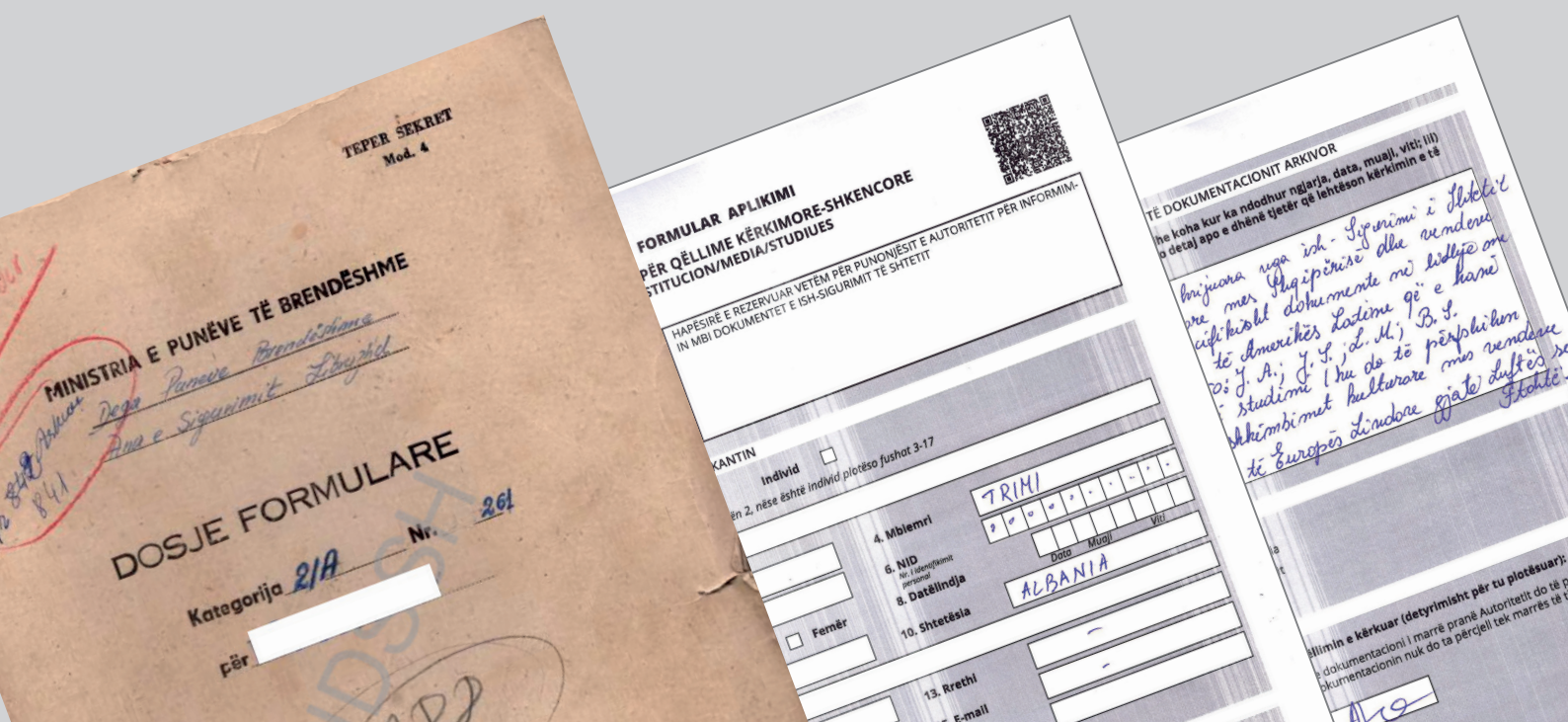# ACCESS TO THE SIGURIMI FILES

MANUAL FOR JOURNALISTS AND RESEARCHERS

DAGMAR HOVESTADT

ACCESS TO THE SIGURIMI FILES

MANUAL

FOR JOURNALISTS AND RESEARCHERS

DAGMAR HOVESTADT

2025

Contents

Greetings

Dear journalists and media staff,

We present to you this Manual, which shall serve as a means to facilitate the work of researchers and media while they explore the archives of the former State Security. The State Security (1944-1991) functioned for decades as a powerful mechanism of terror, surveillance and repression during the communist dictatorship, and left behind a legacy of documentary evidence that is as extensive as it is complex.

The Archives of the former State Security constitute a unique historical asset, enabling us to understand more deeply the functioning mechanisms of the regime, but also the individual suffering and resistance in that dark period.

This Manual was drafted to facilitate a responsible and professional approach to these documents, providing a clear framework for researchers and media in their work. The Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents (AIDSSH), as an independent institution has the responsibility not only to preserve and administer these documents, but also to ensure that while they are used it is done so in respect of the dignity of the victims and contributes to a fair historical review process.

The importance of access to these documents with transparency and a professional stance remains essential for a careful reflection on the past, as well as preserving the historical integrity of the documents. AIDSSH aims to support an open, direct and ethical process, which contributes to shedding light on the past and promoting a culture of memory and justice. This Manual is an important step in this direction, ensuring that journalists and researchers can use the documents from the former State Security in an informed manner, without violating the rights of individuals while avoiding misinterpretations.

In the context of the Manual for Journalists and Researchers, it remains essential to emphasize the importance of media ethics, especially when it comes to the use of such documents from the security service of the communist dictatorship. These documents contain delicate and sensitive information related to individuals, often collected without their knowledge and with the aim of damaging their image. The ethical hurdles in reporting on these materials have multiplied, becoming a great responsibility for journalists. False narratives of the dictatorship continue to circulate, and many individuals use them without thinking about the consequences. Therefore, responsible journalists must act with caution, committing to the truth and avoiding ethical mistakes that can easily occur in this context. Journalistic ethics shall not only be a professional standard, but a moral obligation to respect the dignity of individuals and contribute to a more just and accurate narrative of our history.

PhD. Gentiana Sula
Chair of the Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents

Introduction

On May 22 2015, some 25 years after the end of communist rule in Albania, the Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents, in short AIDSSH, was established by presidential decree promulgating the law No. 45/2015 "On the right to information about the documents of the former State Security of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania". The law No. 45/2015, amended, regulates access to the files of the so-called Former State Security (secret police, or OSSH[1]) in communist Albania, and lays the foundation and rules for the work of its governing body, the Authority. It has been amended twice in 2020 and 2022 to ease access and broaden the portfolio of the Authority.

