

EJROPE'S SOLIDARITY WITH PEOPLE IN DISTRESS

ECHOINALBANIA

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**European Union Humanitarian Aid** 



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## ECHO IN ALBANIA, EUROPE'S SOLIDARITY WITH PEOPLE IN DISTRESS

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#### **Preface**

The European Union's humanitarian activities have developed substantially in recent years to become an important aspect of its external action.

This trend is due to the growth in the number of serious crisis in the world and reflects the EU's willingness to play a full part in international humanitarian efforts. It was against this background that the Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) was established in 1992.

ECHO is a practical expression of the EU's commitment to help the most vulnerable people in countries affected by conflict or natural catastrophe.

### ECHO's mandate

ECHO's mandate is to provide emergency assistance and relief to the victims of natural disasters or armed conflict outside the European Union. The aid is intended to go directly to those in distress, irrespective of their race, religion or political convictions.

ECHO's task is to ensure that goods and services are delivered speedily to crisis zones. The assistance is channelled through ECHO's partners in the field – humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other international organisations such as the Red Cross.

Budget - Partners - Projects

More than 50% of global humanitarian aid from public funding sources comes from the European Union. Of this, about half is provided directly by the European Commission while the remainder is managed bilaterally by EU Member States.

Since its creation in 1992, ECHO has successfully deployed more than 5 billion Euro. It is currently active in some 30-conflict zones and more than 80 countries throughout the world.

A significant proportion of ECHO funding is used to cover the full cost of operations. There are also situations where it co-finances activities together with other funding agencies, international organisations or EU Member States.







In Albania, ECHO has been involved in many of the above activities. It began with food and medicine supplies in 1992 and activities were stepped up with the opening of the ECHO office in spring 1997. In the summer of 1999, the EU, through ECHO, helped Albania successfully to handle almost half a million refugees generated by the Kosovo crisis. By 2002, the running total of European humanitarian aid to Albania has reached 142,4 million Euro with about 240 operations implemented throughout the country by more than 60 partners. Sectors covered included health, water supplies, social support, basic relief and food.

### Initial aid to the most vulnerable, 1992-1997

1992 was a memorable year for Albania with the establishment of the first democratic government after decades of totalitarian rule. The European Union was there from the outset to help the country in this transitional phase. With almost no domestic production, and much uncertainty over land ownership (Albania had only state-owned land, now to be distributed to the people) the country faced serious shortages. With many priorities and only a modest budget, the new government lacked resources for public health, especially drugs and equipment. Thus, the first humanitarian actions of ECHO were focused on food

A teacher of the primary school of Kollovoz in Kukes District. This school was rehabilitated by the British NGO Children's Aid Direct. It was part of a 1 million Euro project to improve learning conditions in 8 schools in Kukes and Has districts. Like this school, other 102 in the country benefited from EU Humanitarian Aid in the form of partial or total rehabilitation and furniture.



and drug supplies. The projects implemented from 1992 to 1996 involved 15 partners including NGOs, UNICEF, WHO and the IFRC (Red Cross Federation), for a total aid of nearly 7 million Euro. ECHO provided significant support during the cholera crisis of 1994 and for polio eradication in 1996.

Prior to the turmoil which affected Albania in early 1997, the EU had already allocated an additional 6.2 million Euro for 14 new humanitarian operations mostly in the food and medical sectors. These included, for the first time, rehabilitation work in hospital wards, and secondary and tertiary health structures. These projects were all completed by the end of that year.

### Spring 1997: civil unrest and the EU/ECHO response

Albania appeared to be making speedy progress on its new democratic path when, in early 1997, a financial crisis prompted widespread civil unrest. Many Albanians had invested heavily in dubious "pyramid investment schemes" and there was serious discontent when the "pyramids" started to collapse. Mass protests began in January 1997 and the authorities found themselves unable to control the situation. Events culminated with a series of raids on army munitions warehouses across the country. 600,000 light weapons were stolen and were widely distributed, posing a serious threat to security. Another dramatic result of the popular unrest was the looting of many public buildings, including schools and health centres. The cost of the damage was estimated at more than 60 million Euro. The government called for an international force to restore public order and pave the way for new elections. With this international presence, general elections were held in June 1997 and a new government took office the following month.

