



## **KOMITETI I PAJTIMIT MBARËKOMBËTAR**

### **Report to the OSCE/ODIHR - Albania**

#### **The two-month expedition of reconciliation missionaries during the election campaign of Local Elections in Albania**

On March 20, 2011, representatives of missionaries and reconciliation associations from all the country's districts began the two-month reconciliation expedition alongside the election campaign, with the goal of controlling the situation between the families involved in blood feuds and offering them the option of dialogue leading to reconciliation, aiming to avoid social confrontations during the election campaign and to stimulate civilized participation of citizens in the voting process. The Expedition was finalized in Puke on May 20th, a district where the reconciliation missionaries have had very positive results and where the population represents a symbol of brotherly cohabitation amongst Muslims and Christians who have entered into mixed marriages and who celebrate Christmas, Eid and Easter together.



*On may 20 2011. North group of the reconciliation missionaries of expedition in Gomsiqe.*

This Expedition was organized at the request of the Extraordinary National Conference of Reconciliation Missionaries and Associations, "About the Tradition in Support of the Rule of Law", that was held in Tirana on October 8th, 2010, in cooperation with the Academy of Science. The expedition was part of the annual program and of the several-months expeditions usually held on the eve of religious celebrations and other national events. as these have proved successful in the reconciliation efforts; they have created valuable experiences in coordinating the work of reconciliation associations and missionaries and have found the support and appreciation among the international community, of the European Commission and of the ODHIR.



*The reconciliation ceremony in Mnela-Mirdite, in the family of Bib Lekani. Representatives of pears in blood feud clasp of the hands in front of the door where the*



*cross will be carved. Carving the cross on the door of Bib Lekani after the reconciliation ceremony for forgiveness of the blood of the Gjon Bardhi.*

In addition to contacts with the families who are already involved in the process of reconciliation, in the last day of this Expedition, May 20th, 2011, a meeting was organized with representatives from the Puka City Hall, from civil society and the Deputy Prefect of Puke District, Mr. Ferit Ringaj. The meeting discussed issues that emerged during the Expedition and the final report of the Expedition was approved. Participants of this meeting requested that the Albanian State Institutions, international organizations and the OSBE observers assigned with monitoring of the local elections of May 8th, 2011, be provided with the final report of this expedition. During the 60-day Expedition contacts were established with the Committee's representatives in about 2,800 villages where the three-person working groups operate; these village-based groups are composed of a missionary, the school principal and a representative of local government. The groups maintained their weekly reporting to their branches of the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation in 36 Districts composed of 21-30 members, and with the administrative boards in 12 counties. These county boards are managed by two main offices: the North Office based in Puke and chaired by Ded Peraj and Jorgjie Dodani, and the South Office based in Lushnje and chaired by Vangjel Pero Bello and Pasho Uruci. The Expedition engaged the moving field groups made up of between 12 and 24 missionaries whose activity is to move from one region to another according to the specific needs arising in the area at the time. During their trips they collaborated and were able to obtain the support of community representatives; on specific occasions these moving field groups increased to as many as 60 members. Throughout the

Expedition the missionaries were greatly assisted by the clergy, especially the Catholic clergy of Shkoder, Lezhe and of Malesi e Madhe who, during the Easter celebration of April 24, 2011 were able to reconcile three families in the Shkoder District, two in the Lezhe District and one in the Kurbin area. The field results of this Expedition have been noticeable and were achieved as a result of the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation's strategy concerning the correct interpretation of our traditions, stressing that the Kanun does not justify present day barbaric acts of revenge and blood feud killings, nor does it allow self-judgment and lack of respect for the institutions charged with upholding of the rule of law. Humanism and democracy, coexistence, peace, resolution and respect for the law are the fundamental principles of the Kanun and of Albanian tradition. During this Expedition this strategy enabled the reconciliation process to begin for 142 families in blood feud due to accidental killings, for 31 families in blood feud due to property dispute killings, and for 27 families in blood feud due to premeditated killings. 1,476 property related conflicts were resolved in the villages and 311 property related conflicts in urban areas; reconciliation was reached between five families involved in inherited blood feuds in the Lezhe district, between four families in the Fier district and between 26 families in the Durres municipality where Mr. Pashk Lleshi, Chair of the National Assembly of Reconciliation Missionaries, operates. 820 families currently in the process of reconciling were able to safely participate in voting. The Expedition enabled families in blood feuds, monitored by the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation, to refrain from killings and confrontations during the electoral campaign and on Election Day. All the incidents which did occur: beatings, killings and injuries caused during the election campaign resulted from altercations incited by political parties. In all the voting stations in the whole of Albania, Albanian citizens presented themselves in a civilized manner, respecting the law and fellow citizens, despite the intensive propaganda played by the political parties who tried to fuel tension by urging people to vote against opposing parties and not for their own choice. Political parties did not present the electorate with a program outlining the ways in which the country would emerge out of the present crisis or a vision concerning the integration of Albanian into Europe, other than making accusations and baseless promises.



