

## **COUNTRY FACT SHEET**

### **ALBANIA**

**August 2007**

Research Directorate  
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## **1. GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Official name**

Republic of Albania.

### **Geography**

Albania is located in southeastern Europe. The total land area is 28,748 km<sup>2</sup>. Albania is bordered by Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea. The climate is temperate Mediterranean. During the winter Albania is prone to cyclones.

### **Population and density**

Population: 3,600,523 (July 2007 estimate).

Density: 114.1 persons per km<sup>2</sup> (2004 estimate).

### **Principal cities and populations (2001 Census)**

Tiranë (Tirana, capital) 343,078; Durrës 99,546; Elbasan 87,797; Shkodër 82,455; Vlorë (Vlonë or Valona) 77,691; Fier 56,297; Korçë 55,130; Berat 40,112; Lushnjë 32,580; Kavajë 24,817; Pogradec 23,843; Gjirokastër 20,630.

### **Languages**

Albanian (official), Greek, Vlach, Romani and Slavic dialects.

### **Religions**

Muslim 70%, Albanian Orthodox 20% and Roman Catholic 10%.<sup>i</sup>

### **Ethnic groups (1989 estimate)**

Albanian 95%, Greek 3%, others (Vlach, Roma, Serb, Macedonian, Bulgarian) 2%.

### **Demographics (2007 estimate, unless otherwise indicated)**

Population growth rate: 0.529%.

Infant mortality rate: 20.02 deaths/1,000 live births.

Life expectancy at birth: 77.6 years.

Fertility rate: 2.03 children born/woman.

Literacy: 86.5% of people 9 years of age and over can read and write (2003 estimate).

### **Currency**

Albanian Lek (ALL).

ALL 88.25 = CAD 1.00.<sup>1</sup>

### **National holidays**

**2006:** 1 January (New Year's Day), 10 January (Great Bayram, Feast of the Sacrifice), 11 January (Republic Day), 14-17 April (Roman Catholic Easter), 24 April (Eastern Orthodox Easter), 1 May (International Labour Day), 23 October (Small Bayram, end of

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<sup>i</sup> Numbers are estimates as religious observance was outlawed until 1990 and there are no current statistics available.

Ramadan), 28 November (Independence and Liberation Day), 25 December (Christmas Day), 31 December (Great Bayram, Feast of the Sacrifice).

**2007:** 1 January (New Year's Day), 11 January (Republic Day), 6-9 April (Roman Catholic Easter), 9 April (Eastern Orthodox Easter), 1 May (International Labour Day), 13 October (Small Bayram, end of Ramadan), 28 November (Independence and Liberation Day), 20 December (Great Bayram, Feast of the Sacrifice), 25 December (Christmas Day).<sup>ii</sup>

### **Head of state**

President Bamir Topi (since 20 July 2007).

### **Head of Government**

Prime Minister Sali Berisha (since 10 September 2005).

### **Form of government**

Albania, an emerging democracy, is a parliamentary republic. The president is the chief of state and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president is elected by the People's Assembly (Kuvendi Popullor) for a 5-year term and may be re-elected for a second term. Once elected, the president must renounce all political affiliations. The president chooses the prime minister, who is a representative of the party or coalition with the most seats in the People's Assembly, Albania's parliament. The prime minister, as the head of government, nominates the Council of Ministers.

### **Legislative structure**

The parliament is a unicameral assembly called the People's Assembly (Kuvendi Popullor). The assembly has 140 seats, 100 of which are elected by direct popular vote and 40 which are allocated according to the proportional vote received by the parties. Members serve 4-year terms.

### **Administrative divisions**

Albania has 12 counties (also known as *qarqe*):

Berat, Dibër, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Gjirokastër, Korçë, Kukës, Lezhë, Shkodër, Tiranë and Vlorë.

### **Judicial system**

The judiciary is composed of the High Court, the Constitutional Court, the Courts of Appeal and the Courts of First Instance. The president appoints the chairman and members of the High Court and the judges of the Constitutional Court to 9-year terms, upon approval of members of the legislature. Other judges are proposed by the High Council of Justice and then appointed by the president. Juries do not exist for court trials. Groups of three judges deliver verdicts.

### **Elections**

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<sup>ii</sup> Some dates may vary by one or two days due to the lunar calendar.

