

COI Focus

ALBANIA

Blood Feuds in contemporary Albania: Characterisation, Prevalence and Response by the State

29 June 2017

Cedoca

Original language: English

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All the sources used are briefly mentioned in a footnote and described in detail in a bibliography at the end of the document. Sources which have been consulted but which were not used are listed as consulted sources. In exceptional cases, sources are not mentioned by name. When specific information from this document is used, the user is asked to quote the source mentioned in the bibliography.

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TO A MORE INTEGRATED MIGRATION POLICY, THANKS TO AMIF

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Introduction

Many Albanian asylum seekers claim that their lives are threatened in Albania because of their involvement in a blood feud. The main goal of this COI Focus was to gather information about the blood feud phenomenon in present-day Albania and about how state and non-state actors are responding to it in terms of protection and prevention.

Cedoca carried out a fact-finding mission to Albania from 13th March to 21st March 2017 in order to collect information about these questions. Cedoca had meetings in Tirana, Shkodër and Fushë-Arrëz with state and non-state actors that are closely involved in the phenomenon. The information in this report is obtained from Cedoca's interlocutors during the fact-finding mission and is supplemented with information from various international reports, specialized literature and online sources.

The collected information is not presented here in a way as to define or to describe the blood feud phenomenon in contemporary Albania in a generalizing manner. The COI Focus is meant as a tool that can help protection officers to assess both the credibility and the seriousness of a given asylum case.

The first chapter briefly describes the development of blood feud in Albania from the Ottoman times (1385-1912) when it was sanctioned by Albanian customary law (the Kanun) till the end of the communist times (1944-1990) when it was largely suppressed by the authorities.

The second chapter portrays how blood feud developed after the collapse of the communist regime. This chapter describes how the phenomenon has transformed in terms of its blurred relation with the Kanun and it also aims to explain the difficulties when attempting to distinguish contemporary blood feud killings from ordinary revenge killings. Lastly, it provides an overview of attempts by various sources to define blood feud in contemporary Albania.

The third chapter enumerates and describes characteristics that can be observed in contemporary blood feud cases. The list of characteristics is not exhaustive but relevant because the selected characteristics were recurrently put forward by Cedoca's interlocutors during the fact-finding mission and are also described in written COI sources.

The fourth chapter deals with statistics on persons and families currently affected by blood feud, blood feud-related killings and blood feud-related criminal offenses (threats and incitement). This chapter provides the latest official figures from the State Police Directorate and the Prosecutor's Office, and illustrates the perspectives from other interlocutors.

The fifth chapter examines how the Albanian authorities are currently responding to blood feud and blood feud-related killings and crimes. Various protective measures by the Albanian State Police and judiciary are mentioned, as well as a number of impediments with regard to their implementation.

The sixth chapter describes the preventive measures taken by the authorities and by non-governmental actors as well as the measures that are still needed according to Cedoca's interlocutors.

The seventh and final chapter looks into the problem of false blood feud attestations and explains which measures have been taken by the Albanian authorities with this respect.

This report has been drafted with funding from AMIF (the Asylum and Migration Fund).

In line with Belgium's continuous efforts to contribute to further harmonization of the common European asylum system, this report has been shared with European colleagues via the CGRS's official website and via the EASO Common Portal.

1. Blood feuds in pre-modern Albania

1.1 Traditional blood feud and the Kanun

According to general reports, a centrally enforced justice system was virtually absent in Albania throughout the whole Ottoman period (from 1385 till 1912). This was especially the case in the remote and mountainous northern parts of the country where - for more than 500 years - clans and tribes were able to keep and develop their own identity, autonomy and traditional way of life. They regulated their communal life (social and cultural issues) with so-called customary law.¹

The principles and structural elements (the regulations) of Albanian customary law are traditionally referred to as the Kanun². Different communities and regions, and sometimes villages in Albania, all had their own orally transmitted Kanun. Originally, it was "a set of rules observed in particular and rather small communities and enforced by a council of elders". A nobleman by the name of Lekë Dukagjini codified the regulations of the Kanun for the first time in the 15th and the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini eventually gained a wide area of influence and became the best known. But even after this codification other Kanuns³ were being used as well. According to the Albanian Institute for Public Affairs (AIPA), the Kanun has never been a single, unitary legal code.⁴

General reports all underline that "the Kanun" regulated the most essential aspects of social conduct within Albanian local communities: family, marriage, the rights of religious institutions, private property, credits and donations, work, claim for damages, justice, the role of the elderly, etc. And, importantly for this COI Focus, the Kanun also regulated the resolution of conflicts and disputes either through violence (*gjakmarrja*⁵) or through mediation (*besa*⁶). The Kanun could be described as the penal law code, the civil law code and public law code all in one same code.⁷ Or, as a report by Operazione Colomba concluded: "The Kanun tradition represented the only form of social and legal control, given the absence of alternative normative systems."⁸

A number of interlocutors Cedoca spoke to during the fact finding mission confirmed that in pre-modern Albania blood feud killings were totally accepted by society as long as they were motivated by the stipulations of customary law or "the Kanun":

¹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 08/2008, p.4, [url](#); Alston P., 14/03/2011, p.4, [url](#); Korngold Danielle J., 03/2016, p.2, [url](#); Migrationsverket, 08/07/2016, [url](#); United Kingdom: Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber), 15/10/2012, [url](#); OFPRA, 2013, [url](#)

² Kanun meaning in Albanian "regulation" or "norm"

³ such as "the anonymous Kanun of 1868, the proof-sheets of the Kanun prepared by E. Cozzi or the Kanun prepared by the baron of Nopça, as well as manuscripts such as the Kanun of Scanderberg (compiled and coded by Dom Frano Illia), the Kanun of Puka (compiled and coded by Xhemal Meçi), Kanun of Luma (compiled and coded by Shefqet Hoxha), Kanuni of Labëria (compiled by ethnographer Rrok Zojzi)

⁴ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 18, [url](#)

⁵ The Albanian term for blood feud, literally meaning 'to take the blood'

⁶ Article 854 of Chapter 22 of the Kanun describes *besa*, or truce, as "a period of freedom and security which the family of the victim gives to the murderer and his family, temporarily suspending pursuit of vengeance in the blood-feud until the end of the specified term" cfr. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 08/2008, p.5, [url](#); Gjeçov, Shtjefën (ed.), *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit, The Code of Lekë Dukagjini*, Albanian Text Collected and Arranged by Gjeçov, Shtjefën, Translated with an introduction by Leonard Fox, Gjonlekaj Publishing Company, New York, 1989

⁷ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 08/2008, p.4, [url](#); Alston P., 14/03/2011, p.4, [url](#); Korngold Danielle J., 03/2016, p.2, [url](#); Heyns C., 23/04/2013, [url](#)

⁸ Operazione Colomba, 17/02/2015, p.5, [url](#)

Mentor Kikia, a journalist and civil society activist, stated that “during ages” it was normal and legitimate that revenge killings were done or that the potential targets of such killings continued their lives in isolation. “They could not do anything about it”.⁹

According to a source at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, traditional blood feud was generally accepted by society but only as long as it was carried out along strict rules of customary law, “If not, it was just murder”.¹⁰

Also, Luigj Mila of the Justice and Peace Commission of Albania stated that customary law allowed (not obliged) a blood feud murder only in three specific cases: “(1) to revenge a first killing (2) to make up for the killing of a guest; (3) to make someone pay who grabbed your wife.” He also explained that traditional blood feud murders were merely allowed “because there were no institutions like prisons” and he claimed that stipulations with regard to traditional blood feud killings were not in the Kanun in order to kill people “but precisely to prevent crimes”.¹¹

In her study “Gjakmarrja: Albanian Highlander’s “Blood Feud” as Social Obligation” Diana Gellçi explains the traditional blood feud phenomenon not from a juridical perspective but from a more anthropological point of view. She stresses that, in the absence of formal state power (like it was the case in Albania under the Ottomans), the individual members’ interests were totally subordinated to the group’s interests whereas “the group”¹² took full responsibility for its members. The individual member of the group never acted in his own right. He could only survive as a part of a group that worked as a whole. With regard to his group, the individual member acted and functioned as its representative only. With regard to his fellow group members, he had to follow rules that were based on total equality, reciprocity and solidarity.¹³

Gellçi specifies that the Kanun in Albania, being a full set of obligated transactions, institutions and sanctions by which the individual had to live, was basically designed in order to guarantee the survival of the group. The concept of honour was seen as a crucial institution. The survival of the group depended on its honourable status which itself depended on the honourable status of each of its individual members. In Gellçi’s analysis, honour was not only the epitome of the better human values in an individual (wisdom, balance, honesty, respect, friendship, courage, self-dominance,...). Honour was also the essential feature of the relationship between the individual and the group. The maintaining of honour was the engine of all the social, cultural and judicial transactions between the members of the group. A man who had lost his honour was dismissed and automatically became (socially speaking) a dead man.¹⁴

In her study, she links the phenomenon of traditional blood feud with the traditional concept of honour. *Gjakmarrja* could be called the threat of the death penalty for someone who infringed in very specific and grave ways on someone’s honour. She claims that *gjakmarrja* was the “kanunical” right and the obligation for the individual to cleanse or restore the group’s honour. According to her, it was an integral social obligation. Apart from “honour”, Gellçi distinguishes also other cultural institutions in the Kanun like for example “hospitality”, “*besa*”. All these concepts were strongly interlinked with each other.¹⁵

⁹ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁰ Gjebre E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹¹ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹² Group could mean a given Albanian highlander’s community as a whole but in the context of blood feud the word “group” is understood as the smallest eligible unit which is subject to inter- and intra-group obligations: *shtëpia*-group (plus minus 20 persons living under the same roof) (father, mother, unmarried daughter, sons with brides, grandchildren, parents of the father, widow and unmarried sisters)

¹³ Gellçi, 2005, pp. 8, 11

¹⁴ Gellçi, 2005, pp. 25, 27

¹⁵ Gellçi, 2005, pp. 28-29

Also according to the report by the Albanian Institute for Public Affairs, traditional blood feud killings were considered as totally legal for ages and they were embedded in a socio-cultural matrix that was known and accepted by all the members of the community.¹⁶

1.2 The end of customary law under the communist regime

According to the AIPA report Albania was ruled by customary laws until the declaration of the monarchy in early 1928 “despite several attempts for the establishment and implementation of state laws”.¹⁷ A report on blood feud in Albania by the OSCE states that the traditional blood feud phenomenon became somewhat less prevalent during the reign of King Zog (1922-1939).¹⁸ However, most reports on blood feud like the reports by the Swedish and French asylum boards note that customary law and the traditional blood feud phenomenon were only halted in a significant way during the communist regime (1944-1990).¹⁹ An academic paper notes the same: “The communist state did not take into consideration Albanian traditional justice and had a huge impact on every aspect of social life. Influence of the state was felt even in the remote parts of the country, exactly where customary law had enjoyed centuries of undisputed authority. The creation of a strong centralized state, law enforcement, state authority, economic and social coercive strengths measures, the action of a tough criminal legislation etc. made the blood feud and revenge murders to be lower than other types of murders. Criminal codes of 1952 and 1977 predicted the revenge killing as aggravated homicide for which the sentence was up to death, so the blood feud. The blood feud murders in the 1960s went towards total eradication.”²⁰

According to the AIPA report, “the official attitude of the communist regime was to eradicate customary law and its role in the country’s history. Important documents of this kind of traditional law were not republished or made available to the general public. Such documents as the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini compiled by Shtjefën Gjecovi, and others (cf. supra 2.1) were sealed at the archive of the Institute of Folk Culture, part of the Albanian Academy of Science.”²¹ The AIPA-report underlines that “during the communist period (1944-1990) the state laws were enforced, leading to a minimization of blood feud cases, in particular because the criminal code condemned killing for blood feuds as a separate form of premeditation.”²²

The OSCE report also notes that the blood feud phenomenon was largely suppressed under the communist regime.²³

All of Cedoca’s interlocutors confirmed during the fact-finding mission that the communist regime effectively repressed the traditional blood feud phenomenon. It was explained that the regime reacted in radical ways, not only by imposing the death penalty on a perpetrator of a blood feud killing but also by separating the affected families from each other. They could be banished to different parts of the country. The representative at the Prosecutor General Office also confirmed that the communist regime had “good statistics” concerning the eradication of the phenomenon.²⁴

¹⁶ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 18 [url](#)

¹⁷ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 4 [url](#)

¹⁸ OSCE, 12/2014, p.4

¹⁹ Migrationsverket, 08/07/2016, [url](#), OFPRA,2013, [url](#)

²⁰ Tepshi A., 5/11/2015, p.201 [url](#)

²¹ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 19 [url](#)

²² AIPA, 05/2013, p. 19 [url](#)

²³ OSCE, 12/2014, p.4

²⁴ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

1.3 Perpetuation of a traditional mentality in modern times

During the fact-finding mission many sources indicated that contemporary Albanian society no longer legitimates or accepts blood feud murders as an integral social obligation under customary law.

