



1. Please advise whether there is a high rate of gun crime in Albania?

Since the end of communism, Albania has suffered from a high rate of crime involving guns, including homicides and armed robberies, compared to elsewhere in Europe. In 2002 Albania was ranked 136th in the world in population, however 15th in the world in homicides involving firearms.¹ Recent statistics, however, indicate that in the ten years to 2007, gun-related homicides in Albania fell dramatically, despite a rise in 2006. Armed robberies are also reportedly falling. Albania is described as having a gun culture and gun possession remains among the highest in Europe. Organised crime, popularly referred to as the ‘Albanian Mafia’, remains a significant problem.

According to a 2008 report by the Country of Return Information (CRI) Project, security in Albania has improved significantly, especially since the riots of 1997; “[t]he Albanian government has improved the country’s law enforcement and security institutions and criminal activity has been greatly reduced.” The report provides statistics for homicides, indicating a dramatic fall between 1999 and 2007, which have been tabulated below:

Year	Homicides
1999	458
2000	258
2005	131
2006	199
2007	87

On the subject of armed robberies the CRI report only states that they “slightly decreased” between 2007 and 2008. However, no actual numbers are provided and therefore it is unclear how Albania compares to other European states or OECD members.²

Gun possession in Albania is reportedly high, particularly when compared with other European nations. A 2003 *BBC News* report on Albania’s gun culture suggested that the average Albanian may in fact own several guns and that changing the gun culture has proven difficult. The author does add that, despite this fact, “Albania’s lawlessness is no longer a spiralling problem.” Nevertheless, the *BBC News* report also states that “[i]t will be a long time before the guns that accompany and perpetuate Albania’s criminal economy are removed

¹ ‘Murders with firearms (most recent) by Country’ 2002, NationMaster, source: United Nations http://www.nationmaster.com/red/graph/crime_mur_wit_fir-crime-murders-with-firearms&b_printable=1 – Accessed 9 March 2010 – Attachment 1

² Country of Return Information (CRI) Project 2008, *Country Sheet – Albania*, December, pp.19-20 Attachment 2

from dangerous hands.”³ While both poverty and gun possession remain at such high levels, the potential for violent crime will also remain elevated.

The high gun ownership rate in Albania is often cited as a legacy of the nationwide riots of 1997, during which a number of military armouries were broken into and looted. According to one reputable source, “an estimated 550,000 weapons (mostly Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles) were looted from military depots” during this time. The source goes on to state that 36% of these looted weapons had been recovered by 2003.⁴ A 2009 United Nations report states that, in fact, as many as 650,000 guns were looted.⁵ If true, this would significantly reduce the percentage of weapons recovered.

There are reports, however, that many of these looted guns have since left the country, sold abroad for hard currency. One British police report states that many guns now found in the possession of criminals in Britain have their origins in Albania.⁶ It is therefore difficult to ascertain what the current level of gun possession is; anecdotal evidence suggests that it remains high.

So-called ‘blood feuds’ are common in Albania and have resulted in gun-related homicides. A 2008 article in *The New York Times* stated that an estimated “20,000 people have been ensnared by blood feuds since they resurfaced after the collapse of Communism in 1991, with 9,500 people killed and nearly 1,000 children deprived of schooling because they are locked indoors.”⁷ The killing of a son is apparently a common form of revenge in blood feuds. Fortunately, blood feud related deaths also appear to be declining in line with the reduction in the overall homicide rate. According to the Interior Ministry, there were four blood feud related killings, out of a total of 85 murders during 2008, the lowest number in 18 years. In 2009 the Interior Ministry only reported one.⁸ The US Department of State (USDOS) attributes this, at least in part, to the criminalisation of blood feuds in the criminal code in 2007 and the subsequent codification of a three-year sentence. It reported that “the Court of Serious Crimes tried blood feud cases” and that the “law punishes premeditated murder, when committed for revenge or a blood feud, with 20 years’ or life imprisonment.”⁹

Organised Crime in Albania, the so-called Albanian mafia, also receives much attention in the media. People smuggling, arms trafficking and prostitution are all cited as common enterprises pursued by Albanian organised crime, both inside and outside of the country. Despite the significance of organised crime and the black economy in Albania, there is little evidence that this translates into a high level of violent crime perpetrated against civilians. The previously quoted 2003 *BBC News* article on Albania gun culture states that “[c]riminal groups, whose stock-in-trade is people-trafficking, drugs and prostitution, as well as arms, are

