

UNCLASSIFIED

E17

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

P820 066 - 1846

NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

RELEASED IN FULL



BUREAU OF  
INTELLIGENCE  
AND RESEARCH

ASSESSMENTS  
AND  
RESEARCH

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: WILLIAM J. GEHRON  
DATE/CASE ID: 20 NOV 2002 200103230

(U) ALBANIA AFTER SHEHU: THE INTERNAL SCENE

(C) Summary

The December "suicide" of Albanian Premier Mehmet Shehu, heir apparent to 73-year-old party leader Enver Hoxha, may destroy prospects for a smooth regime succession and seriously weaken the country's prospects for maintaining its independence and its unique brand of Marxism-Leninism.

Speculation about a Shehu-Hoxha power struggle cannot be confirmed, but persisting suspicion exists among some Yugoslavs and Western diplomats that an internal party dispute had taken place. If Shehu's death was connected with policy differences with Hoxha, then the latter's control of the regime probably has been strengthened, as has been his ability to dictate a successor. Given Albania's strategic location in the Balkans and on the Adriatic, signs of political factionalism and internal instability might tempt Moscow and Belgrade to intervene, particularly during a post-Hoxha period.

\* \* \* \* \*

(U) Albanian Regime Announces Shehu "Suicide"

On December 18, Radio Tirana announced that Premier Mehmet Shehu, 68, had committed suicide early that morning in a "moment of nervous crisis." On the following day, the Albanian party daily, Zeri i Popullit, published the announcement--signed by the Party Central Committee, the Presidium of the People's Assembly, and the Council of Ministers--on its front page. The brief obituary made no mention of Shehu's close collaboration with party leader Hoxha for almost 40 years, or his importance and stature within the Albanian hierarchy--second only to that of Hoxha himself. While

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

RDS-1,3 4/2/02 (Bellocchi, N.)

UNCLASSIFIED

Report 351-AR  
April 2, 1982

UNCLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 2 -

terse acknowledgment was made of Shehu's participation in the Spanish Civil War, his role in the Albanian wartime resistance, and his impressive party and government positions (Party Politburo member, Army General, Chief of the General Staff, Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Defense, and Premier), no period of mourning or state funeral was decreed.<sup>1/</sup>

(U) Shehu became a "non-person": his portraits were removed from public places and his books from libraries and bookshops. During the January parliamentary session which approved his successor as Premier, Shehu was not honored with a moment of silence, even though he had served in that body for some 35 years. Neither Hoxha nor the new Premier mentioned his name during their speeches.

(C/NF) Rumors of Shehu-Hoxha Policy Differences

Shehu's sudden death and his relegation to official oblivion provoked rumors and speculation abroad, above all in Belgrade, that he had lost a power struggle with Hoxha. The Yugoslav media and some high-level officials expounded on this view, but offered no evidence to support it. One of Yugoslavia's most prestigious journals even advanced a version that had the two Albanian leaders locked in a "shoot-out" at a December 17 meeting of party leaders in Tirana.

Yugoslav speculation, rumor, and commentary were generally seen as part of a "disinformation" campaign against Albania related to the polemics over ethnic Albanian unrest in Yugoslavia. But some Western diplomats tended to give credence to suggestions that Shehu's death was associated with an internal party dispute over the choice of a successor to the 73-year-old, reportedly-ailing Hoxha, or over the easing of Albania's foreign isolation and its harsh domestic repression.

Albanian diplomats sought to explain the regime's treatment of Shehu and to refute speculation about an internal power struggle. Failure to honor Shehu, they claimed, accorded with the traditional Albanian position that suicide was a crime against society and a "disgraceful act aimed against the Party." The

<sup>1/</sup> (U) The regime's treatment of Shehu contrasted starkly with that accorded Hysni Kapo, third-ranking member of the hierarchy, who died in September 1979. Zeri I Popullit on that occasion announced a four-day mourning period and featured photographs of Hoxha and Shehu as the leading pallbearers. Shehu delivered the main eulogy.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

UNCLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 3 -

diplomats pointed out that the party had treated the few other suicides of its officials in a similar manner and that Shehu's obituary noted the "important duties" he had been given in "appreciation of his merits." Yugoslav commentary on the suicide was dismissed as sheer propaganda, and it was asserted that no party meeting had taken place in Tirana on December 17.

Fate of Shehu's Relatives and Allies Unknown

(C/NF) No reliable information exists to challenge the official Albanian version of Shehu's death. He apparently had not fallen into sudden political disgrace; he had been reelected to the party hierarchy at the November 1981 Party Congress, where he had delivered a lengthy report on the economy and other foreign and domestic policy issues, all essentially following the line established in Hoxha's keynote address to the Congress. Shehu did sit while delivering his report--presumably because of illness.<sup>2/</sup> Whatever the actual state of his health, he carried out his duties as Premier and met with visiting Greek and Romanian officials only days before his death. Subsequent reporting by these officials gave no indication of any physical or mental distress.

