



Home Office

Report of a fact-finding mission

Albania: Blood feuds

Conducted between 21 and 25 November 2022

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Introduction

Background

This report contains the (approved) notes of interviews with sources during a Home Office fact-finding mission (FFM) to Albania.

The FFM was conducted between 21 and 25 November 2022 by 3 officials from the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT), with support from the British Embassy in Tirana. The team was based in Tirana and visited Shkodër.

The report does **not** provide advice on handling particular types of protection. For this, see the [Albania Country Policy and Information Notes](#).

Purpose of the mission

The purpose of the mission was to gather accurate and up-to-date information from a range of sources about Blood feuds and the situation for victims of a Blood Feud.

See the [Terms of Reference](#) (ToR) for topics that were identified as relevant areas to explore.

Research standards

The FFM was undertaken with reference to the [EU \[European Union\] common guidelines on \(Joint\) Fact Finding Missions: a practical tool to assist member states in organizing \(joint\) Fact Finding Missions](#), November 2010 (EU Guidelines 2010), and the Home Office's internal guidelines for conducting FFMs.

Identification of sources

The FFM team sought to interview a wide range of informed sources (interlocutors), including members of non-government organisations, western embassy officials, government officials, and academics. Sources were identified primarily by desk-based research and in consultation with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

The sources contacted and interviewed are those that the FFM team were able to identify as relevant to the mission's ToR. But, as with any FFM, factors including time constraints and availability of sources mean that the list of sources consulted and information provided are not exhaustive.

That a particular source was interviewed and the notes of the interview have been included should not be taken as endorsement of that source or the information provided. Rather, all sources and information provided need to be critically assessed and considered against other publicly available material.

See [List of sources](#).

Arranging and conducting interviews

The FFM team met with 14 discrete sources, consisting of 22 people in 13 face-to-face interviews, and one source (consisting of 1 person) interviewed over Microsoft Teams.

All interviews/correspondence with sources were conducted in English or Albanian (with an interpreter).

At the start of each interview the FFM team explained the purpose of the mission, including that the notes of the interview may be published in a report on the GOV.UK website and the sources would be able to review the notes before publication.

See [FFM introductory note](#).

Notes of interviews/meetings

The FFM team made notes of all meetings, which were then sent by email to the sources for review and approval. This email explained that, if a source did not respond within a specific deadline, CPIT would assume that the source was content with the notes as sent to them.

Of the 14 sources, 12 approved the notes, with a number making amendments to the original drafts and two did not respond. Two sources returned their approved notes in Albanian and so online translation tools were used to cross check changes with the English version drafts.

All sources are described/referred according to their preference.

See [Interview notes](#).

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Terms of Reference

Prior to the FFM, the following topics were identified as relevant areas to explore:

- Prevalence
 - Numbers of blood feuds in existence: are records kept of people in blood feud? If so, are records kept by the state or non-state organisations? Are records kept at local/provincial/national level?
 - What characteristics are required for a situation to be recognised as a blood feud?
 - Location of blood feuds
 - What are the trends in the number of BFs over the last 5-10 years.

- Families affected by blood feud
 - Which family members will usually self-isolate and the impact on other family members
 - Factors which may cause a family not to seek state protection

- State identification and protection
 - Ministries/departments responsible
 - Understanding of blood feuds
 - Identification of persons involved in BF
 - Police role in protection
 - Protection in place for those targeted as a result of a BF

- Prosecution and punishment and law
 - Number of prosecutions, convictions and sentencing over the last 5-10 years
 - Challenges in seeking prosecutions and convictions
 - Laws that cover BF
 - Laws that cover the threat of a BF (and criminal punishments) – is a threat under a BF sufficient to prosecute that perpetrator.

- Barriers to individuals seeking protection
 - Challenges in seeking protection

- State action to address blood feuds
 - Actions/measures being taken by the state to prevent and address blood feuds

- NGO support
 - Capacity of NGOs to provide assistance
 - The form any such assistance may take

- Blood feud documentation
 - Official and unofficial documentation
 - Reliability of press reports
 - State action towards organisations producing false documentation

- Blood feuds and interconnections with other issues
 - Possible links with money-lenders, human trafficking and organised criminal gangs

- Internal relocation
 - Possibility of internal relocation
 - Likelihood of a person being found

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List of sources

AFCR – Foundation for conflict resolution and reconciliation of disputes

Albanian Helsinki Committee

Bledian Koka, Editor in chief, Syri TV Albania

Center of Keshilation and Psychological Services

Elona Prroj, Pastor based in Shkodër

General Directorate of State Police

General Prosecutors Office

Liljana Luani, founder Child Centre in Shkodër

Ministry of Education

Peoples Advocate

Prosecutors Office - Shkodër

Shkodër Regional Police Directorate

State Agency for Child Rights and Protection

UNICEF

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FFM introductory note

Officials from the United Kingdom (UK) Home Office are undertaking a Fact Finding Mission (FFM) to Albania to obtain information about Blood feuds and the situation for victims of a Blood Feud and would like to interview you about this subject.

The FFM team consists of three officials from the Home Office, the government department responsible immigration and asylum. More information about the Home Office can be found on our website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office>

The information you provide the FFM team may be cited in a report which may be placed on the Home Office website and made available to the public. It will be used to assist UK immigration officials and judges involved in the asylum and human rights decision making process.

However, the FFM team will only publish information you provide with your consent. If you prefer that the information is not made publicly available, this will be respected.

The FFM team will give you an opportunity to review the notes of the interview to ensure they are an accurate reflection of the conversation and ask if you are willing to be identified as the source of the information. If you do not wish to be identified by name, then the FFM team will ask if you are willing to be identified in more general terms, for example as a representative of your named organisation, or as 'an official of an international humanitarian organisation'.

The FFM team would find it helpful if you could provide some background to your organisation (where appropriate) and your role in the organisation. This will help them to understand the context of the information you provide.

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Interview notes

UNICEF

Date: 21 November 2022

Meeting with: UNICEF – An official from UNICEF, Justice for Children Specialist.

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Introduction: I am the Justice for Children Specialist for UNICEF in Albania and the gender focal point. I also cover issues including People's Advocate (National Ombudsperson) and protection against discrimination.

In terms of blood feuds (BF), as a citizen of Albania and as a lawyer, I have got to know things from a historical perspective, but it is a phenomenon that is still alive today and I would say that it has also seen a revival in the last 30 years.

Interview

Q. What is the current definition of a BF from the perspective of the state and of civil society?

A. The government considers any killing as a murder, and as such it is supposedly prosecuted. BF is basically taking justice into your own hands, and choosing not to go through official routes. An offence committed with BF motives, is considered as having aggravated circumstances. BFs are considered an aggravated circumstance, and until some years ago it was the serious crimes courts that dealt with these issues, but given that BF is still flourishing in Albania it means that neither the government nor law enforcement agencies/justice system operators are doing a good job, or dealing efficiently with the affected community. BF stems from customary laws, which were born when law enforcement didn't really exist, mainly in the mountainous areas. These areas were well known as a society where no official government authorities governed, or where they did exist, were seen as being imposed by foreign governments, for example like Turkey as an occupier. In a sense customary laws were connected to ethnic identity, especially in the mountainous areas, and seen as a way to regulate society in lieu of a written law. Of course, no one wants killings or violations of human rights. If dignity and human rights are violated then this damages the society, therefore the society, and the community developed at the time a system for taking revenge, not just against the person that violated the human rights, but for their entire family or tribe. So in some of these communities it is considered a way to restore honour or compensate for a violation.

Q. And that continues today?

A. I believe so. Women and girls historically have not been the direct target of BF, however during the past 30 years, whether by accident or will, women and girls have been the direct subject too. What worries UNICEF is that many children are

becoming both the direct and indirect victims of BFs. Even those whose lives are not taken, are nevertheless threatened, and they are confined to their homes or isolated from everything going on in the outside world. This is particularly difficult as these children are at the stage where they are developing their identities, well-being and stability, their mental health and also education. That is a very unnatural situation to be in.

Q. So if a killing is murder, do the community differentiate between murder and BF?

A. If the justice system was working properly every time, then yes, they would differentiate, but as the system is struggling with corruption, lack of efficiency, and insufficient capacity of professionals, then sometimes things get twisted and if certain officials are willing to take a bribe, then it is possible that the aggravating circumstances will not be properly applied. Also, it is not just about the murder and criminal responsibility; sometimes social norms are so ingrained that people are willing to be imprisoned to supposedly restore the honour of their family. So the murder isn't the only dimension of the problem. The judiciary can do something, reactively, but it's also about the family that is isolated, and the fear of a potential BF chain starting or fear of becoming a victim. You have to consider, how does the government interfere in these cases? It's a violation of human rights on all those affected, yes. But if the murder is just a potential, how does the government proactively interfere or intervene to tackle it? It is that fear of retaliation. People are confined (to their homes) or leave the country. Sometimes, the latter is the only way they can see as escape from that suffocating situation.

Q. Do you know if there are any statistics regarding BF?

A. I don't know, you can only make estimations, it is not exact. If someone is sick you count that person and you have clear statistics, but if we are talking about the potential future spread of an infection to a population, you can only do projections, you don't have sure numbers. Similarly, if BF in many cases remains a potential crime, then you don't have an exact number. I should mention also that it is not just the person directly involved, it's the entire tribe that could potentially be affected and that could be extended bloodlines. You never know who could be affected; according to customary law you have to take the life of a person who is the best in the family or tribe, the one that is the more intelligent, the one who has the most power or reputation in the family. So you never know, those families, sister, brother, cousins, they could be anywhere in Albania, so the BF could extend away from the area it initially arose in. But those living in the community closer to the incident feel the pressure much more. Even if they move away from the area, they are not immune or safe.

BF are strong in north and north-east areas of Albania. However, I visited Saranda a few years back, in the southern-most point of Albania and saw an area in the hills where there was a village of new houses, and I asked what this was and was told that this was a village of people who escaped from a BF area. But they were still not considered safe. Another example I recall is: there were many illegal buildings by the river in Tirana and the government wanted to demolish them, which they did with the exception of one house who had many people and children living there who were escaping from a BF chain. So it is possible the government finally found a solution for these people as they left this house untouched, until they were able to demolish it after a certain time.

Q. Do you think that BF are linked to organised criminal groups (OCG)?

A. I don't exclude it but it's mainly to do with what the family believes is the right thing to do, and the offence they perceive has occurred. That offence might be connected to trafficking and other killings or other social norms, for example, 'you harassed my sister, so I am taking revenge and I am starting a BF chain'. There might be connections with organised crime but not necessarily the continuation of BF is linked particularly to organised crime.

Q. Do you think BF are in decline?

A. I cannot estimate, what bothers me is that the government keeps silent about it, of course to them it is not nice to speak about BF - a medieval, old-fashioned phenomenon - especially when this country claims to be building rule of law, justice reform and wanting to join the EU. So this issue is not mentioned in policy and strategic government documents. However, if you don't have a strategy or action plan, the issue just grows and takes on a life of its own. BFs won't end on their own, the past 30 years have evidenced this. I know the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Killings pointed out a few years ago that there is no government priority included in any of the policy documents to address BFs.

Let me give you another example; child marriage. Until last year this issue was not in government policy at all, even though the CRC committee and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) repeatedly talked to Albania asking them to do something about it. Over 10 years gender equality had seen an improvement, due to intentional national policies on the matter. By contrast, in absence of policies and action plans to tackle it, the matter of child marriage had grown worse, affecting today 11% girls and 2% boys at a national level (vs. 9% of girls and 1% of boys 10 years ago). It leads me to believe that if you dust the problem under the carpet it won't suddenly go away. So, if not in any government policy, even we as the UN do not have a way to intervene, if not stated among the government priorities.

Q. So about families, how many might be affected?

A. This is difficult to estimate.

Q. Or how many in self-isolation?

A. In 2015 I attended a meeting by the Peoples Advocate in Shkoder, and in that meeting the prosecutor stated that his office paid a visit to 200 families in Shkoder, who were known to be in a situation of BF and 25 families were in the classic example of domicile confinement. So it's not just killing, it's the potential that can hang on your head all the time. So although it is 200 families, in a region like that, where you do not have a typical-sized (nuclear) family, but larger families, you have to multiply that number not just by 4; 25 families can mean groups of relatives or tribes.

Q. How many children who are affected are educated at home?

A. I think in Shkoder it is the 200 families and one of the teachers at the People's Advocate meeting mentioned above, described what she did in providing some education through home visiting.

In 2003 I started to work on a USAID programme on women's legal rights, and before that programme there was a mission like yours, trying to visit NGOs and

government institutions, and while NGOs were crying out that there was domestic violence (DV), whereas the government at that time said there is no such thing and no evidence of it exists. But you can't have evidence if you don't gather that data. So the government at the time, even the police, said they had typically no more than 200 cases of DV per year, but if you see the stats now it's over 3,000, close to 4000 per year. Once the government organised a survey, which showed that close to 67% of women live with a perpetrator at home and are in a situation of DV, it became clear what were the true dimensions of the phenomenon. So I can't give you exact numbers of BF given that there's no investment to record data. But Civil Society is saying it exists.

Q. Do any of the families/tribes/extended families, do they engage in mediation?

A. Certainly that is potentially a good way to curb BF. As justice for children specialist, I must say that for children involved in criminality and sometimes victims, it is crucial to explore what mediation can offer and unfortunately this (mediation) is not maximised as a potential. At least for children under 18 this type of service should be offered free of charge but government have not materialised their response in working out a mechanism to offer free mediation or offer it at any stage of the process and as part of the diversion. In Shkoder we had a programme implemented by the Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution (AFRC) and we had to beg prosecutors to recommend to children and families mediation and restorative justice. But prosecutors are pressed for time and understaffed, they want to finish with a case as quickly as possible, thus they rarely refer for mediation and restorative justice interventions. Predominantly, prosecutors just give a warning to juveniles, instead of prescribing additional measures, such as mediation, and that is quite a missed opportunity. Had they recommended children/young people for mediation, for example, I believe many instances of BF could have been prevented. Another opportunity is to include restorative justice principles in the education system, either in curricular or extra-curricular activities. Instead of quarrels and fights between adolescents deteriorating to a killing and then leading to a BF, why not try mediation? It needs to be invested in, in order to turn mediation into a substitute culture and take the place of a BF. Customary law in Albania even offers the opportunity of mediation. In order for them to invest in strengthening the restorative justice mechanisms, the first precondition is to state it in a policy document, to cost it and to turn it into a public commitment to tackle conflicts, including BF, through this route. But many things affecting juveniles could have been helped early on with mediation and restorative justice.