Albania has universal suffrage for citizens 18 years of age and older. Parliamentary elections were held on 3 July 2005. The distribution of the 140 seats was: Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë, PD) 56 seats, Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë, PS) 42 seats, Republican Party of Albania (Partia Republikane e Shqipërisë, PRSh) 11 seats, Social Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Socialdemokrat e Shqipërisë, PSDS) 7 seats, Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim, LSI) 5 seats, Agrarian Environmental Party (Partia Agrare Ambjentaliste, PAA) 4 seats, New Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike e Re, PDR) 4 seats, Democratic Alliance Party (Partia Aleanca Demokratike, PAD) 3 seats, Christian Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokristiane e Shqipërisë, PDK) 2 seats, Union for Human Rights Party (Partia Bashkimi për të Drejtate e Njeriut, PBDNj) 2 seats, Social Democracy Party of Albania (Partia Demokracia Sociale e Shqipërisë), Liberal Democratic Union (Bashkimi Liberal Demokrat, BLD) 1 seat and Independent 1 seat.

On 20 July 2007, Bamir Topi was elected president.

### **Defence**

Military service is mandatory for citizens 19 years of age and over. A conscript's service obligation is 12 months. As of August 2005, the Albanian Armed Forces numbered 21,500 personnel:

Army:	16,000
Air Forces:	3,500
Naval Forces:	2,000

Paramilitary forces include the internal security force and 500 border police.

The 2005 defence budget is estimated at ALL 11,450,000,000 (CAD 129,738,739).

### **Media**

Article 22 of the 1998 Albanian Constitution grants citizens freedom of expression and freedom of the press.

The principal daily newspapers are: *Albanian Daily News* (in English); *Gazeta Shqiptare* (independent), *Koha Jonë* (independent), *Republika* (published by the Republican Party of Albania), *Rilindja Demokratike* (published by the Democratic Party of Albania), *Shekulli* (independent), *Zëri i Popullit* (published by Socialist Party of Albania) (in Albanian).

In 2001, there were roughly 700,000 televisions in households. In 2002, there were approximately 36,000 personal computers in use. In 2005, there were an estimated 75,000 internet users.

### **United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) and Country Rank<sup>iii</sup>**

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<sup>iii</sup> The HDI is a composite measurement of human development in a country, based on life expectancy, levels of literacy and education, and standard of living. Values are: 0.800 and higher (high human

Value: 0.784/1.  
Rank: 73 out of 177 countries.

**United Nations Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Country Rank<sup>iv</sup>**

Value: 0.780/1  
Rank: 59 out of 136 countries.

**Population below the national poverty line (2004 estimate)**

25%.

**Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)<sup>v</sup>**

Score: 2.6/10.  
Rank: 111 out of 163 countries surveyed.

**Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)<sup>vi</sup>**

Political parties 3.2, parliament/legislature 3.2, business/private sector 3.1, police 3.8, legal system 3.8, media 2.5, tax revenue 3.4, medical services 4.1, education system 2.8, military 2.7, utilities 3.2, registry and permit services 3.6, NGOs 3.0 and religious bodies 2.3.

**[Information compiled from: Albania 1998; *ibid.* n.d.; *Europa 2006 2006; PHW 2007 2006, 12-20; TI 7 Dec. 2006; *ibid.* 6 Nov. 2006; UN 2006; US May 2007; *ibid.* 17 Apr. 2007].***

## **2. POLITICAL BACKGROUND**

Albania's long-reigning Communist government fell in 1990.<sup>2</sup> From March 1992 until 1997, Albania was ruled by the Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë, PD).<sup>3</sup> From 1997 to 2005, the Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë, PS) held power.<sup>4</sup>

Problems with electoral procedures and political turmoil plagued Albania in the early 2000s.<sup>5</sup> However, the 3 July 2005 parliamentary election was deemed by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to be a partial improvement as "[i]t was a competitive contest and candidates were offered a wide electoral choice from a range of political parties."<sup>6</sup> Freedom House described it as the "first change of

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development), 0.500-0.799 (medium human development) and 0.500 and under (low development index). Countries are ranked in descending order by their HDI value.

<sup>iv</sup> The GDI adjusts the rating of the HDI to reflect inequalities between men and women.

<sup>v</sup> The Transparency International CPI is based on composite survey data from 16 polls and 10 independent institutions. The data reflects the perceptions of resident and non-resident business people and country analysts. Scores range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). According to their score, countries are ranked in order from least corrupt (1) to most corrupt (163).