(C) Since his death, unconfirmed reports and rumors allege that Shehu's relatives and supporters occupying leading positions are being systematically replaced as a first step in Hoxha's effort to eliminate this source of actual or potential opposition and to enhance his own power. Among those allegedly affected in the purges are:

- Shehu's wife, a longtime member of the Party Central Committee and Director of the Higher Party School in Tirana. She reportedly has been dismissed from all her functions and arrested.
- Fecor Shehu, who was dismissed as Minister of Internal Affairs in the cabinet reshuffle of January 15. The exact relationship between Mehmet Shehu and Fecor Shehu cannot be determined: Yugoslav and Soviet media said that Fecor was Shehu's nephew, while some confidential reporting alleges he was a son or brother. Albanian diplomats abroad deny any

<sup>2/</sup> (C) Shehu was said to have a kidney disorder which resulted in extreme nervousness. He traveled to France in 1972 and 1973 for unspecified medical treatment.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 4 -

family relationship between the two.<sup>3/</sup> If such a relationship did exist, the subsequent changes could suggest Hoxha-Shehu differences. Fecor Shehu's dismissal from the Cabinet constituted the only major change in the reshuffle. No information is available about his present status--i.e., whether he was assigned other functions or lost his membership in the Central Committee.

(U) On the other hand, Defense Minister Kadri Hasbiu, Shehu's brother-in-law, retained his portfolio. He also appeared publicly with Hoxha and other members of the "old guard" at an art exhibition in Tirana, as if to refute speculation that Shehu's relatives and supporters were being purged and to underline the continuity and closeness of the hierarchy.

(U) New Premier Pledges To Continue Hoxha Policies

On January 14, Hoxha addressed the Albanian Parliament and proposed Adil Carcani as the new Premier. He praised Carcani--60 years old, a member of the Party Politburo since 1956, Deputy Premier since 1965, and First Deputy Premier since 1974--for his "ceaseless and relentless" struggle against Albania's enemies.

In his maiden address as Premier, after having received unanimous endorsement from the Parliament, Carcani:

--indicated that no changes in either foreign or domestic policies were being contemplated. He closely followed the line enunciated by Hoxha at the November Party Congress, and promised to "implement fully the correct Marxist-Leninist line" as it has been established and interpreted by Hoxha;

--denied that Albania was "isolated"; rather, he said, it was prepared to establish relations with selected countries, in addition to those with which it currently maintains diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations, on the basis of mutual

3/ (C) Fecor Shehu became Minister of Internal Affairs in early 1980; he succeeded Hasbiu, who had become Minister of Defense, replacing Mehmet Shehu. The latter had assumed the defense portfolio--while remaining Premier--from Defense Minister Balluku, who was purged (and allegedly executed) in 1974. Hasbiu had been Minister of Internal Affairs from 1954 to 1980; he had assumed that portfolio when Mehmet Shehu became Premier. The exchanges and replacements involving the Shehus and Hasbiu illustrate the character of the postwar Albanian leadership, which has been a clique of a few families, relatives, and clan members.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 5 -

interest, non-interference, equality, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity;

- excluded diplomatic or any other kind of relations with the US and the USSR. Moscow and its Warsaw Pact allies were described as being among "our most ferocious enemies";
- reaffirmed Albania's rejection and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact in 1968;<sup>4/</sup>
- reiterated Hoxha's pledges to fight alongside the Yugoslavs if they were attacked by either of the superpowers;
- criticized Yugoslavia (as did Hoxha at length at the Congress) for its "savage, revanchist, chauvinistic, and terrorist" policies against the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia and for waging a "cold war" against Albania;
- denied Albania had interfered or would interfere in Yugoslavia's internal affairs or had made any territorial claims against Yugoslavia, but vowed to continue to defend "all the rights pertaining to our Albanian brethren" in Yugoslavia; and
- asserted that Albania's policy toward Yugoslavia had not changed since the Congress and that Albania wanted to continue "normal diplomatic, trade, and cultural relations" with Yugoslavia, but only on the basis of the "well-known principles of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality, and respect for sovereignty and for each country's territorial integrity."

Leadership Changes Underscore Hoxha's Control; No Evidence of Factionalism

(C) Except for the possible dismissal of Fecor Shehu, the January 15 cabinet reshuffle--as well as changes in the party leadership at the November Congress--apparently were carried out under Hoxha's direction and not motivated by political factionalism or any "settling of personal accounts."