I would also like to touch upon on how BF affects women and girls, although boys and men are generally the direct subject and the most threatened when it comes to their life, and the need to be in domicile confinement. Women and girls, however, do suffer consequences, they have to make up for the husband staying at home and have the double burden of bringing in an income and going out to work in the fields and selling produce. All this, while also taking care of the family, cleaning and cooking (related to the stereotypical gender roles and division of labour in the very patriarchal areas that are affected by BF). We have to deal with very pervasive negative gender norms, rooted particularly among boys and men and of course, any frustration from confinement, on top of it. Imagine who will take the cushion role for all that frustration. Probably you have flourishing DV in those families. And usually, DV becomes more emphasized when women try and break from the rules of society,

such as when they are more often out in the market selling, and interacting with the outside world, and being the bread winner - this comes as a threat to the men's authority and the violence becomes more pronounced. On the other hand, the fact that women are more able to go out and can take on the roles of men, at the same time offers new potential for better use of restorative justice and reconciliation, perhaps initiated or enabled by women themselves. If these women are all suffering the same and sit in the markets together, if supported somehow by professionals and civil society, they could find a way of forging mediation and reconciliation.

Girls who have been confined to their homes due to fear of BF and not able to go to school, maybe in order for them to escape from the situation, their families might want to marry them off as soon as possible. Even far away, possibly abroad, but anyway, away from the family. Poverty plays a role, if a woman's destiny is to be a good mother and wife, then why not do it earlier rather than later – one less mouth to feed. If she is not going to school, anyway, so why not marry her off. It leads to a kind of intra-generational way for gender based violence to continue as well as child marriage. BF and poverty to go on from one generation to another.

Q. So what financial support do these families receive? Is it just the women providing an income?

A. Yes, most probably it is the women, or when those involved in a BF have gone abroad, this is the only way, to send an income home. Usually, the mother goes out to work, because whatever you receive from abroad you still have to do something for yourself. You have to do something to support yourself. I am not familiar whether these families are entitled to any financial support by the state.

Q. Do they seek protection from the authorities, would they go to the police?

A. As the justice reform analysis showed there is a low public trust towards law enforcement, so even though the country is undergoing a major reform, to try and fix the justice system, I don't think the public trust will grow in the immediate future. Of course it is about talking to people and building that sense of trust, but it is also about the authorities fixing things. So the country still needs to invest in the justice reform and making it accessible, child friendly and effectively addressing the issues concerning the communities. To give an example of lack of trust in the authorities: in one of our project sites, one of our partners put an annex in their office where they had a medical bed and had a nurse or midwife that provided services and information to girls and women about sex and reproductive health/rights, and other health issues for women and children. Once every so often a gynaecologist from another town came to the office, to perform visits besides the nurse, so I asked why don't the women and girls go to the new hospital and see the gynaecologist there? They said that the gynaecologist is drunk most of the time so women won't go. Similarly, people know in small communities if the police or the judges take money under the table, and whether they live by the same negative social norms dominant in that community, and won't help women and girls. This, for instance creates a lack of trust, whether in the case of GBV/DV or BF, or any issue, for that matter.

Q. You mention about tribes, are there particular-named clans?

A. Maybe not names, maybe not like the clans in Scotland, but anyone who has a relative and linked to particular family involved in a BF chain, could potentially be affected or become a target.

There is going to be a reorganisation of the courts and prosecution offices in the country. I think the courts will be reduced from 23 to 11 or 12 so typically in smaller jurisdictions there will be no court houses and they will just have offices with court clerks to provide administrative support to people who want to pursue justice. Courts will move to larger areas, instead. Puke, for instance will not have a court and Shkoder will cover it. Kukes will cover Tropoja and other smaller surrounding areas. These are all northern jurisdictions. The thing is that although from a certain perspective they will have bigger courts with more people, so they will no longer suffer the delays that you had in smaller courts, these larger courts will be further away from the communities that they are supposed to serve, and this will no doubt create less access. It will make things more difficult for children and vulnerable women, who want to seek help and may be faced with longer distances and higher transportation time and costs. That might make matters worse and may be one more reason for people to take justice into their own hands.

Q. Are there NGOs or civil society that support families affected by BF?

A. I think the Catholic Church and civil society. But civil society is often dependent on foreign money to survive, and dependent on international organisations like ours to build whatever service they can offer. There is potential in every community, there are champions that can help. But these really require support. The legacy of civil society is short as we've only had these civil society groups in the last 20-30 years. Otherwise the government is not giving anything significant in terms of financial support to civil society organisations seeking to address blood feud, since they don't have the BF articulated as a priority in their policies.

Q. When authorities do become involved, insofar as being aware, do they issue any kind of official documents to verify that a family is involved in a BF, or do any other documents attest to someone being involved?

A. I am not sure about this process. Maybe someone who deals with these cases, in prosecution, they would be best placed to answer. Sometimes the community may be able to advise. I don't know of any process by which the prosecutors formally request civil society or mediators to issue such attestation.

Q. With regard people moving away from areas affected by BF, can you advise if it is possible for someone to relocate safely within Albania

A. Some have already done it, so perhaps they feel less affected by BF, but the example I gave to you about the move to one village in the south, again semi-isolated from the rest of the host community, leads me to believe that they don't feel completely safe, despite the relocation. As a small country, where everybody knows everybody, this information tends to leak, plus the country is struggling with corruption of officials. But potentially yes, one could relocate safely if everyone kept the confidentiality, but we know this country is not good at this. Even with victims of organised crime and trafficking I wouldn't be entirely sure if they are kept confidential. I don't know if the government would venture to come up with a relocation programme and it could be a sensitive political issue.

The government tried to build a campus for children affected by BF many years ago, but there were many problems with it, and the location was discovered. I don't remember the problems but it was a sort of failed experiment. Maybe 15-20 years ago.

Q. If a family was to move abroad would the BF follow them?

A. It is strange that the citizens trust more foreign governments rather than their own. If someone relocates abroad, then protection of the family and its confidentiality is a shared responsibility of the other government, and because people tend to see democracy in countries where there is a more established rule of law, with trustful eyes, then they might feel more secure there. It is not just BF; they might also want to escape the suffocating environment, gender norms, poverty and lack of economic opportunities that overlap and intertwine with BF. Who wouldn't want to go somewhere where they could flourish?

Also, Church and Mosques can be a good contact in northern areas for information, or provide support.

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Albanian Helsinki Committee

Date: 21 November 2022

Meeting with: [Albanian Helsinki Committee](#) (AHC), 2 officials from the AHC

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

AHC introductions: We are law graduates and work for the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), we are an NGO and non-profit organisation who work with human rights in general, although the AHC is in Albania we also help Albanians abroad, for example in the UK.

Interview

Q. We are interested in the prevalence, definition and characteristics of BF, and to know how a situation would be recognised as a BF, as well as the trends in BF over last 10 years.

A. We are a small organisation and we always quote reports prepared by other institutions, we have a report here, which was prepared by the [Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation](#). Part of our work is to provide free legal aid and we have cases related to BF and those that feel threatened. But we don't have nationwide statistics.

In Albania there is not a clear definition of BF in the legal framework but in the Criminal Code BF is mentioned, and those crimes are punished with no less than 35 years in prison. It comes from Kanun law, most of the BF cases stem from the north of Albania and the BF are based on tradition.

We will leave you a [press statement](#) from January 2022 where a 17 year old boy committed a crime as his father was killed when he was very young. This press release gives information on the culture and the way the person is raised, and how this gives him the desire to commit a crime and how a boy can find a weapon to commit the crime.

Q. About definition, what is the current definition from the perspective of the state as well as civil society?

A. Crimes are due to honour and manhood as defined in Kanun, blood is paid by blood. Also there are cases where a person might have had a relative raped and they take revenge by killing the other person. According to the report we have given you there are also cases of BF regarding disputes of land.

A BF can arise from a dispute between 2 people, because of blood, land or revenge.

Disputes can be about different issues, so a dispute is raised, which then leads someone to kill someone else from another family. The situation then continues within the families until they kill the last male in the family. It is not possible to take revenge blood from women or minors so they are excluded.

Q. So according to Kanun law, men are targeted but women and children are not?

A. Yes

Q. Is this still the case, or are women and children now targeted?

A. So we have case of the 17 year old, so even though there was a BF in existence, the other family did not kill him as he was a minor. The justice system in this case was believed to be blamed for the BF existing, as the person who killed the 17 year old's father was sentenced to only 4 years in prison. So the family lost faith in the justice system of Albania.

Q. Does the state differentiate between BF and different types of killings?

A. A crime due to a blood feud is clearly defined in the criminal code.

Q. So are not all revenge killings are BF?

A. As an example, it is a case of revenge if a man kills his wife if he thinks she has dishonoured him and his family. But if family members of that woman then kill the husband, it might become a BF. It can affect the wider family.

Q. Can you tell us what you do with individuals affected by BF?

A. We had a case where a man was sentenced to prison as he killed someone in a BF. It turned out he was in the same prison as a man from the opposing family. However the man that committed the BF felt threatened so he filed a request for a transfer.

Q. Did the transfer happen? How else have you helped people?

A. Yes. Another case was when a man asked to be transferred to a prison where there was someone he was in a BF with. The man claimed that he and the opposing person had signed a reconciliation agreement but we judged that it was not safe for them to be together, so we refused help.

Also the general director of prison has channels where they can support those involved in BF.

Q. Do they take it seriously in prison that there is risk between prisoners?

A. Yes they take it seriously and where there are reports of BF cases in the prisons they conduct their own investigation. When it is clear there is BF they keep the opposing men in separate institutions. It is the responsibility of the prison governor to

guarantee the safety of inmates, so if it looks like it that safety would be infringed then they would keep the men separate to keep them safe.

Q. Have you encountered other people that are at risk and what have you done?

A. So the case we mentioned about the inmate wanting to be transferred, first the prison did not make that connection or relationship between the inmates and that they knew each other's families. We have seen a lack of communication between state police and the prisons.

State police are the first institutions to get in contact with us and those families who might be killed or with families that might turn into BF families.

Q. Do you know how state police might become aware of families?

A. They are informed through court decisions and then the state police monitor those that are related to the BF, or there might be cases where 2 families have got into a fight, the police go there and identify the family involved.

Q. Will a familial dispute always turn into a BF?

A. No, most of BF are very old and they continue to be present until the goal of eliminating the last male family member, there are very few new cases of BF in recent years. Not all conflicts turn into BF.

Q. Do BF still have the significance they previously had in Albania?

A. First we have a new generation that are generally raised differently, they are raised with new spirit, and many families have migrated abroad, plus now there is reconciliation with the new generation of families. BF have ended as families migrated. I knew a person who committed a crime due to BF. They completed their sentence and are now free, but now they are afraid to leave their house as they might be killed.

Q. So isolation and migration is how they protect themselves?

A. Yes

Q. Is there another way to protect themselves?

A. Reconciliation is another way, but there is no official data about reconciliation. However, even though some families have gone through reconciliation, the younger members still commit a crime. They say that reconciliation is for that generation, not us, and can carry on the BF. Also children are isolated at home as they are related to blood feuds so the cycle of BF continues.

Q. What about the police, can they provide protection to the family?

A. So police duty is to keep people safe, but most cases of BF happen in remote areas, where police don't have capacity to monitor houses 24/7 and the education system doesn't have capacity to provide for children to be educated at home.

Q. What about relocating to different area, is this an option?

A. I don't think that is a solution as Albania is small and BF families will find these people in other places in Albania. The 17 year old referred to was not in a remote place where the crime was committed but the police didn't have the capacity to protect the family.

Q. So for some young people is BF still an issue?

A. The issue with the 17 year old in this case, the reason that made him do this is he felt he would be killed when he was 18, it is fear that drives this.

Also, he came from the north, and the elders have a strong force when it comes to BF as part of tradition and maybe if he didn't commit crime the grandparents would say he has to continue tradition, so pressure from family. And also told to do it quickly.

Q. What happened to him?

A. Right now he is in special penitentiary for minors in Kavaja and when he turns 18 he transfer to prison near his family in Lezha, as according to law prisoners should be located nearer their families.

Q. About mediation, do the state provide this?

A. There is a law, but we did a study and we found no website or no actual work although it is stipulated in law. There is a reconciliation council [different to the one mentioned above]. So even though there is a law, no mediation/reconciliation is provided.

Q. So you have not seen reconciliation at work?

A. No, not seen.

Q. What about civil society, do they step in?

A. There is this report by the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation, but we are not sure if they are an NGO or state institution that assists with this. As far as we know, there is no civil society that deals with reconciliation or mediation but there might be individuals that deal with reconciliation.

Q. What about documentation and attestation letters, are those involved in BF issued with documents confirming that a BF is taking place?

A. We believe that the National Reconciliation Council should be responsible but there is no evidence this committee runs. They should be the ones responsible but according to our notes this is not established, the court decisions might act as proof that a family is engaged in a BF, maybe you should have meeting with this organisation as they might give statements.

Q. Are there are any awareness programmes?

A. There are no awareness-raising campaigns about BF in communities.

We believe the most impact of awareness is raised by the committee as the law is already there, and we believe they would have a huge impact. There are stakeholders that get together and analyse the situation and come up with solutions to address the problems.

Q. Do you think the legal penalties will be enough to stop people engaging in BF?

A. If we spoke like lawyers we would say yes, but knowing the context and knowing the law we would say no, it is not enough. Traditional law is more powerful than state law in the north.

Q. Apart from reconciliation what else would change attitudes around BF?

A. There are child protection units in municipalities and they should protect the children, however they did not really do anything, even though such units are in all municipalities. They do however, work in different aspects but they do not do work in BF related issues.

A case in which the media reported that a crime was due to organised crime a few weeks ago. The media initially said that organised crime was to blame, however it is now believed to be a BF-related incident. The case involved a person who returned from Italy. The media said in the beginning it was an OCG and now the police are saying it is a blood feud incident but the case is still under investigation.

Q. To clarify, are you saying that the younger generation are not wanting to continue BF but some are still involved? And if so what is the reason for continuing the tradition of BF?

A. Lack of awareness raising, also children will turn to their home and be influenced by parents and grandparents to continue the feud. In the north you cannot go against the word of parents or grandparents, but it depends on the will of young individuals, it might be a cause for change or stay in the traditions of that area. So basically, some children might feel pressured and some might not.

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General Prosecution Office (GPO)

Date: 22 November 2022

Meeting with: General Prosecution Office, Director of Institutional Coordination

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

GPO: Introductions

Interview

Q. We are interested in blood feud (BF), particularly the definition of a BF and how common BFs are, and would like to understand what protection is available from the State in case of a BF.

A. There is a definition in the criminal code, Article 78a which terms BF as homicide, the punishment is no less than 30 years or life imprisonment. There is a special charter regarding homicide since 2013, a special article defining homicide in the criminal code. In the past it was stipulated in law but not as a special article, but now since 2013 there is a special article for BF defined as aggravated homicide. We created this special article as we wanted BF to attract a special importance.

We think that there are different factors that explain the existence of a BF, for instance a BF means the homicide is premeditated and done on purpose. We have some statistics for 2020, 2021 and first half of 2022. We will share, but there is a decreasing trend in BF over the years, although most of the BF related crimes happened in Tirana according to the study.