*The Leaders of the reconciliation expedition in the families that they are in reconciliation process. Mr. Gjin Marku Chairman of the Committee of Natiowide Reconciliation and Pashk Lleshi Chair of National Assembly of the reconciliation missionaries talking at the Rasim Laçi that is involved in blood feud.*

The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation strategy is to work to raise citizens' awareness that the Kanun demands support for the rule of law and respect of the state laws of the time, especially the law on the abolishment of the death penalty, as one of the most important decisions reached by the Council of Europe. This has had a very positive effect on many families involved in blood feuds from the point of view of

claiming the killer as the sole person responsible for the murder, and thus allowing the state to take on with the prosecution of the murderer. Thanks to these Expeditions and as a result of the understanding of the tradition of the Kanun, in the last three elections, people have been able to participate in them in a civilized manner. Albanian tradition prohibits any improper actions or any kind of conflicts during citizen's decision making: The Kanun clearly states that disturbances, aggravations, disputes or killings between Albanian families or clans are prohibited in times of national decision-making.



*Clergy have supported the efforts of reconciliation missionaries, especially catholic clergy.*

The Expedition confirms that the news aired by the Albanian media that the police accompanied the self-confined families with armored cars to the voting stations and that these families voted for Lulzim Basha, the majority candidate in Tirana, are not true. This misinformation is a violation of families' dignity and a very damaging act for the reconciliation process in which these families might participate in the future. People who feed the media with this kind of information do not have any connection with the reconciliation mission but are known to be "brokers" of corrupt elements within the public administration, the police and the courts. The Expedition was able to verify that there are about 11 brokers of this kind who operate from the Stacioni i Trenit, 1st King Zogu Boulevard right up to the Tirana court, that have established "associations" and "reconciliation institutions" for the purpose of profiting from the issuance of "Certificates" in order to enable the reduction of sentences or even the dropping of charges for people convicted of crimes against persons through "confirmations that the parties have reconciled". Only a few days before our Expedition began these were the means used to facilitate the release from prison of two very dangerous convicts from Shkoder. One of them, Astrit Kurtmema, was executed at the door of his house by his avengers, and the other one, Admir Tafili, was freed for a period of six months; he was able to execute two brothers of Pjetrushli family in revenge for his father's death. Since 1997, about 1,600 murderers have been released with Court Orders obtained by the aforementioned means; 300 of those have been executed by their avengers right after their release; 600 families that are blood relatives of these murderers have been forced to stay in self-confinement for many years because the killers would leave Albania upon their release. There are 800 other persons declared wanted for killings they have committed; they have left Albania and they are presently wanted by the Interpol. These criminals have connections with the "brokers" who provide them with "documents" produced at secret addresses in "Kavaja" Street, at the Train Station and the Black Bird. So far the police have only been able to detain two of these "brokers", Hasan Abazi, who sometimes introduced himself as the Executive Director of a Reconciliation center, or other times as a judge or prosecutor, and Indrit Aliu who introduced himself as the representative of a "National Reconciliation Institute" or assistant with the Ministry of Justice or the Prime

Minister's counselor. His appearances in the media and on Internet pages as a "peace missionary" and as a "humanitarian activist with the Prime minister's wife" or his photos on the Internet with international representatives (photos deliberately taken during different meetings he would attend for that purpose) fooled many citizens and businessmen from whom he extorted a sum of 1 million Euro under the pretense of "solving their plights!"

*Mr Gjin Marku and the leaders of reconciliation expedition travelling in the north of Albania to meet the families involved in blood feud.*

The Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation has repeatedly asked the police to investigate the activity of these persons who are well connected with the individuals incriminated in killings as such activities undermine the reconciliation process. The CNR has, persistently stated that the reconciliation of families in blood feud should be carried without asking for the reduction of the sentence or the release of the killer. Authors of killings should be convicted and sentenced to the maximum demanded by the law, as this is one way of minimizing blood feud related killings. The reconciliation is based on high moral and spiritual principles without ignoring the rule of law and the tradition of forgiveness. The reconciliation Expeditions have become an indispensable tool not only for the purpose of controlling and identifying conflict situations in Albanian society, but also to the identify criminal situations affected by this regressive phenomena, since the Albanian government does not have any data on the state of the organized crime in our society, nor has it any specific data about conflicts and blood feuds. The Expedition concluded that in the last 21 years of transition a total of 10,070 people have been killed in acts of self-justice, in killings motivated by land and property disputes, in honor disputes, in casual altercations and in political confrontations. 680 of those killings remain uninvestigated and the victims are declared missing; another 240 are declared as suicides. 80% of killings motivated by land and property disputes are caused because of the implementation of the Law on Land approved on consensus by the two major parties. The number of people presently living in hiding or in self- confinement due to their fear of blood feuds is 5,500. The number of children who are not able to attend school because of blood feuds is 921. Of those, 190 children are forced to live in self- confinement as their lives are seriously in danger. 731 children have been forced to move into metropolitan areas together with their families who live in hiding and thus forcing the children to work for family members who cannot venture out of their homes. All these families are waiting for the opportunity to leave Albania altogether as their hiding place may be revealed at any time. At present, apart from the information collected from peace missionaries at the district level, and the findings and reports prepared by the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation, there is no study conducted by the government or any independent institution about the origin and causes on the prevalence of blood feuds in Albanian society. A real danger exists for the families who

are not aware of being involved in a blood feud. During the year 2010 and in the first six months of this year there have been 17 tragic, blood feud motivated killings in families whose members were completely unaware about the danger to their lives. The government and the state police have not conducted any research into this phenomenon. The police avoid confronting the blood feud phenomenon and do not report even 10% of the blood feud related criminal cases because, on the one hand, the police finds itself politically pressured to hide the real figures and, on the other hand is forced to deal with tragic consequences each time it provides reports or intervenes in these matters. An official document on blood feud related killings, published after the joint project between Open Data-Albania and the Ministry of Justice reveals that the number of decisions reached by the Albanian Courts in cases of killings motivated by blood feuds is 11 times higher than the number of blood feud related murders reported by the police: <http://open.data.al/lajme/lajm/id/78/lang/en/Gjakmarrja-permes-shifrave>. Between of 2004-2009, proceedings were taken in 106 cases of blood feuds, and verdicts given. Of these the police only declared ten as blood feud murders. In 2010 they did not declare a single one as a blood feud case, although there have been some very disturbing cases which received national media attention. The Expedition concluded that the situation of Albanian families who have left the country due to their danger of blood feuds has not changed after the liberalization of visas. Despite the large contribution made by EU countries, Canada, United Kingdom, USA and Australia in offering protection and granting asylum to families who find themselves in this situation, there are still, a large number of families whose lives are in limbo. Dozens of individuals and families who have been denied refugee status live in a state of depression and some have succumbed to suicide. The situation is worse when these people are deported back to Albania and they are forced to re-enter into self confinement. Sometimes the refusal or the delay in determining their status results from misinformation provided by the Albanian police and the Albanian Embassies in Western countries about the circumstances pertaining to these families or this phenomenon altogether. The Albanian police and Embassies try to hide the reality, fearing such truths will hinder Albania's membership into the EU even though the number of the Albanian refugee claimants, whose claims are based on blood feuds, have never created a concern for the European Union and is quite insignificant compared to the number of refugee claims made by other nationals. Western media and its citizens have been very sensitive concerning this issue and have always supported asylum seekers from Albania. Albanian diplomats and other officials of our country's embassies in Western countries should provide asylum commissions and immigration officials of those Western countries with records obtained from the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation only, since the CNR is the main body that directs and carries out the reconciliation process and the only institution that keeps a detailed record on every respective blood feud file.



*The reconciliation missionaries in Bushat of Shkodra where are 1600 families that are in land conflicts.*

The concern of the CNR in this regard was taken into consideration by the Albanian Prime Minister, who requested to be provided with detailed information about the blood feud cases only from the CNR and advised the Cabinet not to ignore this problem. On Behalf of the Albanian government, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, recommended that local government institutions and international bodies should contact the CNR about all cases of families involved in blood feuds in order to eliminate discrepancies or unrealistic data. (Recommendation nr. 1716, dt. 29. 9. 2009- Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities). The Expedition concluded that the Albanian government's recommendation for the Albanian state institutions and international bodies has been recognized by Western countries and by the reconciliation associations and missions operating in Albania.