Mentor Kikia stated: "Most people started to think differently; persons who were self-confined have understood now that they are no longer obligated to stay in their homes. Nowadays they go to the police and say: I have nothing to do with it and I want to live my life."²⁵

Professor Gjuraj (Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana) also confirmed this:

"The younger generation has a different understanding of life. They don't understand what has happened in the past. The meaning of life has changed. They may have heard something about the Kanun but even in the remote villages, only a tiny insignificant number is still in tune with what the old people are saying. Young people are no longer affected by it. This is also because of emigration, studies abroad, internal migration to the urban centres. Their meaning of life has changed significantly. The collective responsibility of the past has changed in favour of individualism. Blood ties are not sacred anymore. Also time has played a role. When you are born in the 1990s, you don't connect anymore with the ancient mentality. There is also the rising awareness of the damage that is done to Albania by the phenomenon."²⁶

Alfred Koçobashi from the People's Advocate Institution declared:

"Maybe only a tiny fraction of the people still believes in old Kanuns, even when there is a lack of infrastructure and there is no government presence everywhere. I believe the mentality of the people is moving towards the rule of law. There is development. There is communication now. They are not as backward anymore in the remote areas in the North."²⁷

However– in spite of the general claims about a new, modern mentality that is no longer sustaining blood feuds – murders have still been committed in the 21st century whereby the Kanun was invoked. It seems that this phenomenon is the result of the perpetuation of a traditional mentality among some sections of Albanian society:

Professor Gjuraj stated that:

"During the communist regime, it was thought that the phenomenon had died out. But in some cases, this was not true. Sometimes old sores or old family issues have remained and revived. It's about cases where it was believed that an ethical issue was to be solved through a traditional blood feud murder. Some people became afraid of their own kids. It was the continuation of the mentality, the influence of the past. It was still there but it was hidden."²⁸

An appeal court judge confirmed that in the post-communist era, all of a sudden murders have been committed in the name of blood feud after decades of silence.²⁹

²⁵ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁶ Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017

²⁷ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁸ Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017

²⁹ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

Also according to a source at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, the traditional mentality was perpetuated in the mind or consciousness of some people. "Sometimes, there are persons who have never shown any criminal tendency but something was sleeping in their mind and all of a sudden he feels an urge and he will seek for self-judgement."³⁰

A priest from a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz who has many years' experience in community building (including mediation and reconciliation processes between conflicting families) wrote in an e-mail to Cedoca:

"When something in the direction (of an ethical issue) happens, many Albanians think that the rules of the Kanun are applicable. All the rest – 10 commandments, the Gospel, the universal declaration of human rights, the concept of human values,... – is simply clicked away. So comes that revenge, violence and fear have sometimes evolved into a lethal cycle of murders, even after the communist times."³¹

According to a representative from Operazione Colomba, a catholic charity organisation in Shkodër, the old mentality can at times still exist. "They do believe in collective responsibility and they stay inside. Even if the killer was an uncle or somebody external (a very far cousin for example) they sadly say: 'It's not my fault but I have some responsibility because it's my family'."³²

Luigj Mila explained that although blood feud was condemned for 50 years and customary law texts were put into the archives and sealed off, some people kept a kind of nostalgia for it. They remained emotionally attached to it in a negative way. He explained that the very repressive methods of the communist regime may have stopped the practice of blood feud for a certain period but, generally speaking, the same methods may also have fuelled the current mentality of distrust towards the authorities and the preferences for self-justice among some segments of society: "People were taught that the enemy was everywhere. They were taught to be on guard all the time. They created monsters that could kill you every moment for every reason. There was a culture of distrust. Self-protection was primordial."³³

Another source confirmed the importance of the past: "The psychological impact of the dictatorship on the mentality of the people is still underestimated. "Distrust among the people is a very big problem and that has to do with the past."³⁴

The General Director from the Albanian State Police stated that, although society generally does not accept the phenomenon anymore, sometimes it resurfaces as the result of "something which is driven by the past".³⁵

With regard to the examples of traditional practices resurfacing in contemporary Albania, Diana Gellçi acknowledges in her study that the once sacred cultural institutions known as honour, *besa* and hospitality may have remained in the mentality but she claims that they have only remained as "cultural fossils". They are practiced only for the sake of culture.

"What has changed is that *gjakmarrja* has been reduced from an integral social transaction to a less integral tradition. As an integral social transaction, *gjakmarrja* traditionally played an institutional role in society, where it was born as social obligation, was culturally elaborated, and

³⁰ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³¹ Priest, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, e-mail [translated], 25/04/2017

³² Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

³³ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³⁴ Expat living in a village with blood feud-affected families, interview, village in Shkodër municipality, 19/03/2017

³⁵ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

completely matured until it lost its entire function. Finally, what is currently called *gjakmarrja* has little but the name in common with the highlanders' tradition usage."³⁶

2. Blood feuds in contemporary Albania

2.1 The vacuum of state power in the 1990s

After the collapse of communism in 1990 Albania found itself in a difficult transition from an isolated country into a parliamentary democracy.³⁷ According to Fijnaut and Paoli, "in the first years of transition, the population as well as the mass media and the political system were above all concerned with the state-building and the democratization process."³⁸ At the same time, the centralized and planned economy of the communist regime underwent a transition into a capitalist market economy. It needs to be noted that the country had been reduced to desperate poverty when transition began in 1991.³⁹ The so-called pyramid schemes⁴⁰, that led to economic growth in the first years of their existence, finally collapsed in 1997. Violent riots broke out as Albanians took to the streets to reclaim their invested money and property. In the period following the outbreak of the violence some 2.000 people were killed and the country was left in chaos. The government was brought down and an interim government was put in place.⁴¹

In the context of the political instability and social unrest in the 1990s, Albania was confronted with an outbreak of multiple forms of criminality.⁴² An International Monetary Fund (IMF) report details how borrowed funds through the pyramid schemes were used to finance criminal activities like smuggling, illegal emigration, human trafficking, arms trafficking, prostitution and more.⁴³ A study by Saferworld and the Center for Peace and Disarmament Education in 2005 reveals how after the outburst of violence and protests in 1997 hundreds of thousands of weapons were looted from government stockpiles.⁴⁴ This report also shows that corruption and organized crime were major problems in the 1990s and banditry and armed robbery were common after the turbulence of 1997.⁴⁵

According to a report by the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, the opening of Albania to the West enabled local mafia groups to expand their criminal activities (human trafficking, narcotic and extortion businesses) on a broader more international level. These groups are essentially powerful family clans (cfr. infra 3.6 Role of the elderly and of the family) that made use of the chaos after the collapse of the communist period in order to secure themselves high positions in the economy and the administration.⁴⁶ The authorities seemed to be unable to counter the situation. Fijnaut and Paoli argue that "scant attention was paid to the new forms of criminality that flourished in Albanian

³⁶ Gellçi, 2005, p.9

³⁷ de Waal C, 2005

³⁸ Fijnaut C., Paoli L., 2007, pp. 540-541, [url](#)

³⁹ Jarvis C, 1999, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Pyramid schemes work on the principle that people invest money (businessmen but also ordinary people by selling their land and houses) and those investors are promised artificially high returns. People hoped to gain quick money through these investments, but those returns are paid by money that was invested by later investors. The schemes started to run into troubles as soon as the number of people who started to ask for their money exceeded the amount of money invested by new investors.

⁴¹ Jarvis C., International Monetary Fund (IMF), 12/08/1999, pp. 15, 18, [url](#)

⁴² Fijnaut C., Paoli L., 2007, pp. 540-541, [url](#)

⁴³ Jarvis C., International Monetary Fund (IMF), 12/08/1999, p. 8, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Saferworld, 12/01/2006, p. 6, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Saferworld, 12/01/2006, pp. 10, 18, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 4/2014, p.17, [url](#)

society and to the development of appropriate means of crime control. Criminal law was absolutely outdated and unable to respond to the new crime tendencies and structures."⁴⁷

A report by Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, points at other problems in the Albanian society during the 1990s besides the high prevalence of uncontrolled criminality. Alston explains that the communist regime had abolished nearly all property rights, as all property had been collectivized. When the process of privatization of agricultural land and property began in the post-communist period, problems in the form of property conflicts quickly arose.⁴⁸

Many interlocutors confirmed to Cedoca during the fact-finding mission that the weak government institutions in the 1990s were unable to handle both the different forms of criminality and the property conflicts.

Fran Tuçi, the mayor from Fushë-Arrëz in the north of Albania and member of the Socialist Party (*Partia Socialiste*), said that many things happened with the change of the regime and he argued that "murders occurred not only because of property disputes, but also because of other banal reasons like water trenches or because of masked plundering and banditry." He explained that "from 1990 up to now nothing has been done to getting a certificate of property to show you are the owner of a plot. Only now we have started the reformation where every part of land will be certified and mapped to avoid conflicts".⁴⁹

Luigj Mila stated that:

"Another remarkable change in the 1990s was the fact that people moved from the mountains. This movement was not organized by the state and people settled in informal urban areas. At the same time they got embroiled in property and land disputes as they occupied territories. The authorities were not able to tackle the problem."⁵⁰

A representative of Operazione Colomba explained that Albanian citizens who had not been allowed to move from one place to another during communism did so after its collapse. People who had lived in the mountains in the north moved to urban areas where they started to appropriate land (e.g. Kiras, Bardhaj and Mark Lulaj that are situated in the suburbs of the city of Shkodër). Operazione Colomba, which is very active in these informal areas, calls them the "New Migration Areas".⁵¹

Many interlocutors also pointed out during the fact-finding mission that the crimes and conflicts that erupted during the 1990s led to a considerable number of murders that have been labelled as blood feuds. According to Mila, nearly all the blood feuds that started after communism have to do with property and land disputes. He explained that the people who got embroiled in disputes over land had come into the urban areas from the mountains and had brought with them the mentality, traditions and nostalgia for the Kanun.⁵² According to a representative at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate almost 100 % of the contemporary blood feuds come from the conflicts in the 1990s.⁵³ Professor Gjuraj stated that in the 1990s there was a revival of the blood feud phenomenon because of new conflicts due to property disputes, land issues, disputes for petty reasons and problems because of high unemployment among the young generation. He explains: "the issue came

⁴⁷ Fijnaut C., Paoli L., 2007, pp. 540-541, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Alston P., 14/03/2011, pp. 10-11, [url](#)

⁴⁹ Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

⁵⁰ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁵¹ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁵² Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁵³ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

back to the surface in the 1990s and it revived because of the vacuum of state power, the weakness of state structures who were unable to intervene in the interpersonal conflicts of those days.”⁵⁴

Similarly, Philip Alston argues in his report that “property disputes have been a major cause of conflicts, including contributing to blood feuds, in the post-communist era.”⁵⁵ However, as will be explained in the next chapters, these new, contemporary blood feud killings are not to be regarded as a revival of traditional blood feuds. Indeed, it seems that the rules of the Kanun were respected in practically none of these cases (3.2) and that it was nearly always very difficult to distinguish these murders from ordinary revenge killings (3.3).

2.2 Blurring the link with the Kanun

In the AIPA report it is stated that “if the resurfacing of the traditional practice would be seen through the Kanun, the Kanun doesn’t exist anymore. The only thing that is left of the Kanun is self-isolation. Nothing else links the present day murders with the Kanun as such”.⁵⁶

A report by Operazione Colomba states that “The phenomenon has changed and keeps changing. Nowadays the custom has been altered compared to the rules prescribed in the Kanun.”⁵⁷

Mentor Kikia explained that with regard to contemporary blood feud in Albania, the Kanun “no longer makes the lines of conduct: If they would have respected the Kanun to the letter, there would have been less killings in the 1990s.” On the other hand, he acknowledged that Kanun-elements like “self-isolation” (cfr. infra 3.1 Self-Confinement) or the element of “negotiation” (cfr. infra 3.5 Communication: negotiation, mediation and reconciliation) can sometimes still be observed in contemporary blood feuds.⁵⁸

Alfred Koçobashi stated that blood feud still occurs “when someone innocent, a third party has to pay the price for the damage a family member has done, but he added that since the 1990s it is not about honour anymore. 80 % is criminal and not related to customary law or medieval common law. It’s about mafia-style killings. It’s murder cases for other reasons than blood feud, just like they happen elsewhere. It’s normal killings or vendetta killings.”⁵⁹

Elsa Ballauri from the Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG) also referred to the transformation of blood feud: “blood feud has changed in the perspective of the so-called ancient codes.” She pointed out that nowadays, people are killing even women and children for blood feud, which is not in accordance to the stipulations of the Kanun. “It’s not real blood feud like it is written in the Kanun. It has transformed.” She also declared: “It’s more a justification nowadays because they are committing crimes and they say: ‘I did it for blood feud’. But for me, none of the cases after the 1990s is a real blood feud case.”⁶⁰

Also Rasim Gjoka from the Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR) explained that “in most of the cases that are referred to with the term blood feud, people use the term blood feud in order to justify their heavy crimes. It is not true blood feud. It’s pure criminality.” He also said:

⁵⁴ Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017

⁵⁵ Alston P., 14/03/2011, p. 10, [url](#)

⁵⁶ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 22 [url](#)

⁵⁷ Operazione Colomba, 17/02/2015, p.9, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

⁵⁹ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People’s Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁶⁰ Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

“Nowadays, one cannot know anymore what the other part has in the head. Sometimes they don’t care who will be the target. Even women can be a target.” With regard to the reconciliation process, Gjoka also stated that the instrument of the Kanun is not there anymore. He concluded that “very few of all these cases are blood feud.”⁶¹

Well known and often cited examples of murders that are referred to as blood feud cases although the rules of the Kanun were not followed are the killing of a child in 2012 and the killing of a pastor in 2010, both in Shkodër. In both cases the Kanun was invoked but at the same time killings were blatant violations of the Kanun rules.

