Refugee Review Tribunal
AUSTRALIA

RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

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Questions

1. What is the attitude to persons of mixed Muslim/Christian marriage in Albania?
2. What is the information on the Aldo Bare Group?
3. Please provide any available information on an Alfred Shkurti?
4. Please provide any information on a Petrit Lici?

RESPONSE

1. What is the attitude to persons of mixed Muslim/Christian marriage in Albania?

Little information was found on this topic in this time frame, but DFAT gave the following opinion in 2004:

> A.1. It is not plausible that as a result of marriage to a Catholic, an Albanian woman would be liable to generalised persecution. Albania is tolerant to different religions and there is very little religious fundamentalism – except possibly for some specific areas in northern Albania.
>
> Death threats within families usually stem from blood feuds (or family vendettas), as opposed to religious or broader persecution. Blood feuds are an old historical practice in Albania, primarily rooted in the tribal society of the northern Albanian highlands. Central to the notion of blood feud is the concept of honour and kinship: a man can be justified in killing
>
> Someone who has insulted his, or his family's, honour. Subjects in a blood feud can be forced into hiding but only in their own home, which is considered inviolate in the blood feud tradition. It is very difficult to determine if an…asylum claim based on a blood feud is genuine or not. Some countries refuse to accept asylum applications based on blood feud claims.

> A.2. The Albanian government is tolerant to different religions and community groups. The Albanian government has enacted religious freedom legislation within its constitution. Further information can be found at "www.keshilliministrave.al". Sources said that although the majority of the Albanian population is Muslim, there is only a relatively small number who strictly practice the religion. As an example, head-scarves tend to now be worn mainly by older women living in villages.
>
> The Albanian government has also enacted strong legislation in an attempt to eradicate the blood feud tradition. Penalties for blood feud killings are more severe than for other murders. A credible threat of revenge or blood feud that causes a person to remain in hiding is punishable by up to three years in prison.
>
> A.3. Relocation to other towns is an option. In large towns, mixed marriages are not rare.
>
> A.4. Albanians are generally tolerant of different religions. Our understanding also is that Albania is a religiously tolerant society. There have been recent reports of religious conflict in southern Albania around Korce between Muslim and Greek orthodox communities, but these conflicts have been mainly based on disputed territory and political-cultural disagreements, not religious intolerance. Albania's long-term goal is eventual EU membership, so it is striving to develop the institutions and practices acceptable in a modern, democratic society. (DIMIA Country Information Service 2004, *Country Information Report No. 40/04 – Muslim woman married to a Catholic male – claim of persecution Albania* (sourced from DFAT advice of 30 April), 21 May – Attachment 1)

According to the US Department of State "There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious beliefs or practice" (US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – Albania*, 14 September Attachment 2). The report notes that 65 to 70 percent of the population are Muslim and 10% Catholic, and does not mention any problems between the religious groups in Albania.

The legality of interfaith marriage in Albania was briefly looked at by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada in 2002, which noted that it was indeed legal (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002, *ALB39159.E 'Albania: Whether two persons of different religions, for example a Christian and a Muslim, can get married in a civil ceremony in Albania'*, 12 July – Attachment 3).

Other information on Marriage and Blood Feuds

There is a tradition of families arranging marriages for women in Albania. An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response in 2004 looked at marriage law in the Kanun Code (a medieval civil code traditionally used by Albanians):

> Marriage Law in the Kanun Code
>
> The various Kanun Codes discuss social relations such as marriage law, and include stipulations pertaining to engagement, marriage contracts and dissolution of marriage (Südost-Forschungen 1996; ICG 1 Mar. 2000, 22). With respect to women, an analysis of the Kanun of Lek Dukagjini notes that a woman's honour is the property of and comprises one aspect of the honour of a man (Shkoder n.d.). The Observer noted that the Kanun designates a woman to be the "'property of men, to be bought, sold and betrothed before birth'" (12 Feb. 1995). An analysis of the application of the Kanun in Albania also notes that a fiancée's honour passes to the man's family after engagement (Shkoder.net n.d.). This is corroborated by a website concerning cultural customs, which notes that once a women is considered "eligible to marry, she moves out of her parents' home and into that of her husband ...

