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FIRST SESSION

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DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENTS IN ALBANIA

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22, 1991

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Washington, DC

The Commission met, pursuant to call, at 2 p.m. in room 216, Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, the Honorable Dennis DeConcini, Co-chairman, presiding.

Members present: Dennis DeConcini, Senator Alfonse D'Amato, and William D. Fritts, Jr., Department of Commerce representative.

Also present: Representative Bob McEwen.

Staff present: Mary Sue Hafner, deputy staff director, Jane Fisher, deputy staff director, and David Evans, senior adviser.

Co-Chairman DECONCINI. The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe of the Congress of the United States will come to order.

It's a great pleasure to welcome Dr. Berisha here from Albania and Mr. Kadare, also from Albania. We are very pleased that you're here. And Dr. Biberaj, again, we welcome you here, a friend of ours and a good friend of the Albanians. I understand the other guest here is Mr. Hajdari. Is that correct? We welcome you here as well.

Chairman Hoyer is in an important markup right now on an appropriation bill and will be here later. And the House is also having floor votes. He has authorized me to proceed with the hearings.

I've had the privilege to meet our witnesses today in Albania: Mr. Kadare last August and Dr. Berisha just prior to the March elections. Both, to me, are very impressive for their insight regarding developments in Albania and admirable for their advocacy of democratic reforms.

In the past year, I've taken a considerable interest in Albania, having had the opportunity to visit that country twice as the head of the Commission delegation. The Commission's active interest in Albania stems from the desire of that country to join the Helsinki process.

Beginning at the Copenhagen Human Dimension Meeting in June 1990, Albania has been granted observer status at CSCE meetings. Albania would like to move beyond its current observer status and become a full participant in the process.

During the first visit, we were told by almost everyone, from President Alia to the select group of university students that were organized to meet with us, that there was no need for alternative political parties in Albania, nor for the opening of places of wor-

ship. We were told, in fact, that nobody wanted to go to church because Albania did not believe in religion.

At that time, the authorities acknowledged the existence of less than 90 political prisoners. We knew there were many, many more. And no one dared to express openly and clearly their opposition to the government of the Communist Party of Labor.

As a result, the Commission delegation had stated when it left, after its first visit, that it needed to see significant improvements in Albania's human rights performance before we could support Albania's membership in the CSCE.

By the time of our second visit in March of this year, things had changed quite substantially. Several alternative political parties had formed and were fielding candidates for the Albanian Assembly. The population was openly expressing its political preferences. Hundreds of political prisoners had, in fact, been released. And churches and mosques were opening throughout the country.

There is no question that the situation in March was markedly better than it was in August of last year, a fact which we on the Helsinki Commission have welcomed and have even complimented the existing government for moving in what we consider the right direction.

However, when compared to the standards for democracy and human rights held commonly by all of Europe, the United States, and Canada in the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent CSCE documents, these positive developments fell far short in many important respects, including those relating to the critical importance of free and fair elections as stated in the Copenhagen document.

In addition to hearing our witnesses describe the current situation in Albania and the prospects for democracy in that country, the Commission hopes to hear their views on how the United States and the other CSCE countries can best help promote democratic changes in Albania today. We would like to hear their views on how the CSCE process has impacted on developments in Albania as well as how it can best continue to do so.

Similarly, relations between Albania and the United States were finally restored on March 15, 1991, a development which Chairman Hoyer and I very much supported.

A key question now, in addition to that of CSCE membership, is how the United States can best develop these bilateral relations to the benefit of democracy in Albania.

I would like to hear the views of our witnesses on this issue as well. We are very fortunate to have them here today, and I look forward to their statements.

I will now yield to our commissioner from the Department of Commerce, Mr. Fritts, for any opening statements he cares to make.

Mr. FRITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd just like to welcome the witnesses. Dr. Berisha, it's nice to see you again. I was fortunate enough to be on the last trip to Albania and had an opportunity to meet you and offer rather brief congratulations.

