISHA DESTROYED BERISHA THROUGH TELEVISION"

18. DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE POLITICIANS ALSO INITIALLY MAINTAINED THAT THE VOTERS HAD BEEN TURNED OFF BY THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF. HOWEVER, THIS WAS SECONDARY TO THEIR VIEW THAT THE POPULACE HAD BEEN ALIENATED BY THE EXTENSIVE AND ONE-SIDED MEDIA CAMPAIGN. THIS HAD EXPOSED THE PD AND BERISHA FOR WHAT THEY ARE - OLD STYLE POLITICS IN A NEW PACKAGE. THEY DID NOT CARE FOR IT. "BERISHA HAS DESTROYED BERISHA THROUGH TELEVISION." AS WITH THE OTHERS, WHEN QUESTIONED THEY ADMITTED AN ECONOMIC DIMENSION TO THE EQUATION. (COMMENT. NEITHER THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, WHO ARE BADLY SPLIT OVER THE REFERENDUM ISSUE, NOR THE DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE, WITH PRECIOUS LITTLE PROVINCIAL PARTY APPARATUS, IS REALLY READY FOR AN ELECTION NOW. THEY

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[REDACTED]

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WOULD BOTH HAVE TROUBLE MAKING A THRESHOLD CUT. END
COMMENT)

NEED FOR HOUSECLEANING RECOGNIZED

 19. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT CORRUPTION IS ON MANY
 PEOPLE'S MINDS, AS A SELECT FEW IN AND OUTSIDE OF THE
 POLITICAL CLASS REPORTEDLY GET RICH FROM INFLUENCE
 PEDDLING, PAYOFFS, SERBIAN SANCTIONS-BUSTING, DRUG-
 RUNNING AND OTHER UNSAVORY ACTIVITIES. CORRUPTION IN
 THE GOVERNMENT MAY CONVINCED BERISHA OF THE NEED TO
 CLEAN HOUSE. RECENT GOVERNMENT AND PD STATEMENTS
 INDICATE CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT AND PARTY POSITIONS ARE
 IN THE OFFING. (DETAILS RELAYED SEPTTEL)

PART TWO: ANALYSIS

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WHICH ARGUMENT IS CORRECT?

20. OUR ASSESSMENT IS THAT THERE ARE ELEMENTS OF TRUTH IN ALL THE VARIOUS THEORIES EXPLAINING THE REFERENDUM RESULTS. THERE IS SIGNIFICANT DISAPPOINTMENT AMONG THE ELECTORATE OVER THE LACK OF VISIBLE PROGRESS ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT. THIS "QUALITY OF LIFE" ISSUE CUTS ACROSS PARTY AND SOCIETAL LINES AS AN ISSUE SHARED BY THE POPULACE IN GENERAL. HOWEVER, IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT THIS ISSUE ALONE CANNOT EXPLAIN WHAT WAS A FAIRLY STRONG REJECTION OF THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION. FOR ONE THING, RELATIVELY RECENT AND CREDIBLE POLLS HAVE INDICATED THAT ALBANIANS WERE GENERALLY AMONG THE MOST

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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ACCEPTING OF EUROPEAN ELECTORATES WHEN IT CAME TO ACCEPTANCE OF TEMPORARY ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS IN EXCHANGE FOR THE PROMISE OF BETTER TIMES AHEAD. THE CORRUPTION ISSUE IS NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN EITHER. PERHAPS SOME VOTERS WERE PUT OFF BY VISIONS OF CORRUPT OFFICIALS AND CHEATING CITIZENS TAKING UNFAIR ADVANTAGE OF "THE SYSTEM" TO AVOID THE DAILY DIFFICULTIES OF THE NORMAL CITIZENRY.

21. SIMILARLY, WHILE SOME DISCERNING VOTERS MAY HAVE DISLIKED VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSED DRAFT, WE DO NOT HAVE THE FEELING THAT THE QUALITY OF THE CONSTITUTION WAS THE CENTRAL, BURNING ISSUE OF THE REFERENDUM. FINALLY, THE VIEW OF THE SOCIALISTS AND THE DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE POLITICIANS, SUGGESTING A NEGATIVE POPULAR REACTION TO THE EXTENSIVELY PRO-CONSTITUTION MEDIA CAMPAIGN, THE REPORTEDLY HEAVILY-ENCOURAGED PARTICIPATION IN PRO-CONSTITUTION RALLIES AND OTHER PRESSURES ON BEHALF OF THE PD AND GOVERNMENT, IS WORTHY OF CLOSE SCRUTINY. THE EFFORT WAS VERY HEAVY-HANDED. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT SOME VOTERS WERE ALIENATED WHEN THEY SAW A FUTURE THAT TOO CLOSELY RESEMBLED THE PAST.