(U) Party Politburo member and Party Secretary Hekuran Isai replaced Fecor Shehu as Minister of Internal Affairs; two other replacements in the Cabinet also came from the Politburo,

<sup>4/</sup> (C) Carcani's comments were clearly in response to Yugoslav insinuations that Moscow and other Warsaw Pact members had not accepted Tirana's September 1968 denunciation and withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Albania had been a founding member of the Pact in 1955, with Shehu as the Albanian signatory.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 6 -

underscoring the new incumbents' credentials as party/Hoxha stalwarts and strengthening party control over the government apparatus. Haki Toska was dropped as Minister of Finance, but his demotion seems to have resulted from incompetence rather than any political differences with Hoxha. Toska had not been reelected to the Politburo in November, but he retained his membership in the Central Committee, indicating he was still in good grace with the party leadership. All three Deputy Premiers and 12 other cabinet members remained in place.

(C) The leadership changes that took place at the Party Congress made it clear that the privileged members of the partisan-dominated "old guard" would continue to wield decisive power.<sup>5/</sup> However, Hoxha stated that "new blood" had to be brought into the Central Committee and that "no political problem" (read purge) was involved in the cases of those not reelected to the Politburo or Central Committee. (All Central Committee members were "unanimously" elected by the congress delegates.) Some officials, Hoxha said, were no longer able to carry out leadership responsibilities because of ill health, old age, or incompetence. He also intimated that no political disgrace should be inferred from the demotions of three Politburo members (whose tenure in that top policymaking body extended back to 1948, 1952, and 1961); they would remain on the Central Committee. He said that those who would not be reelected understood the situation "correctly" and would remain honored and trusted "comrades."<sup>6/</sup> The main criteria for the "regeneration" process under way were political and ideological loyalty, capability, and a proper balance between younger and older members and between the sexes.

5/ (U) The "old guard" now includes Hoxha, Ramiz Alia (ideology), Carcani (government and economy), Hasbiu (military), Manush Myftiu (culture), and Rita Marko (trade unions). All are full members of the Politburo who served in the communist resistance movement during World War II. Their average age is 63.

6/ (C) At the 1976 Congress, Hoxha revealed the purges and executions of former Defense Minister Balluku and other "traitors," consigning them to the "rubbish heap of history." It is not clear why they were purged: whether they opposed various domestic political and economic policies or the foreign policy of Hoxha and Shehu, whether they were pro-Soviet, pro-Yugoslav, pro-Chinese, or anti-Chinese (at that time Albanian-Chinese relations were being affected by Chinese efforts to mend relations with the US and Yugoslavia), or whether they favored expanding ties with various Western countries.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

UNCLASSIFIED

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 7 -

(U) Four new members were added to the Politburo, increasing its membership to 18 (13 full and 5 alternate members): the Central Committee had 81 full and 39 candidate members, a slight increase from the 1976 Congress. The average age in the Central Committee was now 49, compared with 50.7 in 1976. Hoxha also claimed that the distribution between age groups and the sexes had improved, along with educational qualifications. The intelligentsia was represented in such new areas as science, literature, art, journalism, and culture--evidently the first real effort to include members of the intelligentsia since the purges of cultural-literary officials and personalities in 1973.

(C) Impact of Shehu's Death on Albania

Shehu's death appears to have had little effect on the internal situation. There are no signs of political factionalism, instability, or any weakening of Hoxha's control. Some Western diplomats profess to see a hardening of Albania's isolationism since Shehu's death, particularly where Tirana's relations with the West are concerned. But there are also opposite indications--e.g., Albanian diplomats in Vienna now claim that Tirana is prepared to normalize its relations with Spain and other Mediterranean countries.

Despite continuing rumor and speculation about Shehu's relatives and supporters being purged, no evidence is available to substantiate, or refute, them. The fate of Shehu's wife may throw some light on the situation, as well as on the circumstances of his "suicide"; whether his "treachery" will one day be exposed at a party congress or whether he will eventually be rehabilitated to Albania's pantheon of nationalist and communist heroes remains to be seen. Albania is an extremely closed society, with any kind of information pertaining to the leadership difficult to come by--unless it has first been carefully screened through official sources.<sup>7/</sup>

Little was known about the actual relationship between Hoxha and Shehu, but it was widely conceded that Shehu was the second most powerful leader in Albania. He had supported Hoxha during

