

# *Types of prisons and labour camps and the position of convicted persons in Albania during the communist dictatorship*

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## *Abstract*

This article is an analysis of the types of prisons and labour camps, their structure and organization as well as the position of convicted persons while serving the punishment of imprisonment in Albania during the communist dictatorship period. During this time-period and up to the triumph of democracy in Albania (1944-1991) a large number of prisons and labour camps functioned and operated for the serving of punishment for a large number of convicted persons, the majority part of whom were political prisoners. The large number of prisoners during this time-period as well as of prisons and labour camps was most of all a consequence of cruel punitive policy lead by the Albanian communist state, which as such was directed solely against the opposers of the communist regime. In this line, a well deserved place will be allocated to the organization of prisons and labour camps, the purpose of punishment with imprisonment and the position of convicted persons while serving their punishment. The scope of this article is to separately shed light upon the types and purpose of establishment of prisons and labour camps, the harsh positions of convicted persons, the limitation of their rights and inhuman treatment during the monist Albanian state period.

**Key Words:** Albania, prisons, communist dictatorship, labour camps, torture, political prisoners.

## *Introduction*

The execution of punishment of imprisonment in Albania has its history of development and transformation. Throughout the modern period, from the creation of an independent Albanian state until the

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present time, the means and methods for carrying out criminal sentences and the manner in which convicted prisoners have been treated have changed depending on the prevailing historical, social, economic, and political circumstances. The establishment of an independent Albanian state gave birth to a new Albanian legal system, including the development of the criminal law and the enactment of penal provisions governing the execution of punishment and the conditions of confinement of convicted persons.

The system of imprisonment and the societal response to crime in ethnic Albanian territories has not been studied sufficiently<sup>1</sup> during the historical period before the proclamation of an independent Albanian state (November 28, 1912). Historical legal documents and other data, regarding the system of sentencing and the manner of execution of sentences is very poor. Albanians, who are direct descendants of Illyrians, have for much of their history fallen under the yoke of other people. These ethnic Illyrian and later Albanian lands were under the Roman Empire, and subsequently conquered by the Byzantines. At the end of the XIV century and the beginning of the XV century, the land now known as Albania was conquered by the Ottoman Empire and remained under Turkish rule for almost five centuries. As a consequence, foreign law governed the system of punishments for criminal behavior, and the execution of those punishments. Nevertheless, mountainous regions of Albania did not

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<sup>1</sup> Until the proclamation of independence, the Shariat law, which was based on Qur'an, applied in the Albanian territories under occupation. In addition, the applications of several canons along with the Ottoman Criminal Code of 1878 were in effect. This Code remained in force in Albania even after proclamation of independence, until 1928. The sentences foreseen by this Code for the most serious crimes were: death penalty, shackles for life or temporary use of shackles on prisoners and public exposure of prisoners in chains, confinement in the castle, life imprisonment, imprisonment, permanent deprivation of their titles, denial of their political rights, loss of their jobs and fine. (See: *The Ottoman criminal Law Mbrothësija* (ed.), Tirana, 1924, page 1).

always obey the foreign administration, applying instead Albanian customary law in the field of punishment and their execution.<sup>2</sup>

After the proclamation of independence of Albania by the National Assembly convened in Vlora on November 28, 1912, the first Albanian government was set up and the first prime minister, Ismail Qemali, was elected. Even though the Conference of Ambassadors, held in London in 1913, recognized the foundation of an Albanian state, it arbitrarily excluded from its borders approximately half of the territory and half of the ethnic Albanian population, including Kosovo. The period from the proclamation of independence in 1912 until the beginning of the Second World War was characterized by political instability. Albanian governments were replaced one after another. On September 1, 1928, the president of Albania, Ahmet Zogu, proclaimed a constitutional monarchy for Albania, and declared himself the King. The King Zogu remained in power until the invasion of Albania by fascist Italy on April 7, 1939. From the proclamation of independence until Albania's liberation on November 29, 1944, the country promulgated many laws and other legal acts including provisions regulating the execution of punishment of imprisonment, the structure of prisons, and the treatment and status of convicted persons.

The period following Albania's liberation was followed by a 45-year period of communist rule. A gradual build up of a communist dictatorship and one party state under the leadership of Enver Hoxha characterized this period. During this chapter of the Albanian history, several legal penitentiary acts were promulgated. These acts were a powerful means that served the party-state to implement its

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<sup>2</sup> Main sources of the Albanian customary law are: The Code of Lekë Dukagjini (collected and codified by Shtjefen Gjeçovi), Shkodër, 1933; The Canon of Skanderbeg (collected and codified by Dom Frano Ilia), Milot, 1993; The Canon of Labëria (codified and prepared for edition by dr. Ismet Elezi), Tiranë, 2006; The Canon of Puka, The Canon of Luma and the Canon of Highlands. (For more see: I. Elezi, Knowledge on the Pan-Albanian customary law (s. I.), Prishtina, 2003). There are many of criminal provisions in these canons referring to the punishments and the manner of their execution.

teachings, and resulted in limitations of many rights of the convicted persons, and a significant deterioration of their status. During this period, the number of prisons and labour camps increased, with sentenced prisoners facing harsh living and working conditions, and subject to torture.

