

Defying De-Stalinization

Albania's 1956

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In Beijing in 1956 the leaders of two Communist countries got together in a corner and commiserated. The background was a glorious gathering: the Eighth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The older of the two, Gheorghie Gheorghiu-Dej of Romania, did most of the talking as he complained that party colleagues had taken him to task over his “cult of personality.” As evidence, they had pointed to his image adorning buildings everywhere and countless factories named after him. But Gheorghiu-Dej told his interlocutor, Enver Hoxha, the First Secretary of the Party of Labor of Albania (PPSh), that in fact no such cult had existed in Romania. How could it have? He had been the first to criticize exaggerations about himself. Hoxha knew what his counterpart was talking about. He, too, had occasionally objected in PPSH Politburo meetings to all kinds of excesses: plans to name factories and schools after him; party officials’ eagerness to convert his childhood home into a Communist shrine; and the engrained habit of showering him with gifts at birthdays and anniversaries. On the other hand, Tirana, like Bucharest, was teeming with oversize silk portraits of the middle-aged leader, whose name, etched in solid red and gold, abounded on rooftops and façades. Moreover, Hoxha, like Gheorghiu-Dej, was busy grumbling in Beijing about the onerous challenges they were forced to confront in 1956.¹

1. Hoxha recounted the conversation with Gheorghiu-Dej at a Politburo meeting and at a party plenum on 22 October. The story seemed to lend support to the view that overzealous apparatchiks were responsible for the “cult of personality.” See Report to the PPSH Politburo, 9 October 1956, in Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror [Central State Archive], Tirana (AQSH), Fondi (F.) 14/AP, Organet Udhëheqëse [Leading Organs] (OU), Viti (V.) 1956, Dosja (Dos.) 54, Fleta (Fl.) 25. In an earlier conversation in Pyongyang, Kim Il-Sung complained to the Albanians about an opposition group that had emerged at a party plenum earlier that year. Hoxha in his memoirs skips his conversation with Gheorghiu-Dej—instead denouncing the Romanian leader—and revises the position he took in Beijing. See Enver Hoxha, *The Khrushchevites* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1980), pp. 251–253.

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Such was the international dimension of events in 1956—a series of actions and accidents originating at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February and culminating with the bloody suppression of the revolt in Hungary in early November.² In between, leaders throughout the Communist world tried to cope with the repercussions of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech as they spread from Moscow to the western Soviet republics and on to Warsaw, Budapest, and the Balkans. Neither Khrushchev nor anyone else knew what the outcome of the Soviet leader's gambit would be, but this did not hinder a variety of actors—from Gulag returnees to ambitious intellectuals and socialist instructors—from interpreting de-Stalinization in their own terms.³ Therein lay a danger: As with most Soviet imports to the Soviet bloc, reformist urges and reshuffling in the Soviet Union were apt to generate unexpected outcomes even in far away locales. Still, not everyone went along with de-Stalinization, and some did their best to resist its destabilizing potential.⁴ (“Ironically, the de-Stalinization movement” one author notes, “helped to create in Korean communism many new Stalinist characteristics.”)⁵ De-Stalinization was thus not merely unpredictable; it was far from inevitable.

One of the first shocks in 1956 occurred far away from Moscow, in Albania, where party functionaries launched a critique of the establishment at the

2. Several compelling studies based on newly available sources focus on these events. See Mark Kramer, “The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (April 1998), pp. 163–214; Csaba Békés, “The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 16, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 1996; and Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006). The Institute for the Study of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Budapest has also published numerous valuable accounts.

3. Amir Weiner, “The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (June 2006), pp. 333–376; and Susan Reid, “De-Stalinization and Taste, 1953–1963,” *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1997), pp. 177–201. “For all its rhetoric of empowerment,” argues Reid, “the cultural reformism of the Thaw was paternalistic rather than populist.” See also, Susan Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev,” *Slavic Review*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 212–252.

4. The Chinese were among the first to doubt Khrushchev's chosen path, although Beijing initially registered no public complaints. See Péter Vámos, “Evolution and Revolution: Sino-Hungarian Relations and the 1956 Revolution,” CWIHP Working Paper No. 54, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 2006. The other example was North Korea. See Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

5. “Stalinist characteristics” included pervasive central planning, forced collectivization in agriculture, preference to heavy industry, continued promotion of Marxism-Leninism, a robust cult of Kim Il-Sung's revolutionary tradition, and an emphasis on class struggle and “ideological class education.” See Masao Okonogi, “North Korean Communism: In Search of Its Prototype,” in Dae-Sook Suh, ed., *Korean Studies: New Pacific Currents* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), pp. 177–206, esp. 202.

Tirana Party Conference in April.⁶ This article shows that under Hoxha's tight grip Albania ultimately rejected de-Stalinization. For both internal and external reasons, Hoxha was able to vindicate his position against Yugoslavia's brand of socialism abroad, fortify his rule at home, and claim even greater aid from Moscow, Beijing, and the Soviet bloc. The outcome was curious: a country that strove toward further integration within the Communist world but without de-Stalinization. Ordinarily, de-Stalinization has been viewed as an opening, but in postwar Albania, as François Fejtö observed, Stalinism is what lifted the country from international isolation.⁷ In addition to receiving hefty Soviet loans and imported technology, PPSH leaders credited Iosif Stalin with having saved Albania from Yugoslav annexation in 1948. Rather than an opening, therefore, de-Stalinization was viewed as a major threat. In 1956, the PPSH establishment hardly distinguished between ideological and security concerns.⁸ Any modification in one direction would necessarily affect everything else (or so the party line went).⁹ Reforms at home became synonymous with a rapprochement with Josip Broz Tito, whom Hoxha had long depicted as a villain. If the Albanian leader survived these ordeals, he did so in large part because of duplicitous positioning at key moments as well as contingent events beyond his control. This complicated mix of external and internal factors, as well as bloc-level and regional dynamics, makes Albania a rare case

6. Observers of Communist Albania took note of the Tirana Party Conference and speculated on its impact on the country's foreign relations, but sources at the time were few and far between, and Hoxha's memoirs present a distorted view of the affair. For example, declassified materials support neither the allegation of a Moscow conspiracy to eliminate Hoxha in 1956 nor that of an internal coup. See Stavro Skendi, "Albania," in Stephen Kertesz, ed., *East Central Europe and the World: Developments in the Post-Stalin Era* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), pp. 197–228; Daniel Tretiak, "The Founding of the Sino-Albanian Entente," *The China Quarterly*, No. 10 (April–June 1962), pp. 123–143; Harry Hamm, *Albania—China's Beachhead in Europe* (New York: Praeger, 1963), pp. 100–101; William Griffith, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963), pp. 22–25; and Nicholas C. Pano, *The People's Republic of Albania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 117–134. In Albania, the Tirana Party Conference has generated considerable interest in recent years. Yet, despite memoirs, interviews, and recollections, systematic studies have been rare. See Ana Lalaj, "Tirana's Conference of April 1956—An Abortive Spring of Democracy in Albania," in Dan Cătănuș and Vasile Buga, eds., *Putere și societate: Lagărul comunist sub impactul destalinizării, 1956* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2006), pp. 34–63; and Demir Dyrnishi, "Konferenca e PPSH së Tiranës, shkaqe dhe rrjedhoja (Prill 1956)," *Studime historike*, No. 1–2 (2002), pp. 115–130.

7. François Fejtö, "La deviazione albanese," *Comunità*, No. 107 (1963), pp. 18–32.

8. "During Stalin's lifetime," one author wrote, "the Albanian leaders did his bidding with enthusiasm not merely because they had to, but also because the Soviet dictator's policies and methods of rule were in harmony with their own personal interests as well as with their view of Albania's national interests." See Anton Logoreci, "Albania—The Anabaptists of European Communism," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (May–June 1967), pp. 22–28, esp. 23.

9. "In effect," Fejtö recalled, "the Albanian regime was based after 1948 on a system supported by two claims: fanatical hostility against Yugoslavia and, domestically, *Stalinism to the bitter end*. To take away these foundations would be to endanger the whole regime." Fejtö, "La deviazione albanese," p. 25, emphasis added.

study for analyzing the interplay of ideology and geopolitical shifts—a combination that made socialist states “both stable and precarious, monolithic and brittle.”¹⁰

Given the paucity of archival research on postwar Albania, the narrative here generally follows a conventional chronology. Analytically, however, the article is divided into two sections. The first treats 1956 as an opportunity to look into the Albanian Communist party as an information society. A central puzzle is how rumors and speculation about Khrushchev’s speech and the ensuing de-Stalinization circulated across the country. Tracing the involvement of delegates at the Tirana Party Conference, ordinary party members in the provinces, and students enrolled in universities in Moscow, Budapest, and Warsaw reveals how the party machinery made external factors operative within Albania. The second part of the article focuses on high-level decision-making during the latter half of 1956. The violent unrest in Budapest deeply unsettled the PPSH establishment but also provided a temporary solution to the Yugoslav dilemma.

The two parts of the article are closely linked. By tracing the intersection of these themes, we can take stock of the tensions that 1956 brought to the surface—tensions that lingered for many years after the bloody intervention in Budapest. Although the article is not a social history of 1956 in Albania, the focus on the Communist party itself—top to bottom—is based on the assumption that the party was a form of society. The reasoning behind such a choice goes beyond the obvious interest in elucidating findings from newly declassified archival sources. In the context of 1956 across the Communist world, tiny Albania was both strangely unique and vastly familiar.

Edge of Empires

“Albania is the smallest and most primitive of the satellites,” a U.S. National Security Council (NSC) staff study observed in December 1953, adding that the country was also “the only one of the Soviet European satellites which is geographically isolated from the rest of the Soviet bloc.” This situation presented “a peculiar problem to the Soviet Union whose only uninterrupted access to the Albanians is by sea.”¹¹ The report correctly observes that Soviet influence in Albania was based not so much on direct military deployments as

10. Stephen Kotkin (with a contribution by Jan T. Gross), *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), p. 18.

11. NSC 174, “United States Policy toward the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” 11 December 1953, transcribed in Csaba Békés, Malcolm Byrne, and János Rainer, eds., *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2002), pp. 34–53.

on “strategic infiltration.” Western intelligence services initially considered Albania to be the best option for a rollback intervention. By 1955, however, policymakers in Washington and London had changed their minds.¹² What the NSC did not fully recognize was that Soviet infiltration in Albania was enabled by native elites, that external aid helped maintain a fragile domestic social balance, and that the small Mediterranean country had never really functioned outside the orbit of empire. As the Hungarian émigré writer Paul Lendvai noted, Albania’s independence had never been assured, and the country had “always been an economic liability to the given protector or conqueror.”¹³

The Albanian example does not fit neatly into a story of forced Sovietization from abroad and resistance from within. To say that Albania was closer to an “empire by invitation” is not to imply popular consent per se but merely to point out that distinctly local interests coincided with the rise of a Soviet-dominated camp in Europe.¹⁴ The roots of Hoxha’s party-state were native and heavily grounded among the Tosks of the south. His regime, moreover, relied extensively on structures of kinship and personal loyalties. Even a casual glance at the party-state hierarchy shows that private ownership of property was eliminated in the interest of state ownership. By the mid-1950s, the positions of PPSH First Secretary, prime minister, Central Committee head of propaganda, and Tirana party chief were all in the hands of two married couples.¹⁵ Power in socialist Albania was centralized in a small cluster of low-rise villas along the capital’s southern edge. But if this was a modern variation on “patrimonialism,” it came with access to a vast empire—the Soviet one.¹⁶ Although not everyone shared the sentiment, for many in the backward, impoverished Balkan state the Soviet empire turned out to signify nothing less than the promise of modernity.

Albania in the 1950s was a country of contradictions. Its major cities

12. By 1955, both the United States and Britain recognized Albania’s right to independence and preferred to maintain the status quo rather than risk regional complications with Greece, Italy, and Yugoslavia. See “Anglo-U.S. Attitudes to Albanian Affairs” (Confidential), February 1955, in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), Foreign Office (FO) 371/117602, R A1016/9. For a summary of U.S. strategies vis-à-vis Albania during this period, see Gati, *Failed Illusions*, pp. 86–90.

13. Paul Lendvai, *Eagles in Cobwebs: Nationalism and Communism in the Balkans* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1969), p. 179.

14. With “empire by invitation,” Geir Lundestad means the proliferation of U.S. influence in Western Europe during the first postwar decade. See Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Autumn 1986), pp. 263–277.

15. Enver Hoxha and Nexhmije Xhuglini were married on 1 January 1945 in what she would later call a “partisans’ wedding.” The marriage between Mehmet Shehu and Fiqret Sanxhaktari was similarly a product of war. See Nexhmije Hoxha, *Jeta ime me Enverin* (Tirana: Lira, 2001).

16. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

were undergoing considerable transformations, and new Soviet-designed industrial towns were springing up out of nowhere. State enterprises conspicuously replaced small shopkeepers and neighborhood markets. Yet at the same time, the state never quite managed to feed the population. White bread was a rarity; the workforce and the typically numerous peasant families survived on tough corn bread. Party slogans declared corn excellent for cattle and human beings alike, but many seem to have disagreed. "If that is so," quipped a disgraced Communist official placed under surveillance, "then why do the Soviets here demand to eat white bread?"¹⁷ Newspapers insisted that production quotas were being fulfilled, but ordinary people consumed less meat in 1953 than they had in 1949.¹⁸ For years the government talked of ending food rationing, but it persisted until October 1957. Restrictions were only partially removed for clothes and an array of industrial goods, and even then prices spiked up, worker production quotas were raised, and the popular mood turned sour.¹⁹ To make matters worse, crops fared especially poorly in 1956, forcing the government to double normal import quotas for grain to 100,000 tons. Exports were meager, lines in front of stores long. Even as the party painstakingly built a myth around the liberation war, the war for bread was far from won.

The two major goals of the decade—collectivization and industrialization—also inflicted considerable hardship on the population. Collectivization faced serious obstacles not least because of the scarcity of arable land and the mountainous terrain. Relative to most of the other Soviet-bloc countries, collectivization in Albania was slower, picking up only during the second half of the decade.²⁰ Still, by 1956 more than 8,714 landowners had been completely expropriated and roughly ten thousand others had been allowed small

17. Memorandum from the State Security Department (Sigurimi) to the PPSH CC, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, Drejtoria Administrative [Administrative Department] (DA), V. 1956, Dos. 166, Fl. 30.

18. Transcripts from meetings of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers in 1953, in AQSH, F. 490 (Council of Ministers), V. 1953, Dos. 706, Fl. 226–227.

19. Based on a conversation with the Italian minister in Tirana in late 1955, the British ambassador in Belgrade reported that foreign diplomats also struggled with daily life in the Albanian capital. "In Tirana even the most common foodstuffs were almost totally unobtainable," he observed. "There was a sort of diplomatic shop but it had no stocks, and for such common necessities as eggs and meat, etc., the black market, at very high prices, was the only practical means of supply." See Roberts to Foreign Office (Confidential), 10 December 1955, in TNAUK, FO 371/117602, R A1016/9. Partial measures to eliminate rationing in early 1956, coupled with a revision in worker categories and increased production quotas, proved deeply unpopular when a considerable number of families saw their actual earnings decline.

20. Albanian data on collective farms are compared to Soviet Foreign Ministry sources from roughly the same period. "O nekotorykh voprosakh kooperirovaniya sel'skogo khoziystva v evropeiskikh stranakh narodnoi demokrati" (Top Secret), 19 August 1955, in Rossiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii [Russian State Archive of Contemporary History] (RGANI), Fond (F.) 5, Opis' (Op.) 28, Delo (D.) 286, List (L.) 6.

parcels.²¹ Some 40 percent of the land was brought into the “socialist sector,” either in collective farms (696 by August 1956) or as part of state-owned agricultural enterprises. Not surprisingly, the popular mood on this issue was pessimistic. Security police reports reveal that as government officials exerted ever greater pressure on peasants to collectivize, increasing numbers of families begged to get out of existing collective farms.²² The other goal—building heavy industries—proceeded on borrowed money. A trial-and-error phase, also known as the first Five-Year Plan (1951–1955), led to bewildering contradictions. The Stalin Textile Complex in the confines of Tirana was one of many impressive new factories to pop up, but it produced little. Stores stocked clogs, high-priced bags, and women’s coats but offered almost no milk, meat, kerosene, or other staples. Industrial goods flowing out of the newly minted factories were generally of poor quality, something the state-owned consumer enterprises were the first to admit.²³ The reasons were manifold: a largely unskilled labor force, low-level technology, and unrealistic production quotas for little pay.

This was only part of the backdrop to the events in 1956. The first post-war decade also brought about new institutions, revised social relations, and novel practices. Schools expanded, the number of publications swelled, and the government waged a ruthless war against illiteracy. An unprecedented mobilization of people took place, as the politically suspect were ejected from cities and the young were brought into the Working Youth Union. Before anyone realized it, the party and state bureaucracy had ballooned.²⁴ In 1954 some 45,000 people reportedly were working for either the party or the government (excluding army and security forces) in a country of less than 1.4 million.²⁵

21. PPSH CC propaganda materials prepared on the occasion of conferences held on 7–8 November 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, Drejtoria e Agit-Propit [Agitprop Department] (DAP), V. 1956, Dos. 89, Fl. 49. A Soviet memorandum (in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 286, L. 34) acknowledges that local measures against alleged kulaks had “erroneously” hit hundreds of middle and poor peasants.

22. Interior Ministry memorandum on external and internal enemies in 1956 (Top Secret), 27 December 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 60, Fl. 27.

23. See, for example, a report from the Elbasan party committee (Secret), 6 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, Drejtoria e Organeve të Partisë, Rinisë dhe të Bashkimeve Profesionale—Seksioni i Informacionit [Department of Party Organs, Youth and Trade Unions—Information Section] (DOPRBP-SI), V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 168.