*Mr. Gjin Marku Chairman of Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation in Hoxha family that is involved in blood feud. Foto O.R.*

valuable volunteer work of the reconciliation missionaries. The CNR has composed and is implementing a national strategy that has been approved by all active associations and reconciliation missions in the country. Its strategy has always enjoyed the support of the International Community but not the support of governmental structures who see the involvement in this phenomenon as an impossible task. In first six months of 2010, the CNR contacted high ranking individuals in the Ministry of the Interior, initially Mr. Avenir Peka, the Deputy Minister and later on Mr. Lulzim Basha, the Minister of Internal Affairs. In both cases, in principle, it was agreed that for this strategy to be implemented a

Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the CNR would be co-signed. The CNR, in collaboration with the Academy of Science, drafted this Memorandum and then on October 8th, 2010 organized the Extraordinary National Conference of Reconciliation Missionaries and Associations where this Memorandum was to be signed. The Minister, who was assigned to give a speech and who was personally committed into signing this Memorandum was barred from signing it, because such action would have exposed the government's inability to find the means to combat the blood feud phenomenon; his absence was a surprise for the members of the Academy of Science, of the international community representatives and diplomatic bodies who were quite interested in the outcome of this event. The declaration by Mr. Avenir Peka, the Deputy Minister, that this Memorandum was going to be signed shortly, was simply an excuse for the media and the diplomatic representatives. The Memorandum is presently with the Minister of Interior, still not signed. The CNR strategy has been explicit and has functioned well, not only in the process of reconciliation of families involved in blood feuds, but in the raising of citizens' awareness in the aspect of respect for the law, the protection of institutions and the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. The CNR has a clear vision concerning finding the solution to this phenomenon and therefore has the support of Western countries and of the International Community and especially of the European Commission, of the European Council and of the OSBE.



*Mr. Gjin Marku chairman of committee of Nationwide Reconciliation in the meeting with reconciliation missionaries of the expedition in Lushnja.*

Throughout this Expedition our missionaries attentively followed the problems that emerged during the election campaign and the progress of preparation in process and citizens' participation during voting. The conflict in politics remains an acute problem for Albanian society and has caused serious incidents before and during election campaign, such as the killing of four citizens during the protest of January 21st and the severe police clashes with the citizens of Orikum and Hamalle. The Expedition concluded that it is the political parties and their rhetoric that incite social conflicts despite the well-meaning and balanced calls of the International Community. Some parties promote religious and ethnic division. 1,650 self-confined families were deprived of their right to vote. 60,000 families involved in land disputes, who, in the last five years have relocated in the metropolitan area just to avoid the consequences of blood feuds, have had their right to residence denied; because of the fear of being confronted by the people with whom they are in a feud they cannot travel to vote in the place where they are registered as voters. Despite the substantial increase in citizens' participation in the voting process, the majority of voters do not like to participate as they do not have any faith in politics and state institutions; they do not believe in the promise of a free vote and of the election process. Many citizens fail to go to the polls, they claim their votes are stolen or their voting process is not conducted in a secret manner, and that it would

be easy for the voting commission or the observers to see the voter's choice of candidates. Even in the last week of the election campaign the Albanian government did not present the voting booth or the ballot to be used to ensure free and confidential participation. The election process has degenerated to the point where votes can be bought or sold; people vote based on clan allegiance. During the election campaign, candidates resorted to insults, intimidations and threats, manipulation of citizens and false promises. Albanian people are tired of this political rhetoric. 90% of the population wants the election campaign to last no more than three weeks; they want a reformation of the law in compliance with the European structure where the principles of democracy would take a leading role and not the interests of the two major parties. The current proportional law restricts the representation of citizens and different social groups in the parliament and thus encourages the polarization of the society in two major parties leaving aside independent candidates.

*Post scriptum:*

*The Origin of Reconciliation Expeditions: The reconciliation Expeditions were organized in Northern Albania before the communist system took power. In those Expeditions the leaders, the missionaries, the clergy and the community representatives got together and they approached families involved in blood feuds to negotiate a reconciliation. The leader of the Expedition would usually be the Catholic priest but despite this the reconciliation efforts were offered to all the families of the highlands regardless of their religious background. The priests would then offer a prayer followed by mutual conversation; following this the priest would place the cross with Jesus' figure upside down at the highlander's doorstep or hearth and the group would wait until the man would pick up the cross and give the "besa" or the promise of forgiveness. It was mandatory for both the Christian highlander and the Muslim highlander, to pick up the cross and to give their "besa" of forgiveness. The final reconciliation ceremony was organized when the Expedition group and members of the victims' family would visit the house of the murderer; the family of the murderer was obliged to serve the communal meal for the brotherhood and then a cross would be engraved at the gate of the house of the murderer. The cross would be engraved with a chisel by the victims' family on one the stones of the gate of the person's home to whom forgiveness was extended. In 1967, during the communist system, and during the war against religion, approximately 1,200 such crosses had been destroyed; 340 of those engraved on the gates of Muslim families of Malesi e Madhe area, Kurbin, Kruje, Has, Kukes and Burrel areas.*



*Roconciliatin missionaries and associates on may 20, 2011 in the meeting of the beginning of 2 months reconciliation expedition.*

**THIS REPORT IS APRUVED IN PUKA ON MAY 20, 2011**