This manual was created to help journalists and researchers understand the process of accessing the documents of the Former State Security, active during the Albanian communist period from 1944 to 1991. It seeks to explain the process, the basis of the work of the Authority, deliver some guidance on the reading of files, and guidelines on the publication and use of the documents accessed.

The very nature of the Sigurimi documents requires - more than with many other archival documents - a detailed understanding of the historic context of their origin. The Sigurimi records document state repression in the form of persecution, punishment through political trials, torture (psychological and physical), killings, enforced disappearance, organized career misfortunes and more. It also documents the use of many regular citizens, party officials and others to target persons in this persecution - often by forcing them with violence or material collected against them to act for the OSSH against their will and consciousness - as informants in support of the rule of the communist party. As a result, the records' content is often very personal and intimate. It exposes perpetrators, collaborators, and victims of the time as well as procedures and mechanisms of a security apparatus in service of authoritarian rule.

These records were never meant to be read outside of their original context. Consequently, they were written with an understanding of acting undercover, in secret, and only in service of the goals of the Sigurimi. They also served different purposes within the apparatus. Like any other historical source, they do not portray "the" truth, but an authentic documentation of what happened from the point of view of the security service.

So, when those files are read today, decades after they were in active use, it is particularly important to read them with an understanding of the context and the thinking of a security apparatus charged with protecting one-party rule in a communist dictatorship. It is important to question the content of the records and not see them as simply factual statements. The Sigurimi officers were indoctrinated to look at those critical of communism as "enemies" and interpreted and documented all their activities as "criminal". Much of what was criminalized then, we understand today as making use of one's rights, like freedom of speech, freedom to gather, freedom to move freely and so on.

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1   OSSH was a separate body and an integral part of the Internal Affairs bodies, within which various services functioned and performed certain tasks. The most important were the service for securing the leadership of the Party and the State, the counterintelligence service and the intelligence service. Each service had its specific tasks, within the basic tasks assigned to it by the Party, the OSSH, for the detection, prevention, documentation and suppression of activities considered hostile and malicious. These tasks are defined in the Operational Work Platform of the Internal Affairs Bodies (OPB).

While the records are authentic and the Sigurimi officers wrote down what they felt to be the correct interpretation of what happened, they are not a multi-perspective statement of fact but in many instances a deliverance on ideological demands and propagandistic thinking within a set of rules given to the Sigurimi officers. This is always important to remember in the reading room. A document must be seen in the context of its time and the procedure it belongs to, to avoid misinterpretation. It is necessary, when drawing conclusions from the Sigurimi records, to relate them to other statements at the time, witness testimony, other archival records, historical accounts and books or expert testimony to come to an adequate analysis.

Due to this complex nature, reading Sigurimi files today requires a process: an application procedure and a guided process towards access to the specific files petitioned. Ideally the future reader invests time in the study of the respective historical period before sitting down with the Sigurimi files to better be able to make sense of the documents.

The information by its nature can still publicly expose persons responsible or affected, alive or deceased, their relatives and next generations. This is the main reason for a careful approach: Protecting the information on the victims and making available the identity of those who acted in the name of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania is the guiding principle of the law. Its goal is to further the dialogue over a dictatorial past to improve on the democracy of contemporary Albania.

This manual has the following structure:

It first gives **general background on the history** of the Sigurimi in communist Albania.

It then **explains the legal grounds** for the activity of the AIDSSH, the authority charged with making the Sigurimi records accessible, before guiding the reader through **the process of applying for and reading** through documents.

It will continue by pointing out the rights and duties when **publishing the documents** and illustrate the outcome with a few case-studies of successful or failed research and publication.

It ends with a **bibliography** of relevant books and web-sites to accompany the future Sigurimi files reader.

For additional input or further ideas, please send an e-mail to:
info@autoritetidosjeve.gov.al

What was the Sigurimi?

To conduct archival research, it is essential first to understand the history, organizational structure, and procedural rules of the institution to which the document collection belongs. This is particularly important if the institution is a secretive entity not open to public oversight. When analyzing and interpreting such documents, it is crucial to grasp the context in which they originated. For this reason, the introduction to reading the Sigurimi files begins with a brief historical overview of the Directorate of State Security (OSSH).

The State Security Directorate, known as "Sigurimi", originated during the anti-fascist National Liberation War with the so-called "People's Protection Sections" and officially began operating on December 14, 1944. *The Sigurimi was the national security, intelligence and secret police service of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania.* This body operated during the period from December 1944 to July 1991, coinciding with the totalitarian regime installed in Albania. *De jure*, its duty was to protect Albania from dangers, but *de facto* the Sigurimi served to suppress political activity among the population and to preserve the longevity of the political system in power.

In August 1946, the People's Defense Directorate was renamed the "Directorate of State Security," or "State Security," and came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Following the administrative-territorial reorganization of 1947, Sigurimi underwent several structural changes until 1991, reflecting political and organizational directives that evolved over time.

Sigurimi had its national headquarters in Tirana and was distributed across twenty-six districts in Albania. It was further divided into sections that covered areas such as Counterintelligence; Combating anti-revolutionary organizations, bands, and groups; Protection of the socialist economy; Operational records; Surveillance and control of diplomatic missions; Investigation; Cryptography, and Secretariat services.

Throughout its nearly 50 years of existence, Sigurimi and the communist leadership it served passed through various phases of terror, repression, governance, and order. Consequently, when reviewing a file, it is vital to understand the organizational unit responsible for producing it, its role within the broader organization, and the historical period it reflects and its analysis.

Not only did Sigurimi focus on creating and fabricating files, but it also engaged in their destruction. A significant number of documents were destroyed, though this process is often documented through destruction protocols that remain part of the archival collections.

Legal Base for Access and the Authority

Access to the Sigurimi files is based on the provisions of the law "On the right to information about the documents of the former State Security of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania", in short Law no. 45/2015, amended in 2020 and 2022. It also sets the rules for the AIDSSH.

Based on the law the AIDSSH collects, stores, administers, and uses the documents of the former Directorate of State Security in compliance with this law, using as necessary the information provided by the Central Register of Civil Status.

The AIDSSH is a collegial body with powers and responsibilities derived from the specific law no. 45/2015 and its corollaries and amendments. Its governing board is voted into office by the Albanian Assembly for five years and it runs the Authority independently based on the Law.