24. In June 1953 Lavrentii Beria reprimanded Hoxha: “not even Rockefeller or Morgan could afford to maintain such a bureaucracy.” See Hoxha’s report to the PPSH Politburo on conversations with Soviet leaders, 20–22 June 1953, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1953, Dos. 23, Fl. 1. On the 1953 Soviet recommendations to the PPSH and other Soviet bloc parties, see Mark Kramer, “The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe: Internal-External Linkages in Soviet Policy Making (Part 1),” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 3–55.

25. Mehmet Shehu in the PPSH Politburo, 4 January 1954, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1954, Dos. 4, Fl. 13. Three years later, after considerable efforts to curtail the bureaucracy and following repeated

Party ranks similarly swelled, but less than one in five members was a worker by 1956. (Appalled, Soviet officials urged Albanian leaders to bring more workers into the workers' party.) Hoxha's formidable grip on power suffered a blow after Stalin's death in March 1953, as Soviet leaders forced him to relinquish his posts as minister of foreign affairs and minister of defense. After consultations with Khrushchev a year later, he also gave up his seat as prime minister, which went to his wartime colleague Mehmet Shehu. Nevertheless, Hoxha not only persisted at the party helm but later cited this forced shuffling as irrefutable evidence that the PPSH had been among the first Communist parties to expunge the cult of personality from its ranks.

Bonds forged during the war persevered in the state security apparatus and the armed forces.²⁶ The Sigurimi (State Security) became infamous and widely feared as its ranks expanded with the graduates of a one-year training course in the Soviet Union.²⁷ Its personnel consisted mostly of war veterans who valued the opportunity to carry on the fight—and earn wages—even after the war had ended. But the security apparatus also offered almost unlimited possibilities for exploitation. By the mid-1950s, abuse within its ranks had become so rampant that the issue had to be taken up at the highest party levels.²⁸ Under party control, the Sigurimi waged a vicious war. By autumn 1956 two out of five prisoners in the country had been incarcerated for “anti-state activities.”²⁹ Yet if party leaders found it beneficial to carve the security

Soviet criticism, the number of state and party employees decreased to 25,000. Transcript of meeting between PPSH CC Secretary Hysni Kapo, Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, and head of the Chinese parliamentary delegation Peng Zhen, 16 January 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, Marrëdhëniet me Partinë Komuniste të Kinës [Relations with the CCP] (M-PKK), V. 1957, Dos. 1, Fl. 33.

26. “Under the whip of Enver Hoxha, elected general commander of 30,000 troops at the time, Albania moved from occupation straight to a dictatorship of the proletariat, under the domination of a party that in effect was, as in Yugoslavia, a revolutionary militia impatient to retaliate against old ruling classes and confiscate their properties and privileges.” See Fejtö, “La deviazione albanese,” p. 20.

27. The Sigurimi had become so notorious by 1956 that the monitored conversations it reported to the party were replete with fearful statements (and a plethora of jokes) *about the Sigurimi itself*. From 1953 to 1956 the number of persons “being processed” (*në përpunim*) by security operatives doubled (by 1959 the number had tripled), as did the number of active operatives. See the State Security Department study on anti-party groups, n.d. [most likely after 1972], in Arkivi i Ministrisë së Punëve të Brendshme [Archive of the Ministry of Interior], Tirana (AMPB), bound book, p. 97.

28. Sigurimi abuses came up in the immediate aftermath of Beria's purge in the Soviet Union. See Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 27 August 1953, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1953, Dos. 28, Fl. 26. Three years later, similar abuses were reported in a CC memorandum to the Interior Ministry (Secret), 6 January 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 160, Fl. 3–7. See also a related CC report on problems within the Interior Ministry apparatus, 6 January 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 160, Fl. 8–12. These included examples from the Zadrimë camp where inmates had reportedly been forced to carry local chiefs on their back across a river. An Interior Ministry report to the Politburo from later in 1965 mentions arbitrary executions, rape, and other instances of physical violence. In AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 60, Fl. 37.

29. Interior Ministry memorandum, in AQSH, F.14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 60, Fl. 43.

apparatus out of the wartime partisan movement, the army's fate in the post-war period was less obvious. Against Albanian hopes, Stalin advised Hoxha in 1951 not to expand the armed forces, which would be "too costly."³⁰ Facing enormous financial hurdles, PPSH leaders implored the Soviet Union in June 1954 to underwrite and maintain their entire military establishment and to supply aircraft, artillery, weapons, equipment, and clothing.³¹ Soviet shipments did not preclude further reductions in personnel, which bred discontent among officers. To make up for the shortfall in troops, the government issued weapons to more than 16,000 individuals mobilized in auxiliary defense groups.³² In January 1956, following a meeting of Communist parties in Moscow, Hoxha ordered yet another wave of demobilization.³³ These measures, too, proved deeply unpopular with military personnel.

As this overview suggests, the upheaval of the liberation war had carried into the building of socialism in the 1950s but with a crucial twist—social revolution came with access to a new system of exchange reaching across Eurasia. By 1956, Albania had received roughly a billion rubles in loans from socialist countries (more than half from the Soviet Union alone), excluding military aid. "In our country every single person owes on average one thousand rubles," Shehu explained to a Chinese delegation in 1957.³⁴ The massive descent into debt surely troubled party leaders, and it also encouraged speculation about leadership shuffling. In the vast redistribution system that was the Soviet bloc, however, PPSH leaders became increasingly deft at exploiting "socialist solidarity." As the Soviet Foreign Ministry argued in a note to Mikhail Suslov in September 1956, aid to Albania was particularly important in light of the country's overwhelming Muslim majority, its historical ties to the Middle East, and the opportunity to prop it up as an example of social and eco-

30. Hoxha's notes from 2 April 1951 meeting with Stalin, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, Marrëdhëniet me Partinë Komuniste (b) të Bashkimit Sovjetik [Relations with the CPSU] (M-PK(b)BS), V. 1951, Dos. 15, Fl. 1. Two years later, Beria warned that the Albanian army was packed with enemies, but Hoxha disagreed. By 1956, some 96 percent of army officers were party members, compared to 100 percent of personnel in the security apparatus. See Shehu's remarks to Peng, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 1, Fl. 36.

31. Report to the PPSH Politburo on conversations with the CPSU leadership, 30 June 1954, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1954, Dos. 18, Fl. 2, pp. 9–13. See also the transcript from the meeting, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PK(b)BS, V. 1954, Dos. 1, Fl. 1–9.

32. Interior Ministry memorandum, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 60, Fl. 43.

33. No transcript has surfaced of the 14 January 1956 Politburo meeting during which Hoxha reported on the meeting in Moscow. Only the subsequent decision to continue demobilization is available. See Protocol No. 3 (Top Secret), in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 30, Fl. 1.

34. Paying back all loans and interest by 1980, Shehu explained to Peng in early 1957, would entail keeping a fixed (and very low) standard of living for two and a half decades. In 1956, imports counted for twice as much as exports, so loans were used for the balance. Transcript of meeting with Peng Zhen, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 1, Fl. 33–34.

conomic development for formerly colonized peoples.³⁵ Soviet aid came with a flood of personnel, specialists, advisers, planners, and apparatchiks whom Tirana eagerly demanded and put to use.³⁶ Not since the Ottoman Empire had Albania participated in such a broad exchange of people and goods. This time, however, local elites could both exploit the riches of empire and uphold national independence. By the mid-1950s, tourists from the Soviet bloc were trickling toward the country's Mediterranean shores, and young Albanians were showing up for university classes in Prague, Warsaw, Moscow, and Leningrad. In May 1955 the country became a founding member of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. When Hoxha repeatedly referred in public to the Soviet Union as the country's savior, his point must have seemed like a statement of the obvious to ordinary Albanians.³⁷

The Party Is the Party's Enemy

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the history of the Soviet bloc is just how quickly Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, delivered in Moscow on 25 February, became a conversation topic everywhere.³⁸ This might seem less surprising in the case of, say, Poland rather than Albania, where party leaders remained highly secretive.³⁹ Still, the me-

35. Soviet and Albanian sources do not always agree on numbers, depending on whether "special credits" are included. After the Soviet Union, the highest contributor in 1956 was Czechoslovakia followed by Romania and Hungary. "O polozhenii s ispol'zovaniem kreditov, predostavlyayemykh Albanii Sovetskim Soyuzom i stranami narodnov demokratii" (Secret), 24 September 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 194–195.

36. Beyond the Soviet advisers, Albanian institutions communicated with their Soviet counterparts initially via the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS). For examples, see the VOKS report in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation], Moscow (GARF), F. 5283, Op. 17, D. 38, Ll. 7, 14–15. In less than six years, the Soviet Union completed eighteen industrial projects, including textile mills, a cement factory, and a sugar processing plant.

37. In reference to Soviet control, the British ambassador to Belgrade observed that the Albanians "resented this less than might have been expected." He added, "The ruling group of course needed Russian support, and the country at large was not strongly anti-Russian because Russia was a long way away and was less hated than such neighboring and frequently hostile countries as Yugoslavia and Greece." See Roberts to FO (Confidential), 10 December 1955, in TNAUK, FO 371/ 117602, R A1016/9.

38. William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: Norton, 2003), pp. 270–299; Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 60–87; and Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 54. For reactions in China to the secret speech, see Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 47–53.

39. Hoxha's report to the PPSH Politburo is contained in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 34.

chanics underlying the circulation of rumors tell us a great deal about how Soviet-bloc societies were structured. Despite concerted efforts to keep Khrushchev's speech secret, PPSH leaders were confronted with the curious, if equally distressing, realization that the party machinery itself was facilitating the diffusion of "anti-party" rumors. Eavesdropping on a Western radio broadcast or getting wind of a Yugoslav news bulletin surely helped. No Soviet newspaper correspondents lived in Tirana, and whatever the TASS news agency sent through came in after ten at night, too late to be translated in time to counter Western radio broadcasts the following day.⁴⁰ But once news became available to some, the party ensured dissemination. Like the nervous system running through the body, the party was essential in controlling and transmitting all sorts of crucial information, but it could be equally effective in spreading shocks and provoking seizures. The system was formidable yet fragile and was immensely difficult to control.

Hoxha was initially determined to keep Khrushchev's speech secret. Although he summarized it at a Politburo meeting after he returned from Moscow, he ordered delegates at the Seventeenth Plenum on 2 March to close their notebooks and pocket their pencils.⁴¹ "This matter," he instructed them, "will stay here and will not leave this room because nothing will be told to the party about it."⁴² He proceeded to give a summary of the report "from memory" but going into some detail on Stalin's assorted wrongdoings. Utter confusion engulfed those who heard Hoxha's remarks. What would happen next? Hoxha uttered something vague about drawing valuable lessons from the CPSU. He also reminded delegates that the party was above everyone and everything. As for the ubiquitous and gigantic portraits of party leaders on display everywhere, he clarified that "they still have them in the Soviet Union" but that they might consider emphasizing Lenin from then onward.⁴³ Accordingly, Stalin's name disappeared from official pronouncements over the following weeks. The party base, however, received no special directives or instructions. Even when the CPSU resolutions finally reached Albanian party activists, local members were not allowed to ask questions. Neither was the plenum's resolution made public. Nevertheless, within a matter of weeks, despite the secrecy and foot-dragging, the whole party apparatus was caught up in the

40. Memoranda of conversations on 30 March and 4 April 1956 between Soviet embassy counselor M. Ya. Khoshev and *Zëri i Popullit* editor-in-chief Fadil Paçrami (Secret), 14–16 April 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 29, D. 391, Ll. 9–12.

41. Transcript of the meeting of the PPSH Politburo, 29 February 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 34, Fl. 8–20.

42. Transcript of the Seventeenth Plenum of the CC of the Second PPSH Congress, 2 March 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 24, Fl. 15.

43. *Ibid.*, Fl. 28.

fever of the Twentieth Congress. If anything, the party establishment's tactics provoked even more curiosity and speculation among the rank-and-file.

How the central apparatus expected to keep the matter secret was far from clear. For months the Central Committee had mobilized the party base in preparation for the CPSU Congress, pressuring members to read related party documents and "increase correspondence with Soviet collectives."⁴⁴ As the Soviet embassy in Tirana informed Moscow, Albanian newspapers and radio stations covered the Soviet Party Congress in detail, and the print run of the resolutions was in the thousands. Even those who were suspicious of Western sources, as one witness observed, were glued to their radios.⁴⁵ The party's elaborate propaganda efforts made secrecy almost impossible.⁴⁶ Even as Khrushchev was lambasting Stalin in Moscow, a report from the Berat party committee noted that local party members were raising questions about the conspicuous absence of Stalin's name in the incoming reports from Moscow.⁴⁷ By the first week in March, a considerable mass of the party base was aware of Khrushchev's speech.⁴⁸ What also thwarted any attempt at secrecy was the ongoing mobilization for the PPSH's own Third Party Congress, scheduled for later that spring. Across the country, party organizations were in the middle of electing delegates and filing reports. Party ranks had therefore been doubly mobilized—in cities, villages, factories, and enterprises—by the time rumors of Khrushchev's speech reached Albania. Most of the party gatherings leading up to the PPSH congress were uneventful. But one, the Tirana Party Conference, turned into a tumultuous affair. Because the party later launched detailed investigations into the matter, the conference can be reconstructed in considerable detail.⁴⁹

44. CC memorandum to regional [*qark*] and district [*rreth*] party committees, 21 January 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DAP, V. 1956, Dos. 89, Fl. 5. That same month party members reportedly gathered to read the draft directives of the Twentieth Party Congress. See regional party committee reports contained in AQSH, F.14/AP, DAP, V. 1956, Dos. 96, Fl. 2–20.

45. Peço Kagjini, *Konferenca e Tiranës e prillit 1956: kujtime, refleksione dhe meditime* (Tirana: n.pub., 1999), p. 40.

46. "Ob izuchenii i obsuzhdenii materialov i reshenii XX S"ezda KPSS v Albanskoi Partii Truda" (Secret), 14 June 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 74–75.

47. Report from the Berat party committee on questions raised about the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU (Top Secret), 25–27 February 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, DAP, V. 1956, Dos. 96, Fl. 22. In a matter of weeks, Stalin almost entirely disappeared from newspaper and magazine covers. The April cover of *Miqësia* (Friendship), a monthly publication of the Albanian-Soviet Friendship Society, prominently displayed a portrait of Vladimir Lenin. In the issue's lead article, Nexhmije Hoxha wrote effusively about the "historic decisions" of the Twentieth Party Congress. See Nexhmije Hoxha, "Vendime historike," *Miqësia*, No. 4 (April 1956), p. 1.

48. See the report from the Korçë district party committee on the elaboration of materials of the Twentieth Party Congress, 7 March 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DAP, V. 1956, Dos. 96, Fl. 25–6.

49. Party and security police investigations were tailored to support the charge of an anti-establishment conspiracy at the Tirana Party Conference. Nevertheless, they incidentally provide useful in-

The Tirana Party Conference took place in a climate of growing grievances over the country's economy. While official rhetoric was boastful, rationing persisted and hunger was rampant. A major source of discontent was the perceived luxury of the party elite: an off-limits residential enclave composed of one-family villas, chauffeured service cars, and exclusive stores, clinics, and kindergartens.⁵⁰ The echelons of the Central Committee, moreover, included more than a handful of married couples at a time when party directives sternly warned enterprises against employing married couples for fear of "fraternization" (*familjaritet*). Whether rooted in intense jealousy or honest outrage, resentment against elite perquisites was real and palpable. The concern was not so much that the Bllok, the exclusive residential area where Politburo members snatched up real estate, was an island of conspicuous affluence.⁵¹ (Communist elites were invariably afflicted by a ghastly sense of style.) Rather, the evident hardship that surrounded the Bllok and turned into galling misery the farther one traveled from the capital made elite privileges a constant subject of speculation. Perhaps in some of the other people's democracies the sight of a chauffeured car carrying the First Secretary's wife, or the idea of housemaids and personal chefs, would have been less jarring. But the effect was markedly different in a country lacking enough buses and trucks to effectively transport people, building materials, and imported goods—and where many still lived in barracks.

Discontent in 1950s Albania was not geographically bound. So why did it erupt in the capital? In large measure, this was because Tirana granted close proximity to the two "blocks": the bourgeois Bllok of Politburo homes and the Soviet bloc. Those most likely to be informed on the evolving situation abroad, and thus also more likely to bring up grievances, were relatively well-placed functionaries in the country's chief state agencies in the capital. Disgruntled former landowners, hostile highlander chiefs, and revengeful fallen party cadres did not foment these early discussions. Rather, they originated with intellectual types, heads of departments, and Central Committee rank-and-file, as well as officials in industry and trade, the radio network, the

sights into the techniques and operations of the party apparatus, such as the invention of enemies, the preparation of purges, and the recounting of a "correct party line."

50. See, for example, a report from the party organization of the Ministry of Industry, 30 April 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 37. Rumors about elite privileges had circulated before 1956. For example, members of the party organization of Albanian students in Sofia, Bulgaria, brought them up as early as 1954. Report to the CC from Bedri Spahiu, head of the Albanian delegation to Prague and Budapest, 22 January 1955, in AQSH, F.14/AP, Seksioni Agitacionit [Agitation Section], V. 1955, Dos. 173, Fl. 15.

51. Party members explicitly complained about provisions allowing functionaries to purchase food-stuffs and hard-to-obtain items (frequently at lower prices) in special off-limit stores. For the origins of the Bllok, see the Council of Ministers decision No. 735 on land and housing appropriations, 15 November 1952, in AQSH, F. 490, V. 1952, Dos. 1120, Fl. 56.

Soviet-built film studio (New Albania), the Higher Party School, and the party newspaper. The disgruntled were party associates who enjoyed direct access to foreign media outlets. Some who worked for the “foreign affairs” (meaning Soviet bloc) sections of the various branch ministries and enterprises. They constituted, in short, Albania’s ties to the socialist world.