2.3 Blurring the distinction between blood feud killings and revenge killings

Philip Alston points out in his report that the terms blood feud (*gjakmarrja*) and revenge (*hakmarrja*) are nowadays often used interchangeably, meaning any kind of revenge is likely to be labelled as blood feud or *gjakmarrja*.⁶²

Rasim Gjoka stated that there is confusion in classifying murders in the north of Albania. Influenced by the customary law, there are cases of murders for ordinary reasons, committed to revenge, which are classified as blood feud.⁶³

Similarly, Elsa Ballauri stated this:

“In the south many crimes happen but they don’t use the term blood feud. There are many cases in which they killed a close friend or a brother but nobody calls it blood feud. The intentions are not because of blood feud. They just want to take revenge. But when the same crimes happen in the north, it is called blood feud.”⁶⁴

This observation is also confirmed by Mentor Kikia who stated that a murder that happens in the north of Albania will rather be considered *gjakmarrja* because of the perpetuation of the traditional mentality over there, while the same type of murder in the south of Albania becomes *hakmarrja*.⁶⁵

According to the AIPA report, a reason for the blurring between revenge killings and blood feud killings nowadays could be that sometimes ordinary revenge killings start to resemble blood feud killings after some time because of the way some people respond to them mentally:

“despite the lack of canonical grounds, in most cases families hide or isolate themselves, send mediators to negotiate reconciliation, thus entering into a blood feud. Under these circumstances despite the revengeful character of the intent to commit the second murder, parties position themselves in a blood feud situation, which makes the present day phenomenon a hybrid much more complex than the initial one.”⁶⁶

The General Director from the Albanian State Police also stated that revenge cases, that most often are the consequence of criminal problems and individual conflicts or disputes, can happen to everyone and everywhere and are very often wrongly labelled as blood feud. But he also warned that cases of revenge killing often transfer into cases of blood feud. This happens “as soon as the

⁶¹ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

⁶² Alston P., 14/03/2011, p. 5, [url](#)

⁶³ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

⁶⁴ Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

⁶⁵ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

⁶⁶ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 22, [url](#)

regulating role of the elderly is involved". As prescribed by the Kanun, the elderly sometimes choose a target and the victim will lock himself up.⁶⁷

Rasim Gjoka explained that in the north sometimes "they start with revenge and afterwards it transfers into blood feud".⁶⁸

Operazione Colomba in its 2015 report also stresses the difficulties in distinguishing revenge killing from blood feud. Modern blood feuds in Albania are a form of revenge justified by the norms of ancient practices. In fact, modern blood feuds resemble these practices only in their goal of killing the perpetrator of a crime or his family member and in that families isolate themselves in order to protect their lives.⁶⁹ During Cedoca's fact-finding mission a representative from Operazione Colomba argued that her organisation labels a number of murders "*gjakmarrja*", even though the same murders are not considered blood feud murders by institutions. "Many institutions do not call the first murder blood feud, but refer to it as "*hakmarrja*", whereas they call the second murder "*gjakmarrja*". However, through media analysis we know of criminal organizations that solve problems nowadays by using the same old mechanisms of taking revenge, including the link of family." She concludes that in many criminal issues "there is mainly a cultural thing".⁷⁰

2.4 Towards a characterisation of blood feuds

Nearly all the sources that Cedoca met during its fact-finding mission focussed on the changes and transformations that the blood feud phenomenon has undergone. But it seems to be very hard to define the phenomenon as it happens today in a clear-cut way. Even the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania does not provide a legal definition of blood feud, although it contains a number of special provisions in which the word "blood feud" appears.⁷¹ As explicitly mentioned at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, "the difficulty of definition has to do with the nature of what is called blood feud today: The phenomenon has transformed and the transformation is hard to define."⁷²

When it comes to defining blood feud in contemporary Albania the so-called "UNHCR Position Paper" notes in 2006 that "in general, [...], a blood feud involves the members of one family killing members of another family in retaliatory acts of vengeance which are carried out according to an ancient code of honour and behaviour." Additionally, UNHCR states that "the practice dates back to mediaeval times and is still evident today in a number of places including [i.a.] Albania". The "position paper" defines the aspect "social group" as "family members targeted because of an ancient code" or "male members of a family targeted under a traditional blood feud canon".⁷³

Philip Alston has proposed a similar definition in what he calls his "narrowest understanding" of blood feud: "[it] is defined as a premeditated familial avenging of lost blood; that is, where the family of a murdered victim kills a member of the perpetrator's family to restore the honour and blood lost as a result of the initial murder." Expanded with a reference to a broader, more anthropological understanding, Alston defines blood feud also as a "sanctioned killing that cleanses honour with blood to avenge a crime or infringement upon the honour of oneself or one's family."⁷⁴

⁶⁷ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

⁶⁸ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

⁶⁹ Operazione Colomba, 17/02/2015, pp. 7, 14, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁷¹ Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, 18/06/2015, Article 78/a, 83/a, 83/b, [url](#)

⁷² Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

⁷³ UNHCR, 17/03/2006, p. 1, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Alston P., 14/03/2011, p. 5, [url](#)

In their definitions, it seems that Alston and the UNHCR are still referring to an ancient (mediaeval) mind-set that functions along the lines of traditional, customary law. However, from the above observations it is understood that the label "blood feud" is nowadays used for a much broader spectrum of completely different situations. Therefore, Alston has also included a broader definition in his report that mirrors the transformation of the blood feud phenomenon in contemporary Albania. He draws the attention to the difficulty "to prove any specific cultural motivation for a particular killing" nowadays. And he classifies blood feud as "any revenge killing (*hakmarrja*) between families as a blood feud regardless of any reference to the need to restore blood and honour or of guidance by any *kanun*-related considerations."⁷⁵ With this definition, Alston seems to separate contemporary blood feud killings from the mediaeval concept of honour and he acknowledges the blurring between *gjakmarrja* and *hakmarrja*. Alston also includes in his report a "most questionable" definition that would also count "any initial killing" as blood feud, "because it may, at some point, lead the victim's family to seek revenge against the perpetrator's family".⁷⁶

The AIPA report defines blood feuds in its conclusion as follows: "Blood feuds in modern-day Albania is a hybrid form of revenge killing justified by the norms of primitive practices, but it resembles the latter mainly in the intent to kill the perpetrator or another member of his family and in the fact that families isolate themselves to protect their lives."⁷⁷

It seems that there is no general agreement about how to define blood feuds in contemporary Albania. Definitions range from "a narrowest understanding" to a "a most questionable definition". Neither does the "UNHCR Position Paper" provide a legal definition of the phenomenon. Instead, a number of "factors" are listed that are "relevant to determining the nature of the risk if the applicant were to be returned". The first "factor" is determining "whether the dispute can be characterized as a blood feud".⁷⁸ According to the UNHCR "characterisation" seems to be more appropriate than "definition".

⁷⁵ Alston P., 14/03/2011, p. 5, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Alston P., 14/03/2011, p. 5, [url](#)

⁷⁷ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 51, [url](#)

⁷⁸ UNHCR, 17/03/2006, p. 2, [url](#)

3. Characteristics of blood feuds in contemporary Albania

In the previous chapter it was explained that the blood feud phenomenon has been transformed and that contemporary blood feud has little resemblance with traditional blood feud. Blood feuds in contemporary Albania have been described as a hybrid form of revenge killing resulting from a traditional mentality or even any initial killing justified by the norms of ancient practices. In this chapter a number of characteristics are described that, case by case, can variably be observed in contemporary blood feud cases. It is an enumeration of possible characterizing elements that are recurrently described in recent COI reports but it also concerns the characteristics that have been put forward by the interlocutors Cedoca has met during the fact-finding mission.

3.1 Self-confinement

Self-confinement is often referred to as a possible characteristic of contemporary blood feud cases. However, the Albanian State Police makes a clear distinction between blood feud affected families who are confined and those who are not confined.⁷⁹ It seems that there are also blood feud affected families who are semi-isolated, which means they come out of their houses occasionally or even regularly.⁸⁰

According to the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, there are 68 families in the Shkodër region who are permanently living in confinement (cfr. infra 4. Prevalence).⁸¹ With regard to this group, Mentor Kikia stated that they are really isolated and “cannot even go to or imagine to go to Tirana”.

Nevertheless, sometimes one or more persons of such a family are allowed to leave the house temporarily after a negotiated agreement (cfr. infra 3.5 Communication: negotiation, mediation and reconciliation). An assistant of a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz noted that in a few cases only, people leave their houses for an important reason, “at least if this has been allowed to them”.⁸²

According to the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, there are 122 blood feud affected families in the Shkodër region who are not (permanently) living in self-confinement.⁸³ The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate argued that people belonging to this group can move freely.⁸⁴ A representative from Operazione Colomba declared that all the families they are monitoring belong to this group. Sometimes, people may decide to stay inside their home for some time because of fear (cfr. infra 3.2 Fear). She also explained that in some cases only a small part of the family has to be confined because it was negotiated that only the father, brother or killer have to be at home and not the entire family or clan. Luigj Mila likewise explained that some families only wait for the killer to be released from prison and they do not go after or threaten the rest of the family.⁸⁵

Mentor Kikia argued that there are still 21 confined children in the Shkodër region, based on the statistics he gathered in 2011.⁸⁶ According to Rasim Gjoka, presently there are not more than 20-22 children who are not going to school for this reason.⁸⁷ According to the Shkodër Regional Police

⁷⁹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁸⁰ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁸¹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁸² Pastoral assistant, religious congregation, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

⁸³ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁸⁴ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁸⁵ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁸⁶ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

⁸⁷ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

Directorate, there are currently 15 children who do not go to school because of blood feud.⁸⁸ Liljana Luani, a volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, referred to the statistics from the Shkodër Police Directorate for the exact number but she remarked that children are sometimes registered at the Education Directorate as if they go to school, but they do not (or do not go regularly), or they are registered as if they are home schooled but in reality they go to school every day (and so-called home school teachers are wrongfully paid for this).⁸⁹

Several interlocutors expressed during the fact-finding mission their concern about children in isolation and their school absenteeism. Luigj Mila for example stated that “children in isolation cannot go to school thinking they can be killed. It makes them potential criminals in the future.”⁹⁰ According to Liljana Luani, the same accounts for children of the enemy family who are not isolated but who grow up in the psychology of revenge.⁹¹

A representative from Operazione Colomba confirmed the improvements relating to children in isolation and school attendance by saying: “The good thing is that many children, most of them, nowadays go to school. This was an issue in the past. From our experience self-isolation was very common in the past. We had children who spent their entire childhood locked inside. They are teenagers nowadays and they go out. Still, they are risking, but they go outside. It is difficult to understand the level of danger.”⁹²

Operazione Colomba gave the example of a family with children in (semi-)isolation in a contemporary blood feud situation:

“A murder took place and the guilty person is in prison. His family is living in self-isolation but it is not really self-isolation because the people who are at home are his wife and children. They are free but they are in paranoid isolation. The mother is scared about the male child who goes out to play. These children go to school and the teacher and the police are informed. They know they have to pay extra attention to them (cfr. infra 3.7 Interventions by the authorities).”⁹³

3.2 Fear

Many interlocutors argued that blood feud affected families are characteristically confronted with a kind of fear which is difficult to explain. An appeal court judge explained that just one threat shortly after an initial murder is enough for a family to stay inside their home. “There’s no more pressure but they are convinced that they mustn’t leave the place and move freely. The threat is in their mind.”⁹⁴ Rasim Gjoka likewise argued that “there is no reason in Albania to isolate yourself and to be afraid of killing because a conflict happened some time ago but people are afraid nevertheless.”⁹⁵ This is also mentioned by a priest from a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz who writes in an e-mail to Cedoca that “isolation, the silence [no recurring threats] and the total dependence on the decision of the victim's family create a tough situation for all concerned.”⁹⁶

⁸⁸ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁸⁹ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁹⁰ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁹¹ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

⁹² Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁹³ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁹⁴ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁹⁵ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

⁹⁶ Priest, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, e-mail, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

Operazione Colomba confirmed that the blood feud phenomenon has changed over the last couple of years but drew the attention to the fact that even those who are not isolated often live in fear. "An unknown car passing by can be enough for a family to stay inside their homes for a while."⁹⁷

This was confirmed by a priest from a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz who declared that in the area where he works there are just a few male family members who are entirely isolated. Most men move freely but they are always afraid something might happen to them.⁹⁸

However, not everyone belonging to a blood feud affected family suffers from fear nowadays. Mentor Kikia explained that, in recent years:

"People started to think differently, the persons who are isolated have understood that they are not obligated to stay in their homes because they have nothing in relation with the other family. One person has killed and he has taken the responsibility. They may still be in contact with the other family but on the other hand, nowadays they go to the police and say: I have nothing to do with it and I want to live my life."⁹⁹

According to Mentor Kikia, there are nowadays also a lot of people who feel powerful enough to defy a threat. In such situations, however, they still run a risk.¹⁰⁰ Also according to Luigj Mila, "not everyone is threatened and sometimes someone is simply not afraid."¹⁰¹

3.3 Threats

It is often mentioned that a contemporary blood feud case can be characterized by the occurrence or recurrence of threats.¹⁰² Local prosecutors told Cedoca that the relatives of a victim usually do not send direct threats to the target they have in mind: "They will look for a close person from the other family and then they use expressions like 'you owe it to me'."¹⁰³ Also an appeal court judge claimed that a threat may be uttered more or less indirectly (e.g. "You must be careful"). Additionally she claimed that such a threat is sometimes uttered only once and afterwards it stays in the minds of the affected persons.¹⁰⁴ A pastoral assistant in Fushë-Arrëz confirmed that a threat is mostly uttered only once and not usually repeated.¹⁰⁵

Sometimes it happens that a threat is made through Facebook. A representative of Operazione Colomba called it "a contradiction that these contemporary, high-tech media are used for the continuation of a phenomenon that is many ages old".¹⁰⁶

According to the local prosecutors, a person who has confined him or herself, will never declare before the authorities that he has received a threat.¹⁰⁷ The Director of Cabinet from the General Prosecutor's Office confirmed that very few families who were supposedly in a conflict because of a murder case during the 1990s are prepared to report that they have received threats: "They don't give information. They don't want to collaborate. They are frightened." (cfr. infra 3.8 Latency). She

⁹⁷ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

⁹⁸ Priest, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

⁹⁹ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁰⁰ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁰¹ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁰² Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁰³ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁰⁴ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁰⁵ Pastoral assistant, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹⁰⁶ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁰⁷ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

added that the Prosecutor's Office cannot start a case as long as it is not known who is threatening or who is to be called in as a defendant (cfr. *infra* 5. Protection).¹⁰⁸

According to a number of local prosecutors from the north, it can occur that some members of a family feel threatened "but they aren't per se": "In reality, it can happen that one person receives a threat and the rest of the family tries to benefit from this. It is not always the confined people that seek for asylum but rather their relatives."¹⁰⁹ Also Mila stated that not everyone is always under threat. Some families only go after the perpetrator of a given crime and they wait until he is released from prison. "It's case by case!"¹¹⁰

A threat is something that can have a huge impact on people's lives: According to one source, "some people who feel threatened never travel alone, even today. A threat keeps hanging around easily in Albania. This has also to do with the trauma of the dictatorship. There was a culture of distrust, paranoia and imaginary threats."¹¹¹

Sometimes it also happens nowadays that someone who is threatened ostensibly defies the threat that is made. Several sources have referred to the case of Dritan Proroj, a pastor who had received threats after his uncle had murdered someone in 2005. He went into self-confinement inside Albania and later even moved abroad. When at some point he decided to defy the threats he returned to Shkodër in order to continue his life normally. But he was killed in October 2010, five years after the murder committed by his uncle.¹¹²

3.4 Killings

Official statistics seem to confirm that the number of killings attributed to blood feuds are currently very low (cfr. *infra* 4. Prevalence). Also according to Mila, "the killings attributed to blood feud are reduced to a minimum nowadays."¹¹³ Nevertheless, the continuation of the chain of killings may still be a characteristic of a contemporary blood feud case.¹¹⁴ A representative of the OSCE stated: It is still an issue, there are still victims, it's not fading away. As long as one family member remains, they might keep doing it".¹¹⁵

Local prosecutors from the North have declared that in contemporary blood feuds it is not only the small circle of immediate relatives of a perpetrator that can become a target of revenge: "The circle of potential targets may extend to the relatives of the relatives. This can happen when the first circle of family members has left the country."¹¹⁶

3.5 Communication: negotiation, mediation and reconciliation

Another possible characteristic of a contemporary blood feud is the existence of a permanent line of communication between the families who are in conflict. Mentor Kikia stated: "Between families who live in isolation, there's always communication and negotiation. This element of negotiation can for example lead to a situation where one of the family members is allowed to work or to go to school."

