COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION KEY DOCUMENTS

ALBANIA

14 AUGUST 2008

UK Border Agency
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION SERVICE

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Preface

i This Country of Origin Information Key Documents (COI Key Documents) on Iraq has been produced by COI Service, UK Border Agency (UKBA), for use by officials involved in the asylum/human rights determination process. It provides general background information about the issues most commonly raised in asylum/human rights claims made in the United Kingdom. The COI Key Documents includes information available up to 14 August 2008. It was issued on 28 August 2008.

ii The COI Key Documents is an indexed list of key reports, papers and articles produced by a wide range of recognised external information sources. It does not contain any UKBA opinion or policy.

iii For UK Border Agency users, the COI Key Documents provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source numbers in the index and list of sources. For the benefit of external users, the relevant web link has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.

iv As noted above, the documents identified concentrate mainly on human rights issues. By way of introduction, brief background information on Albania is also provided. Please note, this background material is not intended to provide a summary of the material contained in the documents listed.

v This COI Key Documents and the documents listed are publicly disclosable.

vi Any comments regarding this COI Key Documents or suggestions for additional source material are very welcome and should be submitted to COI Service as below.

Country of Origin Information Service
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Website: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/country_reports.html

ADVISORY PANEL ON COUNTRY INFORMATION

vii The independent Advisory Panel on Country Information (APCI) was established in 2003 to make recommendations to the Home Secretary about the content of the UK Border Agency's country of origin information material. The APCI welcomes all feedback on UKBA's COI Key Documents, COI Reports and other country of origin information material. Information about the Panel's work can be found on its website at www.apci.org.uk

viii In the course of its work, the APCI reviews the content of selected UKBA COI documents and makes recommendations specific to those documents and of a more general nature. The APCI may or may not have reviewed this particular document. At the following link is a list of the COI Key Documents, COI Reports and other documents which have, to date, been reviewed by the APCI: www.apci.org.uk/reviewed-documents.html

ix Please note: It is not the function of the APCI to endorse any UKBA material or procedures. Some of the material examined by the Panel relates to countries designated or proposed for designation for the Non-Suspensive Appeals (NSA) list. In such cases, the Panel's work should not be taken to imply any endorsement of the decision or proposal to designate a particular country for NSA, nor of the NSA process itself.

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Website: www.apci.org.uk

2. Background information on Albania

2.01 **Full Country Name:** The Republic of Albania
Area: Total area approximately 27,748 sq. km
Population: 3.5 million (est.)
Capital City: Tirana
People: Albanian 95%, Greeks 3% and others 2% (Vlachs, Roma, Egyptians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bulgarians (1989 est.). Estimates of the minority populations vary widely between different interlocutors and there is a general absence of reliable statistics.
Languages: Albanian (Tosk is the official dialect), Greek, others.
Religion(s): Sunni Muslim (70%), Albanian Orthodox (20%), Roman Catholic (10%) (est.)
Currency: Lek [ALL]
Major Political Parties: Socialist Party, Democratic Party, New Democrat Party, Social Democratic Party, Republican Party, Socialist Movement for Integration.
Government: Parliamentary democracy
Head of State: President Bamir Topi
Prime Minister: Dr Sali Berisha (Democratic Party)
Foreign Minister: Lulzim Basha
Membership of International Groupings/Organisations: United Nations, South East Europe Cooperation Process, Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe (COE), World Trade Organisation (WTO) (FCO Country Profile: Albania, last updated 28 February 2008) **[4a]**

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GEOGRAPHY

2.02 The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Country Profile on Albania, updated 28 February 2008, noted "Albania lies on the eastern Adriatic coastline, bordered by Montenegro to the north, Serbia/Kosovo to the north east, Macedonia to the east, and Greece to the south and south-east." **[4a]**

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RECENT HISTORY

2.03 Europa World Online, accessed 20 March 2007, stated that:

"On 28 November 1912, after more than 400 years of Turkish rule, Albania declared its independence under a provisional Government. Although the country was occupied by Italy in 1914, its independence was re-established in 1920. Albania was declared a republic in 1925 and Ahmet Beg Zogu was elected President; proclaimed King Zog I in 1928, he reigned until he was forced into exile by the Italian occupation of Albania in April 1939. Albania was united with Italy for four years, before being occupied by German forces in 1943; the Germans withdrew one year later." **[1a]**

