
Interview: Gjon Gjomarkaj

Albanian dictators covet Western aid

Gjon Gjomarkaj, the chief of the Albanian broadcasts for Vatican Radio, was recently interviewed in Rome by Maria Cristina Fiocchi about events in Tirana, the capital of Albania. The interview, conducted in Italian, has been slightly abridged.

EIR: The Albanian regime recently asked to join the CSCE [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe]. How do you judge this move; is this opening real?

Gjomarkaj: There are three causes for this "opening" by Tirana. First of all, there is internal pressure. The people need food. After 45 years of peace, they can't take it any more—having to tighten their belts, while the rulers have shops and consumer goods in abundance. That's why [Albanian boss] Ramiz Alia is asking to participate in international institutions like "Helsinki 2" and the European Community. Albania needs Western aid.

The second factor is Albanian youth, who know nothing of Albania's past nor of the West, but have found out from the media and tourists that there is prosperity and freedom in the West. The youth are protesting. A few days ago, the authorities shut down the universities in order to wipe out the graffiti reading "Down with Hoxha," "Down with communism," and "Down with Stalinism." But a short while later, the signs reappeared. The regime can't contain the youth protests.

The third factor is external pressure. There are 100,000 Albanians in exile because of persecution. That's 100,000 out of 3 million, a very high percentage. The Albanians in the United States have organized demonstrations. They surrounded the United Nations building for days demanding a U.N. intervention on behalf of Albanian freedom; also in front of the White House in Washington, tens of thousands of Albanians came from various nations of the world to demonstrate, and a delegation was received at the White House.

As a result, U.N. Secretary General Pérez de Cuéllar went to Albania, and he insisted, during his visit, on the need for the regime to respect human rights. The rulers already promised him that they will adhere to his demands; but despite these verbal promises, Ramiz Alia spoke a few phrases to the guests, in the presence of journalists, which arouse

suspicious. He stated: "We are guided by socialist ideas" (in other words, communist). At the Tenth Plenum of the Communist Party, held before Pérez de Cuéllar's visit, Ramiz Alia also said, "We are the pupils of [the late dictator] Enver Hoxha." That same Enver Hoxha did not allow, for 45 years, the least freedom, and did everything to crush the Albanian people and make it into an instrument of communism.

These words of Ramiz Alia, to those of us who have lots of experience of the Communist Party's methods, make it clear that for now the promises are just words. The regime does not intend to eliminate the guiding role of the party, as has occurred in other countries of Eastern Europe. That's why we are so cautious about saying there is a real opening. If Ramiz Alia had not taken these steps, one way or the other the people would have forced him to change. What could have happened was what nobody wants, a massacre, as in Romania. The regime would not have survived. The Tirana government showed itself to be smart. And it will be even smarter if it stays on the road of real reforms. Up to now, all the tendencies to open things up have been killed in the cradle, and the leaders eliminated. For example, the ex-chief of government and Hoxha's closest friend, Memet Sciu, who was defense minister and interior minister, was killed at Hoxha's behest because he was pro-opening, and his entire following with him. But the Albanian people can no longer tolerate the dictatorship. Ramiz Alia must first "open up" to Albania, concede freedom to the people, and then open up externally. The first is the crucial condition.

EIR: Is there a liberation movement in Albania?

Gjomarkaj: There has always been a liberation movement in Albania, because the people oppose the communist regime, and have shown it year in and year out. In Albania, every day there are persecutions, killings, jailings, and deportations. There is a National Democratic Committee of Liberation of Albania, headquartered in Paris, created in August 1949 with the blessings of the Americans and British (at least in the act of its founding). Sure, we have had a lot of difficulties and problems, above all because of the lack of Western support.

Almost all the parties and political groups that existed before communism in Albania belong to the Committee, including the National Front, the most democratic party, comparable to the social democracy, which is ready, because it is well known and established in Albania, having fought during the resistance to Nazi-fascism. In fact, the regime's propaganda has always been ferocious against the National Front, precisely because it is so respected. The National Front is fighting for an ethnic, unified Albania, while the Communist Party, under pressure from Tito, gave him Kosovo. Hence, the alliance that had been formed among the political groups against Nazism and fascism and against the foreign occupation broke up, because Tito ordered Hoxha to

break the alliance with the National Front. The communists unleashed a civil war among Albanians, communists against nationalists, while the nationalists, who continued to fight Nazi-fascism alone, had to defend themselves against the communists too. Albania was then subjected to the influence of the communists—first Yugoslavs, then Russians, then Chinese, always against God—but the people always rebelled.

