



Georgia – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 23 January 2019

Is there recent evidence of a lack of State protection for boys at risk of honour killings? Are there recent reports of boys who have been killed by non state agents /family for being involved in a relationship with a girl before marriage?

Recent reports of boys who have been killed for being involved in a relationship with a girl before marriage were not found among sources available to the Refugee Documentation Centre.

The 2017 US Department of State country report for Albania, in a section titled “Other Societal Violence or Discrimination”, states:

“Alleged incidents of societal killings, including both ‘blood-feud’ and revenge killings, occurred during the year, but as of August authorities had reported only one case of a blood-feud killing. 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 (20 April 2018) *2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Albania*, p.22)

A report written by Cedoca, the Documentation and Research Department of the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons of Belgium, in a section titled “Albanian State Police”, states:

“The Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs declared to Cedoca that – generally speaking – the authorities are nowadays closely monitoring the known cases of contemporary blood feuds and that the phenomenon is largely under control. ‘Since 2013 it is not an issue anymore. People feel safer. If the police receive a request for protection, they deal with it.’

The statement by the Vice-Minister was repeated in more detail by two sources at the Albanian police forces whom Cedoca has met during the fact-finding mission. The General Director from the Albanian State Police claimed that the police have made a lot of efforts to end the blood feud phenomenon since the National Action Plan no. 1277 (dd. 24/10/2012) ‘On the prevention, tracking and fighting criminal acts of murder motivated by blood feuds’. He claimed that nowadays ‘each officer knows what to do’. He explained that a good cooperation has been established between the police and several other organizations (the Prosecutor’s Office, the municipalities, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, etc.) and that this cooperation facilitates quick interventions and arrests.

The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate referred to the National Action Plan 419 (which is the updated version of National Action Plan no. 1277)249 against blood feuds. He highlighted that nowadays

different police structures (local police, intelligence officers, wider police structures) are permanently collecting and updating all relevant information with regard to known blood feuds in their area: 'We are updating our information all the time now.'

The same source in Shkodër explained that a network has been set up that comprises stakeholders from outside the police forces (religious leaders, community leaders, actors from local governments, social services, etc.) with whom there is a constant exchange of information. He particularly stressed that lines of communication have been established as well between the police forces and the blood feud affected families themselves: 'All the affected families presently know their neighbourhood police officers. They have their phone numbers and they have the general emergency numbers. The affected families understand now that the support coming from the police is safer for them.'

The representative at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate explained in more detail that his police officers are supervising the situation of the 68 confined families in the whole region of Shkodër by 'contacting them, patrolling regularly and supervising their houses'. He stated that 'local field officers are ordered to approach them regularly and to stay in contact with them.' He also claimed that his officers try to 'mitigate, mediate and soothe down' those blood feud affected families who are not living in confinement.

Apart from controlling and monitoring, the police also claimed to actively contribute to the prosecution of citizens who are involved in blood feuds. Both police sources claimed that as soon as there are serious indications of an imminent crime (e.g. a threat) or that a crime was committed, these elements are transferred to the Prosecutor's Office for investigation and prevention. Lastly, both police sources explained their strategies to prevent new blood feuds (cfr. *infra* 6. Prevention). 'When a murder has occurred, the damaged families are immediately monitored proactively in order to prevent that a blood feud will develop. The dynamics of a case are supervised now. We are trying to collect as much information as possible in order to identify elements that indicate the preparation of a revenge killing.'

Cedoca's interlocutor at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate indicated that negligence by police officers in matters related to blood feud are punished severely nowadays: 'We can be fired if we do not deposit the complaints that are given by the citizens or if we do not verify information that is provided to us.' On the other hand, he also mentioned that the police has to reckon with its 'heel of Achilles': Since they are tasked with many other social responsibilities as well, they cannot always be everywhere.

Both police sources argued that the implementation of directives launched by the government to halt the blood feud phenomenon have had a positive impact and they referred to the statistics that indicate a decrease of the phenomenon (cfr. *supra* 4. Prevalence).

During its fact-finding mission, Cedoca met two experts who expressed strong doubt that the police is capable of controlling, monitoring, preventing and prosecuting the contemporary blood feud phenomenon: Operazione Colomba and Elsa Ballauri. Although they agreed that the police is accessible nowadays and that the police is 'at least' hearing the citizens and that they are taking complaints now, they stressed that there are still very important

issues of negligence and ineffectiveness at the heart of the police forces. They claimed that the police could do their investigation work much better. 'Sometimes the suspects in a contemporary blood feud case are arrested immediately after an incident but what follows is a deficient investigation and the suspects are released again.'

However, multiple other non-governmental sources confirmed that the police forces have renewed and strengthened their attention to the phenomenon of contemporary blood feuds and have also acknowledged its effectiveness and impact on the decrease of the phenomenon:

The local representative of the national ombudsman declared that in the past blood feud cases were not investigated at all. They were considered normal. But, according to this source:

'the presence of the law has very much advanced nowadays. In the last 5-6 years the law and order were re-established. Closed cases have been re-opened and potential blood feud cases are treated with particular attention, even in the remote areas. If something happens, the police will intervene nowadays. Police is eager to solve issues, to resolve disputes. If a dispute arises, the police will act for sure. The police will start a process of investigation and arrest those who pose a threat. They will not leave it like that. There is less space for taking the law in their own hands or for thinking of impunity. Even people in remote areas tend to go to the police station now or denounce to the prosecution office instead of taking the law into their own hands.' He also stressed that nowadays police officers can be 'laid off and be charged for negligence.'