<sup>vi</sup> The Transparency International GCB is a public opinion survey used to gauge people's perceptions of corruption within their own state. Scores range from 1 (not at all corrupt) to 5 (extremely corrupt).

power without significant violence."<sup>7</sup> However, there were problems with multiple voting and security breaches.<sup>8</sup> There was one death connected to electoral violence.<sup>9</sup>

In June 2006, Albania signed the *Stabilization and Association Agreement* with the European Union (EU),<sup>10</sup> an important step toward full membership in the EU.<sup>11</sup> In November 2006, following the ratification of Protocol 13 to the European Convention on Human Rights, Albania abolished the death penalty.<sup>12</sup> A report by Amnesty International (AI) indicates that public confidence in the justice system is low.<sup>13</sup> Albania has responded to EU pressure to address judicial corruption by clarifying procedures for disciplinary hearings, modifying requirements for the qualification of judges and decreasing administrative formalities required for certain permits and licences.<sup>14</sup>

In 2006, political debate in the Albanian parliament was particularly contentious.<sup>15</sup> In particular, there was division regarding local elections initially scheduled for late 2006 or early 2007.<sup>16</sup> The political deadlock in parliament over the local elections was enough to stall other efforts toward reform.<sup>17</sup> Local elections were eventually held on 18 February 2007, instead of their originally scheduled date of 20 January 2007.<sup>18</sup> The OSCE noted that although the election allowed for competition, Albania's chief political parties concentrated their efforts in "short-term party interests over the stability and trustworthiness of the election process."<sup>19</sup>

On 20 July 2007, members of parliament elected Bamir Topi as president of Albania.<sup>20</sup> Topi has stated that he will seek to promote constitutional integrity, good relations among political groups and Albanian membership in the EU and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>21</sup>

### 3. POLITICAL PARTIES

#### **Leading party:**

**Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë, PD):** Established in 1990, the PD supports democratic reform, protection of human rights and open markets.<sup>22</sup> The PD won 56 seats in the July 2005 parliamentary elections.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the elections, the PD made agreements with several parties to cooperate in the election as the Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Welfare (Aleance për Liri, Drejtësi, dhe Mirëqenie, ALDM).<sup>24</sup> The ALDM combined the Liberal Democratic Union (Bashkimi Liberal Demokrat, BLD), National Front Party (Partia Balli Kombëtare, PBK), Albanian Republican Party (Partia Republikane Shqiptare, PRSh), Christian Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokristiane e Shqipërisë, PDK), Democratic Union Party (Partia Bashkimi Demokrat, PBD), New Democratic Party (Partia Demokrat e Re, PDr) and Human Rights League Party (Partia Lëvizja për të Drejtat dhe Lirite e Njeriut, PLDLNj).<sup>25</sup> The Alliance, with the support of the PD, secured 18 parliamentary seats.<sup>26</sup> The leader of the PD is Sali Berisha.<sup>27</sup> See below for further details on ALDM parties that won seats in the July 2005 election.

#### **Main opposition party:**

**Socialist Party of Albania (Partia Socialiste e Shqipërisë, PS):** The PS was founded in 1941 as the Albanian Communist Party.<sup>28</sup> In 1948, the party changed its name to the Party of Labour of Albania and was renamed in 1991 as the PS.<sup>29</sup> The PS has given up its Marxist-Leninist roots and now supports democratic socialism and open markets.<sup>30</sup> In the July 2005 parliamentary election, the PS won 42 seats.<sup>31</sup> The leader of the PS is Edi Rama.<sup>32</sup> The party has 110,000 members.<sup>33</sup>

**Other parties in parliament:**

**Republican Party of Albania (also known as the Albanian Republican Party) (Partia Republikane e Shqipërisë, PRSh):** The PRSh was founded in 1991 and is led by Fatmir Mediu.<sup>34</sup> In the July 2005 parliamentary election, the PRSh ran as part of the ALDM and won 11 seats in the People's Assembly.<sup>35</sup>

**Social Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Socialdemokrat e Shqipërisë, PSDS):** The PSDS was founded in 1991.<sup>36</sup> The party supports gradual changes in economic development and social justice<sup>37</sup> and holds 7 seats in the People's Assembly.<sup>38</sup> The leader of the PSDS is Skënder Gjinushi.<sup>39</sup>

