FROM EARLY SCHOOLS TO THE UNIVERSITY (HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ALBANIAN EDUCATION IN TETOVO)

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Abstract

Education is a key factor in the development of culture and civilization, exercising a direct influence on the process of raising and cultivating a nation's consciousness. For centuries, including the 20th century, foreign rulers showed no interest in eradicating illiteracy among Albanians. Such a situation allowed foreign occupiers to keep the Albanian people in subjugation. This was the case during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, during the rule of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, certain projects were drafted with the aim of Serbianizing the Albanian population through schools in the Serbian language.

During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the government opened schools in the Serbian language across all regions inhabited by Albanians. However, very few students managed to complete elementary school, and even fewer managed to enroll in secondary schools, because heavy taxes were demanded of them, accompanied by systematic oppression and completely unjust classifications by the Serbian educational staff. Consequently, only a very small number of Albanian students could overcome the barriers to enroll in secondary school.

The state of education in Tetovo is reflected by the factual data, according to which four elementary schools operated in Tetovo in the Serbian language with about 1,000 students, but only 200 of these students were Albanian. A gymnasium in the Serbian language also operated, but only 20 students were Albanians.

When it comes to Higher Education, during the 23-year period of rule by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, only 11 Albanian students graduated from higher schools out of 1 million Albanians, and only 1 from Tetovo.[1]

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that illiteracy reigned among the Albanians of Tetovo. Nevertheless, the education of Tetovo Albanians in the Albanian language, which began in 1941, despite numerous challenges, gradually rose from primary education to the University over a period of 53 years (1941–1994).

Keywords: Education, Culture, School, Albanian language.

Education and Culture in the City of Tetovo during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 4 elementary schools operated in Tetovo with about 1,000 students, out of which only 200 were Albanian students studying in the Serbian language. A gymnasium also operated, where only 20 Albanian high school students studied.[2]

Schooling in the Albanian language was forbidden to Albanians.

Following the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the so-called "Albanian Kingdom" was created, which included Tetovo, Gostivar, Kërçovë (Kičevo), Dibra (Debar), and Struga, as well as many parts of present-day Kosovo and Montenegro.

In these cities, elementary schools in the Albanian language were opened for the first time.

Under extremely unfavorable circumstances for Albanian education in the Albanian territories of present-day RSM, the assistance of the Ministry of Education of Albania, led by the great patriot Ernest Koliqi, was extraordinary.

By the Royal Decreeing Act No. 340 of November 20, 1941, the Ministry of Education of Albania organized Inspectors and Didactic Directorates to direct elementary schools in the "Liberated Lands."[3]

According to the decision of the Ministry of Education of the Albanian State, schooling in the "Liberated Lands" was to be compulsory—a 5-year elementary schooling with the same curriculum as those in Albania.

During this time (1941–1944), 19 schools in the Albanian language were opened in Tetovo and its surroundings.

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Two elementary schools began their educational and teaching activities in the Albanian language in the city of Tetovo: the "Skënderbej" school and the "Tajar Tetova" school.

Elementary School No. 1 or "Skënderbej"

The first teachers in this school were: Abdi Kërçini, Zejnel Zajmi, Aleksandra Bibaja, Sotir Gallani, Margarita Gallani, Qemal Haxhihasani, Lirije Shahini, and Spiro Vllazëroi.[4]
In the 1942/43 academic year, the total number of students in the "Skënderbej" elementary school was 310 males and 83 females, distributed across 10 parallel classes, from 1st to 3rd grade.

Elementary School No. 2 or "Tajar Tetova"[5]

In the 1941/42 school year, the second school in the Albanian language was opened in Tetovo, named "Tajar Tetova."
The first teachers in this school were: Pano Hido, Lazër Bibaja, Josif Todi, Lirije Todi, and Vasil Dhimitrika.
In the 1942/43 school year, 299 students were enrolled in the "Tajar Tetova" elementary school, of which 222 were males and 77 females.[6]
In the 1943/44 school year, the "Tajar Tetova" school had a total of 336 students (note: source text records breakdown numbers, historically growing).
The director of the "Tajar Tetova" school was Qemal Haxhihasani.
In Tetovo, there were also two secondary schools: the State Lyceum and the Agricultural-Craft School. The State Lyceum was named "Hoxha Tahsini."
At the beginning of the 1944 school year in Tetovo, an epidemic disease had spread since May 1944, so the school did not even begin its work.

