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Responses to Information Requests

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22 September 2022

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Albania: Attestation letters for blood feuds; issuing organizations; how letters are issued, processed and stored; whether issuing organizations are recognized by the government; whether the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation (CNR) [National Committee of Reconciliation] has the full authority, approved by the government and recognized by international organizations and institutions, to verify the authenticity of blood feuds; fees for mediation services; issuance of false attestation letters (2020–October 2022)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Information on attestation letters for blood feuds was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1. Attestation Letters for Blood Feuds

1.1 Issuing Organizations, Including Whether Issuing Organizations Are Recognized by the Government, and Whether the CNR Has the Full Authority to Verify the Authenticity of Blood Feuds

In a statement prepared by the Albanian Ministry of Interior for the Research Directorate in January 2012, an official indicated that the police, prosecution office, and the courts are the state institutions that handle blood feud problems, and that the courts and prosecution office are the only agencies authorized by the government to issue certificates related to blood feuds (Albania 4 Jan. 2012). Based on an interview with the Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, a report of a fact-finding mission to Albania conducted in March 2017 by Cedoca, the Documentation and Research Department of the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides, CGRA) in Belgium, notes that the Prosecutor's Office "can issue attestations to citizens about cases that have been started but such attestations will never state that a given case is correlated with blood feud. In these attestations the facts of an incident are registered: what has happened, who is a victim and who is the perpetrator" (Belgium 29 June 2017, 1, 2, 43). The same source indicates that a representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate noted that the police does not issue attestations or verifications "declaring families have problem[s]"; however, "every complaint is written down and it is part of the procedure to provide a copy of a complaint" (Belgium 29 June 2017, 43).

The official of the Albanian Ministry of Interior indicated in 2012 that some NGOs in Albania have issued certificates [or attestation letters] to people involved in blood feuds, but these organizations do not have any "legal right" to issue such certificates (Albania 4 Jan. 2012).

Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate in December 2011, the Executive Director of the Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), an Albanian NGO established in 1995 for the purpose of conflict resolution and the promotion of tolerance and understanding, stated that some NGOs have issued attestation letters about blood feuds, but that they do not have any official authority to act in this capacity (AFCR 16 Dec. 2011).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate in September 2022, the Chairman of the CNR stated that "[t]he Albanian Government recognizes the [CNR] as the main and only forum to issue letters and give opinions on blood feuds inside and outside Albania" (CNR 1 Sept. 2022). However, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, also in September 2022, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Tirana indicated that while the CNR is a "registered entity" in Albania, the "right to issue official certification on blood feud cases belongs to the Albanian State Police, Criminal Department" (UN 1 Sept. 2022). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate in February 2014, a journalist at Balkan Insight, an English-language news website focusing on Southern and Eastern Europe that is operated by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) [1] (BIRN n.d.), indicated that the CNR "has issued attestation letters but has no legal authority to do so. The statistics that they claim of the number of blood feuds—10,000 in the last 20 years—is nowhere close to reality" (BIRN 13 Feb. 2014).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an independent researcher based in the UK who focuses on Albania and Kosovo indicated that they are aware of organizations that issue attestation letters, including the CNR and the Peace Missionaries (Independent researcher 13 Sept. 2022). Based on a fact-finding mission to Albania

about blood feuds that was conducted in April 2013, the Swedish Migration Agency states that the CNR was the organization most frequently mentioned by the sources they consulted in Albania as being linked to "accusations of corruption and the issuing of false attestation letters" (Sweden 14 June 2013, Sec. 4.2.3). A representative of Caritas Albania, an organization established by the Catholic Church with 95 missions in Albania that provide emergency relief and social development services (Caritas n.d.), reportedly described the CNR to the Swedish Migration Agency as [translation] "the largest organisation in the field [of blood feud mediation], with a great deal of resources and power, but that the organisation is controversial and that it is difficult to evaluate whether it possesses real knowledge in this area" (Sweden 14 June 2013, Sec. 4.2.3). The Caritas representative also expressed the opinion that the CNR did good work in the 1990s, but became "corrupted" after 1997 (Sweden 14 June 2013, Sec. 4.2.3). In addition, a representative of the Helsinki Committee questioned the capacity of the CNR "beyond purely financial activities" (Sweden 14 June 2013, Sec. 4.2.3). In a 2012 decision by the UK Immigration and Asylum Chamber of the Upper Tribunal, the judges stated, "[w]e consider that the organisation [CNR] and Mr. Marku [chairman of the CNR] are wholly unreliable and that no weight can be placed on the attestation letters they produce" (UK 15 Oct. 2012, para. 55). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of anthropology at Bournemouth University in the UK who focuses on the Western Balkans indicated that "since the 2013 court proceedings," [see section 4 of this Response] Gjin Marku "has remained a spokesperson for issues relating to blood feuds in Albania, evident from several appearances and citations in Albanian media"; however, the authority of the CNR and its Chairman to issue attestation letters "appears only evident from their own claims" (Associate Professor 18 Sept. 2022).

2. How Letters Are Issued, Processed and Stored

Information on how attestation letters are issued, processed and stored could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Fees for Mediation Services

The independent researcher indicated that fees for mediation services "vary according to the means of the family seeking help" (Independent researcher 13 Sept. 2022). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Issuance of False Attestation Letters

According to Cedoca, the General Director of the Albanian State Police "mentioned that unofficial reconciliation organizations have taken advantage of the requests for blood feud attestations by a number of citizens," and that Albanians "have obtained documents from those institutions falsely claiming they are in a blood feud situation," "even" "falsif[ying]" "municipality and police signatures" (Belgium 29 June 2017, 43). The independent researcher stated that attestation letters were "often issued fraudulently prior to 2012," but they are "far less commonly supplied" "now" (Independent researcher 13 Sept. 2022).

