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Author(s): John Kolsti

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*“Judging from what little information there is on its make-up after Hoxha, Albania’s new leadership is off to a sure start, a new beginning.”*

## Albania’s New Beginning

BY JOHN KOLSTI

*Associate Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Texas*

ON April 11, 1985, Enver Hoxha, the last surviving member of Albania’s first Communist government, died of heart failure at the age of 76. He had served as the First Secretary of the Albanian Communist party (the Albanian Party of Labor, APL) since he set up the new government in Berat, in Central Albania, in October, 1944. His 41 years in power mark the longest period of rule of any Communist leader; they also span the longest period of independence for the Albanians. No other Albanian has had such an enormous impact on the lives of a people divided for centuries by religious rivalries superimposed on them by Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman conquerors. No Albanians have witnessed more fundamental political, economic, social and cultural changes, changes that have all but buried the last vestiges of five centuries of Turkish rule.

The transformation of Albanian society over the past four decades has been realized in part because of Enver Hoxha’s restraint in dealing with his non-Muslim Slav and Greek neighbors, particularly his dealings with Yugoslavia’s President Josip Broz Tito, who had inherited the problem of integrating Albanian Muslims into the political as well as the economic life of the Yugoslav federation after World War II. His cautious policies probably have had a stabilizing effect on a corner of southeast Europe no less a “cat’s cradle of local enclaves” in 1985 than it was in 1914 or in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which saw the emergence of nation states in European Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Partly because of the area’s postwar stability, Enver Hoxha’s death received little notice outside the Balkans.

Enver Hoxha had evidently picked his successor before 1982, when Ramiz Alia, the party’s leading ideologist, publicly assumed the day-to-day running of the country. Hoxha had seen to it that his choice, unlike Tito’s, would not be blocked by dissident voices in the APL or by regional loyalties in the country’s administrative districts. There would be no political vacuum at the center, no “rotating presidency” as there is in post-Tito Yugoslavia. The “steel-like unity” between the party and the people and the party’s monopoly of power would remain un-

<sup>1</sup>There are two excellent articles on Albania in *The Economist*, April 20, 1985, pp. 15–16.

<sup>2</sup>The phrase *amanete te shenjta* appears in Nexhmije Hoxha’s remarks directed at her late husband’s “extended family,” over which he had ruled as *kapedan* (chieftain) as much as First Secretary. *Shqipëria e Re*, May, 1985, p. 2.

broken; the principles of “democratic centralism” and the “right of revocation” would operate to assure Hoxha’s successor the loyalty of those appointed to top party and government posts.

The orderly transfer of power from Hoxha to Alia surprised no one inside or outside the country. Shock waves from the events of April 11–13 may have reached Belgrade, but they were probably not felt any farther from Tirana. Albania after Hoxha, after all, would for the foreseeable future remain basically unchanged, charged as the regime was by his widow, Nexhmije Hoxha, to protect her husband’s “sacred trust.”<sup>2</sup> However Enver Hoxha may be remembered outside Albania, this “unrepentant Stalinist to the end” should also be credited with leaving behind a new nation state confident enough to rediscover its European roots and even its American shoots (not the least of which is the Albanian Orthodox Church), while at the same time cultivating its centuries of contact with the Muslim world in the eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

### HOXHA’S LEGACY

In the spring of 1985 Hoxha could look back over four decades and feel he had little to repent. The suicide of his long-time number two man, Mehmet Shehu, in 1981, and the subsequent purge of his relatives and supporters, only cleared the way for Hoxha’s 59-year-old successor. Continuing unrest in Albanian districts in Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia, following the violent student demonstration in 1981 that left some Albanian “irredentists” dead in the streets, had begun to turn against Belgrade the joke that it was better to be an Albanian in Yugoslavia than in Albania itself. When young Albanians in Yugoslavia began to see themselves as “specific targets for political persecution and prosecution, economic neglect, and educational and social discrimination,” they could more easily accept the fact that Hoxha’s fortress on the Adriatic had undergone a far-reaching social as well as political and economic transformation.