¹⁰⁸ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁰⁹ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹¹⁰ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹¹¹ Expat living in a village with blood feud-affected families, interview, village in Shkodër municipality, 19/03/2017

¹¹² Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹¹³ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹¹⁴ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹¹⁵ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

¹¹⁶ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

He concluded that “if there is an element of ongoing negotiation, a given situation will rather be considered as a blood feud.”¹¹⁷

The mayor of Fushë-Arrëz declared that families in conflict communicate with each other all the time as part of a strategy to protect themselves.¹¹⁸ Another source in Fushë-Arrëz declared that – as a result of the ongoing communication between two opposing parties of a contemporary blood feud – sometimes the members of a family that live under threat are allowed to leave their homes “on big occasions, like when attending a funeral.”¹¹⁹

A representative of the AHC gave an example of two families who communicated with each other in order to regulate the rights of a teenage boy. “When I was in high school some time ago, we had a boy in our class who was allowed to come to school. His freedom was negotiated between the two families who lived in blood feud. After his graduation, he immediately left the country.”¹²⁰

Operazione Colomba gave the example of a family that had communicated after negotiation that “the entire clan is in blood feud with us but just the father, brother or killer have to be at home.”¹²¹

Communication between affected families also can be part of a process of mediation and definitive reconciliation. According to Rasim Gjoka, the process of mediation and conflict resolution has modernized nowadays. While mediators had a decisive role in the past and used the Kanun in order to solve conflicts, mediators nowadays no longer force families to take a decision. Families are invited to talk to each other and sometimes traditional elements are used (*besa*, the elderly) if they can contribute to reaching a peaceful solution. Schools and the church can also play a role in mediation.¹²²

The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate acknowledged the existence of this type of communication between the affected families and he believed that in modern Albanian society “people try to find a solution through talking, dialogue and mitigation”.¹²³ At the local Prosecutor’s Office it was stated that “Families nowadays use mediators to lead them towards reconciliation or they try to find the closest and most influential people to the family of the victim in order to find a way to mitigate and reconcile.” The prosecutors declared that they prefer not to take part in the mediation and reconciliation process “because the elderly can do it better”.¹²⁴

Rasim Gjoka stated that it is easier to find a solution in old cases because these families still communicate with one another. According to this source, reconciliation is more difficult in new cases because families “don’t accept communication or negotiation for getting a solution”. In recent years the maximum number of successful reconciliations supervised by his organization was 2 to 3, while 15 years ago there were approximately 10 solutions annually.¹²⁵ Other interlocutors confirmed that successful and definitive reconciliations have become rare nowadays.¹²⁶

Luigj Mila declared that one of the reasons why reaching a solution is often a long and difficult process is that reconciliation is forever. He added that especially the public part of an agreement

¹¹⁷ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹¹⁸ Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹¹⁹ Pastoral assistant, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹²⁰ Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹²¹ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹²² Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹²³ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹²⁴ Regional Prosecutor’s Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹²⁵ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹²⁶ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017; Pastoral assistant, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

remains an obstacle. "It is difficult for the affected families to overcome their pride in public."¹²⁷ This was confirmed by a person from a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz who explained that reconciliation is "a public matter" and therefore "a big deal" in Albania. Representatives from Operazione Colomba knew families who have decided not to revenge but they do not want to reconcile officially and communicate this to the other family either.¹²⁸

Sometimes people pay money during the reconciliation process. Some of Cedoca's interlocutors said they know cases in which amounts varying from 30.000 to 50.000 euros were paid to associations (with no legal status) in order to - sometimes partially - resolve their conflict.¹²⁹ According to most interlocutors, these associations have mostly deteriorated situations as they kept the money for themselves instead of handing it over to the opposing family.¹³⁰ The authorities have been dealing with this problem by pressing charges against some of these associations (cfr. infra 7. Attestations).¹³¹

Rasim Gjoka declared that in the experience of the mediators of AFCR the monetary compensation for blood has not been applied, considering it an old customary norm.¹³² Also Luigj Mila declared that he does not consider money as an element but he acknowledged that he once managed to reach a reconciliation where a family "did not accept money, but was helped to build a house".¹³³

Rasim Gjoka stated that there is no difference between Muslims and Catholics in the way they contribute to reconciliation but he claimed that the Catholic church in Shkodër has been very active "to prevent a situation or an escalation of conflicts".¹³⁴

A priest from Fushë-Arrëz describes in an e-mail to Cedoca how he witnessed a reconciliation as recent as 2013. During a holy mass ceremony that was especially organized for the purpose of reconciliation, the two families shook hands and ritually sealed their reconciliation.¹³⁵

Nearly all of Cedoca's interlocutors agree that families are more likely to reconcile when the murderer has been sentenced fairly.¹³⁶

3.6 Role of the elderly and of the family

It seems that a contemporary blood feud can be characterized by the attribution of an important role to the elderly when it comes to regulate the situation. The General Director from the Albanian State Police stated that he qualifies a murder case as a blood feud case when a decisive role has been attributed to the elderly, for example in order to choose the target.¹³⁷ Rasim Gjoka underlined the importance of the role of the elderly when it comes to finding a reconciliation: "The elderly have an influence as a supporter from outside or inside a family. Old and wise men, like also the heads of a

¹²⁷ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹²⁸ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹²⁹ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017; Pastoral assistant, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹³⁰ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹³¹ Gjebrea E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹³² Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹³³ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹³⁴ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹³⁵ Priest, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, e-mail, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹³⁶ Projects' Manager, Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹³⁷ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

village, are needed as a supporter in the process of communication and negotiation between two parties in a blood feud."¹³⁸ Representatives of four local Prosecutors' Offices also declared that the elderly are sometimes very reliable when it comes to reconciling two parties of a contemporary blood feud case: "They can help better than the authorities".¹³⁹ According to a report by sociology lecturer and UNHCR Protection Officer Edlira Baka Peco, usually an elder can be approached by families in blood and asked to organize a reconciliation meeting. Although this looks like an old ritual, "similar scenes are being seen in the peripheries of big cities even nowadays".¹⁴⁰

By their very nature, blood feuds have always been characterized by the involvement of the family since, as Alston notes, it is characteristically the nuclear family "that carries the burden of a revenge".¹⁴¹ Also according to the General Director from the Albanian State Police, a case of contemporary blood feud is invariably a family issue: "It's not about two individuals, the whole family is linked with the issue".¹⁴²

However, Professor Gjuraj pointed out that "the current softening of the phenomenon" (cfr. infra 4. Prevalence) is also a consequence of the changing importance Albanians are attributing to the family unit. According to him, "blood ties are not as sacred anymore as they used to be in the past" and individualism is gaining importance. He claimed that since the 1990s it depends on each case whether a violent dispute turns into a family issue or not.¹⁴³ The General Director from the Albanian State Police warned that there are cases nowadays where family members of a victim and a perpetrator do not become involved in the dispute: "Many persons who are embroiled in a violent dispute only have individual problems, their family members have nothing to do with it."¹⁴⁴ And according to Mentor Kikia, it often happens nowadays that family members of a murderer do not isolate themselves because they do not see a given situation as a family issue anymore.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, a representative of the Albanian Helsinki Committee stated that the family of a victim is not always exerting the same pressure anymore to take revenge as used to happen in the past.¹⁴⁶

Representatives of regional prosecutor's offices confirmed these opinions about the changing involvement of the family but they also stated that there are still cases where even the relatives of the relatives of a perpetrator can become a target of revenge (for example when the perpetrator and his closest family members have emigrated).¹⁴⁷ A representative of the Albanian Helsinki Committee summarized that nowadays you do not know anymore who can become a target, even if "it is usually the murderer himself who is the one they're after". She confirmed that it is uncertain whether the person who wants to take revenge will consider the closeness of the relationship to the murderer as a reason or not.¹⁴⁸ Also Rasim Gjoka confirmed that nowadays you cannot know anymore whom the threatening party has in mind: "Sometimes they apparently don't care who of the opposite family will be the target. Even women can be the target."¹⁴⁹

¹³⁸ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹³⁹ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁴⁰ Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences Vol 5 No 4 (Baka Peco, E), *Blood-Feud- Internally Displacing Because of Life Security Threat*, p.514, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Alston P., 14/03/2011, [url](#)

¹⁴² General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁴³ Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017

¹⁴⁴ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁴⁵ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁴⁶ Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁴⁷ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁴⁸ Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁴⁹ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR)

A representative of the OSCE gave an explanation for the complexity of the family link as a characteristic of contemporary blood feuds. He stated that it should always be taken into account that a dispute between members of two families nowadays can cover a dispute between two organized crime groups because organized crime groups in Albania are mostly structured along family ties as well. This implies that the choice of the victims can be determined in the first place by motives that are related to their mafia business.¹⁵⁰

3.7 Interventions by the authorities

Interventions by the authorities (police and Prosecutor's Office) have become another possible characteristic of contemporary blood feuds. All the consulted experts agreed that the police forces nowadays try to intervene in blood feud situations and that police interventions can be of various kinds (identification, monitoring, prevention, arrest, etc.)(cfr. infra 5. Protection). A representative at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate declared that his police officers try to supervise the confined families in his district, "by regularly contacting them, by patrolling in the proximity of their houses. Local police officers are tasked to stay near the affected families and to stay in contact with them." With regard to the affected families in his area who are not living in confinement he declared: "we are trying to communicate, mitigate, mediate, negotiate and soothe down." This source declared that "all the affected families know neighbourhood police officers. They have their phone numbers and general emergency numbers."¹⁵¹

Mentor Kikia confirmed that police officers have visited many families in order to identify those who are still affected by blood feud. He also confirmed that many affected families have been provided with the necessary contact details in case they felt an immediate danger. Besides he stated that a lot of people have been arrested after the amendments in the penal code.¹⁵² Police units may also intervene in other ways. In Fushë-Arrëz for example, the police was called in order to provide security for two men who had come from abroad to attend the funeral of their father, who was the last person in the village to be in a blood feud.¹⁵³

In some cases affected families may have been visited by police officers of the Prosecutor's Office who encouraged families to denounce their situation. On this occasion they were asked to formally indicate by whom they were threatened so that a court case could be started (cfr. infra 3.8 Latency).¹⁵⁴ In the years 2013-2014, officers of the prosecutor have gone to "every house where there was a claim linked with blood feud" in order to obtain "enough evidence to start a case". The representative from the Prosecutor's Office explained that 200 families in Shkodër have been approached "which are in conflict because of a murder case since the 1990s."¹⁵⁵

Even though there are various ways to file a complaint (in the office, by telephone, by e-mail or through a mobile phone application)¹⁵⁶, many experts confirmed that people do not easily go to the police or to the prosecutor to denounce or to report a contemporary blood feud case (cfr. infra 3.8 Latency).

¹⁵⁰ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

¹⁵¹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁵² Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁵³ Pastoral assistant, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹⁵⁴ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁵⁵ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁵⁶ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

3.8 Latency

Latency refers to the observation that blood feuds in contemporary Albania are often not reported to the authorities by the persons who are involved and to the observation that these persons don't report consciously: According to the Office of the Prosecutor, blood feud affected families generally refuse to denounce, collaborate or to give information. A representative from the Prosecutor's General Office in Tirana even stated that there is "a problem of denunciation". She explained that it is important to denounce because "we cannot start a case if we don't know who's threatening, when we don't know who to call a defendant."¹⁵⁷ A representative of the OSCE stated that the functioning of the authorities is less problematic nowadays, but what is more problematic is the fact that blood feud cases are not reported, that they remain hidden.¹⁵⁸

A variety of reasons have been put forward as to why people do not contact the authorities or refuse to collaborate with them.