To explain the statistics: here we see five BF related crimes happened in Tirana. The reason is that people are moving from the North to Tirana, as they leave rural areas and have their own business in the south, this is why crimes happen now in Tirana. People move from the north where BF are more widespread, where they inherit a BF, but there are still some cases of BF in the southern areas and here in Tirana.

Q. Do BF related offences attracted higher penalty than other criminal offences because of aggravated circumstances?

A. Yes this is in law.

Q. You said you can provide stats, 2020 to 2021, can we go back to 2015 onwards?

A. We cannot provide information of sentences over those years, the stats just say minimum, maximum or life sentence but do not provide exact years. These are cases that have been registered and final decisions made, they explain that more or less they have been sentenced for life or maximum terms. There is one case in stats that based on Article 53 of the Criminal Code a reduction of the sentence below the minimum provided for by Law was requested for a minor.

I want to talk about prevention, it is the duty of state police and ward of community policing. It is state police that first identify the conflicts and try to resolve them, however informally there is a council of elders in these remote area who are seniors, they try to resolve conflicts between parties. These are called BF reconciliation councils and members are generally senior citizens and those with higher reputations who are appreciated in the community.

Q. Does the state have oversight of the reconciliation councils?

A. No, they are informal, the duty of the state police is to identify conflicts and try and resolve them. These councils of elders help to be witnesses in the community of what has happened, they help with evidence and can provide testimony. The President of the Republic was keeping an eye on the reconciliation council but they don't have any up-to-date information.

There are many causes for a BF, from the trivial issue such as divorce or land dispute, however these trivial issues can turn into conflict and then into murder.

Q. How many BF prosecutions have resulted in convictions over 5-10 years?

A. I do not have a percentage but if we have statistics to show that these crimes were carried out, then I believe that these people went to court and were also sentenced.

Q. Could we request firm figures for this?

A. Yes we will ask for such data.

Q. Is there a specific offence to incite a BF, so something hasn't happened but just the threat of a BF, and would that result in an arrest and prosecution?

A. Yes. The person that pushes one to commit a crime can be punished as they are considered collaborators in the role of instigators.

Q. Do you send these people for penal prosecution?

A. Pressure to commit a crime is part of the investigation. If we can provide evidence of incitement then they are considered collaborators

Q. If a family is identified as at risk of a BF, does the state automatically intervene to investigate and make an arrest or provide some form of protection to those at risk?

A. First if a family is threatened then the threat itself is a criminal offence, nevertheless if family is in danger then there is a special department in the police that assists, they are called Sector of Special Protection. This is not protection of witnesses, this is a special sector.

Q. What do they do to protect family, exactly?

A. When a family is in need and the Sector of Special Protection sends police to their houses and provides monitoring and police services.

Q. So they will post police near the house?

A. Yes

Q. Do they do anything else?

A. Apart from state police, associations also help families related to BF, such as education. As you know families affected by a BF isolate themselves, once in isolation it is difficult for the children to get education, the associations help family to go to work and get a profession.

Q. If the family has to isolate is this enough for police to go and speak to families involved?

A. No it's not enough

Q. What else needs to happen?

A. BF have consequences, and before state police can intervene a person should be wounded, or threatened, or a death has occurred or other violent act. Some cases when a family feels threatened they take measures themselves, and they move.

Q. Does the government help them to move?

A. It is not up to me as a prosecutor, it is the civil society that is more engaged with movement of people involved in a BF.

Q. So do civil society help people relocate, but not the state?

A. This is complicated, first the reconciliation council is responsible to assist in reconciliation, if this does not work then local government might intervene for the transfer of these families. Community police might intervene by asking people and advising them, it's a complicated process.

Q. What happens, if the family complains that they are in a BF with another family and a member of that family is high profile or a state actor?

A. From the criminal point of view nothing changes, I do not think I am the best person to respond with this side of BF.

Q. Have there been instances when a family is involved in a BF and the opposing BF has been high profile and it has resulted in prosecution. Has a high profile person been prosecuted for a BF?

A. There has been a case many years ago, but not for BF. It was related to 2 MPs who were involved in a fight.

Q. With BF documentation, is a person who is at risk of BF issued with documents to confirm they are or potentially are a victim of a BF?

A. We as prosecutors release a statement that this person is prosecuted for a crime against a person, it is only the prosecution office that releases this document. The Prosecution Office is the only institution eligible to issue such documents, however what I have seen is that civil servants (CS)/local government have issued such documents. Or even police officers. I have seen cases where police officers have issued such statements. However, it is not up to them, the Prosecution Office is the only one who can issue this documentation.

Q. So they have been issued illegally?

A. Yes

Q. What is being done to stop CS and police issuing such documents?

A. I believe the best way to prevent this is for the institutions in the hosting country to not accept such a document if such a document is presented. Or they should verify it. If it is not issued by the Prosecution office then they should not accept it.

Q. Why do CS and police issue these documents?

A. For their personal interest. There are cases where people have gone to the police and filed a suit but they have told lies, and this case goes to prosecutors just so they can get the document. I believe that the only valid document is received from prosecutors office, but police have issued such documents after being told lies from the person.

Q. Are police aware they shouldn't issue these documents?

A. Of course.

Q. You said that some police may issue a document because of personal interest, could you expand on that?

A. So they might be relatives of the person claiming BF, or bribed.

Q. What point after a complaint is raised that a person is at risk of BF does the prosecutor office issue a document?

A. After the prosecution office have concluded their investigation they can have the document, however the person is informed at each phase of the investigation. According to law people can ask for a statement at any time, however there is a difference between a document saying that they have filed a complaint, to one confirming that a person is in a BF.

Q. So a document may say a complaint has been raised or that a BF is in place?

A. The document says that the complaint was filed and an investigation initiated.

Q. Just because a complaint is filed, is it correct that this does not necessarily mean that there is a BF?

A. Of course, no matter what is said in the complaint it does not mean there is a BF.

Q. Is it possible to have an example of the document that is issued by the Prosecutors office when a complaint is filed and also an example of when it is confirmed that a BF is taking place?

A. With regard examples of documents, to get a model you should ask the district prosecution offices. We, in the General Prosecution Office, do not investigate cases and do not issue such documents. I can guide you to what you want, according to articles 105 and 110 both parties can ask from the prosecutor the status of the investigation process, so this statement might just say a law suit has been filed and under investigation. If the investigation has ended it will say so, and if sent to court for adjudication and they have been given a sentence, it will say so. There are also cases where the statement says there is no further action.

Q. Is relocation away from the home area an effective way to stay away from a BF?

A. I am not the correct person to respond to this, plus the GPO does not deal with relocation, but my opinion is local government and state police make it possible.

Q. Are there witness protection (WP) programmes in place?

A. There are WP programmes, and people involved in BF might be included in WP programmes. In the criminal code there is a special article regarding witnesses so following this code this might also provide protection.

Q. The people who illegally issue documents saying a BF taking place, is action taken to investigate and prosecute those issuing fake documents?

A. Yes, they are investigated as this is a criminal offence, it's called presenting fake circumstances in a document.

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Albanian Foundation for “Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes”(AFCR)

Date: 22 November 2022

Meeting with: [AFCR](#), Rasim Gjoka, Executive Director

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Rasim Gjoka, Executive Director at AFCR provided an overview of the organisations role in Albania:

First I want to thank you for your communication and your interest in blood feud (BF) offences and incidents. I was previously the director of [AFCR](#) but now I am an expert and consultant. I have 28 years' experience in conflict management. Our organisation has dealt with the identification and resolution of property, land, civil, family and penal conflicts. Before, the cases used to all go to court and the situation would get worse. Now we use mechanism of restorative justice especially for juveniles.

AFCR has developed over the years programmes with several partners such as Norway, UK and Denmark. We have had other partners including the European Commission, US Embassy, USAID, and The World Bank. It is our mediation on the issues regarding criminal matter that has context here, and we are especially orientated to juveniles and young people in conflict with the law. We also apply a

restorative approach, or justice for children but also try to involve the community as well as other actors.

As part of our work we have helped in legal changes with law on mediation, we also dealt with a public awareness campaign on mediation. We have also dealt with concrete cases through mediation programmes, rather than through court. This is a very wide programme that has lasted many years and would require a long time to explain. In recent years we have dealt a lot with criminal cases through restorative justice. Thanks to the support of the European Commission, UNICEF and Save the Children and Terre des hommes we exercise a huge impact on resolution of conflicts without going to court so, again, through mediation. AFCR cooperated closely during the process of the legal reform, especially in drafting the Criminal Justice Code for Children(2016-2017).

Interview

Q. Does your work on restorative justice extend to cases involving blood feuds?

A. I can tell you about a programme which was done by UNICEF thanks to UK government funding. The programme was in 2021/2022 and implemented in Shkodra and Puke where the phenomenon of BF is more visible. There we dealt with juveniles and friendly justice for juveniles. One of the elements of the programme was the treatment of concrete cases with justice for minors and those that had parents engaged. Out of all the cases we had, 2 were related to BF. We were referred these cases and we provided our assistance and service so the situation would not escalate, and also to find a peaceful resolution between both parties. Young people, students and pupils were affected by these concrete cases and that is why they were referred to us. There are two tools that we use, one is called victim offender mediation, and also group conferencing or family circle and peace making circle. The last tool was implemented in schools in Shkodër and Puke to educate teachers and pupils on how to prevent a conflict situation in general terms and particularly the BF phenomenon.

Q. Do you know how many BF are currently ongoing?

A. Before I answer, I would like to make an observation, as an organisation we have been involved in this issue since the pyramid schemes collapse in 1997 to 2002, we had 10 to 15 cases a year and in most cases we managed to find a peaceful resolution. But then with time our influence and engagement reduced as there were many new stakeholders involved in this field. Regarding your question, we have an opinion about how many, but it is very hard to come up with concrete statistics around BF. In 2017 there was an initiative by the state police to create a database but this was not capitalised. I believe more concrete data can be found from the police in Shkodër and Puke, and other places in the north, where the phenomenon is widespread. At a glance, we are seeing a decreasing trend of the phenomenon. For example we get information from colleagues of mediators network and the police and judicial officials and we have seen a decreasing trend of BF, however, [the media] are trying to make it more obvious and make it more of an issue than it really is. In 2021 according to state police in Shkodër there was only one BF related homicide, but the media present ten-times more than that, maybe they don't have correct information or they are labelling murder as a BF, we don't know. The reason is there

is confusion between the revenge murder, (which happens all around the world), and also BF murders, which are different. There is also the reconciliation association who have increased the number of BF cases even though they are not the real ones. This is an opinion but I believe in the Shkodër and Malesi-i-Madhe municipalities there are no more than 50-60 families involved in BF. This number is based on gathering information and statistics from civil society network statistics. But you need to consider that this changes continuously, however the phenomena is still present and requires our attention and you need to be careful of speculations on this phenomenon.

Q. Are all the 50-60 families self-isolating?

A. It is believed that 80% are isolating. We also noticed that some families have migrated from the north to Tirana and other cities or they have moved abroad. But we should always be careful as this are not official data and this is the reason why you will find different data from different stakeholders.

Q. If a man in the family is isolating can he leave his home at all?

A. If we refer to traditional law that person might leave the house if he gets permission from the other family in a conflict situation. But what is interesting and what we have noticed is that the isolation phenomenon has extended beyond tradition, even though this was not for children or women we have now seen this, as before it was only the men who were in danger.

Q. Why is that?

A. First it is seen as a prevention measure and second there have been cases where women have been killed even though this is not part of the tradition.

Q. You mention the 2 families and restorative justice, do you know if many families go through this process and if it is successful?

A. The restorative justice is easier to be applied when juveniles are involved, in cases of adults and homicides in recent years it is more difficult to apply restorative justice measures.

Q. Do families involved in BF generally seek protection from the police?

A. The law is harsh to this phenomenon and police have an important role to play when it comes to protection. Nevertheless there are problems with the implementation of the law, not the law itself but with implementing it. Another problem is the capacity of the police to intervene and to prevent. It could also be related to how professional the police are.

Q. Can you tell us about other NGOs who help families affected by BF?

A. It was the [Operazione Colombo](#) [now ended in Albania], they are Italians and they played a huge role and had good impact but this mission was interrupted in the last 3 years. We have collaborated a lot with them and they have applied restorative approach to address BF cases. We are aware of a reconciliation association that work in Shkodër and in Albania in general.

Q. Who are they run by?

A. What happens is that such associations are created, they carry out one activity and then they disappear. One of them is the [Nationwide Reconciliation Committee](#).

In the past they have approached us and communicated with us to collaborate, however we saw that we had different philosophies and at no point was there collaboration between us

Q. Are you aware of organisations that provide documentation to say a family is involved in a BF?

A. The organisation I just mentioned, the media showed that this organisation issued such certificates illegally. Also, several years ago municipal administrators issued such documents, but according to my knowledge law enforcement addressed this issue and in last 3-4 years there has not been reports of such documents being issued.

Q. Are you aware of anyone else that issues these attestation type documents?

A. No

Q. If someone says they are involved in a BF can they relocate to another area of Albania safely?

A. It is difficult to say yes because safety is an issue not only for those involved in a BF but also for those in general. I can tell you that there is more safety in big cities, but in the remote areas safety is more of an issue.

Q. In what way is it an issue?

A. There is a higher risk and there are more crimes. I am not a criminologist, but a sociologist, there is a problem of order in remote areas, there is petty crime and organised crime and there is a problem with the safety issue. For example you are driving in the street and someone doesn't follow the rules and then your life might be in danger [accidents on the roads]. So crime control management is problematic remotely, but this is my personal opinion.

Q. If a person moved could they be found by the opposing family?

A. It is true that if they moved there would be less exposure to opposite clans, but I believe that there is a higher number of people who claim that they are involved in BF and that they have problems associated with BF than there actually are. This decreases the relevance and importance of those families who really must relocate and are genuine cases of BF.

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General Directorate for State Police

Date: 23 November 2022

Meeting with: 3 x Officials of the General Directorate for State Police.

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Police: Welcome to the State Police. We can give present you with information on the blood feud (BF) situation in Albania.

Interview

So I will give you a historical overview of Blood Feud (BF) in Albania including an historical summary.

After a few days it will be Albania's 110th anniversary. Albania in the past was part of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years. The Ottoman Empire had its own administration and rules governing the country at the time. In addition to the rules of governance of the Ottoman Empire, in the Albanian territory, there was also governance through the rules established by the people themselves. This rule that was customary in some parts of Albania was in the form of the Kanun and there were different districts that followed this law, the most popular being the Kanun of Lek Dukagjini, which established rules in the north of the country. You can find (Kanun of Lek Dukagjini) on the internet.

There were also other Kanun laws, such as the Kanun of Dibra, and in the south and smaller areas. From a legal point of view this Kanun law had a wide scope, set the rules and included elements of criminal, civil and family law. After Albania declared independence and was created as a state in 1912, the country set its own rules and laws, and own instruments to implement these laws. These laws were institutionalised after the monarchy in 1928, at a time when the criminal code was approved together with the code of criminal procedure, constitution, and civil code, this means there were stronger instruments to guarantee the rule of law.