EIR: What is the cultural grounding of the Albanian resistance?

Gjomarkaj: The anti-communist resistance has always had Christian values. Patriotic defense, either against Nazi-fascism or against Stalinism, has always started with the Christians, first of all with the Catholics. That's why communism's first crime was destroying the Catholic community, because with the Catholics intact, communism would never have won, even if the Catholics are a minority. In fact, in the north, in Scutari, the center of Catholicism, communism has never taken root, not even today. That's why in the present government there are almost entirely southerners. (There were some northerners, but Hoxha had them killed because he did not consider them trustworthy, either because they were Catholics, or came from persecuted Catholic families. Among them, Gjin Mark Toma, and Tuk Jakova were killed for being Christians.)

In recent months, Tanjug, the Belgrade [Yugoslavia] news agency, which is Serbian, reported that there had been a popular uprising in Scutari like the one in Romania. Unconfirmed reports came to us that three students were hanged in the square, and left on the gallows so people would look at them. We heard about hundreds of youth being arrested for having risen up peacefully, asking for freedom and reforms. After two or three days, the European mass media stopped publishing such reports, perhaps because they believed the denials from Tirana. But a few days later, an agency in West Germany ran a story confirming the Scutari uprising and saying there were 140 youth in jail and that arrests were ongoing. The agency confirmed what we knew all along: The resistance has never stopped. But the police, the "Sigurimi," is very strong. One out of three people is a spy for the regime, either paid or blackmailed or forced. More than three people cannot meet publicly, or the police intervene and threaten them or take them to the country. The police are present both in the cities and rural areas. Albania's riches (minerals, natural resources, farming, fish) are used mostly to maintain and build up the secret police, internally and abroad. We know that all over the world, including here in Rome, there are people paid handsomely by Tirana to spy on activities of the regime's opposition.

EIR: Is there an elite, a recognized democratic leadership?

Gjomarkaj: When we reflect on the problem of the Albanian liberation movement, we have to keep in mind that the

question is complex. Albania is a dismembered nation. Half of the Albanians, those who live in Kosovo, are persecuted every day; they live for months in a state of siege, because the Serbians want to eliminate the "problem" of the Albanians and definitively annex a territory that is not theirs and never was. The Serbians have reduced, and attempted to cancel, the autonomy Tito gave Kosovo in 1974 (a minimal autonomy, still incorporated into the Serbian republic). Milosevic, the Serbian leader, has abolished even this minimal autonomy and is trying, through a law of last July, to replace Albanians with Serbs, to take land and houses away from the Albanians and give them to Serbs (there are about 9 million Serbs in all).

Since the majority of Albanians in Kosovo are Muslims, for historical reasons, Milosevic is trying to convince world public opinion that they are Turks. They are not Turks, they are Albanians!

A few weeks ago we received reports that Milosevic was replacing the Albanian teachers and intellectuals, in the universities and high schools, with Serbian professors, and that he was imposing Serbian as the official language in Kosovo, whereas it had been Albanian until last March. Milosevic wants to wipe out the memory of Albanians. He is building a Greater Serbia, already having Kosovo in his very rich region which produces the goods the Serbs consume (we call Kosovo "the granary of Albania"). Once he's destroyed the Albanians of Kosovo, Milosevic has a plan to do the same with the other neighboring republics, just as occurred 100 years ago. With the Albanians, Milosevic has a tough nut to crack, because they don't surrender; they would rather die than be the slaves of an occupying force.

There is another question. Last year [the Greek socialist premier Andreas] Papandreou recognized the borders of Albania, and removed the state of war between the two countries. Until then, Greece had claims on Epirus in the north, and the cities of Korcia and Gjinokastra. In that region there are Albanians who belong to the Orthodox faith, which is why the Greek Church, which is active in politics, was pushing annexation. With the pretext of alleged religious persecution in Albania, the Greek Orthodox Church is still raising border questions. Even though the government shut down that quarrel, the Orthodox Church is still fanning the flames.

So the Albanians don't just have to fight communism. We also have the problem of defending our borders, the national territorial integrity, and of the survival of Albania as a nation. Hoxha, and Ramiz Alia, have always used the argument of the "foreign enemy" and the threat to the borders to keep the people under their domination. The Albanian people, kept in ignorance, deceived by the regime, and with hundreds of years behind them of battles to defend their nation, have suffered under communism, believing that the "foreign enemy" was at the door, and have often feared to attack the regime because then they would have no defense against that "enemy."