In this article we will present and analyze the types of prisons and labour camps which functioned during the communist dictatorship period in Albania. Also, we will treat the position of convicted persons while serving their punishment with imprisonment throughout the time of existence of the monist state and up to the triumph of democracy in Albania (1944-1991). During the analysis of this historical development we based our interpretation on archived data, legal provisions, respective legal-criminal and penological data, penitentiary practice, prison diaries and other publications of convicted persons, interviews with former convicted persons as well as other important data which dealt with execution of punishment with imprisonment and treatment of convicted persons during this time. In this manner, we will get acquainted with the main characteristics of execution of punishment with imprisonment in Albania during the long period of totalitarian state. Moreover, we will present the main characteristics of prisons and labour camps, as well as of the convicted persons during the serving of this punishment.

### ***1. Types of prisons and labour camps in Albania during the communist dictatorship period***

During the rule of the totalitarian state until the triumph of democracy in Albania, the punishment of imprisonment was carried out in prisons and labour camps or "units for reeducation" which existed in large numbers and were under the Interior Ministry. During this long period of time, dozens of prisons and labour camps were built for convicted persons to serve their sentences. The number of convicted people who served their sentences in these prisons and labour camps was very large; in particular, the number of political prisoners was high during the first years following the establishment of communist rule. Thus, referring to the available data for January

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1947, out of 4749 prisoners, 3659 were political prisoners and the remaining 1090 were ordinary prisoners <sup>3</sup> so, there is a rate 3 to 1 in favor of political prisoners. This number continued to increase rapidly, so that in 1950 this number reached to 7168 prisoners and 2000 interned, in all 9168 prisoners.<sup>4</sup> As many political prisoners claim, living conditions in prisons and labour camps were inhumane and they were subject to torture and degrading treatment, so that in a way these facilities were used for physical elimination of political opponents of the regime.

This large increase in the number of political prisoners and prisons in post war Albania was due to the harsh punitive policy pursued by the communist state which was directed especially against opponents of the regime. At the same time numerous labour camps were set up and the work of prisoners was used in numerous constructions throughout the country. It not easy to estimate the exact number of such prisons and camps because its number has changed during different phases of development of the communist state. It is also very hard to ascertain the exact number of convicted persons who served their sentences here, during this period of time. According to the evidence of the Directorate of the Camps and Prisons of 1947, at this time Albania had 18 prisons (8 out of which were political prisons, 7 ordinary prisons and 3 prisons were mixed).<sup>5</sup> The first labour camps for convicted prisoners were operational during this time, such as: the labour camp of Maliqi, of Bedeni, of Vllashku, of Valiasi etc. The number of labour camps increased continuously, especially after 1950. With a decision of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, Number 1620 of 1955, camps were called units and were denominated as follows: Camp number 1- Unit number 301; Camp number 2-Unit number 303; Camp number 3-Unit number 305; Camp number 4-Unit number 307; Camp number 5- Unit number 309,

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<sup>3</sup> According to: F. Sufaj, *The history of Albanian prisons during XX-th century, "Albin", Tirana, 2000, p.106.* In addition to this, Albania had another 1272 people interned because of their political views.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110.

<sup>5</sup> According to: F. Sufaj, *op.cit.*, p.116.

whereas prisons were denominated: The prison of Shkodra-Unit number 315; The prison of Vlora-Unit number 319; The prison of Korça-Unit number 317; the prison of Tirana-Unit number 313; and the prison of Burrel-Unit number 321.<sup>6</sup> These were the prisons and units in Albania, according to data from November-December 1962: Unit 301 Bulqizë, Unit 307 Tirana, Unit 321 Burrel, Unit 309 Tirana, Unit 303 Tirana, Unit 315 Shkodra, Unit 318 Korçë, Unit 319 Vlorë, Unit 305 Tirana, Unit 313 Tirana, Unit of Handicraft and the camp in Durrës.<sup>7</sup> The total number of number of prisoners was 4662, out of which 1809 were political prisoners and 2853 ordinary prisoners.<sup>8</sup>

