

CONTRIBUTION OF ALBANIANS WHO LIVE IN MACEDONIA FOR KOSOVO DURING 1999

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Abstract

The efforts of Albanians living in Macedonia on the Kosovo issue date back to before and after World War II. Fewer things have been noted before World War II, while much more data has been recorded after this period. Various historians and researchers have written on this subject, but a lot remains to be done, not only for the newer period but also for the earlier period, in particular by using human resources that are still accessible, as well as local and foreign archives.

According to studies and analyses of the development of global politics around the Balkans in 1997, there seems to have been a rapid turn of course in politics to not support the war in all Albanian areas. We remember that Albania in the same year was going through very critical moments after the collapse of the pyramid firms, in which case large quantities of weaponry emerged from the barracks. Exactly these weapons, specifically some of them were transferred through illegal groups to Kosovo in which case it was used to begin the process of Kosovo's eventual liberation from Serbia. All Albanians were mobilized around the world and the war broke out, which with the help of NATO received a liberating epilogue.

In this work, through authentic narratives, we will focus mainly on general assistance, provided by the Albanians of Macedonia in 1999, including their direct participation in the KLA, diplomatic engagement, organizing demonstrations to sensitize the situation, assistance to refugees, the opening of the 'free Kosovo' war radio, etc.

Keywords: Albanians of Macedonia, war, KLA, refugees, soldiers, media, liberation

1. Introduction

After the end of World War II, the Slavs did not keep their word, ignoring even the legitimate decisions of the Bujan Conference (December 31, 1943 – January 2, 1944) that after the war all Albanians would join their mother state.⁵ Therefore, areas inhabited by Albanians unbelievably joined the SFRY. In this way, the Albanian issue not only remained unsolved but also scattered. It remained the only event in the world where the native state was bordered by its own people, later divided into five neighboring countries. So, the majority of Albanians

⁵ Rexhepi, Fehmi, *Bujan Conference Decisions - Inspiration for Active Participation of Kosovo Albanians in Anti-Fascist Liberation War*, Institute of History, Prishtina, 1998, p.31

remained in artificial fabrication the so-called Slavic Titans of the SFRY. In this way, their problems were the same, with common denominators: 'the infringement of basic human and national rights'. Dissatisfied by this, mass revolts broke out in several cities of Kosovo (Ferizaj, Gilan, Drenica and Mitrovica in 1944 and 1945). To control the tense situation, the Yugoslav leadership with Tito as the head ordered (from 8th February till 5th July 1945 throughout Kosovo) military measures to be put in place.⁶ Meanwhile, to legally invalidate the Bujana Conference, the regime improvised the Prizren Assembly (8-10 July 1945), attended by 142 delegates, of which 33 were Albanians,⁷ and where was staged the alleged voluntary union of Kosovo with Serbia. After this insidious and violent annexation, the Slavs could not stop themselves from the constant cruelty on the Albanians. According to the 1953 census, Serbs with 27% of the population in Kosovo, accounted for 68% of the posts and administration⁸. On December 25, 1955, the Pristina Albanological Institute was closed on June 1st, 1953.⁹ In 1958 there were 49 industrial enterprises throughout Kosovo with 16,000 employees, while by comparison, Slovenia had 465 companies.¹⁰ Apart from violence, terror, and mounted litigation, Albanians' forced displacement to Turkey was occurring daily until 1966.

After the closing of the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in Brione (July 1966) and the political elimination of Alexander Rankovic, for the Albanians, there were made more favorable conditions for the development of life.¹¹

The head of the Directorate of State Security, at the same time, was the third man in the state hierarchy and the main leader of the campaign to collect weapons in Kosovo (1955-1956) where many Albanians were killed and disappeared without a trace, and others suffered unjustly in prisons.

After 16 years, in March 1967, Tito visited Kosovo, where he stated: "We can not talk about equal rights when Serbs have the advantage everywhere in factory employment, while Albanians are rejected even though they have the same or even higher qualifications."¹² This turn of Tito must also be seen as a facade, because he needed international fame before the group of the Unblocked States, as a man of peace, freedom and equality. He could not promote these values abroad without having them inside.