> becom[ing] part of (the property of) her husband's family" (Jolique 9 June 2000). The Research Directorate was unable to find reports relating to blood feuds resulting from the end of an engagement.
> (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004, *ALB42373.E 'Albania: Blood feuds resulting from one party refusing to agree to marriage after formal acceptance of an engagement; remedies available to avert a blood feud'*, 11 March – Attachment 4)

The response also looks at the operation of blood feuds in Albania.

In another 2004 reponse, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada looked at the question of whether a blood feud can be caused by a woman failing to marry a man who has been chosen by her family and his family. They state:

> According to a Website about cultural customs, marriages in Albania are arranged for those who live according to the Kanun, a code of ethics (Jolique 9 June 2000). This Website as well as two reviewers of the book *Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins* state that **if an Albanian woman whose family lives by the Kanun chooses not to marry the man chosen for her, she cannot marry anyone else** and must take a vow of lifelong celibacy under the code of the Kanun, under which she must dress, act and be treated as a man, and must never marry (ibid.; UNP Jul. 2002; Colgate University Sept. 2000). However, according to both a reviewer of the book Women Who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins and the academic and author Predrag Sarcevic, the sworn virgin custom appears to be limited to patriarchal communities in northern rural Albania (UNP Jul. 2002; Sarcevic n.d.).
>
> Based on information obtained from a non-governmental organization, Citizenship and Immigration Canada reported in 2002 that a blood feud did result in Albania when a woman rejected a man's engagement proposal made to her (CIC July 2002, 9). In corroboration, an Albanian Blood Feud Specialist who helped establish the Centre for Reconciliation of Blood Feuds in Shkoder, Albania, and who is also an academic as well as the author of several publications relating to Albania, wrote the following in 9 May 2004 correspondence to the Research Directorate:
>
>> The basic answer [to the question of whether a blood feud can be caused by a woman failing to marry a man who has been chosen by her family and his family] is yes, although the argument would be stronger if she is a northerner [where the Kanun is more strictly followed (Jolique 9 June 2000)](Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004, *ALB42629.E 'Albania: Information on whether a blood feud can be caused by a woman failing to marry a man who has been chosen by her family and his family'*, 14 May – Attachment 5).

In 1996 the executive director of the Albanian Helsinki Committee in Albania told the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada "Minors are not obliged to enter into forced marriages and there are no religious influences. They have the freedom to choose. Couples unify in marriage according to the law." (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1996, *ALB23666.E 'Albania: Update to Response to Information Request ALB22731.E of 20 February 1996 on forced marriages among Moslem minors'*, 27 March – Attachment 6)

Two other responses by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada deal with the operation of and escape from blood feuds within Albania

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, 'ALB101471.E – 22/09/2006 Albania: Protection available to persons targeted in blood feuds from the government,

police, judiciary and non-governmental organizations; effectiveness of protection measures (2005 – 2006)', 22 September – Attachment 7

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, 'ALB101479.E 'Albania: Possibility for those targeted in blood feuds to relocate within Albania; whether avengers can locate targeted individuals who have relocated in other areas of Albania (2005 – 2006), 13 September – Attachment 8.

2. What is the information on the Aldo Bare Group?
3. Please provide any available information on an Alfred Shkurti?

The Aldo Bare gang is reportedly one of Albania's most notorious organised crime gangs from Lushnja (also spelt "Lushnje") in central Albania. It is also referred to as the "Banda Aldo Bare gang", the "Panda Aldo Bare gang" and the "Lushnja gang".