Next to the governing board with a chairperson and four additional board members, the authority has four directorates.

The **Archives Directorate (1)** deals with the collection, processing, indexing, safe-guarding and digitization of the Sigurimi files, that the AIDSSH acquires and declassifies from other government bodies on an ongoing basis.
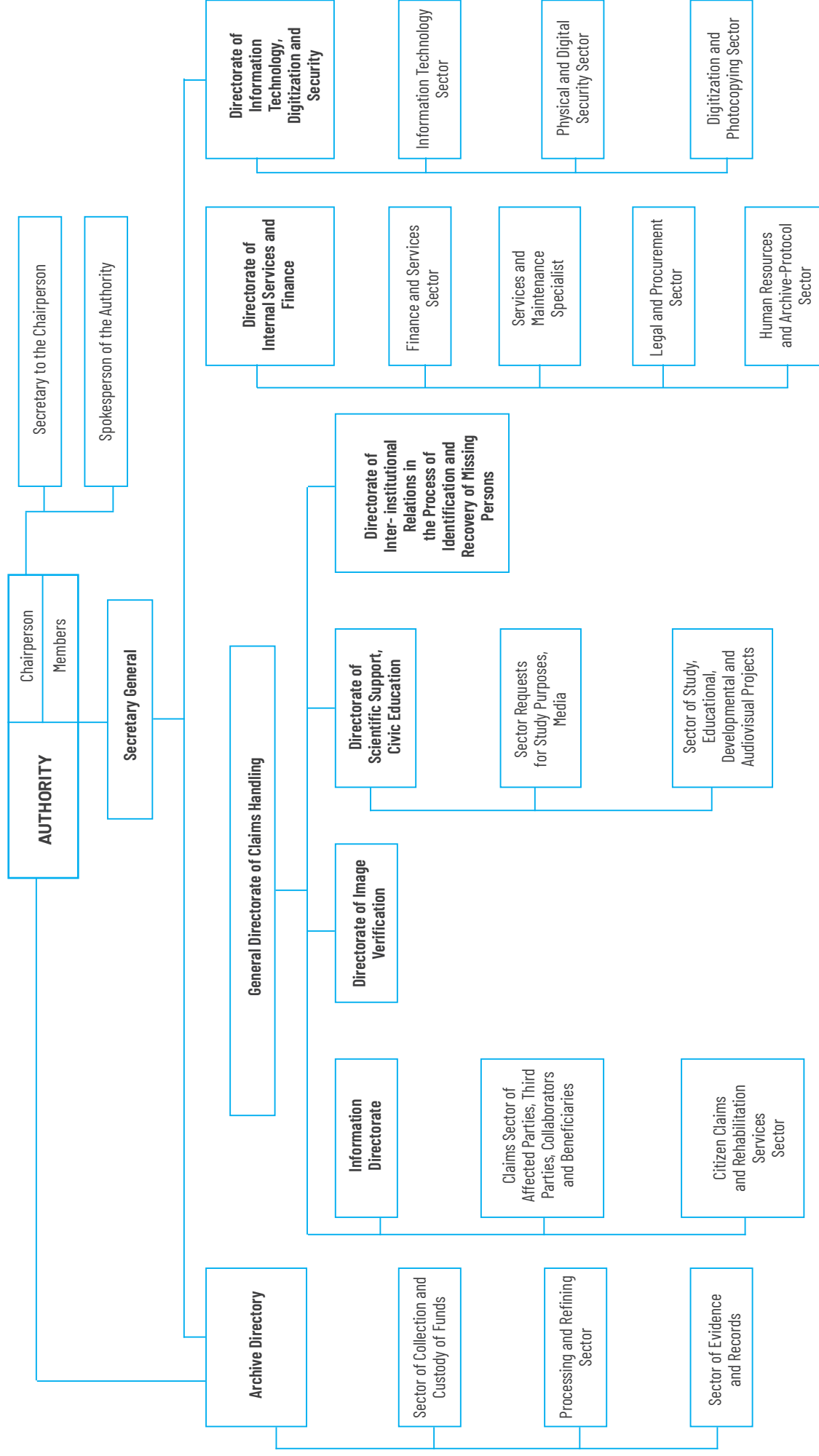
The **General Directorate of Claims Handling (2)** is subdivided into:

- an **information directorate**,
- a **directorate** charged with **verifying figures**,
- a **directorate of scientific research and civic education**, and
- the **directorate of inter-institutional relations in the process of identification and recovery of missing persons.**

The **Directorate of Internal Services and Finance (3)** and the **Directorate of information technology, digitization, and security (4)** provide services to the other directorates and the running of the Authority.

A journalist will mostly deal with the Directorate of Claims Handling and here with the **Directorate of Scientific Research and Civic Education.** It provides information from the Sigurimi files to researchers or journalists who, based on the law, have access to this information.

The Authority has a great responsibility in collecting, safe-guarding, and making accessible the Sigurimi files. For a journalist and researcher, the staff of the Authority is a constant partner during the decision-making process towards reading of files. Internal procedures, mandated by law, and data protection of victims in the files mean that there is no immediate access to any document. However, the Authority strives to be as transparent and accommodating about the process as possible, within the framework of the Law.

AUTHORITY

Chairperson

Members

Secretary to the Chairperson

Spokesperson of the Authority

Secretary General

General Directorate of Claims Handling

Directorate of Inter-institutional Relations in the Process of Identification and Recovery of Missing Persons

Directorate of Scientific Support, Civic Education

- Sector Requests for Study Purposes, Media
- Sector of Study, Educational, Developmental and Audiovisual Projects

Directorate of Image Verification

Information Directorate

- Claims Sector of Affected Parties, Third Parties, Collaborators and Beneficiaries
- Citizen Claims and Rehabilitation Services Sector

Archive Directory

- Sector of Collection and Custody of Funds
- Processing and Refining Sector
- Sector of Evidence and Records

Directorate of Internal Services and Finance

- Finance and Services Sector
- Services and Maintenance Specialist
- Legal and Procurement Sector
- Human Resources and Archive-Protocol Sector

Directorate of Information Technology, Digitization and Security

- Information Technology Sector
- Physical and Digital Security Sector
- Digitization and Photocopying Sector

Conditions for access to files for media

Access to Sigurimi files is regulated by the Law for defined purposes. The Authority has the responsibility, according to article 10 of the Law 45/2015, to provide access to information and *"giving information and notices about the documents, as well as guaranteeing their examination and delivery to applicants."*

Articles 36 to 38 regulate access to the files for the purpose of historic research and media. In the logic of the Law this purpose relates to the publication of the *"historical re-examination of the activity of the former State Security"* to further the dialogue about the past. Also, citizen education is a legitimate purpose for access under this Article.