II. Demonstrations in 1968 and 1981

While the Albanian villains were silent, clinging to the Yugoslav armchairs, the intelligence of the time did not speak. From 6th October until 27th November 1968, several mass demonstrations broke out in the cities of Kosovo, extending to Macedonia as well. In addition

⁶ *History of the Albanian People*, volume IV, Group of authors, Tirana: "Toena", 2008, p.341

⁷ Malcolm, Noel, *A short story of Kosovo*, Pristina-Tirana: Time & Book House, 2001, p. 328

⁸ Malcolm, Noel, *A Short History of Kosovo*, Pristina-Tirana: Time & Book House, 2001, pp.336-337

⁹ *Thirty Years of the Albanological Institute (1967-1977)*, Prishtina: Prishtina Albanological Institute, 1997, p.14

¹⁰ Malcolm, Noel, *A Short History of Kosovo*, Pristina-Tirana: Time & Book House, 2001, pp.336-337

¹¹ Buxhov, Jusuf, *Kosovo - From the London Conference to the International Protectorate*, Third Book, Prishtina & Houston: Faik Konica - Prishtina & Jalifat Publishing - Houston, 2012, p.328

¹² Malcolm, Noel, *A Short History of Kosovo*, Pristina-Tirana: Time & Book House, 2001, p.332

to the main demand for the Republic of Kosovo, other demands were paved in those demonstrations, such as: "We want self-determination up to secession", "We want unification of Albanian-inhabited areas with Kosovo", "We want the Constitution", "We want University" etc. These demonstrations began to shake the foundations of Titoist Yugoslavia. The regime began to reflect a little more. The Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, at a meeting held on 18th November 1969, promulgated the law establishing the University of Pristina. The Founding Assembly was held on 13th February 1970, and on the 15th February 1970 was held the solemn founding meeting of the University of Pristina. The last federal constitution was adopted on 21.02.1974, the most voluminous [with 406 articles]. On 27.02.1947 the Constitution of Kosovo was promulgated. It has often been said that Tito gave Kosovo the constitution of '74.¹³ This was also confirmed by Bill Clinton. Before its first anniversary, on 16.01.1975, the Presidency of the Republic of Serbia demanded a revision of the Constitution, justifying the return of 'Serbian power over the provinces'. Serbian remarks about the constitution were summarized in the Blue Book. With the adoption of the new Constitution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 21st February 1974, the legal path was opened for Albanians who live in Kosovo to advance within the Yugoslav Federation by which the constitutive element of Kosovo was guaranteed in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Although the objective was not achieved, discrimination was evident everywhere. A few months after Tito's death on March 11, 25, and 26, and on April 1, 2, and 3, 1981, mass student demonstrations were organized. They predicted students' social dissatisfaction with food and housing conditions. On 13th May 1981, which was the day of the Yugoslav police, in the Prekaz of Skenderaj, large Yugoslav police and military forces attacked the house of Tahir Meha. In an unequal war, face to face with the Yugoslav police heroically felled killed dad and his son, Nebi and Tahir Meha¹⁴. Many illegal organizations were established abroad, some of which were also aimed at armed resistance against the Yugoslav regime. In a report by Admiral Branko Mamula, Federal Secretary of the People's Defense of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, drafted for senior Yugoslav leaders, it was reported that only during the period from 1981 to 1987, the authorities had discovered that Albanians had 216 illegal organizations with 1432 members.¹⁵

III. The violent suppression of Kosovo's autonomy

After the 1981 demonstrations, discrimination, differentiation, segregation and various forms of political, economic, cultural and spiritual violence against Albanians began again. On 21st January 1987, the Assembly of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia approved the "Proposal for the Beginning of the Constitutional Amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia", and on 23rd March 1987, the Federal Chamber decided to initiate amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. From 20th February till 28, 1989, Trepca miners went on a hunger strike in defense of the constitution. On 14th March 1989, the Presidency of the Autonomous Socialist Province of Kosovo and the Presidency of the Central Committee of the League of