I understand that events have not progressed far enough from your perspective, but I, unlike some people, believe that there's hope in what has just happened in Albania. The "genie of democra-

cy" is out of the bottle some time, the commission will prevail.

Mr. Chairman, I'd at this point.

Co-Chairman DECO to thank Commission we were there.

And, Dr. Berisha, you have to make. Pl may proceed.

TESTIMONY OF DEMOCRACY

Dr. BERISHA. Mr. (tors, ladies and gentlemen) Democratic Party of Albania the Congress, Government having invited us to democracy.

The Albanians are mains our only salvation that we are not forgotten.

We are encouraged mains the bastion of gives optimism and specially to us Albanians.

No indigenous Albanian nation. During barbaric occupations, massacres and

When I ask myself much, I like to remember repeated calamities,

Of course, this is not a Albanian nation, but I worry, no nation has suffered two decades of this of our territories being

Nevertheless, during and established the frightened reactionaries Albania's democratic democracy in the entire

From 1925 until today Albanians have suffered history reminds one deaf and blind from

Keller eventually went through difficult years of dictatorship

cy" is out of the bottle. And I believe that, although it may take some time, the commitment of the Albanian people to self-determination will prevail.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to have my prepared statement included at this point.

Co-Chairman DECONCINI. The statement will be included. I want to thank Commissioner Fritts for being part of the delegation when we were there.

And, Dr. Berisha, we will hear from you first for any statement you have to make. Please pull the microphone in front of you. You may proceed.

TESTIMONY OF DR. SALI BERISHA, CHAIRMAN, THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF ALBANIA

Dr. BERISHA. Mr. Chairman, Honorable Congressmen and Senators, ladies and gentlemen, Albania's democratic forces, the Democratic Party of Albania, and the entire opposition are grateful to the Congress, Government, and the people of the United States for having invited us to appear before this temple of freedom and democracy.

The Albanians are going through difficult times, and hope remains our only salvation. Your invitation represents a clear indication that we are no longer a forgotten people, or better said as self-forgotten.

We are encouraged and hopeful because the United States remains the bastion of democracy. The journey to this great land gives optimism and strength to all those fighting for democracy, especially to us Albanians.

No indigenous nation in Europe has suffered more than the Albanian nation. During its thousand year long story, it has experienced barbaric occupation, great dramas, long dark periods, genocides, massacres and tortures, and partition as no other nation.

When I ask myself why this great nation has had to suffer so much, I like to remember the story of Job, who survived the test of repeated calamities, but never received an answer to his questions.

Of course, this is not the place to review the history of the Albanian nation, but I would like to remind you that during this century, no nation has suffered as much as my nation. During the first two decades of this century, our nation was divided into two, half of our territories being given to the neighboring countries.

Nevertheless, during the period 1920-24, the Albanians fought for and established the most democratic state in the Balkans. But the frightened reactionary rulers of neighboring countries overthrew Albania's democratic government and, at the same time, killed democracy in the entire region.

From 1925 until today; that is, during the last 65 years, the Albanians have suffered under the worst dictatorships in Europe. Their history reminds one of the American writer Helen Adams Keller, deaf and blind from infancy.

Keller eventually regained her hearing and vision. Her cure went through difficult phases, just like Albania, which after 65 years of dictatorship is now in the process of its reawakening.

But before she joins the family of democratic nations, Albania, just like your great writer, will have to experience further suffering and crisis for many reasons, some of which I will enumerate here.

First, Albania lacks a tradition of a pluralist democracy; second, Albania's experiences under feudalism and totalitarian socialism; third, the establishment after World War II of Enver Hoxha's ruthless dictatorship, which in many aspects surpassed the dictatorship described by George Orwell in his works. This regime isolated the country, which led the world to forget that Albania even existed.

The number of political prisoners and of victims whose freedom of conscience was violated in Albania was greater than in any East European country. This proves not only the high degree of the repression, but also the fact that the Albanians responded to the Bolshevik Stalinist occupation in the same way they had responded to other invasions during their long history.