During the Monarchy there was a duality between the law and the Kanun in Kanun-governed areas. After some time had passed the Albanian state was consolidated and this means that the laws were more dominant than the Kanun. As it is known, after World War II, the Albanian government fought to defend the rule of law already created and this remained in force until 1990. After 1944, the government of the time urged people to follow the rules of that government, and the state required for all Albanians to follow the laws of the state. There was Kanun law, part of which spoke about blood feud.

What should be noted is that during 1944 to 1990, blood feuds were minimised and there was a 20 year period that no blood feuds occurred. Thus, no blood feud -feud killing has ever been reported from 1967 to 1987. The state of that time, in addition to the rule of law, also had other means to minimise BF.

During that time there was the organisation of the masses and by that we mean that youth organisations, women, civil organisations and even the state party at the time had a preventative role regarding BF. Also exile was considered an administrative method regarding BF and other crimes. Families that had a tendency to commit BF related crime and conflicts that were not resolved were considered by the exile commission who would decide to exile that family. These exile committees mostly dealt with political crimes but also serious crimes such as blood feuds were also dealt with. After 1990 Albania took its first steps towards democratisation and transformed from a mono-party into a pluralist state. The elections were more direct, more effective, and had more influence on central and local government. This period was marked by numerous reforms in political, social and other sectors. A new constitution was approved through referendum, and after the criminal code, code of criminal procedure, family and civil code were approved, thus creating the legal basis

of a democratic state. The criminal code has always considered murder as a very serious crime and stipulated very harsh punishments for perpetrators. During communism there were on average 20 murders per year on average, as you can see from the figures the nature of such crimes was very low. After 1990 there was an increase of murders in Albania and also an increase in other crimes, as well as BF-related crimes and murders. The latter was especially concentrated for the north of Albania, where the BF phenomena came back to life again.

Below, we will provide you with some statistics regarding murders that were initially assessed as blood feuds, but it is the court that gives the final decision as to whether these were revenge killings or blood feuds.

In 1998, there were 45 murders related to blood feuds, and in the following years, the situation is reflected as follows:

- 1999 – 41
- 2000 – 41
- 2001 – 32
- 2002 – 13
- 2003 – 12
- 2004 – 11
- 2005 – 5
- 2006 – 4
- 2007 – 0
- 2008 – 5
- 2009 – 1
- 2010 – 5
- 2011 – 5
- 2012 – 5
- 2013 – 4
- 2014 – 4
- 2015 – 0
- 2016 – 1
- 2017 – 1
- 2018 – 1
- 2019 – 0
- 2020 – 1
- 2021 – 1
- This year (2022) there have been 2 murders related to blood feud.

Something needs to be clarified, we have provided an historical overview of BF in Albania and this is a very old phenomenon, plus this is not only present in Albania, but also other Mediterranean countries including Greece, southern Italy, Corsica and European part of Turkey, so the entire Balkan area. However in Albania, this phenomenon was preserved unlike other countries. The Kanun was meaningful for the time it was created, however the state law means now the 'Kanun' has degraded and lost its meaning.

Today there is no duality between Kanun and state law because it is now the state law that operates. Now there are law enforcement authorities such as Police, Prosecution, Courts and Local Government.

As you know crime driven by revenge happens all around the world. BF should not be confused with the clashes between organised crime groups.

Until recently in the criminal code, BF were included in a general article, it was Article 78 that stipulated that murders were committed out of revenge or blood feud. The Albanian state, as an instrument in the fight against BF, amended the Criminal Code, so now it has included a special article on BF. And that is Article 78a of the Criminal Code. It says that murder driven by BF is punishable by 30 years or life imprisonment. This is one of the crimes that has the harsher punishment according to Albanian legislation. Also for the first time threats related to BF are also punished. This is Article 83a of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, which stipulates that the serious threat of BF or revenge that forces people to isolate themselves is punished by up to 3 years in prison. Another offence was added for the first time under Article 83a is for when you incite people to commit BF crimes. When people are motivated to commit crimes related to blood feud or revenge, they can be imprisoned for up to 3 years. These articles are very powerful tools in the hands of law enforcement authorities so that we can properly fight such cases and minimize bloodshed.

The traditions written in the Kanun law are indicative of the behaviour of the citizens who lived in the territory where the influence of 'Kanun' extended. So BF in Kanun law is considered as a punishment for the people who followed this law. According to Kanun law, BF is when you kill someone who has killed someone of your own family. In Kanun law there are around 150 articles that regulate the BF. The Kanun of Lek Dukagini addresses this issue the most. It says that blood is washed with blood. This was divided [shared] among families in blood feuds. Regarding the law about when you push or motivate others to commit such crimes, when you were involved in BF cases you were isolated at home. These traditions that were brought back to life after 1990 also caused some social problems. By enforcing the state laws we made it possible to minimise the BF related cases. With the enforcement of the law we saw a degradation and change in behaviour regarding the Kanun law related to BF.

Some citizens sometimes see the Kanun as an excuse to commit a crime of blood feud. The State Police currently has a number of legal frameworks and articles in the criminal code to prevent crimes related to blood feud. In 2012, an action plan was prepared regarding the prevention, certification and protection of blood feuds. This plan was renewed in 2014 and is still in effect. Concrete preventive measures have been defined and there is more cooperation with the local government and NGOs. There is a great cooperation with other law enforcement bodies such as the Prosecutor's Office and the Courts, that such crimes are investigated and judged. There is also greater cooperation with the Educational Directorates in order for children to grow up with the spirit of the rule of law, not with Kanun law, as we want to raise children with the spirit of law and tolerance.

Our main task as State Police is to prevent such criminal offences by cooperating with our local police so we can obtain information and identify any cases of those who are driven to commit such crimes. As we mentioned above, we have an action plan renewed in 2014, which and is still in force and guides our work. This is the

reason why we cooperate closely with local government and NGOs to achieve the highest results in order to achieve reconciliation and prevent the escalation of these conflicts. After each piece of information is received, we structure our work and cooperate with local police to resolve conflicts and to prevent such crimes. From 2014 up to now, crimes related to blood feud are minimal with only one case per year or even zero as in 2019. I believe that changes in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania have been effective and thus we see that the phenomenon of blood feud is heading for extinction. However, it will continue to occupy our attention until blood feuds have completely disappeared from our society.

For the figures we gave above, initially those crimes from our side were referred to as crimes of blood feud, but in many cases the courts have qualified that the crimes were actually crimes of revenge and not blood feud, however we do not have numbers for the final qualification of these criminal offenses, as the courts have them.

We talked about article 78a of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, where it says that blood feud refers directly to the Kanun. So this means that the perpetrator must refer to the Kanun to commit such a crime and it is difficult for the court to prove this.

Since we have at least 25 years of experience in dealing with crimes related to blood feuds, we can say that this issue is gradually fading. We are completely optimistic when it comes to criminality and we think that in the next 10 years the crime of blood feud will have disappeared in Albania.

It is the older generation of people who have conveyed the spirit of this Kanun/blood feud to the younger generation until now, but Albania is already a candidate country for the EU and the younger generations are more up to date with the current legislation, which is in compliance with EU laws and thus they have less faith in blood feuds in general. We must distinguish between the real phenomenon and the perception of the phenomenon.

Some families, because they want to go abroad, use blood feud as a reason and try to get documents that prove their blood feud conflicts. Regarding this fact, the State Police has initiated criminal proceedings against the persons who issued such documents. When it comes to law enforcement, Albania is a safe country.

Q. Is the 2014 updated action plan available in English?

A. First we can say that the plan is classified as it includes secret police procedures of the State Police, but there is a committee that gathers information whenever there is the need. The core of this plan is that the state police and local government, NGOs, and central government if necessary, will deal with the BF phenomenon. There is a rule in this plan that if a BF related crime happens then it will be investigated within the next 30 days. This is done by the Criminal Police Department and crimes related to blood feud are investigated in close cooperation with the Prosecutor's Office.

But the question is what will happen to the conflict, how will it develop? This is where NGOs and local government come in, to help resolve the conflict. As we pointed out above, there is a tendency towards the disappearance of cases of blood feud and this should not be confused with incidents of organised crime. Because organised

crime clashes occur both within the UK and also in the Balkans, they are everywhere.

In Albania, there have been 42 murders related to criminal offences this year.

Q. Of the 42 murders are any suspected to be revenge killings?

A. Of course, the state police has identified two possible crimes related to blood feud this year, but it is the courts that will decide whether it is related to blood feud or revenge.

It is understood that you are here because of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom who present blood feuds as a reason for asylum. If in your practice you have cases of people who have left Albania due to blood feud, you can cooperate and coordinate with us, and we will give you an official answer for each case with details. I believe this is the best way for institutions. We can give you an answer for asylum seekers who say they are involved in a blood feud, this will allow a better decision making if you get an answer from the Albanian State Police, avoiding abuses in this matter.

We have a complete database of criminal activity in Albania and can provide it to you so that there is complete transparency in these cases. UK authorities pursuing specific cases can submit a request to the Albanian State Police and we can provide a full and detailed background, including information about this person's family and whether they are involved in a crime revenge, blood feud or any other issue. What we are saying is official and you can use this information. We are part of the administration and refer cases, but the court only works with evidence in Albania, anyway you can use the information we provide you.

I want to finish by saying first that in Albania there are sporadic cases of criminal acts of blood feud, however the blood feuds have minimal dimensions, they are also decreasing year by year.

What you need to know is that the law applies in Albania and that the rule of law prevails in Albania, not the Kanun.

There is no doubt, absolutely no duality between the actual law and its applicability, and the Kanun law of the Middle Ages.

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Peoples Advocate

Date: 23 November 2022

Meeting with: [Peoples Advocate \(PA\)](#) - an official from People's Advocate

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

PA: I am commissioner of the special section that deals with Blood Feuds (BF).

Interview

Q. Could you give us some background information on what you do and how that links to blood feuds (BF)?

A. The Peoples Advocate it is a constitutional institution that protects and guarantees human rights (HR) in the country. It is the biggest institution that deals with such issues of guaranteeing human rights of Albania, and the right to life is an issue that is directly linked to BF. The right to life as a fundamental human right is protected by the Universal Declaration of UN General Assembly (1948), by the European Convention and by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, Article 21. Apart from protecting and guaranteeing HR we deal with promotion of HR and the values that might infringe this right. The institute of Peoples Advocate has been very concerned about BF because it infringes on the right to life. Not only are there murders or fatalities due to blood feud, but also an infringement of other HR. Due to BF and revenge, and we are saying that now revenge is more prevalent, families are isolated especially men and boys, and this we judge is infringing the right to freely move into any part of the state's territory, the right to vote, the freedom of organization, the right to work, to education, to benefit from the social services and get healthcare, practicing religion etc.

As an institution we have addressed this concern and we have made in the following recommendations, 2 special reports, one in 2013 [[Special Report on Blood Feud Phenomenon 2013](#)] and another in 2015 [["On the phenomenon of blood fighting in Albania" Special Report \(II\), 2015](#)]. The one in 2013 was used in the Albanian parliament to adopt a resolution for more cooperation between authorities to address the BF issue. Also, it was our recommendation that brought the law in 2005 of the establishment of the Coordinating Committee for BF related issues. But even after the approval of this resolution, we find that no concrete solution has been made by the state institutions for the implementation of the tasks assigned by the Assembly for the prevention of this phenomenon. What we saw in the coming years was that the law was not followed with sub legal acts. These sub legal acts were necessary so the law could function. One of these articles of the law (article 4) ensured the full cooperation of the council with the state authorities, and this ensured studies would be conducted and that the phenomenon would be addressed properly and put to rest. Another article which should have been adopted was the creation of a platform to ensure cooperation between units to create a preventative approach. There should be other articles, a Technical Secretariat which would coordinate work between the council and other state authorities. The Coordinating Council would comprise of representatives from various institutions that would gather ad-hoc and the secretariat would guide the work of the council. All these gaps were included in a second report of 2015 and represented to the public and discussed with civil society in 2016 and sent to parliament for discussions. What we noticed is there is no national strategy for this phenomenon and we believe there should be cooperation between many stakeholders including Ministry of Interior affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Protection, religious bodies, police, local government, etc., and they should work together so we minimise the BF phenomenon in Albania. There is no database on BF and there is contradictory or different data regarding the number of people murdered and the number of people isolated. We estimate there should be a full data base, clear statistics dated from 1990 so people can take proper measures. We have managed to obtain statistics

from various institutions, but we saw that there was contradictory information between the data we obtained from civil society institutions and the State Police.

We have organised open days, especially in Shkoder and during open days we have spread leaflets and we have involved students, civil society, religious and local community and spoken about the measures that need to be taken. We also created posters and leaflets in local offices across the country and distributed leaflets to children across school to educate them with the spirit of tolerance.

Our institution in 2013, in collaboration with some NGO organized a national conference on the phenomenon of blood feud, its consequences and the concern it has brought to our society.

From 2013 to 2015 we have presented to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health and Welfare at that time, recommendations with packages of measures that they should take for the education of isolated children and the offering of financial aid to isolated families and proper health care treatment to those families. We have also recommended to the State police measures for faster investigation and more in-depth investigation and more cooperation with the prosecutor office, as we believe the perpetrators should be brought to justice. If the perpetrators are not punished according to law, then the message giving to opposing families continues to be that they should take justice into their own hands.

According to our knowledge, State police action plans have been approved, there was one in 2012 and reviewed in 2014 and updated frequently. Also there were changes in the criminal code in 2013 regarding BF and revenge and also for serious threat to retaliation or blood revenge against a person to be locked up at home and incitement to blood feud.

Q. Do you know how many people are in BF?

A. We currently do not have any data because we only have data from the last report from 2015, though this year we have had a few complaints from people asking for help as they are in BF and asked us to help to get to EU countries, but this is not part of our jurisdiction. We guided these people to the State police and prosecuting office to ask for protection.

Regarding the report of 2015, in this report we gathered data from the General State Police Directorate and there were 60 isolated families, but this has not been updated so we don't know the current situation. Of this 60 there were 145 individuals and out of them 40 minors and this is the reason we have cooperated with the Ministry of Education.

Q. Where are these families located?

A. Referred to Special Report (2015), most of them were in the Shkoder district. They were also in Kukës, Lezhë, Durrës and Tirana districts, but time has passed since then and many families have moved from rural areas to city centres so we do not know where they are now.

Q. Do they seek protection from the police and if they do what protection is offered?

A. When people feel threatened they can go to the police and denounce the person threatening them. However the last annual report of the prosecutor's office in 2021, on criminality in Albania, showed that there were more registered criminal

proceedings BF-related murder due to blood feud rather than serious threat to retaliation or blood revenge against a person to be locked up at home and incitement to blood feud. So our opinion is there should be a better cooperation between prosecutor and state police. So they find those that commit crime.