To help Albania and its government tackle the grave situation, two donors' conferences were held in Rome and Brussels in October 1997. The international community confirmed its willingness to support Albania's efforts to resolve the economic, social and institutional crisis. Following the adoption of a joint "rapid impact" programme for economic recovery, proposed by the EU and the World Bank, the European Commission approved a new tranche of humanitarian operations through ECHO, in December 1997, amounting to 10 million Euro.







The ECHO office in Albania, set up to monitor the implementation of the humanitarian assistance, opened in May 1997 at the peak of the crisis. The international troops had arrived in April.

The focus of the new EU humanitarian assistance was going to be the badly hit health sector - 30% of all health institutions had been severely damaged during this crisis. Indeed, although ECHO had previously provided drugs and equipment to the public health sector; as well as contributing to rehabilitation of health structures, the situation was now dramatic.

The new ECHO-funded projects included a major emphasis on the provision of medicines. Essential supplies, covering a 6-12 month period, were made available to 32 of the country's 49 hospitals as well as to 242 health centres. Priority was given to emergency units and maternity departments. ECHO also funded emergency pharmaceutical supplies and the basic rehabilitation of six public health and 30 hospital laboratories, including the provision of consumables, essential equipment and technical assistance.

Aid to the social sector was focused on the partial rehabilitation of 25 social institutes (orphanages, centres for the handicapped, mental health centres, and old people's homes). In addition, six schools in Lezha district were assisted with small-scale rehabilitation.

A nurse from Tirana Maternity where ECHO has funded five interventions for a total of 1,9 million Euro in different departments, providing not only rehabilitation but also equipment and basic medicines as well as a new heating system. The first of those intervention started right after the establishment of the office in 1997, and the last ending in October 2001 with the technical support to the equipment maintenance unit. These interventions were carried out by the Italian NGO's CINS and CRIC.







58 operations totalling 46,2 million Euro, shared between NGOs, the Red Cross and specialised UN agencies, contributed to the easing of the situation and to relieving the suffering of displaced people throughout Albania. Through special projects, ECHO established a transport fleet for humanitarian organisations in need of logistical support. In the same vein, it funded air bridges linking Albania, Kosovo and Rome. In addition to its experts in the field, ECHO gave an NGO the task of monitoring the implementation of ECHO-funded projects and of providing updated reports for all districts.

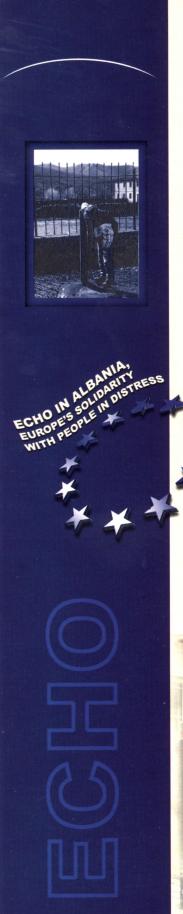
While in all the countries of the region affected by this crisis, the humanitarian situation was brought under control relatively speedily, on the political scene, the peace agreement brokered by the international community within FRY was only concluded in June 1999. The refugees returned to their homes within a few weeks, either using their own means or with the support of agencies present in the field.

The crisis may have ended but it continued to have a considerable impact on Albania's socio-economic situation. ECHO's work in Albania was not yet over.

### The post emergency situation – ECHO remains a major player

Half of the 91 million Euro earmarked for the Kosovar refugees in Albania was required to meet their needs, due to the relatively rapid resolution of the immediate crisis. Following a decision of EU Member States, and in recognition of Albania's contribution, ECHO was given the task of deploying the remaining 45 million Euro to assist the Albanian people who had been mostly affected.