That means, journalists have a legal right to access the Sigurimi files for the purposes of examining the past.

The Authority in this context is tasked with balancing the public interest in the files with the right to privacy of those documented in the files.

By applying detailed rules and procedures after the request, the Authority guarantees for each case, the right to privacy for those affected by Sigurimi activities and for third parties. If a journalist has been in contact with a victim and the victim has given his or her permission to access files relating to them, this consent makes it possible for a journalist to then use the name in publication. Otherwise, names cannot be published. (See also "Waiting time and reading files")

The identity of those who acted on behalf of the Sigurimi, after reaching the age of 18, like the employees, collaborators or favored persons of the former State Security, are not protected by the Law. They can be made known for their activities performed in the service of the former State Security.

A journalist can petition access through a form, easily found on the Authority's website.

https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/formular-aplikimi-per-kerkues-per-qellime-kerkimore-shkencore-institucion-media-studiues

It is mandatory that the journalist's affiliation to the media is authenticated. This can either be through documentation of her or his affiliation with a media outlet through an Email address or through an identification card as journalist if she or he is an independent journalist. It is also mandatory that a specific topic, person(s), historic circumstance or secret police mechanism is articulated in the request.

IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOSING A TOPIC FOR THE REQUEST !

The formulation of the media request is based in an interest in the past

The Law allows access for media with the goal of initiating a public discussion on the re-appraisal of the communist past. This means that an interest in how the Sigurimi worked and how that work affected people in the past is at the center of a request.

The request can be initiated by a current event, but the interest in evaluating the past should be greater than the news of the day. Only if the assessment of the past enables the clarification of contemporary political events can the political assessment exceed the historical assessment in the request. This is however a rare exception.

Taking into consideration the limited capacities of the Authority and in the interest of equal treatment of all requests, each research project should be limited in subject matter in such a way that it is possible to carry out all possible archival research. That means the petitioner should be as precise and specific as possible with names and/or dates and/or locations as well as events on the request form. Not only will this make the acceptance of the request possible, it will also lead to a more efficient and successful archival search.

If a petitioner has no precise data and yet thinks the Sigurimi records can hold information needed for an intended story, the best approach would be to contact the Authority for a consultation on how to formulate a topic so a request can be successful.

The research request sets the parameters of the archival research

It is important to be thoughtful in the formulation of the request. If the request is too narrow, for example restricted to one date or place only, as a result it is possible that no document could be found. Also, a petitioner should be aware that his request sets the parameter for his research. Any information outside of the parameters of a request will not be given. For example, if the subject of your request was "Surveillance of X hotel in the years 1982-1985" any information on the year 1979 would not be made accessible to the petitioner. It might not be needed, because the petitioner is looking for specific historic events in the period noted in the request. But if the petitioner is not sure about the length of a period, it is advisable to consult with the archivist how to broaden the scope without making the research impossibly broad.

If in a file there is information relating to the research topic but also to other topics, the petitioner will only see that part relating to his or her request. Other information will be redacted.

If on the other hand a petitioner is too broad in his or her formulation, it is impossible to start research in the archives. Without a defining element in the request, the researchers at the Authority have no possibility to begin their process. The amount of material is too vast to approach it with only a vague idea of what the petitioner is looking for.

It is advisable to contact the Authority with questions and use their assistance through the process of formulation of your request.

For questions call the general number of the Authority +35542210424 and ask for the Directorate of Scientific Research and Civic Education or send an e-mail to
info@autoritetidosjeve.gov.al

The following sample form gives a good description of an application that the Authority can accept.

FORMULAR APLIKIMI

PËR KËRKUES PËR QËLLIME KËRKIMORE-SHKENCORE
INSTITUCION/MEDIA/STUDIUES

Nëse keni pyetje, lutemi kontaktoni:	HAPËSIRË E REZERVUAR VETËM PËR PUNONJËSIT E AUTORITETIT PËR INFORMIM-IN MBI DOKUMENTET E ISH-SIGURIMIT TË SHTETIT
E-mail: info@autoritetidosjeve.gov.al Web: www. autoritetidosjeve.gov.al	
Shënim: Ju lutem plotësoni me kujdes dhe qartë informacionin e kërkuar në fushat më poshtë, **ME GËRMA KAPITALE DHE NË NGJYRË BLU.**	

SEKSIONI A: INFORMACION MBI APLIKANTIN

1. Aplikanti   **Institucion** ☐   **Individ** ☐

Nëse aplikanti është institucion plotëso fushën 2, nëse është individ plotëso fushat 3-17

2. Emri i Institucionit TV

3. Emri ANIL   **4. Mbiemri** TRIMI

5. Emri i Babait PAL   **6. NID** *Nr. i identifikimit personal* 9 0 0 0 9

7. Gjinia ☒ **Mashkull**   ☐ **Femër**   **8. Datëlindja**   Data Muaji Viti

9. Vendlindja TIRANA   **10. Shtetësia** ALBANIA

11. Adresa

12. Qyteti   **13. Rrethi**

14. Kodi Postar 0 0 1   **15. E-mail**

16. Nr. Tel. Celular   **17. Nr. Tel. Fiks**

SEKSIONI B: INFORMACION SPECIFIK MBI APLIKUESIN

18. Aplikuesi paraqet kërkesë për informacion në cilësinë e:

☐ Institucion   ☐ Studiues
☒ Media   ☐ Shoqëri Civile/ OJF
☐ Nxënës/ Student   ☐ Tjetër

19. Aplikuesi paraqet kërkesë për informim për:

☐ Kërkime shkencore   ☐ Edukim qytetar

☐ Detyrë kursi/ Punime Diplome   ☐ Tjetër TV

Specifiko

Ky formular është miratuar me vendim të Autoritetit   **05-05-2017**

SEKSIONI C: TË DHËNA PËR LEHTËSIMIN E IDENTIFIKIMIT TË DOKUMENTACIONIT ARKIVOR

20. Të përcaktohet: i) kërkimi në fondin arkivor; ii) vendi dhe koha kur ka ndodhur ngjarja, data, muaji, viti; iii) periudha në të cilën do të përfshihet kërkimi; iv) si dhe çdo detaj apo e dhënë tjetër që lehtëson kërkimin e të dhënave (të bashkëlidhet dokumentacioni, nëse ka).