Some of them had even studied in other socialist countries, notably the USSR. The situation was ironic: The most vocal critics of the establishment turned out to be graduates of universities and short-term training programs in the Soviet Union. The Soviet embassy in Tirana struck an almost embarrassed note when relaying such facts to Moscow. These were people who owed their careers and plum appointments in large part to their Soviet credentials. Whence their “anti-party turn”? Party authorities claimed to know the answer. They explained to Soviet officials that Albania at the end of the war lacked a working class. Given planning and staffing needs, state officials had been forced to send the children of the former bourgeoisie abroad for training. But this generation had supposedly failed to integrate fully into Soviet life. To make matters worse, Albanian authorities admitted having neglected to conduct any “educational work” (*vospitatei’noi raboty*) with them following their return.⁵² As with every kind of effective manipulation, this account contained some truth. Postwar Albania had almost no working class. In the early 1950s local authorities almost blindly promoted Soviet-trained youths, a telling insight into how Sovietization unfolded. But, if anything, events in April 1956 revealed just how effectively these young men and women had been integrated into Soviet—and party—life. Back in Albania, some of them listened to Western radio broadcasts and begrudged superiors or other party apparatchiks.⁵³ In this, too, they replicated professional scuffles typical of socialist systems. Their anti-establishment criticism in light of Khrushchev’s blow to Stalin did not come from a supposedly enduring bourgeois consciousness; it was an act of faith.

Once information about the Twentieth Party Congress made its way into party circles, it circulated quickly. Confidential one-on-one conversations escalated into full-blown discussions among like-minded party colleagues. Where else could such matters have been discussed? What other association could have competed with the party? Spontaneous exchanges emboldened

52. “Ob izuchenii,” n.d., in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 81–82.

53. Many listened regularly to the Voice of America as well as radio broadcasts from Bari (Italy), Athens, Belgrade, and Rome. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was also a favorite, and officials at the British Foreign Office were well aware of this (as were the Italians). The British Foreign Office even passed on suggestions to the BBC about how to present international news (like the Mau Mau uprising) to an Albanian audience. See Foreign Office minutes and report on conversation between Selby and Bachetti, 15 April 1955, in TNAUK, FO 371/117605, RA10338/2.

party members to bring up the possibility of reforms, in line with what was taking place in Poland and Hungary. Some complained that party meetings entirely ignored Moscow's resolutions or other momentous changes, such as improved relations with Yugoslavia. The most embittered then decided to raise these questions in their local party organizations. Upon hearing about this, others followed suit. They went back to their workplaces and urged their colleagues to address problems such as the crippled economy and the "cult of personality" in "the spirit of the Twentieth Party Congress." When delegates were chosen for the upcoming Tirana Party Conference, they promised to bring up these issues there as well.⁵⁴

These scattered conversations were later woven together as evidence of an organized conspiracy. In Romania, such exchanges were called "unprincipled discussions."⁵⁵ In Albania, they were "conversations beyond party channels." The only facts brought forward (and only internally) to support the charges of a conspiracy were limited to observations that these officials all shared "opinions and intentions" and that a few of them had known and met each other before.⁵⁶ They were guilty, in other words, of party socialization. But none of these early exchanges were unknown to district and city party bosses. Yet they did not take any decisive steps to censor them, something Hoxha later identified as an egregious oversight. But if this had been merely an oversight, it would have hardly caused a storm. Rather, this chain of events provided evidence, yet again, that the party apparatus produced many of its own problems. Focused on external enemies and consumed with its own privileges, it had grown overconfident, neglecting a crucial detail: The party was its own enemy.

Storm in April

The Tirana Party Conference convened on 14 April in a movie theater called The Worker. Hoxha was on vacation in the southern coastal city of Vlorë, but his presence in the capital was widely felt. On the first day of the proceedings, *Zëri i Popullit* carried a lengthy article penned by the PPSH leader, who admit-

54. Reports from party organizations at the Ministry of Industry, Kinostudio, and Radio Tirana, 30 April 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 31; Records from 5 May 1956, Fl. 42; and the discussion of the events leading to the Tirana Party Conference in the PPSH Politburo, 17 April 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 39, Fl. 6–10.

55. Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 147.

56. Concluding report from the Tirana party committee on elaboration of the resolution of the Tirana Party Conference and the Third PPSH Congress, 4 August 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 124.

ted to past transgressions and abuses, especially in the immediate postwar years. Remarkably, the article offered full support for Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin and implied at least some revision in ongoing class-based policies; it was an unprecedented public stand. As if to balance the admission of excesses, however, Hoxha also warned that those who threatened the party's hold on power would face the full impact of the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁵⁷ Exactly what motivated the piece remains unclear, but the timing was impeccable. Whether clever bait, a calculated warning, or neither, the article emboldened many of the Tirana party delegates. Some explicitly mentioned it in their speeches.⁵⁸ The article seemed to confirm rumors circulating among party cadres that Hoxha himself was not averse to reforms but was under pressure from a circle of staunch Stalinists around him.⁵⁹ The image of Hoxha as a moderate has escaped outside observers of Albanian affairs but was in fact carefully nurtured with public pronouncements and calculated interventions.

If Hoxha's article seemed promising, the speech delivered on the first day by Tirana party secretary Fiqret Shehu was utterly ordinary. After she was finished, the audience turned noticeably agitated. Where were the issues brought up at the Twentieth Party Congress in Moscow? Where was the critical assessment of the Central Committee's work? Why did party chiefs, whose spouses avoided manual labor (if they worked at all), enjoy special perks? What about the bleak economic outlook? Why had relations with Yugoslavia stalled?⁶⁰ Ignoring Shehu's report altogether, delegates took the floor one by one to raise a series of hard-hitting questions about Politburo privileges, nepotism, wages, and purges. Recent press accounts and published post-1991 recollections have often painted a heroic picture of those speaking at the meeting, but not all participants targeted the establishment and not all questions were driven by a reformist zeal. Transcripts show that a number of delegates took aim at colleagues, sought penalties for fellow functionaries they referred to by name, and confronted the party leadership for not being punitive enough. This was, after all, a Communist party. Still, intraparty vendettas and small politics were eclipsed by calls to embrace the Twentieth Soviet Party Congress.

These interventions came as a shocking surprise. Shehu awkwardly

57. Enver Hoxha, "Marksizëm-Leninizmi mëson se populli është krijues i historisë," *Zëri i Popullit* (Tirana), 14 April 1956, p. 1.

58. Kagjini, *Konferenca e Tiranës*, pp. 83–85.

59. Report from the Durrës party committee, 21 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 114. The report notes the circulation of these rumors.

60. Official party accounts later framed these questions as evidence of an organized conspiracy, but records from the Tirana Party Conference show how openly they had been raised across party ranks. Transcript of proceedings from the Tirana Party Conference, n.d., in AQSH, F. 2/AP (Tirana Party Committee), V. 1956, Dos. 1/1, Fl. 117–140.

cluded most of the questions by addressing only party organizational matters. Responsibility fell entirely on Beqir Balluku, the Central Committee representative who served as the other chair. His responses were invariably inadequate—such and such question was unfair, the rest were dubious, for everything else they ought to wait for the party congress. A man of mediocre intellect, Balluku proved no match for the party delegates. (Years later, he was deemed to have been an enemy all along. The so-called Tirana conference plot thickened even further.) Some delegates were amused by his hollow responses, others aggravated. Adriatik Kanani of the *Zëri i Popullit* party organization and Veip Demi of Radio Tirana brought up censorship. Articles by Hungarian leader Mátyás Rákosi and Italian party boss Palmiro Togliatti, they complained, had been published only in part. Similarly, when Radio Tirana had broadcast an article by Polish Central Committee Secretary Jerzy Morawski, the PPSH CC had reprimanded the radio.⁶¹ Vandush Vinçani, a high-ranking party official responsible for propaganda, argued against Balluku's insistence that calling Stalin "a despot" was wrong. Khrushchev himself, Vinçani pointed out, had done as much.⁶² Later that evening, Mehmet Shehu nervously tracked down the Soviet ambassador, L. I. Krylov, and informed him that the conference had gotten completely out of hand. Some delegates had gone so far as to suggest that the Yugoslavs lived well whereas the Albanians were worse off than in 1946. The two agreed to intervene "quietly and carefully, without accusing anyone of hostility."⁶³ Later that night, Hoxha was summoned from Vlorë.

The party leader was given an enthusiastic welcome on the second day. Hoxha's strategy was to allow the most ardent critics to present their grievances before dealing them a direct blow. In his speech he made clear that the conference had taken the wrong path. Nevertheless, he managed to appear restrained and reconciliatory. He admitted to manifestations of the cult of personality and conceded that the PPSH had not rushed to embrace the Twentieth Party Congress resolutions. But the PPSH was not supposed to "parrot" (*shabllonizëm*) the other people's democracies, he asserted. For instance, Hungarian Interior Minister László Rajk had been executed on trumped-up charges, but Koçi Xoxe, the Albanian interior minister, had actually conspired against the party and had been rightly punished.⁶⁴ As for Yugoslavia, the Albanians were ready to put the past aside and move forward. To make this ap-

61. *Ibid.*, Fl. 169, 175–176.

62. *Ibid.*, Fl. 194.

63. Memorandum of conversations on 14–15 April 1956 between Krylov and Shehu (Secret), 8 May 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 26–27.

64. Koçi Xoxe, minister of interior and Central Committee secretary from 1945 through 1948, was ousted at the first party congress in 1948 for "deviationism" and was executed in 1949.

proach even more convincing, Hoxha lashed out at his wife for employing a chauffeur to drive her to work.⁶⁵

Neither his presence nor his tone deterred delegates like Iljaz Ahmeti from going back to concerns over Politburo privileges. Each Central Committee member, Ahmeti claimed, cost the state one million lekë per year. His accusation infuriated Hoxha, who aggressively responded. "That, of course, was somewhat rough on my part," he later explained to the Soviet ambassador, "but to allow such demagoguery, especially given the mood of the conference, would have been impermissible."⁶⁶ Ahmeti, however, struck back, reminding Hoxha that eighteen members of the Central Committee were related by blood or marriage.⁶⁷ A recently demobilized army major, Ahmeti had made no secret of his grievances. As later investigations confirmed, including party reports from army defense units, he had openly spoken to his colleagues about the Twentieth Party Congress as well as about his views on the PPSH leadership. Not only that: Ahmeti's colleagues had openly supported him. As one of them later acknowledged to party investigators, "those days we too got involved in all that commotion and said, for example, that they were right on these issues, that they were rightly bringing up economic concerns." Others had gone so far as to demand that Stalin's portraits be removed from their offices.⁶⁸

In crushing dissent, Hoxha depicted Ahmeti and his colleagues as a handful of rotten cadres. These were, he warned, assaults organized by a few, not the grievances of many. When reassuring Krylov about his ability to normalize the conference, he also took care to depict the episode as an organized plot to oust the party leadership. While seeming reconciliatory at the conference, he appeared unapologetic in front of Krylov. The PPSH leadership had acted correctly in not distributing Khrushchev's secret speech, he insisted. As evidence, he invited the ambassador to look to the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Hungary, and Poland, where "comrades took it upon themselves to widely publicize all the issues and questions about the cult." Such a principled stand had come at a price. He told Krylov that "some of our workers got the impression that we were keeping silent on the issue of the cult, though everyone knows that already in 1954, based on the example of the CPSU, our party

65. Enver Hoxha's speech at the Tirana Party Conference, 15 April 1956, in AQSH, F. 2/AP, V. 1956, Dos. 1/1, Fl. 197–215.

66. Memorandum of conversation on 16 April 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha (Secret), 8 May 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 17.

67. Transcript of proceedings, in AQSH, F. 2/AP, V. 1956, Dos. 1/1, Fl. 236.

68. Notes from the meeting of the party organization of the Marine Defense Command on the internal letter of the PPSH CC, 24 April 1956, n.d., in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 189.

carried out significant measures to eliminate the cult of personality from our country, so that now we can only speak of minor vestiges.”⁶⁹ On Yugoslavia, he admitted that the issue was “sensitive,” but he relegated Albanian mistakes to the machinations of Lavrentii Beria’s gang. Tirana was ready to foster better relations. Hoxha’s efficient handling of the proceedings impressed Krylov, who reported to Moscow that the Albanian leader seemed firm, confident, hardly nervous.⁷⁰

The blow came swiftly the next day. Hoxha warned that the party would crush all those who sought to harm it. As a witness later recalled, when the delegates heard the ominous reference to “enemies,” they sank into their seats.⁷¹ As Hoxha’s tone grew increasingly virulent, the delegates who had kept silent up to that point joined the condemning chorus. All dissenters from the previous two days were forced to undergo self-criticism. The conference effectively turned into a vicious trial. Trying to fend off charges of a conspiracy, delegates insisted that they had first brought up their concerns in their local party organizations, but to no avail.⁷² Hoxha called a Politburo meeting later that night and opened it in a menacing tone. He noted that the events at the Tirana Party Conference had been carefully planned to revise the party line and topple the leadership. He blamed city party bosses as well as the central apparatus. How was it, he fumed, “that a situation like this could have been brewing for two–three months already, since the Twentieth Congress; that political issues have been approached in this spirit and these connections have been made; and that these people [the central party apparatus] do not even know about it?” Hoxha denounced “fraternization” within the central party apparatus and lashed out at Shehu’s wife for “lack of vigilance” and at his own wife, Nexhmije, who was head of party propaganda.⁷³ “Fraternization,” seemingly, was permissible only at the very top.

69. Memorandum of conversation on 16 April 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 18–19.

70. *Ibid.*, Ll. 19–20.

71. Sigurimi memorandum to the PPSH CC (Top Secret), 21 November 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, V.1956, Dos. 166, Fl. 43; and Kagjini, *Konferenca e Tiranës*, pp. 104–113.

72. Hoxha’s interventions at the Tirana Party Conference were published in Albania for the first time in 1973 as part of his collected works. See “Ata që nuk e duan të mirën e Partisë nuk do t’i lemë të veprojnë: Partinë duhet ta mbrojmë,” in *Vëpra*, Vol. 13, *September 1955–June 1956* (Tirana: Naim Frashëri, 1973), pp. 202–237. The earliest detailed account of the Tirana Party Conference abroad was published abroad in the last of a series of articles on Albania in the Yugoslav press in 1961. Dragutin Solajic, “Recite cinjenice,” *Borba* (Belgrade), 19–22 March 1961, p. 2 (same title and page in all issues). The articles, which contained numerous hitherto unknown details, constitute the basis for later Western accounts. A major army general and party official, Panajot Plaku, escaped to Yugoslavia in May 1957 and furnished brief comments on PPSH affairs to the Yugoslav press in 1961.

73. Transcript of the meeting of the PPSH Politburo, 17 April 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 39, Fl. 1–2.

Hoxha denounced not so much the content of the allegations as the fact that such views had not been stamped out at the root. Echoing the criticism voiced by speakers at the Tirana conference, he concluded that the party apparatus had grown detached from the rest of society. He claimed that no parallels could be drawn between events unfolding in the people's democracies and what was going on in Albania. The PPSH had no need to revise past positions and was therefore not acting against the rest of the socialist camp. At the Tirana Party Conference, similarly, Hoxha had told delegates that Albania, like the People's Republic of China (PRC) and North Korea, had nothing to revise. Those who expected Albania to follow others, Hoxha said, did "not know the specifics of the issues we deal with here." Xoxe was no Rajk, so no rehabilitation would be forthcoming.⁷⁴ Hoxha conceded that they might need to "look again at some of the decisions of the CC against Communists, especially against former members of the CC, to see whether they have been fair, in case there have been any mistakes."⁷⁵ However, this proved to be a formal commitment designed to silence any lingering opposition ahead of the Third Party Congress.⁷⁶

The episode proved useful for Hoxha. In the short term, it allowed him to screen delegates carefully for the congress, at which he was resoundingly confirmed in a choreographed show of resolve in front of the Soviet envoy, Petr Pospelov.⁷⁷ In his speech, Hoxha noted that "events in the Soviet Union" as well as measures taken by other fraternal parties in releasing prisoners had provided fertile ground for anti-party conspiracies.⁷⁸ In the long term, too, the episode proved useful in defending a hardline approach both domestically and in foreign policy. Hoxha told Krylov that from that point onward all party appointments would be carefully screened and only the most loyal promoted.⁷⁹ Tirana's Party Conference had greatly disturbed him, he admitted, but at least it had played out behind closed doors. What he meant was that an open display of dissent at the PPSH Congress would have been immensely more damaging. In any case, the party had now identified the enemies among

74. *Ibid.*, Fl. 3/1.

75. *Ibid.*, Fl. 4/1–5.

76. The conference's resolution (in AQSH, F. 2/AP, V. 1956, Dos. 1/1, Fl. 91–94) blamed the outcome on a group of "rotten elements" and called for measures to enforce collectivization at the district level and to bring about improvements in housing construction.

77. Hoxha later claimed that Pospelov pressured him to rehabilitate Xoxe, but no evidence has emerged to bear out this claim.

78. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 17 April 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, OU, V.1956, Dos. 39, Fl. 4/1.

79. "Ob izuchenii," in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 81–82.

its ranks. “We have information,” Hoxha went on, “that the plan against the CC was strongly fueled by certain officials of the Yugoslav mission.”⁸⁰ The same intelligence officials who had missed the alleged conspiracy at the Tirana Party Conference had now managed, somehow, to identify the Yugoslav culprits in less than three days.⁸¹ No matter how improbable, Hoxha’s maneuver proved useful, and Moscow picked up on the idea that Yugoslavia was behind the Tirana Party Conference.