Albanian Education in Tetovo during Federal Yugoslavia

Following the end of the Anti-Fascist War, the borders of Yugoslavia were re-established, with the difference that it was no longer the former Kingdom, but Federal Yugoslavia. A communist regime, led by J.B. Tito, was established in this state.
In Second Yugoslavia, the compact Albanian territories were divided: a part formed the Region of Kosovo[7], a fairly large part was given to the Republic of Macedonia[8], a part was given to the Republic of Serbia[9], and a part to Montenegro[10].
Thus, in the second Federal Yugoslavia, the ethnically compact Albanian territories were divided among three neighboring republics.
Albanians had taken active part in the Anti-Fascist War because during the war the Communists had called them to arms, promising that only through the war against the Fascist Powers would they win the right to self-determination. At the end of the war, the issue of self-determination was forgotten—effectively, Albanians were betrayed by the Yugoslav communists.
However, the schools in the Albanian language that had been opened earlier could not be completely ignored by the Yugoslav regime.
The Albanian-language schooling that had been "tasted" by the Albanians, although hindered in various ways by the communist regime in the People's Republic of Macedonia, nevertheless survived despite many challenges.
To illustrate, a report dated June 22, 1945, by the education referent, Mr. Tehli Çela, submitted to the Ministry of Education of the PR of Macedonia, describes the factual state of four-year

elementary schools with instruction in the Albanian language in Tetovo, Gostivar, Kërçovë, Struga, Resen, Bitola, and Prilep:
"The main obstacles to the progress of education in these cities are: the lack of school premises, the lack of inventory and teaching aids... Mr. Tehli Çela mentions that in the city (Tetovo), 1,700 students were enrolled this school year, but due to the lack of school premises, the teaching staff was forced to register only 700 students, while the others were left to roam the streets. For these 700 students, there were only 65 five-seater benches, and the premises were in no way suitable for a school."[11]
Further, in the "Statistics" section, it states:
"The city of Tetovo has 8 teachers, while its surroundings only 4. The central school has 13 parallel classes and 5 grades... for the next school year, 25 more parallel classes should be opened and the city should have 26 teachers."[12]
The same document states:
"The villages of the Tetovo district where schools are needed and can be opened for the next year are: Grupčin, Čiflik, Lërcë, Merovë, Roglë, Novosellë, Želinë, Strimnicë, Leshnicë, Palçisht, Kamjan, Lisec, Bogovinë, Pirok, Sanakos, Negotinë, Gradec, Jellovjan, Urviç, Gorjan, Gjurgjevisht, Sallarevë, Çellopek, Tenovë, Sellcë, Veshallë, Brodec, Radushë, Odër, Nerasht, Dobrosht, Gllogjë, Përševc, Tearcë, Neproshten, Xhepçisht, and Poroj." It is also emphasized that only 4 schools were open in the surroundings: Gajre, Slatina, Reçicë, and Shipkovicë.[13]
If archival data is carefully analyzed, we can conclude that while 19 elementary schools were able to function during the time of "Ethnic Albania," only 4 elementary schools were able to function in Macedonia.
Another challenge was discrimination in school subjects.
In 1946, the Minister of Education of the PR of Macedonia, Mr. Nikolay Minchev, issued a Decision ordering the directorates of schools in the Albanian language that in the following school year (1946/47), the history and geography of the motherland—Albania—would no longer be taught, but only the history and geography of Yugoslavia.[14]
According to statistical data from the Ministry of Education of the PR of Macedonia compiled on April 15, 1948, an overview of Albanian-language schools in Tetovo and its surroundings is provided.[15]

Opening of the "Normale" (Normal School) in Tetovo

From the minutes of the Commission meeting held on May 26, 1950, regarding the opening of the Normal School, we learn that this school was initially named the "Naim Frashëri" Albanian Pedagogical School, but it would ultimately be named the Albanian Normal School of Tetovo "LIRIJA."
According to the documentation of the time, the Tetovo Normal School "Lirija" began its educational-teaching process in the 1950/51 school year.[16]

The Gymnasium of Tetovo

Regarding the Tetovo Gymnasium, it operated from 1929 to 1940 as the State Real Gymnasium of Tetovo in the Serbian language.
During the time of the Albanian Kingdom, the former Serbian-era Gymnasium functioned as a State Lyceum named "Hasan Tahsini" (a secondary school that enrolled students who had completed 5 elementary grades).

The Challenge of Albanian Education in the 1980s in RSM

The events of 1981 in Kosovo and other Albanian spaces, now known as the "Spring of 1981," were in reality a manifestation of dissatisfaction with the position of the Albanian people in former Yugoslavia, which ran counter to the propaganda of the political circles of the time.
The aforementioned events were assessed by the highest circles of the Yugoslav political leadership as a "counter-revolution" or anti-communist developments. Based on this assessment, the Yugoslav communists and their "affiliates" in Macedonia drafted a political platform known as the "Struggle against Albanian nationalism and separatism." At the foundation of this anti-Albanian policy was the fight against the cultural and political rights of the Albanian people, which had been won during the previous two decades and crowned by the Constitution of 1974.