¹³ Clinton, Bill, *My life*, Alfred, A. Knopf Borzoi Book, New York, 2004, p.849

¹⁴ Newspaper "Day Time", 4 April 2006, p.15

¹⁵ Mirkovic, Todor *KOSOVO AND METODIJA* - Nine Centuries Later, Part of the Army, summer / 2014, p.194

Communists of Kosovo came out with a joint statement in support of constitutional changes. On 23rd March 1989, Slobodan Milosevic violently undermined Kosovo's autonomy by military and police force. Only 10 members of the Kosovo Provincial Assembly voted against this change. There were massive demonstrations and marches of citizens, of which 19 demonstrators were killed and hundreds were injured. On 28 March 1989, the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Serbia declared the constitutional amendments to abolish the autonomy, while the Serbian regime of Milosevic imposed a state of emergency throughout Kosovo. Nearly 25,000 Serbian police were brought to Kosovo and 18,000 teachers were excluded from the teaching process. Pristina radio, TV and newspaper 'Rebirth' were closed. By the year 1993, about 400,000 Albanians had left Kosovo due to the aggravating political and economic situation.

IV. Self-organization of Albanians

Albanians began to self-organize inside and outside Kosovo. On 23rd December 1989, the largest legal party of Albanians in Yugoslavia LDK (Democratic League of Kosovo), was formed, with the majority of Albanians who live in Kosovo joining. Then (on 2nd February 1990 till 17th May 1992) the blood feud reconciliation action began. The symbolism of the unification message was clearly addressed to Serbia. But Serbia continued with its rudeness. In March 1990, 7,000 Albanian students were poisoned in 13 Kosovo municipalities. According to local and international medical reports, Albanian students who live in Kosovo were poisoned with chemicals: SARIN, taboo and SOMAN. All of these substances belonged to the group of poisons that affected the nervous system. On 2nd July 1990, the Members of the Assembly of Kosovo declared the Constitutional Declaration in front of the building under exceptional conditions, whereby the decision of 23rd February 1989 was canceled and Kosovo declared equal to other republics in Yugoslavia.¹⁶ Then the same delegates, on 7th September 1990 in Kacanik, adopted the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. On 26th September – till 30th, 1991, the citizens of Kosovo voted in a referendum on Kosovo as a sovereign and independent state, the results of which were announced by the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo on 19th October 1991. After a mutual agreement political parties in Kosovo formed the Provisional Government of the Republic of Kosovo, and then started the functioning of parallel structures. On 24th May 1992, under Serbian occupation, the legal parties in Kosovo, led by the LDK, organized multi-party elections for the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo and for the election of the President of the Republic. Dr. Ibrahim Rugova was elected and sworn in as President of the Republic of Kosovo on 26th June, 1992.

V. Beginning of the armed resistance

On 31 January 1997, three KLA leaders, Zahir Pajaziti, Edmond Hoxha, and Hakif Zejnullahu, were killed in the village of Pestova, Vushtrri. In March 1997, in Albania, the great revolts of the citizens against the pyramid schemes took place. Many weapons came out

¹⁶ Newspaper 'Renaissance', July 03, 1990, p.1,2

of the Albanian barracks, which were then infiltrated into Kosovo. On 28 November 1997, at the funeral of teacher Halit Geci, in which more than 20,000 people attended, three KLA soldiers descended from the Drenica Mountains told to people that took place at the funeral that: "there is and will be a KLA until Kosovo is liberated from Serbia" and that "Serbia is killing and slaughtering Albanians and the KLA is the only force who fights for national liberation and unity."¹⁷ On the other hand, Rugova held re-election on 22nd March 1998, where he was re-elected again as a president.¹⁸ In Prekaz, Drenica, large police and military forces for three days (5, 6, and 7th March 1998) terrorized the Jasharaj family, killing 56 of their fighters (women, children, grandparents), where the legendary commander Adem Jashari fell heroically as well too. On 11 March 1998, all the fallen in Prekaz were buried. After the massacre of Racak on 15th January 1999, where Serbs massacred dozens of women, children and old people, the International Community and NATO were closer to intervening militarily against Serbian barbarians. On 6th February 1999, after a series of preparations, the Peace Conference began in Rambouillet near Paris. Following Serbia's refusal to sign the peace agreement, on 24th March 1999, NATO began airstrikes against Serbia, which continued until 10th June 1999 [78 days]; in which 10,500 airstrikes were carried out. On 10th June, a military-technical agreement was signed between the Yugoslav army and NATO in Kumanovo, and on the same day, the UN Security Council, with 14 votes in favor and no against, with China abstained, adopted Resolution 1244. On 18th June, Serbian forces finally left Kosovo.

