



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Albania

Albania – ALB40190 – Bajraj Clan –  
Muslim criminal gangs – Organised crime  
– Shkoder – Criminal links with Albanian  
government  
17 April 2012

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**1. Attempt to locate sources that mention: a.) the Bajraj clan; b.) Muslim criminal gangs in Shkoder;**

No information was located regarding the Bajraj clan, or regarding Muslim criminal gangs in Shkoder specifically. Limited general information was located regarding Albanian Muslim criminal gangs.

According to an undated report on the Serbianna.com website titled “The New Islamic Mafia”, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced that “ethnic Albanian gangs including immigrants from Kosovo, are replacing the Italian La Cosa Nostra as the leading organized crime outfit in the US”. According to the report, “the Albanian mob is already the chief perpetrator of drug and people smuggling, passport theft and forgery, weapons and human body parts sales, sex-slavery, abductions [and] murders”. The report further noted that the “predominately Catholic Mafia is being replaced by a predominately Muslim Albanian *Fis*”, and that the emerging Muslim Albanian Mafia in the US “may be implicated in terrorist financing”. Serbianna.com noted that the, “Albanian mafia is based on family groups...The division among clans or family groups in Albania was originally a social division, not a criminal one”.<sup>1</sup>

While not specifically referring to Muslim criminal gangs, a 2004 *CNN* report on the rise of Albanian organised crime noted that the FBI was “closely watching to see whether the militant Muslims in the emerging organized crime world demonstrate ties to organizations suspected of involvement in terrorist financing”.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, Italian intelligence publication *Gnosis* reported on the history and growth of the Albanian mafia. The report noted that an Albanian “Islamic Integralist group called Al Jihad Al Djadid, probably connected to Al Qaeda...presumably has installed relations of collaboration with criminal organizations, also with a view to utilizing the already experimented “routes” of the illegal emigrant traffic, for the transfer of militants”. The article further noted the importance of “monitoring both a possible spiral growth of a direct or indirect presence connected to Islamic integralism and possible interaction between

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<sup>1</sup> Bozinovich, M n.d., ‘The New Islamic Mafia’, Serbianna.com website  
<<http://www.serbianna.com/columns/mb/028.shtml>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>2</sup> Frieden, T 2004, ‘FBI: Albanian mobsters “new mafia”’, *CNN*, 19 August  
<<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/LAW/08/18/albanians.mob/>> Accessed 10 April 2012

criminality and terrorism, which would offer an unexplored and dangerous support to terrorist “carriers” right close to the heart of Europe”.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Report on organised criminal activity in Albania, focussing on the north and Shkoder.

Sources suggest that armed crime continues to be prevalent in northern and north-western Albania, including Shkoder.

According to the US Department of State in January 2012:

Organised crime is present in Albania; organised criminal activity occasionally results in violent confrontations between members of rival organizations. Armed crime continues to be more common in northern and northwestern Albania than in the rest of the country.<sup>4</sup>

The US Department of State’s ‘Albania 2012 Crime and Safety Report’ noted that “organized criminal groups continue to operate in all regions...[and] remains a serious problem in Albania, but the violence related to it rarely affects the international community”. According to the report, “[m]ost armed crime occurs in the north of the country”.<sup>5</sup> Though dated, a September 2005 US Department of State report specifically mentioned Shkoder:

...organized criminal gangs continue to operate in all regions and corruption is pervasive. The U.S. Government maintains security procedures regarding the travel of U.S. Government employees to the Administrative districts of Malesi E Madhe, Shkoder, and Tropoje (with the exception of cities along the national road) and to the southern town of Lazarat, with such travel restricted to secure vehicles with escort. In most cases, police assistance and protection is limited...