Albania’s rigidly centralized political and economic structure had succeeded after the war where Yugoslavia’s worker-management system, as unemployed Albanians in Kosovo understood it, had failed. Albania’s economic revival after 1945, Ramiz Alia reminds his audiences, is only one benefit derived from the fact that Albania emerged from centuries of national humiliation and the ruins of the war as an independent country with the

proven capacity not only to survive but also to plan its economic strategy "relying on its own resources," regardless of the personal sacrifices Hoxha's policies demanded.

Hoxha's ultimate goals, the physical survival of Albania as a state and the Albanians as a nation, were worth the risks the APL had taken. The risks were almost continuous: Albania survived Hoxha's break with Tito in 1947–1948, with Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev in 1960–1961 and with Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong's successors in the mid-1970's, when absolute self-reliance became a reality, not merely a slogan. Five-year economic goals could no longer depend on foreign loans or credits.

Hoxha could, with some justification, equate his commitment to the building of an independent, socialist state based on Marxist–Leninist principles with the still unrealized visions of an ethnic Albania that had motivated Albanian revolutionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century: that is, a nation united by a common language, no longer divided by its two Muslim and two Christian communities. Hoxha had little reason to regret the disappearance from the Albanian landscape of the pastoral and bucolic scenes permeating the poetry of the country's cultural and political "Awakeners." Gone also were the swamps that in 1938 spread malaria to nearly 60 percent of the country's schoolchildren, what few of them there were. In the 1980's, Hoxha could boast, Albania's schoolchildren were the products of a cost-free health service; their cost-free education was a guarantee of full employment after graduation from compulsory eight-year schools, vocational training programs, or the university.

Over 46 percent of the labor force were women, some having risen to ministerial rank in sectors they all but dominated (e.g., education, agriculture).<sup>3</sup> That their grandmothers or mothers had little or no chance for schooling or work outside the home before 1945 was a fact not lost on the first generation of Albanian women who had been spared the worst abuses of a patriarchal, predominantly Muslim society. The impressive achievements of Albania's youth organizations and Soviet-model schools between 1945 and 1965 gave Hoxha nothing to apologize for.

The government's drive to transform Albania's countryside had made the "poorest country in Europe" self-sufficient in energy and food. Annual statistics and economic growth charts evoked new images of an Albania in

<sup>3</sup>For an extensive study on the status of women in Eastern Europe, with a chapter on Albania, see Alfred Meyer and Sharon Wolchik, editors, *Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup>*Radio Free Liberty Research*, Background Report 216 (November 30, 1984), p.3.

<sup>5</sup>*New Albania*, no. 5 (1984), pp. 10–11.

<sup>6</sup>See Hartmut Albert's article, "Kosova 1979, Albania 1980: Observations, Experiences, Conversations," in Arshi Pipa and Sami Repishti, eds., *Studies on Kosovo* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 1984), pp. 103ff.

the mid-1980's far removed from the mid-1930's. Regardless of how they are presented or interpreted, the statistics nevertheless attest to real changes. Albania's economy is dynamic enough to meet the needs of its population which, by 1980, was more than double the population of 1950.<sup>4</sup> Families with two or three children remain the norm. Thirty percent of the country's inhabitants are less than 15 years old. (However, these statistics do not tell the entire story: the World Bank estimates the 1981 Albanian GNP [gross national product] per capita at US\$820—the lowest in Europe.)

In Tirana, the prospect of a population of over four million by the year 2000 (up from 2.6 million in 1979) was welcomed, not dreaded, by Hoxha. The continuing capacity of the country to cope with its high birthrate has created a society whose social, if not economic, development may be measured as much across borders as across time. More important to Hoxha's successor than the fact that new hydroelectric stations enable the country to generate 427 times the electrical energy it did in 1938 is the reality that life in New Kukës,<sup>5</sup> situated on the shore of a power lake created by the Fierza dam in the North Albanian Alps, is as far removed from the oriental marketplace of the old village now under water as it is from towns to the east in the Dukagjini Plain (Kosovo, or Old Serbia), whose bazaars are still overshadowed by the minarets that surround them.<sup>6</sup>

