

UNCLASSIFIED

Current Class: CONFIDENTIAL
Current Handling: n/a
Document Number: 1991SOFIA01492

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.5(D)

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P 131115Z MAR 91
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5512
INFO RUEHXE/EASTERN EUROPEAN POSTS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SOFIA 01492

BRUSSELS FOR USEC - AMB. NILES

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, AL, BU
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH ALBANIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS

REF: SOFIA 1398

1. CONFIDENTIAL ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY. TWO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ALBANIAN OPPOSITION DESCRIBED THEIR PARTY, ITS PROGRAM, ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERICS, AND THE GENERAL SITUATION IN ALBANIA, MARCH 5. THE LARGELY INTELLECTUAL LEADERSHIP HAS FORGED
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A CHARTER EMBRACING DEMOCRACY, FREE MARKET ECONOMICS, THE HELSINKI PRINCIPLES, AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THEY ARE GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC THAT THEY WILL GARNER ENOUGH SEATS TO FRUSTRATE COMMUNIST ATTEMPTS TO PASS AN INSUFFICIENTLY PROGRESSIVE CONSTITUTION THROUGH THE NEW ASSEMBLY. THEIR SMALL BUT SELF-SUFFICIENT NEWSPAPER AND LIMITED ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC MEDIA HAVE BEEN HELPFUL, BUT THEY ARE HOPEFUL OF PRE AND POST ELECTORAL SUPPORT FROM THE WEST.

3. THEY CHARACTERIZED RAMIZ ALIA AS A POLITICAL

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OPPORTUNIST DEDICATED TO TOTALITARIANISM. TOGETHER WITH THE YUGOSLAVS, ALIA HAD DISTORTED EARLY PARTY STATEMENTS REGARDING KOSOVO. WHILE THE PAST TWO WEEKS OF TERROR HAD CHANGED THE SITUATION SOMEWHAT, THE TWO WERE CONVINCED THAT DEMOCRACY SOONER RATHER THAN LATER, WOULD COME ALSO TO ALBANIA. END SUMMARY.

4. UNION OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES (BULGARIAN OPPOSITION) CONTACTS PUT POLEC CHIEF IN TOUCH WITH [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] MARCH 5, WHO IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS MEMBERS OF THE "DIRECTIONAL COMMISSION" OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF ALBANIA. THE TWO WERE TRAVELLING PRIMARILY TO ESTABLISH CONTACT WITH THE BULGARIAN OPPOSITION AND HAD EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO MEET WITH THE U.S. EMBASSY IN SOFIA. TRAVEL TO BELGRADE FOR THIS PURPOSE WAS "VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE." THE TWO DISCUSSED THE PARTY AND ALBANIAN POLITICS FOR NEARLY TWO HOURS AT THE EMBASSY.

THE PARTY AND ITS PROGRAM
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5. [REDACTED] DESCRIBED THE PARTY AS DEVELOPING OUT OF THE STUDENT MOVEMENT CENTERED AT TIRANA UNIVERSITY. SOME 80,000 MEMBERS ARE LED BY A DIRECTIONAL COMMISSION OF 21 PERSONS, ALL BUT A FEW OF THEM UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AND "PRO-DEMOCRATIC," PROMINENT INTELLECTUALS. THE MOST PROMINENT OF THE LEADERS ARE:

DR. SALI BERISHA, CHAIRMAN, CARDIOLOGIST, 46;

DR. GRAMAZ PASHKO, ECONOMIST, CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISOR, PROF. OF ECONOMICS AT TIRANA U., 37;

MR. AZEM HAIDARI, STUDENT LEADER, 28;

DR. ALEXANDER MEKSI, ARCHEOLOGIST, SPEAKS ITALIAN AND ENGLISH (FAIR), APPROXIMATELY 55-60 [REDACTED]

PROF. ARBEND IMAMI, THEATER DIRECTOR, SPEAKS ITALIAN AND ENGLISH (FAIR), APPROXIMATELY 35 [REDACTED];

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PROF. EDUARD SELAMI, PHILOSOPHER;
MR. NERITAN SEKA.