A social worker from the American NGO, ICMC counselling a Kosovar refugee hosted in an Albanian family. Indeed, besides providing the refugees with basic relief items, food, shelter and water, ECHO funded also psycho-social projects to give support to those displaced in camps and families. After the Kosovar refugees left, half of the 91 million Euro remaining from the refugees' allocation, were redirected in favour of the population living in Albania.



he redeployed resources were quickly channelled into public health, education, water/sanitation and social projects to cover the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Projects included rehabilitation works in 19 hospitals, 122 primary health centres (including polyclinics), 65 schools and 75 rural and suburban water systems, throughout Albania. Associated with these actions was the provision of training and equipment in most cases, thus enlarging the scope of the EU's humanitarian aid in the country.

The Albanian health system also benefited from countrywide 'horizontal' programmes. One example was the regional Tuberculosis Programme, aimed at improving the conditions of patients in 12 TB dispensaries and at raising awareness among health institutions and the wider population about TB control. Another horizontal programme named ALERT, focused on improving the country's health surveillance by improving reporting, computerising the surveillance system and providing the responsible institutions with the necessary medical materials to detect diseases. A third programme involved establishing community mental health centres to provide treatment for mentally ill patients outside the hospital setting and close to their own homes. ECHO also assisted this vulnerable group through major rehabilitation works in the country's four regional neuro-psychiatric hospitals (Tirana, Elbasan, Vlora, Shkodra).

All of the projects supported from the remaining funds originally allocated for the Kosovo crisis were subject to an external evaluation in June 2000. One key conclusion of the evaluation was that "ECHO's decision to reallocate unused funds from refugee aid to the urgent needs of Albanian affected communities was appropriate and relevant".

ECHO's post-crisis response continued with further allocations of 6 million Euro and 5 million Euro in the course of year 2000. Twenty-three projects in the health, water and social sectors were initiated by the end of 2000 and beginning 2001. The focus was on vulnerable groups and areas of greatest need that were difficult to reach — and were unlikely to be catered for by either the Albanian authorities or other agencies in the foreseeable future.







Korce, Pogradec, Librazhd, Lushnje (rural health centres). Training was an important element in the new health projects.

ECHO funding also supported the second phase of the Pharmacy Management Programme that has modernised the pharmaceutical system in nine hospitals. In some cases, this included infrastructure improvements and the supply of the latest technology for medicine storage.

Through one of ECHO's partners, 25 local Albanian NGOs from Korça, Kukes and Durres received funding to implement mini-projects in the social sector. Almost all NGOs established in the three cities took part in the training sessions organised under the project. The culmination was a "fair" staged in Tirana which attracted around 40 national and international NGOs. As a whole, the project made an important contribution to the strengthening of civil society in Albania. Three other partners implemented projects relating to children at risk in Durres, Shkodra and Vlora districts.

### Phasing out - linking relief to development

Another important conclusion of the evaluation carried out in June 2000 was that "there is no longer a humanitarian emergency in Albania and no clearly identifiable humanitarian gap at the present stage." The evaluators therefore recommended that ECHO should plan its exit strategy, while recognising that "in some remote areas, the health indicators remain catastrophic and needs persist".

A nurse from Librazhd, receiving the training certificate from the doctor of Movimomdo, the Italian NGO that implemented a Primary Health Care project that comprised the rehabilitation of three structures and provision of furniture and basic equipment to ten PHC centres for a total amount of 250,000 Euro. All ECHO's last health PHC projects included training of doctors and nurses as well as the rehabilitation of selected health centres and the provision of medical equipment and furniture.



In March 2001, ECHO prepared a strategy paper, based on the evaluation recommendations and on its own assessment of needs in the health, social and water sectors. The central recommendation was that ECHO should exit from Albania by the end of 2002. In the run up to this, the Commission allocated a final tranche of 5 million Euro to cover remaining humanitarian needs in Albania.