One of the most cited reasons seems to be that it is part of the traditional mentality, that it is a cultural issue to keep away private conflicts out of sight of the authorities. A representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate said that the traditional mentality is "sleeping somewhere in the minds and conscience". He also explained that those who seek self-justice come from remote and isolated areas and that they are "lacking information or cultural background and they do not know how the police works and do not know how to file a complaint."¹⁵⁹ Operazione Colomba confirmed this by saying that many people who moved from the mountains do not know who to approach and how to get a lawyer. "Their basic instinct is to take revenge themselves. They also fear that the existing conflict might escalate if the authorities are contacted."¹⁶⁰ Luigj Mila argued that families who are (self-)isolated do not even consider the police as an authority. He claimed that people from remote mountainous regions in particular "do not accept the State as a right partner to condemn an aggressor."¹⁶¹ Other sources pointed at the influence the old generation still have on young people. Liljana Luani, a volunteer teacher with children who are affected by blood feud, referred to the role of mothers in situations of blood feud. She argued that "mothers play the main role in fighting blood feud. They are the first teacher for children and can teach them the meaning of tolerance but they can urge for revenge as well." In addition, she also blamed men and their pride. "Men are so proud and they want to solve things themselves."¹⁶² Also Rasim Gjoka stated that the traditional community surrounding a family can have a negative influence.¹⁶³

A second reason that is given for the latency of the phenomenon is that there remains a general distrust of the authorities based on what has happened in the past. Tonin Gjuraj and Rasim Gjoka believed that in the past people took the law into their own hands because they did not agree with court decisions or because the author of the crime was not even arrested by the police.¹⁶⁴ Rasim Gjoka stated that people may nowadays still avoid contacting the authorities and seek self-justice because of a lack of trust in the authorities.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁵⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

¹⁵⁹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁶⁰ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁶¹ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁶² Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁶³ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁶⁴ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017

¹⁶⁵ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

Elsa Ballauri also mentioned the fact that people do not go to the police because in the past nothing had been done after they had filed a complaint. She remarked that people still have the idea that the institutions are not functioning. Regarding this she argued there is a possibility the police will take sides in a conflict because of corruption and bribery (cfr. *infra* 5. Protection). She also stated that people may feel more insecure after filing a complaint because their enemies are more likely to be more angry with them.¹⁶⁶ Liljana Luani explained that in most cases people do not go to the police because they do not want the situation to further deteriorate.¹⁶⁷

Another reason why people do not report a blood feud case to the authorities is that they fear to be prosecuted themselves. Liljana Luani stated that “they don’t go to the police because they might be sentenced themselves.” A representative of an international organization in Tirana stated that people sometimes do not go to the police because they have done something unlawfully themselves.”¹⁶⁸ This was confirmed by Mirela Arqimandriti, head of the Tirana based Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), who stated that sometimes people do not go to court to file a case because they have done something wrong themselves. They may want to keep the police out of their drugs business or property issues.¹⁶⁹

3.9 Vulnerable position of women

Although they are not supposed to be targeted according to the Kanun, women and girls have become victims of contemporary blood feuds.¹⁷⁰ According to the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, these have mostly been cases of collateral damage.¹⁷¹ But women can also be perpetrators of blood feud crimes. Statistics from the Ministry of Justice show that 7 women have been sentenced for blood feud murders between 2005 and 2015, whereas for the same period 128 men were sentenced for the same offences.¹⁷²

Apart from their direct involvement as a victim or a perpetrator, a recurring characteristic aspect of contemporary blood feuds is that women in the affected families easily find themselves in a vulnerable position and are subjected to domestic violence.¹⁷³ According to the AIPA report, these women place themselves in a position of dependence even though they are responsible to maintain the family. The same report remarks that “these women live under the pressure of psychological, physical and sexual violence of males”, but they do not denounce them because they “justify this violence as a result of their husbands’ or sons’ circumstances”.¹⁷⁴

According to Mentor Kikia, the Albanian police has become more accessible and helpful to women over the last few years.¹⁷⁵ Mirela Arqimandrita confirmed that the police has improved its abilities to receive complaints regarding domestic violence as a result of strengthened legislation against domestic violence and a series of specific trainings that were recently organised in each district. She claimed that the police has become more sensitive now although she does not exclude that isolated

¹⁶⁶ Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁶⁷ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁶⁸ International organization in Tirana, interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

¹⁶⁹ Arqimandriti M., Executive Director, Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017; International organization in Tirana, interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

¹⁷⁰ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017; Regional Prosecutor’s Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁷¹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁷² Open Data, 2017, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁷⁴ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 8 [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

cases of ignorance and unprofessionalism in this domain still may occur. "But in these cases there are other contact points now that are trained to receive complaints."¹⁷⁶

The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate claimed that female victims of any kind of violence now have the possibility to talk to a female police officer if they wish to. He added that the Albanian police counts a lot of female police officers and that there are implemented rules and procedures with regard to the treatment of women that police officers have to follow.¹⁷⁷ The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate stated that there now is a zero tolerance policy towards domestic violence. But he noted that women do not always file a complaint because of socio-economic and cultural factors. "But if a woman declares she is a victim of domestic violence or when the police are aware of this, the police will act without hesitation."¹⁷⁸

There are also a number of non-governmental initiatives for women affected by blood feud in and around Shkodër. Liljana Luani in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the Directorate of Social Services is providing professional courses¹⁷⁹ for women in blood feud. Women are picked up from their homes and brought to the place where these courses are given. Afterwards they are dropped off at their houses again. The aim of these courses, is to teach women a profession which will allow them to start working afterwards. These women are also offered psychological support. Liljana Luani remarked that one of the biggest challenges was to change their husbands' mentality in order to let the women leave their houses and follow the courses. According to Liljana Luani, many changes can now be observed with regard to these women's behaviour towards their husbands and children.¹⁸⁰

3.10 Socio-economic support

The AIPA report states that it is difficult for families in blood feud to qualify for financial support because of structural problems (place of residence or legal status).¹⁸¹ According to Fran Tuci, the mayor of Fushë-Arrëz, financial or economic assistance for blood feud affected families is absent or reduced to a minimum. He argued that he can only offer some pocket money from time to time to those affected by blood feud. But he claimed that he tries to raise awareness among businesses and NGOs to prioritize people affected by blood feud when hiring new employees.¹⁸²

There are however some initiatives that provide socio-economic support to blood feud affected families. It is not provided on a very large scale, but, according to Liljana Luani and a representative of Operazione Colomba, some families have the opportunity to benefit from it. Families can either be contacted by organizations who provide aid or contact these organizations themselves.¹⁸³

Liljana Luani has initiated a lot of aid to blood feud affected families in and around Shkodër. Apart from home-schooling she has also facilitated an agreement between the Directorate of Electricity and the Directorate of Social Services in Shkodër on the provision of free electricity for the affected families. The eligible families were identified after a survey done by Liljana Luani in cooperation with

¹⁷⁶ Arqimandriti M., Executive Director, Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

¹⁷⁷ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁷⁸ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁷⁹ In the first phase 26 women attended these courses. In the next phase women from other areas will be given the opportunity to attend these courses. The courses (sewing, cooking, hair styling, cleaning, psychological training) started at 13.00 in the afternoon.

¹⁸⁰ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁸¹ AIPA, 2013, p. 52

¹⁸² Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹⁸³ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017, Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

the Albanian police in the summer of 2016.¹⁸⁴ Liljana Luani also noted that the Directorate of Electricity has started to hire women affected by blood feud in their offices.¹⁸⁵

According to Alfred Koçobashi, the representative of the national Ombudsman in Shkodër, the Ministry of Education is still running the Second Chance program that offers home-schooling to children in blood feud, even if it is largely underfunded.¹⁸⁶ Besides, the Directorate of Education has contributed a lot by providing school equipment (computers) to isolated children according to Liljana Luani.¹⁸⁷ Operazione Colomba organizes sports and other activities for children affected by blood feud in the Shkodër region. These children would otherwise not be able to afford them because of their problems. These youngsters are also given the possibility to talk with Operazione Colomba's volunteers about their situation.¹⁸⁸ According to Operazione Colomba finding a regular job is very difficult for people affected by blood feud because they cannot afford to be at the same place every day for a long time. Besides, employers also fear something might happen at work if they hire someone who is involved in a blood feud.¹⁸⁹

Some sources also have indicated that blood feud affected families sometimes benefit from charity initiatives in the form of food and clothes gifts. Such initiatives have typically taken place around Christmas time.¹⁹⁰

3.11 Media coverage

Another possible characteristic of a contemporary blood feud case may be its coverage in the media. Many sources have claimed that the Albanian media tend to exaggerate the blood feud phenomenon.¹⁹¹ The Vice Minister of Internal Affairs even claimed that the press is sometimes involved in cases where people falsely claim to be involved in a blood feud.¹⁹² Mentor Kikia agreed that the media tend to exaggerate. "For the sensationalist media blood feud is just a beautiful story that sells well." But he pointed out that the media coverage can be regarded as something positive as well. "It breaks the taboo. It forces the authorities to deal with the issue. If everybody remained silent, the phenomenon would never stop."¹⁹³

3.12 Migration

In a study about blood feud and internal displacement, Edlira Baka Peco concludes that "when mediation seems not to be effective, then migration enters as a substituting tool of regularizing the situation".¹⁹⁴ Indeed, an often recurring characteristic in contemporary blood feud cases seems to be that the affected families try to move away from the place where they are living (either abroad or

¹⁸⁴ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁸⁵ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁸⁶ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁸⁷ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁸⁸ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁸⁹ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁹⁰ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017, Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

¹⁹¹ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁹² Gjebrea E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

¹⁹³ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁹⁴ Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences Vol 5 No 4 (Baka Peco, E), *Blood-Feud- Internally Displacing Because of Life Security Threat*, p. 515, [url](#)

inside Albania). Emigration is even seen as a reason for the decrease of the phenomenon (cfr. infra 4. Prevalence):

According to Mentor Kikia, there are currently fewer people who suffer from blood feud in Albania because (among other reasons) many families have left the country.¹⁹⁵ This is confirmed by an appeal court judge, by Elona Gjebrea (Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs) and by Elsa Ballauri, all of whom cite emigration from Albania as one of the reasons for the present decrease in murders.¹⁹⁶ Liljana Luani said she personally knows Albanians who were living in self-confinement and who eventually left the country with their entire family.¹⁹⁷ Fran Tuçi noted that many affected families have emigrated from Fushë-Arrëz. He claimed that “leaving the country was the only way to be protected.”¹⁹⁸ According to an assistant of a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, all the blood feud affected families in the village have left the area: “All the people are gone now, only some women have stayed.” He explained that “it’s impossible to stay inside the house all the time.” According to this source, people leave one or two years after an incident but he also gave the example of a family that moved out of Fushë-Arrëz in 2010 under police protection the night after one of their relatives had committed a murder.¹⁹⁹ The incident was confirmed by other sources.²⁰⁰

Some of the affected families have moved inside Albania. With regard to the aspect of internal migration, the AIPA report notes that “The conflict situation has reduced these families to poverty and has forced them to migrate from their villages, communities, and cities. They display numerous social and health problems and have very little or no contact with the outside world”.²⁰¹

The mayor of Fushë-Arrëz explained that only the poor have remained in the country: “They have moved to urban areas like Durrës.”²⁰² Operazione Colomba is monitoring a number of blood feud affected families that have moved from the mountains into the so-called “New Migration Areas” in and around the city of Shkodër.²⁰³

According to multiple sources, some of the affected families are not particularly safer after having moved away from where they were living. The Director of the Prosecutor’s Office stated that for the affected families “the fear can be everywhere”.²⁰⁴ Also a representative of the Albanian Helsinki Committee warned that in the case of a contemporary blood feud situation, a potential victim will not necessarily be safe after having moved inside Albania. He explained that “each country is a village” nowadays.²⁰⁵ Mentor Kikia claimed that some of the isolated families cannot even dream of moving to Tirana either because they are either too poor to move outside or because nowhere is safe for them.²⁰⁶ Elsa Ballauri confirmed that there are situations where moving is not an option because the potential targets will surely be followed, even abroad if necessary.²⁰⁷ Luigj Mila, Alfred Koçobashi

¹⁹⁵ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁹⁶ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017; Gjebrea E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

¹⁹⁷ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

¹⁹⁸ Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

¹⁹⁹ Priest, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

²⁰⁰ Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

²⁰¹ AIPA, 05/2013, p. 9, [url](#)

²⁰² Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

²⁰³ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁰⁴ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁰⁵ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁰⁶ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁰⁷ Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

and a representative of the OSCE likewise claimed that the blood feud mentality, insofar as it still prevails, does not know any limits of time and place.²⁰⁸

4. Prevalence

4.1 Affected families

An OSCE-representative stated that blood feud remains an issue in Albania: "As long as one family member remains, some people might keep doing it. And there are still victims seeking justice. The thing is not fading away here."²⁰⁹ However, all of Cedoca's interlocutors agree that the number of people affected by blood feud is gradually decreasing. The Albanian State Police stated that, according to their current registers, 60 families in total are suffering from blood feud (nearly all in the north). These families altogether count 143 individuals, including 40 children.²¹⁰

At the Regional Police Directorate in Shkodër it was stated that in 2016 there were 68 confined families registered in the Shkodër region: Shkodër municipality (61 confined families), Vau i Dejës municipality (3 confined families), Malësi e Madhe municipality (4 confined families), Fushë-Arrëz and Pukë municipalities (0 confined families). The representative at the police directorate remarked that "some of these 68 families have gone abroad or have moved inside Albania".²¹¹

Still, according to the representative at the Regional Police Directorate in Shkodër, there are another 122 families who are in blood feud but not confined in the Shkodër region. He claimed that these families move freely. Shkodër municipality counts 74 families, Vau i Dejës municipality counts 20 families, Malësi e Madhe municipality 28 families and Fushë-Arrëz and Pukë municipalities have none. Still, according to the representative at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, there are currently 15 children who are not attending school because of blood feud.²¹² He also remarked that there are 13 families who reconciled in 2015-2016.²¹³

Nearly all of Cedoca's non-governmental contacts referred to police statistics when asked about the number of people currently involved in a blood feud. Rasim Gjoka's AFRC does not count more than 50-55 families (121 persons) affected by blood feud. His information is based on the work of his network of mediators who are in contact with the local police and public institutions in the Shkodër region.²¹⁴

According to Rasim Gjoka, there are also improvements regarding school attendance (cfr. supra 3.1 Self-Confinement). A few years ago there were "not more than 100 children who did not go to school because of blood feud, even though the media reported figures exceeding 2000. Currently the number is reduced to 20-22 children who are not going to school because of blood feud."²¹⁵

²⁰⁸ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017; Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

²⁰⁹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

²¹⁰ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²¹¹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²¹² Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²¹³ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²¹⁴ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFRC), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²¹⁵ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFRC), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

Mentor Kikia, who conducted a study on confined people in 2012, stated that the families identified by the police at that time corresponded in general with his own list. Mentor Kikia concluded that the government and police are nowadays aware of the cases.²¹⁶

Liljana Luani confirmed that the police is updating its information on families affected by blood feud. In the summer of 2016 she “fruitfully” collaborated with the state police to identify families who are in a blood feud but who were not included in the police statistics and to adapt information on formerly isolated families.²¹⁷

At the Prosecutor’s Office, the statistics on families who suffer from blood feud are based on a field study from 2013-2014. During this field study, officers from the Prosecutor’s Office visited 200 families in the district of Shkodër who were known to be in a conflict for a murder case after the 1990s. Out of these 200 families, 25 families agreed to report to the authorities. Those 25 families consist of 30 persons and are confined.²¹⁸

The Prosecutor’s Office has not updated its information on the prevalence of blood feud but has access to the police registers that are mentioned above. The Prosecutor’s Office is informed about new cases only when a complaint has been registered or when there has been a referral by the police about a new case. “Each referral becomes a case and is added to the statistics of the Prosecutor’s Office.”²¹⁹

The AHC representative stated that he has the impression that the number of families in blood feud has reduced and that the General Prosecutor has the right figures “from a legal point of view.”²²⁰ The representative at the Prosecutor’s Office explained this by pointing out that their figures (as opposed to the police figures) only comprise those cases where there was a denunciation and where a court case could be filed.²²¹

The table below compiles the most recent data on families affected by blood feud in Albania.