The minarets, like the malarial swamps, are missing today from the Albanian landscape. In the 1960's, Albanian schoolgirls who volunteered for agit-prop teams had little difficulty in convincing their sisters in the more backward regions of the country that the creation of the world's first atheist state, given the harsh realities of the life they all knew all too well, was nothing less than what Nexhmije Hoxha said it was, namely, a moral act. Twenty years of indoctrination in the youth organizations and in the schools greatly minimized the risks taken by the top leadership of the APL when it eliminated the clergy, Muslim and Christian, from the mainstream of Albanian life. The women who supported the APL in the 1960's and who began in the 1970's to move into high-level party and government posts, owe no small part of their "great leap forward" to Ramiz Alia, who headed Albanian youth organizations for 10 years after the war. Hoxha left his successor a ruling party in which one member in three is a woman, a ratio, high as it is, that still lags behind the general acceptance of women in the work place. But the ratio will no doubt continue to climb as long as the APL equates the emancipation of Albanian women with the success of the social revolution orchestrated "from above" in the 1960's.

As traditional religious barriers in the country began to disappear, so did regional and cultural differences, particularly in the country's expanding educational, agricultural and industrial centers. The drive toward modernization has not been felt more than in Central Albania, where rail links between Tirana and Durrës, the coun-

try's major port, have been joined by tracks reaching north and south into new grain-growing and oil-refining districts. In the new settlements the distance separating the son of a Muslim shepherd in the North Albanian Alps from the daughter of a Christian schoolteacher in South Albania has been reduced to an aisle in the classroom or a hall in an office building.

Dialectical differences between North Albanians (Gegs) and South Albanians (Tosks) have been reduced, because of the mobility of the labor force and the adoption of a standard literary language. In rural areas, to be sure, old antagonisms may linger. But even there a leveling of wages and benefits, to say nothing of the generating of electricity, has reduced the social as well as the economic disparity that once separated the country's urban and rural population. Hoxha left behind no regional elite, no "new class," no Old Guard at the top of the party; the Central Committee is no longer dominated by foreign-educated Tosks.

#### RAMIZ ALIA: ALBANIA'S NEW KAPEDAN

On April 13, 1985, the APL Central Committee elected Ramiz Alia its second leader. His nomination by the Politburo was not unexpected. For several years before his death Hoxha had left much of the speechmaking to his "relatively younger alter ego," who had emerged as the party's leading ideologist.<sup>7</sup> Alia was frequently accompanied by Nexhmije Hoxha (who had probably played a role in the selection of her husband's successor) and by some members of the government who had been removed from their posts after Shehu's suicide. His audiences included former political detainees who had benefited from the general amnesty declared by Hoxha in 1982, when the country celebrated 70 years of independence.<sup>8</sup> In the same year Hoxha and Alia further enhanced their public images by creating an investigator's office under the direct control of the People's Assembly, headed at the time by Alia, to end the abuses of the country's internal security forces.<sup>9</sup> As a result of actions taken in 1982, Alia's reputation sharply contrasted with that of his most dangerous rival, Mehmet Shehu, who had been both respected and feared by anyone opposing him.

If some choose to regard Hoxha as "brutal and paranoid and, in a crazed way, a brilliant survivor,"<sup>10</sup> what kind of assessment might these sources make of his successor? Ramiz Alia was born in North Albania, some suggest Kosovo, in 1925. His family was Muslim. It is significant that the new First Secretary of the APL is a Geg, as are approximately two-thirds of the Albanians living in the Balkans, half of them in Macedonia, Serbia

<sup>7</sup>Louis Zanga's background reports for *Radio Free Liberty Research* provide what little information there is on Ramiz Alia and other top party leaders in Tirana (and Kosovo).

<sup>8</sup>*Radio Free Liberty Research*, Background Report 93 (April 29, 1983), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>*Radio Free Liberty Research*, Background Report 166 (July 13, 1983), pp. 6–7.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

(Kosovo) and Montenegro. In the more tradition-bound Albanian districts in Yugoslavia, the rise of a North Albanian to power in Tirana can hardly go unnoticed.