Alfred Shkurti, also known as Aldo Bare, is reportedly the founder and leader of Aldo Bare gang. In March 2006 Shkurti was arrested in Turkey, and several other members of the gang were arrested in April 2006 in Albania, Greece and Italy. A news report of 26 March 2006 gives details of Shkurti's arrest and profiles the alleged crimes of the gang:

> Turkish police have arrested the founder and leader of one of Albania's most notorious crime gangs in a raid in Ankara, officials in Albania said Sunday.
> Alfred Shkurti, leader of the Banda Aldo Bare crime gang, was detained early Saturday carrying a false Macedonian passport, Albanian Interior Ministry spokesman Altin Ndroqi said.
> Turkish news reports said he was detained at a house in Ankara's residential Batikent district following a tip.
> Shkurti's gang operated out of Albania, Turkey, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania, trafficking drugs to Western Europe, according to Albanian Interior Minister Sokol Olldashi.
> Albanian prosecutors say Shkurti, who also goes by the name Aldo Bare, was behind more than 15 murders and several hijackings, as well as the destruction of property and the desecration graves.
> Shkurti was expected to be extradited to Albania, Turkey's Anatolia news agency reported.
> In 2001, Shkurti was sentenced in absentia by an Albanian court to 25 years in prison for one murder, though an appeals court reduced the sentence to seven years.
> In 1997, Shkurti killed and decapitated the alleged killer of his brother, showing off the head of his victim in his hometown of Lushnja, 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of the capital, Tirana, according to Olldashi.
> He is also accused of killing a policeman and plotting to kill other officers.
> Shkurti leads "one of the most important international drug trafficking rings toward Western Europe," Olldashi said Saturday.
> Olldashi said Shkurti used fake Macedonian passports to move in and out of Albania.
> Police in Ankara would not comment on his arrest.
> The Albanian has been wanted on an international arrest warrant since 2000.
> He is believed to have been in hiding in Turkey for the past four years, and narrowly escaped arrest in a raid in Istanbul two years ago, Turkey's Hurriyet newspaper reported.
> Albanian police arrested seven alleged members of his gang a week ago. It is believed one of them was instrumental in helping authorities track down Shkurti.
> ('Leader of Albanian crime gang arrested in Turkey' 2006, Associated Press, 26 March – Attachment 9)

Shkurti was described in an earlier report:

> Aldo Bare (Alfred Shkurti) known as "the kingpin" of Lushnja band … was a former police officer ... The Lushnja band is accused of a series of grave penal acts as premeditated murder, tortures, kidnapping, maltreatment, illegal possession of arms and so on. He has been involved in illegal activity from July '97 to May '99.
> (Shkodrani, d. 2001, 'Prosecution demands life imprisonment for Aldo Bare and his accomplice', *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, 11 September – Attachment 10).

Other reports on the gang are attached:

- 'Albanian interior minister announces capture of notorious gang leader' 2006, *BBC Monitoring*, Source: Albanian news agency ATA, 26 March – Attachment 11;

- 'Albanian interior minister announces police success in breaking up criminal gang' 2006, *BBC Monitoring*, Source: Albanian news agency ATA, 13 April – Attachment 12;

- 'Deputy Minister Lezhja: Three Suspects Of Being Members Of Aldo Bare's Gang Cuffed' 2006, *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, 22 April – Attachment 13

As of mid-2007, Shkurti was still fighting extradition from Turkey to Albania ('Ankara is cool to Tirana's expectations on Shkurti's extradition' 2007, *Turkish Daily News*, 13 March http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=68148 – Accessed 4 December 2007 – Attachment 14; 'Albanian gang leader to be extradited' 2007, *Turkish Daily News*, 6 April http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=70028 – Accessed 4 December 2007 – Attachment 15). No firm reports of his extradition were found and his current status and whereabouts are unknown.

In April it was reported that "Shkurti's lawyer claimed that the crimes said to be committed by the defendant were of political nature." ('Albanian gang leader to be extradited' 2007, *Turkish Daily News*, 6 April http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=70028 – Accessed 4 December 2007 – Attachment 15).