	Mentor Kikia (2009) ²²²	Religious institutions Shkodër (2014) ²²³	Prosecutor’s Office (2014) ²²⁴	People’s Advocate (2015) ²²⁵	CNR (2016) ²²⁶	State Police Directorate (2017) ²²⁷	AFCR (2017)
Families in blood feud		238		200		122 (not confined)	
Confined families	84	138	25	60	398	60	50-55
Confined individuals			30	145		143	121
Confined children	21	15		40	198	40	20-22

²¹⁶ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²¹⁷ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²¹⁸ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²¹⁹ Regional Prosecutor’s Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²²⁰ Projects’ Manager, Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²²¹ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²²² Top Channel, 21/06/2012, [url](#)

²²³ OSCE, 12/2014, p.7

²²⁴ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²²⁵ People’s Advocate Institution, pp. 20, 24, [url](#)

²²⁶ Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation, 28/12/2016, [url](#)

²²⁷ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

Apart from the figures published by the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation (CNR) in 2016, which are significantly higher than all other figures, all other records show that the phenomenon is gradually decreasing. The Ombudsman said he trusts official figures rather than NGOs' or people's general opinion. Alfred Koçobashi argued that "figures are very low compared to some NGO figures" because those NGO's "try to increase this number to gain money for their activities".²²⁸

4.2 Murders

At the State Police Headquarters it was stated that the number of murders for reasons of blood feud, as well as the total number of murders, is gradually decreasing:

The year 2013 counted 3 blood feud-related murders, but the investigations in these cases have not been concluded yet.²²⁹ In 2014 one murder was listed as related to blood feud. This case was transferred to court.²³⁰

In 2015, no murders were registered as blood feud murders. Nationwide, 54 murders were committed in 2015.²³¹ In 2016, one murder was classified as a blood feud-related murder. A total of 63 murders were committed nationally in 2016. Approximately 80% of all murders in 2016 were related to property disputes. A small number of cases was related to criminal offenses and one to blood feud.²³²

As of 13 March 2017, no registered cases of murders were committed for reasons of blood feud.²³³

Many non-governmental interlocutors referred to the police statistics as a reliable source. New cases of blood feud murders are "very rare" according to Rasim Gjoka.²³⁴ From the point of view of the AHC, only a handful of murders have been committed for blood feud in recent years. The representative from AHC referred to official statistics for the exact number.²³⁵

When Cedoca's interlocutors were asked about recent murders related to blood feud, most of them referred to the murder of a pastor in 2010 and the murders of a young girl and her grandfather in 2012. No one except Operazione Colomba could give examples of murders that were committed for blood feud after 2012. This organization disposes of its own database of contemporary blood feud murders. The database is updated through daily media research by its staff members who scrutinize the press not only for murders that are literally labelled as blood feuds but also for "reliable and typical elements that sometimes couldn't even be noticed by journalists".²³⁶ Thus, Operazione Colomba is aware of 6 murders with blood feud elements in 2016, 2 in 2015, 4 in 2014 and 7 in 2013. These are cases from all over Albania that appeared in the media. Operazione Colomba could not provide information about the outcome of investigations or legal proceedings in these cases.²³⁷

It appears that most experts consulted by Cedoca are introduced to new cases through the media. According to Rasim Gjoka, the media - as well as some reconciliation associations - have an interest

²²⁸ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²²⁹ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³⁰ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³¹ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³² General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³³ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³⁴ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³⁵ Projects' Manager, Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³⁶ Operazione Colomba, e-mail, 10/07/2017

²³⁷ Operazione Colomba, e-mail, 5/05/2017

to exaggerate numbers.²³⁸ Mentor Kikia agrees that blood feud is “a beautiful story” for a newspaper.²³⁹

Some sources believed that in recent years murders have been committed for reasons of blood feud without being registered because people avoid the authorities.²⁴⁰

4.3 Serious threat and incitement

According to the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, no blood feud-related crimes have been registered in the region of Shkodër in 2015-2016.²⁴¹

The local prosecutors stated that court proceedings and convictions under article 83(a) and 83(b) are very rare. They argue that a confined family never declares before the prosecutor or the police that they have received threats. “If they do not declare, measures cannot be taken.”²⁴²

The table below shows figures provided by the General Prosecutor’s Office concerning court proceedings on criminal offences related to blood feud.²⁴³

Criminal offences		Article 83/a Serious threat for <i>hakmarrja</i> or <i>gjakmarrja</i>	Article 83/b Incitement for <i>gjakmarrja</i>
2013	Registered procedures	10	0
	Court proceedings	5	0
	Accused	4	0
	Accused sent to court	5	0
	Convicted	2	0
2014	Registered procedures	16	1
	Court proceedings	1	0
	Accused	2	0
	Accused sent to court	1	0
	Convicted	3	0
2015	Registered procedures	4	1
	Court proceedings	1	0
	Accused	1	0
	Accused sent to court	1	0
	Convicted	1	0
2016	Registered procedures	7	0
	Court proceedings	1	0
	Accused	3	0
	Accused sent to court	1	0
	Convicted	1	0

None of Cedoca’s (non-governmental) interlocutors had a clear insight into the prevalence of threats and incitement related to blood feud. Concerning threats Cedoca’s interlocutors stated that the

²³⁸ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²³⁹ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁴⁰ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁴¹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁴² Regional Prosecutor’s Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁴³ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, e-mail, 13/03/2017

majority of the people do not go to the police to complain for a variety of reasons (cfr. supra 3.8 Latency). Besides, threats often appear to be subjective (cfr. supra 3.2 Fear; 3.3 Threats).²⁴⁴ The Albanian Helsinki Committee – which runs a small clinic to process human rights complaints – has not received any complaints or requests from individual citizens regarding blood feud over the last two and a half years.²⁴⁵

5. State protection

5.1 Albanian State Police

The Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs declared to Cedoca that – generally speaking – the authorities are nowadays closely monitoring the known cases of contemporary blood feuds and that the phenomenon is largely under control. “Since 2013 it is not an issue anymore. People feel safer. If the police receive a request for protection, they deal with it.”²⁴⁶

The statement by the Vice-Minister was repeated in more detail by two sources at the Albanian police forces whom Cedoca has met during the fact-finding mission. The General Director from the Albanian State Police claimed that the police have made a lot of efforts to end the blood feud phenomenon since the National Action Plan no. 1277 (dd. 24/10/2012) “On the prevention, tracking and fighting criminal acts of murder motivated by blood feuds”.²⁴⁷ He claimed that nowadays “each officer knows what to do”. He explained that a good cooperation has been established between the police and several other organizations (the Prosecutor’s Office, the municipalities, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Affairs, etc.) and that this cooperation facilitates quick interventions and arrests.²⁴⁸

The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate referred to the National Action Plan 419 (which is the updated version of National Action Plan no. 1277)²⁴⁹ against blood feuds. He highlighted that nowadays different police structures (local police, intelligence officers, wider police structures) are permanently collecting and updating all relevant information with regard to known blood feuds in their area: “We are updating our information all the time now.”²⁵⁰

The same source in Shkodër explained that a network has been set up that comprises stakeholders from outside the police forces (religious leaders, community leaders, actors from local governments, social services, etc.) with whom there is a constant exchange of information. He particularly stressed that lines of communication have been established as well between the police forces and the blood feud affected families themselves: “All the affected families presently know their neighbourhood

²⁴⁴ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People’s Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017; Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017; Pastoral assistant, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

²⁴⁵ Projects’ Manager, Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁴⁶ Gjebrea E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁴⁷ “In parallel, the Albanian State Police launched, in June 2012, a database of persons directly involved in blood feuds. According to the information received, the database covers the entire country, and includes all physical persons directly identified as involved in a blood feud. The database contains information both on cases submitted to the court and cases that are not followed up through official channels. It is regularly updated. The State Police, the Prosecutor-General’s Office, the representatives of the courts, and the People’s Advocate are reported to have access to this database.” cfr. Heyns. C, 23/04/2013, p.7, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁴⁹ National Action Plan 419 for the prevention, discovering and documentation and prosecution of criminal acts motivated by blood feud

²⁵⁰ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

police officers. They have their phone numbers and they have the general emergency numbers. The affected families understand now that the support coming from the police is safer for them.”²⁵¹

The representative at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate explained in more detail that his police officers are supervising the situation of the 68 confined families in the whole region of Shkodër by “contacting them, patrolling regularly and supervising their houses”. He stated that “local field officers are ordered to approach them regularly and to stay in contact with them.” He also claimed that his officers try to “mitigate, mediate and soothe down” those blood feud affected families who are not living in confinement.²⁵²

Apart from controlling and monitoring, the police also claimed to actively contribute to the prosecution of citizens who are involved in blood feuds. Both police sources claimed that as soon as there are serious indications of an imminent crime (e.g. a threat) or that a crime was committed, these elements are transferred to the Prosecutor’s Office for investigation and prevention.²⁵³ Lastly, both police sources explained their strategies to prevent new blood feuds (cfr. *infra* 6. Prevention). “When a murder has occurred, the damaged families are immediately monitored proactively in order to prevent that a blood feud will develop. The dynamics of a case are supervised now. We are trying to collect as much information as possible in order to identify elements that indicate the preparation of a revenge killing.”²⁵⁴

Cedoca’s interlocutor at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate indicated that negligence by police officers in matters related to blood feud are punished severely nowadays: “We can be fired if we do not deposit the complaints that are given by the citizens or if we do not verify information that is provided to us.” On the other hand, he also mentioned that the police has to reckon with its “heel of Achilles”: Since they are tasked with many other social responsibilities as well, they cannot always be everywhere.²⁵⁵

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

During its fact-finding mission, Cedoca met two experts who expressed strong doubt that the police is capable of controlling, monitoring, preventing and prosecuting the contemporary blood feud phenomenon: Operazione Colomba and Elsa Ballauri. Although they agreed that the police is accessible nowadays and that the police is “at least” hearing the citizens and that they are taking complaints now, they stressed that there are still very important issues of negligence and ineffectiveness at the heart of the police forces. They claimed that the police could do their investigation work much better. “Sometimes the suspects in a contemporary blood feud case are arrested immediately after an incident but what follows is a deficient investigation and the suspects are released again.”²⁵⁶

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

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

²⁵¹ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁵² Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁵³ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁵⁴ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁵⁵ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁵⁶ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

“the presence of the law has very much advanced nowadays. In the last 5-6 years the law and order were re-established. Closed cases have been re-opened and potential blood feud cases are treated with particular attention, even in the remote areas. If something happens, the police will intervene nowadays. Police is eager to solve issues, to resolve disputes. If a dispute arises, the police will act for sure. The police will start a process of investigation and arrest those who pose a threat. They will not leave it like that. There is less space for taking the law in their own hands or for thinking of impunity. Even people in remote areas tend to go to the police station now or denounce to the prosecution office instead of taking the law into their own hands.” He also stressed that nowadays police officers can be “laid off and be charged for negligence.”²⁵⁷

An appeal court judge in Shkodër confirmed that nowadays the police have the data of all the families that are involved in a blood feud. She explained that when a murder has been identified as a potential blood feud case, the police will search for family members who could be involved.²⁵⁸

The mayor of Fushë-Arrëz confirmed that the police is present and that they will intervene whenever they are called: “People don’t have to protect themselves anymore since the police is there now.” He gave the example of a funeral in the beginning of 2017. After the last survivor of a blood feud affected family who resided in the village had died, his children were able to come from abroad to attend the funeral thanks to close police protection. The mayor also stated that the local police is now trying to collect all possible information and data in order to know every person in his municipality who might be affected by blood feuds and threats. But the mayor also pointed at some very concrete shortcomings that are still jeopardizing effective police protection: “The infrastructure and logistics of the police in my commune remain deficient. Sometimes I even have to lend them my private car.” He also indicated that the salaries of the police officers are too low to guarantee maximum efficiency. Nevertheless, there is some improvement: “the salaries have risen and the police are more mixed. Police officers are brought in from other places as well. This way they are not too closely connected when something happens.”²⁵⁹

Mentor Kikia confirmed that the police forces have identified all the families who are in a blood feud (“Government and police know the cases of isolated persons now.”) and he agreed that it is possible now for citizens to reach the police for protection: “Each affected family has a list of phone numbers in case a problem becomes urgent. They can always call. The police will come and intervene, even if a family lives far away.” Kikia also acknowledged that there is a real improvement in the registration of complaints, but he warned that a complaint is sometimes too vague for the police to react swiftly. He also explained that nowadays a police officer should have the courage not to register a complaint or to ignore received information in cases where the public uses the media because they feel that their requests and complaints are not answered. He agreed that the blood feud phenomenon has decreased since the state and the police are more powerful. He concluded that “you cannot be ‘in blood feud’ anymore like that. You want safety and you will reach for the police nowadays. When someone is a target, it is in his interest to have it registered.”²⁶⁰

Liljana Luani confirmed that the police directorate has the right data now and she repeatedly declared that the local police department is always ready to help her and her mission.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People’s Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁵⁸ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁵⁹ Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

²⁶⁰ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁶¹ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017; Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, e-mail, 18/05/2017

Other sources like professor Gjuraj, the OSCE representatives, Luigj Mila and Rasim Gjoka have unanimously declared that the functioning of the police forces is not problematic anymore even if improvements should be made in efficiency. They all confirmed that the police forces try to identify all the blood feud cases; that they are more professional now in registering complaints and information and that they will try to intervene when the life of citizens is threatened because of a blood feud case.²⁶²

