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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY REPORT
 INFORMATION FROM CD NO. []
 FOREIGN DOCUMENTS OR RADIO BROADCASTS

COUNTRY Albania
 SUBJECT Military; Economic; Political
 HOW PUBLISHED Daily newspaper
 WHERE PUBLISHED Zurich
 DATE PUBLISHED 21 Aug 1950
 LANGUAGE German

DATE OF INFORMATION 1950
 DATE DIST. 20 Nov 1950
 NO. OF PAGES 3
 SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

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REPORTS ON CONDITIONS IN ALBANIA

Dr Erich Mathis

The fate of Albania is in the hands of about 100 Soviet political, military, and defense specialists or instructors.

Reports that the 1st Soviet Marine Infantry Brigade is stationed on Saseno Island are false. Only a few primitive bunkers for motor torpedo boats are on Saseno.

At present, the Albanian fleet owns the armed yacht Illira, of 654 gross-registered tons, which was built in 1918; several Yugoslav-made mine sweepers and wooden patrol boats delivered to Albania between 1945 and 1948 (the patrol boats were later equipped with motors in Albania); and several motor torpedo boats and tugs from Italy and the USSR.

Batteries of Russian-made guns have been emplaced along the coast from Shengjin (south of Shkoder) to Sarande. These batteries include medium-caliber guns, but do not include Soviet standard 30.5 and 45.5-centimeter guns.

The Soviets have increased the production of the chromium mines near Kukes in northern Albania, that of the former Italian copper mines in Rrubig (40 kilometers south of Shkoder), and that of the petroleum wells of Kucove in southern Albania.

Every month, two or three Soviet ships leave Albanian ports with agricultural products. Every third month the ship Plekhanov (formerly the American ship Charles Christenson) of 5,630 gross-registered tons hauls chromium ore from Durres and unloads it in Constanta, from where it is shipped to Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.

At present, 130,000 to 135,000 men are under arms in Albania. The nucleus of the Albanian troops consists of special voluntary units, called "Broites." The discipline of the Albanian Army is good, its training is strict, and its officers make an excellent impression. The uniforms correspond to Soviet uniforms, and the shoulder patches are imitations of Soviet shoulder patches. The

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troops consist chiefly of infantry divisions, which are armed exclusively with Soviet arms. Each company has great fire power, as every soldier is armed with at least a ten-round automatic weapon. Virtually all the Broites, and the regular infantry to some extent, have the new light machine pistols with a double magazine holding 40 rounds each. A new Soviet weapon has replaced the old water-cooled 20-millimeter machine gun. The new Soviet weapon fires 2,000 rounds per minute and resembles a modified German MG-42. The bolt and the gun barrel do not have to be changed because they are made of steel, which is twice tempered. Mortar companies equipped with 8.2, 12, and 15-centimeter mortars have been assigned to every regiment. According to the latest Soviet pattern, such a mortar battery is armed with at least 12 and at most 15 mortars.

The Albanian Army is well supplied with 7.5-centimeter caliber antitank guns. The antiaircraft defenses have been fortified. The chief antiaircraft weapon used is the Soviet imitation of the German 8.8-centimeter gun with a caliber of 85 millimeters. It is equipped with a muzzle flash brake.

When some time ago unidentified reconnaissance aircraft approached the Albanian coast at an approximate altitude of 6,500 meters, it was fired upon by many antiaircraft bases in Albania.

The armored force is in the process of being formed. At present, only training armored cars of the old KWI, KWII (Armored Car I and II) and T-34 types are to be seen. The motorization of the army is in its initial stage. Thus far, three-axle General Motor trucks from UNRRA have been used. However, there is a shortage of spare parts for these trucks. During the past few months, the USSR has been shipping 3.5- and 5-ton ZIS trucks to Albania.

The Durres-Tirana and the Durres-Peqin railroad lines are of military significance. The government has not begun to build new strategic highways, but it has begun to repair some of the old highways, especially the Tirana-Elbasan highway.