22. NEVERTHELESS, IT MUST BE STRESSED THAT WE SHARE THE VIEW OF MANY OTHERS THAT THIS CONTEST WAS NOT A HEAD TO HEAD VOTE ON THE SOCIALISTS VERSUS THE DEMOCRATS. THIS WAS A CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM THAT AFFORDED VOTERS DISGRUNTLED OVER "QUALITY OF LIFE" AND OTHER ISSUES THE CHANCE TO SEND A SAFE MESSAGE - A CHANCE THEY TOOK AND HOPEFULLY A MESSAGE THAT THE

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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GOVERNMENT WILL READ CORRECTLY.

ALBANIAN POLITICS: WHAT NEXT?

23. WE BELIEVE THE REFERENDUM RESULT HAS ALREADY HAD A POSITIVE EFFECT ON ALBANIAN POLITICS. THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PARTY WITH WHICH IT IS (PERHAPS TOO CLOSELY) ASSOCIATED, SEEM TO HAVE HEARD THE MESSAGE THAT ALL IS NOT WELL, IN THE ECONOMY AS WELL AS IN THE CONDUCT OF GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL. THE PEOPLE ARE NOT READY TO SWITCH HORSES, BUT THEY ARE CLEARLY UNAFRAID TO CRITICIZE A GOVERNMENT THAT WAS PERCEIVED AS USING OLD-STYLE, HEAVY-HANDED METHODS TO GET POPULAR CONSENT FOR ITS GOALS. AS [REDACTED] TOLD POLOFF: "THE ALBANIANS WANT A STRONG LEADER, BUT THEY ALSO LIKE TO REMIND HIM OF THEIR POWER ONCE IN A WHILE."

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24. IF THE GOVERNMENT AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY TAKE THIS LESSON TO HEART, THEY WILL FIND CERTAIN STEPS BOTH LOGICAL AND NECESSARY:

-- THEY MUST REEVALUATE THE CURRENT CONTROL OVER AND

[REDACTED]

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	PM-00	PRS-01	P-01	SB-00	SCT-03	SNP-00	SP-00
	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	SA-01	SNIS-00	NISC-01
	PMB-00	PRME-01	DRL-09	G-00	/032W		

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P 181352Z NOV 94
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6055
USMISSION USVIENNA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
USEU BRUSSELS
USLO SKOPJE

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HANDLING: n/a

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 05 OF 05 TIRANA 003376

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE, EUR/SE, AND DRL

BUDAPEST AND USVIENNA FOR USDEL CSCE

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AL

SUBJECT: THE FAILURE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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USE OF THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA;

-- THEY MUST TRY TO REACH AN INTERPARTY CONSENSUS ON
ACHIEVING THE FUTURE DRAFT CONSTITUTION;

-- THE PARTY MUST REEVALUATE AND RE-INVIGORATE ITS
GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT IS
HAPPENING OUTSIDE TIRANA; AND,

-- THE GOVERNMENT MUST RID ITSELF OF THOSE HIGH
OFFICIALS TAINTED IN THE PUBLIC EYE WITH CORRUPTION.

25. IF, INSTEAD, THE GOA TREATS THE REFERENDUM OUTCOME
AS PURELY A MATTER OF ADOPTING AND PROPOSING ANOTHER,
SLIGHTLY REWORKED, DRAFT CONSTITUTION, IT MAY WELL SET
ITSELF UP FOR ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT. WHILE THE
DETAILS OF A CONSTITUTION ARE UNDERSTOOD BY SOME
LIMITED ELEMENTS OF THE POPULATION, THE MAJORITY WILL
NEED TIME, DEBATE, AND EDUCATION BEFORE THEY WILL
APPRECIATE ANOTHER DRAFT BEING SERVED UP TO THEM.

EFFECT ON U.S.-ALBANIA RELATIONSHIP

26. BERISHA WILL BE PREOCCUPIED WITH HIS DOMESTIC
AGENDA FOR SOME TIME TO COME

HE WILL HAVE TO MEND FENCES WITH THE ELECTORATE
THAT SPURNED HIM, AND THIS MAY INCLUDE PAYING MORE
ATTENTION TO RIGHT WING FORCES BOTH WITHIN THE PD AND
WITHOUT THAT ARE AVERSE TO COMPROMISE ON ISSUES
INVOLVING GREECE.

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27. THE VOTE DOES BODE WELL, HOWEVER, FOR OUR OTHER, LONGER TERM GOALS OF PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC REFORM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ALBANIA. THE GOA AND THE PD RESISTED THE TEMPTATION TO MANIPULATE OR DENOUNCE THE RESULTS. IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO MOVE IMPORTANT ISSUES FORWARD WITHOUT A MORE PLURALISTIC APPROACH, BOTH IN AND OUT OF PARLIAMENT. THEY ALSO SEEM TO HAVE REALIZED THAT THE POWERFUL TOOL OF MEDIA CONTROL MUST BE EXERCISED WITH CARE. FINALLY, THEY ARE CLEARLY SENSITIZED TO CORRUPTION AS AN ISSUE. HOW THEY WILL UTILIZE THESE REVELATIONS AND REACT IS ALL STILL AN OPEN QUESTION. HOWEVER, IF PROPERLY INTERPRETED BY THEM, THIS LOSS COULD ULTIMATELY BECOME THEIR GAIN.

SMITH

NNNN