2.04 The BBC Country Profile on Albania, updated 5 March 2008, reported "After World War II, Albania became a Stalinist state under Enver Hoxha, and

remained staunchly isolationist until its transition to democracy after 1990. The 1992 elections ended 47 years of communist rule, but the latter half of the decade saw a quick turnover of presidents and prime ministers." **[7a]**

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RECENT EVENTS AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

2.05 The FCO Country Profile on Albania, updated 28 February 2008, noted:

"In March 1992 the Democratic Party (DP) led by Sali Berisha won the parliamentary elections. Berisha became President and was re-elected in May 1996. The 1996 elections were criticised by international observers for violations of the electoral law and for Government-instigated intimidation. In January 1997, anti-government demonstrations erupted in the south of Albania following the collapse of a number of pyramid financial schemes. Riots spread across the country and insurgents gained control of many towns in the Southwest. Protesters called for the resignation of President Berisha and for the return of their money. Over 13,000 refugees fled to Italy during the crisis. The state armouries were attacked and an estimated 550,000 small arms looted: some were smuggled out of the country, but 120,000 had been collected and destroyed by 2001.

"The Parliamentary general election that took place on 24 June 2001 was followed by a further 3 rounds in July. Though long and drawn out, these elections were peaceful and produced a decisive victory for the ruling Socialist Party. On 21 August Ilir Meta was nominated for another term as Prime Minister. A report on the elections by the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), published in October, drew attention to a number of flaws and instances of manipulation in the elections, but concluded that such shortcomings were not sufficient to have affected the overall result. Berisha has continued to dispute the result, and a further Democratic Party boycott of Parliament lasted until 29 January.

"On 24 July 2002 President Alfred Moisiu, a consensus candidate, elected by parliament, was sworn in. On 25 July Pandeli Majko resigned as Prime Minister. A Presidential decree named Fatos Nano as his successor.

"The latest Parliamentary elections were held on 3 July 2005. After a lengthy appeals process and re-runs in three of the 100 constituencies, the results were announced on 1 September (in total, there are 140 seats in Parliament, the additional 40 are allocated on a party basis). The leader of the Democratic Party, former President Dr Sali Berisha, was then invited to form a new government. In early November 2005, the OSCE/ODIHR released their final report on the elections and noted that although Albania had enjoyed its first peaceful transfer of power since the end of single party politics, there were still shortcomings to be addressed." **[4a]**

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ECONOMY

2.06 **GDP:** US$ 7.5 billion (2004)

GDP per head: US$ 2385 (2004)
Annual Growth: 5.9% (2004)
Inflation: 2.9% (2004)
Major Industries: Cement, Oil, Chromium, Nickel, Copper, Hydroelectric power.
Major trading partners: Italy, Greece, Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey, Macedonia **[4a]**
Exchange rate: £1 = 155.159 ALL (XE.com, accessed 30 April 2008) **[24]**

2.07 On the economy of Albania, the FCO Country Profile, dated 28 February 2008, further stated:

"Albania is one the poorest countries in Europe. Since 1990, the economy has struggled to recover from the distortions of the communist regime, the impact of the move to a market economy and the 1997 crisis. Growth is strong albeit from a very low base. Energy provision remains a serious problem as a result of under investment and low water levels in the reservoirs on which hydroelectric production depends. The maintenance of law and order remains a major problem in Albania. There are high levels of organised crime and corruption." **[4a]**

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3. Human Rights

OVERVIEW

3.01 The USSD 2007 Country Report on Human Rights in Albania stated:

> "The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas, including societal "blood feud" killings, security force abuse of prisoners and detainees, poor prison and pretrial detention conditions, police corruption and impunity, discrimination against women, children, and minorities, and human trafficking." **[2a]**

3.02 In their 2007 Annual Report on Human Rights, the FCO noted in their overview of Albania that although it is party to several international agreements on human rights, Albania continued to have difficulty implementing legislation and reform in some areas. **[4b] (p72)**