4. Please provide any information on a Petrit Lici?

An Albanian newspaper, *Gazeta SOT Online*, reported that Petrit Lici was one of seven Aldo Bare members arrested and awaiting trial in April 2006 ('Other members of Lushnja band arrested' 2006, *Gazeta SOT Online*, 14 April http://www.sot.com.al/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=21414 – Accessed 4 December 2007 – Attachment 16).

Petrit Lici was reportedly tried in June and gave evidence against other gang members in return for a reduced sentence: "As regards the other defendant, Petrit Lici, who has repented, the prosecutors asked reduction of period of imprisonment from 25 years to 7 years since he is under witness protection program" ('Prosecution Demands Life Imprisonment For Member Of Lushnja Gang' 2006, *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, 23 June – Attachment 17).

Petrit Lici also gave evidence that judge Artan Gjermeni was linked to the Aldo Bare gang ('Albanian minister provides reasons for cancelling mandate of "corrupted" judge' 2006, *BBC Monitoring*, Source: report in English by Albanian news agency ATA, 27 July – Attachment 18).

List of Sources Consulted

Internet Sources**:**

Government Information & Reports
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UNHCR http://www.unhchr.ch/
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Amnesty International website http://www.amnesty.org/
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BBC News website http://news.bbc.co.uk/
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Databases**:**
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BACIS (DIMA Country Information database)
REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)
ISYS (RRT Country Research database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)
RRT Library Catalogue

List of Attachments

1. DIMIA Country Information Service 2004, *Country Information Report No. 40/04 – Muslim woman married to a Catholic male – claim of persecution Albania* (sourced from DFAT advice of 30 April), 21 May (CISNET BACIS 'Albania' CX94926)

2. US Department of State 2007, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007 – Albania*, 14 September.

3. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2002, *ALB39159.E 'Albania: Whether two persons of different religions, for example a Christian and a Muslim, can get married in a civil ceremony in Albania'*, 12 July (REFINFO)

4. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004, *ALB42373.E 'Albania: Blood feuds resulting from one party refusing to agree to marriage after formal acceptance of an engagement; remedies available to avert a blood feud'*, 11 March (REFINFO)

5. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004, *ALB42629.E 'Albania: Information on whether a blood feud can be caused by a woman failing to marry a man who has been chosen by her family and his family'*, 14 May (REFINFO)

6. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1996, *ALB23666.E 'Albania: Update to Response to Information Request ALB22731.E of 20 February 1996 on forced marriages among Moslem minors'*, 27 March (REFINFO)

7. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2006, 'ALB101471.E – 22/09/2006 Albania: Protection available to persons targeted in blood feuds from the government, police, judiciary and non-governmental organizations; effectiveness of protection measures (2005 – 2006)', 22 September (REFINFO)

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9. 'Leader of Albanian crime gang arrested in Turkey' 2006, *Associated Press*, 26 March (Factiva)

10. Shkodrani, d. 2001, 'Prosecution demands life imprisonment for Aldo Bare and his accomplice', *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, 11 September (Factiva)

11. 'Albanian interior minister announces capture of notorious gang leader' 2006, *BBC Monitoring*, Source: Albanian news agency ATA, 26 March (Factiva)

12. 'Albanian interior minister announces police success in breaking up criminal gang' 2006, *BBC Monitoring*, Source: Albanian news agency ATA, 13 April (Factiva)

13. 'Deputy Minister Lezhja: Three Suspects Of Being Members Of Aldo Bare's Gang Cuffed' 2006, *Albanian Telegraphic Agency*, 22 April (Factiva)

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16. 'Other members of Lushnja band arrested' 2006, *Gazeta SOT Online*, 14 April http://www.sot.com.al/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=21414 – Accessed 4 December 2007

17. ‘Prosecution Demands Life Imprisonment For Member Of Lushnja Gang’ 2006, Albanian Telegraphic Agency, 23 June (Factiva)

18. ‘Albanian minister provides reasons for cancelling mandate of “corrupted” judge’ 2006, BBC Monitoring, Source: report in English by Albanian news agency ATA, 27 July