Objekti i kërkesës: Dokumente të krijuara nga ish-Sigurimi i Shtetit në lidhje me shkëmbimet kulturore mes Shqipërisë dhe vendeve të Amerikës Latine. Kërkohen specifikisht dokumente në lidhje me përndjekjen e disa shkrimtarëve të Amerikës Latine që e kanë vizituar Shqipërinë në vitet '50: J. A.; J. S.; L. M.; B. S. Kërkimi bëhet në kuadër të një studimi (ku do të përshihen edhe gjetjet e këtij kërkimi) mbi shkëmbimet kulturore mes vendeve të Amerikës Latine dhe vendeve të Europës Lindore gjatë Luftës së Ftohtë.

Seksioni E: Dokumentacioni i paraqitur

[X] Autorizim nga Institucioni/OJF/Media

[ ] Vendimi i Regjistrimit (vendim Gjykate/AMA) si OJF/Media

[X] Fotokopje e kartës së identitetit të kërkuesit/autorizuesit

[ ] Vërtetim nga pedagogu/udhëheqësi i temës

SEKSIONI F: NËNSHKRIMI I DEKLARATAVE

Deklaratë për përdorimin e dokumentacionit vetëm për qëllimin e kërkuar (detyrimisht për tu plotësuar):

Deklaroj nën përgjegjësinë time personale që informacioni dhe dokumentacioni i marrë pranë Autoritetit do të përdoret vetëm për qëllimin e kërkuar. Deklaroj se informacionin dhe dokumentacionin nuk do ta përcjell tek marrës të tjerë.

Nënshkrimi i Aplikantit

Emër Mbiemër Nënshkrim

Deklaratë për vënien në dispozicion të punimit (e drejta e autorit):

[ ] Nuk jam dakord që punimi t'u vihet në dispozicion palëve të interesuara.

[X] Jam dakord që punimi t'u vihet në dispozicion palëve të interesuara.

Deklaratë për dorëzimin pranë Autoritetit të kopjes së punimit të pregatitur me dokumentacionin e fondit arkivor të ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit.

Pranoj që një kopje e punimit të realizuar përmes konsultimit me dokumentacionin e tërhequr nga Autoriteti për Informim mbi Dokumentet e ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit të dorëzohet pranë Bibliotekës së Autoritetit.

Nënshkrimi i Aplikantit

Emër Mbiemër Nënshkrim

E drejta e kërkimit për informimin dhe vënia në dispozicion e dokumenteve sipas ligjit nr. 45/2015 "Për të Drejtën e Informimit për Dokumentet e Ish-sigurimit të Shtetit të Republikës Popullore Socialiste të Shqipërisë", ushtrohet nga kërkuesit individ, duke ju drejtuar Autoritetit për Informimin mbi Dokumentet e Ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit nëpërmjet shërbimit postar ose pranë zyrës së informimit të Autoritetit.

Nënshkrimi i Aplikantit

Emër Mbiemër Nënshkrim

| 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Data | | Muaji | | Viti | | | |

Ky formular është miratuar me vendim të Autoritetit

05-05-2017

Waiting-time and reading files

The request and, later, the documents found after research, go through an internal approval process. Once the request is accepted it can take anywhere from one week to six months before results come back from the archive. It all depends on the number of files that need to be consulted and the availability or existence of documents.

Sometimes thousands of pages need to be read before something is found on the requested topic. This takes time and can only be done by members of the Authority because of privacy reasons. The Authority strives to be as efficient as possible, working on the request with a small staff.

If a petitioner is working under a deadline, it is advisable to note this on the request form.

In cases, where documents have been published by another journalist, a set of the copies previously given out for that story can be made available in a very short time.

Once the results come back from the archive and are approved for reading, the petitioner will be invited to the reading room of the Authority to consult a digital copy of respective files.

Reading the files requires not only familiarity with the historical context, but also some familiarity with the language employed by the Sigurimi. The Sigurimi Authority and its archivists offer help with the words and their translation into modern language.

Before a journalist can read any file at the Authority premises, it is necessary for him or her to sign a **confidentiality form** relating to the use of personal data in the files. The Authority trusts the journalists and other researchers with unredacted information in the reading process. With the confidentiality form the journalist takes on the legal responsibility to respect the privacy of those whose information cannot be made public.

Information about the confidentiality form and the form itself can be found here:

https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/files/uploads/Udhezues-per-kerkesa-studimore-mediatike.pdf

When you have succeeded and you are sitting at the desk or at your computer with digitized files and begin to read, there is a third element to take into consideration, next to historic context and specific language employed. Those are the organizational rules that surround the writing of the records. It is helpful therefore to understand the key elements of the documents to make immediate sense of them.

The following is an overview of the most central components of archival files from the Sigurimi Authority, but also other archives. They are important for the analysis and use of archival files.

Components of an archival document

The following overview is meant to help interpret archival documents. Most information refers to the interpretation of the historical document and the file it belongs to. In its time the document was an active participant in bureaucratic procedures and had an active function.

Once it is archived it loses its active context and becomes organized by archival principles. Some information below, like storage information, thus refers to the archival processes that are attached to the historic document by the archivists who organize it in a data base to make finding and retrieval more effective.

For a researcher the historic context of the active document is the central clue to its interpretation.

Title of the document
The title of the document specifies its purpose or subject matter, providing a brief summary of what the document contains. The titles of the documents relate to the issues that are dealt with inside the file, but also relate to the department and persons in charge.

Date
The date indicates when the document was created or finalized, allowing for historical context and chronological organization. A date range on a file folder or files show the time span of the events that are included in the file.

Author/Creator
The name or organizational department responsible for creating the document. It helps identify the source and ensures credibility.

Format
Format refers to the physical or digital form of the document, such as a printed paper, a scanned image, a PDF file, or an electronic record.

Content
The actual content of the document is the core information, including the text, images, tables, graphics or any other information it may contain. This information may vary in depth and quality depending on the type of document, such as a report, memo, letter or contract.
A larger set of documents in a file often has an internal inventory, a list of documents belonging to the file, which reflects data on reports, minutes, decisions, biographies, correspondence, extracts, action plans, tasks, as well as the relevant dates when they were created and the number of sheets for each document.