Word of the commotion in Tirana quickly got around the country. As with Khrushchev’s secret speech, the party infrastructure made this possible. Unlike with Khrushchev’s speech, however, no foreign radios or published bulletins transmitted the information. Even so, the word got out with astonishing efficiency. Exhaustive reports and investigations carried out over several months reveal the extent to which rumors and word of mouth spread quickly across party ranks. In the majority of cases, party officials, correspondents, or officers who happened to be on duty in the capital in April brought the rumors back with them upon returning to their hometowns. This is a testament to the level of social mobilization within the relatively young party by the mid-1950s. In achieving it, the party relied heavily on local community bonds and interpersonal relationships. Under other circumstances, the party thrived on the corruption and exploitation of such relationships, through the introduction of informants or choreographed rumor campaigns. In this case, however, the routinely effective party techniques seemed to go against the aims of the party leadership.⁸²

The punitive measures of the Central Committee came in waves. Some were expelled from the party.⁸³ Several ended up arrested, banished, or in the clutches of the Sigurimi (presented with the “choice” of serving as informants or facing persecution, quite a few took up the offer). In accordance with Hoxha’s instructions, such measures were taken “quietly.” Party members in

80. Memorandum of conversation on 20 April 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha (Secret), 8 May 1956, in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 22.

81. The Sigurimi admitted having failed to analyze available information, maintaining that evidence had been there all along. See State Security Department study on anti-party groups, p. 165.

82. See, for example, reports on rumors about the Tirana Party Conference from party committees in Lushnje, 17 April 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 6; in Berat (Top Secret), 18 April 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 7–8; and in Fier (Top Secret), 20 April 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 9–10. On the role of on-duty officers in informally disseminating information, see the correspondence between the Krujë party committee and the PPSH CC (Top Secret), n.d., in AQSH, F.14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 188.

83. These included Nafiz Bezhani, Ihsan Budo, Veip Demi, Zija Dibra, Qamil Disha, Pëllumb Dishnica, Peço Fidhi, Hiqmet Garbi, Pajo Islami, Niazi Jaho, Dhora Leka, Gjovalin Luka, Marie Luka, Dali Ndreu, Foni Qirko, Viktor Stratobërdha, Nesti Zoto, and Ibrahim Zverku. Twenty-nine others received “various kinds of penalties.”

the armed forces were shuffled around, and the propaganda apparatus underwent personnel changes.⁸⁴ In April and May alone, some 993 officers from the defense and police units were released from duty and “assigned” to various jobs around the country.⁸⁵ Without officially acknowledging so, the Central Committee also instructed Tirana party officials to address the pervasive housing shortage in the capital, curtail the burgeoning bureaucracy, and take stock of local organizational problems.⁸⁶ As a notable (and Soviet-trained) lawyer confidentially informed a Soviet envoy in the aftermath of the conference, Tirana’s intelligentsia was terrified and dared not speak. Among those charged as party enemies, he insisted, “were some very good people” driven by the purest of intentions.⁸⁷ The pressure on them steadily mounted. Hoxha lashed out at the Sigurimi—a tactic he would frequently employ to highlight the party’s dominant role vis-à-vis the security apparatus—and a surge in security police activity against alleged anti-party elements ensued.⁸⁸

On 21 April, the Central Committee sent an internal letter to all rank-and-file party members explaining the events at the Tirana Party Conference.⁸⁹ Soon thereafter, party organizations mobilized in an effort to identify and counter suspicious attitudes within their ranks. Remarkably, even during these somber meetings, some got up to complain about Central Committee privileges and their own everyday lives of hardship.⁹⁰ This was espe-

84. On the army measures, see the report from the Ministry of People’s Defense on the elaboration of confidential CC letter (Secret), 17 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 98–99.

85. Report from the Administrative Department of the PPSH CC, n.d. [hand-dated 9 June 1956], in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA (Foreign Section), V. 1956, Dos. 192, Fl. 5.

86. Concluding report from the Tirana party committee on the elaboration of the resolution of the Tirana Party Conference and the Third PPSH Congress, 4 August 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 121–145.

87. Jusuf Alibali later remarked that if he had attended the Tirana Party Conference, he might have criticized the party in much the same way. This did not mean he harbored anti-party feelings in his soul, he insisted to a Soviet diplomat, but that severe everyday living conditions in the country necessitated much-needed reforms. “Zapis’ besedy” (Secret), 8 June 1956, 12 June 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 114.

88. Top-secret surveillance records from March–May 1956 are contained in the correspondence between the Interior Ministry, the Sigurimi, and the PPSH CC, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 166. On the surge in “processing” (*përpunime*) and informers, see also the State Security Department study on anti-party groups, pp. 166–167.

89. Internal letter of the PPSH CC (Top Secret), 21 April 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 12–15. That same day, Hoxha explained the incident to representatives of other socialist countries. He informed them that no revision of past charges against Xoxe would be made. See Tirana (GDR embassy) to Berlin (CC of SED, Abt. Außenpolitik), 3 May 1956, sent to the Politburo and Ulbricht, in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR [Foundation Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the GDR] (SAPMO), DY30/IV2/20/100, 1–2.

90. See, for example, the memorandum on the 24 April meeting of the party organization of the First Battalion, First Regiment (Mechanized), 26 April 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 26–27. A party member working for the Ministry of People’s Defense admitted he had

cially true in party units within the army. As local party bosses reported, some of the questions were “almost identical to those of the persons criticized in the letter.”⁹¹ These meetings uniformly embraced the measures taken in Tirana and almost as uniformly denounced the work of the “ill-disposed elements” that had allegedly masterminded the conspiracy. Although some claimed not to have fully understood what had transpired, or pretended not to have understood, the majority seemed knowledgeable. This category fell roughly into two groups: those who had more or less openly supported the criticism voiced at the Tirana Party Conference but now found themselves on the defensive; and those who saw a fresh opportunity to launch personal attacks against the first group. The party made possible the appropriation and local reproduction of the episode.

During these party meetings, some also inadvertently exposed contradictions and inconsistencies in the Central Committee’s position. “How was it possible,” one question went, “to so effectively uncover all of this hostile anti-party activity when almost the whole local apparatus in Tirana seems to have been in error?” Or this: “Why does the letter say that these elements exploited our party’s internal democracy?” The “party’s internal democracy,” this person went on, “allows every Communist to say whatever is on their mind.”⁹² Others asked why high-level officials got off lightly (the Politburo decided merely to demote Shehu’s wife to deputy party secretary at a time when others fared considerably worse).⁹³ Precisely how many of these questions were genuine and how many were deliberate provocations to test the party base is impossible to say. Officials took note of each question asked, and Central Committee bureaucrats passed the information on to their superiors. To justify themselves, if only slightly, local party chiefs noted that their constituents were “uncultivated,” “politically immature,” or “overly curious.”

Curiosity may have been pervasive, but something else was going on as well. In the months following the Tirana Party Conference members across

“thought the party would rehabilitate Koçi Xoxe just like Rajk.” A major with the air defense command, on the other hand, argued that the country’s economic troubles stemmed from the fact that Albanian and Soviet officials “lacked experience in administration.” The Germans, he observed, “are an entirely different story; they actually know how to lead.” To support his claim, the major cited the successful example of a Vlorë factory run by GDR specialists.

91. Report from the Durrës executive committee, 21 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 114.

92. Report from the Shkodër party committee, 15 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 90.

93. One party member in Vlorë stated that the light punishment meted out to Shehu’s wife was directly linked to her husband’s position as Politburo member and head of government. Report from the Vlorë party committee (Secret), 5 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 46. The same issue was brought up in Krujë (Top Secret), 5 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 49; and Berat (Secret), 10 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 69–71.

the country did something the leadership in Tirana found perplexing: they closely engaged with what was taking place across the Soviet bloc. For years the party propaganda apparatus had vigorously promoted the other Soviet-bloc countries among ordinary Albanians: daily newspaper reports about flourishing Czechoslovak industries and Bulgarian kolkhozes; plays, radio bulletins, and folk music marathons; films and documentaries that traveled to remote villages and factories; endless lectures, gatherings, and exhibitions. Now that inhabitants were actually paying attention to the rest of Eastern Europe, the establishment grew alarmed. As meeting records reveal, ordinary people often interpreted far-away events using local examples with which they were familiar, such as the woes of collectivization, relentless shortages, or some spiteful local party hack. Even the dramatic conclusion of the Tirana Party Conference did not necessarily drown all hopes of change and reform, though it did silence intellectuals. As rumors about developments in the other people's democracies spread across the country throughout summer and early autumn, hopes revived and speculation peaked.

By May, peasants in the villages around Shkodër simply assumed the kulaks would disappear. Reports spread of an imminent rapprochement with Yugoslavia, news that purportedly caused some to rejoice that Albania would "become like Yugoslavia."⁹⁴ In villages in Elbasan and near Gramsh, local party organizations quickly moved to rehabilitate the area's kulaks (there was even talk of village-wide celebratory dinners and loud drinking sprees).⁹⁵ In other villages, too, kulaks assumed that they would soon be rehabilitated. Peasants in Elbasan had gone so far as to write a letter to the Central Committee asking that their local collective farm be abolished.⁹⁶ Party members were reportedly also taking great liberty in interpreting the "cult of personality." Farmers in Librazhd, for example, routinely confronted their superiors for showing symptoms of "the cult." In one village, the local party boss accused the collective farm's chief—the latter having insisted that women ought to join men in farming work—of suffering from the affliction.⁹⁷ No matter how

94. Report from the Shkodër party committee, 15 May 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 89.

95. Report from the Elbasan party committee (Secret), 6 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 167. Similar incidents were reported from villages in Fier (Secret), 28 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 181. In Gjirokastrë, too, reports noted that local inhabitants had assumed that class war was being "eliminated." These rumors, the report concluded, had "weakened revolutionary vigilance and produced opportunist positions against the kulaks in addition to inspiring enemy slogans" (including a popular expression of regret that Lenin had not been stillborn). See these documents in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 185.

96. Report from the Elbasan district party committee (Secret), 6 October 1956, *Ibid.*, Fl. 167.

97. Report from the Librazhd party committee (Secret), 18 September 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DOPRBP-SI, V. 1956, Dos. 10, Fl. 149. Similar examples were reported from the north, in Koplik.

“politically immature,” ordinary party affiliates across the country drew politically logical conclusions from events taking place abroad. From the bottom up, they engaged with the PPSH on the party’s own terms. Having forcefully promoted this political consciousness, the party establishment was deeply disturbed by the outcome.

Bringing the Bloc Home

That events in one corner of the Soviet empire could mean something local for peasants in remote Albania or even apparatchiks in Tirana was both obvious and astonishing. A lot of this had to do with the institutional isomorphism brought about by Communist parties and planned economies.⁹⁸ But a better understanding of the underlying dynamics requires analysis of the policies put in place to engineer a new Albanian professional class. Precisely because party authorities saw the country as an island under threat from Tito’s Yugoslavia and physically isolated from the rest of the bloc, they desperately sought Moscow’s security guarantee. If the story of the Soviet bloc is ordinarily told in terms of Soviet coercion, resource extraction, and hands-on control, in the lone Mediterranean outpost the local leaders were the ones who actively sought out and directly depended on Soviet interference as well as technical transfer for their regime’s survival. A definite economic calculus underlined the pervasive rhetoric of “socialist solidarity” among Soviet-bloc countries. Albania was the poorest and most peripheral member of the bloc, and its industrialization effort required huge infusions of equipment, technology, and expertise.⁹⁹ But national interest, as far as Albanian officials were concerned in the 1950s, happened to converge with subsidies produced by “socialist solidarity.”

Many of the rebels at the Tirana Party Conference came from a distinct professional class that emerged in the 1950s out of an extensive state-sponsored campaign to build entire professions from scratch. The country at the time was plagued by high illiteracy rates, and no universities were established

Report on CC letter No. 1328, 12 October 1956, Fl. 177. From Gjirokastër came reports that local people’s council leaders and cooperative farm directors were hesitant to make decisions of any kind for fear of being accused of succumbing to the cult. The result was a marked increase in meetings to reach “collective decisions” on all sorts of trivial matters. See report from Gjirokastër (Top Secret), 31 October 1956, Fl. 186.

98. See Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 3),” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 2005), pp. 3–96, esp. 74–95.

99. For an overview, see Michael Kaser, *Comecon: Integration Problems of the Planned Economies*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1967).

until 1957. The meager Western-educated professional circle of the interwar period either did not survive the war or remained politically suspect and marginalized. Hence, like North Korea, Albania sent hundreds of its youth each year to other socialist countries for training.¹⁰⁰ Soviet specialists increasingly took up positions in the country, and some 3,000 local trainees received short-term instruction in the Soviet Union in the 1950s.¹⁰¹ “A generation is being educated in Albania,” one exiled author noted, “that will know only Soviet culture and will consider it supreme in the world.”¹⁰² For a relatively isolated and backward country, this was the promise of a future elite (those trained in the Soviet Union in the 1950s constituted Albania’s elite for more than four decades). Even before the war, a number of prosperous Albanian families had sent their children to receive an education abroad. Under King Zog’s rule, a system of scholarships for promising young people had been set up. One of its beneficiaries in the early 1930s was the young Enver Hoxha, who studied at (but failed to graduate from) the University of Montpellier. The exchanges in the 1950s, however, were unprecedented in scope and planning, a model of social engineering.¹⁰³

During the first half of the 1950s, university spots in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries became a commodity distributed via the central plan. As with other aspects of early planning, this effort was fraught with errors. State agencies had a hard time allocating university spots because budgets and planning targets had a tendency to fluctuate halfway through the academic year. As a result, education bureaucrats often switched students’ disci-

100. As in North Korea, youths sent abroad included the children of the elite. See Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 174–180; and Stephen Kotkin and Charles K. Armstrong, “A Socialist Regional Order in Northeast Asia after World War II,” in Charles K. Armstrong et al., eds., *Korea at the Center: Dynamics of Regionalism in Northeast Asia* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 110–125. Cold War student transfers, mostly from undeveloped countries toward the “imperial centers,” constituted a global phenomenon. Asian students had been brought to the Soviet Union for training since the 1920s, and the postwar period saw a similar stream of East European, African, and Latin American youths. In the 1960s, significant numbers of students from Third World countries entered U.S. universities. Even though the exchanges were often shaped by ideological motivations and political calculations, home countries had no guarantee that youths trained abroad would resist influences deemed corrupt at home. See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 37, 93, 254.

101. CPSU leaders repeatedly mentioned the Soviet assistance at the height of the Sino-Soviet clash in the early 1960s. See memorandum from CPSU CC to Soviet party organizations, 22 January 1962, in BA, SAPMO, DY30/3593, 15.

102. Skendi, “Albania,” in Kertesz, ed., *East Central Europe*, p. 216.

103. “Socialist solidarity” was more than an ideological catchphrase. For example, the Soviet government paid almost all the expenses of Albanian students in the Soviet Union, and China and Romania paid them in full. Albanian students in Hungary and Poland, moreover, received twice what locals received in stipends. See Report on students, trainees, and specialists abroad, n.d., in Arkivi i Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme, Tirana [Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] (AMPJ), V. 1956, Dos. 26/1, Fl. 67–70.

plines in the middle of their studies—an act that might have “corrected” planning errors but infuriated the students. Some spent many months in their host countries without knowing what they would study, as officials back home scrambled to allocate names to priority fields and planning estimates. Others, especially those in the upper years, often waited for months to receive approval from Tirana on everything from thesis topics to marriage requests or even summer vacation plans. Albania’s integration into this state-controlled transnational flow of people and knowledge was no doubt advantageous and unprecedented, but was far from smooth.¹⁰⁴

Beyond the technical hitches of the central plan, postwar education policies reflected the party’s ideological position on the class struggle. A higher education abroad was a privilege that party and state officials gladly handed out to reward young people from well-connected families or war veterans (recall the lack of a working class). Poorer families and party members had precedence over, say, small traders, artisans, or the politically uninvolved. Yet, as authorities admitted to Krylov following the Tirana Party Conference in April 1956, available candidates often lacked the “right” political credentials. Compromises had to be made. As written requests for scholarships attest, eager applicants soon learned to recount the “correct” life narrative in order to obtain a university spot abroad. Ultimately, allocation resulted from a combination of ideological guidelines and improvisation, high-minded social engineering with blatant nepotism, a necessarily imperfect outcome of the application of proletarian policies in a country with scarcely any proletariat.¹⁰⁵ Student lists from the late 1940s and early 1950s abound with familiar last names, as Central Committee members and high-ranking officials sent siblings, relatives, or cronies to the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Politburo members often knew by name the students they sent to elite Soviet military academies.¹⁰⁶

Education in the Soviet Union and the people’s democracies was sup-

104. The internal view of chaotic central planning in matters of technical exchange is confirmed by East German sources. See GDR State Planning Commission report on economic relations with Albania, 12 October 1960, in Bundesarchiv (BArch.), DE1/21355.

105. According to CC guidelines, the acceptable categories of social origin in mid-1950s Albania were worker, poor peasant, middle peasant, wealthy peasant, estate owner (*çiftligar*), craftsman with apprentice, single craftsman, ordinary clerical worker, mid-level clerical worker, high-level clerical worker, petty trader, middle and large trader. PPSH CC guidelines for student party organizations abroad, n.d. [hand dated August 1956], in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA (Foreign Section), V. 1956, Dos. 192, Fl. 21.

106. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 29 June 1949, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1949, Dos. 44, Fl. 45. By 1956, 21 Albanian officers were enrolled at the Frunze Military Academy, 21 at the Lenin Political-Military Academy, 12 at the Kuibyshev Military Academy of Engineer Troops, and more than 30 others at medical and artillery academies in Moscow and Leningrad. See report of the Albanian military attaché in Moscow to the PPSH CC (Top Secret), 2 January 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V.1956, Dos. 177, Fl. 1–18.

posed to produce socialist Albania's political, military, and technical elite. But education also produced a serious problem: how to control these young and politically naive men and women. One idea was to bring the party to them. By 1955 student party organizations had been established everywhere from Moscow to Sofia. In the Soviet Union, for example, seventeen such entities for students existed in 1956, as well as twenty-eight for officers in training.¹⁰⁷ That was a high level of organization, even compared to the rest of the Soviet bloc countries. Organizations in Moscow had a central coordinating body, whereas others relied on embassy personnel, who filed reports on academic progress, political behavior, and students' mood.¹⁰⁸ These reports, as well as contemporary correspondence and memoirs, reveal that exposure to life in Moscow, Leningrad, Prague, and Warsaw made a profound impression on Albanian students, who often arrived from tiny villages carrying a wooden suitcase and a winter coat. A new world—the socialist world—opened up in front of them. The realization was bittersweet because their home country appeared considerably backward compared to their host country. The socialist civilization they encountered, with its plethora of nationalities and languages, was awe-inspiring.