During the years of communist rule in Albania there were many prisons and labour camps. Relying on the data on prisons and labour camps in communist Albania as well as documents from the archives and witnesses made by convicted persons during this time, it comes out that the most known prisons and labour camps during totalitarian system in Albania were: 1. Closed Prisons: *the prison of Gjirokastra, the prison of Tepelena, the prison of Vlora, the prison of Berat, the prison of Korça, the prison of Elbasan, the prison of Durrës, the old prison of Tirana, the new prison of Tirana, the prison of Burrel, the prison of Shkodra, the prison of Peshkopi, the prison of Handicraft*; 2. The forced-labour camps for desiccation of the marshes: *The camp of Maliqi, the camp of Llakatundi, the camp of Levani, the camp of Variboba, the camp of Radostina, the camp of Vlashku, the camp of Tërbufi, the camp of Gosa, the camp of Lekaj, the camp of Bedeni, the camp of Juba, the camp of Thumana, the camp of Gjadri or Zadrime, the camp of Skrofotina*; 3. The forced-labour camps in agriculture and for canalizing: *the camp of Torovica, the camp of Zejmeni, the camp of Valiasi, the camp of Belshi, the camp of Borshi, the camp of Shënvasia or "Përparimi"*; 4. The forced-labour camps for construction: *the camp of stadium "Qemal Stafa", the camp number 4 of Tirana, the camp of stadium "Dinamo", the camp of Sanatorium, the camp of Blloku "Puna", the camp of sport center "Dinamo", the camp of the Bona bridge, the camp of Bishqemi*; 5. The forced-labour camps for industrial constructions: *the camp of the*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp.116-117.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,p.127.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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*Combine of foodstuff of Tirana, the camp of the Combine of meat product and milk in Tirana, the camp of Rubiku, the camp of Laçi, the camp of Fushë Krujë, the camp of the concrete factory in Elbasan, the camp of Rrepsi in Mirdita, the camp of Balshi;* 6. The forced-labour camps for constructing airports: *the camp of ura Vajgurore, the camp of Rinas;* 7. The forced-labour camps for work in the mines: *the camp of Bulqiza, the camp of Spaçi, the camp of Qafëbari;* 8. The forced-labour prisons and camps for imprisoned women convicted for political reasons: *The women annex in old Prison of Tirana, the camp of women in Valias, the prison of handicraft for women, the camp of Kuçova, the camp of Kosova in Lushnjë, the camp of Sharra, etc.*<sup>9</sup> As one can notice, the number of labour camp is much larger than the number of prisons during this time. Inmates of these labour camps participated in construction activities throughout the country that contributed greatly to the development of the country, such as: extracting metals, desiccation of the marshes, constructing factories and airports, building stadiums, buildings, sport centers, etc.

Prisons of this time were distinguished from labour camps. Usually, prisoners who were sent to prison to serve their terms were sick people, who were not fit for working in the re-education institutions because of their physical condition, and those who seriously and systematically violated the regulations of the labour camps while serving their sentences or when their presence in the labour camps or institutions for re-education posed a threat. Prisons also differed from labour camps in terms of the regime of serving sentences. The regime of serving sentences in prison was tougher compared to labour camps or institutions for re-education through work. Prisoners serving their sentences in prison had far fewer rights than those in labour camps. There was no work to do in prisons. Even disciplinary measures against the convicted persons were tougher compared to the same measures in the labour camps and institutions of re-education through labour.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see: A. Musta, Prisons of the Prison State, "Toena", Tiranë, 2000, pp.8-64; H. Sula-P. Kaso, The Dictatorship..., "Alta" Tirana, 1995, pp.11-12; J. Zegalli, Confessions from the prison of communist dictatorship, "Koha", Tirana, 1999, pp.12-28 etc.

The number of convicted persons serving punishments of imprisonment during the communist regime was very large. This number has changed in different periods. We don't have accurate data on the exact number of convicted persons that is why we refer to the writings of different writers who were sentenced and served time at these labour camps or prisons. Periodicals and newspapers of that time provide additional data, but accurate figures are nevertheless difficult to ascertain. According to the author A. Musta, former political prisoner, during the period 1945-1991 in Albania, there were 20.000 people who served time in these prisons and labour camps, not including 2500 people that were executed.<sup>10</sup> According to another political prisoner of the totalitarian state, J. Zegalli, there were 14,555 male and 450 female political prisoners in Albania.<sup>11</sup> A large number of convicted people died while serving time in these prisons and labour camps. It is estimated that around 2000 people died in the prisons during the communist regime, due to poor working and living conditions and cruel treatment.<sup>12</sup>

The following are some of the most notorious prisons and working camps of this period. We will take a brief look at their history, character and organization as well as the status of prisoners during their stay in prisons and working camps. In analyzing these issues we will refer to the books of different writers, archival data, diaries and testimonies of former prisoners.

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<sup>10</sup> A.Musta, *Mandela's of Albania*, "Naim Frashëri", Tirana, 1993, p.8. The number of prisoners published in the Newspaper of the Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victim, number 1, of 1996. According to this newspaper there were a total of 17.900 people imprisoned, out of whom 952 died in the prisons. Some other authors took about much higher number of political prisoners during the communist rule. In his book, "Dictatorship...", Publishing House "Alta"(ed.), Tirana, 1995, page 3, authors Haxhi Suli-Pullumb Kaso, also a former prisoner, referring to the incomplete data from the archive of the Interior Ministry mentions 600.000 prisoners during this period.

<sup>11</sup> J. Zegalli, *Confessions from the prison of the communist dictatorship*, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> A. Musta, *ibid.*, p.8.



**The prison of Gjirokastra.** This prison was set up in the beginning of the 1930s, in the middle of the castle of Gjirokastra, and was regarded as a "General Prison of the Albanian Monarchy." During the rule of the communist dictatorship, especially during the period 1945-1950, this was the State's biggest prison and prisoners from all over Albania were sent to serve their punishment of imprisonment there.<sup>13</sup> Both male and female prisoners were housed in this prison. This was a notorious and frightening prison, with a grand hall and seven windows in its center. The hall branches off into two branches: the right-smaller branch (which was the prison for women) and the left-larger branch. There were several confinement cells with inhuman conditions for living. The number of cells increased during the communist regime by creating more such cells in the ground floors of the prison. There were about 100 political prisoners in the first year of the existence of totalitarian state, and they were fed just 400 grams of corn bread until 1949.<sup>14</sup> Around 100 people lost their lives in this prison because of cruel and inhumane treatment and grave living condition in this facility.<sup>15</sup> This prison functioned until the time when labour camps were opened and became regular places where convicted persons served their punishments of imprisonment.