Organization/Structure

The way the document is structured and organized may include sections, headings, paragraphs, bullet points or numbering systems, helping to present information in a logical and coherent manner. The internal organization of the file as a whole, which often includes several documents, tells a story as well. The arrangement of archival documents relating to the case (which means the arrangement of documents according to the events that occurred), according to chronology (which is used in cases where after the grouping of documents according to the case, time is also used) and finally counting and numbering sheets, which is marked on the top right of the sheet only with a pencil and circled only by the specialist who processed the archival document.

Metadata

Metadata provides additional information about the document, such as keywords, tags, or descriptions, which can aid in search and retrieval. It is usually added by the archivists and also contained in their research data base.

Signatures or Verification

Some documents may include signatures or verification marks to indicate authenticity or approval by relevant individuals or authorities. In general, all the archival documents from the Sigurimi Archive are signed by the authors who created them regardless of their function, i.e. whether they were the persecuted or the persecutor. Names and functions in their signatures are evidenced in hand-writing but also with a typewriter.

References/Citations

If applicable, an archived document may contain citations or references to sources or other documents used in its creation or to support its claims.

Storage Information

Documentation related to the archiving process itself, including any storage method, storage location, or metadata associated with the storage of the document.

Secrecy Level

Another element that is evident in the archival documents administered by the Authority's archive is the "state secret" classification level. These levels are divided into two categories "Top Secret" and "Secret".

TEPER SEKRET
Mod. 4

Pushka Fuoir

Nr 842 Ashuar
841

MINISTRIA E PUNËVE TË BRENDËSHME

Dega Puneve Brendëshme

Ana e Sigurimit Libyshd

DOSJE FORMULARE

Kategorija *21A*   Nr.   *261*

për ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Flet 288

Fillnar *48*   V. 19*65*   Nr. Arhivës_____

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How to publish information from the files

After the reading is done and possible copies have been handed over within the stipulation of the Law, the journalist can produce his or her story within the format of his or her outlet.

If the journalist is unsure about his or her handling of personal data from the Sigurimi files in his or her manuscript, the Authority is available for support. In this case the respective passages can be sent to the Authority for an exchange on possible compliance issues in regards to the Law.

If the Authority finds no fault in relation to the Law, the publication can go ahead. In cases where the journalist, ignoring the Authority's misgivings on the form of publication, decides to publish the documents and their portrayal without change, the "Guide for accessing and using the archive of the Authority for Information on Former State Security Files", chapter 7, stipulates that he or she is from that moment on prohibited from further research in the archive of the former State Security. Upon ascertaining the violation, the Authority applies the legislation (Article 42 of the Law 45/2015) in force on administrative offenses. A fine from 100.000 to 200.000 Lek can be assigned. If the offence is found to be criminal, the case can be given to a prosecutor.

When all rules for the access to the information are guarded and the Authority finds the parts in the story or article using information from the archive well within the rules of the Law, the journalist is then responsible for the publication in his outlet in line with the usual practice: The accurate presentation of facts as well as the minding of other laws such as data protection, defamation and press laws. As is the case with any other subject reported, if a person feels inaccurately portrayed in a publication based on the research in the Sigurimi files, all responsibility for this publication lies with the media outlet.

What are the reasons my request cannot be fulfilled?

A simple reason for the Authority to not be able to fulfill a research request is that for the requested topic no archival material could be found. One reason is that the files have been destroyed in the final stage of the active times of the Sigurimi. Since there are very limited records documenting what was destroyed, it is mostly impossible to know if a specific document was part of the massive final disappearance of documents. The amount of destroyed files is considerable.

If the Authority does not hold any records on your topic, it is also an option to consult other archives that might hold information on that topic. In the communist era, other governmental institutions worked with the Sigurimi and kept their own files on this cooperation or have their own records on an event or a person.

On rare occasions files could be used in a judicial proceeding. Then they can only be accessed after the proceedings are finished. The Authority can attempt to give an estimate of the wait time but it is completely dependent on the court schedule.

Examples of public use of Sigurimi files

The following chapter introduces a few examples of access to files, stories published, the effects of those publications, as well as specialty rules.

The Disappeared – from an idea to an amended law

The story

In 2018 documentarian and author Luljeta Progni approached the Authority with a special idea: She wanted to bring light to the fate of the many disappeared during the communist dictatorship and the lasting effects on Albanians today. With the opening of the Sigurimi files a new path to uncovering the facts about those who perished was opened.

Under the communist rule thousands of people were arrested and disappeared. They were killed by the execution squads or sentenced to hard labor in labor camps never to be heard of again. To this very day thousands of Albanian families do not know what happened to their loved ones, leaving a shadow over the families, now for generations.

Progni approached the Authority with a list of names, places and events researched through her contacts with the families of the disappeared, other archives and news clippings. Her goal was to tell the story of two disappeared persons from two families through documents, visits to sites, and interviews.

Her request was approved and the Authority started the research for Progni's project. It was able to find proof of the arrests and incarceration locations of the people in question.

Her research met with efforts of the Authority who had started from its beginning to address the issue of the disappeared. Combining their efforts seemed effective as it was helpful to reach out to the public through the medium of a documentary. It was decided to support the production of a documentary based on the research. The film entitled "The Disappeared" was released on August 30, 2019, the International Day of the Disappeared. Ever since then, the documentary serves as a tool of civic education and has been in the public domain.

Link to the film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qhkgnoELRA

The aftermath

Since 1991 Albania more than 24 legislative acts addressing the issue of victims of the former regime have been adopted. Institutions also work with the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) on this matter. With the newly opened Sigurimi Files Authority and its support in the matter, as an effect of the research and the film, a transfer of responsibility has been made. The Sigurimi Law was amended in 2022 to make it an official task of the Authority to continue the search for information on the disappeared from the communist era.

Finding a missing person involves several steps. The first step is receiving and reviewing the request concerning the missing person. The second step involves the search, discovery, and identification of their remains. The third step is the return of the remains to their family, allowing for burial through a proper ceremony.

As per changes to its Law in 2022, Article 22/1, the Authority cooperates with central and local state institutions or international agencies in the process of identifying and recovering the remains of those who disappeared or were executed during communism, as well as in taking measures to adequately protect and preserve the places that are currently or will be latter identified as burial sites.