3.03 Amnesty International's (AI) 2008 Annual Report, covering events of 2007, expressed the following concerns in Albania:

- Torture and ill-treatment
- Police impunity
- Conditions of detention
- Violence against women
- People trafficking **[11a]**

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TRAFFICKING

3.04 The Freedom House 2008 report, published August 2008 stated:

> "Albania is a source country for trafficking in women and children. As the result of a national strategy to combat the problem, there has been a reduction in trafficking across the Adriatic and Ionian seas over the last few years. Moreover, a number of traffickers have been successfully tried and convicted in Albanian courts. Due to weak witness-protection programs, however, only about 10 percent of victims have been willing to testify against trafficking defendants." **[22a]**

3.05 In their 2007 Annual Report on Human Rights, the FCO noted:

> "Although some progress has been reported by the European Commission, trafficking in human beings persists and this remains a significant challenge for Albania. The authorities recognise this: in February 2007 Albania became the first country to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. It has a comprehensive national anti-trafficking strategy and an improved legal framework to protect the rights of victims of trafficking." **[4b] (p68)**

3.06 The USSD Trafficking in Persons report, published 4 June 2008, commented:

"The Government of Albania failed to consistently sustain efforts to identify, refer, protect, and reintegrate victims of trafficking during 2007. The government's ability to fund protection and assistance services was limited; however, it operated one victim care shelter in Tirana. The government provided sporadic in-kind assistance to four additional NGO-managed shelters, such as the use of government buildings and land. In July 2007, all five shelters signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the shelters. In a change during this reporting period, there was an overall decline in the number of victims identified due to inappropriate application of the national referral mechanism for several months by anti-trafficking police.

"Victims are not jailed or fined for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of their being trafficked. The Albanian witness protection program is available for victims of trafficking who participate in prosecutions; however, evidence suggests that the system is ineffective for victims of trafficking." **[2d] (p)**

3.07 The Council of Europe Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights, published 18 June 2008, stated "Although the numbers of trafficked Albanian women and children appears to be decreasing, credible reports indicate that many still are faced with the danger of simply being recycled into trafficking. Owing to the illicit nature of the act, the extent to which re-trafficking exists is undocumented and unclear. …

"Tackling the widespread problem of victim identification, the government has stepped up its efforts in the course of the lat year to secure effective identification of victims through initiating interviewing procedures in the presence of not only border, migration and/or anti-trafficking police officers, but reinforced with representatives from the social services and specialised NGO's. However, representatives of specialised anti-trafficking NGOs told the Commissioner that the inclusion of NGOs does not happen on an institutionalised and regular basis and needs to be improved." **[27a] (p20)**

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BLOOD FEUDS

3.08 The Freedom House 2008 report, published August 2008 stated "In the north, traditional tribal law and revenge killings have come to fill the void left by the state." **[22a]** The USSD report for 2007 further noted that societal killings, including both generational "blood feud" killings and revenge killings, had continued to occur in 2007.

"Statistics vary on blood feud activity. According to the Interior Ministry, of the 96 murders during the year, two were related to blood feuds, with the number of blood feud killings dropping due to an increase in investigations. However, the Committee for National Reconciliation, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), continued to cite high levels of blood feud activity including over 1,000 families imprisoned in their homes for fear of blood feud reprisals against them. The tradition of blood feuds stems from a traditional code of honor that is still followed in only a few isolated communities. In February parliament approved amendments to the Criminal Code to criminalize blood feuds and made them punishable by a three-year sentence.

This COI Key Documents contains the most up-to-date publicly available information as at 14 August 2008.
Older source material has been included where it contains relevant information not available in more recent documents.

"During the year an NGO-sponsored conference called on the government's Coordinating Council on the Fight Against Blood Feuds, which is headed by the president, to take a more proactive role in fighting blood feuds. The council held its first meeting this year.