In 1948, when the first serious internal threat to Hoxha and Shehu was crushed, Alia, a World War II medal winner, was elevated to the party's Central Committee. Alia's loyalty to Hoxha was rewarded a second time in 1960–1961, when pro-Soviet factions were purged from the APL after Hoxha's confrontation with Khurshchev. In 1960, Alia replaced Liri Belishova, a woman, in the Secretariat of the party, and one year later he was appointed a full member of the Politburo, in which he had served as a candidate member since 1956. Although the party's drive to industrialize the country in the 1960's was slowed by the loss of Soviet aid, the country's economy did not collapse. Hoxha's Albania survived its second major crises in part because of help from Beijing. That it had sufficient and significant resources of its own, human as well as material, cannot be overlooked.

The human factor, much of which was a product of Albania's youth organizations and schools—Alia had been named minister of education in 1955 at the age of 30—was appreciated by the party's top leadership in the late 1960's when support "from below" made possible the social and cultural revolution. Alia had helped reduce the risks the APL took in the 1960's; at the same time he helped the population to prepare for the eventuality that (should the party's hardline economic policies remain unchanged) Albania would have to survive alone, eschewing all foreign loans or credits. That eventuality became law on December 28, 1976, when the country's new constitution was approved by the People's Assembly.

The purges that immediately preceded the Assembly's unanimous acceptance of Hoxha's "sacred trust" affected nearly every ministry in the government. Alia emerged once again as a "winner," and no doubt he played an active role in the removal of a third wave of "traitor groups" that challenged Hoxha. This time, however, the foreign-trained Cabinet ministers were replaced by men and women who had received their ideological as well as technical or professional training in Albania itself.

Although the purges of the mid-1970's were extensive, they evidently did not eliminate all dissident voices inside the party. Alia still echoes his mentor's attacks against the "number one fire extinguishers of the revolution," pointing his finger at Polish and Yugoslav revisionists who have brought two Communist states to the brink of political chaos and economic bankruptcy; and he reminds his listeners that opportunists in the APL will not be allowed to jeopardize the country's political independence or its debt-free economy.

Alia's wife, Semiramis Xhuvani, who is dean of the college of natural sciences at the University of Tirana, comes from a Greek Orthodox family. Her name links Alia to earlier periods of the Albanian revolutionary movement. Her father, Aleksandër Xhuvani, was a lead-

ing educator before 1912, and after the war supported the establishment of the Albanian Orthodox Church in the country. Thus, through his wife's family, Alia is connected with Albania's cultural and political awakening at the end of the nineteenth century. Belgrade has perhaps less reason to be concerned about Alia's ideological ties than about his "spiritual" links with Albania's first revolutionaries.

A Serbian scholar at Belgrade University warns that Albanian nationalism, no less "romantic" today than it was a century ago, has moved into its "aggressive and explosive phase."<sup>11</sup> Perhaps it would be more reasonable to suggest that Albanian nationalism (with a North Albanian whose family roots reach into Kosovo as a leader) could, if necessary, be fully exploited to destabilize the already tense situation in Yugoslavia's Albanian and Muslim districts.

### ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

Unlike Albania's newly laid railroad tracks that reach only as far as its borders, Alia's influence extends well into Yugoslavia. Albanians living in Yugoslavia's Kosovo (and in Montenegro and Macedonia, where they are in fact a "national minority") need no daily reminding from Tirana that they do not control their own future.<sup>12</sup> Not that it is any great consolation to them that Enver Hoxha would certainly have lost any "kitchen debate" with Fadil Hoxha<sup>13</sup> in Prishtina. Tirana lacked private automobiles, not political sovereignty. Nor do Albanians need to be reminded that in gaining the status of an "autonomous province" in the Serbian republic they have in all probability lost any chance of becoming the Yugoslav federation's seventh republic (a right, evidently, reserved only for South Slavs).

Alia shows little hesitation in pressing the question of human rights for ethnic minorities in the Balkans. As he points out, one does not have to look too hard or to wait too long to run across attacks aimed at the Kosovars. A random glance at a recent newspaper, for example, catches the heading, "People are returning to Kosovo."<sup>14</sup> The article celebrates the return of Slavs, not Albanians, to the country's most economically depressed and racially tense regions. It implies that the danger of losing Serbia's medieval heartland to non-Slav nonentities has been averted: no more political concessions will be made to

<sup>11</sup>*The New York Times*, November 11, 1984, as reported from Belgrade, that "center of Albanian misinformation" routinely ridiculed by Tirana.