6. THE PARTY CHARTER EMBRACES A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT FOUNDED ON PRINCIPLES OF PRIVATE PROPERTY, MARKET ECONOMICS AND PRIVATIZATION THROUGH THE USE OF
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FOREIGN CAPITAL. MEMBERSHIP IN THE PARTY IS OPEN TO ALL SUBSCRIBING TO DEMOCRATIC IDEALS. IMAMI ALLEGED THAT THE SOCIAL BASE FOR THE COMMUNIST (LABOR) PARTY DID NOT EXIST OUTSIDE OF BUREAUCRATIC AND MILITARY CIRCLES. AS A RESULT THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY WAS NOW THE TRUE PARTY "OF THE MASS(ES)." THE PARTY WAS STRONG IN THE LARGER CITIES BUT WEAKER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, WHERE FEAR OF THE COMMUNISTS AND CONTROL BY THE NOMENKLATURA WAS STRONG. THERE WAS ALSO A NORTH/SOUTH DISTINCTION, WITH THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (LED BY COMMUNISTS) MORE CONSERVATIVE IN THE SOUTH.

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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
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BRUSSELS FOR USEC - AMB. NILES

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MEDIA SUPPORT

7. "RILINDJA DEMOKRATIKE" (DEMOCRATIC RENAISSANCE)
SERVES AS THE PARTY'S PRESS ORGAN, WITH A CIRCULATION
OF 60,000. AFTER RECEIPT OF SOME INITIAL ASSISTANCE
FROM THE STATE, THE PAPER IS NOW SELF-FINANCING; HOWEVER,
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IT IS STILL PRINTED IN A STATE-CONTROLLED PRINTING
FACILITY. FROKK CHUPI SERVES AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, AND
PRECH ZOGAI, ALSO A MEMBER OF THE DIRECTIONAL COMMISSION,
SERVES AS POLITICAL DIRECTOR.

8. THE PARTY HAS HAD LIMITED ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC MEDIA,
PRIMARILY TO PRESENT ITS PROGRAM TO THE PEOPLE.
ADDITIONAL TV TIME WAS PLANNED "LATER ON" IN THE
CAMPAIGN. SOME PRESS CONFERENCES AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS
HAD BEEN TELEVISED, FOR EXAMPLE ON THE TOPICS OF
DEPOLITICIZATION AND PROPOSED ELECTORAL SYSTEM, AND THE
PARTY REPRESENTATIVES HAD SUCCESSFULLY DEMONSTRATED
THEY HAD "NOTHING IN COMMON" WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

9. [] WAS QUICK TO PRAISE THE VOICE OF AMERICA AS
CRITICAL TO THE PARTY'S EFFORTS. VOA WAS THE MOST POPU-
LAR RADIO PROGRAM IN ALBANIA. THE CITIZENS ABANDON
THEIR WORK TO RETRN HOME FOR THE VOA BROADCASTS.
CONTACTING VOA BY TELEPHONE, THE PARTY FREQUENTLY FOUND
ITS MOST RECENT STATEMENTS BROADCAST WITHIN HOURS, IF
NOT SOONER. MEKSI ASSERTED THAT THE "STATE DEPARTMENT
STATEMENTS" CONCERNING ALBANIA HAD ALSO PROVED "VERY
IMPORTANT."

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THE ELECTIONS

10. ELECTIONS ARE SET FOR 31 MARCH WITH RUNOFFS IN THE
ALL-MAJORITARIAN SCHEME SET FOR APRIL 14. THE DEMOCRATS
HAD ARGUED FOR A PROPORTIONAL ASPECT, BUT THEY HAD NOT
PREVAILED. NUMEROUS PARTIES AND MOVEMENTS (THEY NAMED
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ABOUT TEN) WOULD PARTICIPATE FOR 250 SEATS IN A UNICAMERAL
PARLIAMENT. THE DEMOCRATS WERE TO REGISTER THEIR CANDI-
DATES DURING THE WEEK OF MARCH 11. THEY HAD NOT FORMED
ANY "UMBRELLA" OPPOSITION ORGANIZATION, PRIMARILY
BECAUSE WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE REPUBLICAN
PARTY, THEY WERE UNSURE OF THE LEANINGS OF MANY OF THE
OTHERS. THERE WAS AN "ECOLOGISTS" PARTY, BUT THEY KNEW
ONLY THREE OF THE LEADERS FROM THEIR TV APPEARANCES.
THE AGRARIAN PARTY WAS PERHAPS SINCERE, BUT SMALL AND
DOMINATED BY ELDERLY PERSONS. THEY DID HAVE AN AGREEMENT
FOR SECOND (RUNOFF) ROUND COOPERATION WITH THE
REPUBLICAN PARTY.