**Old prison of Tirana.** This prison is also considered one of the oldest prisons in Albania, built in 1930. This is a two-storey building; political prisoners usually served their sentences in the first floor, where the confinements or cells were located. In the second floor were placed ordinary prisoners and there was also a "kaush"<sup>16</sup> for convicted political prisoners with foreign citizenship. There was a small two-storey building next to this prison, in the western part of the prison, which served as a prison for women during the reign of

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<sup>13</sup> A.Musta, *Mandela's of Albania*, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The word "kaush" is of Turkish origin and means an enclosed carrel with a small window, poorly ventilated, where several arrested or convicted prisoners were kept. In the prisons of a communist state this term meant a prison room, where convicted persons were placed.

the Albanian Monarchy. During communist rule this building was used for interrogation and torture. According to some political prisoners, special secret trials conducted by security services took place in this building until 1957.<sup>17</sup> In 1946, 40 cells were built behind this prison, without sufficient ventilation and light. It is worth mentioning the cell number 18 was known as the cell of death, because it was poorly ventilated and in total darkness.<sup>18</sup> This prison was overcrowded compared to its capacity. The living conditions for convicted prisoners were very bad. Thus, in the Annual Report for the year 1950, among other things is stated: "in our dealing with the prisoners regarding to disciplinary measures not only do we isolate them in the dungeon (coop) but we also chain them in heavy shackles".<sup>19</sup> In particular, political prisoners were in an awkward situation, because as we know they were treated as "the enemies of the people".<sup>20</sup> In 1967, old prison of Tirana was closed down and all political prisoners were transferred at the prison of Burrel. In the aftermath of the events of 1997, due to the destruction of prison facilities and lack of necessary capacities, this prison was put back in function and renamed as Prison of Tirana number 302, and it has been significantly renovated.

**New prison of Tirana.** A new prison of Tirana, known as Unit 313, was established in 1943. This is confirmed by the State's Central Archival data, where among we learn that "Central Penitentiary Directorate, on February 2, 1943 notifies the Presidency of Council of Ministers that a cantonment of Fascist Police was adopted and transformed into a political prison. The Ministry of Public Services spent 112,000 Albanian francs for this purpose. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>17</sup> A.Musta, *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Referring to the data collected from the Archive of the Interior Ministry (data available at the prison in Tirana number 302).

<sup>20</sup> In the decision of the Government of Albania, date 1.03.1950, among other things is said: "It should be made clear to the prisoners that despite their hostile activities because of the political importance of this problem the people's power still cares for them". (*Ibid.*).

building didn't fit perfectly requirements of a prison and further changes are necessary."<sup>21</sup> The opening of this prison was dictated by the increase in the number of prisoners because of the expansion of the National Liberation War and during the period 1943-1944 this prison served for their isolation. In the first years of the communist regime, this prison was used "for isolation from the society of the hostile elements and war criminals." Living Conditions in this prison were very bad and it was over crowded. It should be noted that in 1950, there were 902 political prisoners and 873 ordinary prisoners in the prison of Tirana even though the capacity of this prison was much smaller: 287 political prisoners and 191 ordinary prisoners.<sup>22</sup> Until 1967, the prison in Tirana was the sanatorium for patients suffering of tuberculosis and detainees. From 1967 until 1998 this prison was turned into a prison in transit, or the distribution point for prisoners going to other prisons. This used to be the place where high ranking political personalities of the communist regime were investigated like: Beqir Balluku, Kadri Hazbiu, Abdyl Këllezi, Petrit Dume etc.<sup>23</sup> After the fall of communism, some of the close associates of Enver Hoxha, including her widow Nexhmije Hoxha, served time in this prison during 1991-1992. The prison of Tirana 313 for the moment serves only for holding detainees.

**The prison of Burreli.** The construction of this prison began in 1938, on the initiative of the Albanian Monarchy, but was not completed due to the invasion of Albania by Italy on April 7, 1939. This prison is located east of the town of Burrel and still functions. During the fascist occupation it was used for the stabling of horses. It was subsequently turned into one of the most notorious prisons of the communist regime where the opponents of the state were persecuted. This prison has the shape of a parallelepiped surrounded by a concrete wall, which is high enough to make it impossible to see inside from outside and vice-versa. A terrace of concrete of 40-cm.

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<sup>21</sup> The State's Central Archive, Stock number 152, File number 954, year 1943.

<sup>22</sup> According to Prison of Tirana 1943-2000 (material available in the prison of Tirana number 313).

