

## **CONCEPT NOTE OF THE PROJECT: “Dealing with the aftermath of Communism in Albania”**

Until today the painful heritage of the communist regime is an open wound of the Albanian society. The Albanian society is deeply divided. An important part of the political, social and cultural problems of today find their roots and reasons in this past poisoned by violence and repression. Without healing and reconciliation a positive future for Albania will be most unlikely. Unfortunately the questions of healing and reconciliation are not properly addressed so far. There is a huge category of people for whom the “persecution” is still going on. We have in mind the ex-persecuted who have not received a fair reward for their sufferance. They were neglected and denied the social position they belong to. As a matter of fact, they all received some material compensation, but they were not involved in the social, political and administrative structures. Attention turns to them only during election campaigns, where they are used as a rhetoric tool in the clashes between the political opponents.

On the other hand, Albania has not carried out the lustration process and the secret files of the ex collaborators of the Communist Regime are still in darkness. This gives the opportunity to them to become part of the leading structures in nowadays Albania. As a natural reaction of self-protection, their tendency is to avoid the class of the ex-persecuted and to do everything possible to keep power off their hands. The first opposing political party created in 1990, had ex-communists among its leaders. This is due to them being highly educated and qualified and eager to take the chance. This category is still on the top structures and it tends to favor only “its kind” leaving out the real victims of the communist persecution. Under the flag of democratic progress, they seek to wipe out everything that relates them to their Communist past. Their psychological complex is against the interests of the ex-persecuted because the testimonies of their sufferance are being destroyed and if it goes on like this, will be wiped out from the memory of the old and inexistent for the coming generations.

History teaches us that we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past if we forget them. So, if the crimes of the Communist History are forgotten, it is very likely that they show back in the future generations, and also is very likely that the consequences will be greatly amplified.

For this very reason, the JP Commission of Albania together with the Maximilian-Kolbe-Foundation and Renovabis have decided to undertake an initiative to document and publish facts related to the communist prisons in Albania. Starting with this documentation we like to provide space to speak about these questions in an appropriate way in order to make a humble contribution to healing and reconciliation. We are convinced that achieving these goals needs a long term perspective. But the starting point of this process is bringing up the painful truth and showing respect and solidarity to all those who suffered under the regime and still suffer under

the impact of our violent past. Going this way we hope to give a living witness of our desire to reconciliation and renewal of Albania.

## **PROJECT GOALS**

Bringing public attention to and strengthening the public discussion about the painful history of the Communist Regime and the ongoing meaning of this period for Albania today in order to contribute to healing and reconciliation:

- Through visiting the buildings of the communist prisons, meeting persons responsible for their preservation, research of archives and encounters with ex- prisoners, to obtain information on the dimension of the communist persecution in Albania.
- Through organizing a conference at national level to present facts, documents, records, photos and testimonies with the purpose to inform the public about the history, structures and functions of the communist prisons in Albania.
- Through putting memorial and informative signs i.e. placates etc. to refresh the memory of the public opinion on the atrocious persecution in the communist prisons.
- Through lobbying in the highest state organs and to the persons responsible for preservation of testimonies and documentation of communist crimes, aim at a new objective evaluation of the injustices which took place during communism and have detailed information open to the public
- Through lobbying for an appropriate preservation of the sites of the communist crimes and making the accessible to activities of commemoration and reflection.

## **PROJECT REALIZATION**

The realization of this project demands a work group composed of members of the Albanian JPC; representatives of Renovabis; representatives of Maximilian Kolbe Foundation; representatives of the Albanian Institute of Integration of The Ex Persecuted; historians, jurists, sociologists, political ex-prisoners and people of art. The activity will be directed and supervised by the Albanian JP Commission. We intend to ask the support of our fellow European Commissions, especially the German one, in order to benefit from their experience.

The project will start in February 2012. In the first phase (six months) we will make expeditions to six sites that used to serve as prisons: Spaç; Qafë e Barit; Burrel; Tepelenë; Shkodër; Bulqizë. (The sites list could be edited. Other ones may be added.) Their current condition will be photographed and recorded in order to present it. The group will be assisted in

their expeditions by ex-prisoners who have been there, and thus can shed some light over the hardships they experienced. Their testimonies will be documented and presented to the public in various forms (Photographs, video records etc.). We will provide photographs and other recordings showing the atrocious Communist persecution in Albania in order to realize an exhibition with photographs of scenes from the Communist prisons and portraits of ex-prisoners.

The exhibition of photographs, video recordings and other testimony items such as personal belongings of the prisoners, samples of barbed wire, handcuffs etc. will take place during the national conference which will be organized in the end of the first phase of the project which is in September 2012.

A group of persons from the project will have a training expedition in similar sites through Europe in order to learn from other experiences in terms of methodology of preservation and commemorating. This exchange is supposed to connect the project with other actors in Europe working in this field.

We will collaborate with the associations of the ex-politically persecuted in order to obtain reliable information on the exact number of people who suffered in the prisons, were deported and executed during the Communist Regime. We will organize a one-day workshop to discuss the current social and economical situation of the ex-persecuted of Communism and the necessary steps for their integration. We seek cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice to obtain exact information on the number of people persecuted during the Communist Dictatorship and the steps taken for their social rehabilitation.

The national conference will be organized, with the participation of representatives of institutions and associations of the ex-political persecuted; guests invited from different JP European Commissions; donors; representatives of foreign embassies; representatives of state institutions concerned with the social integration of the politically persecuted during the Communist Regime. The conference will provide space for a workshop to discuss on the current political and economical status of the politically persecuted during the Communist Regime in Albania. The conclusions and results will be included in a final declaration approved by all participants before its release. During the conference the participants will be able to see recorded witnesses.

In the places that used to serve as prisons we will pay our homage and put commemorative placates in honor of all people who suffered in there during the Communist persecution.

The competent state organs will be demanded to take concrete steps to preserve those prisons as testimony of the Communist persecution and open them for visitors who wish to see. This way they would be a powerful mean of sensitizing in favor of freedom and human rights. Creating memorial sites as places of commemoration, moaning as well as ethical, historical and

political reflection would be a symbolic and concrete expression of the constructive attempt of the Albanian society coming to terms with its history.

It will be crucial for the project to address all these painful issues with the right attitude balancing compassion with those who suffered and the will to understand what happened. We are aware that the sufferings in Albania are a part of a broader picture and history of crimes and sufferings in Europe. Therefore the international cooperation being part of this project has to be understood as an contribution as well to the Albanian public discussion as well as to the European discourse on these issues.