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Date Printed:
04 Jan 2002

DOC_NBR: 1994TIRANA03492

CHANNEL: n/a
HANDLING: n/a

PTQ6202

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RELEASED IN FULL

PAGE 01 TIRANA 03492 01 OF 02 010843Z
ACTION EUR-01

INFO	LOG-00	AID-01	BIB-01	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	OASY-00	DODE-00
	FBIE-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-01	ADS-00
	MOFM-04	MOF-03	M-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	PA-01
	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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R 010655Z DEC 94
FM AMEMBASSY TIRANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6117
INFO AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
USMISSION USVIENNA
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
USLO SKOPJE
USEU BRUSSELS

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 TIRANA 003492

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

BUDAPEST AND USVIENNA FOR USDEL CSCE

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AL
SUBJECT: REFERENDUM - DEMOCRACY GAINS, WITH POLITICAL

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PAGE 02 TIRANA 03492 01 OF 02 010843Z
PAINS

REF: TIRANA 03376

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

SUMMARY

2. THE NOVEMBER 6 REFERENDUM DEFEAT OF THE GOA'S DRAFT CONSTITUTION REVEALED A BASIC DISCONNECT BETWEEN AN INCREASINGLY ENTRENCHED GOVERNMENT-DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADERSHIP AND A POPULATION DISSATISFIED WITH ECONOMIC AUSTERITY MEASURES AND CORRUPTION. VOTERS ALSO

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16

RESENTED THE GOVERNMENT'S PATRONIZING ATTITUDE, SEEN IN THE INTENSE, RHETORIC-LADEN, PRO-CONSTITUTION CAMPAIGN.

3. PRESIDENT BERISHA IS EXPECTED TO MAKE CHANGES IN HIS GOVERNMENT WHILE TRYING TO FORGE A BROAD, INTERPARTY CONSENSUS ON THE PROCEDURE FOR ADOPTING A NEW CONSTITUTION. TO SATISFY THE ELECTORATE IN THE LONGER TERM, HE MUST REDUCE CORRUPTION AND ENSURE THAT ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS ARE SEEN TO BE SHARED BY ALL, NOT JUST THE HONEST. IN THE SHORTER TERM, HIS ROOM FOR MANEUVER ON KEY ISSUES, INCLUDING GREEK-ALBANIAN RELATIONS AND THE TRIAL OF THE OMONIA FIVE, MAY HAVE BEEN FURTHER LIMITED BY THE POPULAR REBUKE. END SUMMARY.

GOVERNMENT LOST TOUCH

4. THE GOA'S FAILURE TO GET POPULAR APPROVAL OF A

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PAGE 03 TIRANA 03492 01 OF 02 010843Z
DRAFT CONSTITUTION IN THE NOVEMBER 6 REFERENDUM WAS UNEXPECTED AND BASED ON A NUMBER OF FACTORS, BOTH RELATED AND UNRELATED TO THE DOCUMENT ITSELF. THE GOVERNMENT'S COMPLETE SURPRISE AT THE RESULTS DEMONSTRATES A FUNDAMENTAL FAILURE OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE BERISHA GOVERNMENT AND THE ALBANIAN PEOPLE. THIS CAN BE PARTLY ATTRIBUTED TO THE DIMINISHED CAPACITY OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S LOCAL ORGANIZATION. DURING TWO AND A HALF YEARS OF RULE, THE PD LOST THE VERY GRASSROOTS APPEAL THAT BROUGHT IT TO POWER IN 1992. IT CAME TO DEPEND FAR TOO MUCH IN THE CHARISMA OF PRESIDENT BERISHA AS IT BECAME TOO CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH THE STATE POWER APPARATUS IN TIRANA. THE HORTATORY, LOW-CONTENT, AND PEP RALLY CHARACTER OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PRO CONSTITUTION CAMPAIGN PROBABLY TURNED OFF MANY VOTERS THAT HAD, IN EX-MINISTER GENC RULI'S WORDS, "DEMOCRATIZED THEMSELVES FASTER THAN THE GOVERNMENT," AND REFUSED TO BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