It is true that they were not able to organize themselves, but, as Nietzsche used to say, where there are graves, there are resurrections. I would like to emphasize that it was the sufferings, tortures, and imprisonments of so many people that eventually gave rise to the democratic change which in Albania started later than in other countries of Eastern Europe.

There were many domestic and foreign factors that led to these changes, the most important being: the spirit of Helsinki; developments in Eastern Europe; the rise to power of Mikhail Gorbachev; dissent of the Albanian intelligentsia, which, although not as vocal as its counterparts in Eastern Europe, played a vital role, especially during the last 3 years; and labor revolts in Shkoder, Kavaje, Tirane, Fier, and Vlore, which represented a clear expression of the popular dissatisfaction from the totalitarian regime.

Labor unrest and the student movement in December 1990 represented the first open challenge to the Albania rulers. Thus, under strong domestic pressure and foreign democratic opinion, the ruling Party of Labor of Albania was forced to initiate reforms and sanction political pluralism.

It was under such conditions that our party, the first opposition party of Albania, was born. Since its inception, the Democratic Party has had to contend with a party which for some 50 years had treated any individual with independent ideas as a traitor, an enemy, subject to long imprisonment.

Immediately, the Communist Party embarked upon a campaign of violence and terror against the Democratic Party, which reached its peak with the massacre in Shkoder on April 2.

In the March 31 elections, the Democratic Party won a partial victory. It won 75 seats in the new Albanian parliament. Some 39 percent of voters voted for the Democratic Party.

But our party won overwhelmingly in all the major cities, Albania's vital centers. Our party won the support of the workers, the youth, intellectuals, the most emancipated sectors of the society.

Although greatly disadvantaged in the electoral campaign, the Democratic Party made the Communist Party a marginal party, with the countryside and small military administrative centers remaining its main base of support.

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Nevertheless, I would like to emphasize that the election cam- paign was totally unfair. Foreign observers had expressed different opinions on the nature of the March 31 elections. But, in my opin- ion, the most objective report was made by the United States Com- mission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and I would like to express my appreciation to the delegation that visited my country.

The electoral process was not fair, free, or honest. This assess- ment can be substantiated by the following facts. In addition to the massacre in Shkoder on April 2, during the election campaign 6 persons—including Artan Lanja, Ismail Capari, and Mikel Lara— were killed, and 37 others wounded. More than 300 persons were arrested.

The official media, such as radio and TV and the Albanian Tele- graphic News Agency, were subject to a Stalinist type of censor- ship. In many districts, such as Sarande, Permet, Pogradec, and Cjirokaster, Democratic Party candidates, activists, and officials were beaten up, fired from their jobs, their homes, and offices at- tacked with bombs.

The exodus, this hemorrhage of the Albanian nation, reached its peak during the election campaign. The Communist-sponsored ter- rorism was followed with the biggest exodus in Albania's history. Within 10 days, 60,000 young Albanians, encouraged by the govern- ment, fled to Greece and Italy. Thus, the Albanians became boat people.

In the Central Election Commission, the opposition had only 3 representatives. The election law was biased in favor of the Com- munist Party. It provided that 6.5 percent of voters could vote in an election zone where they were not registered.

Gerrymandering was widely used. The number of voters from one zone to another differed from 4,000 to 13,000. This made it pos- sible for the Communist Party, with 55 percent of the votes, to ensure 167 seats in the parliament, compared to 75 seats for the Democratic Party, which won some 39 percent of the vote. Thus, with 16 percent of the vote, the Communist Party ensured 92 seats, compared to 30 seats for the Democratic Party, with 16 percent of the vote.

Election day was characterized by many irregularities. On the other hand, there are many examples of chairmen or members of election commissions appearing armed in voting stations.

There were also other irregularities. In many election commis- sions, the chairman and the secretary did not permit observers from the Democratic Party to observe the counting of ballots.