VI. Contribution of Albanians from Macedonia before the start of the 1999 war.

It seems that it was not by fate but Serbia failed to sign its capitulation in Macedonia. Albanians from Macedonia are among the major contributors to Kosovo's liberation. There was no political, economic, or military organization, where they were not among the first. In 1946 the first mounted trial of members of the Albanian National Democratic Organization was organized in Skopje. Azem Morana and Mehmet Bushi were sentenced to death and executed, while Skender Morana was sentenced to 20 years in prison. In 1948 Minister of Education Nexhat Agolli was sentenced to death, while his brother Qemal Agolli was sentenced to life sentence. In 1952, the Albanian Information Group was convicted. The Albanian National Movement of the 1960s that besides the motto 'Kosova Republic' had national unity, also extended to Struga, Debar, Kicevo, Tetovo, Kumanovo. The demonstrations of 1968 after a month extended to Tetovo as well. The organizers of this demonstration were Albanian students from Tetovo studying in Kosovo. The Albanians of Macedonia made a great contribution during the demonstration of 1981, they contributed to organizing the illegal migration in the Albanian diaspora which is also evident. Among the organizers of the illegal cells were those who later joined the KLA General Staff as well as the political and diplomatic representation of the war wing.

¹⁷ Judah, Tim, Kosovo, *War and Revenge*, Time, Pristina 2000, pp.172 -173

¹⁸ Shala, Blerim, *Years of Kosovo*. 1998 -1999, Pristina 2001, p.30

VII. Fighting Contribution

When the war began in Kosovo, Albanian volunteers from Macedonia were involved in all these operational areas. Soldiers who were involved in the war were from all the Macedonian places where Albanians lived. Ismet Jashari-Kumanova played a key and very important role in the KLA, who settled in the Drenica Mountains, then moved to Klecke / Klecka where he, at the behest of the KLA General Staff, established the unit "Steel". On 25th August 1998, he fell martyr.¹⁹ The other fighter Ismet Mustafa from Kumanovo, in March 1999, with some friends went to join the war friends and after two weeks he joined the fighting. He was fearless in the battles of 14-15 April 1999, fighting face-to-face with the enemy. He fell heroically on the morning of 16th April 1999²⁰. The brave Safet Ajeti from Kumanovo involved in the KLA on 05.05.1998 in the Shala Operational Area at 142nd Brigade, Bivolak-Vushtri, was found on the front lines. He fell martyr on 14.06.1999. Among the many brave of the nation in the difficult days was also Mujdin Aliu from Tetovo, who, fighting face to face with the enemy, fell heroically in the battle to break the Albanian-Albanian border, defending Kosovo's honor in Koshare, Gjakova. on April 14, 1999. Also during this terrible face-to-face war with the enemy on the altar of freedom fell four martyrs from Skopje: Shabi Kajolli (whose family gave three martyrs by the name of Shabi to the nation), Remzi Xhaferi and Zekir Dardhishta. The brave man from Kichevo who did not shy away from the battlefield was Aliriza Selmani in the Pashtrik Operational Zone. Over 80 were wounded in combat operations in all operational areas of Kosovo, with a number having the status of war invalids. Only in the war part of Koshare were 68 Macedonian soldiers, 35 wounded and 5 martyred. According to statistics provided by the OVL-KLA-Pristina, provided by the President of this Organization, Hysni Gucati, there were 435 fighters from Macedonia and over 200 soldiers engaged in logistics, who carried out heavy and dangerous tasks while carrying weapons and all the tools needed for war. So the total number is over 600 soldiers of freedom. From these Freedom Soldiers on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the KLA's staging in 2017, the President of OVL-KLA, Hysni Gucati, was awarded postmortem decoration and gratitude to 10 fallen martyrs in the Kosovo War: Rahim Samiu-Zogu, Isa Lika-Iliri, Nuri Mazari-Struga, Ismail Memeti-Careku, Baftjar Jakupi and Samedin Guri. In the course of the activities organized by the OVL-KLA, in addition to the decorations, gratitude was given to members of the General Staff and to nearly 200 disabled and war veterans from Macedonia. This continues until the inclusion of all KLA veterans and invalids from Macedonia. According to the law on the recognition of the status of martyrs, invalids and war veterans of the KLA, all families of martyrs, war invalids and war veterans are entitled to a pension from the Republic of Kosovo.