**Socialist Movement for Integration (Lëvizja Socialiste për Integrim, LSI):** The LSI was founded in 2004 as a splinter group of the Socialist Party of Albania.<sup>40</sup> A leftist group, the LSI won 5 parliamentary seats in the July 2005 election.<sup>41</sup> The leader of the LSI is Ilir Meta.<sup>42</sup> The party has 40,000 members.<sup>43</sup>

**Agrarian Environmental Party (also known as the Environmentalist Agrarian Party and the Agrarian Party of Albania) (Partia Agrare Ambjentaliste, PAA):** The PAA was founded in 1991 as the Agrarian Party of Albania.<sup>44</sup> The PAA focuses on rural populations, addressing issues such as property rights.<sup>45</sup> The PAA secured 4 parliamentary seats in the July 2005 election.<sup>46</sup> The PAA's leader is Lufter Xhuveli.<sup>47</sup>

**New Democratic Party (also known as the Democrat Party) (Partia Demokratike e Re, PDr):** The PDr was founded in 2001 by former Democratic Party (PD) leader Genc Pollo<sup>48</sup> and other former members of the PD.<sup>49</sup> In July 2005, the PDr, running under the banner of the ALDM, won 4 seats in the parliamentary elections.<sup>50</sup>

**Democratic Alliance Party (Partia Aleanca Demokratike, PAD):** The PAD was founded in 1992 by former members of the Democratic Party of Albanians.<sup>51</sup> The PAD garnered 3 parliamentary seats in the July 2005 election.<sup>52</sup> The leader of the PAD is Neritan Ceka.<sup>53</sup>

**Christian Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokristiane e Shqipërisë, PDK):** The PDK was founded in 1991 and draws most of its support from the Catholic northern regions.<sup>54</sup> The PDK won 2 seats in the July 2005 parliamentary elections running as part of the ALDM.<sup>55</sup> The leader of the PDK is Nard Ndoka.<sup>56</sup>

**Social Democracy Party of Albania (Partia Demokracia Sociale, PDS):** The PDS was founded in 2003 by former members of the Social Democratic Party of Albania.<sup>57</sup> The



PDS supports centre and centre-left policies and secured 2 seats in the July 2005 parliamentary elections.<sup>58</sup> The leader of the PDS is Paskal Milo.<sup>59</sup>

**Union for Human Rights Party (also known as the Human Rights Union Party) (Partia Bashkimi për të Drejtat e Njeriut, PBDNj):** The PBDNj was founded in February 1992 as a successor to the Democratic Union of the Greek Minority (Bashkimi Demokratik i Minoritet Grek) after legislation was passed which banned political parties based on ethnicity.<sup>60</sup> The PBDNj primarily represents ethnic Greeks in the south<sup>61</sup> and won 2 parliamentary seats in the July 2005 election.<sup>62</sup> The leader of the PBDNj is Vangjel Dule.<sup>63</sup>

**Liberal Democratic Union (Bashkimi Liberal Demokrat, BLD):** Founded in January 1995, the BLD was first known as the Social Democratic Union of Albania (Bashkimi i Social Demokratikët i Shqipërisë).<sup>64</sup> The BLD contested the 2005 election as part of the ALDM and secured 1 parliamentary seat.<sup>65</sup> The leader of the BLD is Arjan Starova.<sup>66</sup>