In addition to transforming monasteries into permanent military barracks (such as the Franciscan monastery in Shkoder in 1948), other permanent barracks have been erected. At present, three large permanent barracks are under construction for a regiment in Tirana. There are no important defense plants in the country, but only accessory and repair shops, which work on military and civilian orders. Such establishments include the Automobile and Tractor Repair Shop in Durres with 400 workers, a recently completed foundry, and a spinning mill, which is equipped with Soviet machines. The last two establishments are in Tirana.

There is a hydroelectric power plant in the mountains and a distributing station in the vicinity of Tirana.

The war economy in Albania exerts an especially strong pressure on the population, because of the high cost of maintaining the Albanian Army and the experiments in planned economy of the Communist Party. These experiments especially affect the small farmers, who usually possess only a few sheep and goats.

On the pretext of agrarian reform, the Communist Party has established eight state farms, each of 800 to 1,000 hectares of land. The most significant state farms are the Ferma Skutch [Skuq?], Ferma Lushnje, and Ferma Kamsa [Kamze?]. On these eight farms the area under cultivation varies from as little as 200 or 300 hectares to not more than half of the total area. The harvesting is usually behind schedule. Farmers are forced to deliver their products to cooperative stores, and are not able to obtain salt and certain other items unless they deliver their goods to the cooperative stores.

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In the factories, there is a constant shortage of raw material and skilled labor. The percentage of tools ruined by insufficiently skilled apprentices is very high. Thus far, the Soviets have not succeeded in exploiting the Albanian industrial potential.

Officially, heavy workers are allotted 900 grams of dark bread per day, and 400 grams of sugar, 700 grams of meat, and 400 grams of olive oil per month. In the spring, only corn bread is available. Meat has not been available on ration cards for many months.

Last year, after the government failed in its compulsory delivery program, it introduced the free market in addition to state stores, with the intention of exhausting inflationary buying power. One kilogram of bread costs 5 lek with cards and 40 to 50 lek without cards, one liter of oil 150-200 lek with cards and 500 lek without, and one kilogram of Czechoslovak sugar costs 35 lek with cards and 250 without. In general, meat is available only on the free market. One kilogram of lamb costs 125 lek and one kilogram of pork 200 lek. One suit of clothes made of Czechoslovak cloth theoretically may be purchased every year on a ration card for 600 lek, but it can be obtained only on the free market, for 2,000 lek. The chief contraband articles are cigarette lighters. For one lighter a person can get one chicken, one kilogram of butter, or 20 eggs. Salt costs 800 lek per kilogram. In comparison with the above prices, the daily wage of a worker's helper is 90 to 120 lek, that of a bricklayer 150 lek, and that of a special worker 200 lek.

The population gives the impression of being undernourished, and well over 50 percent of the children suffer from tuberculosis.

The supporters of Communism in Albania are the youths between 20 and 30. They include students and, to a lesser degree, artisans, such as tailors, shoemakers, etc., who have not as yet been subject to state interference. The other strata of the population are either indifferent to the Communist Party or are hostile to it. The political dissatisfaction among the Albanian peasants has spread to factory foremen within the past year. Every day 2 or 3-hour conferences are held in the factories. The workers complain about the bad living conditions.

Because of sabotage, the repair of tractors for state farms takes 6 or 7 months, so that they are never available during harvesting.

For security reasons, the government was forced to introduce the "Lea Cakolini," i.e. a permit similar to the Soviet "propusk" for travel between any two places.

Northern Albania, bordering on Yugoslavia, is much more against the regime than southern Albania, bordering on Greece. The center of the resistance movement is the Catholic city of Shkoder. The Communist retaliated against the city by dismantling factory machinery and installing it in other places.

After Koci Xoxe was sentenced to death in 1949, many Albanians fled to Yugoslavia, where they are being re-educated and indoctrinated by Gani Bej Kryeziu, a Tito agent.

Albania is an undernourished but well-armed country. Its assignment is not to attack Yugoslavia single-handed, since it is too weak. However, it is strong enough to keep Yugoslav forces busy in the rear, while Yugoslavia is attacked from the front. Albania is staging a dress rehearsal for this role by obstructing the reclamation of Lake Shkoder /Serbo-Croatian, Skadar; Italian, Scutari/ with machine-gun fire and acts of sabotage.

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