VIII. Humanitarian Contribution

Albanians from Macedonia have made a major contribution to sensitizing world reaction by organizing demonstrations in support of the KLA and calling on NATO to intervene as soon

¹⁹ Jahiu, Nehat, *Orizari through the Ages*, Tetovo, 2010, p.195

²⁰ News, April 17, 2014, Special, article by Minir Ademi

as possible in defense of Kosovo's population. Their rise has given alarming signals to the international factor, in the possibility of widening the conflict to an even greater extent. Since the outbreak of the refugee crisis, alongside the home country of Albania, Albanians from Macedonia have been extremely mobilized in all directions: providing housing to hundreds of families (close to 20,000 refugees), gathering food and clothing, distribute them in Blace, providing medical assistance and so on. A great humanitarian contribution was made by: Kumanovo-Lipkovo region aid coordinator Etem Xheladini, former political prisoner Teuta Bekteshi Ajeti, Abil Ademi, Demir Shabani, Faik Latifi, Sebehate Emini, Dije Arifi, etc. It is worth mentioning that the activity of over a hundred humanitarian activists was under the scrutiny of the Macedonian police who were following them step by step. There was great mobilization of Albanians from all other cities in Macedonia.

IX. Informational Contribution

The responsibility of removing the information darkness in Kosovo was taken over by the director of the private television, Voice of Kumanovo, Ismet Bexheti. In 1998 the radio technique from Kumanovo was transferred to the war zone in the Berisha Mountains, from where the waves of the Radio Free Kosova began to broadcast. Ismet Bexheti had first contacted the leading people in Albania about the initiative he wanted to take, but due to the delay in response from Albania, he contacted Shaqir Shaqiri, who was assigned by the General Staff as the Corridor Officer. KLA suppliers: Albania-Macedonia-Presevo-Kosovo. Through this corridor, after a period of almost six months, the goal and intent for the broadcast of combat events by this media was achieved.²¹ A notable contribution to the information plan was made by local Albanian radio and television broadcasters in Macedonia (highlight TV Festa in Kumanovo), which in addition to informing the population about developments in Kosovo, mobilized Albanians to collect emergency aid for refugees in Blace. as well as for the housing of some of them in their own homes.

X. Conclusion

This work is just a chronological summary of events related to and about Kosovo, with particular emphasis on the contribution of the Albanians of Macedonia who in all different forms and ways contributed to the liberation of Kosovo. The priority was to at least briefly mention the deeds of those who gave the most expensive of themselves – called life. But we are aware of the fact that all those who joined the KLA were not sure that they would be saved, so they risked their lives and therefore deserve the deepest respect. In this context, not only we, but also various scholars, have a moral obligation, and I hope to work diligently so that nothing is left out. The glory of the KLA never ends and the pen for freedom fighters will never run out. With this concluding sentence, we want to encourage other scholars to continue writing about glorious historical events. Remembrance and dedication to them make the fruits of freedom more meaningful to us.

²¹ Ismet Bexheti, born 10.08-1965, interview with 25.05.2019, Kumanovo

XI. References

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