Q. Do people ask the police to provide protection?

A. There might be individuals that go to police however we cannot speak in general terms but take cases one by one and need to see how many of these denouncements have ended up in court. The state police is responsible for patrolling areas however it is the prosecution office that do the investigation. We believe that the threat of BF or forcing people to isolate is punished by law. However, people who isolate do not denounce (declare a BF) as they cannot go to police (because they can't leave their homes), or maybe because of tradition or that they do not trust the police. Or the case might take quite a long time. For some years the vetting system has been applied in Albania meaning many prosecutors and judges have been removed, this means that the investigation and adjudication of cases takes some time, this makes system less effective and makes individuals have less trust in the system. We have had cases in the media where a relative has lost a loved one in a BF offence and said that if justice does not work then we will take justice into our own hands.

Q. Does your organisation help with mediation in these families?

A. We do not do mediation, according to our knowledge several organisation might do some kind of mediation.

Q. Is it mainly males that isolate or whole families?

A. Generally they are males, however due to the deformity [misinterpretation] of the practice of Kanun there have been cases of women and girls who are subject to BF. There are sporadic cases but they do not happen so frequently

Q. Do you think that BF are declining?

A. Yes, but I believe that revenge is also a small dynamic. According to the law, the police response is the same whether the offence is deemed revenge or BF, but the investigation will prove whether murders are due to BF or revenge. I believe that many cases of revenge can develop into a BF. So a murder occurs due to a rival in organised crime or a death happened for other reasons, and this can lead another member of a family to begin a BF. There might also be property disputes, or petty disputes which might degenerate because of the mentality of the area.

The General Directorate of the State Police informs us that, for the period 2017-2021, it has been recorded a total of 4 murders for blood feud.

From 2017 to 2021, we have only 4 murders for blood feud, 1 for each year, looking at the statistics of recent years, we are dealing with a significant decrease in the phenomenon of blood feuds, but it is still a very delicate problem.

As for the data on the victims of these murders, they are all male adults, there are no minors or women.

Q. Are you aware of organisations that issue documents to attest to a BF being in place?

A. Our institution in 2013, in collaboration with some NGO organized a national conference on the phenomenon of blood feud, its consequences as well as the concerns it has brought to our society.

We appreciate their contribution to this phenomenon, as well as for the awareness of citizens. Also, some other organizations have contributed to reconciliation of blood between families involved in blood feud. But there have also been cases when leaders of associations have been involved in illegal activities by issuing fraudulent documents regarding the status of certain individuals who have sought asylum in western countries. Referring to Special Report (2015), following communication with prosecutors office in Shkoder and Durres, based on the referrals of the state police structures (in cooperation with the competent Belgian structures), they prosecuted 16 people for falsification of documents and use of falsified documents, one of which was head of [Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation in Durres](#), so there have been several cases of abuse of office, and individuals issuing such documents even though it was not their responsibility.

Q. Do you think that this continues?

A. We have no information regarding this situation.

Q. If a family is involved in a BF do you think that the family can relocate somewhere else within Albania?

A. Certainly relocation is an option and used by several families who are in a BF. This is especially true for families in the same village who face each other often so they decide to relocate to another city in Albania or abroad. But, the chances of a person being found after moving/relocating from one residence/place to another within the country exist due to the fact that we are a small country.

Q. Do you think people can leave self-isolation?

A. It is very difficult for an individual to leave the place where they were born and take income. Mostly the families involved in BF are very poor and in need of financial aid and need support to educate children. In the 2015 report it showed most involved in BF are at a low level of education, with 4-8 years of schooling.

Q. Could they leave if they felt threatened, or is the threat so great they are unable to leave their home?

A. It is a matter of choice.

Q. Those on low income, do they receive state benefit?

A. So yes this is one of the recommendations on our special reports we presented to the Ministry of Social Protection and Youth. We proposed for social protection experts to go to families and for financial aid to be given to the family, but aid is minimal, it depends on the municipalities and they decide on their possibility and budgets. But it is never enough to allow them to have a dignified life. When it is men affected by isolation the burden falls on the women to work.

Q. How is the Peoples Advocate continuing to help and support those involved in BF?

A. Apart from receiving the request from the individual who express a desire to go abroad this is not part of our jurisdiction to attest documents to a blood feud, so we

guide them to the police and prosecution office. However the People's Advocate has limited human resources, there are 57 individuals working in total (only 24 experts), that cover all human rights. Meanwhile, we cover all mandates as a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and we have all tasks included by them (FRA Report 2022-NHRI accreditation status and mandates). We have a great scope of work and also new generations rights, so it's a big challenge for us to go into detail with every case.

I should say that BF is not a national issue but a local one, it infringes on the right to life and cannot go hand in hand with rule of law in a democratic country. The topic is very sensitive and something that we have been working on for a long time. The problem affects vulnerable groups, which is and will be a part of the work of the People's Advocate.

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State Agency for Childs Rights and Protection

Date: 23 November 2022

Meeting with: An official from the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Interview

Q. Could you tell us about isolated children?

A. Blood feuds (BF) are clearly stipulated in Albanian Law. It is in the code of the Criminal Procedure of Albania. When it comes to isolation of children we have only one case of an isolated child, I think this is a child in Kukes, I can send the report. According to the law when a child is threatened there should be a denouncement to the police and there should be a procedure for the prosecutor to investigate, but so far, from my awareness, there have been no denouncements. So far there are people who have been threatened but there have been no denouncements since 2018, when I joined the agency.

Q. How are you aware of this one child that has been isolating?

A. The family of the child asked for support and the child protection unit were advised, but there was not a denouncement from the family to the state police. The family have since migrated from Albania.

Q. So the family are no longer in Albania?

A. Correct.

Q. Is this the only case of a BF or are there others you have heard of?

A. So legally we cannot identify whether the case is BF-related or not. As an agency we only deal with social issues, we protect the children in need. We haven't had cases of a family of a child that have come to us and asked for help and support because they are in a BF.

Q. So when the family you mentioned did ask for help, what support was provided to that child?

A. When there are cases then we provide an assessment of the family and conditions in the family. We see if there is a school nearby where the child can go, or if a teacher can go to the child, or provide other services like food packages or psycho-social treatment as we work a lot with psychologists in schools.

In my opinion it is a social issue and not a legal issue. The law is there and murder is a criminal offence, the state can intervene in a criminal offence and send a BF person to prison. However, it is the families that self-isolate because they are afraid or feel threatened, that is their mentality. The family damage one another by self-isolating, it is not the state.

Q. So even though no family has approached the child protection unit or your agency, do you think that there are still families in self-isolation?

A. I cannot say yes or no, but maybe. We get information from the municipality and that information is informally given. We are just told - look there is a family that has self-isolated, but there is no official register of these cases. We do not gather data on isolated children. Because it is not stipulated in the law.

Q. Do you think that the local municipalities who are aware of children that are isolated provide support to them?

A. Yes, they can provide support but it is up to the will of the family because, as I said, it is not part of the law, it is their will to self-isolate. The state should provide support to vulnerable groups and the municipality can help with reconciliation and provide other services. Before, when BF was more widespread in the past, it was the NGOs that supported the families in self-isolation with support teachers and education. But nevertheless with the passing of time many families migrated from Albania, and you cannot stop this. They are arguing that the State does not provide protection, but how can the State protect them when this is a social conflict, nothing to do with the law.

Q. Doesn't the state have an obligation to provide the child with rights and protection, for their health, education and so on?

A. The issue with this phenomenon is that there is zero data because there is zero denouncement, if they do not denounce then there is nothing we can do. There has been only one case that I told you about before.

Q. If the state are informed that a child is isolated, for example informed by the school, then does that child become a child in need?

A. In the case when we have children that are involved in BF, or in any case, where children are in need, we always initiate a process to provide services. We make an assessment of the family and custodian of child, however with BF there should always be a denouncement. So, who is this person who is threatening you, why are you at high risk? When there is no denouncement there is a lack of evidence, and it is very difficult to prove in court, because generally speaking there is no evidence. Legally speaking there is no evidence to show that this family are in BF, that is why it's very difficult to properly address this issue. For us the threat of a BF is a criminal offence' however it's very difficult for the court to act if there is no evidence. There are several things available like special witness programs, but we need evidence

Q. So you might have a concern but in the absence of evidence you can't help?

A. Yes, we might have concern, but these persons in BF, they can commit the crime and that retribution, it can go on for many years, we don't have anything legally in evidence to show that they are in BF. I'm not saying it doesn't exist, it does absolutely, for us it is treated solely as a criminal offence. In such cases it is criminal offence and treated as such, so same as trafficking, but as in all criminal offences we always need evidence.

Q. Are you aware of any NGOs that support families affected by BF?

A. Yes one in Shkodër, I think but we can send this information. Shkodër is the largest area where Kanun law exists, implemented since the middle ages and the perception is from then, and most of the families have actually now migrated. In Shkodër and other areas in the north, BF is one of the reasons they have migrated from these areas, the majority of people have migrated to the US or the UK as they want to go as far away as possible. BF are criminal offences - at the end of the day it is murder.

Q. Do you think a family affected by BF could safely relocate somewhere in Albania?

A. Yes there are cases, and we provide assistance and aid to those in need but it is not defined whether these people are in BF or for what purpose they ask for support. A case example when 3 people were killed due to some dispute between minors and the families relocated in Tirana, now we don't know if this will resolve the conflict, it might? In such cases we provide whatever support is needed such as rent bonus or other social services.

Q. Are children legally obliged to attend school?

A. Yes up until the 9th grade. But high school is not mandatory.

Q. At what point can the state intervene if a child is not going to school?

A. According to the law all children are protected until they are 18 years of age. According to our law we can provide immediate protection if they are at high risk, however, there has not been such cases, for example there have been cases when children do not go to school after the first few days of a BF crime was committed, but after a few days they go back to school. The reason we have not had many cases, and the reason why many families migrate far away, is because BF-related crime happens after the child becomes an adult. If the case is at high risk we take the child under protection and can send the child to a shelter. So BF happens when the child becomes a man. It is no problem to stipulate BF in law but we don't want to promote it as a phenomenon. Very often these BF-related crimes are committed after these individuals reach adulthood and maybe it will never happen, but we cannot know.

Q. Are you aware of programmes run by the government that run awareness prevention programmes?

A. Absolutely yes, we have such awareness raising campaigns especially in the north of country and similar campaigns on early child marriage, which has been a problem but we have seen a decrease in this trend. We argue that at 16 years old it's not easy to be a mother. When it comes to BF it is very difficult to provide legal arguments in such cases, they are not stipulated in legal frameworks or international conventions. Our approach is to raise awareness saying that BF is a violation of human rights. This has been our approach. The State of Albania does not engage in retribution, and Albania has abolished the death sentence.

Q. Are awareness campaigns helping?

A. Yes we believe they are, an example is that there is a decreasing trend of early child marriages. In the past the families arranged the marriage of girls to elders after they graduated 9th grade, whereas now we see a trend where families send their girls to high school and not marry them. There is a high rate of divorce in child marriage and even the families understood how wrong it was and decided it is better to send children to school.

Q. Do you see a similar trend in BF?

A. The situation is very different now, the legal amendments made the law harsher for BF related offences and we also tried not to promote this criminal offence within laws. However, this is a sensitive topic and such offences can happen over many years, or years later, so you cannot predict. This is why there is a high level of migration. Also the state can provide protection until the child turns 18 but they do not know when this offence will happen so they do not feel safe, so they decide to migrate. Maybe other experts can advise, I am only speaking from a child protection point, there is only one case, but BF related crimes happen many years after they become adults.

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Shkodër Regional Police Directorate

Date: 24 November 2022

Meeting with: Shkodër Regional Police Directorate. Hamdi Fjora, Director of police and Agron Jahar - Human resources in Shkodër.

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Presentation:

Hamdi Fjora, Director of police.

Blood feud is a declining phenomenon, but there are still cases of its occurrence. One of the reasons for the decline of this phenomenon is the toughening of the legal provision which provides for severe penalties for this crime.

The State Police follows blood feud cases under the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, it is the court that decides whether we are dealing with blood feuds or whether it is a murder for other motives.

The State Police in the case of blood feuds take measures to prevent the escalation of the situation and follows the work done by organizations such as NGOs or blood feud reconciliation associations for such cases.

We have recently had a murder and we think we are dealing with a blood feud. The alleged perpetrator carried out the murder by being a masked on his face. From the operating data collected by the police it appears that we are in front of a blood feud but as I mentioned above is the court that decides. There was another case in Shkoder. The case involved two families with a strong criminal basis. Both have their own criminal gangs.

In the first ten years after communism, the blood feud was widespread, but it has fallen. During communism the sentence for blood feuds was the death penalty, and perhaps this was the reason that this phenomenon went to zero.

Interview

Agron Jahad– Chief of Human Resources

Q. Could you give an overview of how you operate within the scope of blood feuds (BF)?

A. It was the choice of the Director to speak to you as I have a lot of experience in BF. I have dealt with BF cases since 1998 until 2013. There was a period where we had a dedicated office for BF cases in 2004/2005, but with the passing of time and decrease in cases this office was no longer necessary and BF cases were addressed by other sectors such as serious crimes. I have some material to share, and information but some is sensitive, it is the names of people involved in BF so I cannot share this part.

From 2004 to 2007, in the Shkodra Police Directorate there was a blood feud sector and I was the head of this unit. Part of our work was the identification of all the families involved in blood feuds, we knew there were associations dealing with blood feud cases, but we wanted real figures. I had an approach at the time to closely follow the cases and work with families.

We had a meeting in the Shkoder prefectures in 2006 with the associations that dealt with BF cases and we asked that they present the number of families involved. However, the number they gave was exaggerated. We had our own numbers, and during the meeting, that was attended by organisations such as OSCE, I said that I know, for example, that this family has 3 children, so the numbers we have are correct. It was true that this phenomena was present here in Shkoder and this was a serious problem, that was why we opened a special sector. However, in 2007 there was no BF related murders, this is why we said we no longer needed this sector in the state police and cases were dealt with by other departments. This problem had been concerning for us, there was a great percentage of murders attributed to BF. However for 5 years there have been no BF related cases in Shkoder apart from one case that happened this year, so from 2018 to 2022 there have been no BF cases.

Q. Is there a concern about active BF cases throughout Albania, not just in Shkoder?

A. I can speak only of Shkoder district but bear in mind that this district has been the most problematic out of the whole of Albania. There have been some cases in Lezhe and some northern areas. There are still some families in Shkoder that are in isolation, but following the free movement of citizens, many have left their villages or Shkoder district in general. However we consider them still at risk if there is no reconciliation.

Q. How many families are in isolation in Shkoder?

A. When it comes to proper isolation there are no such families. However there are 96 families who are at risk as they are involved in BF and they cannot move freely.

This figure is for 96 families not 96 persons, this figure came from associations [civil society/NGOs]. Within these families we think there may be only one or two people in isolation.

Q. So are you saying that not all of the family isolates?

A. At risk but not full isolation, according to our figures 10% of families are in real or full isolation. I can give you an example, there are 33 families in BF and 11 families have migrated. However we believe that this is not the real level, we believe 22 families have migrated but don't have confirmation of this.