The Campaign against Albanian Education in RSM

Based on the political platform branding it a "counter-revolution," in the 1980s of the 20th century, the process hindering the momentum of education among Albanians was systematically developed—a process leading toward the acculturation of the Albanian people in former Yugoslavia.
In Macedonia, the process of acculturation of Albanians was carried out in the form of a systematic campaign with unprecedented aggressiveness, through ideo-political differentiation, which was applied by brutally dismissing Albanian teachers from the educational process. During the implementation of the process for the acculturation of Albanians and the attempts to assimilate the younger generation, alongside the brutal dismissal of Albanian teachers, they also invented so-called "mixed parallel classes," where instruction was conducted exclusively in the Macedonian language.
The epilogue of this entire systematic process in education was the successive closure of secondary schools in the Albanian language in Macedonia—in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Gostivar, Kërçovë, Struga, and elsewhere.[17]
Albanian schooling and the education of Albanians were blamed for "indoctrinating Albanian youth with nationalism and separatism." Albanian students from RSM studying at the University of Prishtina were monitored by State Security organs. Censorship and medieval-style control were applied in every sphere of life: the content of textbooks was restricted beyond any measure by eliminating all authors from Albania. Consequently, prominent authors of the Albanian National Awakening were removed from Albanian Language and Literature programs; the use of Albanian textbooks published in Kosovo was banned; and all literary works published in Albania were removed from libraries in Macedonia...!
The anti-Albanian propaganda of Macedonian state institutions produced ordinary slanders aimed at keeping alive the spirit of systematic ideo-political differentiations and sowing fear among the sparse Albanian intelligentsia.
Under the pretext of the fight against Albanian separatism and irredentism, the communist regime in Macedonia implemented the anti-Albanian strategy drafted in Belgrade by Serbian nationalist circles. Even the few cultural rights that Albanians enjoyed began to be systematically curtailed, first and foremost in the sphere of education.
Through the so-called mixed parallel classes, the communist regime of the time aimed to eliminate all possibilities for the development of cultural distinctiveness among Albanians and, naturally, to open avenues for eventual assimilation, especially in peripheral areas inhabited by Albanians where they were an ethnic minority relative to Macedonians, such as: in Bitola and its surroundings, the surroundings of Veles, Prilep, Kruševo, and elsewhere.

In the spirit of the process for the acculturation of Albanians in Macedonia during the 1980s, Slavic elements were also introduced into Albanian-language textbooks through the study of Yugoslav authors who had proven themselves in their works to be fierce anti-Albanians. In this context, it is also worth noting the changes in the naming of geographical toponyms, which had to entirely adopt a Slavic tone. Thus, for Albanians, Skopje became *Skopje* instead of Shkup; Bitola instead of Manastiri; Debar instead of Dibra; Kičevo instead of Kërçova; Ohrid instead of Ohri... etc.
The true crusade against education in the Albanian language began in the 1986/87 school year. The organs of the communist power began dismissing and imprisoning Albanian teachers, and closing Albanian secondary and higher schools. This was the period when education in the Albanian language and the education of Albanians in Macedonia were challenged, leaving very severe consequences for the future of the Albanian people, as well as for interethnic relations in Macedonia.

The Period of Political Pluralism

In the new political circumstances, Albanians made efforts to establish higher educational institutions, such as universities. One of these institutions to which Albanians particularly contributed was the Albanian University of Tetovo.
The Macedonian government of Branko Crvenkovski responded brutally to Albanian efforts to establish a higher educational institution, sending special police and bulldozers to demolish the buildings designated for the commencement of the first lectures. On December 14, 1994, on the eve of the initiation of lectures, the government deployed numerous police forces to resolve matters through the force of arms. Under the assistance of heavy police forces, the buildings intended for the first university lectures were demolished.[18]
Angered by the brutal police attack, the Albanians of Tetovo and its surroundings came out to defend the efforts to establish a higher educational institution in the Albanian language. During these spontaneous gatherings, clashes broke out between the gathered crowd and the Macedonian police forces, resulting in Albanian deaths and injuries.
In these clashes, which occurred near the demolished temporary buildings in Mala Rečica, Abdylselam Emini was killed, falling as a martyr for the Albanian University.
The initiative of Albanian intellectuals was not halted; it continued and was crowned with success. Professors together with the leading heads of the Albanian University approved a Decision according to which the nucleus of the University of Tetovo in the Albanian language would consist of 6 faculties:

1. Faculty of Philology,
2. Faculty of Philosophy,
3. Faculty of Mathematical and Natural Sciences,
4. Faculty of Law,
5. Faculty of Economics, and
6. Faculty of Arts.[19]

The main organs of the University of Tetovo, according to the decree-decision, were:

1. The Senate,
2. The Teaching-Scientific Council, and
3. The Rectorate.

The decree-decision on the establishment of the University of Tetovo provided for the harmonization of curricula with existing universities in RSM. On this occasion, a competition for the admission and enrollment of students was announced for the 1994/95 academic year.[20]

In 1996, Albanian mayors of the new municipalities undertook to finance the Albanian University of Tetovo. In May 1996, the mayors of the Albanian municipalities signed the Declaration for the University of Tetovo. The declaration was signed by 25 municipal mayors.[21]
In 2001, an armed conflict broke out in RSM. The failure to formalize the Albanian University of Tetovo was one of the causes of the conflict.
Following the armed conflict in RSM in 2001 and the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement on August 13, 2001, conditions were created for the formalization of the University of Tetovo, with financing from the state budget. The law on the formalization of the university was approved in January 2004 by the Assembly of North Macedonia.
On January 21, 2004, the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (RMV), at its 51st session, approved the Law on the Establishment of the State University of Tetovo, with 68 votes FOR. With this, the issue of the official recognition of the Albanian University of Tetovo was closed. On February 20, 2004, President Boris Trajkovski signed the Decree on the promulgation of the Law on the Establishment of the State University of Tetovo. Following the signing of the Decree, President Trajkovski's Cabinet issued a press release, which stated: "Bearing in mind that this is a fundamental human right, it is indisputable that projects in the field of education and the upbringing of new generations should be given a chance to prove through their performances that they are of sufficient quality for our contemporary integration, based on the foundations of civilizational values."[1]

References

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[2] Abdylazis Veseli, *Shkolllat dhe Arsimi shqip në Maqedoni gjatë periudhës 1941-1944*, ÇABEJ, Tetovo, 2000, p. 27.
[3] Royal Decreeing Act no. 340, November 20, 1941, *Rregullimi dhe organizimi i shërbimeve t'Arsimit fillor në tokat e aneksueme*, "Fletorja zyrtare", Tirana, 1941, no. 193, dated December 20, p. 2.
[4] AQSH (Central State Archive), F. 295, v. 1942. D. 278, p. 62, *Raporti mbi kuadrin mësimor që shërbeu në vitin shkollor 1941/42, në Prefekturën e Tetovës*.
[5] The naming of this school took place on the occasion of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Albania's independence.
[6] AQSH, F. 295, v. 1942. D. 278, p. 62, *Raporti mbi kuadrin mësimor...*.
[7] At the end of the Anti-Fascist War, Kosovo was recognized as a "Region" (Oblast), which included centers such as: Pristina, Mitrovica, Podujeva, Peja, Gjakova, Prizren, Ferizaj, Gjilan, and Kaçanik.
[8] The Republic of Macedonia was given the predominantly Albanian territories in the form of an arch starting from Kumanovo, comprising the cities: Kumanovo, Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kërçovë, Dibra, and Struga.
[9] The Republic of Serbia was given the main predominantly Albanian cities: Presevo and Bujanovac.
[10] The Republic of Montenegro was given the predominantly Albanian cities: Plav, Gusinje, and Ulcinj.
[11] DARM (State Archive of the Republic of Macedonia), 1. 170. 38. 7-107'109, Qerim Lita, *Problemi shqiptar në RP të Maqedonisë 1944-1974 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh) Arsimi, Kultura, Religjioni*, Vol. 6, LOGOS-A, Skopje-Pristina-Tirana, 2018, p. 25.
[12] Ibid., pp. 25–26.
[13] DARM, Tetovo 170. 38. 7-107'109, *Problemi shqiptar në RP të Maqedonisë...*, p. 26.
[14] DARM, 1. 170. 17/1/2, *Problemi shqiptar në RP të Maqedonisë...*, p. 48.
[15] DARM, 1. 170. 28. 1/75-90, *Problemi shqiptar në RP të Maqedonisë...*, pp. 67–68.
[16] DARM, 1. 170. 40. 4/162-163, *Problemi shqiptar në RP të Maqedonisë...*, p. 117.
[17] Hajrulla Koliqi, *Historia e arsimit dhe e mendimit pedagogjik shqiptar*, Pristina, 2002, p. 494.
[18] "Flaka e vëllazërimit", *"U rrënuan pjesët e egra të Universitetit"*, December 15, 1994, p. 2.
[19] Decree-Decision, Article 6.
[20] Decree-Decision, Articles 8 and 11.
[21] The document is preserved in the Archive of the Administration of the University of Tetovo.
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