...Armed crime is common in Shkoder and frequent in other towns in northern and northwestern Albania. Throughout the country, street crime is fairly common, and occurs particularly at night. Criminals do not deliberately target U.S. citizens or other foreigners, but criminals seek targets of opportunity and select those who have anything of value...<sup>6</sup>

In September 2011, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) advised against “travel to the north-east region bordering Kosovo (including the cities of Bajram Curri and Tropoje) due to the risk of criminal violence and unexploded ordnance along the Albania-Kosovo border”. DFAT noted that “[a]rmed criminal gangs are particularly prevalent in this north-east region...[and f]oreigners have been robbed and assaulted when travelling in this area”.<sup>7</sup>

According to a report posted on the Balkanweb.tv blog in April 2011, Shkoder police arrested two criminal gangs in separate incidents. The first group was arrested while reportedly attempting to extort 80,000 Euros from a businessman. The gang members had been under surveillance, and were accused of “extortion by threat or violence, committed in cooperation”, as well as of “illegal firearms possession and ammunition”. The second gang

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<sup>3</sup> Gnosis 2005, ‘The growing Albanian Mafia: from the risk of area to the great alliances’, *Gnosis Italian Intelligence Magazine*, n.4/2005 <<http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/gnosis/Rivista5.nsf/ServNavigE/19>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs 2012, ‘Albania Country Specific Information’, 27 January <[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1076.html#crime](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html#crime)> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State 2012, ‘Albania 2012 Crime and Safety Report’, OSAC website, 2 March <<https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12106>> Accessed 13 April 2012

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State 2005, ‘Albania: Consular Information Sheet’, 21 September <[http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_1076.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html)> Accessed 27 January 2006

<sup>7</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2011, ‘Travel Advice for Albania’, Smart Traveller website, 27 September <<http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Albania>> Accessed 10 April 2012

were arrested for armed robbery, and had reportedly been previously sentenced by Shkoder Court.<sup>8</sup>

While not specifically regarding the northern region and Shkoder, in 2005, Italian intelligence publication *Gnosis* noted that the “Albanian criminal scenario is characterized by diversified criminal plans which, in their complexity, show one of the highest criminal capacities in the world”, and that they “co-exist in mutual assistance”.<sup>9</sup> To wit:

*Mafia type organizations*, characterized by a rooted control of the territory, by systematic collusive practices and by qualified “external” projections, through which they assure the development of trans-national illicit activities...The mafia type organizations are based on clan structure, families and are essentially indigenous although their distinct opportunistic vocation renders them “open” to interactions with other organizations, to the formation of functional cartels and to “network” logics...

*criminal gangs*, extremely fluid and mobile on the territory, gifted with high versatility and often given to activities of service with respect to the interests of the mafia associations. These gangs are versatile, essentially predatory, ready to move on the national territory or abroad (also in Italy) with precise operative and collusive connections. They often adopt “hypertrophic” criminal attitudes, i.e. excessively violent with regard to the targets they intend to pursue;

*criminal aggregations*, having transient structures and only tied by temporary and occasional opportunities to commit illegal acts. They work on the territory, both specializing in basic criminal activities...and adapting rapidly to other unknown activities.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Report on links between criminal gangs and/or criminals and the government of Albania.**

Limited specific information was located regarding links between the Government of Albania and criminal gangs. According to *The New York Times* in January 2011, “Albania remains one of Europe’s poorest and most unstable states...the European Union has delayed membership talks out of concern for Albania’s weaknesses with the rule of law and failure to combat organized crime and corruption”.<sup>11</sup> An undated report published by the Research Institute for European and American Studies claimed that “Albanian Organized Crime groups constitute one of the most expanding and networked criminal groups in contemporary Balkans and Europe”. According to the report, Albanian organised crime groups are “hybrid organizations, often involved both in criminal activity of an organized nature and in political activities”.<sup>12</sup>

In July 2010, the UK Home Office noted that:

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Balkanweb.tv.blog 2011, *Shkoder, two gangs of robbers caught*, 18 April

<<http://balkanwebtv.blogspot.com.au/2011/04/shkoder-two-gangs-of-robbers-caught.html?z#!/2011/04/shkoder-two-gangs-of-robbers-caught.html>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>9</sup> Gnosis 2005, ‘The growing Albanian Mafia: from the risk of area to the great alliances’, *Gnosis Italian Intelligence Magazine*, n.4/2005 <<http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/gnosis/Rivista5.nsf/ServNavigE/19>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>10</sup> Gnosis 2005, ‘The growing Albanian Mafia: from the risk of area to the great alliances’, *Gnosis Italian Intelligence Magazine*, n.4/2005 <<http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/gnosis/Rivista5.nsf/ServNavigE/19>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>11</sup> ‘Tension builds beneath calm after violence in Albania’ 2011, *The New York Times*, 25 January <[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/25/world/europe/25iht-albania25.html?\\_r=1&ref=albania](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/25/world/europe/25iht-albania25.html?_r=1&ref=albania)> Accessed 31 January 2011

<sup>12</sup> Michaletos I n.d., ‘Shape of the Albanian Organized Crime’, Research Institute for European and American Studies <[http://rieas.gr/index.php?Itemid=42&id=332&option=com\\_content&task=view](http://rieas.gr/index.php?Itemid=42&id=332&option=com_content&task=view)> Accessed 10 April 2012

The Albanian Government has undertaken several measures to combat organised crime and corruption and there are mechanisms in place to deal with police who are corrupt. Prosecutions against corrupt police officers and government officials are evident. However, some links between rogue officials and organised crime may remain and where there are links to serious organised crime or corruption the state may not be able to provide sufficient protection.<sup>13</sup>

In 2008, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that organised crime “is believed to have achieved its current proportions because of corruption...[t]his can include petty corruption such as the extortion of bribes by civil servants, and grand corruption such as major procurement fraud”. While UNODC noted that Albania has “one of the best legislative frameworks against corruption in the region”, it also has the largest problem, and the number of public officials convicted for corruption is growing. Recent arrests included “the Deputy Minister for Public Works and Transportation; the Secretary General of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; the Director General of Roads; directors and specialists at the regional agencies of the Tax Office and department of Forests, and others”.<sup>14</sup>

According to an undated report on the Serbianna.com website, the Parliament of Albania “recently addressed the close connection between the criminal and political”, and in July 2004, “adopted a package of anti-mafia legislation and among the provisions is a prohibition of officials convicted of corruption from holding public office for a specified period of time”. Despite this, according to an Albanian writer, “[n]ot a single trial of a criminal gang has successfully been completed in Albania... trials of groups linked to politics are usually held behind closed doors by decision of the courts, and the judges usually resign and emigrate from the country”.<sup>15</sup>

In April 2006, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights reported that the Albanian government had “launched rigorous legal and institutional reforms to address widespread corruption and organized crime”. Despite many of these initiatives being “welcomed by civil society, others raise human rights concerns and question the government’s commitment to the rule of law”. According to the report, the government “proposed to limit the immunity of members of parliament without amending constitutional provisions guaranteeing immunity, and to exclude employment in public administration, customs and tax authority positions virtually any relatives of authorities already holding high positions in government or public administration”. The report acknowledged that the government had “made it a priority to combat corruption and organized crime, but we are concerned about the means used, some of which violate Albania’s international commitments”.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> UK Home Office 2010, *Operational Guidance Note – Albania*, July, p.10

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2008, *Crime and its Impact on the Balkans*, UNODC website, March, pp.88-90 <[http://www.unodc.org/documents/Balkan\\_study.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/Balkan_study.pdf)> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>15</sup> Bozinovich, M n.d., ‘The New Islamic Mafia’, Serbianna.com website <<http://www.serbianna.com/columns/mb/028.shtml>> Accessed 10 April 2012

<sup>16</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights 2006, ‘Threats to human rights in Albania’, 17 March <[http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc\\_summary.php?sec\\_id=3&d\\_id=4215](http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4215)> Accessed 10 April 2006

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