<sup>12</sup>See an excellent study by Adi Schnytzer, "The Economic Situation in Kosovo: Notes on a Comparison with Albania's Economy," in Pipa and Repishti, op. cit., pp.167-184.

<sup>13</sup>No relation. The name, from *hoca* (priest) in Turkish is fairly common among the Albanians, Europe's only predominantly Muslim nation.

<sup>14</sup>"Ljudi se vraćaju," in *Sedam Dana-Vjesnik*, 15 Ožujka (March) 1985, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>Albert, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>16</sup>*Radio Free Liberty Research*, Background Report 19 (March 13, 1985), p. 2.

meet the "unreasonable demands" of the country's most backward and abrasive Muslim minority.

Alia warns that the Yugoslav federation's strategy for the area is an extension of Slav racial prejudice and Serbia's centuries-long policy of "cultural genocide" aimed at the Albanians. His warnings will no doubt be taken more seriously by the Kosovars if anti-Albanian feelings get out of hand in Yugoslavia, or if Belgrade fails to address the economic and social problems that persist in its poorest regions, whose Albanian inhabitants have the highest birthrate in Europe. Alia's moves toward blunting Prishtina's criticisms of Tirana's failure to respect the human rights of its own citizens can only make Albania more attractive to Albanians living under martial law in Yugoslavia, *hoxhas* or no *hoxhas*.

Kosovo today, one recent visitor has remarked, is Albania "thirty years ago," insofar as its social and cultural development is concerned; that is, it is an area in which the influence of the *hoxhas* and priests is still felt.<sup>15</sup> Folk customs and rituals preserve a traditional way of life and a language that reminds them of their roots but offer little hope for the future. (In Albania itself, the same rituals have been declared crimes against the state, their public condemnation serving the same function as the publishing of "dreary" statistics.) Tirana has nothing to lose in its cautious defense of Yugoslavia's Albanians who, by the year 2000, will number over two million.

The more Serbia's autonomous province lags behind the rest of the country in economic development, the more Albanian it becomes, although Albanians as well as Serbs leave to seek a better life elsewhere. If Albania under Alia can attract unemployed Kosovars, and if the religion of the region's moderates as well as "irridentists" becomes Albania, an unavoidable political crisis will occur in the Yugoslav federation, and the attention of Europe will once again focus on the Balkan peninsula and on its poorest, perhaps most ignored, inhabitants.

### ALIA'S FORTRESS

As the political authority of Kosovar leaders declines, Alia's authority increases. There is no doubt that the First Secretary of the APL intends to be the spokesman for all Albanians in the Balkans. His message is clear. First, the state, in which there is "one ideology and one policy, one way of thinking and one social consensus," will survive.<sup>16</sup> There is no leadership crisis in the APL, no "political vacuum" in Tirana. Proof of this lies in the purges that have safeguarded the "steel-like" bonds between the party and the people. Second, the nation, soon to number

*(Continued on page 386)*

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**John Kolsti** has contributed to several studies on the folklore and politics of East Europe, most recently "From Courtyard to Cabinet: The Political Emergence of Albanian Women," in Alfred Meyer and Sharon Wolchik, eds., *Women, State and Party in Eastern Europe* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985).

## DISSENT AND THE CONTRA-SYSTEM IN EAST EUROPE

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ticated public policy to cope with the challenges to party hegemony, including corrective accommodation, cooptation, coexistence, and containment. Corrective accommodation usually involves incremental change in the official definition of what constitutes approved art to accommodate concepts, themes and techniques introduced by the contra-culture.