Today the focus, in this decision, is still on vulnerability and on meeting the most urgent needs. The main fields of action for ECHO's partners are primary health care and water supply. ECHO is supporting water projects in the rural areas of Elbasan, Librazhd, Gramsh, Peshkopi, Berat, Fier, Lezhe and Vlora. It is also continuing to provide assistance, in the form of training and monitoring, for previously funded water projects. In the health sector, projects are continuing and being developed in the rural districts of Skrapar, Librazhd, Elbasan, Permet, Lushnja, Tropoja, Puka, Pogradec, Korça, Kolonja, Durres. Some of these include rehabilitation and medical supplies.

Finally, part of that last financial allocation is being used for continuing support to the National TB Programme as well as ALERT (Albanian Epidemiologist Surveillance Tool) programme, both implemented through the World Health Organisation.

### ECHO leaving: its last intentions

Working through ECHO, the European Union has responded to successive humanitarian crisis in Albania in 1992, 1997, and 1999. ECHO's presence in the country has been extended beyond the immediate crisis to ensure that no major gaps remain in areas of vital public interest such as the health, water and social sectors. To date, the EU has invested 142,4 million Euro in humanitarian projects in Albania.

In 2001–2002, ECHO is consolidating its interventions by improving the quality and accessibility of health and water services in remote areas. Once this process is completed, ECHO will have reached the limit of its mandate with no further urgent needs to cover. In the phasing-out process, it is working to ensure a smooth handover to the relevant public institutions and to international development agencies.



### Special scenes of humanitarian aid to Albania





May 2000 is a month which the people of the neighbouring villages of Çerrave and Qershize are unlikely to forget. For this was when reliable water was finally brought to these communities in Pogradec district, 140 kilometres south-east of Tirana, after ten long years of shortages. Hope and vitality has been restored to the villages thanks to an ECHO-funded project implemented by OXFAM. The villagers expressed their appreciation by granting ECHO and OXFAM the title of "Citizens of Honour" of Çerrave commune. "We decided to do this because you deserved it," said Festim Killo, head of the commune during a field visit by ECHO and OXFAM to Qershize.

In 1999, after the Kosovar refugees left the area, local officials approached OXFAM to explain their problem. Their villages had an outdated water system that was only capable of providing water for a quarter of the families living there. Women and children were forced to spend many hours and a lot of energy carrying water to meet their hygiene needs. They obtained their water either from households which had their own wells, or from those fortunate enough to obtain water from the old system (when it was working). The problem had become progressively worse, in part, because of illegal connections from other villages but also because of the poor functioning of the system.

Work began on the project in September 1999 with the support of the 12-member of the Community Water Committee. A spring was tapped to fill a huge water tank located in nearby hills and an aqueduct was built to deliver water to the consumers.

The people of Çerrave commune were not the only ones to get more water. This scheme was part of the much wider ECHO-funded programme, costing 3.5 millionEuro, which also brought water to almost 35,000 people in similar villages in Korça, Lushnja and Shkodra. This is how these funds, originally allocated for emergency water supply for Kosovar refugees in those districts, were successfully redeployed to cover the essential needs of 32 villages.

Almost 14 % of EU humanitarian aid for Albania went to water projects providing potable water to remote villages. As Oxfam, ECHO other partners in this sector were NGO's like Intersos, Plan International, ACTED, Premiere Urgence, Movimondo, Solidarites, CAM, COOPI, CINS, IRC, MSF, ACF etc. In most of these projects, they build the whole system, sometimes only the water tank, or the pump station.

### A community rallies round

The day when the team from ECHO visited Tropoja district to monitor health projects was one of the coldest of the year. It takes six hours to get to the town of Bajram Curri, the district centre. This includes a three-hour ferry trip along the Drini River. It is a mountainous area with roads that can only be driven with 4-wheel drive vehicles.

While in Tropoja, we visited the health centre of Valbona village, named after the river that has its source here. We were 1200 metres above sea level and just a few kilometres from the border with Montenegro. ECHO was funding two health projects in the district - primary health care in five villages with CAD, a British NGO, and partial rehabilitation of the hospital in Bajram Curri itself with HCC, a German NGO.