<sup>23</sup> A. Musta, op.cit., p.11.

thicknesses covers it. Following the installation of the totalitarian state in 1946, a large number of inmates from other prisons were brought here, mainly political prisoners and opponents of the regime. Referring to the available data on prisons, we learn that from 1946 to 1949, the prisoners were given only 400 gr. bread per day and 300 prisoners died because of starvation and poor conditions in prison.<sup>24</sup> Besides poor living conditions in the prison, it was also severely overcrowded. From 1992 until 1997 this prison did not function and was turned into a museum-prison. The prison of Burrel was reopened and became operational again in 1997 due to the lack of prison capacity following the economic collapse and destruction of public facilities (including prisons) during the crises in Albania in March of 1997.

**The camp of Maliqi.** This camp was opened in 1947 and functioned until 1952. It is considered one of the biggest camps during the communist regime, where convicted persons have done an enormous work in the desiccation of the Maliqi marsh. The camp of Maliqi was divided into three smaller camps: the camp of Vloçishta, Orman Pojani and Nishaveci. Near 2000 prisoners have worked in this camp for the time of its existence.<sup>25</sup> Living and working conditions for persons in this camp were formidable, the food was poor, and prisoners were subject to inhuman tortures. The prisoners of this camp were given a potato soup and only 600 grams of cornbread per day.<sup>26</sup> It is estimated that 62 people died in this camp, due to cruel treatment and harsh working condition<sup>27</sup>.

**The camp of Spaçi.** This camp functioned during 1968-1990, where thousands of prisoners have done very difficult jobs under very bad conditions. Usually, political prisoners were brought here, whose duty was to extract minerals of copper and pyrite from the galleries of Spaçi. This camp was set up in a hollow surrounded by high

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,p.11. Motto of this prison was: "This place is called Burrel, where you get in and don't get out "

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

mountains, where political prisoners were forced to work in three shifts with primitive tools and without real technical security. During the winter time temperatures fell 15 degrees below zero. Beside the hard work the prisoners were also frequently subject to violence and torture. As a response to these inhumane conditions prevailing in the prison and physical abuse to which the prisoners were subject to, several escape attempts and rebellions occurred in this camp. These attempts to escape usually ended up with murder or re-punishment with long-term sentences of those who tried to escape. Some of the prisoners were so severely traumatized that they committed suicide or jumped to the barbed wires to be killed by guards.<sup>28</sup> The biggest rebellion in the history of prisons and labour camps of the communist regime against continuous violence and terror to which the prisoners were subject to occurred in this prison. This rebellion took place on May 1973.<sup>29</sup> As a result of violence and cruel treatment against the prisoners in May 1973, the prisoners lifted up the flag without the communist star. They took over the prison. Soon after, a large number of police forces managed to re-arrest almost all of exhausted prisoners following several days of clashes, firing and severe beatings of prisoners. Four prisoners were executed by firing squad following a simulated trial in the camp's headquarters, and 130 others were convicted with long-term sentences.<sup>30</sup> After this rebellion, the violence and terror increased further not only in the Spaci camp but also in other camps of the communist Albania.<sup>31</sup> This contributed to the worsening of the conditions of convicted people. During their stay

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<sup>28</sup> A. Musta, *op.cit.*, p.16.

<sup>29</sup> For more see: A. Musta, Spaçi, the anticommunist grave where the burying of communism began, Daily Newspaper "Republika", on May 21, Tirana, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> See: A. Musta, *Mandela's of Albania*, p.16; J.Zegalli, *Confessions from the prison of the communist dictatorship*, Tirana, 1999, p.20 etc.

<sup>31</sup> For more on this horrible event see: Lubonja, F., *Re-sentence*, Përprjekja (ed.), Tirana, 1996. The author of this documentary novel, also an ex-prisoner, is one of the protagonists of this events that have occurred in this camp, who represents in an original way appalling scenes of this event.

in this camp several prisoners died, many others caught incurable illnesses. This camp was closed in 1990.

**The camp of Qafëbari.** This camp was opened 21 km east of Fushë-Arrëz and operated between 1982 to 1990. In this camp about 400-500 political prisoners worked in three shifts for extracting minerals of copper and pyrite.<sup>32</sup> Prisoners' living and working conditions on this camp were very bad; the prisoners who did not fulfill certain daily quotas were subject to cruel tortures. As a reaction to the violence and torture exercised by the personnel of the camp, a revolt broke out in 1984, which resulted in the re-arrests of 40 people, three of whom were sentenced to death, and 14 others were retried and sentenced to long-term imprisonment.<sup>33</sup> After the rebellion, beating and torture against the prisoners increased further worsening their situation in the camp.

**The labour camp for opening the canal Peqin-Kavajë.** This camp operated during 1952-1955. 2000 prisoners of this camp worked to open a 50 km long canal from Peqin to Kavajë. Political prisoners worked in this camp under poor working conditions and insufficient drinking water. 23 people perished while working to open the canal.<sup>34</sup> Tortures against prisoners were frequently used.

**The camp of Ballshi.** This camp was set up east of the city of Ballshi and operated from 1971 until 1984. 1000 prisoners worked in constructing the oil refinery and buildings in the city of Ballshi.<sup>35</sup> Dozens of people perished while working in this camp.