In this context, it has also worked to bring the historic sites where people disappeared, the labor camps and prisons, into public view, for example, in Shkodër, Maliq or Tepelena.

To remember

- Researching and publishing about this chapter of Albanian history is still a very contemporary issue. Many of the stories will contribute to the negotiations on how to deal with the past today.
- In order to reconstruct the narrative about the past, it is helpful to seek out those still alive from the communist era and listen to their recollections. It can add important information to what is written in the files.

The case of Martin Camaj – a failure of understanding leads to disinformation

The story

In July 2020, an online portal published documents relating to Martin Camaj (*1925 - +1992), an Albanian writer, academic and albanologist, who was briefly arrested as an opponent of the communist regime in 1948. Two months after the arrest he fled to Yugoslavia to escape punishment and lived abroad ever since. He ultimately spent a long and successful career as an academic in Germany.

In 2020, an online author had petitioned access and published documents from a part of the file where it was claimed that Martin Camaj had signed on to be an associate of the State Security. This article was published on the "Landscapes of the Word" portal, stating that two Albanian writers, Ernest Koliqi and Martin Camaj, were agents of foreign secret services, the UDB (Yugoslavia) and CIA (USA), denigrating the figure of a writer who was actually persecuted by the State Security.

However, taking into consideration the complete file for the case of Martin Camaj, over 200 pages from 1948 to 1990, a central element is its designation as a "2A file". "2A files" in the typology of former Sigurimi were files that were prepared before a subject was arrested. A processing "2A file" was created for every Albanian citizen, foreign citizen and stateless person, when there was "proven data" for him/her that he/she developed "malicious hostile activity against the state". They indicated the direction which the forms of operative work (or secret police work) was taking.

The complex documentation around the decades-long observation of Martin Camaj is also examined by the Authority in order to clarify what is found in it. The information will be made available to applicants alongside the documents in the file, upon request.

The aftermath

In this case, media focused only on a small part, a few pages, of a larger collection of documents without paying attention to the full depth of the material. Consequently, the falsehood resulting from this partial misreading of a file served as a source for the distribution of sensational "news" as the revered writer had never been associated with any intelligence body. It damaged the image of someone who spent his entire

life in emigration and that no longer had the opportunity to protect his integrity since he was no longer alive. The online-story created an echo in media circles and many scholars came to read the file at the Authority. After consulting the documents, they treated it correctly in their publications. However, to this day the falsehood is still to be found online and people connect it to the legacy of Martin Camaj.

The Authority held a panel discussion in 2020 on the 95th anniversary of the writer's birth, who was seen in his three dimensions as an academic, as a writer and as a linguist. It also began its own investigation for the verification, clarification, and completion of the documentation data on the figure of Camaj. It will make its finding available online for anyone to read to slowly diminish the power of the falsehood.

It also opened an administrative investigation into the case in order to deal with the consequences of the abuse of the files.

> **To remember**
>
> ● Always make sure you have the context of a document, never rely on partial information so you are really accurate to the historic facts. As with any other journalistic source, also archival sources, like the Sigurimi files, need to be fact-checked and contextualized.
>
> ● Be aware of the allure of Sigurimi files, they can be seductive if you focus too much on a "scoop" or a sensation, you may easily spread a lie.
>
> ● Use all the resources at hand within the Authority and the historians' community.

A case of misuse through passing on of documents

The story

A request was submitted by a public media outlet. It wanted to find documents created by the former State Security in relation to two citizens that were political prisoners during the communist regime.

As the request related to two citizens, who were no longer alive, approval to access the files by the closest relatives was also given. The stated goal for publication was to create an article about the lives of these two political prisoners and their fate. The Authority approved the provision of duplicate documentation for the applicant.

The applicant signed the declaration of confidentiality, where it says, among other things, that the applicant receives this information only for his media outlet and the stated purpose. The provision on the form includes that the applicant cannot hand over personal data or confidential information that was received from the Authority to unauthorized persons. Also, the form signed means a journalist agrees to the obligation to inform the Authority in writing about the date of the publication of the story based on access to the files and, if applicable, the publication of the document copies before it is published.

In this case, the proposed story however never appeared in the public medium. Instead, a private news outlet, that never petitioned for access, used information from these documents during the 2023 local elections. In an article a mayoral candidate was attacked with the accusation that his father had been a member of a judicial panel during trials in the communist years, something that was documented in said files.

The aftermath

Even though the documents were handed over for a specific purpose to one media outlet, they ended up in the hands of a different media outlet. There the original story was ignored and the document was used to attack and damage the image of a public figure by reminding him that his father was participating, as a member of the communist party, in a trial session during communism. His name could be read because as a party official his name was also left open in the files that were handed out on the lives of the political prisoners, as those were judicial documents.

In this case, the Authority as the issuer of the document was attacked by those affected, the relatives of the political prisoners, as the document was clearly misused. The journalist from the public media outlet is under administrative investigation to determine the penalty. The story of the two political prisoners still remains untold.

To remember

- Not adhering to the rules of the Law makes access for everyone harder in the long term.

- Every access is a chance to right a wrong from the past and raise the understanding and awareness of the past. Using the files for contemporary political purposes undermines the integrity of journalism, the access process, and the work of the Authority.

- Be responsible with the unique possibility to access these files.

Different rules: Vetting by public authorities vs. access by journalists

The Authority has the legal obligation to vet public officials against the Sigurimi files. The reason for this provision of the Law lies in its goal to support democracy. By making transparent possible secret connections to the Sigurimi in the past a public discussion is possible. With this knowledge the credibility of those working in state institutions is strengthened.

Albania follows with this vetting provision in the Law for the Sigurimi Files Authority the path of all the other Eastern European countries who opened their secret police files as a means to address the injustices and crimes of the communist era. From Germany to Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and the Czech and Slovak Republics all former Eastern European communist countries felt the necessity to deal with those who worked for the secret police apparatus. Some countries, like Poland and the Czech Republic, even created so called lustration laws which made working for the former secret police apparatus a crime and excluded persons to run for office for a limited amount of time, for example. All the above countries have had many instances of public discussions after the publication of former secret police staffers and informants. Creating a public discourse about it in the new democracies was felt essential. Albania follows on this path with its own Sigurimi Files Authority Law.