Generally speaking, as far as the larger sections of Albanian society are concerned, it appears that distrust towards the police does not seem to be an issue anymore. According to the latest "Annual Trust in Governance Opinion Poll" (held by the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) in 2016), larger sections of Albanian citizens are trusting the police services (66 %) more than any other public service provider.²⁶³ Only two of Cedoca's interlocutors, Operazione Colomba and an expat living in a village with blood feud affected families, claimed that the police forces have to be bribed with so-called "coffee money" in order to intervene (or can be bribed in order not to intervene).²⁶⁴ However, most sources agree that this is not imaginable in cases where the lives of citizens are under threat.²⁶⁵ Koçobashi claimed that there is much less space now for impunity at the police level. There is a new generation now that is eager to solve issues, to resolve disputes.²⁶⁶ Concerning corruption, Mila stated that "at least at the police level, there is a lot of improvement".²⁶⁷

However, despite improvements in police work and better trust in the police by larger sections of Albanian society, it appears that when citizens find themselves in a contemporary blood feud situation they still tend to avoid contact with the police forces. Multiple sources confirmed that in many cases citizens still cannot overcome feelings of distrust towards the police and keep their problems from them (cfr. supra 3.8 Latency):

According to a representative of the OSCE, blood feud cases are still not always reported to the police: "In spite of the current professionalism, the latency remains in this domain. Especially in the countryside some people consider the legacy of the Kanun more important than the police. This remains a problem because without a perpetrator and a denunciation it is difficult to connect a crime with blood feud. If there is not 100 % proof, they will qualify a crime as 'uncertain motivation'".²⁶⁸

Koçobashi acknowledged that the mentality of some Albanians is stronger than all the possible efforts by the authorities and that there remain people who continue to "go for self-protection".²⁶⁹

Elsa Ballauri indicated that those who file a complaint feel more insecure because they believe it will make their enemies more angry. She claimed that some people are not going to the police because they do not trust the police or other representatives from the State. They believe that only self-isolation can save them.²⁷⁰

²⁶² Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017; Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017; Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFRCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁶³ Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), 10/02/2017, p. 7, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017; Expat living in a village with blood feud-affected families, interview, village in Shkodër municipality, 19/03/2017

²⁶⁵ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁶⁶ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁶⁷ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁶⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

²⁶⁹ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁷⁰ Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

Likewise, Operazione Colomba argued that the affected families do not reach for the police because they do not want to make the opposite family more angry and because they do not trust the police.²⁷¹

5.2 Judiciary

The Director of Cabinet at the Prosecutor's General Office stated that blood feud has been regarded as one of the Cabinet's priorities in the last few years. She cited the EU integration process and the issue of Albanian asylum claims in the EU as the reasons for this. The Director has also explained to Cedoca in more detail how the priorities have been translated into actions on the ground. "In 2013 the Prosecutor's Office has organized a number of roundtables in "every county but especially in Lezhë, Pukë, Tropojë and Shkodër in order to investigate the real number of confined people and to inform itself what to do in order to minimize the blood feud phenomenon." Then in 2013 and 2014 officers of the prosecutor went to "every house where there was a claim linked with blood feud" in order to obtain "enough evidence to start a case". The Director of Cabinet explained that 200 families in Shkodër have been approached "from which it was claimed that they were in conflict because of a murder case in the 1990s."²⁷²

The Director of Cabinet at the Prosecutor's General Office also declared that they have not organized new roundtables since 2013 but she added that the identified blood feud cases are monitored by the authorities and that the field work is basically a police task. However, she claimed that as soon as the Prosecutor's Office receives a referral of a new intervention by the police, it will become a case.²⁷³

Representatives of Prosecutors' Offices from the north confirmed that they now have access to the police database with all the collected information on potentially at-risk families. They explained that the collected information is helpful to assess whether a new crime case can be identified as a contemporary blood feud case stemming from issues in the past.²⁷⁴

Koçobashi confirmed that in the year 2013 several roundtables initiated by the Prosecutor's Office were held in Shkodër. They were attended by the local prosecutors, court directors (first instance and appeal) and by a number of judges. "File by file they have scrutinized cases that contained potential indications of a contemporary blood feud." He also confirmed that in response to the roundtables an order was issued by the prosecutor for the police commissariats to go out in the field to identify potential blood feud elements or threats (cfr. supra 5.1 Albanian State Police). Koçobashi declared that these steps meant a huge change of direction for the local prosecutors because "in the past cases were closed and it was decided not to continue when there was no immediate proof."²⁷⁵

According to Koçobashi, in 2015-2016 more progress was made in the field of cooperation between the Prosecutor's Office and other institutions. He referred to the presence of the prosecutors at multiple roundtables with different stakeholders and to an order from the Prosecutor's Office to the police commissariats to re-open old cases that had been closed because of a lack of evidence. Also, the Prosecutor's Office has initiated criminal investigations against people who issued fake attestations, and charged them with fraud and abuse of power (cfr. infra 7. Attestations).²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁷² Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁷³ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁷⁴ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁷⁵ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁷⁶ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

There have been legislative changes as well since 2012. The Albanian Penal Code was amended in September 2012 and in May 2013. Murder for blood feud is punishable by no less than 30 years or life imprisonment according to article 78/a of the Penal Code. The amendments also resulted in a sentence of up to 3 years of imprisonment under article 83/a: serious threats of revenge or blood feud, threats against a person to be locked up at home; and article 83/b: incitement to blood feud.²⁷⁷

According to the Prosecutor's Office, the increased severity of the penal code concerning sentences for crimes related to blood feud has proved its effect in reducing such crimes.²⁷⁸ At the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate they agreed that the amendments to the penal code have contributed to reduce the phenomenon. Operazione Colomba agreed that the new articles on punishment for blood feud-related crimes are implemented but "a culture of revenge" still needs to be discouraged.²⁷⁹

The Prosecutor's Office provided a list with statistics on court cases related to blood feud from 2013-2016.²⁸⁰ The first part concerns court cases for murders for revenge killings under article 78/2 of the penal code. The second part concerns court cases for murders for blood feud under article 78/a of the penal code. These statistics show the number of cases in different stages of the judicial procedure per year. One needs to take into account that a conviction in one specific year does not mean that the murder took place in the same year. The same applies for other stages in the procedure. The statistics can be found in the table below.

Murders		Article 78/2 Murder for hakmarrja	Article 78/a Murder for gjakmarrja
2013	Procedure started	7	3
	Court Proceedings	5	1
	Accused	4	2
	Accused sent to court	7	1
	Convicted	2	0
2014	Procedure started	0	8
	Court Proceedings	2	3
	Accused	0	7
	Accused sent to court	2	4
	Convicted	5	2
2015	Procedure started	0	3
	Court Proceedings	1	3
	Accused	0	4
	Accused sent to court	1	4
	Convicted	2	4
2016	Procedure started	6	2
	Court Proceedings	3	0
	Accused	15	2
	Accused sent to court	9	1
	Convicted	1	0

²⁷⁷ Journal Officiel de la République d'Albanie, 20/05/2013, p.32, [url](#); Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania, 18/06/2015, Article 78/a, 83/a, 83/b, [url](#); Open Data, 2017, [url](#)

²⁷⁸ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁷⁹ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁸⁰ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, e-mail, 13/03/2017

The Director of Cabinet from the Prosecutor's Office in Tirana claimed that in a court case the prosecutor will always ask for the maximum penalties.²⁸¹ The local prosecutors also declared that in the majority of the cases they ask for the highest penalties.²⁸² The appeal court judge Cedoca spoke claimed that convictions in Shkodër district range from 32 years minimum to life sentence, but when someone is convicted for blood feud, the person can receive a reduction of his sentence from the first instance court, according to the law.²⁸³

In the media it was reported that since 2013 blood feud cases are to be treated by the Serious Crimes court (*Gjykata e Krimeve të Rënda*).²⁸⁴ However, a judge from an appeal court in Shkodër declared that blood feud cases (78, 83/a and 83b) are currently still treated by district courts.²⁸⁵

According to most consulted experts²⁸⁶, the increased severity of the penal code concerning sentences for crimes related to blood feud has proved its effects in reducing such crimes. Mentor Kikia for example confirmed that a lot of people have been arrested after the amendments in the penal code and that judges do not have an alternative anymore but to give the proscribed, fixed penalty. He also indicated that families are attempting "manoeuvres" now in order to receive lower sentences such as having their minors to pose as the perpetrators.²⁸⁷

In his 2011 report, Philip Alston noted that "A number of interlocutors also raised concerns about the impact of corruption in the justice system on charges and sentencing for blood feud-related killings. There is at least a widely held perception that bribing a judge may result in a lower sentence. Bribing a prosecutor was also seen as a means of reducing the potential charge from that for blood feuds,..."²⁸⁸ Also according to latest (2017) annual Trust in Governance Opinion poll (organized by IDM in Albania), more than half of the citizens are still not satisfied with judiciary services (66%) (along with employment services (78%), and with social welfare services (60%)).²⁸⁹

Multiple interlocutors stated that the judiciary remains the weak point and they especially stressed the issue of corruption at the level of the judiciary.²⁹⁰ Liljana Luani believed that families "pay to avoid heavy sentences". She claimed that she has knowledge of many perpetrators who live freely because lawyers, judges and prosecutors were bribed to avoid heavy sentences. She hoped that the reforms of the judiciary and the vetting system will solve the problem.²⁹¹ A representative from Operazione Colomba also said that judges can be bribed, although she acknowledged that a lot has been done to counter this in recent years. She also claimed that judges can be bribed in order to release convicted blood feud murderers before they have served their sentence.²⁹² Large sums of

²⁸¹ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁸² Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁸³ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁸⁴ "Blood feuds have been a competence of the Serious Crimes since when it was established, but were removed in September 2004." cfr. Top Channel, 08/06/2013, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁸⁶ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017; Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

²⁸⁷ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁸⁸ Alston P., 14/03/2011, p. 9, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), 10/02/2017, p. 7, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017; Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁹¹ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁹² Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

money are collected abroad or via the criminal circuits for this purpose.²⁹³ Mila claimed that there is a lot of "dirty money from prostitution and drugs business" and that judges can be bribed.²⁹⁴

Professor Gjuraj claimed that poor citizens are not able to bribe a judge. He claimed that only those who have strong ties with politics are able to influence court decisions. "Hence the importance of the vetting process and the decriminalization law."²⁹⁵ According to Mentor Kikia, judges can be bribed, yet he believed this only occurs rarely in cases of blood feud.²⁹⁶

Both the Director of Cabinet of the Prosecutor's Office in Tirana and the local prosecutors in the north have complained that many blood feud affected families do not want to collaborate with the judiciary. The Director declared that 175 out of 200 families who were living in conflict (during their study in 2013-2014) because of a previous murder and who were asked for a denunciation in order to start a court case, have refused to denounce. "They were frightened. They don't want to collaborate. This is a real problem." A delegation of local prosecutors with whom Cedoca talked stated that the family of the confined never declare to the prosecutor or the police that they have received threats. "In those cases, we can do nothing. The state structures are not powerful enough. We cannot take measures if they don't denounce." The prosecutors can only take action when a crime has happened. "The state can merely only punish a murderer, the person who has committed a crime or a murder. In case of threats, the state can do nothing when there is no denunciation."²⁹⁷

Also the appeal court judge Cedoca met stated that the blood feud-affected families generally try to avoid the authorities. "They want to deal with the issue themselves. They also try to confuse the judges in the court room. They try to make the judges believe that it was a 'normal murder' and not a blood feud murder." She added that sometimes, however, the accused are also proud to have perpetrated a blood feud killing.²⁹⁸

All of Cedoca's interlocutors agree upon the fact that a fair sentence for an offender could help to prevent future conflicts or prevent escalation of existing conflicts.

²⁹³ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

²⁹⁴ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁹⁵ Gjuraj T., Professor in Sociology and Rector of the European University of Tirana, interview, Tirana, 15/03/2017

²⁹⁶ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

²⁹⁷ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

²⁹⁸ Appeal Court Judge, Shkodër Appeal Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

6. Prevention

6.1 Prevention by state actors

The General Director from the Albanian State Police Directorate declared that, following the 2012 action plan (cfr. supra 5. Protection), the police has taken several measures to increase the prevention of blood feud. He declared that his police officers proactively approach a person as soon as there are indications that he or she will commit a crime.²⁹⁹ The representative from the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate indicated that intelligence officers will assess whether there are somewhere intentions to take revenge and evaluate the situation by analysing how the families feel about the blood feud. He also referred to the permanent communication, negotiation and mitigation by his officers with families affected by blood feud and declared that the police also inform the Prosecutor's Office of preventive police actions. The success rate of these preventive measures is documented but was not shared with Cedoca. The police representative argued that the statistics on blood feud (related crimes) speak for themselves. Nevertheless, he also said that it will take 25 more years to change the revengeful mentality of some Albanians.³⁰⁰

According to the Prosecutor's Office, the harshening of the sentences for blood feud related crimes can also be seen as a preventive measure.³⁰¹ In his 2015 report, the Ombudsman praises the efforts made by the Prosecutor's Office of Shkodër in 2014 to visit all families who were known to be in a conflict and to register all claims from persons under threat of being confined (cfr. supra 5. Protection). The Ombudsman believes that these actions have contributed to the prevention of blood feud in Shkodër and have encouraged people to move freely.³⁰²

However, not all of Cedoca's interlocutors are convinced that the police and the Prosecutor's Office are sufficiently active in prevention. According to Rasim Gjoka, there are different initiatives coming from the police but the problem is the implementation of these initiatives.³⁰³ Elsa Ballauri stated that the police most often respond to crimes reactively instead of proactively.³⁰⁴

Prevention also has to do with addressing broader issues. The mayor of Fushë-Arrëz argued that Albania has developed rapidly but that a lot of people have been left behind. He pointed out that many socio-economic issues have to be addressed in the long term in order to eradicate the phenomenon because, according to him, "poverty is the mother of evil".³⁰⁵

Many interlocutors argued that the Albanian State could do much more in its fight against blood feud than merely strengthening the police and the judiciary, as the phenomenon is linked to socio-economic context and to traditional mind-sets as well. A representative of Operazione Colomba explained that "It's not only about punishment but there is also a socio-cultural dimension. Many people who are in need to receive justice are from very poor and backward backgrounds and they are not even able to ask for justice. They do not know who to approach."³⁰⁶

Mentor Kikia argued that from now on socio-political strategists should also be consulted. He stated that: "Blood feud should no longer be a police matter only. Nowadays, the police have the names,

²⁹⁹ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³⁰⁰ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³⁰¹ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³⁰² People's Advocate Institution, 12/2015, p. 11, [url](#)

³⁰³ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³⁰⁴ Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

³⁰⁵ Tuci F., Mayor, City of Fushë-Arrëz, interview, Fushë-Arrëz, 18/03/2017

³⁰⁶ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

the exact numbers and they are in contact with the affected people but they cannot change the mentality and the psychology of the people.” Mentor Kikia saw an important role for the so-called Coordinating Council³⁰⁷ in this perspective: “What the Coordinating Council should do is the psychological treatment of all these families, which is more important than just having their names in a list. The council should coordinate the care of the social part of the phenomenon. They have to work on the mentality and the psychology.”³⁰⁸

Echoing Kikia, Luigj Mila stated that nowadays “It is not only a matter of the law and the authorities. It is also a matter of civilization like education, awareness, conditions of life, exchange, openness, resolution of the property issues, less guns.” Like Kikia he stated that it also takes civilization to change the mentality and that the Coordinating Council could play an important role: “Tirana cannot solve the problem by ignoring it or by just blaming the Catholics in the North.”³⁰⁹

The Ombudsman also considers that the “Coordinating Council on the fight against blood feud” - which was to be created under a 2005 law - could play an important role in preventing blood feud.³¹⁰

The authorities, however, have not implemented the law on the Coordinating Council. According to the Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, the Coordinating Council is no longer needed because the number of people affected by blood feud is decreasing.³¹¹

Alfred Koçobashi and the OSCE representative referred to an important roundtable gathering in March 2015 attended by local prosecutors and other judicial representatives at which plans were made to act together with civil society groups in order to prevent new incidents of contemporary blood feud.³¹² Cedoca is however not aware of recent initiatives by the Albanian government to increase awareness and to work on prevention.