**The camp of Torovica.** This camp was constructed northeast of Lezha, at the base of the mountain of Kolaj close to the marsh of Kakarriq and was operational from 1968 until 1991. Mainly young prisoners worked in this camp, aged from 14-20 years, and their number was around 400.<sup>36</sup> Convicted persons worked in agriculture, opening canals and expanding arable land. This camp was regarded

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<sup>32</sup> A. Musta, *op.cit.*, p.17.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23; J.Zegalli, *op.cit.*, p.17.

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by the communist system as “a model of re-education” for the political prisoners. Working and living conditions of the prisoners of this camp were very poor as in other camps elsewhere in Albania.

In the prisons and other camps of this time, working and living conditions of the prisoners were draconian. These camps and prisons were a major source of industrial labor, and had a significant impact in building public works of the State, from the sweat of prisoners. In particular, the status of political prisoners was very grave; they were separated from ordinary prisoners and were stigmatized as “the enemies of the people” with serious consequences for them and their family members.

There are several prisons and labour camps, where large number of convicted female prisoners served time. Upon the restoration of a totalitarian regime, special annexes for holding female prisoners were constructed in the old prison in Tirana and in other prisons throughout Albania. The best known prisons and labour camps for convicted female prisoners were: *The camp of Valiasi in Tirana, The handicraft prison of Tirana, the camp of Kuçova, The camp of Kosova in Lushnja, and The camp of Sharrë in Tirana etc.*<sup>37</sup> These were prisons and camps with very poor living conditions and the nature work of female prisoners was hard to cope with. They were very often subject to torture. Among the convicted prisoners were many outstanding Albanian female intellectuals who spend many years in these prisons and labour camps. It is worth mentioning here the well-known Albanian intellectual and politician Musine Kokolari, who served 37 years in prison and deportation. Though such activities were illegal under the regime, she founded the Albanian Social-Democratic Party. In 1945 she created a political group called “The Democratic Union.” In 1946, a military court sentenced her to 20 years of imprisonment. She declared courageously in court: “I am not a communist and this should not be a punishable crime. I am a follower of the Albanian National Renaissance. By punishing me, you are punishing the Albanian National Renaissance.”<sup>38</sup> In prison she was regarded as a

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<sup>37</sup> See at length: A.Musta, op.cit., pp.13-14; J.Zegalli, op.cit., pp.21-22 etc.

<sup>38</sup> See: “Musine Kokolari’s Foundation” 1917-1983, (s. 1.), Tirana.

symbol of endurance for all imprisoned Albanian women. After serving jail terms, she was interned for life in Mirdita where she remained unconquerable until her death.

There were several hundred foreigners besides the Albanian prisoners in the labour camps of the communist Albanian state. This group of convicted persons was also subject to violence, harsh labour, severe living conditions and other forms of cruel tortures.<sup>39</sup>

## ***2. Position of convicted persons while serving their punishment of imprisonment in Albania during the communist dictatorship period***

From the so far analysis, one may rightfully conclude that the number of prisons and working camps and the number of convicted persons during this time was very large. This was done to achieve certain goals. Writers H.Sulo and P.Kaso are right when they point out that arrests were planned from above following a directive whose goals were: to ensure the largest contingent of convicted persons for performing unpaid work as possible and to frighten the rest of the nation and compelling them to be obedient.<sup>40</sup> During this time the number of political prisoners was extremely high. It is known for a fact that many ordinary prisoners were sentenced for political reasons

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<sup>39</sup> This is confirmed in Diaries and testimonies of foreign convicted prisoners like: G. Gardini, *Ten years in prison in Albania (1945-1955)*, La Civilita Cattolica (ed.), Roma, 1992; B.N. Dyzi, *20 years in the prisons of Enver Hoxha*, Uegen (ed.), Berat, 1995, etc.

<sup>40</sup> H.Sulo, P.Kaso, *The Dictatorship...*, Tirana, 1995, p.4. K.SH. former official of the Interior Ministry, branch of Lushnja, who was serving a four year sentence, in the camp of Batra, because of "lack of vigilance", "avoiding the duty" had confirmed: They had sent their people from the Interior Ministry to ask us how are we doing with our plan to round-up opponents. I answered: How can we arrest people for no reason, nothing has happened in our region?! - No, you are not working properly- they replied- you are not vigilant!- warned us people from the Ministry. (See: Sulo, H. - Kaso, P. *Dictatorship...*, Alta (ed.), Tirana, 1995, p.4.)



and the sentence they received was not always proportional to the gravity of the crime, except in the cases of murder, robbery, or rape. For example, severe sentences were handed down for minor criminal offences just because they had been sentenced in the past for political reasons or if the communist regime had executed by firing squad any of their close family members.<sup>41</sup>

During the period of communist rule, prisons and labour camps had a certain structure and organization of personnel. In the first years after the liberation, prisons were managed by people loyal to the Communist Party, but lacking experience for work in prisons. Many of them were illiterate or had only a few years of primary education. After 1970, mainly people who completed military or police school were assigned to work in prisons. By analysis of archival data on prisons we learn that in 1956 trained soldiers guarded prisons from the outside. In an annual analysis of the Management of the Camp and Prisons of 1956, among others is said that: "...It is necessary to train the soldiers who are brought to work in prison, but the most important thing is to explain to them the attitude they should take toward the enemy. They should know who these enemies are, so that they will hate them fully. This attitude should apply to prisoners' families as well..."<sup>42</sup>

The following is the organic or organizational structure of prisons: commander, commissary, official for evidence, clerk, commander for services in prison and training, a physician and a nurse, and a cluster of soldiers for external guarding of the prison and a cluster of police officers for internal guarding of the prison.<sup>43</sup> Small changes were made in the organizational structure and number of personnel depending on the situation.