ECONOMIC WOES: MISERY WANTS COMPANY

5. THE REFERENDUM BECAME A "SAFE" CONFIDENCE VOTE IN THE GOVERNMENT - A WAY TO PROTEST CURRENT POLICIES WITHOUT NECESSARILY OPTING FOR THE OPPOSITION. BERISHA WAS CLEARLY AS INTERESTED IN AN ENDORSEMENT OF HIS PRESIDENCY AS HE WAS IN GIVING ALBANIA A CONSTITUTION. THE NEGATIVE RESULT DEMONSTRATES FIRST AND FOREMOST, POPULAR DISCONTENT WITH THE HARSH PRICE OF ALBANIA'S RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC

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16

RESTRUCTURING EFFORT. THIS "QUALITY OF LIFE" ISSUE
INTERLACES WITH THE ISSUE OF CORRUPTION. SOME VOTERS

[REDACTED]

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PAGE 04 TIRANA 03492 01 OF 02 010843Z
SURELY REJECTED A PD AND GOVERNMENT SEEN AS TOLERATING
ENRICHMENT THROUGH DISHONESTY, WHILE CONDUCTING A
POLICY OF BELT TIGHTENING FOR THE PUBLIC.

THE HARD SELL BACKFIRED

6. A SECOND REASON FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFEAT WAS
SOMETHING THAT THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF COULD HAVE
CONTROLLED MORE EASILY THAN THE ECONOMY: ITS CAMPAIGN
FOR THE CONSTITUTION. THE VOTERS SEEM TO HAVE FELT THE
SAME EERIE DEJA-VU THAT MANY FOREIGN OBSERVERS
EXPERIENCED WATCHING THE BERISHA'S MASSIVE CAMPAIGN.
ELECTRONIC MEDIA COVERAGE WAS MASSIVELY ONE-SIDED, WITH
HOUR-LONG FOOTAGE OF BERISHA'S PRO-REFERENDUM RALLIES
AGAINST THE FEW MINUTES ALLOWED TO THE OPPOSITION.

7. ANOTHER MAJOR REASON FOR THE REFERENDUM RESULT WAS
THE NATURE OF THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION ITSELF. MOST
PEOPLE DOUBTLESS EITHER DID NOT READ OR DID NOT
UNDERSTAND THE DOCUMENT. THEY WERE EASILY SWAYED BY
OPPOSITION CLAIMS, BROUGHT HOME IN PARTICULAR BY THE
SOCIALIST PARTY'S STRONG LOCAL ORGANIZATION, THAT THE
DRAFT WOULD GIVE THE PRESIDENT FAR TOO MANY POWERS,

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PTQ6207

PAGE 01 TIRANA 03492 02 OF 02 010843Z
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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 02 OF 02 TIRANA 003492

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CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TIRANA 03492 02 OF 02 010843Z
PAINS

ESPECIALLY AT THE EXPENSE OF THE JUDICIARY, WOULD
PERPETUATE THE CLOSE PARTY-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP THAT
VOTERS ASSOCIATE WITH THE BAD OLD DAYS.

WORRIED GREECE WOULD SHUT DOOR

8. MANY VOTERS, ESPECIALLY IN THE SOUTH OF ALBANIA,
RECOGNIZED THAT GREECE HAD TAKEN STRONG EXCEPTION TO
CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF THE DRAFT. EVEN THOSE WHO WERE
NOT PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DRAFT ARTICLE
PUTTING TOUGH QUALIFICATIONS ON RELIGIOUS LEADERS
FEARED THAT PASSAGE OF THE CONSTITUTION WOULD RESULT IN
A STRONG GREEK REACTION. MANY WERE ANXIOUS THAT GREECE
WOULD LIMIT OR CLOSE THE EMIGRATION SAFETY VALVE TO THE
SOUTH, USED BY HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF ALBANIANS AND
THE SOURCE OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF REMITTANCES.