<sup>7/</sup> (C/NF) Western diplomats resident in Tirana generally admit they had no knowledge of any Hoxha-Shehu differences or party factionalism. These diplomats also admit they have almost no contact with Albanian officials and none with the ordinary citizen. Rumors that circulated in the diplomatic community in Tirana on January 13 about an assassination attempt against Hoxha were suspected of having originated with the Yugoslav Embassy there, as part of Belgrade's "disinformation" effort against Hoxha and the regime.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS

UNCLASSIFIED

the numerous factional struggles and purges and during Albania's bitter conflicts with Yugoslavia, the USSR, and China. He was said to be as committed to the regime's isolationist, repressive policies as Hoxha. In effect, the two leaders functioned as a political duumvirate, with Shehu expected to succeed Hoxha as party leader and thereby ensure a smooth succession and continuity of policy. Although Shehu presumably used relatives and friends to build his own base of power, there is no evidence suggesting he had ever done so in opposition to Hoxha.

(C) Possible Shehu-Hoxha Differences?

Nevertheless, despite their long collaboration and possible close personal friendship, policy differences between Hoxha and Shehu cannot be discounted, particularly because their special areas of activity and responsibility could have contributed to conflicting perspectives regarding present and future policies. As Premier, Shehu was responsible for the daily conduct of the government bureaucracy (economic matters, foreign affairs, internal security)--in short, he dealt with problems and developments which affected the daily lives of the population and the regime's official contacts with the outside world.

Hoxha was said to have devoted himself to long-term political and ideological issues; he was more remote and removed from the practical impact of his policies. His constant exhortations for ideological purity and for increased self-reliance and sacrifice may have been increasingly seen by Shehu as counterproductive, even inimical, to economic and social progress. Shehu conceivably may have proposed easing Albania's foreign isolation to obtain Western technology, and its harsh political/ideological controls to stimulate economic production.

The two leaders also may have differed over the choice of a successor to Hoxha, with the latter favoring someone more sympathetic to his thinking, as, for example, the ideologist Ramiz Alia, who is now being touted as the most likely successor to Hoxha as party leader, with Carcani remaining as Premier. Such a scenario, however, would hardly be revealed to the outside world.

But if such a scenario did occur and Shehu was murdered or forced into suicide, internal instability and party factionalism would probably increase unless Hoxha managed to move quickly and decisively against Shehu's allies. Hoxha would, by doing so, seek further to consolidate his control over the government bureaucracy, presumably Shehu's stronghold, and so be much more able to dictate his successor without challenge.

On the other hand, if Shehu had committed suicide because of his health, in a "moment of nervous crisis," then his absence would be all the more sorely felt. It might well result in

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 9 -

greater uncertainty and confusion about the leadership succession and the direction the post-Hoxha regime will take. It could also provoke factionalism, especially among rivals within the leadership, and, as a consequence of this ensuing uncertainty and factionalism, tempt Soviet or Yugoslav intervention in Albania. A strong successor would be in a much more advantageous position to cope with potential popular unrest, pressing economic difficulties, and party divisions--as well as foreign influences.

#### Outlook

(C/NF) There is little likelihood that Hoxha will significantly alter his unique brand of Marxism-Leninism. His successor or successors, presumably coming from the "old guard," can be expected to make little change in his policies, at least in the short term. However, the demise of the "old guard" and the emergence of a younger, more educated, and pragmatic element might eventually force marked departures from Hoxha's domestic and foreign policies. Some Yugoslavs and Western diplomats believe there is a pro-Soviet element in the Albanian party that is merely waiting for Hoxha's death or political departure before making its own bid for power. Such a possibility disturbs the Yugoslavs, who feel that Soviet influence or, more ominously, a Soviet military/ naval presence in Albania could destroy Yugoslavia's unity and territorial integrity and undermine Balkan/Adriatic stability. Moscow has made several overtures to reestablish relations with Tirana, but has been spurned--thus far. Hoxha's successors, however, may perforce change this aspect of Hoxha's foreign policy, particularly if the Soviets were to provide substantial economic/military assistance and "protection" against a threatening Yugoslavia.

(C) One cannot identify future Albanian leaders, especially among the younger elements. Even such relatively known and prominent officials as Alia and Carcani are enigmas to Westerners. In a sense, Hoxha and Shehu were at least predictable; they were known for their ruthlessness, their unswerving devotion to Stalinism, and their hostility to "revisionists" and US "imperialism."

(C) Yet, because so little is known about Albania, and because its traditions and behavior can hardly be judged in a Western/democratic context, even those younger and more educated leaders who come to power could just as well prove as adamant as Hoxha and Shehu in perpetuating isolationism and repression. In the end, foreign pressure and influence may be more important in determining the future Albanian leadership and its internal policies than strictly internal developments.

Prepared by P. Costolanski  
x22876

Approved by M. Mautner  
x29536

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS