



Albania – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 30 January 2018

Up-to-date information that the lives of businessmen are threatened presently in Albania by criminal gangs seeking to extort money or close down competing businesses.

A technical report jointly authored by academics Fabian Zhilla and Besfort Lamallari, in a section headed “Threat assessment of organized crime in Albania”, states:

“Albanian criminal groups active in the territory of the Republic of Albania are generally made up of 3-4 members and include, mostly, the trafficking of narcotics, mainly cannabis. They also traffic other kinds of drugs such as cocaine and heroin to neighboring countries, with EU countries being the final destination. Sporadic groups are involved in arms trafficking across the borders with Montenegro and Kosovo. Extortion cases are of concern as they are not reported. Neither is the use of explosives, murders by paid assassins or murders for which the perpetrator is not found, with the aim of eliminating rivals, rebalancing the market, and control of territory. There has been an increase in conflicts between businesses which in itself has brought about the proliferation of assassinations, i.e. murders for which paid assassins are used. In addition, the number of murders using remote-controlled devices and ordinary explosives are on the rise. The majority of these murders are believed to take place over territory and competition. Extortion of businessmen is considered a real concern. Sources confirm that these cases are never reported to the Police or Prosecution Service due to the lack of trust in the justice system and the potential of repercussions/ consequences. Furthermore, it is believed that organized crime invests in corrupting police officers and prosecutors.” (Zhilla, Fabian and Lamallari, Besfort (January 2015) *Organised Crime: Threat Assessment in Albania*, p.9)

A report published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, in a chapter titled “Prevalence and patterns of other forms of crime” (section headed “Extortion”), states:

“While the prevalence of extortion for businesses in Albania is 0.5 per cent, it is nevertheless cause for concern. Extortion is a very serious crime in which the perpetrators try to obtain money or other benefits from a company by threatening or intimidating managers or employees. In some cases, extortion is also presented as the offer of ‘protection’ from damages to property or persons and the money paid is presented as a type of ‘protection money’. In some cases extortion can be linked to organized crime groups, who have the power and the means to make a credible threat towards a business with potentially dire consequences if their demands are not met.

The data indicate that extortion threats take on a variety of menacing forms. According to victimized businesses in Albania, over half (52.4 per cent) of

extortion threats involve specific damage to the business or its property, while 16.1 per cent spell out unspecific damage to the business or its property. In addition, 11.3 per cent involve specific personal threats to harm the owner, manager, employees or their relatives. Other cases involve other threats, such as harming clients or contaminating products.

It is notable that the methods used to convey extortion threats to businesses in Albania are fairly conventional and seem designed to have the greatest possible impact on the person threatened. In almost two thirds of cases (62.3 per cent) one or several offenders walk into the premises of the business victimized to convey the threat, while in almost one third of cases (32 per cent) the threat is made in a personal encounter elsewhere. In about one fifth (20.6 per cent) of cases extortion threats are simply communicated by telephone.” (UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2013) *Business, Corruption and Crime in Albania: The impact of bribery and other crime on private enterprise*, p.56)

A short article from the Albanian Daily News states:

“Two persons were arrested by Vlora police on Sunday on charges of allegedly threatening a businessman to pay them a sum of EUR 100.000. Endri Beqiraj, 28 and Julo Rrokaj, 25 threatened to kill the businessman Sh.S. if he would refuse to give them the ransom.” (Albanian Daily News (13 August 2017) *Vlora, Two Arrested for Extortion Calls to a Businessman*)

A recent report from the Albanian media platform Exit states:

“On January 13, C4 explosives were placed in the car of businessmen Lulzim Kalla (43), known as one of the ‘big guys’ of the city. Kalla was wounded by the explosion, while also six others, who happened to be in the area, were heavily wounded. Kalla is known since 1997 as the head of a criminal organization mainly involved in extortion of businesses. Recently the Prosecution of Shkodra started the investigation of the death of local trader from after being tortured. Kalla is assumed to have the perpetrator of this crime, although the murder has officially remained unsolved.” (Exit (15 January 2018) *Mafia Executions Return to Albania*)

The 2016 US Department of State country report on Albania, in a section headed “Other Societal Violence or Discrimination”, states:

“Incidents of societal killings, including both ‘blood feud’ and revenge killings, occurred during the year. Media portrayed some gang-related killings as blood feud killings, and criminals at times used the term to justify their crimes. There were no cases of minors or women falling victim to blood feud killings. The ombudsman reported that authorities’ efforts to protect families or prevent blood feud deaths were insufficient, although the government increased efforts to prosecute such crimes.” (US Department of State (3 March 2017) *2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania*, pp.25-26)

A European Commission working document, in a section headed “Fight against organised crime”, states:

“The country has reached some level of preparation in the fight against organised crime. Overall, some progress was made, in particular on identifying and destroying cannabis plots. However, police and prosecution fail to identify criminal gangs behind drug cultivation and trafficking, and efficient judicial follow-up in criminal proceedings is seldom secured. There was little progress on fulfilling the recommendations identified last year. The police was modernised and international police cooperation intensified, especially with Europol. However, cooperation between police and prosecution needs to be further strengthened so that they can dismantle criminal networks more effectively. The number of final convictions in organised crimes cases is still limited, marking only a slight increase in recent years. Financial investigations targeting suspected members of organised criminal groups are not systematically and effectively used.” (European Commission (9 November 2016) *Albania 2016 Report*, p.19)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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