This process of vetting office holders is however bound by specific rules of the Law. The Authority starts a research process based on a list of names given to it by an asking agency. This could be the parliament,

a ministry, or a municipality. The Law specifies that the outcome of the research will be given ONLY to the asking agency. It is then in the decision-making power of that agency how it deals with the results. For example, whether they make the information from the Sigurimi Files Authority public or not and whether they draw consequences from it like removing a person from office or moving them to a different post.

The Law regulates for journalists that they cannot simply receive information about current public figures. It is important to remember, that media are allowed a right to access because in the logic of the Law they want to understand the historic past. A request that only attempts to vet a person or several persons of today by name against the records cannot be accepted. It is mandatory to connect any request to an event or person(s) in their historic role foremost. Any contemporary function of a person is not relevant for the request, only their historic role.

The Sigurimi Authority is of course also bound by Law No. 119/2014 "On the Right to Information". Journalists can submit request based on this law in regards to verification processes that the Authority has undertaken of officials exercising public functions. Cases of such requests have been made.

In all these cases, the Authority informs the media about the public entity that required the verification of the official, as well as the result of the verification. Of course, the media also have at their disposal the official website of the institution, where the results of the verification and the concrete findings of the Authority for the officials are published in abbreviated form.

A few additional facts and figures on the Authority

After its start in 2017 the Sigurimi Authority had a temporary home on the Ministry of the Interior grounds at the Guard of the Republic of Albania and moved to its permanent quarters at the at Administrative Unit no. 4, Rruga e Dibra, "Skënderbej" garrison, Tirana in 2023.

On rare occasions files are in the possession of the Authority, but for reasons of national security or the maintenance of peace they cannot be given out to petitioners. This is in line with the Law 10/2023 on Classified Information from 2023, that in general declassified all Sigurimi files except those "*that concern relations among states and national security*". It is possible that over time this stipulation gets lifted. Information when this is the case will be given to the petitioner.

In 2021 the Sigurimi Authority became a member of the European Network of Agencies in Charge of Secret Police Files (https://securityarchives.eu/). Since 2008 the archives from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Slovak Republic exchange their experiences in this network. As every year a member takes over the chair of the network, Albania held this role in 2024.

The Authority is seeking to be part of efforts to find information and to search the remains of the many people that disappeared throughout the communist regime, based on the changes of 2022 to its Law 45/2015 and sublegal acts pursuant to it that are yet to be approved.

Resources: Books, Articles, Web Resources

The following selection on books and articles on the communist period from 1944 to 1991 and the reappraisal of that era in the following decades should give the reader of Sigurimi files additional information and context.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Austin, Robert C.; **Ellison**, Jonathan. 2008. Post-Communist Transitional Justice in Albania. In: East European Politics and Societies, Vol. 22, No. 2, pages 373–401. https://dl.isca.ac.ir/multiMediaFile/67471072-4-1.pdf

Bardhoshi, Nebi; **Lelaj**, Olsi. *Etnografi në diktaturë: dija, shteti dhe Holokausti ynë*. Akademia e Shkencave, 2018

Baruti, Vasfi. *Enver Hoxha (Gjysma Tjetër e Hënës)*. ISKK, 2017. 685 pages.

Butka, Uran. *Bombë në Legatën Sovjetike*, Instituti "Lumo Skëndo", 2018. 260 pages

Çaushi, Perlat. *Kush e vrau Mehmet Shehun*. UET Press, 2020. 248 pages

Dervishi, Kastriot. *Doracak termash të diktaturës komuniste*, ISKK, 2020. 88 pages

Godole, Jonila. 2023. Albania: Coming to Terms with the Communist Dictatorship. In: After Dictatorship. Instruments of Transitional Justice in Post-Authoritarian Systems, Peter Hoeres and Hubertus Knabe (ed) https://after-dictatorship.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Albanien/Godole_Albania.pdf

ISKK. *Kolana "Zërat e kujtesës"*, I-VIII, 2022

ISKK. *Ligjshmëria Gjatë Regjimit Komunist 1944-1990*. 2021. 188 pages

Muneka, Hajdar. *Dritëhijet e një miqësie që çuditi botën*. Albpaper, 2019, 508 pages

Pipa, Arshi. *Stalinizmi shqiptar*, Princi. 2010

Qafoku, Roland. *100 vrasjet më të bujshme shqiptare*, 1912-2017. West Print, 2017. 736 pages

Sadiku, Xhafer. *Kooperativat Bujqësore dhe Disidenca e Fshatarëve*, Filara 2023. 304 pages.

Saraçi, Alvin. *Dokumente mbi Cenimin e Pronës 1944-1946*. ISKK, 2021. 188 pages.

Todorova, Maria; Gille, Zsuzsa; Lela, Alfred. *Nostalgjia post-komuniste*, Politiko, 2022. 522 pages

WEB RESOURCES

Films

Documentary "The Disappeared"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qhkgnoELRA

Documentary "Butterflies"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oHDYEHcUTM

Documentary "The Hidden Documentary" 2013
https://dokufest.com/en/festival/2014/special-screenings/the-hidden-documentary

Memorials and museums

Suspected burial site at the tombs of Rrmaji in Shkodër
https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/blog/perkujtohet-30-gushti-dita-nderkombetare-e-te-zhdukurve-shenjezohet-vendvarrim-i-dyshuar-tek-vorret-e-rrmajit-ne-shkoder

Camp of Maliqi Site
https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/blog/perurohet-ekspozita-e-jashtme-e-perhershme-ne-ish-kampin-e-maliqit

Internment camp site in Tepelena
https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/blog/ekspozite-e-perhershme-informuese-ne-ish-kampin-e-internimit-ne-tepelene

Spaç Prison Site
https://chwbalbania.org/portfolio/spac-prison-a-place-of-dialogue-and-action-addressing-communist-era-heritage/

Legal and other resources

Law 45/2015 (amended)
https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/uploads/faqosje%20e%20ligjit%20te%20ndryshuar%20ok%201%20(1).pdf

Sigurimi Files Authority
https://autoritetidosjeve.gov.al/

European Network of Official Authorities in Charge of the Secret Police Files
https://securityarchives.eu/

International Commission on Missing Persons
https://www.icmp.int/

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/disappearance-convention.pdf

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ACCESS TO THE
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MANUAL
FOR JOURNALISTS
AND RESEARCHERS

DAGMAR HOVESTADT