In the 2011 correspondence, the Executive Director of AFCR stated that the CNR has issued false attestation letters and that state authorities have initiated penal proceedings against the organization (AFCR 16 Dec. 2011). Similarly, an Albanian State Police press release indicates that the Financial Crime Directorate at the Department of Organized and Serious Crime of the State Police provided materials to the Prosecution Office against Gjin Marku (Albania 2 Dec. 2011). According to the same source, Marku was suspected [translation] "of using [his] official position ... to issue forged certificates to different

people with the aim of applying and obtaining unfair asylum in some countries of Europe, thus committing the offense of forgery of documents according to article 186 of the Penal Code" (Albania 2 Dec. 2011). The Associate Professor indicated that this led to a court case in 2013 that ended with the release of Marku (Associate Professor 5 Sept. 2022).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) is a network of NGOs "promoting freedom of speech, human rights and democratic values in Southern and Eastern Europe" (BIRN n.d.).

References

Albania. 4 January 2012. Ministry of Interior. "Protocol Number 101: Reply to the Immigration and Refugee Board." Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Works and Government Services Canada. Document sent to the Research Directorate through correspondence.

Albania. 2 December 2011. Albanian State Police. "Materials Passed on to the Prosecution Office Against Gjin Marku, Chairman of the Committee of Blood Feuds Reconciliation and Pashko Popaj." Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Works and Government Services Canada. [Accessed 9 Jan. 2012]

Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR). 16 December 2011. Correspondence from the Executive Director to the Research Directorate.

Associate Professor, Bournemouth University, United Kingdom (UK). 18 September 2022. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Associate Professor, Bournemouth University, United Kingdom (UK). 5 September 2022. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Belgium. 29 June 2017. Commissariat général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides (CGRA), Cedoca.  *Blood Feuds in Contemporary Albania: Characterisation, Prevalence and Response by the State.* [Accessed 6 Sept. 2022]

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Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation (CNR). 1 September 2022. Correspondence from the Chairman to the Research Directorate.

Independent researcher, United Kingdom (UK). 13 September 2022. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Sweden. 14 June 2013. Migrationsverket. *Blodfejder i Albanien.* Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Works and Government Services Canada. [Accessed 2 Jan. 2014]

United Kingdom (UK). 15 October 2012. *EH (Blood Feuds).* Tribunal Decisions, [2012] UKUT 348. [Accessed 27 Feb. 2014]

United Nations (UN). 1 September 2022. International Organization for Migration (IOM), Tirana. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Albania – Institute of Statistics, Ministry of Justice, Policia e Shtetit; Albanian Institute for International Studies; associate professor at a Canadian university who focuses on traditional justice in Albania;

associate professor at a university in the UK who focuses on blood feuds in Albania; Belgium – Cedoca; Center for the Study of Democracy and Governance; Gruaja në Zhvillim; Hellenic Resources Network; Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit; Kosovar Centre for Security Studies; lawyer in Albania who practises criminal law; legal researcher in the UK who focuses on immigration, asylum and nationality law; Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim; Open Society Foundations; post-doctoral fellow at a German university who focuses on blood feuds in Albania; professor at an Albanian university who focuses on the state-society relationship and transition in Albania; professor at a university in the UK who focuses on social anthropology in Albania; research affiliate at an American university who focuses on the Balkan region; research associate at a university in the UK who focuses on blood feuds, security, and crime; researcher at a university in the UK who focuses on peace studies in Albania; US – Embassy in Tirana; visiting senior fellow at a university in the UK who focuses on social protection in the Western Balkans.

Internet sites, including: 24 Ore Lajme; 55 News; ABYZ News Links; Albania – Institute of Statistics, Policia e Shtetit; *Albanian Daily News*; Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes; Albanian Post; Albanian Telegraphic Agency; Albanian Times; Al Jazeera; American Broadcasting Company; Amnesty International; Article 19; Australia – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Austrian Red Cross – ecoi.net; BBC; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Brookings Institution; Center for Strategic and International Studies; Comité de liaison pour la solidarité avec l'Europe de l'Est; Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation; Council of Europe; Council on Foreign Relations; EU – EU Agency for Asylum; EURACTIV; European Observatory of Crimes and Security; *Europe-Asia Studies*; Exit News; Fair Observer; Fédération internationale pour les droits humains; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Freedom House; Free Movement; *Gazeta Fjala*; *Gazeta Panorama*; *Gazeta Shqiptare*; *Gazeta SOT*; *Gazeta TemA*; Germany – Federal Office for Migration and Refugees;

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime; *The Guardian*; Hellenic Resources Network; Human Rights Watch; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; INTERPOL; *Irish Examiner*; Islington Law Centre – Migrant and Refugee Children's Legal Unit; *Koha Jonë*; Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit; Médecins sans frontières; Mondo Times; Netherlands – Ministry of Foreign Affairs; The New Humanitarian; Norway – Landinfo; Open Society Foundations; Organisation suisse d'aide aux réfugiés; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Reporters sans frontières; *Rilindja Demokratike*; *Shekulli*; shqip.media; *Tirana Times*; Transparency International; UK – Home Office; UN – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Committee on the Rights of the Child, International Organization For Migration, Refworld; US – Department of State, Library of Congress; Wilson Center.

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