An appeal court judge in Shkodër confirmed that nowadays the police have the data of all the families that are involved in a blood feud. She explained that when a murder has been identified as a potential blood feud case, the police will search for family members who could be involved.

The mayor of Fushë-Arrëz confirmed that the police is present and that they will intervene whenever they are called: 'People don't have to protect themselves anymore since the police is there now.' He gave the example of a funeral in the beginning of 2017. After the last survivor of a blood feud affected family who resided in the village had died, his children were able to come from abroad to attend the funeral thanks to close police protection. The mayor also stated that the local police is now trying to collect all possible information and data in order to know every person in his municipality who might be affected by blood feuds and threats. But the mayor also pointed at some very concrete shortcomings that are still jeopardizing effective police protection: 'The infrastructure and logistics of the police in my commune remain deficient. Sometimes I even have to lend them my private car.' He also indicated that the salaries of the police officers are too low to guarantee maximum efficiency. Nevertheless, there is some improvement: 'the salaries have risen and the police are more mixed. Police officers are brought in from other places as well. This way they are not too closely connected when something happens.'

Mentor Kikia confirmed that the police forces have identified all the families who are in a blood feud ('Government and police know the cases of isolated persons now.') and he agreed that it is possible now for citizens to reach the

police for protection: 'Each affected family has a list of phone numbers in case a problem becomes urgent. They can always call. The police will come and intervene, even if a family lives far away.' Kikia also acknowledged that there is a real improvement in the registration of complaints, but he warned that a complaint is sometimes too vague for the police to react swiftly. He also explained that nowadays a police officer should have the courage not to register a complaint or to ignore received information in cases where the public uses the media because they feel that their requests and complaints are not answered. He agreed that the blood feud phenomenon has decreased since the state and the police are more powerful. He concluded that 'you cannot be "in blood feud" anymore like that. You want safety and you will reach for the police nowadays. When someone is a target, it is in his interest to have it registered.'

Liljana Luani confirmed that the police directorate has the right data now and she repeatedly declared that the local police department is always ready to help her and her mission.

Other sources like professor Gjuraj, the OSCE representatives, Luigj Mila and Rasim Gjoka have unanimously declared that the functioning of the police forces is not problematic anymore even if improvements should be made in efficiency. They all confirmed that the police forces try to identify all the blood feud cases; that they are more professional now in registering complaints and information and that they will try to intervene when the life of citizens is threatened because of a blood feud case." (Cedoca (Documentation and Research Department of the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS)) (29 June 2017) *Blood Feuds in contemporary Albania: Characterisation, Prevalence and Response by the State*, pp.32-34)

A report from Operazione Colomba, the Nonviolent Peace Corps of the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, states:

"Nonviolent Peace Corps of the Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, learns from Albanian media sources about Indrit Pepa's homicide, 27 years old killed on 6th September 2018 in Mamurras, in the prefecture of Kurbin, to revenge the wounding of Azis Markola, committed by Pepa in 2013. Agron Markola, Azis Markola's brother, is wanted for Indrit Pepa's murder.

Since 2013, following the attempted murder against Azis Markola, which ended with the latter's legs injury, Indrit Pepa's family lived self-isolated for fear of blood feud. Moreover, in 2015 Indrit Pepa went to Germany as asylum seeker, declaring that in Albania he was in danger of life. According to Albanian sources, 'after a year and a half the victim would have been repatriated'. In fact, for German State, Albania is a safe country.

Last April, following Mario Majollari's murder in Tirana, Operazione Colomba denounced the lack of protection to people and families in blood feud. After Indrit Pepa's murder, Operazione Colomba renews its concern over the failure to adopt national and international measures to protect and guarantee the right to life of those involved in the blood feud phenomenon." (Operazione Colomba (13 September 2018) *Operazione Colomba urges the protection of blood feud victims*)

See also Operazione Colomba report which, in a paragraph headed “Activities”, states:

“Visits to families continued in November, but less frequently due to the preparation of the awareness-raising national event scheduled for December 10th, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In the middle of the month, we accompanied a woman and her three children in jail to visit her husband, who killed a man to defend his sister's honor and was recently moved to a new prison north of Shkodër. Compared with the previous one, the closer proximity of the new prison allows this woman to bring their three children to meet their father, without missing a day of school. After the visit, the woman brought us her husband's regards and gratitude for our work.

During a home visit to a family, an elderly lady shared with us her concern for the future of his son, who is currently abroad. He applied for international protection in a European country due to his involvement in a feud. His application, however, has been rejected and now he may be forced to come back to Albania with his wife and children; we fear that his return may raise tensions with the rival family.” (Operazione Colomba (28 December 2018) *Operazione Colomba – monthly report of activities in Albania – November 2018*)

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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