Most of the Albanian students thrived, but some got into trouble. In 1955, twelve students were repatriated for various infringements, including one for “lying about the real living conditions in our country” and another for posing as an Albanian secret service agent.¹⁰⁹ By the mid-1950s reports were emerging that Albanian students had embraced popular music, fashion, and Western hairdos.¹¹⁰ The mechanisms that the Soviet bloc mobilized to circulate people and knowledge could also promote practices deemed anti-socialist. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that students became involved in the intense discussions following the Twentieth Party Congress. By that point, some 660 Albanian young people were studying abroad, nearly half of whom were enrolled in Soviet universities. After Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, Hungary hosted the largest number, at 68.¹¹¹ As Albanian officials came to find out,

107. Correspondence from Moscow embassy to the PPSH CC on elections in local student party organizations, 15 January 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 177, Fl. 45. Student organizations abroad exercised considerable power. They reviewed member performance, proposed disciplinary measures, and had considerable say in all matters of student life, including personal aspects.

108. Hungary and Czechoslovakia did not have student party organizations set up by 1956. See the correspondence from the Moscow embassy regarding the 28 January 1956 meeting of Soviet and East European diplomats at the Polish embassy in Moscow, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 14, Fl. 18–18 verso.

109. Letter from the PPSH CC to student party organizations and trainees enrolled in institutes, schools, and courses abroad, 13 March 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 160, Fl. 19–22.

110. In 1956, “Western influences” emerged as a problem among Soviet youths. See Bittner, *The Many Lives*, pp. 62–65.

111. Statistics from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16/1, Fl. 41. In 1956 alone, Albania requested some 300 additional university spots, twice as many as the previous year

shortly after the Twentieth Party Congress Soviet officials had called university meetings to discuss Stalin's "cult of personality." Because the meetings included foreign students, several of the Albanians asked the embassy to clarify why the press in Tirana was keeping silent on the issue.¹¹² Similar problems were reported with students from Poland.¹¹³ A report prepared for the Polish United Workers' Party concluded that many students had come "under the influence of the anti-Marxist and anti-Soviet spirit that pervades the country." Some had openly supported the newly reinstated Polish leader Władysław Gomułka, denounced collectivization, and complained about false and tendentious coverage in the press back home.¹¹⁴ Unlike the story in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, or even Romania, where students rose in protests from within, Albanian officials were wary of importing the "counterrevolution" through students abroad.¹¹⁵

In Budapest, too, student grievances predated the turmoil in October. The embassy there had occasionally warned about flaring "foreign influences."¹¹⁶ Student accounts also confirm that relations with Albanian diplomats were poor. In a handwritten letter from 28 September 1956, young people complained about missing school supplies and indifferent embassy personnel.¹¹⁷ As their Hungarian colleagues increasingly demanded better living conditions, some Albanian students followed suit. When demonstrations erupted in Budapest, they supported those too. Precise details about student

(more than three-quarters of them were granted). Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bulletin No. 2, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 25, Fl. 23. Each year a steady supply of fresh graduates returned to take up jobs in government and industrial projects across the country. In 1955, for instance, 135 graduates returned from studies abroad. Of those, roughly equal numbers took jobs in agriculture, heavy industries, education, and healthcare. See State Planning Commission report on students returning from abroad, in AQSH, F. 495, V.1955, Dos. 86, Fl. 16–17.

112. Moscow embassy to the PPSH CC, 30 March 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V.1956, Dos. 177, Fl. 65–66.

113. Warsaw embassy to the PPSH CC (Secret), 14 July 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, V.1956, Dos. 179, Fl. 28.

114. Report of the Administrative Department of the PPSH CC on the conditions of students in Poland, 30 May 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V.1956, Dos. 179, Fl. 69–70.

115. The students' role during the Hungarian uprising has been widely noted. Events in Budapest had an immediate effect on students in Romania and Czechoslovakia, as well as in Moscow. See Johanna Granville, *If Hope Is Sin, Then We Are All Guilty: Romanian Students' Reactions to the Hungarian Revolution and Soviet Intervention, 1956–1958*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, No. 1905 (Pittsburgh: The Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2008); Kramer, "The USSR and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," pp. 195–198; John P. C. Mathews, "Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1956," CWIHP Working Paper No. 24, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 1998; and Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, pp. 77–79.

116. Report on the activities of the Albanian embassy in Budapest, 15 March 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 13/5, Fl. 15–17.

117. Handwritten letter from Budapest, 28 September 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA (Foreign Section), V.1956, Dos. 192, Fl. 49–50 verso.

behavior during those days are limited. Almost all accounts stem from informants who were unable to monitor their colleagues constantly during the turmoil. Nevertheless, we know that at least one fellow, Thoma Dardeli, a student of medicine, assisted in a Budapest hospital treating “counter-revolutionaries.”¹¹⁸ A fellow medical student, a young woman from Krujë, was “corrupted” by Hungarian and Yugoslav “counter-revolutionaries” by offering her dorm room for Radio Free Europe listening sessions.¹¹⁹ Yet another student—the report emphasized his peasant origin—placed on his jacket a Hungarian flag with the Communist emblem cut out.¹²⁰

As chaos gripped Budapest, officials in Tirana grew alarmed. On 30 October they ordered all Albanian students and trainees transferred to Romania.¹²¹ Although embassy messages confirm that some students initially refused to leave, by the second week in November all had been sent home or to neighboring countries.¹²² Special PPSH envoys were then dispatched from Tirana to the Soviet Union, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria to “clarify the situation.”¹²³ They were “appalled” by the anti-Soviet sentiments they encountered in Poland, where one Albanian university student had allegedly signed up for a blood drive to help victims in Hungary. (The young man swore he did not know the destination of the donated blood.¹²⁴) Upperclassmen proved to have been the most likely to sympathize with anti-party protesters, having allegedly been “corrupted” over the years. Those recently arrived from Albania were still “clear and showed almost no reservations” in their political orientation.

Nevertheless, explaining why party members were also the loudest protesters proved more difficult. The investigative team sent from Tirana recommended removing all students from Poland, warning that the situation there was hopeless and that religion would soon replace Marxism-Leninism in the school curriculum.¹²⁵

118. Information presented to the PPSH Politburo on the behavior of seven students enrolled in Hungarian universities (seen and approved by Politburo members), n.d. [hand-dated December 1956], in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1957, Dos. 7, Fl. 4.

119. *Ibid.*, Fl. 4/1.

120. *Ibid.*, Fl. 5/1.

121. Tirana to Bucharest, Cable No. 769 (Top Secret—Very Urgent), 30 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 364, Fl. 13.

122. Budapest to Tirana, No. 162 (Top Secret), 3 November 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 20; and Tirana to all embassies and New York, No. 930 (Top Secret), 16 November 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16, Fl. 158.

123. Report to the PPSH CC, 12 November 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V.1956, Dos. 195, Fl. 11–14.

124. Report on meetings with students in party organizations abroad, discussed at a meeting of the CC Secretariat, 22–30 December 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 79, Fl. 10.

125. *Ibid.*, Fl. 12.

As with “overly curious” peasants, party officials referred to these students as “wavering” and “confused.” Yet the questions they posed hardly indicated confusion. What was Tito’s involvement in the events in Hungary? What was the state of relations with Yugoslavia? What about those who had been purged? What was Tirana’s stand on Gomulka? Nagy’s fate? What happened at the Tirana Party Conference?¹²⁶ “Confused,” it appears, was party-speak for “asking tough questions.” How party representatives explained these matters is unclear, as is the matter of how local party activists explained the international situation to inhabitants across the country. Reports to the Central Committee boasted that all suspicions had been cleared—a dubious claim. Party leaders grew increasingly aware of the potential threat emanating from the Soviet bloc. By mid-December the Foreign Ministry advised embassies to hold biweekly meetings with students in order to keep them “abreast of developments,” a euphemism meaning to keep them under control.¹²⁷

The immediate impact of foreign-based students on domestic events and the party’s position was limited. But in the aftermath of the Tirana Party Conference, senior party officials recognized that foreign-educated specialists would need to be carefully monitored.¹²⁸ Of particular concern was their potential influence after returning home. A December 1956 report submitted to the PPSH Politburo, for example, noted that Dardeli, the 24-year-old medical student who had volunteered in a Budapest hospital during the uprising, had denounced the Soviet Union and the new Hungarian leaders to his family.¹²⁹ Two years later, party apparatchiks confirmed that students in Poland and the GDR had fallen prey to “foreign influences” (*shfaqje të huaja*), including open displays of sympathy for Tito’s Yugoslavia, voiced suspicions about Albanian press accounts, and spread rumors about elite perquisites in Tirana.¹³⁰ Like

126. Memorandum of the Administrative Department of the PPSH CC on the mood of students in Hungary, n.d. [likely early December 1956], in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 192, Fl. 57.

127. Tirana to Sofia, Bucharest, Prague, Berlin, Warsaw, Moscow and Beijing, No. 1277 (Top Secret), 17 December 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos 16, Fl. 179.

128. Allegations of problematic student behavior had been reported to the PPSH Politburo throughout the summer, especially when the students involved came from families with party connections. See, for instance, a summary from the Administrative Department of the PPSH CC on the elaboration of the CC letter about the Tirana Party Conference among students abroad (with a handwritten note by Enver Hoxha), 31 July 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1956, Dos. 192, Fl. 35.

129. Information to the PPSH Politburo on the students in Hungary, n.d. [hand-dated 25 December 1956], in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1957, Dos. 7, Fl. 4. In recent testimony about the events, Dardeli revealed that he had treated a wounded Soviet soldier at the hospital. The soldier had appeared anxious, but Dardeli had reassured him that he was not Hungarian but “*albanets*.” The truth hardly mattered. The Politburo canceled Dardeli’s scholarship. Thoma Dardeli, interview on *Histori me zburmues*, Televizioni Klan, 4 January 2009.

130. PPSH CC memorandum on the conditions of students abroad, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1958, Dos. 34, Fl. 5–6. Within one year, some 27 youths lost their state-funded scholarships because of “political errors.”

the rebels at the Tirana Party Conference, these young people presented a problem beyond their limited immediate threat. They embodied both the promise of a modernizing professional class as well as the threat of “anti-socialist” practices emanating from the Soviet bloc. Even after Hoxha and his cronies successfully crushed this new professional class in 1956, they mounted a second brutal campaign against its members, an effort that culminated in the 1960s.

The Perpetual Problem

For fifty years, the PPSH establishment tried to keep it a secret: The Communist Party (renamed the Party of Labor at Stalin's behest in 1948) had come about in the autumn of 1941 in large part through Yugoslav efforts. Not only did Tito's envoys bring together the dispersed Communist groupings; they also played a central role in shaping the party's structure and designing the fledgling state's institutions. The war produced an odd hybrid—Yugoslav in form, parochial in content. The party was, nevertheless, an organization decisive enough to ruthlessly crush opponents and competitors (both real and imagined). The Communists, moreover, claimed exclusive credit for having liberated the country from the Nazis. Only Tito's Yugoslavia could boast of the same achievement. If Albania's formal conversion into a constituent Yugoslav republic did not actually come about, this was not because Hoxha disapproved of the idea. Acutely aware of his inferior hand in the power dynamic with Belgrade, Hoxha was happy to meet Tito's demands. Stalin initially went along with the idea of a Balkan federation but became increasingly troubled by Tito's expansive ambitions in the region.¹³¹ Vacillations in Moscow made all the difference between a subordinate but independent Albania and a seventh Yugoslav republic. In addition to fracturing the Communist world, the Stalin-Tito split made Albania—suddenly—relevant.¹³² From “the epitome of insignificance,” the country swiftly turned into “the Stalinist avant-garde in the Balkans.”¹³³

At no point during these years was Hoxha's position at the top of the

131. Leonid Gibianskii, “The Soviet-Yugoslav Split and the Cominform,” in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 291–312. See also Jeronim Perović, “The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring 2007), pp. 32–63.

132. Wayne S. Vucinich, “Communism Gains in Albania (Part II),” *Current History*, Vol. 21, No. 124 (December 1951), pp. 345–352.

133. Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 35; and Fejtő, “La deviazione albanese,” p. 25.

party hierarchy inevitable. He was neither Tito's chosen leader, nor Moscow's favorite. Despite the myth of wartime heroics he later craftily assembled, other strong and widely popular characters emerged from the war. An intense power struggle had developed over the years within the PPSH Politburo, especially between Hoxha and Xoxe. When the Yugoslavs accused the PPSH leadership of stalling relations in 1947, responsibility fell on the shoulders of 29-year-old Nako Spiru, who was in charge of industries and planning. Xoxe, the stern proletarian who rose to become interior minister and organizational party secretary, turned against Spiru, whom he accused of promoting an anti-Yugoslav line. At this critical time, Hoxha, consumed with his own political survival, let his young and impressionable colleague take the fall. On the eve of a high-level investigation, Spiru made desperate attempts to solicit help from the Soviet Union. On 22 November, the Democratic Front daily *Bashkimi* reported that Spiru had "inadvertently" killed himself "while playing with his revolver."¹³⁴ The official version was then adjusted to confirm a suicide. After being eulogized, Spiru was publicly condemned as a traitor and then rehabilitated following the split with Belgrade.

As Stalin grew increasingly impatient with Tito's independent agenda in early 1948, Soviet-Yugoslav relations took a decisive turn for the worse. Xoxe was the first East European high-ranking official to be put to death as a pro-Yugoslav conspirator. Hoxha was then able to charge the slain minister with responsibility for almost all the abuses of the security apparatus. "I can speak with competence on this subject, having later served as minister of interior for six years," Shehu explained to visiting Chinese officials in 1957. "There are hardly any cases from Koçi Xoxe's days that were handled according to socialist laws."¹³⁵ To be sure, the PPSH leaders were not an undifferentiated whole. But, as Shehu's admission suggests, Communist party leaders were held together not solely by fear but by a common recent history of violence and fabrications. If the PPSH was founded on an original crime—or, rather, a series of crimes and sectarian violence unleashed during the war—the bloody bodies of Spiru and Xoxe were the gruesome scenes of its baptism.

Not surprisingly, Soviet overtures toward Yugoslavia in 1955 under Khrushchev perturbed Hoxha.¹³⁶ Having led the angry anti-Yugoslav attacks

134. "Komunikatë e Qeverisë së Republikës Popullore të Shqipërisë," *Bashkimi* (Tirana), 22 November 1947, p. 1.

135. Transcript of meeting with delegation led by Peng Zhen, 16 January 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 1, Fl. 18.

136. The Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia, which peaked in May–July 1955, came in the context of a broader shift in foreign policy meant "to reassert the Soviet position as a global revolutionary leader." See Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), pp. 94–103. For the Khrushchev-

over the years, Hoxha could not support rapprochement with Belgrade without being, as one author writes, “the first victim of it.”¹³⁷ The point is not merely that Moscow’s new course after Stalin’s death directly threatened Hoxha’s standing within the party hierarchy. Revised relations with Belgrade, as the PPSH leaders saw them, necessarily meant a revision of the Albanian party’s foundational history. The Soviet-Yugoslav split—indeed, Stalinism—had made Tirana relevant, lifting it from isolation and culminating in the security guarantee of the Warsaw Pact. Challenging Stalinism raised questions not only about Hoxha’s hold on power but about the establishment as a whole. So when the Soviet authorities informed Tirana that a CPSU delegation would visit Belgrade in May 1955 and that the Cominform resolution from 1949 denouncing Yugoslavia would be rescinded, Hoxha responded swiftly and angrily. He wrote to Khrushchev that the new Soviet course diverged considerably from discussions in June 1954 and even from positions taken earlier in 1955.¹³⁸ Hoxha demanded that issues related to “principles” be brought up only at a special Informburo meeting and that the Soviet delegation refrain from discussing non-technical matters in Belgrade. That the leader of a country of fewer than 1.5 million would attempt to discipline the leader of the Soviet Union shows how deep anxieties over Yugoslavia ran within the echelons of the Albanian party.¹³⁹

Two days later, following “friendly consultations” with Soviet representatives, Hoxha held a Politburo meeting in his heavily guarded villa to explain that his response had been hasty. The PPSH should have supported the talks. Still, he reminded his colleagues that even if Tito admitted all his past wrongdoings, he would remain “a very suspect Marxist.”¹⁴⁰ The Yugoslavs, Hoxha explained, had erred against the Albanians, and nothing could change

Tito correspondence in 1954, see Svetozar Rajak, ed., “New Evidence from the Former Yugoslav Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001), pp. 315–324. In addition to mutual high-level visits, the CPSU CC wanted to expand exchanges in science and technology. See “O merakh po dal’neishemu razvitiyu kul’turnykh, nauchnykh i obshchestvennykh svyazei s Yugoslaviei,” n.d., in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 282, Ll. 30–33.

137. Iván T. Berend, *Central and Eastern Europe 1944–1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 127.

138. The correspondence is contained in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PK(b)BS, V. 1955, Dos. 10. By this point, the Albanians had already taken limited steps in establishing formal relations with Belgrade, in line with Soviet requests. Throughout 1954, however, information on Soviet-Yugoslav relations was strictly limited to the PPSH Politburo. See the report on meetings in Moscow with CPSU leaders, 30 June 1954, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, Dos. 18, Fl. 13–14.

139. For an unusually perceptive account of Albanian-Yugoslav relations, despite the limited sources available at the time, see Peter Danylow, *Die aussenpolitischen Beziehungen Albanien zu Jugoslawien und zur UdSSR 1944–1961* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1982), esp. pp. 107–136.

140. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 27 May 1955, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1955, Dos. 17, Fl. 3.

that “even if the KPJ leadership undergoes self-criticism.”¹⁴¹ During a trip to Moscow in July, when Hoxha was handed the full Soviet-Yugoslav correspondence, he repeated in a telegram to Shehu that relations “cannot be fixed with a letter.”¹⁴² Yet, later that year in Moscow, Suslov insisted that the split had been a mistake driven by baseless accusations. Yugoslavia was on a solid path, and Albania’s relations with Belgrade needed to be revised. The Soviet Union wasted no time in orchestrating a Yugoslav-Albanian reunion. “We went to Tempo,” Hoxha recounted to the Politburo, “as if nothing had ever happened between us.” As perturbed as he was, Hoxha played the part. “How did this misfortune fall upon us!” he reportedly exclaimed in front of the Yugoslav official. The laughter-filled and “heart-felt conversation” lasted two hours. Mutual courtesies and invitations were exchanged.¹⁴³ In his 1980s recollections, Hoxha claimed that the “heartfelt conversation” had actually kept him awake and angry at night.¹⁴⁴

Whatever influence Moscow exerted during the second half of 1955, it paled in comparison to the months following the Twentieth Party Congress. As other Communist parties took steps to revise their position vis-à-vis Belgrade, Yugoslav officials increasingly put pressure on Albanian diplomats: Why was the PPSH so slow in revising its stand? Why did Albania trail other bloc countries in rehabilitating officials, like Xoxe, who had been purged as pro-Yugoslav?¹⁴⁵ Dobrivoje Vidić, a former Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow and then foreign affairs secretary in Belgrade, brought up Rajk and Kostov in a conversation with the Albanian ambassador on 11 May. “We do not care for Xoxe,” he explained, “but for everything that has been said against us.”¹⁴⁶

141. *Ibid.*, Fl. 4. The KPJ (Kommunistička Partija Jugoslavije) was renamed the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in 1952, but Hoxha kept referring to it by the old name.

142. Hoxha to Shehu, Cable No. 1050 (Top Secret), 17 July 1955, in AMPJ, V. 1955, Dos. 68, Fl. 17.

143. The high-ranking Yugoslav official, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo had served in Albania during the war and was well known to PPSH leaders. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 15 September 1955, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1955, Dos. 32, Fl. 118. Hoxha’s report was filed under “Miscellaneous issues—Top Secret,” Fl. 115–121.

144. The party archives contain both the original version of Hoxha’s report and a heavily edited version from February 1967. The latter includes the core of what was used for Hoxha’s memoirs. “On Yugoslavia,” PPSH Politburo (Top Secret), 15 September 1955, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1955, Dos. 32, Fl. 115–118, 140–143, unnumbered archivist’s note.

145. See, for example, Belgrade to Tirana, No. 172 (Top Secret), 23 April 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 34; and Belgrade to Tirana, No. 187 (Top Secret), 5 May 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 55. Similar conversations were also taking place with Yugoslav diplomats elsewhere, from Poland to China. See Beijing to Tirana, No. 59 (Top Secret), 31 May–1 June 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 82; Warsaw to Tirana, No. 143 (Top Secret), 2 June 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 83; and Bucharest to Tirana, No. 275 (Top Secret), 15 June 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 9.

146. Vidić informed Albanian Ambassador Karafili that without a clear retraction of anti-Yugoslav accusations “there can be no normalization.” The ambassador reported that “all others around kept silent and only approved.” See Belgrade to Tirana, No. 201 (Top Secret), 11–12 May 1956, in AMPJ,

That the Soviet ambassador in Belgrade, Nikolai Firyubin, allegedly had denounced Vidić's position amounted to little; Firyubin simply urged the Albanians to be patient.¹⁴⁷ But patience was the last thing on Hoxha's mind in May 1956. A broad campaign against alleged party enemies had been launched in the aftermath of the Tirana Party Conference, an event the Albanian leader exploited to thwart any serious *rapprochement* with Belgrade. In the short term, however, the expedient course was to agree to improved relations so long as they did not require substantial revision of internal party affairs. Xoxe, he insisted, was precisely such an internal affair. Even while admitting at the Third Party Congress that the break with Belgrade had been a mistake, Hoxha ruled out Xoxe's rehabilitation.¹⁴⁸

The summer of 1956 was a season of uncertainty. When Hoxha was in Moscow for a meeting of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, he learned about the content of the Khrushchev-Tito talks. Tito had lambasted Albanian leaders as a staunch and unreformed bunch who "had not comprehended what is happening around us."¹⁴⁹ Khrushchev reportedly assured Hoxha that he had rebutted the Yugoslav leader by bringing up the Tirana Party Conference and other Yugoslav efforts to undermine the PPSH—a point Hoxha subsequently exploited at home.¹⁵⁰ Later that summer, Hoxha repeatedly complained to the Soviet ambassador about Tito's alleged schemes.¹⁵¹ Was the self-criticism of the Third Party Congress, he protested, not enough for Belgrade? Were the Albanians supposed to bow down and ask for forgiveness? He stressed that nothing of the sort would happen and that "what the

V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 61–64. See also Karafili's later summary of the conversation with Vidić (Secret), 17 May 1956, in AMPJ, V.1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 68–70.

147. Belgrade to Tirana, No. 205 (Top Secret), 15 May 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 65; and Conversation with Firyubin (Secret), 17 May 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 71 verso. Hoxha brought up Vidić's comments to Krylov on 14 May. Krylov to Moscow (Secret), 28 May 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 41.

148. Over the years, Hoxha perfected the tactic of simultaneously advancing two positions not wholly in line with each other. For example, he vigorously argued against the "cult of personality" at the party congress but warned that too sharp a focus on that issue alone was characteristic of Western propaganda. Albanian diplomats were ordered to report any Yugoslav reactions after the disclosure that Xoxe would not be rehabilitated. See Tirana to representatives abroad (Top Secret), 1 June 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16, Fl. 84.

149. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 28 June 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 45, Fl. 14.

150. *Ibid.*, Fl. 15/1. These documents were later selectively used for Hoxha's memoirs—a process personally supervised by his wife, Nexhmije. A handwritten 1973 note from her specifies how the material was supposed to be handled and who could have access to it.

151. Memorandum of meeting on 6 August 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha (Secret), 17 August 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 150–155; and "Zapiska A. P. Kovaleva o vstreche albanskoj partiinoi delegatsii, napravlyayushcheisya na S"ezd Trudovoi partii Korei, i besede s Enverom Hodzhei" (Secret), 29 August 1956, in V. K. Volkov et al., eds., *Sovetskii soyuz i vengerskii krizis 1956 goda* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998), pp. 239–240.

Hungarians did—we won't do that." The Yugoslav leader had relentlessly protested against Soviet meddling in Yugoslav affairs, Hoxha charged, but now Tito was doing the same with Albania (on the issue of Xoxe) only a few years after Belgrade had attempted to swallow Albania entirely.¹⁵² The sense of being trapped by Moscow's evolving foreign policy was compounded by limited possibilities for communication because of the PPSH's total dependence on the Soviet embassy for information.¹⁵³

In internal party discussions, Hoxha's tone was defiant and severe. To Soviet leaders, however, he came across as a mediator, someone who could be relied on to control allegedly violent anti-Yugoslav passions among ordinary inhabitants. In conversations with Krylov, he presented himself as a pacifier and characterized the decision to play down Xoxe's rehabilitation as conciliatory.¹⁵⁴ The Yugoslavs were hardly convinced. Newspapers in Belgrade reproached Tirana's unwillingness to assume responsibility for past errors. Arso Milatović, the newly appointed Yugoslav ambassador in Tirana, warned (on the same day that Albanian diplomats abroad received instructions to resist Yugoslav pressure at all costs) that improved relations were impossible without a retraction of past charges.¹⁵⁵ When Milatović complained to the Chinese ambassador in Tirana, Xu Yixin, that Tirana was unwilling to move forward, Xu conferred with Krylov. Both diplomats concluded that Yugoslav complaints were unfounded.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Hoxha's unlikely scenarios might have seemed less credible if Belgrade had not manifested any regional ambitions in the past.¹⁵⁷ The Yugoslav case was also not helped by Milatović, who reveled in provocations, which he also directed at Soviet diplomats in

152. Memorandum of meeting on 25 July 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha (Secret), 6 August 1956, in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 141–143.

153. In September 1955, Hoxha had complained to Soviet Ambassador Levychkin that, unlike other party secretaries, he did not have the option of calling Moscow whenever he needed to. See Memorandum of conversation on 21 September between K. D. Levychkin and Hoxha (Secret), 26 September 1955, in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 288, L. 185. A few months later, during a reception for Levychkin's departure, Hoxha and Shehu spoke at length about the dubious activities of the Yugoslav mission in Tirana. See Levychkin to CPSU CC (Secret), 10 December 1955, in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 288, L. 204.

154. Memorandum of meeting on 12 May 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha (Secret), 28 May 1956, in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 35–37.

155. Memorandum of meeting between Foreign Affairs minister Behar Shtylla and Yugoslav Ambassador Arso Milatović on 9 July 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 101 verso; and Letter/circular from Foreign Affairs minister Behar Shtylla to representatives abroad (Strictly Personal), 9 July 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16/1, Fl. 38.

156. Memorandum of meeting on 21 July between Krylov and Xu Yixin (Secret), 4 September 1956, in RGANI, F 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 175–176.

157. For a discussion of Yugoslav regional ambitions under Tito, see Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split," pp. 42–48.

Tirana.¹⁵⁸ Coercion and party controls, therefore, helped Hoxha, but external factors and Yugoslav missteps also played a role. Not everyone in the Communist world, after all, was enamored with Belgrade. The Soviet bloc contained plenty of unreformed Stalinists. Tirana-based Communist diplomats in 1956 were a divided lot: the Polish envoy got along with the Yugoslav, but the Bulgarian and the Hungarian chided Milatović in talks with Krylov. All of these factors converged to create a situation in which Hoxha's ceaseless complaints, and even his fabrications, could find a sympathetic ear among certain foreign observers.

When reporting to Moscow in September, the Soviet ambassador praised Hoxha's standing within the party and his handling of relations with Belgrade.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Krylov's dispatch also noted that the PPSH had failed to implement directives from the Twentieth Party Congress and complained that intraparty criticism was rare.¹⁶⁰ Hoxha desperately needed a firmer display of support from the USSR. Throughout summer and fall, as relations with Belgrade became increasingly strained, the PPSH leader routinely pressed Khrushchev for a formal visit, which would, as Hoxha put it, "help us politically."¹⁶¹ With a deteriorating situation in Poland and Hungary, however, the visit never materialized. During one of the trips to Moscow when Hoxha pleaded with Khrushchev, the PPSH delegation stopped in Budapest for one night. Appalled by the troubles afflicting the Hungarian Workers' Party, Hoxha urged the Hungarians to defend the party line by all means necessary. He described to them the events at the Tirana Party Conference and explained how the PPSH had delivered a decisive "blow" to the perpetrators.¹⁶² Communist leaders, he insisted, ought to be prepared to uphold authority by force. At the time, his hosts found the advice silly.¹⁶³

158. During a reception, for example, Milatović pointedly asked the Soviet attaché in Tirana about the number of "concentration camps" still operating in the Soviet Union, prompting the astounded diplomat to pretend he did not understand the question. See Soviet embassy in Tirana to Moscow (Secret), 9 August 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391 Ll. 177.

159. "Ob albano-yugoslavskikh otnosheniyakh," Krylov to Shepilov (Secret), 24 September 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 218–229.

160. Also troubling for Krylov were the numbers of people fleeing the country. Some 260 had fled in the first eight months of the year, compared to only 38 over the whole of the previous year. See "O politicheskom polozenii v NR Albanii," Krylov to Shepilov (Secret), 4 October 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 388, L. 187–189.

161. Transcript of the meeting of the PPSH Politburo, 28 June 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 45, Fl. 24.

162. *Ibid.*, Fl. 23.

163. Hoxha also brought up Hungary in meetings in Beijing in September but was given contradictory information. Zoltán Szántó, who served as ambassador in Tirana in the late 1940s, told the Albanian delegation that conditions in Budapest were bleak. A high-ranking Soviet party official, Boris

Budapest and Beyond

Throughout September and October 1956, PPSH leaders anxiously followed the unfolding events in Hungary. The Foreign Ministry instructed diplomats abroad to keep a close eye on embassy personnel and stay “vigilant” against Yugoslav “provocations.”¹⁶⁴ Daily cables warned that Albanian students in Budapest were “under no circumstances to participate in any kind of demonstrations.”¹⁶⁵ Incoming information, nevertheless, was in short supply. This was an outcome, in large part, of party policies. Albania’s ambassador to Hungary, Bato Karafili, like numerous other Albanian representatives abroad, was no career diplomat. He came from a well-known family of war partisans, but he spoke no foreign languages and was generally unequipped for the task. He was, in short, a direct product of postwar policies allocating important posts among veterans who often lacked any formal education. Although uninformed and erratic, these men were thought to possess a more valuable feature: party loyalty. But it also did not help that Karafili was new to Budapest (he arrived at some point in August), having previously served in Belgrade.¹⁶⁶ Earlier that summer, Yugoslav officials had complained that they had difficulty communicating with Karafili (this, during the height of Tirana’s efforts to “normalize” relations with Belgrade).¹⁶⁷

Scant information, nevertheless, did not prevent Hoxha from drawing conclusions about the events in Poland and Hungary. At a party plenum on 22 October, he warned that both countries were headed down a disastrous path. He also provided yet another litany of alleged Yugoslav efforts to undermine the PPSH. “It seems that what they want us to do,” he told the delegates, “is to bow down in front of them.” But Khrushchev, he reassured the audience, had offered his full support to the PPSH.¹⁶⁸ Hoxha warned that Bel-

Ponomarev, confirmed that Hungarian leader Mátyás Rákosi was in the Soviet Union “on vacation,” but Ponomarev denied Szántó’s pessimistic outlook.

164. Tirana to all embassy chiefs abroad, No. 662–665 (Top Secret), 23 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16, Fl. 149–150, 162.

165. Tirana to Warsaw and Budapest, No. 679 (Top Secret), 25 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16, Fl. 152.

166. Karafili informed Tirana on the situation within the HWP early in September. Budapest to Tirana, No. 10 (Top Secret), 8 September 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 107, Fl. 3.

167. Memorandum on meeting with the Yugoslav ambassador, 21 July 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 110 verso. A Foreign Ministry report similarly complained about Karafili’s limitations. See Report to the PPSH CC (Secret), 9 August 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 17, Fl. 26.

168. In fact, when Hoxha met with Suslov in Moscow a month earlier, the Soviet position was measured at best. Suslov demanded that Albania also revise relations with Greece. As far as Yugoslavia was concerned, Suslov told Hoxha that Khrushchev was talking to the Yugoslavs and that relations would be improved. See PPSH Politburo meeting, 9 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956 Dos. 54, Fl. 30; “Ob albano-grecheskikh otnosheniyakh” (Soviet Foreign Ministry information prepared for Suslov) (Secret), 2 October 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 181–183; and “O

grade's aim was "to eliminate the current leadership of the party and state, meaning the current Central Committee." But the Albanians would not "keep silent with the Yugoslavs for the sake of better relations." Was it not obvious, he asked, that events in Poland and Hungary were aimed at destroying relations with the Soviet Union? "Even a child understands," Hoxha went on, "that without the Soviet Union and the CPSU constantly present, our country would be in huge trouble." He then delivered the finishing touch:

Comrade Khrushchev has openly defended our party and has kept the Yugoslavs firmly in check with the answers he has given to them, but if things had been any different, the Yugoslavs would not only have kept on mouthing off but would have actually stepped right in [*jo vetëm do të kishin zgjatur llapën, por do të kishin futur edhe këmbët*].¹⁶⁹

Anxiety was at a peak.

Two events moved the Albanians to act. On 30 October, Béla Szalai, who until a week prior had served as a secretary of the Hungary party's Central Committee, sought refuge at the Albanian embassy.¹⁷⁰ The next day, another Hungarian official from the party's International Department sought help.¹⁷¹ Disturbed by the evolving situation, Karafili informed Tirana that high-ranking HWP officials were under threat and that state security operatives were being "shot on the spot."¹⁷² On 31 October, Shehu sent a cable ordering all embassies abroad to grant political asylum immediately to any Hungarians who sought it.¹⁷³ He also ordered Karafili to take in "any high-ranking Hungarian Communists like Béla Szalai or others who ask for our help" (though Soviet Ambassador Yuri Andropov did not agree).¹⁷⁴ Shehu instructed Karafili to ask Andropov for vehicles and weapons they could use to open fire "at the bandits" in case they tried to enter the Albanian embassy.¹⁷⁵ The Alba-

grecheskom naselenii v narodnoi respublikhe Albanii" (Top Secret), 5 October 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 388, Ll. 169–171.

169. Hoxha's report to the of the PPSH Third Congress on 22 October 1956 is contained in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 28.

170. Budapest to Tirana, No. 148 (Top Secret), 30 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 170, Fl. 9.

171. Budapest to Shehu, No. 155 (Top Secret), 2 November 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 19–19 verso; Budapest to Tirana, No. 149 (Top Secret), 31 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 107, Fl. 10–10 verso; and Budapest to Tirana, No. 150 (Top Secret), 1 November 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 107, Fl. 12–12 verso.

172. Budapest to Tirana, No. 149 (Top Secret), 31 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 107, Fl. 10 verso.

173. Shehu to missions abroad (handwritten), 31 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16, Fl. 143.

174. Shehu to Budapest, No. 760 (handwritten), 31 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 14–15; Shehu to Budapest (handwritten), No. 777, 31 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 16; and Budapest to Shehu, No. 156 (Top Secret), 2 November 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 17.