Q. How are police made aware of these families?

A. We built a database of our own in 2004/2006, we received certificates for all families. We recorded all families and we wrote who is the head of household, how many members, the gender of family members, how many in isolation, how many are children, how many are students and what is the reason for isolation. This is the database we built ourselves.

Q. So you are advised of who is in isolation and then you record this in your own database?

A. We cooperate with the associations up to a certain extent because we have noticed that not all associations are serious and some associations have built their work on Kanun law, but we work on actual law. It was the duty of community officer to identify those in BF and to obtain the family certificate. Nevertheless we continue to cooperate with associations and when we receive denouncements (declaration of BF) from associations and we verify the information before we take action.

Q. Do any families involved in BF report to the police directly?

A. Yes, there have been a few denouncements. When someone is in BF they send a message to the other family and threaten them. There have been cases when we have been informed [we were shown model of information held on the database]. This is the database owned by the state police, in the case of this family there has been a reconciliation, some have also migrated. The database records full details of all family members as well as some information on the nature of the dispute, and contains full names of family members – this was the situation in 2011. All police stations in Shkoder have their own database and we asked directorate to create a central one and police HQ centralises the data. At the time when there was a special sector we maintained a database, but now the local police hold their own.

Q. Is there still a central record?

A. Yes, they are updated by the police officers, so the police have a certain number of families and when there are changes they update the data.

Q. On the active case mentioned has this resulted in any arrests?

A. There have been changes in criminal law and amendments so now punishments are harsher, and there have been some arrests, when families denounce, and we have made arrests.

Q. Has this resulted in prosecution?

A. Yes, for sure.

Q. Do the police issue any documents when they are satisfied someone is in a genuine BF?

A. We do not issue certificates to individuals. However when institutions come to us to ask about the situation we can give them information. It has happened very rarely, when a citizen was at high risk, that we have issued them such certificates. There might have been some cases in the beginning of the 2000's because then the situation was problematic as 400 families were involved in BF, but now there are only a few cases. If such certificates are issued by us then there is room for abuse by others. I can speak about my directorate but I don't know what other police stations are doing. I'm not 100% sure but I believe that they are not issuing such things. The situation is very dynamic and we cannot give you a 100% answer, maybe other stations can answer this. Our approach is that we are only going to issue such certificates only when institutions ask us for such documents, but not to individuals. I don't believe there is a violation of law in those cases.

Q. What institutions might ask for a certificate?

A. When I say institutions I mean foreign countries, they have asked for information as there used to be many abuses but I don't know the situation now. There is internal communication between us to take the proper measures.

Q. When was the last time this station issued a certificate?

A. I am not able to answer this question.

Q. Of the 96 families mentioned, given by civil society, was it 10% of this number that are in full isolation?

A. This is information we got from the association, but together we verified this information. I believe the number is lower but we will stick to this number.

Q. And the 10% in isolation?

A. There are 96 families involved, as informed by the association, and 50 families in Shkoder. However I personally know some individuals and I know they are not in isolation, or they have migrated, and according to my judgement 10% are in isolation. But they are still at risk of BF. So basically these are 96 families who are at high risk and tomorrow something might happen, but it does not mean they are in isolation. I can give you example, in Puke there are no isolated families, however there are families still at risk if families have not reconciled. Maybe one day a child will say, 'this person killed my father', and they will carry on with the BF.

Q. If you know families are at risk, what do the police do to protect or help them to reconcile?

A. Police in general are not involved directly in the reconciliation process for BF families. Reconciliation associations for BF carry out the work and reconcile based on Kanun law norms. The participation of police in such processes would damage their reputation as reconciliation is based on Kanun law, not on the rule of law. Police officers, during meetings and with cooperation with associations, have asked for their activity to be in compliance with the state law. An example is that someone might say that they are open to reconcile but don't want the person punished for murder, but the state law cannot do that [cannot ignore the murder].

I will give you this material. (data from 2006 to 2011).

Q. Have there been police prosecutions of any associations in Shkoder?

A. It was a problem in 2011. I think this occurred in the UK when people there were claiming they were in a BF and they possessed documents issued by elders in villages, and associations. During that time, prosecutions were initiated against elders of villages and the associations because of the documents released. The association was the Council of Reconciliation of blood feud.

[document provided from 2011 but any details of document to be redacted]

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Prosecutors Office - Shkodër

Date: 24 November 2022

Organisation meeting with: Official from the Prosecutors Office Shkoder

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Interview

Q. Could you let tell us about your role?

A. I have been a prosecutor in Shkodër office for 7 years and leading this institution for 3 years. The BF phenomena is a social problem but also a legal problem and there are there are specific articles to regulate and address this issue. Article 78a stipulates and addresses the phenomenon. In the past the BF issue was addressed with one article and after the introductions of amendments in 2013 it has been regulated in a special article. The same is true when it comes to threat and also when you motivate or incite people to commit BF. All these articles provide harsher punishments for people who commit these crimes. This amendment in the law brought 2 results: first it decreased the number of BF killings, and second, the lawyers of people who commit those offences hide that it is a BF killing to reduce the punishment. They declare it as a simple killing and not BF killing because of the harsh punishment. The first and last cases of individuals investigated and punished according to Article 78a was in 2014, so after the amendment of the law. Whereas when it comes to Article 78, so killing because of revenge, there have been (number of prosecutions):

- 2 in 2013
- 1 in 2014
- 2 in 2016
- 1 in 2019
- 1 in 2022.

What we have noticed is a decreasing trend of BF related offences, however, there has been an increase in the number of murders committed by hitmen. This kind of murder is difficult to prove it is related to BF. However, our investigations have shown that there are some murders related to previous murders but it is difficult to define under Article 78a, hence we say these murders were committed because of revenge.

Q. So the last person to be convicted of BF was 2014?

A. Yes the same is true for threat of BF. When it comes to threats we had:

- 2 cases in 2103
- 8 in 2014
- 1 in 2005
- 1 in 2006
- 1 in 2016
- 3 in 2018
- none in 2019 to 2022.
- One case of incitement of BF in 2017.

Q. Are these cases of prosecution and conviction?

A. When it comes to the threat there have been very few cases of people that have been prosecuted and convicted, this is because we cannot find sufficient evidence to prove it, so the investigation stops. What happens is someone denounces (declares) someone is threatening them, they get an attestation and then they migrate.

Meaning that the investigation stops before we get further evidence from these individuals. In 2014 there were 8 cases of people under investigation due to the threat of BF, there were several families in isolation. The police and prosecution office led the investigation and we approached the families and they said, 'no, we have not been threatened', this is a tradition, so we cannot investigate. There are cases in which the BF-involved families have started reconciliation efforts so this process might take some time or it might not be finalised. For example, the victim from one family will make a denouncement of a BF against the other family, even if there is no evidence, just because the reconciliation process has failed.

Q. When you say denouncement, does this mean one family is declaring BF against another family?

A. Yes. So the case is verified so we make the connection between a previous killing and the family that are in isolation because they are afraid to leave.

Q. Do you know how many families are currently affected by BF or are in isolation?

A. We do not have an exact number, we as a prosecution office do not have such data or capacity for data, efforts are made by local government, municipality and state police. The example of 2014 when we had 8 cases in which we suspected families were threatened because of BF. We carried out investigations and approached families but they said they were not threatened, but that they were afraid, because this is the tradition.

There was one case, in 2014 a father of two was sentenced with capital punishment for killing a police officer. The mother of the 2 children made a denouncement saying that the family of the police officer had threatened to kill her children when they became adults. So we launched an investigation and we found that the sons had travelled to the UK because they said that they would be secure there. We asked the mother and she told us that she did not receive any direct threats, and she had no contact with the other family. However, her sons had claimed that they heard, on the street, people talking about such things, and when we tried to approach the children to ask for information they were abroad, in the UK.

Q. Do the prosecution office issue documentation to say that a BF is taking place?

A. From a legal point of view, BF is not mentioned, we do not release a statement or documents saying this individual is involved or threatened because of a BF. What we do is release documents providing information about a case, whether it is being investigated or has gone to court, or is being adjudicated under Article 78a [final judgement of the court that decides whether a BF or not]. We provide such documents to the victim's side. There are cases when we issue a statement saying murder has been committed and we provide information about the murder but cannot say if it is related to BF if there is no evidence of such. There were requests for murder to be considered as BF but they were refused due to no evidence. The situation is different regarding threats because the documents we issue say this person has been threatened because of BF related issues.

We have had cases of individuals who seek asylum in UK and Belgium, but for economic purposes. After failing to get asylum, their lawyer tells them to relate the claim to BF as they are told it is easier to obtain asylum and that is why there is such a document.

Q. So a lawyer might contact you for documents to say there is a BF?

A. So the lawyer contacts family members in Albania and the family member comes to us asking for such a document.

Q. I assume you decline?

A. Absolutely. We have had cases of individuals who had burglars in their home 10 years ago and they ask us to issue a statement so they can say it is not safe in Albania and can seek asylum.

Q. When would you issue a document to say there is a BF?

A. First the documents we issue are saying that an event has happened, and that there are legal proceedings initiated on criminal offences, and the status of the case. So information on the victim and perpetrator and that an investigation has been initiated, but we do not state that this individual is at high risk, as long as there are no real threats presented by these individuals. Even in cases of threats related to BF, we issue a document stating that an investigation has been launched, not that the BF is factually true.

Q. You mention people have migrated due to BF. Are you aware if a family under BF could relocate within Albania?

A. Apart from life uncertainty, a BF also creates economic uncertainty, you should know Albania is a small country and there is little opportunity to hide and create a new life. Some go from Shkodër to Tirana, but only a few cases. Many migrate for economic reasons and because they cannot create a new life here, They move abroad as they feel safer and in some instances they have relatives that live there and they possess documents and they might help them with a new life. But we have also had cases of people moving from the city to Shkodër.

Q. The case you mentioned when the mother sent her sons to the UK due to a rumour, could the mother have done something else in that instance?

A. When it comes to that case we need to consider that both children were minors and their father was in prison for life, so the best thing would have been that the

children stayed with their mother. Nevertheless, there are cases of parents sending children abroad as minors as it is easier for them to get documents, get adopted and create a new life. There are some cases where children get documents and in 2 or 3 years they return to Albania even if they've claimed asylum for being in a BF. Or they go to stay with relatives (abroad) but then go to the authorities to say they have been abandoned.

If it was only about BF then the citizens could hide in Montenegro or Kosovo, but they choose countries with more economic possibilities. Some information from Europol said that children went abroad with their parents, they stayed with relatives, then the parents return and leave the children with uncle or aunts. Then the children go to the authorities saying they are unaccompanied minors.

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Center of Keshilation and Psychological Services

Date: 24 November 2022

Meeting with: Altin Nika, Psychologist at the Center of Keshilation and Psychological Services

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Altin Nika provided an overview of his work and centre:

This is the centre of psychological counselling, I am the activity coordinator, my colleague Eva is the president of the centre. I can respond to technical elements. I am a psychologist and worked with blood feuds (BF) maybe 7 or 8 years ago. There was a project that offered psychological support to children in isolation.

Interview

Q. Can you tell us about the support you offered to children in isolation?

A. (hands out leaflets in Albanian) It was a 6 month project supported by [ABC Foundation](#) and we offered children psychological support, so basic support and entertainment activities because they couldn't go out.

Q. Is this project ongoing or in the past?

A. It was in 2014.

Q. The organisation that funded this project, was that connected to the Albanian state?

A. No

Q. Do you know why they funded the project at that time?

A. They opened a tender for this project and we competed and we won, we don't know why it was opened.

Q. Was the project successful?

A. 50/50 – it was the first time we were doing such a thing, in the beginning even us as staff were afraid to go to families as the situation was unclear, in a way we were foreigners to families meaning that they did not trust us. In one of the activities we managed to organise a birthday party for a child, who had never experienced such a party, with balloons, games and cake. This was maybe the best moment of the project.

Q. Why did the funding end?

A. It was the donor that defined the time period and the money put into it.

Q. How many children did you support?

A. We provided direct support to a target group of 9 or 10 children, I don't remember the exact number. Here we have the documents of all the children and all the details. They show the name, reference numbers, the description of the situation, how often they were attending school, what were the other factors, there is also a general assessment of the family, such as how they were with one another, how they communicated with one another. We also have information about emotions, psychology and communication, verbal and non-verbal and how aggressive they were, we had a tendency to work with children who were aggressive. After giving out the assessment we planned an intervention and a clear job description of all who would carry out the intervention.

Q. What was the objective when targeting children who were aggressive?

A. First we wanted to understand the aggression and why. Because we need to consider that all families have different dynamics and also we wanted to intervene as much as possible to leave a trace and mark as there was not much time.

Q. You said you supported 9 or 10 children, do you know how many were in isolation at that time?

A. All children were either in full isolation or partial isolation, there were cases when children could leave house secretly or attend school occasionally. Even though the opposing family granted permission for them to leave their house, the families were afraid because of past incidents. There was a case when a girl was killed when out with her grandfather in Malesi-e-Madhe. So this case with the grandfather happened in 2014. We worked with the family of this girl as she also had a brother and sister.

Q. How would permission be obtained from opposing the family? Who obtains the permission?

A. So first I should tell you that this was not the scope of our work, neither reconciliation nor mediation. We dealt with improvement of the factual situation. Nevertheless we can tell you that families did not have direct conversations, it could be the church or someone important who would act as mediators.

Q. Have there been any organisation that have filled that space since the project ended?

A. I do not have this information

Q. Do you think there is a need for this support to be in place today?

A. I would say no, as the number of children and families in isolation is quite small. Eight years have passed since then, I would say such a programme is not so necessary today, I don't think it's something we need to work on now.

Q. Do you think there is no longer a problem of families involved in BF needing to isolate today?

A. Back at that time we received correct data from institutions, and what I say now is just my perception, but I believe this is not a big problem, not a priority, the problem is still there but not that big. I believe there are other priorities we need to focus on.

Q. Since this project ended have you had any involvement working with families with BF?

A. We have not been directly involved through projects, meaning no well-structured intervention, but we have offered psychological support to one or two children that have been referred to us, the nuns make referrals.

Q. Because the children are from families involved in BF?

A. Yes, so the nuns have identified that they need psychological support and they have referred them to our centre.

[shows newspaper article in [Reformiert](#)] Here is an article in a Swiss newspaper, dated 8 August 2022 which has a story on BF. This is a story on BF through the years, so the journalist managed to find a family in isolation today and they spoke about the phenomenon in general through the years, and they carried out an interview with me regarding psychological support, and the journalist carried out field visits and met citizens and priest don Raffaella and the people spoke about the history of the BF and isolation.

Q. The children referred to you by nuns, was that recently?

A. It was 2 or 3 years after the project ended, so around 2017. I remember that the nuns recalled the project we were involved in.

You asked me whether we provided support after the project ended and I said there was no longer a need. And then I think, what kind of intervention we should carry out? I believe we actually need to change the mindset and culture, I believe it would be a good idea to intervene to change this mindset for the future. This is the best approach to prevent BF. I knew you were coming here and accordingly I obtained data. To date (2016 to 2022) there has been only one BF-related murder in Shkodër, in January 2022, there was only one.