GOVERNMENT SHAKEUP

9. HAVING CONSIDERED AND REJECTED THE OPTIONS OF
PRESIDENTIAL RESIGNATION OR CALLING NEW ELECTIONS, THE
GOVERNMENT IS UNDERTAKING MAJOR HOUSEKEEPING IN THE
COMING DAYS. SEVERAL MINISTERS ARE EXPECTED TO BE
REPLACED. IN THIS WAY BERISHA HOPES TO BLUNT CRITICISM
OF GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION. LEADERSHIP CHANGES ARE ALSO
POSSIBLE AT DEMOCRATIC PARTY HEADQUARTERS. NO MAJOR
CHANGES TO THE ECONOMIC AUSTERITY PROGRAM HAVE YET BEEN
SUGGESTED, ALTHOUGH POPULAR DISCONTENT MAY RISE YET
FURTHER AS ELECTRICITY AND FUEL SUPPLIES ARE SQUEEZED

CONFIDENTIAL

Page - 4

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TIRANA 03492 02 OF 02 010843Z
DURING THE COLD WINTER MONTHS.

INTERPARTY AGREEMENT SOUGHT

10. THE GOA HAS ATTEMPTED TO GET INTER-PARTY AGREEMENT ON A PROCEDURE FOR DEVISING AND ADOPTING ANOTHER CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFT. WHILE BERISHA EXPRESSES OPTIMISM THAT A BROAD AGREEMENT CAN BE REACHED ON THE MODE OF ADOPTING A NEW DRAFT, THE OPPOSITION HAS BEEN CLEAR THAT ANY DRAFT MUST BE APPROVED BY THE PARLIAMENT. THE GOVERNMENT, MEANWHILE, INSISTS THAT THE CONSTITUTION CAN ONLY BE ACCEPTED BY ANOTHER PLEBESCITE.

GOVERNMENT LESS RESPONSIVE ON OUR ISSUES

11. WHILE BERISHA HAS DECIDED TO HANG TOUGH, GOVERNMENT CHANGES ARE IN THE OFFING AND THE POLITICAL SITUATION WILL REMAIN FLUID FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. THIS DOES NOT BODE WELL FOR ANY SUSTAINABLE GOA INITIATIVE FOR DIALOGUE WITH GREECE AS WELL AS FOR ANY DRAMATIC GESTURE OF EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY AS THE TRIAL OF THE FIVE ETHNIC GREEK "OMONIA" LEADERS REACHES THE FINAL APPEAL.

BUT DEMOCRACY HAS ITS DAY

12. THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THE ALBANIAN PEOPLE WERE CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO SEND A BOLD MESSAGE AGAINST THE COZY GOVERNMENT-DEMOCRATIC PARTY RELATIONSHIP AND THE ATTENDANT PERCEPTION THAT IT IS THE BREEDING PLACE OF INCREASING CORRUPTION. BERISHA SHOULD NOT

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 TIRANA 03492 02 OF 02 010843Z
UNDERESTIMATE THEM AGAIN, PARTICULARLY AS 1996
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS APPROACH.

FIGHTING CORRUPTION TO SELL AUSTERITY

13. BERISHA IS UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO SIGNIFICANTLY SOFTEN ECONOMIC AUSTERITY MEASURES WITHOUT RISKING INTERNATIONAL AID AND LONG TERM ECONOMIC VIABILITY. HE CAN DO FIGHT CORRUPTION AND BUILD THE PERCEPTION THAT HARDSHIP IS ENDURED MORE BROADLY, IN HOPES THAT ALBANIANS WILL REAP THE FIRST FRUITS OF THEIR PATIENCE BEFORE THE 1996 ELECTIONS.

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