175. Handwritten note from Shehu to Budapest, 2 October 1956 [this is clearly a mistake; it should

nian request for “weapons, grenades, automatic guns, and rifles” baffled Andropov. He explained to Karafili that the Soviet embassy did not stock weapons, that fighting in such numbers would be useless anyway, and that diplomats were not supposed to engage in armed conflict.¹⁷⁶ Regardless, Karafili informed Tirana that embassy personnel had managed to acquire two rifles and two handguns, and he vowed to use them if the opportunity presented itself.¹⁷⁷

With no information forthcoming from Moscow about what was happening in Budapest, Hoxha appeared particularly agitated at the 3 November Politburo meeting.¹⁷⁸ The party relied on Krylov as its main source of confidential information from Moscow, but the Soviet ambassador was not delivering.¹⁷⁹ Barely concealing his dismay, Hoxha admitted that circumstances had forced him to rely on “Western radios, Hungarian radios, and the few bits from Radio Moscow.”¹⁸⁰ Two days later, Shehu reported having complained in person to Krylov about the fact that the dearth of information had forced PPSH leaders to have equipment installed in their offices in order to receive Western radio stations.¹⁸¹ At the meeting, Hoxha blamed the Yugoslavs for fomenting the unrest in Poland and Hungary. While the precise details were murky, he asserted, the Albanians had been through enough with the Yugoslavs to recognize an “intrigue” when they saw one.¹⁸²

Hoxha found something all too familiar in the grumbling over Hungary. Hungary’s Stalinist leaders might have committed some mistakes, Hoxha told the Politburo, especially in economic matters, but certainly nothing so great as to warrant a change of leadership. “Only an anti-Marxist and anti-revolutionary orientation against the people’s power,” he claimed, “could stand for eliminating Communist elements with a long record of activity and a long revolutionary past.” He denounced János Kádár and Rajk as “bandits,” dismissed Imre Nagy “a panderer,” and alleged that Hungarian leaders generally had proven irresponsibly weak in refusing to “strike hard against such enemy

be 2 November], in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 27. Shehu also ordered that all embassy documents and correspondence be destroyed.

176. Budapest to Tirana, No. 162 (Top Secret), in AMPJ, V.1956, Dos. 40, Fl. 21.

177. *Ibid.*

178. According to Hoxha, Moscow’s last information to Tirana was on 18 October, when the CPSU informed other Communist parties of the situation in Poland.

179. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 3 November 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 57, Fl. 15.

180. *Ibid.*, Fl. 16.

181. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 5 November 1956, in AQSH, F.14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 57, Fl. 29–31.

182. *Ibid.*, Fl. 17.

attempts.¹⁸³ But something seemed not quite right in Moscow, either. The Soviet declaration on relations with socialist countries, issued on 30 October and published in *Zëri i Popullit* two days later, had struck him as “excessively self-critical,” formulated “as if errors have been made in regard to equality and sovereignty.” The PPSH would refuse to acknowledge any Soviet mistakes, he declared, because without the Soviet Union “our people cannot live.”¹⁸⁴ Hoxha’s anxiety was also rooted in potential economic troubles. With Egypt engulfed in flames, he warned, “if something happened to us, we would have barely anything at all to eat; we live day to day.”¹⁸⁵ Expecting war, peasants might stop deliveries. Above all, the future of Soviet and bloc loans was far from certain. In a preemptive measure the PPSH Politburo, rushed to halt officer demobilization and reinserted war veterans into the security apparatus.¹⁸⁶

The PPSH records for 5 to 13 November, when the Politburo officially met again, include a suspicious gap. This was a crucial week. Hoxha told Krylov that high-ranking party leaders discussed Hungary “almost every night,” but no written evidence of these discussions exists. What the sources do show is the crippling effect that news of the correspondence between Khrushchev and Tito had on the PPSH leaders.¹⁸⁷ Krylov delivered the letters directly to Hoxha’s office in two sets. The first set included the Soviet-Yugoslav correspondence from 4 to 6 November. No records have surfaced of any high-level discussion of this set or even any confirmation of receipt. The second set, delivered to Hoxha on 13 November, included Tito’s letter from 8 November (regarding Nagy’s fate) and Khrushchev’s response. From the transcript of the PPSH Politburo meeting on 13 November, we can infer that discussion also took place—most likely, informally—about the first set of letters as well, though the nature of these discussions may never be known. Five days earlier, on 8 November, Hoxha had published a thinly veiled Tito-bashing article in *Pravda*, an attack that Soviet officials were willing to feature but

183. *Ibid.*, Fl. 18.

184. *Ibid.*, Fl. 19.

185. *Ibid.*, Fl. 21.

186. Despite maintaining a strict silence on the turmoil in Budapest, *Zëri i Popullit* ran bold headlines denouncing the “imperialist aggression” that led to the Suez crisis. The newspaper also ran a series on the history of the PPSH, printing historical documents that attested to the “iron-clad unity” of the people and party as well as the crucial role the Soviet Union had played in “saving” Albania.

187. For a detailed account of the correspondence between Khrushchev and Tito during the Hungarian crisis, as well as important background on relations between the two countries during this period, see Leonid Gibianskii, “N. S. Khrushchev, I. Broz Tito, i vengerskii krizis 1956 g.,” *Novaya i noveishaya istoriya*, No. 1 (January–February 1999), pp. 10–29; Leonid Gibianskii, “Le trattative segrete sovietico-jugoslave e la repressione della rivoluzione ungherese del 1956,” *Storia Contemporanea*, No. 1 (1994), pp. 57–82; and Leonid Gibianskii, “Soviet-Yugoslav relations and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 10 (March 1998), pp. 139–148.

later cited when criticizing Hoxha's heavy-handed approach to international affairs.¹⁸⁸ Three days later, on 11 November, Tito responded to Hoxha in his Pula speech.

Evidence of the Khrushchev-Tito talks during the Budapest crisis (and Khrushchev's failure to hold any similar talks with Hoxha) came as a shock. Hoxha informed Krylov that the PPSH strongly disagreed with the decision to install Kádár and found the consultations with Tito inexplicable. He also told his Politburo colleagues that the situation was "critical" and that they needed to "think carefully and weigh their words."¹⁸⁹ An intense discussion ensued, during which Politburo members raised serious questions about the CPSU and even suggested aggressively confronting the Soviet leadership. Hoxha hinted at one point that the whole thing might be Krylov's fault. On ideological issues, Hoxha advised, the PPSH would not keep silent "even if we are left all alone. We will surely not be left alone for long if we wage a just war in defense of principles."¹⁹⁰ The meeting's conclusion was to refrain from voicing any reservation for the time being. Yet, as during the escalating Stalin-Tito conflict years earlier, Hoxha found himself trapped within a much greater power dynamic. The Khrushchev-Tito deliberations in 1956 were a disturbing déjà-vu of another period when the PPSH leader's fate could have gone either way. By 1956, however, Hoxha had grown more proficient in domestic damage control. He asserted that Central Committee members were "unprepared" to handle news of the Khrushchev-Tito talks, so the matter was kept secret. In later talks with Krylov, he railed against Tito even though the Soviet representative urged him to tone down the attacks. Finally, Hoxha laid the groundwork for an upcoming visit to Moscow during which he planned to seek explanations and solicit more credits. The country was bankrupt, he told Krylov, and had been waiting patiently for some ten months. China had just handed out 30 million rubles' worth of wheat, rice, and oil. Moscow was next.¹⁹¹

In the aftermath of the Soviet security organs' abrupt arrest of Nagy, relations between Moscow and Belgrade cooled. This reassured Hoxha, but the underlying problem had not altogether disappeared.

Hoxha continued his relentless protests against Yugoslav interventions in

188. The article had been sent to *Pravda* to coincide with the PPSH's anniversary. Hoxha mentioned it to the PPSH Politburo as evidence that the CPSU supported the PPSH's stand on Yugoslavia. Otherwise, he reasoned, Soviet leaders would not have promptly printed the article. Transcript of the PPSH Politburo meeting, 13 November 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 59, Fl. 23.

189. *Ibid.*, Fl. 1.

190. *Ibid.*, Fl. 33.

191. Memoranda of meetings on 22 and 26 November 1956 between Krylov and Hoxha (Secret), 10 December 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, Ll. 240–243; and Cheng Xiaohu, "Yishi Xingtai Zai Zhongguo Lianmeng Wajiao Zhong de Zuoyong: Zhongguo—A'erbania Lianmeng Pouxu,"

internal affairs. Tito's involvement in the Hungarian events seemed to lend a degree of plausibility to Hoxha's complaints. Nevertheless, foreign Communist observers were shocked to hear that, in such a tense climate, Albanian authorities had decided to execute three persons accused of being on the payroll of "a foreign service." The group included a woman, Liri Gega; her husband, Dali Ndreu; and Peter Bulatović, a Yugoslav national who had fled as a Cominformist in 1948. Observers hardly needed this final detail to figure out which country was meant by "a foreign service." Even though the proceedings, culminating on 22 November, took place behind closed doors, the executions became widely known.¹⁹² Rumors eventually spread that Gega had been pregnant, a fact that Khrushchev would later affirm publicly, though the veracity of the claim remains unclear, and the archives bear no evidence to substantiate the assertion.¹⁹³ In Moscow, Yugoslav Ambassador Veljko Mićunović complained to Khrushchev that the Albanians had again initiated an anti-Yugoslav campaign.¹⁹⁴ Others around the bloc also took note of, and were appalled by, the "Stalinist-style" executions.¹⁹⁵

Gega, a high-ranking CPA member during the war, had fallen into disfavor with the Albanian Communist leadership in 1944. Ndreu was a reputable figure within the armed partisan forces, but he suffered the consequences of Gega's purge. Secret surveillance records reveal that Gega had become a nuisance for PPSH leaders. She criticized the party hierarchy, spoke favorably about Tito's Yugoslavia, and closely followed the events at the Tirana party conference. Among other things, Gega refused to accept that Xoxe, whom she deemed to have been "incompetent," could have been solely responsible for postwar abuses.¹⁹⁶ She seemed like an obvious target for proclaiming a Yugo-

Waijiao Pinglun, No. 105 (October 2008), pp. 40–54. I am grateful to Li Qianyu for directing me to this source.

192. On 24 October, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed diplomats abroad that the three had been executed as "enemies of the people" and "spies on a foreign payroll." Tirana to all missions abroad (except Belgrade), No. 1037 (Top Secret), 24 October 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 16, Fl. 163.

193. The controversy surrounding Gega's alleged pregnancy has not been resolved. In recent published testimony, former high-level CC officials have claimed that Gega had undergone unspecified surgery that would have made it impossible for her to conceive children. Khrushchev thought otherwise and brought up the charges after the rupture in relations in the early 1960s.

194. Memorandum of conversation on 29 November 1956 between Khrushchev and the Albanian ambassador in Moscow, Mihal Prifti, (Secret), 3 December 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 14, Fl. 46; and Moscow to Tirana, No. 363 (Top Secret), 30 November 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 341, Fl. 146–147.

195. Gheorghiu-Dej, for instance, told the Soviet counselor in Bucharest the executions had been a terrible idea in "the current climate." See "Zapis' besedy V. F. Nikolaeva s G. Georgy-Dezhem o pozitsii Yugoslavii po voprosu ob I. Nade i ego gruppe i merakh, neobkhodimyykh dlya normalizatsii v Vengrii" (Top Secret), 26 November 1956, in Volkov, et al., *Sovetskii soyuz*, p. 694.

196. At a Politburo meeting in September 1955, Hoxha depicted Gega's "bashing" as a problem that needed to be dealt with, although at the time he had been inclined to "save" Ndreu. See Transcript of

slav-inspired conspiracy. What made the entire scheme believable, besides Gega's genuine affection for the Yugoslav path, was the fact that the three seem to have been in contact with an official at the Yugoslav embassy in Tirana. If Albanian sources are to be believed, Yugoslav officials acted recklessly in this case, too. However, documents linking Gega to the Yugoslavs, which she supposedly hid, were never found.¹⁹⁷ The case was built on provocations and self-incrimination. That the Sigurimi had closely observed the couple for a long time did not matter. Gega and Ndreu were forced to admit that they had attempted to pass sensitive information, especially about the Tirana Party Conference, to the Yugoslavs.¹⁹⁸

A month after the executions, Hoxha traveled to Moscow. His extensive handwritten notes in preparation for the meetings reveal the extent to which events in Poland and Hungary—and, more importantly, Moscow's lack of communication—had perturbed him. The notes include a synopsis of relations with Yugoslavia going back to 1943, in addition to a brief commentary about the events in Poland and Hungary. Disagreements between Albania and Yugoslavia, Hoxha argued in writing, were neither merely regional affairs nor a product of petty personal squabbles. He evidently wanted to make Soviet leaders understand that the conflict rested on principles and that it implicated the whole Soviet bloc. However, during the first meeting with Leonid Brezhnev, Boris Ponomarev, and Mikhail Suslov (who did all the talking), Hoxha was forced to skip the history lesson on Yugoslavia because Suslov complained that it was old news. The anxious visitor then complained about Tito's role in Hungary and also criticized Gomułka, who, he warned, "might go Tito's way." Suslov tried to reassure Hoxha that things were under control. Caught in the midst of an escalating crisis, he explained, the CPSU had simply not been able to conduct more extensive consultations prior to the military intervention in Budapest.¹⁹⁹ Finally, he advised Hoxha to support Kádár and Gomułka and to tone down the rhetoric. The meeting left Hoxha less than satisfied.

Hoxha's intransigence in Moscow had its limits. He wanted the Soviet au-

PPSh Politburo meeting, 15 September 1955, in AQSH, F.14/AP, V. 1955, Dos. 32, Fl. 121. After Gega was arrested in August 1956, Hoxha outlined her various infringements to Krylov (Secret), 31 August 1956, in RGANI, F. 5, Op. 28, D. 391, L. 165.

197. State Security Department study on anti-party groups, p. 169.

198. *Ibid.*, pp. 171–175. See also the Interior Ministry memorandum on the activity of foreign and internal enemies (Top Secret), 27 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V.1956, Dos. 60, Fl. 19. This report complains about numerous instances when interrogated individuals admitted to mistakes they had not committed; it blames persistent violence and personnel abuses for the phenomenon.

199. Like others, Hoxha seems to have greatly underestimated the degree of confusion and hesitation among Soviet leaders on account of Hungary. Report from Hoxha to the PPSH Politburo on meetings with the CPSU Presidium, 3 January 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, V. 1957, Dos. 6, Fl. 1–39. The actual minutes and a transcript are held in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PK(b)BS, V. 1956, Dos. 18. Hoxha's handwritten preparatory notes are held in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PK(b)BS, V. 1956, Dos. 18, Fl. 1–35.

thorities to forgive previous loans worth hundreds of millions of rubles, and he also planned to ask for even more credits. To appease Hoxha, Soviet leaders were willing to oblige. During a cheerful and boozy five-hour dinner held in honor of the delegation on 23 December, Khrushchev indulged the visitor by calling the Yugoslav position in international affairs a *vinegret*. (essentially equivalent to a “mishmash” in this context).²⁰⁰ In jest, Soviet Presidium members took turns calling Nikita Sergeevich “*albanets*” (an Albanian). Drunken merriment combined with seemingly serious pronouncements about Albania’s strategic location in the Mediterranean and free-floating ideas about deploying a Soviet submarine base off the Albanian coast. Three days later, however, Khrushchev summoned Hoxha to a meeting focused on party affairs and reprimanded him for the three executions in November. The Soviet carrot-and-stick tactics were played down to the rest of the PPSH Politburo. “Everything is fine,” a party telegram to Shehu proclaimed, “you can go happily to work and hunting now.”²⁰¹

To what extent, if at all, Hoxha was appeased is difficult to assess. Little changed in his approach at home. As he had done for over a year by that point, he appeared to be in total agreement with Soviet officials in Moscow but sustained a hard line back in Albania. To Khrushchev’s criticism about the executions, for example, he responded by complaining about Krylov. Had the Albanians been given a warning from Moscow, he claimed, the executions would not have taken place.²⁰² Back in Tirana during a Politburo meeting in January 1957, however, he had declared the executions necessary to make “an example out of their treason.” In April 1957 Khrushchev insisted that he had instructed Krylov to advise the PPSH to halt the executions, but the Soviet ambassador had allegedly (and inexplicably) failed to carry out his duty. No record of such a document has been found in the archives, and Hoxha, in conversation with Khrushchev, denied having received it but does mention it in *The Titoites*.²⁰³ What the records do show is that Krylov brought up the trials to Hoxha on 13 November. At the time, Hoxha informed him that the trials would go ahead as planned. When this “Soviet intervention” was discussed in the Politburo later the same day, some wondered whether it was a signal to halt the trials. Yet the Politburo had decided to go ahead with the executions

200. Notes from the dinner, drafted “from memory” by members of the PPSH delegation, are also contained in AQSH, F.14/AP, M-PK(b)BS, V. 1956, Dos. 18. They were discussed at length during the 3 January meeting of the Politburo. Passages with particularly damaging comments about the Yugoslavs were underlined in the report.