Q. Have you details of this one case?

A.[redacted]

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Liljana Luani – Child Centre Shkodër

Date: 24 November 2022

Meeting with: Liljana Luani - Child Centre in Shkodër

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Liljana Luani, founder of Child Centre in Shkodër provided an overview of her role:

First I want to thank you for coming, if you come to this centre then you appreciate the work we have done on blood feuds (BF). It's been 20 years that I have tried to give my own contribution to the war against BF either as a teacher or an activist. I am also trying my best, not only for the education of children who are victims of BF, but also trying to take their voice to the authorities who need to hear them.

Interview

Q. Can you tell us how many families are in BF and self-isolating?

A. The situation of BF has changed. In 2017 I made a study in 6 counties including; Kukës, Dibër [Dibra], Shkodër, Lezhë, Tirana and Durrës. you will find this study here [study is not available online]. So the study looked at how many people are in a family affected by BF, how many are in isolation, how many children, how many children are in isolation, how many have no education, and how many migrated and where they have migrated. But this was in 2017 and the situation has changed, so since then there have been more killings and aggression, but I can't give exact numbers now.

The study was supported by OSHEE (Electricity Distribution Operator), OSHEE have supported our project since 2017. During the Study and throughout the process we also had the support of the State Police for the realization of our mission. I want to highlight that for this study, we knocked door to door from Dibër to Durrës. We started the study from the county of Kukës door to door where the phenomenon of blood feuds was present. We continued with the County of Dibër and then [onto] the county of Shkodër, and Lezhë. Afterwards we extended our study to the county of Tirana where, like in all other counties, we also witnessed the support of the Police to go to every door affected by this phenomenon. These areas were covered by 8 Police Commissaries (the 9th Commissioner is the Road Police). All these Tirana County Commissioners were prepared to carry out our study as effectively as in all other counties where we conducted our study.

We finally continued our study in Durrës County where we saw the state police's support and conducted an accurate study on blood feuds, looking at the economic-social and health status of families, as well as the educational and psycho-social level of children, the families of those who are affected by this phenomenon.

The situation has really changed. There have been cases of blood feuds, but not more to my knowledge [see study].

We started from Kukës district then Dibër, Shkodër to Lezhë and to Tirana, we talked to 9 police stations in Tirana, we then went to Durrës and we concluded that the problem of BF is still present in Albania and that there were 591 families in BF at that time. However, the problem is not as worrying as the "reconciliation" of different areas can present. During the study we counted many families who had left for outside of the country and migrated abroad, but there were also families leaving from Dukagjin (in the north) towards the south of Albania. Families have moved from the north where the situation is more problematic. I have not completed the mission. I

now intend to travel to the south of Albania to obtain a full picture of the situation as it relates to BF.

Q. You mentioned a study in 2017, are there children now that you help with education and that are in isolation?

A. Yes there are. From 2017 when we conducted the study, OSHEE supported me with a working group, this is 5 teachers and a psychologist and after the study we continued helping the students by having classes either in person or online using tablets, however the support ends in December 2022, which is the middle of the school year.

The working group that helps me in the centre provides support to 60 children who are either in BF or vulnerable groups, there are 27 in vulnerable groups and the rest [33] are BF cases. The children who are in need (vulnerable group) are provided with teaching 3 times a week, but when it comes to those in BF we conduct teaching according to the schedule, so we carry on the education with these children online, using tablets provided by OSHEE. We keep a diary for the cases and also a lesson plan, so a daily, monthly and annual plan. We carry out online classes once a week with every child and twice a week we go in person where we teach for 3 hours during each visit and we teach maths, physics and Albanian language.

There are 2 teachers for primary education and 2 teachers for secondary school education, one of the teachers teaches social sciences, like language, geography, and so on, and the other teaches sciences, so maths, physics and IT.

Q. Of the 33 children, how many families are affected by BF?

A. Together with the working group, we offer support for 60 children [33] in blood and [27] in need [Orphaned children, children of the Roma community and children with divorced parents and other social problems including those at risk of street crime]. We also treat 40 families where 27 of them are families in blood feuds and 13 families in need. These 33 children who are in blood feuds are not totally isolated as [some] go to school according to the possibility that they are given to go to school and we work with them with supportive teaching, with the intention of perpetuating every hour of the lessons that is lost and to feel equal to their fellow members in school.

Besides the teachers, a great help is also provided by psychologists who work on the psychosocial treatment of children and family especially with mothers, who very often feel hopeless from the situation they go through. Education is mandatory up until 9th grade, so some of the children in the families no longer need to attend. Some children passed age for intervention, they no longer need to attend school. OSHEE support 40 families by funding the equipping of children with internet and supplying basic food for families. The 60 children we treat are children from 40 families being treated by our project. I want to highlight that the families we support are in real need because they are very poor. There are some families in isolation that do not need our support.

From 2018 up to now, thanks to the support of OSHEE we have managed to take some of these children on holiday. We take a group of 30 children for 10 days. In the past we took them to a property owned by the Ministry of Interior, Cavaliscence, which was used as a holiday destination for officers, so it is a public owned place.

During the vacation, the children are accompanied the whole time by state police and sometimes we have children from opposite families. Later this place was damaged by the earthquake. One year we took the children to Vlore.

The main purpose for sending the children on vacation is more for the socialisation and integration and also teaching them citizenship and how to behave with each other, but this is difficult due to the Kanun law even though they are accompanied by state police. But I have to stress that in over 20 years I have had no problems. I also believe that it is important to work with the mothers, as they are the first teachers and they can teach tolerance and rule of law and they can push them not to commit BF crimes.

Q. Of the 40 families involved in BF, have they officially declared to the police that they are in BF?

A. Yes I believe so. The first list of families I prepared was done with the support from the state social services of Shkodër and I also obtained information from the state police. The police helped with the study and the numbers of citizens. Then I went door to door accessing social conditions, and I also tested their educational level so I can see how I can intervene with them. We also offered some vocational courses for the mothers of those children so we could help them with their integration in society by helping them get employed, this was done with thanks to the Ministry of Welfare and the support of Valbona Tula, Director of State Social Services in Shkodër.

Professional courses for women and girls in blood were carried out with the support of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and State Social Service, County of Shkoder.

I can feel the state social services support even today as they provided me with aid, such as food and clothes, for BF-affected families who have been affected by recent floods in Shkodër, with support with distribution through 'The Door' organisation. Apart from vocational courses, we try to help with employment. So OSHEE has employed 5 women, 3 in their offices and 2 were employed as janitors. After vocational courses have finished we have been in close contact with employment offices to have these women employed in the private sector. The vocational courses are on hairdressing, cooking or sewing. There has been some work with the private sector to secure employment, but I believe there is room for even more work.

The beginning of my work was very difficult because the state did not want to believe what was happening and thought that BF would leave a stain on the country, but I believe that we should not hide BF but identify it and find a remedy. More needs to be done, I believe that we should fight for education, but educating 60 students is not enough, there are cases of children who go sporadically to school or they take a diploma even though they do not have the right knowledge or enough education.

Q. How many men in these families are actually isolating?

A. There are men but they are not fully isolated today, but this brings problems. There was a killing of a man 3 or 4 months ago, in Grude village. That man was in a bar and he was killed. There was also the case of the 17 year old boy in Lezhe. There are also other BF cases and killings in Shkodër. So blood kills and blood does not forgive and I think we should strengthen the rule of law. It is impossible for

people to stay inside the whole time as the aid they receive from the state is very little and not enough to cover basic needs and they have to go out to work.

Q. About state aid, what is this?

A. The aid received is similar to other families that are in need.

Q. For someone to receive aid, do they need to provide evidence that they cannot work?

A. I do not know if they are given such a document but there is a case of a man who lives in a village in Shkodër district and they receive 5,300 Albanian Lek [£39¹] per month. There are 4 family members. So he is 40 years of age and married to a 30 year old and they have 2 children, and that is the only economic aid they receive.

Q. Do the men in BF seek protection from the police?

A. To my knowledge they keep their pride hence they do not ask for protection. There was a case where a person surrounded a house and that man in the house called me and I called the police. And when the police came they did not find anything so maybe the perpetrators left the area. According to the Kanun the perpetrators cannot enter the house.

Q. Do you think generally the police are able to provide protection?

A. I believe that if they notify the police they can get protection, however police cannot follow them day and night, whereas the perpetrators can. Plus you do not know when the offence will be committed, it might be tomorrow or it might be after many years.

Q. What about those that don't need economic help but are in isolation?

A. I have worked with families that are victims of Kanun law [but not all]. Generally in the north we do not see revenge but only BF. But [some involve criminal groups] and the police discouraged us from working with them. With these families, the feud has not stayed in the blood line.

Q. But children are still isolated?

A. Yes, but they have the economic possibility to hire a teacher so they don't ask for my support. For me children are children, however in this case they have not asked for my support and to go to their house you need to be a safe person for them. But I have been working 22 years and never had problems.

I would like to add, that I am a woman from Duka so I know the Kanun quite well and this has helped me with my work with families in BF. I believe the problem can and will be resolved and this will happen when the vetting process and the corrupted judges and prosecutors are removed from the process and social and educational policies should also be taken into account.

It is very important to make sure that Albanians do not migrate. But we need to help children in BF by helping them finish school and the chance to attend a vocational course. One child in the 9th grade was accompanied by the police to attend the exam support from the UK, and there was help in Kukes and if I was Mayor of Kukes I would use the UK money to create jobs. It is important to get job opportunities,

¹ Xe, [Currency converter](#), 28 November 2022

because only then can they be educated and integrated they can live and be free. The British Ambassador has been here, similar to this visit, and so I feel very much appreciated, and when a country like the UK comes here and shows an interest this means a lot to us.

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Elona Prroj

Date: 24 November 2022

Meeting with: Elona Prroj

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Interview

Q. Could you please tell us your story

A. My story is that I come from the south of Albania, and I fell in love with a young man from the north, I was 16 and I got engaged and married. My husband [Tani] and I were pastoring the Word of Christ church here in Shkodër where we were living. Shkodër was an amazing city for us to live, it was so different to the south though. The first moment I told my father I would marry Tani he said, 'what about blood feud?' But I had never heard of this before, so for me I told my father that Tani is great man, he loves the Lord, what does he have to do with blood feud (BF)?. But he said what about his uncles, and I said no, everyone here has to be responsible.

We were serving the Lord and we were having many women begging for food but I thought we are not a food bank, we are a church, and you should work hard to provide food. And then one day I met in the street one of the ladies that came to the church for food, she was in black and said that her husband had been killed in the corridor of their house because of a BF. Although her husband was not the first murder that started the BF, she was one of the first person I met involved in BF.

Three years later in a restaurant, after an argument, my husband's uncle killed a man. After this there were 25 men in my husband's family who immediately isolated, this included my son Gabriel who at the time was 4 years old. Traditionally in Kanun you cannot kill women, children or clerics, but now there are many cases of women and children killed. I was worried about my son living in confinement so after one year of isolating I sent him to a private catholic school and knew that they would not give my son to anyone else apart from me in Shkodër. But even after this my husband was a prisoner in his house, he never went out, if he needed a doctor or barber, or anyone, they needed had to come to the house. So it was an awful time, you know because you rob men from the 2 main abilities in life that God gave them, being a provider and protector of their family. But they have to stay in the house as **they** need protection and they can't provide for their families. So for 4 years, even with him being a cleric, he never went out, not even to the church for any reason, and then after 4 years we decided to go to England. We had friends there and a vicar from an Anglican church provided a home for us. They created facilities for us, we got a visa and had the idea to stay for 2 years in the hope that God will bring us back to fulfil our calling to fight BF. But after 2 months my husband said that we

should go home. We were hoping that the other family would forgive us, as it is forbidden to kill a cleric and we were hoping we would be free, we were hoping things would be different.

To explain, in 90% of cases, the (opposing BF family) never kill the first murderer from the other family. They choose the youngest and the best of the family to cause the deepest pain. For example, my husband's father was too old, he would walk in front of the opposing families home intentionally, however they were not interested in him because he was an old man. He could walk by the opposing family with no issues, as they wanted a younger man. My husband took the decision to go out and serve the Lord, and said that if God said it was time to go home [to die] then I will go home.

I started to read stories on how to protect my husband, and I read that if the man is accompanied by his children or wife they will not kill him. So I was always running around with him until one day, a year later, he was alone, and the brother of the man that Tani's uncle killed was waiting in the door of the church and he killed Tani coming out of his church. My husband was killed and 2 other ordinary people that were walking in the pedestrian of Shkodër that day were wounded. This was in 2010, the man was a young man but in fact he was also a victim of his own family. He was 16 when his brother was killed and 21 when he became a killer. My son was 9 when his Dad was killed at age 34. My biggest fear was that my son would want to take revenge. But one week before he died, my husband asked to his brother that if he was killed because of revenge, we should forgive the other family, so the cycle in our family was broken because we chose to forgive.

Q. Did you know the family?

A. No, we didn't see or know them, never saw their faces.

Q. After your husband's uncle killed a man, how did you know your husband would be a target?

A. By default, all men in the family are at risk, they are a target. So there were 25 men in the family over several generations, 6 generations and one blood line. The moment my husband's uncle committed murder there were 25 men who were confined. This only ended when my husband was killed and we forgave the family. So as soon as my husband was killed the other 24 men of the family knew they could come out as blood killed with blood and they were free.

Q. How were the other family aware the BF ended?

A. They didn't make any approach, the killing of my husband was very public and in the media, and discussed also in the Albanian Parliament. The medias were asking, what will you do with the blood of the pastor? It was tragic it was against the Kanun. On the day of the funeral, we declared the end of the BF in our family so it was all over the media. We [the families] have never interacted.

BF are kept alive by poverty, lack of education, lack of power in the justice system and lack of law being implemented. Even if in a public case like this, the guy can be out after a short sentence, so imagine how long they might be punished for other cases that are not so public. Short sentences are due to corruption. The UN Ambassador at that time was very involved in our case.

Q. When you were aware of the threat and the entire male line of the family was confined, was going to police an option?

A. No, the police would come to us and would say, are you crazy, you're going out!? The Kanun goes alongside the law, the police know you are in a BF and there were many advising my husband to stay inside the house when my husband took the decision of going out.

Q. Do you think they approached the opposing family?

A. No not at all.

Q. Your husband was a priest and so should not have been a target, has the Kanun changed and how are BF presenting now?

A. I don't want to be trapped by numbers, because even if one family is isolated in a house because of BF, that is enough. On the other hand, this is a mindset that should be changed, BF can happen every day because of people's mindset. I would say that there is an improvement by the state with the vetting of the justice system, but they are so busy with the process it's not reflected in everyday life. Another area of improvement is that the families are moving. I asked the family of a man who has been confined in a house for 20 years, if you asked him what the way is out, he will say, please take me out of Albania, this is the only way out, move out of Albania. Before, those in a BF might be followed to other countries where they have migrated.