"The Court of Serious Crimes tried blood feud cases. Premeditated murder, when committed for revenge or a blood feud, is punishable by 20 years' or life imprisonment." **[2d] (p1)**

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LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PERSONS

3.09 The Council of Europe Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights, published 18 June 2008, stated "Same-sex consensual relations have been decriminalised by the Albanian Parliament but an open discussion regarding homosexuality remains taboo in Albania. Since 2004 the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexuals is 14. Albania does not recognise marriages or civil unions of any kind between same sex partners. A draft antidiscrimination law has been submitted to the parliament; among its provisions it addresses equal opportunities for all irrespective of sexual orientation.

"LGBT persons are routinely subject to intolerance, physical and psychological violence and seen by many persons suffering from an 'illness'. There were reports from the OSCE Mission, human rights NGO's and LGBT groups whom the Commissioner met that the LGBT community suffers abuses not only from the general public, but that there have also been cases of mistreatment by the police. The recent Naser Muhed Saidik Almalak case (relating to the arrest of five individuals in Tirana) highlighted shortcomings in police arrest and detention procedures when dealing with LGBT persons, but also discrimination, arbitrariness, maltreatment and the public disclosure of the health status of some of the arrested persons." **[27a] (p18)**

3.10 The USSD report for 2007 noted: "As in previous years, NGOs claimed that police targeted the homosexual community for abuse [in 2007]. According to the Albanian Gay and Lesbian Association, the police arbitrarily arrested homosexuals and then physically and verbally abused them while they were in detention.

"The Albanian Human Rights Group reports that during the year police harassed members of the Albanian Gay and Lesbian Association and other known homosexuals, sometimes searching their homes without a warrant." **[2d] (p11)**

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ETHNIC GROUPS

3.11 The Freedom House 2008 report, published August 2008 stated:

"Although Albania has created a basic framework to protect ethnic minorities, implementation of many measures is incomplete. The country's 95,000 Roma face significant discrimination and social and political marginalization. According to a 2007 European Commission report, less than 50 percent of Romany children attend elementary school, and only 25 percent complete primary

education. The state has taken some steps to improve housing and employment opportunities for the Roma, but very little real-life progress has been achieved thus far. Other minorities, including the Greeks, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Aromanians, are well integrated socially and economically. The constitution mandates that all minorities have the right to receive education in their native language." **[22a]**

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WOMEN

3.12 The Freedom House 2008 report, published August 2008 stated:

"The constitution places no legal restraints on women's role in politics and society, but women are vastly underrepresented in most governmental institutions. At the end of 2007, only one of 15 government ministers and 10 of 140 members of parliament were women. Traditional patriarchal social mores impose significant limits on the position of women in society. A gender equality law was adopted in 2004, but the situation for women has improved only slightly. Domestic violence is common and is not a criminal offense. Women who seek redress against domestic abuse are often ignored by the authorities, who generally lack training on such issues." **[22a]**

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Violence against women

3.13 The Council of Europe Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights, published 18 June 2008, stated "Violence against women, particularly domestic violence is a widespread human rights violation which is under-reported, under-investigated, under-prosecuted and under-sentenced in Albania. There is an un-qualified number of offenders enjoying impunity as the crime is still seen as a private issue and therefore seldom reported." **[27a] (p17)**

3.14 The USSD report for 2007 commented that:

"The government has a department of equal opportunities at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity which covers women's issues, including domestic violence. The government did not fund specific programs to combat domestic violence or assist victims, although non-profit organizations did. Women to Women, a Swedish NGO, reported that there were approximately six domestic violence hot lines that operated throughout the country. … Shtreheza, an NGO that operated two shelters for battered women in Tirana, reported an increase in reported cases of domestic violence, primarily due to increased awareness of services." **[2d] (p8)**

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3. Index to key source documents

(KB users - click source number to access document directly)

KEY FACTS AND GEOGRAPHY	**[1a]**	Europa World Online, Location, Climate, Language, Religion, Flag, Capital (accessed on 20 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
	[1a]	Europa World Online, Country Statistics (accessed on 20 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2007: Albania http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm
	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Albania, last updated January 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm
	[4a]	Country Profile: Albania, last updated 28 February 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1018696633488
	[7a]	BBC, Country Profile: Albania, last updated on 5 March 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm
	[10a]	Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), The World Factbook Albania, last updated on 15 March 2008 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html
MAP	**[6a]**	UNHCR, Map of Albania http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3dee189b4.pdf
	[28]	Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, Albania Maps, undated http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/albania.html
HISTORY	**[1a]**	Europa World Online, Recent History (accessed on 20 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2007: Albania http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm
	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Albania, last updated January 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm
	[4a]	Country Profile: Albania, last updated 28 February 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1018696633488
	[7a]	Country Profile: Albania, Last updated 5 March 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm

HISTORY CONT'D	**[7b]**	BBC Timeline: Albania, last updated on 5 March 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1004984.stm
	[22a]	Freedom in the World 2008: Albania http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7337
POLITICS AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS	**[1a]**	Europa World Online, Government and Politics (accessed on 20 March 2007) http://www.europaworld.com/pub/
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	[2c]	United States Department of State, Background Note: Albania, last updated January 2008 http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm
	[4a]	Country Profile: Albania, last updated 28 February 2008 http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1018696633488
	[7a]	Country Profile: Albania, Last updated 5 March 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm
	[7b]	BBC Timeline: Albania, last updated on 5 March 2008 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1004984.stm
	[8a]	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Response to Information Request – Albania National Front Party, 16 November 2006 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=450659
	[11a]	Amnesty International (AI) report 2008: Albania, covering events from January to December 2007, published 28 May 2008 http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/albania
	[22a]	Freedom in the World 2008: Albania http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7337
	[22c]	Nations in Transit 2008: Albania (accessed via ReliefWeb) http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4865cf570.pdf
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	[5a]	Human Rights Watch (HRW), Albania Country Page, accessed on 1 May 2008 http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=europe&c=albani
	[6c]	UNHCR, Albanian Constitution, 21 October 1998 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.pdf?tbl=RSDLEGAL&id=3ae6b5dd0
	[11a]	Amnesty International (AI) report 2008: Albania, covering events from January to December 2007, published 28 May 2008 http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/albania
	[22a]	Freedom in the World 2008: Albania http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7337
	[22c]	Nations in Transit 2008: Albania (accessed via ReliefWeb) http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4865cf570.pdf
HUMAN RIGHTS – SPECIFIC ISSUES: **(IN ADDITION TO GENERAL REPORTS ABOVE, INFORMATION ON THE FOLLOWING ISSUES IS PROVIDED IN THE DOCUMENTS LISTED BELOW)**		
ARREST AND DETENTION – LEGAL RIGHTS	**[2a]**	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2007: Albania http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm
BLOOD FEUDS	**[2a]**	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2007: Albania http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm
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	[8p]	Response to Information Requests, ALB102098.E National Association of the Blood Feud Reconciliation, 26 February 2007 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewre

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	[2a]	United States Department of State, Report on Human Rights Practices – 2007: Albania http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100544.htm
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	[11a]	Amnesty International (AI) report 2008: Albania, covering events from January to December 2007, published 28 May 2008 http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/albania
	[11g]	Albania: Respect the right of orphans to housing, 21 November 2007 http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR11/008/2007/en/dom-EUR110082007en.html
	[15a]	Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Global Report 2008: Albania http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf
	[20a]	UNICEF, Albania Background (accessed on 9 May 2008) http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/albania_background.html
	[20b]	UNICEF Albania (accessed on 23 March 2007) http://www.unicef.org/albania/
	[22a]	Freedom in the World 2008: Albania http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7337
	[26c]	USAID Albania, Shelter on Frontlines, 5 September 2007 http://albania.usaid.gov/shfaqart/110/94/Success_Story.htm
	[27a]	Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, on his visit to Albania 27 October - 2 November 2007 (accessed via RefWorld) http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/485a176f2.pdf
CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONALITY	**[6d]**	UNHCR, Law on Albanian Citizenship, September 1998 http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.htm?tbl=RSDLEGAL&id=3ae6b5c10
	[6e]	UNHCR, On some changes in Law no. 8389, Dated 5 August 1998 "On Albanian Citizenship" http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-

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	[8k]	Response to Information Requests, ALB102520.E Procedure to obtain a passport from outside the country, 10 October 2007 http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451256
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