201. Kapo (Moscow) to Shehu (Tirana) (Top Secret), 23 December 1956, in AMPJ, V. 1956, Dos. 36, Fl. 107.

202. Hoxha in the PPSH Politburo, 3 January 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1957, Dos. 6, Fl. 32.

203. Enver Hoxha, *The Titoites* (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1982), p. 609. *The Titoites* has the distinction of being Hoxha’s most paranoid published account.

despite what Tito might eventually say and even despite the position of the CPSU.²⁰⁴

At the third party plenum, held 13–16 February 1957, Hoxha delivered a scathing critique of the Yugoslavs and mounted a vigorous defense of Stalin's legacy. This episode, as one author observed a few years later, “injected an ideological content into the conflict with Khrushchev and Tito.”²⁰⁵ Deteriorating relations between Moscow and Belgrade enabled this forceful stand, though it did not go unchallenged. During a trip to Moscow in April 1957, the Albanian leader was severely reprimanded about relations with Belgrade. When meeting with Khrushchev on 15 April, Hoxha went on a tirade—at one point Khrushchev complained that it had lasted a full hour—about Yugoslav anti-party and anti-state efforts going back to the Tirana Party Conference. Khrushchev was not impressed. As “southern peoples,” he complained, Albanian leaders were “warm-blooded” and approached the Yugoslav issue “nervously.” Even some bloc partners considered them “quarrelsome” (a reference to the Romanian newspaper *Scînteia*). When Hoxha nervously interrupted Khrushchev's rebuttal, the Soviet leader turned angry. “You want to build your policies based on emotions!” he exclaimed. “The Romanian comrades have rightly called you quarrelsome.” Khrushchev blamed Hoxha for presenting the state of affairs with Yugoslavia as “utterly hopeless,” as if no relations could ever be possible. “According to you,” he added, “we ought to go back to what Stalin used to do.” The host continued: “When I hear you talk about these matters, you are boiling inside! The Italians, the Greeks, and the Turks are no better than the Yugoslavs.” In vain Hoxha attempted to depict the Yugoslavs as historical enemies. Khrushchev disagreed.²⁰⁶

The Soviet leader then brought up the November executions. Sentencing a woman to death, he asserted, had “attracted the wrath of the whole world.” He warned that Tuk Jakova, another purged PPSH official, should not be executed.²⁰⁷ In no uncertain terms, he blamed Hoxha for having promised “self-

204. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 13 November 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V.1956. Dos. 59, Fl. 1–36.

205. Stavro Skendi, “Albania and the Sino-Soviet Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (April 1962), p. 473.

206. Transcript of conversation with CPSU leaders, 15 April 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PK(b)BS, V. 1957, Dos. 2.

207. Formerly an organizational secretary and high-ranking party member, Jakova was a party “old guard” who had once refused to side with Hoxha during an early internal conflict. As retribution, he was dismissed from his duties for “opportunism” and “a lack of hatred toward class enemies” at the Ninth Plenum in February 1951. In the post-Stalin era, however, Jakova was emboldened to seek further modifications in party policies in April 1955, including a new course with Yugoslavia. He also objected to the distorted official narrative of the war effort (as evidenced, for example, by the war museum in Tirana). This narrative presented Hoxha and others around him as heroes, Jakova charged, but the party had actually been organized by the Yugoslavs. Bedri Spahiu, a CC member and minister

control” in Moscow and then resorting to abuses back in Tirana. The April 1957 dressing-down was comparable in severity only to what PPSH leaders had endured with Beria in 1953. As usual, in public, Khrushchev resorted to boasts about Albania’s unparalleled potential to become an example for Asian, African, and Arab countries. The tiny Mediterranean country, he proclaimed, was to become a “garden in bloom” of the Soviet bloc. But he also emphasized the importance of not giving the impression that socialism in Albania was being built by the Soviet Union. Hoxha and his colleagues, however, were interested in more Soviet involvement, not less. They asked that the Soviet Union forgive all loans extended prior to 1955. Moscow agreed to 550 million rubles (though the published figure was lower). Still, the trip left the delegation conflicted. During Hoxha’s visits to various workplaces and landmarks in Leningrad, Soviet officials forced him to soften his speeches and remove damning references to Yugoslavia. As he confessed in a later Politburo meeting, he came away from the trip feeling that Soviet officials did not “understand” the development of Albania.²⁰⁸

Many of these conversations appear in Hoxha’s later memoirs. Despite drawing on dialogues almost verbatim from party documents, these accounts artfully manipulate context and timing to give the impression that Hoxha stood up to Khrushchev. Nothing of the sort actually took place. In an unsettling *déjà-vu* of the forced meeting with Vukmanović-Tempo in 1955, Khrushchev pressed Hoxha at a state dinner to shake hands and raise a toast with Veljko Mićunović, the Yugoslav ambassador in Moscow. “Truth be told,” Hoxha later reported, “the atmosphere at dinner was warm but we felt hurt inside.”²⁰⁹ As in 1955, Hoxha said that he did not sleep the whole night. By early morning, however, the PPSH leaders allegedly “drew the correct conclusions”: The PPSH had employed the wrong tactics, but the party line against Yugoslavia had been correct all along. This was a half-hearted admission designed to appease the Soviet Union. “If Khrushchev had not taken this stand,” Hoxha admitted to the PPSH Politburo, “we would have done as before, said that we agreed with them but in practice we would have acted differently.”²¹⁰ For quite some time the PPSH leader had played this intricate balancing game. Back in Tirana he forcefully emphasized the limits of the concession: The PPSH would continue to denounce revisionism and opportunism, and the

of education, supported Jakova. Both were banished and placed under surveillance. Downgraded to a lowly job in a furniture factory, Jakova wrote to the CPSU CC to make his case. Khrushchev’s warning in April 1957 may have spared Jakova from execution, but he was nevertheless completely isolated in 1957 and died in prison—officially of complications from illness—two years later.

208. Hoxha’s report to the Politburo on meetings with the CPSU Presidium, 27 April 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1957, Dos. 10, Fl. 1–35.

209. *Ibid.*, Fl. 23.

210. *Ibid.*, Fl. 24.

party line would not be revised. They would merely need to rethink their tactics. Sure enough, the PPSH leadership quickly resumed, as *The Economist* had once put it, “their favorite occupation of attacking Yugoslavia.”²¹¹

The Chinese Connection

In late December 1956, less than two weeks after Hoxha’s visit to Moscow, Peng Zhen from the Chinese Politburo, who was also vice chairman of the Central Committee of the National People’s Congress, visited Tirana.²¹² Two senior PPSH officials, Shehu and Hysni Kapo, offered to give Peng a detailed overview of relations with Yugoslavia, presenting a remarkable, if selectively put together, summary. In addition to a lengthy narrative of internal party affairs going back to 1944, they disclosed a series of highly confidential details, including the admission that the Albanians had placed explosives in the Corfu Channel based on Tito’s direct instructions and with Yugoslav technical assistance. (Two British destroyers struck mines in the channel in October 1946, sparking an early Cold War incident and the first case to be tried at the International Court of Justice.) Evidently, Albanian leaders had come to realize China’s growing role in the Communist world. When the hosts pressed a reluctant Peng for a communiqué at the conclusion of the meeting, the Albanian hosts emphasized that China’s endorsement was critical for the PPSH.²¹³

Until late 1956, relations with the Chinese were limited, although Tirana was among the first to recognize the PRC, exchanging ambassadors in 1954. In turn, China had proven sympathetic to Albanian economic requests, granting a long-term loan of 50 million rubles. Beyond that, the CCP kept the Albanians abreast of high-level meetings with Yugoslav officials after establishing diplomatic relations with Belgrade in 1955.²¹⁴ Hoxha met with CCP Chairman Mao Zedong in September 1956 while attending the Eighth CCP National Congress, and the Chinese leader told him that neither Tirana nor Belgrade—but the Informburo—was to blame for the crisis with Yugoslavia

211. “Albania Steps Up the Attack,” *The Economist*, 20 April 1956, p. 235.

212. The Chinese parliamentary delegation was on an extended tour of the Soviet bloc, having been in Moscow at the height of tension after Tito’s Pula speech on 11 November. The Chinese tried to step in and facilitate a meeting of Communist leaders, including Tito, but the latter refused. See Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, pp. 64–68; and Cheng, “Yishi Xingtai Zai Zhongguo Lianmeng Waijiao Zhong de Zuoyong,” p. 43.

213. Transcript of meeting between Kapo, Shehu, and Peng Zhen, 16 January 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 1, Fl. 1–55.

214. Report on the meeting of Deng Xiaoping and Wang Jiaxiang with LCY CC members [Dragi] Stamenković and [Vlajko] Begović from 26–27 May 1955, in AQSH, F.14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1955, Dos. 1.

in 1948. Stalin also came up during the conversation, and Hoxha asserted that the late Soviet dictator had committed a number of “grave errors”—a detail Hoxha’s later memoirs omit. During the conversation, Mao appeared surprised that relations with Yugoslavia had stalled but nevertheless proved sympathetic to the PPSH.²¹⁵ At the plenum on 22 October in Tirana, where Hoxha warned about events in Hungary and Poland, he also confirmed Mao’s support for the PPSH’s “Marxist-Leninist line.” This was the first time that Mao’s teachings and China’s example were forcefully embraced and held up as an example. The party, Hoxha noted at the plenum, could learn a great deal from the organizational experience of the Chinese.²¹⁶

The January 1957 talks with Peng constituted the first serious effort to mobilize Chinese support. Reiterating Hoxha’s point in Moscow a few weeks prior, Shehu told the visitor that Yugoslavia was not merely a regional problem. Going back to 1944, he asserted, the Yugoslavs had consistently plotted to undermine the PPSH. When Peng asked why the PPSH had been unable to preempt Belgrade’s numerous conspiracies, Shehu averred that although the Albanian side “had no facts,” they were convinced that the Yugoslavs had provoked the Budapest crisis, just as they had masterminded the Tirana Party Conference.²¹⁷ When Peng asked about Moscow’s stand on the matter, Shehu argued that the PPSH had the CPSU’s full backing with the exception of a “formal complaint” about the November executions. Those executions had been necessary, Shehu insisted, given the dangerous situation at the time.²¹⁸ He admitted that Albania might have made a few mistakes in handling relations with Belgrade in 1948, but Stalin’s letters to Tito and the Informburo’s forceful stand against Yugoslavia had helped preserve Albanian independence. Without these documents, Shehu declared, “Albania would have been liquidated as a state.” Thus, he concluded, the Albanians considered these documents “the principal factor that led to a second liberation of Albania.”²¹⁹

215. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 9 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956 Dos. 54, Fl. 17–18. During the same trip, Zhou Enlai assured Hoxha the Chinese would provide “anything necessary” via their ambassador in Tirana. He also invited himself to Tirana, a visit that would coincide with a planned trip to Belgrade.

216. Report to the Second Plenum of the PPSH Third Congress, 22 October 1956, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, OU, V. 1956, Dos. 28, Fl. 31. In his later memoirs, Hoxha claims that Mao did not impress him during the meeting in 1956. In his original report to the Politburo, however, as well as in his speech in Tirana when he returned on 7 October, he makes a much different assessment. See “Fjala e shokut Enver Hoxha,” *Zëri i Popullit* (Tirana), 8 October 1956, p. 1. Despite extensive citations from party documents, the version of the visit to China presented in Hoxha’s memoirs is an amusing 1980s attempt at historical revision. See Hoxha, *The Khrushchevites*, pp. 241–246. A source widely used by foreign observers, Hoxha’s memoirs need to be treated with great caution.

217. Transcript of meeting between Kapo, Shehu, and Peng Zhen, 16 January 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 1, Fl. 23.

218. *Ibid.*, Fl. 26–7.

219. *Ibid.*, Fl. 19.

The messages from the Chinese were mixed. By this point, Beijing was actively seeking a more central place in East European affairs, but a clear partner had not yet emerged.²²⁰ When an Albanian parliamentary delegation returned the visit later that year, Peng summarized the hour-long conversation he had had with Tito regarding the role of the Soviet Union in bloc affairs. Peng made clear to the head of the delegation, Rita Marko, that “the USA is exercising a tremendous pull on the Yugoslavs so it is crucial that we pull them toward us.”²²¹ In a similar vein, Liu Shaoqi claimed that “Stalin’s policies at the time [during the split] were not right vis-à-vis Yugoslavia. We went too far by calling them enemies.”²²² As the Chinese became more vocal in international Communist affairs, they initially tried to maintain a balance between Tirana and Belgrade.²²³ Only in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet clash did China confirm its support and Mao assert that the Albanians had been right on the Yugoslav issue all along.²²⁴

In attempting to court the Chinese, PPSH leaders implicitly acknowledged their anxieties about Soviet positions throughout 1956. Hoxha had become, as François Fejtö writes, “a prisoner of his own loyalty to the socialist camp.”²²⁵ The Tirana Party Conference in April, but also its aftermath, indicated that the biggest assets for Communist rule in the small Balkan country—the party and the Soviet bloc—were also the biggest liabilities. Khrushchev’s secret speech, and rumors about relaxed ideological positions in other socialist countries, circulated through the party ranks. Coercion enabled Hoxha to eliminate the disorganized “opposition” at the Tirana Party Conference, but he was also helped by the fact that a large swath of the party establishment had been directly implicated in the purges of the late 1940s and the virulent anti-Yugoslav campaigns. If intraparty discontent had instead erupted at the Third Party Congress, Hoxha’s authority would have incurred more damage.

220. Mercy Kuo, *Contending with Contradictions: China’s Policy towards Soviet Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Sino-Soviet Split, 1953–1960* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), pp. 69–112, 164.

221. Minutes from meeting between Peng Zhen and PPSH Politburo member Rita Marko, n.d. [May 1956], in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 4, Fl. 1–3.

222. Transcript of meeting between Liu Shaoqi and Rita Marko, 9 May 1957, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, DA, V. 1957, Dos. 730, Fl. 3. Another transcript of the meeting is held in AQSH, F. 14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 2. Hoxha wrote in the margin of this version that the transcript could be shown to the rest of the Politburo.

223. On this point, as well as for information about relations among the Soviet Union, China, and Yugoslavia in 1957, see Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, “Hidden Currents during the Honeymoon: Mao, Khrushchev, and the 1957 Moscow Conference,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 74–117.

224. Records from meeting between Mao and a delegation of the Albania-China Friendship Society, 20 October 1960, People’s Republic of China Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, 109-00960-03, cited in Cheng, “Yishi Xingtai Zai Zhongguo Lianmeng Waijiao Zhong de Zuoyong,” p. 42.

225. Fejtö, “La deviazione albanese,” p. 31.

To this day, opinions differ about whether the flare-up of criticism at the Tirana Party Conference was provoked or even orchestrated by the party apparatus itself. Although no available evidence supports the claim of party involvement, the party establishment undeniably benefited from the wide-ranging witch-hunt undertaken in its aftermath. In the short term, party leaders were able to fabricate enemies, purge party ranks, and denounce calls for reform as Yugoslav-inspired conspiracies. Later they realized that they would also have to screen all Soviet and East European-trained specialists, students, and apparatchiks.

During the fall and winter of 1956–1957, the PPSH establishment found itself in a curious position. Despite deep anxiety about developments in Budapest and Moscow, Albanian party leaders were nevertheless kept in the dark. Although this infuriated Hoxha, it also helped him maintain a degree of control over party ranks. Throughout 1956, Albania's isolation compounded the anxiety of the establishment but also made possible the maintenance of a tight regime of censorship and strict controls. Even as Soviet leaders continued to reprimand Hoxha in private talks, he continued to pursue a hard line at home. The bloody suppression of the Hungarian uprising and, more importantly, renewed coolness in Soviet-Yugoslav relations helped Hoxha reinforce his orthodox position vis-à-vis Belgrade. But the Yugoslav problem did not abate. Well into 1958, Hoxha and Shehu used every available opportunity to assail Belgrade's "revisionism."²²⁶ When Khrushchev finally visited Albania in 1959, he demanded that Yugoslavia not be discussed or even mentioned during speeches. The Albanians were incensed. "Our party line is correct," Hoxha asserted during a tense Politburo meeting convened to discuss Khrushchev's precondition. "There is no doubt about this."²²⁷

The Albanian dilemma in 1956 does not look all that different from the Soviet dilemma; namely, that "ideology (socialism) and geopolitics (Soviet security) had been made inseparable."²²⁸ The difference was that Hoxha and his party colleagues had been on the brink before—at the height of the Stalin-Tito conflict—and the paranoia vis-à-vis Belgrade had almost turned into a method of rule. If Tito rejected Soviet and Chinese overtures for the sake of Yugoslav independence, Hoxha claimed to reject de-Stalinization for the sake of Albanian independence (from Belgrade). Existing accounts of Communist Albania have therefore portrayed Hoxha as a fierce nationalist and the Albanian variant of Communism as deeply shaped by some sort of tribal national-

226. On Hoxha's and Shehu's attacks, see GDR embassy in Tirana to SED CC, n.d. [hand-dated 18 October 1958], in BArch, SAPMO, DY30/IV2/20/100, 90–92.

227. Transcript of PPSH Politburo meeting, 19 May 1959, in AQSH, F. 14/AP, V. 1959, Dos. 17, Fl. 1–6.

228. Kotkin (with Gross), *Uncivil Society*, p. 18.

ist ethos. In fact, Albania's choice under Hoxha was "indefinite Stalinism," and the party merely mobilized nationalism to keep reforms at bay. In 1956 Hoxha successfully managed to equate calls for reform with an anti-national stance. But without the capacity generated by Soviet subsidies (which were later replaced by the Chinese), as well as external factors beyond his control, Hoxha's so-called nationalism would have amounted to little, if anything at all.²²⁹ In exaggerated form, Albania came to embody both the promises and perils of socialist interactions. Precisely because the country had been so thoroughly Sovietized in the 1950s, it mirrored the arbitrariness and inconsistencies of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign. Just as Stalin had incidentally helped make Albania internationally relevant in 1948, so Khrushchev incidentally helped to keep it that way. This "mirroring effect" was a fundamental feature of Communist rule in the small Balkan country and helps explain how, over time, the PPSH establishment came to believe that Albania embodied Mao's words, spoken one year after the glorious gathering in Beijing in 1956: "Small states sometimes win over big ones; they succeed over those better armed; and the weak overcome the strong."²³⁰

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229. Peter Prifti allows that ideology was one of "the more important mainsprings" of the PPSH, but he notes that Hoxha had undoubtedly been assisted by "an element of luck." See Peter R. Prifti, *Socialist Albania since 1944: Domestic and Foreign Developments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), pp. 25, 243.

230. Transcript of conversation between Mao and Rita Marko, 12 May 1957, in AQSH, F.14/AP, M-PKK, V. 1957, Dos. 3, Fl. 4.