³ Henley, P. 2003, ‘Albania’s gun culture proves hard to shift’, *BBC News*, 15 January <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2660853.stm> – Accessed 11 March 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ Szajkowski, B. (ed) 2005, ‘Albania’ in *Political Parties Of The World*, John Harper Publishing, London, p.4 – Attachment 4

⁵ United Nations 2009, *Small Arms: No Single Solution* – Attachment 5

⁶ Association of Chief Police Officers (UK) 2007, ‘*Gun Crime And Gangs: Response To The Home Secretary*’, September, p.19 http://www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/Gun_Crime_and_Gangs_160908.pdf – Accessed 9 March 2010 – Attachment 6

⁷ Bilefsky, D. 2008, ‘In Albanian feuds, isolation engulfs families’, *The New York Times*, 10 July http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/10/world/europe/10feuds.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&ref=world – Accessed 11 July 2008 – Attachment 7

⁸ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009: Albania*, 11 March <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eur/136016.htm#> – Accessed 12 March 2010 – Attachment 8

⁹ US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Albania*, 25 February – Attachment 9

a threat mostly to each other.”¹⁰ One impact upon civilians reported is the apparent abduction and smuggling abroad of young girls, to be used as sex workers in foreign brothels.¹¹

2. Please provide any information on whether the police are willing or able to pursue perpetrators of violent crime in Albania?

Like most former Eastern Block countries, post-communist Albania inherited a large corps of police from the former regime; however, communism’s demise saw a large exodus of personnel and collective skill, significantly diminishing the country’s capacity to fight violent crime. The collapse of the economy in the mid 1990s saw violent crime rates soar and during the riots of 1997, many police joined in the violence that ensued: “[i]n some towns, members of the police and the army (many of whom were victims of the collapsed pyramid schemes) sided with the rebels and voluntarily handed over their weapons.”¹² Low morale and salaries compounded the already ineffectual nature of the police. A decade later, however, and police morale, professionalism and capacity to pursue perpetrators of violent crime are all reportedly making improvements; due largely to cooperation from other European law enforcement agencies.¹³

The professional development of the Albanian police force does appear to be paying dividends; the response to question 1 indicated that a dramatic drop in homicides has been achieved. Furthermore, there is evidence that so-called ‘cold cases’ have been reopened by the police, resulting in a number of arrests. According to the US Department of State, in 2008 Albanian police “restarted investigations in some older cases, and uncovered the perpetrators of 81 murder cases from previous years.”¹⁴ This indicates improvement in both organisational and investigative skill capacity. It also indicates a willingness to pursue perpetrators of violent crime. The report does not, however, indicate the number of these perpetrators who were actually convicted and sentenced, nor does it indicate how many crimes remain unsolved. Accurate data collection and reporting by Albanian police is a problem cited by a number of non-government organisations.

As part of police reform and professionalisation in Albania, a new ‘State Police Law’ was introduced in 2008. According to the European Commission, this new law is already “having a positive effect on the behaviour of police managers, on recruitment and on career structures for officers.” This appears to translate into professional management of investigations and higher police morale. However, the Commission also indicates that many problems remain: staffing levels at the Albanian State Police (ASP) have yet to stabilise and skills gaps, “particularly in specialist departments” remains a problem and “the practice of removing previously trained and competent staff from their posts is adversely affecting the police... Another problem is that staff who have failed basic competence tests are retained within the State police training programme for up to three years.”¹⁵ The disinclination to sack

¹⁰ Henley, P. 2003, ‘Albania’s gun culture proves hard to shift’, *BBC News*, 15 January <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2660853.stm> – Accessed 11 March 2010 – Attachment 3

¹¹ Burrell, I. 2001, ‘Albanian mafia takes control of Soho vice scene’, *The Independent*, 18 June <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/albanian-mafia-takes-control-of-soho-vice-scene-674530.html> – Accessed 12 March 2010 – Attachment 10

¹² Szajkowski, B. (ed) 2005, ‘Albania’ in *Political Parties Of The World*, John Harper Publishing, London, p.4 – Attachment 4

¹³ British Embassy Tirana 2009, ‘Joint Press Release: EU Supports The Fight Against Organised Crime In Albania’, http://ec.europa.eu/delegations/albania/documents/news/2009/20090714_en.pdf – Accessed 12 March – Attachment 11

¹⁴ US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Albania*, 25 February – Attachment 9

¹⁵ European Commission 2008, *Commission Staff Working Document: Albania Progress Report*, 5 November – Attachment 12

incompetent staff most certainly would undermine the police service's ability to pursue perpetrators of violent crime.

The US Department of State concluded in a 2008 report that “[t]he overall performance of law enforcement remained weak. Unprofessional behaviour and corruption remained major impediments to the development of an effective civilian police force.”¹⁶ The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), however, recently praised Albania's police for their professional conduct managing recent elections, times traditionally associated with high levels of violence in Albania. Commenting on the 2007 elections, the OSCE stated that the police “were able to maintain order under circumstances that were at times difficult, and their involvement was called upon only when tensions resulted in physical violence.”¹⁷ While this does not speak to the question of whether police are prepared to pursue perpetrators of violent crime, it does indicate the ongoing professional development of the police and their increasing ability to maintain law and order in a state until recently characterised by lawlessness. One concern for the ongoing professional development of the Albanian police is the resignation in October 2009 of Albania's director of police, Ahmet Prenci, the man who oversaw much of the police reform since the middle of the decade.¹⁸

3. Please provide any information on police corruption and whether criminals are prosecuted.

Police corruption remains a problem in Albania. A commonly cited causal link to corruption in Albania is the generally low salaries, making police “vulnerable to corruption”. Nevertheless, there are strong signals that the authorities are attempting to eradicate such corruption; the Country of Return Information (CRI) Project states that the anti-corruption unit in the Ministry of the Interior, the Office of Internal Control (OIC), took disciplinary measures against 100 policemen in 2007 on bribery charges.¹⁹ The US Department of State stated that in 2008 a “total of 153 government officials were investigated (including police officers), and 72 were arrested.”²⁰

Like the US Department of State, Freedom House also describes Albanian law enforcement agencies and the judiciary as “inefficient and prone to corruption, and judicial proceedings can be unjustifiably delayed.” In addition, criminals who are prosecuted and sentenced often avoid punishment; “[e]nforcement of court decisions is weak, especially when they go against government interests.” Freedom House states that Albania's President Bamir Topi “complained that a third of all court orders are not enforced.”²¹ There are, however, some indications that police are making efforts on this front, particularly in relation to violent crime; in February 2010 the *Tirana Times* reported that Albanian Police successfully extradited a convicted murderer, Fredi Aliaj, from The Netherlands. In the same article the *Tirana Times* also reported that police extradited Gentian Lici from Italy. Aliaj was convicted

¹⁶ US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Albania*, 25 February – Attachment 9

¹⁷ Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2007, *Republic of Albania Local Elections 18 February 2007: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report*, 5 June, p.21

http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2007/06/24859_en.pdf – Accessed 6 October 2009 – Attachment 13

¹⁸ Likmeta, B. 2009, ‘Albania's Police Chief Replaced’, *Balkan Insight*, 29 October

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/23285/> – Accessed 2 February 2010 – Attachment 14

¹⁹ Country of Return Information (CRI) Project 2008, *Country Sheet – Albania*, December – Attachment 2

²⁰ US Department of State 2009, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2008 – Albania*, 25 February – Attachment 9

²¹ Freedom House 2009, *Freedom in the World Country Report Albania*, 16 July – Attachment 15

in 2007 for a 2004 murder and was sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. It is not stated in the article how he managed to escape police custody.²²

A December 2008 UK Home Office report argues that failure to punish perpetrators of crimes remains a problem in Albania and part of the problem has been a lack of coordination between agencies and a culture of apportioning blame; “[p]olice, prosecutors and the judiciary continued to blame each other for failures that allowed criminals to avoid imprisonment.” The report does, however, suggest that measures are being adopted to improve inter-agency co-operation, “including the initiation in September 2007 of the Joint Investigative Unit, which brought together criminal investigators and prosecutors to work on specific cases.”²³

Attachments

1. ‘Murders with firearms (most recent) by Country’ 2002, NationMaster, source: United Nations http://www.nationmaster.com/red/graph/crime_mur_wit_fir-crime-murders-with-firearms&b_printable=1 – Accessed 9 March 2010.
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8. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009: Albania*, 11 March <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eur/136016.htm#> – Accessed 12 March 2010.
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²² ‘Extraditions from Netherlands, Italy’ 2010, *Tirana Times*, 15 February

<http://www.tiranatimes.com/print.php?id=8660> – Accessed 11 March 2010 – Attachment 16

²³ UK Home Office 2008, *Operational Guidance Note: Albania*, source: UK Border Agency, December, p.3, section 2.1 – Attachment 17

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17. UK Home Office 2008, *Operational Guidance Note: Albania*, source: UK Border Agency, December.