Q. Is there a deviation from Kanun law?

A. There are so many deviations, there are many deviations and people use the Kanun to justify their self-righteous actions that are against the law. Although the younger generations will change this. When my husband was killed, he had a project in his bag against blood feud. We took that project, and we founded the No Blood Feud - Yes to Life Foundation [[Homepage - No Blood Feud](#)]. We have done this for 11 years now. We are trying to have in our focus 3 areas: raising awareness in our community and the state, investing in the education of the new generation, because not all children can be helped by their mothers, and help to fight poverty through teaching the mothers professions and helping them with the basic food.

Q. Do you think raising awareness with the state is having an impact?

A. Yes. When we started it was awful. No one from the local government was admitting or accepting that blood feud exists at all. I believe that the first step to fight this phenomenon is accepting that it exists. Now it is a totally different story and approach to it. We wanted to raise awareness, but one of the biggest curses in this country is being socially passive, meaning if it doesn't happen to me, it's not happening at all. I was not active either, I only became reactive when it happened to me. But people are being killed. About 6 months ago, a 17 year old, he went to kill the brother of the murderer of his dad. He was 4 at the time his father was murdered, and his mother killed herself on the same day. He had a bio on his Instagram: I am not a killer but I want to bring back honour to my family.

Q. So avenging honour of those killed, is that part of the BF tradition? What would compel someone to take revenge?

A. Yes, it's all about honour and shame, if you are shamed this is the worst that can happen. Bringing honour back is encouraged, until the moment you get revenge,

then you can become equal again. This will follow you all your life until your honour is restored. We have a community with mothers and we try to put a big light on mothers who have chosen to forgive, and raise them as heroes, and to do the opposite of what society, which is calling a brave man the one who takes revenge and the coward the one who forgives. We say you are brave and should be proud. But it is a mindset. It is whole community doing this. In our case, if the mother had forgiven, we would be forgiven. Sometimes the stronger hand behind the men is the mothers.

Q. How big an issue is BF?

A. I would say in the north it is big, it can happen any time due to the mindset, but I don't know the number of families impacted. If one man is killed then by default more than 10 families are involved. We tried to reconcile before my husband was killed, we tried to release the children and we took the risk of taking the children out, as none of the males in the family were forgiven. That is why it is serious, it is a mindset, it is fighting against the mindset, about how people think. I think it will change over time as people are moving. A boy in our centre was from a family of 10 people whose family was involved in a BF, he was having problems and he was not wanting to go to school. He said, 'why bother [going to school], I am living to kill or be killed'. This is the day we opened the day-care centre, when we heard this story we needed to try give them a reason for life and maybe a good education would help in this. Also, when people move and go to other countries, they get other meanings in life and lose these traditions.

Q. Have you had cases of young men who have killed because of BF and then gone on to commit other murders?

A. No, I don't know any.

Q. Is it a problem in all of Albania?

A. No, just the north community, and wherever the people of the north move to, the phenomenon moves with them.

Q. How easy is it to find someone who has moved away from the north, such as Tirana?

A. In this country it is easy to find anyone. We moved to Vlore and then elsewhere, and still they found us there, so no, it's not enough.

Q. What do you think needs to be in place to protect people?

A. Stay in the house because there is no other protection, because it is so strong, it's not just one individual doing the crime it's the whole family. It is planning day by day, it is like a tiger waiting to hunt until they find the man and they don't care where.

Q. In addition to the boy who killed your husband, was anyone else found accountable?

A. No, and he was not alone. The tradition is that on the day of a funeral of someone killed, the men gather around the coffin and swear they will take revenge and they choose the youngest male in the family to carry out that revenge. This is why I say that the killer of my husband was a victim too.

Q. When you were made aware of the BF did the police give you any document to confirm a BF existed?

A. No.

Q. Do you know if they do this now?

A. No. they don't, the families never report if they are in a BF. If you go and ask the police, their statistics are only 60 families in all Albania. But we know that there are many more but they will not report to the police. It was the prosecutor who got the killer, we did not see the police.

Q. Are the police aware of families in BF?

A. Yes, they are all living in the community, it's a small city, everyone knows everyone.

Q. Even though your husband's death was a high profile case, the police didn't follow up with you?

A. No.

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Ministry of Education

Date: 25 November 2022

Meeting with: Ministry of Education

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

Introduction: I am the General Director of Education, and I am with my colleagues who are responsible for pre-university education.

Interview

Q. Are you aware of any families that are self-isolating due to blood feud (BF) and whether any children are self-isolating and whether their education is affected?

A. Right now in our system there are no children who do not attend school due to BF. In the past there were 4 to 5 children, I don't recall the exact time of this.

Q. Is that within the whole country that there are no children who do not attend school due to BF?

A. Yes, we have data for the whole of Albania. But we need to bear in mind that the situation changes and when this happens we are notified of them.

Q. Who would notify you that a child wasn't attending school?

A. In schools there is a system which reports when there are such cases and this system notifies the municipal education office, and they notify the regional office, who notifies the national office and we have a special office of statistics. We constantly monitor the drop-out rates month after month during the school year.

When there are schools which have students who are likely to be of high risk to drop out we have set mediators there. These mediators deal with coordination between parents, school and the community and local government. We also offer scholarships to the students who are at high risk of dropping out of school, dropping out because of family reasons.

Q. Can you confirm that at present, there are no schools, across Albania, that has notified your department a child has not been attending school?

A. Up to now, no [notifications of this].

Q. In the areas where BF may have been an issue in the past has the Ministry introduced any education policies to deal with the situation?

A. We have educational programmes in the school curriculum on conflict resolution, mediation and children's rights, further there is cooperation between organisations. For example, there is the foundation for the resolution of conflict who have trained teachers on how to resolve conflict through mediation. We have had several activities with the British Embassy in the north of country like Kukes and Tropoja and we want to engage young people in activities so we can educate them to avoid extremism and violence. We also have psycho-social services in schools and this year we increased the number of persons that provide this service, so all schools can now provide and these people are in continuous communication with teachers, students, parents and the community.

We also have another project turning schools into community centres so schools are open throughout the day and can be accessed by communities for various activities.

We also attached 220 police officers at 220 schools (1 officer per school) to increase the safety in schools and they are in communication with psychologists, headmasters, parents and the community. We also have an after school programme so the children can do their homework at school. The purpose of the programme is to make students feel equal when doing homework and have the opportunity to socialise with one another.

During Covid we paid close attention to where students could not attend classes and we offered digital devices and internet free of charge and also we offered them complimentary lessons and classes to fill the gaps. We also enabled teaching through Albanian broadcasters/TV, so the students who might be in isolation they might attend lessons through television programme, and upload classes through YouTube channel, a channel dedicated only to teaching. We also have it in law that if a student cannot attend school we can offer classes at home. In cases of students in isolation we gave tablets through the support of NGOs and we sent them teachers and gave them text books free of charge, and there is an app called 'school me' for basic education. There is another platform called 'akademi.al' and this was created during the pandemic and can be used for education.

Q. When you talk about children in isolation are you talking during Covid or now?

A. What I told you about tablets, teachers and school me, it was for children in isolation, the 'school me' App is free of charge.

Q. In isolation because of BF?

A. Yes

Q. When was this, as you said previously that you had no children in isolation due to BF at present?

A. It was in 2014, so it happened many years ago and the Minister herself distributed tablets and text books. The idea is that if we have such cases now we will have the same approach, so text books, tablets and the internet and tv station and also the platform.

Q. You mentioned there are police in schools. What kind of protection are they offering?

A. They are not exactly police they are security officers, these people could be psychologists, physical education teachers, they could be of all profiles and their focus is safety in school premises. They are trained and certified by the Academy of Order and they are there to ensure safety of children and prevent cases of violent extremism and violence and so on. We have excellent relations with the centre on extremism and we have trained all of the teachers. In each school there is a coordinator for violent extremism and radicalism.

Q. Is this in schools across Albania?

A. Yes. We also have great cooperation with the British Council, they support us with digital education, which is a challenge.

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Bledian Koka - Journalist

Date: 25 November 2022

Meeting with: Bledian Koka, Editor in chief, Syri TV Albania, syri.net.

Present in the meeting: 3 representatives from UK Home Office, 1 British Embassy representative, 1 interpreter.

I am Bledar Koka, I am Editor in chief for Syri TV and [syri.net](#).

Interview

Q. Can you tell us about the work that you do?

A. As you know blood feud (BF) phenomenon dates back to the early ages and is based on Kanun law, the famous one is Kanun of Lek Dukagjini, the most prominent of the time, like a constitution.

This problem continues up to present times. It stopped between 1945 and 1990 during communism. You could say that this was the only good thing about the communist regime.

We have to say that BF returned to Albania after the fall of communism and sometimes BF offences are committed for something that happened 50 years ago. From 1991 till now there are still conflicts between people and this conflict sometimes leads to BF and Albanians have moved back to the old model of settling justice themselves, this is because they have little trust in the justice system. They bring justice themselves. What I told you is an overview. I did some research and

from 2022 to now there are no reports, the last report of BF in Albania was presented in January 2022 by the National Reconciliation Committee (NRC).

According to statistics, from 1991 to today, around 270,000 families have sought asylum because of BF. Such requests were made in Nordic countries, Norway, Sweden and Finland, because they are familiar with this phenomenon and it is easier for them to give a positive response to this asylum request.

Q. Where does this figure come from?

A. People's Advocate have this figure, but this is not an indication of the actual situation as many of these families are not in real BF. But sometimes they were issued with a certificate by various committees or associations, they got such documents in exchange for money.

Q. What underpins the lack of trust in the justice system?

A. So in one case, even if the perpetrator is a known person, the justice system does not punish accordingly because they [the perpetrator] can buy justice or freedom, he can pay not to be punished according to law.

Q. Are people aware that justice can be avoided this way?

A. We are a small country and we can see how things work.

Q. Is there a lack of trust and faith in how to get justice or be protected?

A. We have seen that state institutions and law enforcement have failed in their duty, and the fact that today we have at least 290 families that are in isolation.

Q. Are documents always issued on payment of bribe?

A. Yes, there is some truth in that. There was some time during 2001 and 2005 when documents were issued because of bribes. Sometimes even the ones who deserve to have such a document issued to them, they still pay. I recall that there was an investigation.

Q. So these documents are being issued by police and committees?

A. Committees are issuing documents and countries have asked for verification and the police have confirmed this.

Q. How widespread are BF in Albania today?

A. First I want to say that in my opinion the situation is becoming more problematic.

Albania has a problem with drug traffickers and frequently they come to resolve their problems in Albania, during the summer, and this has brought an increasing trend in murders, especially since 2015 until now.

Such cases do not always bring isolation, however when blood is shed by one side it has to be shed by the other side. We have seen cases in Elbasan, Vlore, Lezhe, Shkodër and Durres.

Q. We have been told that BF typically occurs in the north, or is it more widespread?

A. It is a problem of our times, that was old times, now we have new conflicts, and conflicts between drug gangs.

Q. Do you think current the trend in BF is linked to organised crime?

A. Absolutely yes.

Q. Will these be considered BF or just criminal activity?

A. For police it is criminal but for the person, if someone kills your brother or father, then it's a BF issue. This brings us to 2 conclusions, first that the police are less and less powerful and second, that people believe that justice cannot be brought as people will not be punished according to the law and will be given minimum punishment so they take action and justice themselves.

Q. We have been told about the legal framework for BF and for those that motivate and incite. Is this law implemented?

A. Our laws might be harsher than the law in UK and of higher quality, however the problem is that laws are not properly implemented.

Q. Are most people linked to BF today involved in drug groups or criminal activity?

A. Mostly yes, but also there are cases where families are in isolation, so to survive they become involved in criminal activity for economic reasons. In some cases, although not involved in criminality at the beginning, because they are in isolation they decide to deal and do criminal activity to get an income to survive and to support families.

Q. About protection, do you think someone who has received threats can receive protection?

A. Technically yes, no one is denied protection, however how effective is protection? Can people go out freely, can police guarantee such a thing? For example, for families it is not necessary for them to go abroad, they can stay in Albania, but the police do not help them to relocate and this is why there is such a high number leaving, the police could help them relocate however they do not feel safe.

Q. If police helped people relocate, provide accommodation and so on, could that family remain safe?

A. That is a wishful thinking from my side. I don't think Albanian's necessarily need to go abroad, but this could be a strategy from the police to help them relocate within Albania.

Q. We have been told that there is a difference between BF and revenge killing, do you think this is the case?

A. In my opinion a revenge is taken in a short period of time, but if a murder is committed in 1999 and the next murder is committed now, is it BF or revenge? So, for me, revenge is over a shorter period of time.

Q. We have been told a BF needs to be declared as a BF. Do you think BF are declared in the same way as they traditionally were?

A. In old times, when someone had to commit BF crime to avenge the death of someone but did not, they were treated differently, they cannot be treated as a man because they had not avenged death. This was in old times and according to tradition. But things have changed now and not avenging death is seen as a sign of weakness and matter of honour.

Q. So in old times not being treated as man versus losing honour, is there any real difference?

Q. It is the same, the perception is the same. There is the case of the 17 year old boy in Lezhe whose father was killed when he was very young and he grew up to kill the brother of the perpetrator. This was linked to a lack of trust in the justice system, and also related to honour.

Q. In the case of the 17 year old boy, he didn't kill the person who shot his father, but the perpetrator's brother. So he didn't give justice a chance.

A. Not all cases are related to lack of justice, but to honour.

Q. We have been told in traditional BF there are rules that children and women are exempt, is this still the case today?

A. The fact that there are at least 290 isolated cases means that the rules have been broken and it means women and children are affected. However, I don't remember the last time a woman or child was killed because of a BF.

Q. In terms of previous ways to end a BF like reconciliation and mediation, is this still the case?

A. Yes.

Q. Does the Albanian media report on all BF killings in Albania?

A. We always report BF related murders. So when someone is killed we always see their past and criminal activity they have been involved in, and we might say 50% are involved in criminal activity and 50% it's blood feud. But it is not possible to be involved in criminal activity like drug trafficking and not be involved in murder.

Q. Can you expand on this?

A. The gangs are fighting for territory abroad. But because it is difficult to resolve the issue abroad they come to Albania to resolve it by killing one another and because police turn a blind eye.

Q. The 290 families isolated, is that figure from just one report?

A. This is the main institution [National Committee for Reconciliation] that deals with these cases so I found this figure only from this authority. It is only this authority that deals with BF.

Q. Do you have anything to add?

A. Everything I had to say I said, but would like to say again about the isolation of families and that there should be a strategy of relocation in Albania, as Albania is suffering a lot due to immigration and I don't want more Albanians to leave the country.

Q. What do you think it will take to get the government to put this in place?

A. First they have to have the vision, one it has not had for 30 years. I believe that in no cases can the crime, or the will or desire to commit crime, be stronger than the state.

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **23 January 2023**

Official – sensitive: Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

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