11. [REDACTED] ARGUED THAT THEY HAD MORE SUPPORT
THAN ANY OTHER PARTY, INCLUDING THE COMMUNIST (LABOR)
PARTY. MOST ALBANIANS WERE DISGUSTED WITH COMMUNISM.
OUTSIDE OF BUREAUCRATIC AND MILITARY CIRCLES ONLY FEAR
WOULD MOTIVATE A LABOR PARTY VOTE. MANY MEMBERS OF THE
LABOR PARTY HAD ALREADY EXPRESSED THEIR INTENTION TO
VOTE DEMOCRATIC. THEIR MAIN CONCERNS WERE THAT THE
COMMUNISTS WOULD EMPLOY FEAR TO MANIPULATE VOTERS AND
THAT THE LABOR PARTY WOULD NOT ACCEPT AN ELECTORAL DEFEAT.
THE PRESENCE OF OBSERVERS WOULD BE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.
THEY EXPECTED ABOUT 500, INCLUDING SOME FROM NDI AND NRI.
THEY GROANED AUDIBLY WHEN POLOFF INFORMED THEM THAT
PROPOSED U.S. OBSERVERS WERE HAVING VISA DIFFICULTIES,
AND THEY EXCHANGED KNOWING GLANCES.

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12. BOTH MEN FELT IT POSSIBLE THAT THE PARTY COULD WIN
THE ELECTIONS OUTRIGHT, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE NOT EMPHATIC
OR OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC ON THIS POINT. THEIR MAIN GOAL
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WAS TO WIN MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF THE SEATS. BY SO
DOING, THEY COULD FRUSTRATE LABOR PARTY ATTEMPTS TO PASS
THROUGH THE ASSEMBLY A PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFT
WHICH CONTAINED ONLY TOKEN REFORMS AND WAS INSUFFICIENTLY
PROGRESSIVE. WITH THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE THEN ON THE
TABLE, THEY FELT THEY COULD PRODUCE A BETTER DOCUMENT,
EVEN WITHOUT A MAJORITY. THIS WAS NOT TO BE A CONSTI-
TUENT ASSEMBLY, BUT IT MIGHT BECOME ONE DE FACTO, IF
THEY GAINED ENOUGH SEATS. THE MAIN PROBLEMS OF THE
PROPOSED DRAFT CENTERED AROUND THE ISSUES OF HUMAN

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RIGHTS AND PRIVATE PROPERTY.

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P 131115Z MAR 91
FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA
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BRUSSELS FOR USEC - AMB. NILES

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13. THEY HAD RECENTLY HEARD RUMORS OF A POSSIBLE SCHISM IN THE MAKING WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY. THEY WERE NOT AT ALL SURE WHETHER THE RUMORS WERE ACCURATE OR MERELY WISHFUL THINKING. SOME LABOR POLITICIANS ARE ALLEGEDLY CONSIDERING FOUNDING A "SOCIALIST" PARTY. THEIR LEADERS WOULD INCLUDE SOME OF THE MORE "ENLIGHTENED" COMMUNISTS, MANY OF WHOM HAD PREVIOUSLY LIVED ABROAD.

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RAMIZ ALIA

14. BOTH MEN WERE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF RAMIZ ALIA, CHARACTERIZING HIM AS "DEDICATED TO TOTALITARIANISM,"

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"FLATLY COMMUNIST," AND "INCAPABLE" OF REFORM. ALIA WAS MERELY TRYING TO "PRESERVE HIMSELF." HE WAS LACKING IN POLITICAL MORALS AND PERFECTLY CAPABLE OF SELLING OUT HIS FRIENDS AS HE HAD SHOWN WITH (FORMER PRIME MINISTER?) CHARCHANI. ALIA WAS, NEVERTHELESS IN A TOUGH SITUATION. HIS TOKEN LIBERALIZATIONS HAD ANGERED THE CONSERVATIVE WING OF HIS PARTY, WHO SEE HIM AS A TRAITOR. HE WILL MAKE EVERY ATTEMPT TO AVOID VIOLENT CONFRONTATION. HE DOES NOT "WANT BLOOD" BECAUSE HE REALIZES THAT THE GREATEST DANGER WILL ULTIMATELY BE TO THE COMMUNISTS. THEY ADMITTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE MILITARY COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR. THE LEADERSHIP WOULD DO WHAT IT WAS TOLD. THEY WERE THICK AND INCAPABLE OF INDEPENDENT THOUGHT. THEY HAD RECENTLY BEEN EMPLOYED TO "TERRORIZE" THE COUNTRYSIDE, ALONG WITH THE SECRET POLICE. HOWEVER, IMAMI CLAIMED THAT MILITARY COMMANDERS HAD SHRUNK FROM ALIA'S ALLEGED RECENT OFFER OF IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW, WHEN THEY WERE ALSO INFORMED THAT THE COUNTRY HAD ONLY ABOUT A TEN-DAY FOOD SUPPLY.