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<sup>41</sup> Thus, former prosecutor of Tirana, Hava Bekteshi, had declared: "...We received recommendations on the penalty to be handed down for each defendant undergoing criminal trial from the Interior Ministry". (According to: Sulo, H. -Kaso, P., op.cit., p. 9).

<sup>42</sup> The archive of the Interior Ministry, Branch of Camps and Prisons, File 47, in 1956.

<sup>43</sup> According to: F.Sufaj, op.cit., p.114.

The situation of the convicted prisoners in prisons and labour camps, during the communist rule, was very hard. This is documented with archival sources, other data as well as the testimonies of the former convicted persons, referring to accommodation, feeding and medical treatment of the convicted, harsh work, cases of diseases and deaths in prisons and labour camps, limitation of their rights, frequent use of violence and torture against them, repeated convictions etc.

What we learn from the available data and testimonies of former prisoners of this period are that until 1950 the only foodstuff provided for prisoners was the cornbread without anything else to eat. Only in March of 1950, did the government decide to offer soup to the prisoners along with bread. In their explanation of this decision we read this: "...It should be explained to the prisoners that despite their hostile activities, the People's Power cares about them."<sup>44</sup> Referring to the testimonies of prisoners, hunger was a very frequent occurrence in the prisons and camps of this period. Thus, an ex-prisoner in the prison of Burreli, testifies that: "They brought in a youngster from Çamëria in room number 7, who was seriously ill. He died two days later but we didn't notify the guards because we wanted to take advantage of the situation and take his portion of bread. In order to cheat the guards we placed a cigarette in his mouth and kept him this way for four days until the body began to decompose. We did what we did only to get 100 gram of bread more for each of us. This is what we did because of hunger."<sup>45</sup> Because of the serious condition in prisons and labour camps, lack of food, poor sanitary conditions, etc. many people got sick and some of prisoners died. A report made by the branch of camps and prisons for the prison of Burreli in 1950, shows that the majority of prisoners were sick, suffering from various

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<sup>44</sup> The archive of Interior Ministry, The Fund Branch of Camps and Prisons, File 10, 1950.

<sup>45</sup> According to: A. Musta, Living Files (Vivid Files), "Arbëria", Tirana, 1995, p.164.

diseases such as: scorbout, malaria, scabies, dysentery, rheumatism, etc.<sup>46</sup>

Convicted prisoners in the prisons and labour camps were subject to physical violence very often to fulfill the daily quotas of work for the State's plans. Knowing that the work done by the prisoners in some labour camps was very hard, especially in the galleries for extracting minerals (in Spaçi, Bulqizë, Batra, etc.) as well as in the desiccation of the swamps (Maliqi swamp, Tërbufi swamp, etc.), there were reports that some prisoners harmed themselves deliberately in order to escape from the exhausting work and severe physical punishment. Some of the prisoners were punished with isolation because they refused to work and others died because of harsh working conditions and the lack of safety in the workplace.<sup>47</sup>

It becomes clear from the confessions and testimonies of convicted persons and other relevant data during this period that torture was used against convicted persons in prisons and labour camps.<sup>48</sup> Some forms of torture against prisoners have been documented, and can be

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<sup>46</sup> The archive of Interior Ministry, The Fund of Camps and Prisons, File 10, 1950..

<sup>47</sup> Thus, in the "D" zone of the mine of Bulqiza, in January of 1979, nine ordinary prisoners died from gas poisoning. (According to: Sulo, H. - Kaso, P., op.cit., p.15).

<sup>48</sup> According to: The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1987), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations by its resolution 39/46 of 10 December 1984, entered into force on 26 June 1987, the term "torture"... means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions. (Article 1 of this Convention).

divided into physical and psychological torture, each of them causing severe consequences to the individuals. The most frequent forms of physical torture according to witnesses were: systematic beating, sexual torture, electric torture, drowning torture, torture by burning, bringing people into the state of anxiety, pharmacological torture, mutilation and dental torture; whereas the most common psychological tortures were considered: deprivation or exhaustion, threats of torture, threats of mutilation, threats of murder, as well as by threatening his family member, friends or the presence of other people while being tortured, humiliation and sexual torture.<sup>49</sup> Some of these techniques of torture are used on defendants during interrogation as well as against the convicted persons in the prisons and labour camps. Thus, "The Pavilion of the Communist Genocide" of the National Museum in Tirana, shows these means and forms of torture which were used in the prisons and labour camps during the time of communist regime in Albania: 1. The torture jacket (terrible torture),<sup>50</sup> 2. Injury to the genitals, 3. The whip and wood-stick, 4. Food deprivation, water deprivation, sleeps deprivation and being forced to keep standing for days, 5. The use of electrical current until loss of consciousness, 6. Attaching heavy chains around the neck, 7. When a person had his hands bound behind his back and he was tied to the window or a tree by his hands, high enough that he would barely be able to touch the ground with his toes, 8. Filling the mouth with salt, 9. Pretending to be sending the prisoner for shooting, firing arms, and walking the prisoner up to the gallows for hanging, 10. Plunging (immersing) the head of the prisoner into the barrel of water, 11. Burning the body with cigarettes, 12. Soaking the prisoner's hands or hair in alcohol and setting it on fire, 13. Bone breaking and

