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Current Issues

3000 Albanian lost their right to vote because of blood feuds.

An expedition of the National Reconciliation Committee, which works with families that in blood feuds, noted that all parties across the political specters lacked a strategy for how to fight the phenomenon of vendettas and blood feuds. Chairman of this committee, Gjin Marku, said on Thursday that 3000 Albanians, who because of their ongoing blood feud can not leave the safe-houses where they are staying, did not get to vote. Marku accuses Albanian government and local administration for not taking the necessary measures to guarantee these people's right to vote. Blood feuds, once a phenomenon of the past, made a come back when the communist government was toppled and today it affects mainly the northern Albanian, where the code of Lek Dukagjini is still implemented.

(Vizion Plus, news; Top Channel, news; Gazeta Shqiptare, 10; Shqip, 22)

Albanians , eagerest for the EU.

Albanians, those living in Albania and those of Kosovo, more than anything else want country's integration in the EU. When it comes to Balkan people who want to see their country as part of the union, Albanians claim the top spot. At least according to a poll by Gallup conducted for Balkan Monitor. The poll surveyed citizens of the Balkans, whom where asked questions on immigration. The poll goes on to show that the people of the countries left out of the visa liberalization package are the ones that want the more this integration. Croatians, who already enjoy the lifting of the visa regime and whose country is the closest to joining the EU, are the least enthusiastic. Albanian's love for EU might be related to the fact that many of them, if chance was given, would leave the country and not come back. According to the same poll, 38% of Albanians surveyed think that life here is improving, against the 35% who think that things are only getting worse.

(Vizion Plus, news; Top Channel, news; Shqip, 4; Korrieri, 3)

Religious leaders against the legalization of gay marriages.

Religious communities in Albania have positioned themselves against Prime Minister Berisha's initiative for the legalizing of gay marriages, calling being gay an unacceptable behavior that hurts the society. Catholic and Orthodox Church, along with the leaders of Muslim community, strongly oppose this idea, saying marriage is between a man and a woman, and that Albanian Parliament should not involve itself with this sin. For leaders of Catholic Church right now it's the time to focus on lowering the skyrocketing numbers of divorce and not on the

approval of gay marriages, which according to catholic leaders will destroy the Albanian family. But Albanian gay community sees it differently. For them, government's newest initiative is a big step toward equality and gives them hope for more social rights. Albanian government argues its initiative for the legalizing of gay marriages with the fact that's one of the requirements for joining the EU.

(Vizion Plus, news; Top Channel, news; Shqip, 5; Shekulli, 4)

Domestic Policies

Business/Economy

Ministry of Finance dismisses Governor Fullani's concerns.

Governor Fullani's concerns for Albania's economic growth were dismissed by Ministry of Finance. According to this Ministry, budget indexes are positive and this situation guarantees stability for this year's second half. Director of macroeconomics at this ministry says that only 50% of the funds intended for investments have been used and budget deficit falls within the forecasted range. Even that revenue from Customs is less than initially planned, Ministry of Finance says that situation is under control and that tourism will have a positive effect on the finances of this year's second half. But despite the pink picture painted by the ministry, they hesitate to give a number on Albania's economic growth

(Vizion Plus, news; Top Channel, news; Korrieri, 9)

Clothing manufacturers meet with deputy Minister of Finance.

National Chamber of Clothing Manufacturers are raising their voice against the latest decision to come out of Directory of Customs, according to which all items whose origins is a non-EU country will have to be taxed an extra fee. Concerned by the number of factories that have closed their doors, are near bankruptcy or have reduced their work force in order to stay afloat, these businesses met on Thursday with deputy Minister of Finance Florion Mima and experts from Directory of Customs. According to National Chamber of Clothing Manufactures, the implementation of additional control indexes does not refer to the real prices mirrored by international markets. If the new custom fees are implemented, many of the clothing companies that operate in Albania, and employ a considerable number of workers, will have to shut down.

(Vizion Plus, news; Top Channel, news; Shqip, 6; Korrieri, 8)

International Relations

Legal immigration, a must for visa liberalization.

European Commission's Commanded Chief, Fulgencio Garrido Ruiz says that European Commission is committed to speed up the process of visa liberalizations for Albania. In the last phase of "Support for the implementation of national strategy for immigration" project, was discussed Albania's future immigration management plan, with Ruiz confirming that the correlation between legal immigration and visa liberalization cannot be denied. European Commission is committed to the idea of visa liberalizations for Albanian citizen, it's aware of the importance of the lifting of visa regime for Albanians, continued Ruiz, and if Albania continues with its progress and accomplishes all its obligations soon it will join its neighbors. Albanian Minister of Labor and Social Issues Victor Gumi assured Ruiz that Albania is very much committed to meeting all of its obligations so that the visa regime can be lifted and the fight against illegal immigration can be won. "Support for the implementation of national strategy for immigration" was financed by European Commission, CARDS 2004 and Italian government.

(Vizion Plus, news; Top Channel, news; Shqip, 4)

Austria: no enlargement without Albania.

Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs Michael Spindelegger called on Monday for the simultaneous accession of Iceland and Croatia to the European Union. Spindelegger said during an EU foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels that Eu should not open its doors to Iceland and discriminate against the countries of Western Balkans. Austrians want Iceland, along with Croatia and Albania, to go together in the direction of EU. Analysts believe that Iceland's speedy progress, the country applied for the Eu only a month ago, might frustrate the countries of Western Balkans. According to Sweden's Minister of Foreign Affairs Bildt, the frustrations have nothing to do with Iceland itself, and everything to do with the blockages that exist. Bildt says that while working with Iceland on its accession, EU government should not forget about the candidates like Albania.

(Panorama, 4; Gazeta Shqiptare, 5; Korrieri, 5; Koha Jone, 3; Shqip, 4)