Cooptation, a more ambitious policy approach, aims to wean young people from the counterculture by offering some of the same attractions under state control. In contrast, coexistence is an approach based on an official attitude of resignation: if the regime cannot eliminate a problem, it must tolerate it. Most regimes long ago adopted this stance toward all but the most egregious extremes of the second economy. In fact, the party leaderships have come to recognize the functional value of the second economy as a means of keeping consumer discontent within acceptable bounds without facing the politically disquieting prospect of economic reform. Hungary has gone even further by decriminalizing and coopting the consumer service area of the second economy.

Finally, repressive containment as a policy option was widely used against nearly all opposition in the formative years of the Communist regimes. However, since the 1970's containment has been confined for the most part to political dissent, ethnic nationalism, and underground religious activism. The style and severity of political justice vary. For instance, Romania tends to be far more repressive while Hungary tends to favor much less severe forms of containment. However, no East European regime hesitates to resort to mass repression when a serious threat to the system is perceived; witness Yugoslavia and Poland in 1981.

As for the future, opposition is growing while the official systems appear to be stagnating. More problems lie ahead as more and more crossborder television transmissions from the West<sup>12</sup> hook into the video revolution going on in virtually every East European country but Albania. The personal computer will soon transfer technology from West to East, connecting with the emerging countercultures to create the kind of systemic "subversion" that the police, law codes and repressive machinery cannot even begin to contemplate, no less cope with effectively. Time is on the side of the contra-system as cleavages grow wider between increasingly open opposition of all kinds and the closed state systems. The ideas of Lenin may still reign in the citadels of power of East Europe, but beyond the palace walls the public mood is probably better summed up by the irreverent graffiti, "Lennon is still with us," scrawled on a wall in Prague. ■

<sup>12</sup>See George H. Quester, "Transboundary Television," *Problems of Communism*, vol. 33, no. 5 (September-October, 1984), pp. 76-87.

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over six million, will survive. Given the strong anti-Yugoslav tone of his addresses, Alia's statements on the fate of the nation give his immediate neighbors good cause to be concerned.

The fortress walls behind which Hoxha and other hardliners in Tirana retreated in 1948 and 1961 and again in the mid-1970's served their purpose well. For 40 years, the leadership of the APL could concentrate on the country's physical survival and on its plans to industrialize and modernize Europe's least developed corner. Today the walls in no way block the expansion or renewal of mutually beneficial trade agreements or diplomatic contacts with the West as well as the East. New doors, even those opening up the possibility of joint Albanian-American scientific projects, are no problem for Alia's "Stalinist bastion" on the Adriatic. Alia's continuing defense of Hoxha hardly prevents him from following any course of action that will bring Albanians closer to the goal envisioned by their revolutionaries a century ago. Enver Hoxha's "immortality," as one observer notes, in no way implies "immobility" for his successor.<sup>17</sup> The principles of "democratic centralism" and the "right of revocation" have indeed surrounded Ramiz Alia with those "winners" whose loyalty leaves nothing to be desired.<sup>18</sup>

The new kapedan must follow any course of action that will turn back South Slav attempts to liquidate the Albanians as a people. Will Ramiz Alia follow a strategy aimed at the further destabilization of an area threatened with political as well as economic restructuring? It is not that Alia would open his fortress walls to a foreign military presence. The stability of the area would be threatened more by improved lines of communication between Tirana and Kosovo than by Soviet submarine lanes from the Black Sea to the Adriatic.

Destabilization of the area could bring one step closer the establishment of an independent ethnic Albanian state in the Balkans, or, given the hostility of its South Slav neighbors, another major disaster for the Albanian nation. Alia apparently finds himself caught between the centuries-old goal of the former and the continuing reality of the latter. For the time being, Kosovo's problems remain Belgrade's. Alia will have to ensure first his own country's economic and political stability, lest Albania in the year 2000 finds itself where Kosovo is today. Judging from what little information there is on its make-up after Hoxha, Albania's new leadership is off to a sure start, a new beginning. ■

<sup>17</sup>*The Economist*, April 20, 1985, p.49.

<sup>18</sup>One Politburo member perhaps worth watching closely is Hekuran Isai, who is in charge of the country's internal security forces. His rise to top-level positions in the party and the government since the early 1970's has kept pace with that of Alia. His Illyrian name (*hekur* or iron) could not be more appropriate.