Having returned from our monitoring trip, we settled down in the dining room of a guesthouse and began discussing our day's experiences. The television was switched on – a local channel broadcasting folk songs. Suddenly the programme was interrupted by an announcement from the district hospital whose rehabilitation we were due to inaugurate the following day. They were calling for blood donations. A 20-year girl had been shot and had lost a lot of blood. The doctors were fighting for her life.

At the hospital the next day, we inquired how the girl was doing. The news was good. She was now out of danger thanks to the generous response of those who had turned up at the hospital. We were amazed to learn that within minutes of the





### Special scenes of humanitarian aid to Albania





TV appeal, almost 50 people had joined the queue, standing in the bitter cold to offer their blood.

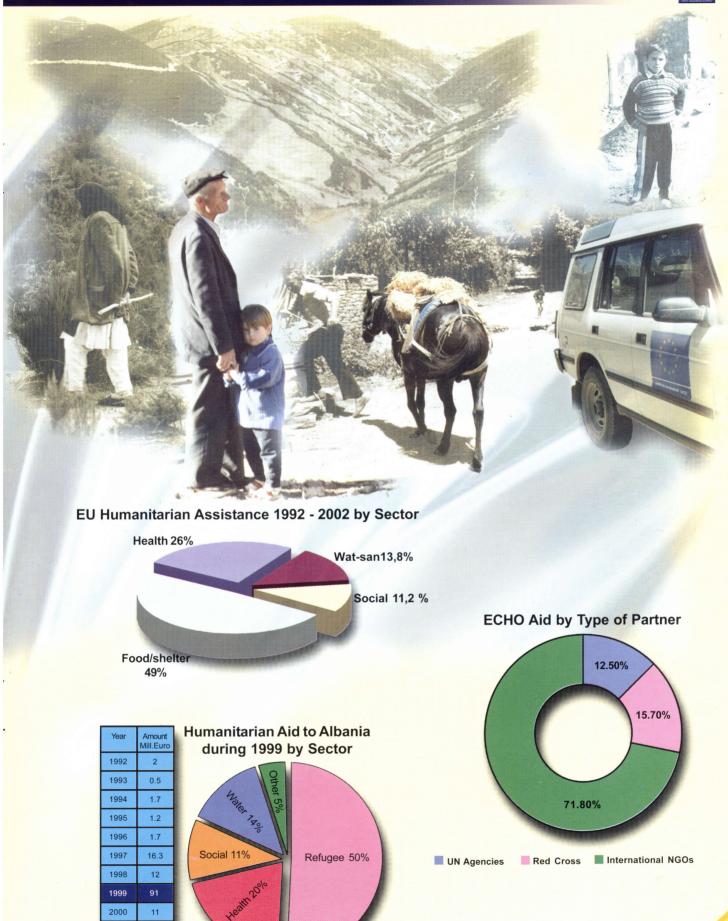
The people of this area have a reputation for being tough, conservative....some might even say intolerant. Yet their response to the girl's plight suggested something else – a sense of community; a willingness to endure discomfort to help others. "There *is* a strong feeling of solidarity among our people in emergencies", according to one of the doctors in the hospital - who worked ten hours with a colleague to save the girl's life. She continued: "We get this kind of response time and again from the people of Tropoja. During the Kosovo crisis, we welcomed more than double the population that actually lives in the district (28,000). I myself had ten refugees in my house. "

There is no doubt in the gratitude of the people of Tropoja for their newly refurbished hospital, as the ECHO team discovered that day during the inauguration ceremony. The work that ECHO does throughout the world is an expression of European solidarity with *all* victims of humanitarian crisis, whatever their background - but it is especially satisfying to help a community whose own sense of solidarity is so impressive.