YUGOSLAVIA

15. DISCUSSING ALBANIAN/YUGOSLAV RELATIONS, [REDACTED] STATED, "THE KEY TO ALBANIA IS IN THE HANDS OF THE
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YUGOSLAWS." VIRTUALLY ALL OF ALBANIA'S TRADE WAS WITH THE SFRY AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF ALBANIA HAD BEEN CREATED IN THE PRESENCE OF YUGOSLAV COMMUNISTS. ALIA AND MILOSEVIC "STAND FOR TOTALITARIANISM," AND TOGETHER THEIR PROPAGANDA HAD DISTORTED PREVIOUS DEMOCRATIC PARTY STATEMENTS REGARDING KOSOVO. BOTH MEN SHARED VISIBLE CONSTERNATION AND [REDACTED] BURIED HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS WHEN POLOFF RAISED THE ISSUE OF KOSOVO. THE PARTY HAD NO TERRITORIAL DESIGNS ON KOSOVO. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE PARTY WAS DESIGNED TO BRING ALBANIA INTO EUROPE. THEY DO WANT "ALL ALBANIANS TO BE ABLE TO USE THEIR OWN LANGUAGE," AND THEY DO RESPECT "ALBANIAN ASPIRATIONS FOR UNIFICATION WITH KOSOVO," BUT "ONLY IN THE CONCEPT OF THE HELSINKI ACCORDS," WHICH THE PARTY CHARTER RECOGNIZES.

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WESTERN ASSISTANCE

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16. BOTH MEN STRESSED THE NEED FOR WESTERN ASSISTANCE TO ALBANIA. THE ECONOMY HAS A "CATASTROPE." THE CURRENT FOREIGN DEBT WAS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF 300 MILLION USD, ALL COMPILED LAST YEAR IN EXCHANGE FOR IMPORTANT OF RAW MATERIALS. HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FROM THE WEST, INCLUDING LARGE AMOUNTS OF FOOD AID, WOULD BE ESSENTIAL. THE GREEKS, TURKS, AND ITALIANS HAD OFFERED SOME HELP. EVENTS OF THE LAST TWO WEEKS HAD BROUGHT RESERVATIONS TO PREVIOUS AUSTRIAN OFFERS.

17. ASIDE FROM ELECTORAL OBSERVERS, THE WEST COULD BE INSTRUMENTAL IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-ELECTORAL PERIOD BY
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INSISTING THAT THE LABOR PARTY ABIDE BY THE RESULTS. BOTH MEN EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT IT WOULD SOON NOT BE NECESSARY TO TRAVEL TO SOFIA TO MEET WITH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE U.S. EMBASSY. POLOFF RESPONDED ONLY THAT IT WAS "STILL UNCLEAR" TO HIM WHEN THEY MIGHT EXPECT USG DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN TIRANA. [REDACTED] ALSO EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRES FOR MEETINGS IN ROME AS DESCRIBED REPTEL.

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COMMENT

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-----4C85FB 131132Z /23

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18. WE WOULD OFFER ONLY LIMITED COMMENT ON THIS EXCHANGE.
BOTH [REDACTED] SEEMED SINCERE, INTELLIGENT AND
ARTICULATE; HOWEVER, THEY ALSO CAME ACROSS AS POLITICALLY
NAIVE. THIS IS PERHAPS, UNDERSTANDABLE, GIVEN THEIR
ENVIRONMENT. THEIR COMMENTS ON MORE COMPLETE MEDIA
ACCESS "LATER ON" IN THE CAMPAIGN BELIES THE URGENCY
OF THE MOMENT. THEIR NEAR AFTERTHOUGHT ADMISSION OF THE
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IMPORTANCE OF THE MILITARY AND THE HOPE FOR WIDESPREAD
SUPPORT IN AN ATMOSPHERE FREE OF MANIPULATION THROUGH
FEAR RUN COUNTER TO OUR LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF THE
DEGREE OF CONTROL STILL EXERCISED BY THE REGIME. END
COMMENT. HILL

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