In the absence of the Coordinating Council, the Ombudsman has repeatedly recommended that the Ministry of Education contribute to the prevention of blood feud by raising awareness through education about the importance of tolerance and the negative effects of self-justice, blood feud and revenge.³¹³ However, it is not known to Cedoca if and how these recommendations are implemented. Liljana Luani told Cedoca that she has received support from the Ministry of Education in the form of didactic teaching tools and through expressions of interest in her work.³¹⁴ Another teacher Cedoca spoke to claimed that she has never received official instructions on how to work on children’s mentality with regard to blood feud.³¹⁵ According to Liljana Luani, teachers are obliged to inform the authorities when they know of a case of a child affected by blood feud.³¹⁶ The former teacher confirmed that she informs the authorities of such cases, although she has never received official instructions concerning this.³¹⁷

³⁰⁷ Law No. 9389 “On the creation and functioning of the Coordinating Council for the Fight against blood feuds” passed on 04/05/2005 aimed at coordinating all the possible efforts and actors in Albania in order to fight the phenomenon

³⁰⁸ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

³⁰⁹ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³¹⁰ People’s Advocate Institution, 12/2015, p. 13, [url](#)

³¹¹ Gjebrea E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³¹² Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People’s Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017

³¹³ People’s Advocate Institution, 12/2015, p. 17, [url](#)

³¹⁴ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³¹⁵ Teacher in the area of Shkodër (also with children in blood feud), e-mail, 18/05/2017

³¹⁶ Luani L., volunteer teacher with children in blood feud, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³¹⁷ Teacher in the area of Shkodër (also with children in blood feud), e-mail, 18/05/2017

6.2 Prevention by non-state actors

A representative of Operazione Colomba explained how her organization actively works on prevention by organizing awareness campaigns among civil society and national institutions. Operazione Colomba directly involves the local population in its monthly demonstrations in Shkodër and Tropojë. Operazione Colomba thus aims to open a dialogue about blood feud and its consequences.³¹⁸ Operazione Colomba also has working groups with youngsters and women who are affected by blood feud. According to Operazione Colomba, the members of the youngsters' groups believe it is "a very bad tradition" and want to struggle to overcome it.³¹⁹ Besides, Operazione Colomba closely cooperates with the Ombudsman by organizing conferences and periodic meetings. In this way, different (local) institutions are stimulated to work together to look for a solution to overcome the phenomenon of blood feud. However, the representative of Operazione Colomba argued that they have not received a lot of response from the public prosecutors or from the mayor of Shkodër.³²⁰

Mentor Kikia also spoke about protests he organized in different cities in Albania after a 17-year old girl was killed. He emphasized the importance to talk about blood feud and break the taboo because "if we remain silent, the phenomenon will not stop."³²¹

AFCR has been working on the education of other stakeholders. Its network of mediators in the north of Albania also aims at the prevention of further escalation of existing conflicts.³²² According to Rasim Gjoka, the catholic church in Shkodër has also been successful in preventing conflicts or escalation of conflicts.³²³ A priest from a religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz said that he has contributed to the prevention of the escalation of existing conflicts by talking to the opposing families.³²⁴ Luigj Mila confirmed that the Catholic church has contributed to diminishing the phenomenon by ordering the excommunication of any potential perpetrator by the local bishops. Mila claimed that the deterrent was successful because the locals "are more afraid of God than of the State".³²⁵

³¹⁸ Operazione Colomba, 15/12/2015, pp. 4, 7, [url](#)

³¹⁹ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

³²⁰ Operazione Colomba, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

³²¹ Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

³²² Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³²³ Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³²⁴ Priest, religious congregation in Fushë-Arrëz, e-mail, 25/04/2017

³²⁵ Mila L., Executive Director, Justice and Peace Commission of Albania, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

7. Attestations

The issuance of fake blood feud attestations and the presentation of such certificates by asylum seekers in and outside Europe is a recurring topic in many reports on blood feud.³²⁶ According to the 2014 OSCE report on blood feud there is neither an official nor a non-official entity that is authorized to issue such certificates.³²⁷

A representative at the Shkodër Regional Police Directorate confirmed that the police offices do not issue attestations or verifications declaring families have problems. "But every complaint is written down and it is part of the procedure to provide a copy of a complaint." Telephone complaints are also registered in a special book in the command room and citizens can obtain a copy of any official document at any time.³²⁸

The Prosecutor's Office declared that it can issue attestations to citizens about cases that have been started but such attestations will never state that a given case is correlated with blood feud. In these attestations the facts of an incident are registered: what has happened, who is a victim and who is the perpetrator.³²⁹

The General Director from the Albanian State Police mentioned that unofficial reconciliation organizations have taken advantage of the requests for blood feud attestations by a number of citizens. He stated that Albanians have obtained documents from those institutions falsely claiming they are in a blood feud situation, and he noted that even municipality and police signatures were falsified.³³⁰

The Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs argued that a lot of research has been done into organizations that are abusing the phenomenon. She declared that the Ministry of Interior Affairs has intensified its actions against this kind of abuse.³³¹

The Prosecutor's Office has started several proceedings against associations that deliver false attestations. These proceedings have resulted in convictions and are a warning to other NGOs, according to a representative at the Prosecutor's Office in Tirana.³³² She cited two court cases (in Durrës and in Shkodër) in 2016.³³³ With regard to the Durrës-case, the head of the National Assembly of Missionaries for Reconciliation was sentenced to 2 years³³⁴ imprisonment while his associate was sentenced to 9 months³³⁵ imprisonment.³³⁶

Apart from reconciliation associations, some local police officers and heads of villages have also benefitted from issuing false documents. According to Alfred Koçobashi, in recent years a total of 16 persons were criminally investigated and charged for fraud and abuse of power: the head of the National Assembly of Missionaries for Reconciliation in Durrës and two of his associates (cfr. supra Durrës case), the mayor of Postribë town, the secretary general of the Association of Missionaries for

³²⁶ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 1/02/2012, [url](#); UK Home Office Country Information and Guidance, 6/07/2016, pp. 25-31, [url](#)

³²⁷ OSCE, 12/2014, p. 15

³²⁸ Shkodër Regional Police Directorate, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³²⁹ Regional Prosecutor's Offices of Shkodër, Lezhë, Tropojë and Pukë, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

³³⁰ General Director, Directorate of Albanian State Police, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³³¹ Gjebrea E., Vice-Minister of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³³² Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³³³ Director of Cabinet, Prosecutor General Office, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017

³³⁴ According to article 406/1 from the Penal Code, the sentence was reduced by 1/3 of the sentence imposed and Ndrec Prenga was finally sentenced to 1 (one) year and four (4) months' imprisonment.

³³⁵ According to article 406/1 from the Penal Code, the sentence of the accused was reduced by 1/3 of the sentence and Sabahete Manuka was finally sentenced to 6 (six) months' imprisonment.

³³⁶ Court decisions, e-mail, 13/03/2017, Prosecutor's Office

Peace, the heads of the villages of Mes, Boks and Drisht, an elder of the village Shtoj and of Rrethina, and seven citizens.³³⁷

Most non-governmental sources Cedoca met during its fact-finding mission have received requests from Albanian citizens or foreign lawyers to issue attestations to prove (often wrongly) that their clients are in a blood feud situation. The persons asking for such attestations often say they or their family members need them as a proof of their situation. None of Cedoca's interlocutors have complied with such requests.³³⁸

³³⁷ Koçobashi A., Head on duty, People's Advocate Institution (*Institucioni i Avokatit të Popullit*, the Ombudsman), interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2017

³³⁸ Projects' Manager, Albanian Helsinki Committee, interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Gjoka R., Executive Director, Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes (AFCR), interview, Tirana, 13/03/2017; Kikia M., Journalist and Executive Director of the Forum for Free Thought (*Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë*), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017; Ballauri E., Executive Director, Albanian Human Rights Group (AHRG), interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

Summary

Traditional blood feud killings are a practice that was common in specific regions in Albania for more than 500 years (throughout the Ottoman period) and that was embedded in a socio-cultural matrix that was known and accepted by all the members of the local communities in those regions.

In pre-modern Albania, the individual's honour was closely linked to the community's honour and its survival. Committing a blood feud killing in order to restore or cleanse one's honour after it was infringed upon was sanctioned by customary law. It was seen as an integral social obligation. It could be called the death penalty for the one who had violated someone's honour and the honour of his community.

Both the traditional phenomenon itself and the acceptance of it by society were halted in the 20th century, particularly by the communist regime. A modern criminal code and harsh methods of law enforcement replaced customary law and its implementations even in the most remote parts of the country. In the post-communist era, Albanian society also swiftly changed towards a more individualistic, open and modern one.

Yet many murders that have been committed since the 1990s are still being labelled as blood feud killings. This report shows that these contemporary blood feud killings have little but the name in common with traditional blood feud. The main change is that the practice has been reduced from an integral social obligation, accepted by the totality of a local community, to a much less integral social obligation. The practice still may be instigated by a mental or emotional attachment to a tradition that belongs to the past but it has lost all but a few of the tradition's formal aspects. The practice seems to be continued as a mere justification for acts of violence that have little to do with cleansing or restoring one's honour. Instead, it appears that these acts are mostly related to the consequences of – depending on the case - political instability, social unrest, poverty, property issues or to the myriad forms of criminality that have been omnipresent in Albania, especially in the 1990s. Therefore, this report argues that, although they are formally inspired by an attachment to a traditional mentality, contemporary blood feud killings are mostly about ordinary revenge killings that could happen anywhere in the world. Since there is very little correlation with customary law motivations and prescriptions, they appear nowadays as hybrid forms of ordinary revenge killing.

Both desk-based research and a fact-finding mission have not revealed a definition of the blood feud phenomenon in contemporary Albania that is broadly accepted and used in juridical, sociological, and political contexts. The phenomenon has transformed and the transformation appears to be difficult to define. Even the Albanian penal code does not provide a legal definition. Nevertheless, research has made it possible to enumerate a number of characteristics in this COI Focus that can variably be observed in contemporary blood feud cases: self-confinement, threats, killings, negotiations, mediations, reconciliations, role of the elderly, importance of the family, interventions by the authorities, socio-economic support initiatives, latency, vulnerable position of women, etc. These characteristics are not always present in each case of contemporary blood feud (and the list is not exhaustive). However they can be used as tools to assess both the credibility and seriousness of a given case.

Furthermore, this COI Focus also provides the most recent official data about the prevalence of contemporary blood feuds. In 2013 three murders were attributed to blood feud and ever since there was annually either one (2014, 2016) or none (2015, 2017) killing attributed to blood feud. The data also show that there are still families that are affected and that there are still citizens (even children) that live in confinement. It seems that the data about the affected persons and families are quite divergent, depending on the source (state or non-state). Yet, it is generally agreed that these phenomena have strongly decreased in the last ten years.

This COI Focus also describes the strategies that the Albanian authorities have applied in order to curb the phenomenon. It appears that, especially in the years 2012-2014 a lot has been done to identify the families that are affected and to mitigate their situations. Ever since it seems that these families are being monitored closely. New murder cases are always investigated with special attention to potential characteristics of contemporary blood feuds. Annually a number of court proceedings are started and continued against accused perpetrators of such crimes. However, it also seems that those who recur to or who are affected by contemporary blood feud violence or threats, still do everything to avoid interventions by the authorities. The mentality of some Albanians remains stronger than all the possible efforts by the state. This COI Focus also pays attention to the authorities' strategy to halt the production of attestations that are wrongly endorsing a blood feud case.

Finally, the COI Focus also addresses the aspect of prevention. Since the phenomenon of blood feud in contemporary Albania is linked with the socio-economic context in post-communist Albania and with a mentality in some sections of the Albanian society that is oriented towards the past, it is argued that the Albanian state could do much more than only strengthening the efforts of the police forces and the judiciary. There is a socio-cultural dimension that involves the mentality and the psychology of some citizens and this dimension should be addressed as well. It is argued that the non-convening of the Coordinating Council for the Fight against Blood Feuds definitely is a missed chance.

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