Top left, the Primary school of Suk Bull rehabilitated by European Perspective, a Greek NGO. It is located in a village of Mat district (North of Tirana), where three other schools where fully rehabilitated and furnished within the same 475,000 Euro project. Picture above, you see children of Suk Bull having lessons in a strange place. This is a train wagon which the director and teachers used during the rehabilitation of the school so that children could continue to have classes.









### ECHO 2002: ATTENTION TO "FORGOTTEN CRISES"

For 2002, ECHO will intervene in areas of the greatest humanitarian need, focus on "forgotten crises" and allocate more balanced aid per beneficiary. Furthermore, it will promote quality humanitarian aid by paying due attention to cross-cutting issues, systematic evaluation of operations, to maximum complementarity and coherence with other key humanitarian players, and to improving information and communication.

In 2002, ECHO will continue to shift the emphasis away from Eastern Europe towards crisis theatres in both Africa and Asia, where the most urgent humanitarian needs were identified.

In the Western Balkans, ECHO will continue its strategy of gradually phasing out. Two main theatres of operations will continue to be Serbia and fYROM.

Speech delivered to the European Parliament Development Committee by Mr. Poul Nielson, Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid 23 January 2002

### ECHO'S DEPARTURE: A POSITIVE EVENT FOR ALBANIA

ECHO ten's year presence in Albania has been the practical expression of the EU's commitment to help the most vulnerable Albanian people affected by conflicts and crisis resulting from a difficult transition. Working through ECHO, the European Union has responded to successive crisis in Albania in 1992,1997 and 1999. To date, the EU has invested more than 140 million Euros in humanitarian projects in Albania. But, ECHO's presence in the country has been extended beyond the immediate crises and its exist from Albania by 2002 is the sign that the country left behind the emergency phase.

And although ECHO's humanitarian mission in Albania is about to end, the EU will remain present in the country and will face new challenges through the new coming CARDS programme.