Naturally, I do not understand how anyone can talk of free elec- tion in the absence of a free election campaign. But the most tragic moment among these developments in Albania, the incident which shocked the country and the entire democratic opinion was the massacre of Shkoder.

The beginning of the post-election period in Albania was tragic. On April 2, Shkoder, an ancient city, experienced a true massacre, a political crime, a state-sponsored terrorism.

On that day, students from middle schools which are located on the same street as the Communist Party headquarters, walked from their classes in a protest against the manipulation of votes. With their books in their hands, the students staged a sit-in.

This was not the usual form of protest. Apparently they had learned it from American movies. The police asked the students to disappear. They refused.

The police asked Democratic Party activists for assistance. Our activists complied and convinced the students to leave the square. When only about 20 students still remained in the square, criminals from the ranks of security forces fired from within the headquarters of the Communist Party, killing: Arben Broci, one of the founders and prominent leader of the Democratic Party; Mazmi Kryeziu, Bujar Beshenaku, and Besnik Ceka, all leading activists of the Shkoder branch of our party. In addition, 58 persons were wounded in this massacre.

Co-Chairman DECONCINI. Excuse me, Dr. Berisha. Excuse me for interrupting you.

I have been called to the floor of the Senate for a vote. I'm going to ask Commissioner Fritts to continue to chair this hearing. I will be back in about seven minutes. But he will continue, and you may continue with your statement.

Dr. BERISHA. Yes. In this massacre, the security forces used tanks and all sorts of arms, including machine guns. Shkoder, the bastion of our 1,000-year-old civilization, was terrorized and witnessed a bloody spring.

On April 3, Shkoder buried its sons who fell in the struggle for freedom and democracy. To us, they are not only martyrs, but they were great fighters for democracy in Albania.

A commission was appointed, but it has delayed its investigation, suggesting that there is a cover-up. Only two officials have been arrested, and it is known that neither of them fired the shots that killed the victims.

In other words, those who committed this crime, as well as those behind it, remain free. The massacre of Shkoder is clear proof what the Stalinist forces in power in Albania are capable of doing and how distant are the justice and the rule of law for Albanian citizens.

It was in this background that the Democratic Party began its parliamentary activity. As a sign of protest, it decided to boycott the opening session of the parliament.

In other sessions of the parliament, the Democratic Party committed itself to transform the parliament into a true democratic institution. From the very beginning, we rejected the draft constitution prepared by a commission appointed by the Communist Party.

Our parliamentary group prepared a package of 13 laws, all taken from the Helsinki agreements on human rights, the rule of law, and market economies. We insisted on the separation of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches.

Our country has suffered so much under the dictatorship, and we insisted on the creation of a strong parliament and a weak president. The Democratic Party, considering the vital role of the opposition for the development of democracy in Albania, rejected the Communist Party's offer for a coalition government.

It did not propose a candidate for president, although it was well aware of the fact that Communist Party candidates could not meet the demands and hopes of the Albanian people for democracy.

History has assigned the entire Albania independence to the government.

The government program of the Communist Party, the ownership of the land in the village, but do not have a general amnesty, the Communist Party.

In addition, the questions posed by the March 31 election.

A clear indication of the workers, which be-

In the beginning, the government sent the government identification cards. Organizers of the strike, but an issue of survival.

Second, a 50 percent pay hike is very high during the last 3 years.

In addition, several measures are being conducted a study of measures.

The general strike if we take into account the workers whose salaries are families.

The workers are now in the government of Prime Minister. The workers are now in the government. They say that for the time being they still continue to be in the government.

For these reasons, the national salvation front organization of a free Albania.

On this occasion, Nano's government has rejected the exodus and the government.

The government does not offer any hope for the symptoms and not for the government.

On the one hand, the foreign assistance such assistance.

This government does not aim to temporarily pacify the government.

It has expressed its going about achieving the old political structure, creating, thus, the government.