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<sup>49</sup> For more information on methods of torture and its consequences see: L. Jacobsen-P. Vesti, *Torture survivors - a new group of patients*, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, Copenhagen - Denmark, Re-publication, 1995, pp.16-26.

<sup>50</sup> This form of torture was carried out with a special tool resembling a jacket (a waistcoat), by squeezing hard a large portion of the humane body, usually applied to the back and the waist, and inflicting enormous pain on the prisoner.

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tearing the flesh out with pinchers (claw), 14. Giving salty meal and depriving him of water, 15. Plunging into water and leaving him wet in the winter, 16. Gradual reduction of food in order to cause death after a certain time,<sup>51</sup> 17. The use of substances that can irritate or damage the nervous system, 18. Special helmet in the head to prevent the prisoner from committing suicide, 19. Holding the prisoner's hands and feet in shackles for indefinite time, 20. The use of a swarm of bees against naked prisoners, etc.

The testimonies and ordeals of convicted persons and the statements made by people who were ordered to use torture against the defendants and prisoners, show different forms of torture used against convicted persons.<sup>52</sup> Torture causes ulterior physical and psychical consequences, so it is not a horrible act only at the time when it is exercised, but its later consequences are far more terrible.

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<sup>51</sup> For example, Kostaq (Koço) Kota, former Prime Minister and Interior Minister in the government of the Albanian monarchy, died in the Burreli prison, by gradual reduction of food. (See: K. Shamari, *The Drama of Interior Ministers of Albania*, Vilson Arbëri (ed.), Tirana, 1999, p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> The following tortures are mentioned to have been used: beating with a wood-stick as far as wounds are inflicted, scratching putrid wounds with a wood-stick, puncture of body with hot wire, striking with electricity in the ear, insertion of salt in the burnt flesh, soaking the body with cold water, starvation to death, starvation for certain time, living the person naked in the cold, the jacket (waist-coat), squeezing fingers with pincers, insertion of defecation (fecals) in the mouth, hanging with the head down, preparing s.o's grave, insertion of the rifle in the mouth, attempt to rape the prisoner's daughter etc. (See: P. Pepa, *The file of dictatorship*, Visar Zhiti (ed.), Tirana, 1995, page 241). For more on the sufferings and tortures to which were subjected political prisoners see also: J. Zegalli, *Confessions from the prison of the communist dictatorship*, Koha (ed.), Tirana, 1995; A. Musta, *Living Files*, Arberia (ed.), Tirana; 1995; B.N.Dyzi, *20 years in the prisons of Enver Hoxha*, Uegen (ed.), Tirana, 1995; F. Kokoshi, *Kalvar of sufferings and hardships*, Albanian Center of Human Rights (ed.), volume 1, number 1, Tirana, 1995, pp. 46-48 etc.

Torture is not exercised solely to obtain information or a confession, but it also used to destroy the identity and integrity of the people.<sup>53</sup>

Several times during the communist regime amnesties and pardons were granted for convicted prisoners. The amnesty and pardon was part of communist propaganda and a gesture of "generosity" of the Party and the amnesty was announced on the verge of holidays and anniversaries of different events. In most cases, those who benefited from these amnesties and pardons were ordinary prisoners, whereas political prisoners were rarely granted amnesty, which best shows the attitude of the communist state towards this category of political prisoners. The most frequent reason for granting amnesty and pardon was the overpopulation of prisons.

### ***Conclusion***

From the analysis and treatment of prisons and labour camps, their organization and the position of convicted persons while serving their punishment with imprisonment during the communist ruling in Albania, one may rightfully state that the scope of execution of this type of punishment had nothing to deal with the reeducation and re-socialization of the convicted persons, but rather this punishment contained numerous retributive elements, thus of vengeance and pay-offs, and as such has influenced in frightening other members of the society. Especially harsh was the position of political prisoners, which were stigmatized as "enemies of the nation", which in turn had serious consequences for their future and that of their families. This is very well proved by the data on the large number of prisons and labour camps, their inhuman treatment, frequent use of violence and torture, organization of trials in these prisons and labour camps, re-sentencing of convicted persons, etc. Whereas as the response to this

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<sup>53</sup> Many convicted prisoners were subject to torture during the communist regime, therefore they need rehabilitation. Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims, in Tirana, that commenced its work in August of 1993, serves this purpose and aims at: medical rehabilitation (physical and psychological) and help in preventing torture in the future.

violence and harsh situation in prisons and labour camps during this period of time there were numerous escape attempts and revolts of prisoners, which unfortunately resulted in their re-sentencing and further worsening position of the convicted persons.

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