#### **Other Parties:<sup>67</sup>**

Albanian Business Party (Partia e Biznesit Shqiptar, PB), Albanian Communist Party (Partia Komuniste Shqipëtare, PKSh), Albanian Conservative Party (Partia Konservatore Shqiptare), Albanian Ecological Party (Partia Ekologjike Shqiptare), Albanian Force Party (Partia Forca Albania, PFA), Albanian Green Party (Partia Të Gelbëritë Shqipërisë), Albanian Homeland Party (Partia Shqiptare Atdheu, PShA), Albanian National Security Party (Partia e Sigurisë Kombëtare Shqiptare, PSKS), Albanian Party for Democracy and New Europe (Partia Demokracia e Re Europiane Shqiptare, PDRESh), Albanian Party of Labour (Partia Punëtore Shqiptare, PPS), Albanian Socialist Alliance Party (Partia Aleanca Socialiste Shqiptare, PASS), Albanian Workers' Movement Party (Partia Lëvizja Punëtore Shqiptare, PLPS), Alliance for Welfare and Solidarity Party (Partia Aleanca për Mirëqenie dhe Solidaritet, AMS), Democratic Monarchist Movement Party of Albania (Partia Lëvizja Monarkiste Demokratike Shqiptare, PLMDS), Democratic Union of the Greek Minority (Bashkimi Demokratik i Minoritet Grek, OMONIA), Democratic Union Party (Partia Bashkimi Demokrat, PBD), Emigration Party of Albania (Partia Emigracioni Shqiptar, PES), Environmentalist Party (Partia Ambientaliste, PA), Labour Party of Albania (Partia e Punës e Shqipërisë, PPSH), Legality Movement (Partia Lëvizja e Legalitetit, PLL), Liberal Party (Partia Liberale), Macedonian Alliance for European Integration (Makedonskata alijansa za evropska integratsija), Movement for National Development (MND) (Lëvizjes për Zhvillim Kombëtar, LZhK), National League Party of Albania (Partia Lidhje Kombëtare Shqiptare, PLKS), National Reconciliation Party of Albania (Partia e Pajtimit Kombëtar Shqiptar, PPKS), National Union Party of Albania (Partia Bashkësia Kombëtare Shqiptare, PBKS), National Unity Party (Partia e Unitetit Kombëtar, PUK), Party for the Defense of Workers' Rights (Partia për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave të Punëtorëve, PMDP), Popular Alliance Party (Partia Aleanca Popullore, PAP), Reform Democratic Party of Albania (Partia e Reformare Demokratike Shqiptare, PRDS), Renewed Democratic Party (Partia Demokratike të Rinovuar), Republican Union Party of Albania (Partia Bashkimi Republikan Shqiptar, PBRs), Social Christian Party of Albania (Partia Socialkristiane e Shqipërisë, PSKS).

#### 4. ARMED GROUPS AND OTHER NON-STATE ACTORS

**Albanian National Army (Armata Kombëtare Shqiptare, AKSh):** The AKSh advocates for the formation of a "Greater Albania" to encompass Albania, Kosovo and parts of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.<sup>68</sup> Both the United Nations (UN) Mission in Kosovo and the United States have listed the AKSh as a "terrorist" organization.<sup>69</sup> The leaders of the AKSh are Gafur Adili and Idajet Beqiri.<sup>70</sup>

#### 5. FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Freedom House reports that "widespread lawlessness" is pervasive in Albania and that government institutions are fragile.<sup>71</sup> As such, criminal organizations have increased their power.<sup>72</sup> In northern Albania, traditional tribal law has experienced a revival resulting in blood feuds and revenge killings.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oanda 9 May 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> OSCE 7 Nov. 2005, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Freedom House 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> AI 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Freedom House 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> UK 14 June 2007; Freedom House 2007.

<sup>17</sup> UK 14 June 2007.

<sup>18</sup> OSCE 5 June 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> EC 27 July 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 485.

<sup>24</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 16-17.

<sup>26</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 16.

<sup>27</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007; *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 485.

<sup>32</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.

<sup>33</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.

- <sup>38</sup> Ibid. 485.  
<sup>39</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>40</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.  
<sup>41</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 18.  
<sup>42</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>43</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.  
<sup>44</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.  
<sup>45</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>46</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 485.  
<sup>47</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.  
<sup>48</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>49</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.  
<sup>50</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.  
<sup>51</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 486.  
<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 485.  
<sup>53</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>54</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17; *Political Parties of the World* 2005, 9.  
<sup>55</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.  
<sup>56</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>57</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 19.  
<sup>58</sup> Ibid.; *Europa 2006* 2006, 485.  
<sup>59</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>60</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.  
<sup>61</sup> *Europa* 486; *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 17.  
<sup>62</sup> Ibid.; *Europa 2006* 2006, 485.  
<sup>63</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>64</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 16.  
<sup>65</sup> *Europa 2006* 2006, 485.  
<sup>66</sup> US 17 Apr. 2007.  
<sup>67</sup> Compiled from: *Europa 2006* 2006; *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006; *Political Parties of the World* 2005.  
<sup>68</sup> *PHW 2007* Oct. 2006, 19-20.  
<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 20.  
<sup>70</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>71</sup> Freedom House 2007.  
<sup>72</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

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