Words from the European Commission Delegation in Albania





### LAST PROJECTS FUNDED BY ECHO IN ALBANIA IN 2002

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	AMOUNT (EURO)	LOCATION	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	Start	Months	Finish	
COSPE (It)	300,000	Shkodra	Social activities in the schools of Shtoj i Ri, Xheladin Fishta, Dobraç, Trush, Pistul, Vukatane. Rehabilitation of the school of Ashta, the kindergarten in Shtoi i Ri and partial rehabilitation of Obot school.	1-Feb-01	13	31-Mar-02	(III)
WHO	300,000	All Albania	Support to National Programme for Management of Tuberculosis.  Consolidation of previous project of €1.3 million.	1-Mar-01	16	30-Jun-02	
Movimondo (It)	250,000	Librazhd	Training for all the personnel of Primary Health Care in the district. Rehabilitation of three primary health care centres in Katjel, Rajce -Sutaj and Faret. Provision of basic medical equipment and furniture.	1-Jun-01	9	28-Feb-02	rnovi
ACTED (F)	350,000	Diber	Construction of water systems in five villages: Pesjak, Pocest, Kercisht, Kovashice, Fushe e Vogel.	15-Jun-01	12	15-Jun-02	
Movimondo (It)	450,000	Vlora	Construction of 5.3 km mainline and distribution branches with public taps for Novosele, Fitore and Bishan villages.  Complementary to ECHO funded COOPI project of €650,000.	1-Mar-01	12	28-Feb-02	movi
MDM (F)	140,000	Durres	Training for all nurses of the district and sensibilisation of women to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates in the district.	1-Aug-01	16	30-Sep-02	AND HOLD
CESVI (It)	650,000	Lushnja, Permet	Training for all Primary Health Care personnel in Permet and Lushnje; basic furniture and medical equipment for all PHC centres in Permet. Rehabilitation of five health centres in Golem, Ngurrez (LU), Kosinë, Petran (PR) villages and one HC in Permet town.	1-Sep-01	11	30-Jul-02	WORLD AIO FROM ITALY
OXFAM (UK)	173,000	Shkodra, Korça, Lushnja	Support and training to water committees.  Consolidation of two previous phases of € 3.7 million.	1-Oct-01	8	31-May-02	<b>Q</b> Oxfam
COOPI (It)	458,000	Malesi e Madhe	Training for all Primary Health Care personnel in the district.  Rehabilitation of Koplik maternity and basic furniture and medical equipment for selected health centers in the district.	1-Dec-01	9	31-Aug-02	COOPI
Solidarités (F)	285,000	Berat, Elbasan	Construction of water systems in three villages: Rrasë e Poshtme, Guri i Bardhë (EL) and Cete (BR).	1-Nov-01	7	31-May-02	Sølida
lan International (UK)	255,000	Elbasan, Librazhd, Lushnja	Construction of water systems in six villages: Gjyrale (EL), Orenje, Floq, Zdrajsh (LB), Garunjas, Matjan, Manasufaj (LU).	1-Jan-02	8	31-Aug-02	Plan Bespartels
MDM (SP)	210,000	Korça, Kolonja	Training for all Primary Health Care personnel in Korça and Kolonja.  Basic furniture and equipment for selected PHC centres in Kolonja.	1-Jan-02	9	30-Sep-02	
WHO	400,000	All Albania	Communicable Disease Surveillance System - ALERT Consolidation of previous phases of €950,000.	1-Dec-01	9	31-Aug-02	
HCC (G)	300,000	Tropoja	Training in management for the personnel of Bajram Curri hospital. Specialised training for Primary Health Care personnel of the district. Consolidation of previous interventions, implemented by HCC & CAD.	15-Jan-02	9	14-Oct-02	Н
COSPE (It)	146,000	Shkodra	Social actions at local level of communities for children, youth and women at risk in Shkodra communes.	1-Feb-02	9	31-Oct-02	CHEPE
CAM (F)	300,000	Elbasan, Librazhd, Gramsh	Construction/rehabilitation interventions in water supply systems in six villages: Letem (LB), Zavaline (EL), Kishte, Grazhdan, Lenie, Drize (GR).	1-Jan-02	6	30-Jun-02	Comité d' Komiteti i
oanish Red Cross (S)	200,000	Elbasan, Berat, Fier, Vlora	Reintegration of children at risk in selected schools of Vlora, Fier, Berat and Elbasan.	1-Feb-02	9	31-Oct-02	Cruz R
CAD (UK)	200,000	Puka, Pogradec	Training for Primary Health Care personnel of Puka and Pogradec. Furniture and basic equipment for selected health centres in Puka.	1-Feb-02	8	30-Sep-02	Childre
CISP (It)	156,000	Vlora	Training in management for the personnel of Vlora hospital Consolidation of previous phases of €1,2 million.	15-Feb-02	9	14-Nov-02	CISE
lan International (UK)	120,000	Lezha, Tirana, Lushnja, Elbasan, Fier, Berat, Gramsh	Training in water management for the water committees of 53 villages, of which 28 were provided with water through previous ECHO projects.	1-Mar-02	8	31-Oct-02	Plan Beepart of it.
remière Urgence (F)	2,397,000	Tirana	Improve water and sanitation in Kamza municipality. Construction of primary and secondary distribution network bringing water to all inhabitants of Kamza.	1-Sep-00	21	15-May-02	PREMI

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# ECHO - Humanitarian fel Office

### For more information please contact:

ECHO Humanitarian Aid Office/ECHO Information 2 Rue Geneva, 1140 Brussels Tel: (32 2) 2954400, Fax: (32 2) 2954572 E-mail: echo-Info@echo.cec.int Website: www.europa.eu.int/comm/echo/index.html

ECHO Humanitarian Aid Office in Albania Rr. Vaso Pasha, No.7/1, Tirana Tel/fax: (+355) 4 232596, (+355) 4 250269 e-mail: echo@echo.icc-al.org

European Commission Delegation in Albania Rr. Donika Kastrioti, Vila 42, Tirana Tel/fax: (+355) 4 230752, Tel:(+355) 4 228320 e-mail: mailto@delalb.cec.eu.int