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SERBIA'S ANNEXATION OF KOSOVA IN 1945

The warring sides in World War II were careful to draw the Albanian people into their respective blocs. This was mainly because of the very important geostrategic position and the human and natural resources of the Albanian lands. Kosova and the other ethnic Albanian territories that had remained within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia assumed an important place in these plans. The Conference of Bujan, which approved a resolution confirming the right of the Albanian people of Kosova¹ to self-determination to the point of secession, led to the mass mobilization of the population in the Antifascist National Liberation War. The conference marked a turning point, not only in the war itself, but in relations among Albanian political forces.

The resolution of the Conference of Bujan laid down for the first time a path toward the solution of the national question of Kosova on the basis of the right to self-determination and of participation in the struggle against fascism².

The fair and principled decisions made at this celebrated meeting were signed by 48 delegates and were welcomed by representatives from the antifascist coalition. They were based on international agreements. The representative of the British Military Mission to the Staff Headquarters of the National Liberation Army of Kosova and the Plain of Dukagjin emphasized in his greeting, "First of all I wish to express my thanks for the invitation to take part in this conference. Immediately upon my arrival in this area, I had contacts with many people with different political views. I realized very quickly that the National Liberation Movement is the only movement fighting against our common enemy of fasism(...). I have reported this to my headquarters. I ask you to continue your work for the freedom and independence of your country. I promise you that will have our full support as allies in your noble efforts"³.

The decisions of the Conference of Bujan met with strong support among Albanians both at home and abroad, but were attacked in the most savage and unjust manner by the Yugoslav side.

The central committee of the Albanian Communist Party and the Yugoslav Communist Party and their emissaries several times discussed the status of Kosova and the Albanians in correspondence up to September 1944. The Albanian side based its arguments on principle, but, it must be admitted, did so ineffectively, out of concern not to upset the Yugoslavs. The Yugoslav Communist Party leadership intentionally delayed the solution to this question, leaving it to be considered after the end of the war. At the same time, they systematically drew up plans to include not only Kosova and other ethnic Albanian territories in Macedonia and Montenegro, but the whole of Albania in a kind of Balkan or Yugoslav-Albanian federation.

As a result of the successful struggle waged by the powers of the antifascist coalition, the final battles of the National Liberation War in Albania, Yugoslavia, and Kosova were fought between September and November 1944. These battles involved about 53 000 members of partisan units led by the Main Staff of the Yugoslav National

Liberation Army for Kosova and Dukagjin, the overwhelming majority of whom were Albanian. However, after the expulsion of German troops from Kosova, instead of order and calm being established by means of a popular government based on the National Liberation Councils, as was claimed, foreign troops arrived in these areas and provoked conflicts with the indigenous Albanian population. The Albanians' anxieties were further increased by the decisions of the Supreme Staff of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army to turn the Main Staff of Kosova into a provisional staff, as well as by the decision on 4 September 1944 to subordinate it to the Main Staff of Serbia⁴.

Besides these measures taken during and at the end of the war, the future of the Albanian people and in particular the status of Kosova were not clearly and openly defined; it was implied that this was a problem that would be conclusively settled after the victory over fascism⁵. However, with the aim of discounting the results of the National Liberation War in Kosova and other areas and to prepare for a new enslavement of these territories, J.B. Tito ordered the imposition of military rule on Kosova on 8 February 1945⁶. This infamous order was a new landmark in the Albanians' bloody history, because it was accompanied by the massacre of thousands of Albanians. Henceforth, Kosova and the Albanians were to be pursued by the phantom of "counterrevolution". Thousands of charges for the political and physical liquidation on Albanians were to be contrived on the basis of this Bolshevik formula⁷. Data collected in the field by activists of the National Democratic Committee of the Albanians show that 48 000 Albanians were liquidated at this time⁸.

Military rule in Kosova was not established by chance, but was inspired by Great Serbian chauvinism and had begun to be applied in practice from the middle of November 1944. This is clearly evident from the proposals in Dr. Vasa Cubrilovic's second memorandum of 3 November 1944⁹. He suggested to the state authorities that, "besides purges by the army, other methods must also be employed during the operations to force the national minorities to emigrate... Concentration camps must be set up... The Albanians must be mercilessly brought before military tribunals, and their property must be confiscated... This must be done now, while the army plays the most important role"¹⁰.

The anti-Albanian campaign was accompanied by the collection of weapons, the mobilization of young Albanian men in order to send them to battle fronts in the north of Yugoslavia, and the persecution and imprisonment of prominent personalities. In connection with the situation in Kosova at that time, Ymer Berisha, chairman of the Besa Kombetare organization, wrote to General Hodgson, the representative of the British Military Mission in Tirana: "Every weapon was confiscated, all the headmen were imprisoned and well-known personalities were hurled into the worst prisons, where many of them died of starvation... Seventy-five headmen and prominent people from Drenica were drowned, first being struck on the head by a hammer and then thrown into a deep well. Because of all these reprisals, all the inhabitants of this region with a population of 35 000 rose up and raised their voices with the cry, "Death or freedom!". Six thousands men started the struggle known as "The Battle of Drenica", because it was waged in Drenica by the people of that area". According to Ymer Berisha, the tragedy of Tivar, in which 1 670 people died, also provoked the popular revolt¹¹.

The aim of the military administration was to "pacify" this ever-rebellious people by means of a military and police regime, to impose a political settlement for the future, and to establish the status of Kosova within the Yugoslav federation.

Between the summer of 1944 and March 1945, the leadership of the National Liberation War several times discussed the question of the status of Kosova. Several variants were put forward for solving this problem, including provision for an administrative division between Serbia and Montenegro on the example of the prewar banovine. It was also said that "...the best solution would be if it (Kosova) were to be united with Albania, but because neither foreign nor domestic factors favor this, it (Kosova) must remain a compact province within the framework of Serbia..." (proposal of Kardelj at the Yugoslav Communist Party Central Committee in February 1945)¹². As is evident, the standpoints advanced by the Yugoslavs in all cases entirely contradicted the statements made during the war years. Demagoguery and violence were combined in order to impose these decisions on the Albanians. For example, an extended meeting of the representatives of the councils of Kosova and the Plain of Dukagjin was summoned in Prishtina between 19 and 24 March 1945 and was attended by about 400 delegates¹³. This meeting was to reject the decisions of the Conference of Bujan. Many representatives of the National Liberation Councils openly opposed the proposals of the Presidium "(...) that Kosova should for a time remain within the framework of Yugoslavia because of the threat posed to Albania by reaction"¹⁴. In particular, Halim Spahiu clearly stated that, "It is clear that all the assistance we gave to the National Liberation War was in vain (...) and I do not understand why we are not uniting with Albania, which was the cause for which we fought". Meanwhile, at a meeting of the Antifascist National Liberation Council of Serbia in April 1945, Dusan Mugosa and Mehmet Hoxha, without the authorization of the Assembly of Kosova, stated that "We express the desire and will of the peoples of Kosova and the Plain of Dukagjin to unite with fraternal federal Serbia"¹⁵. These developments were a clear expression of the efforts of the Yugoslavs and specifically the Serbs to annex Kosova to Serbia, which conflicted with the will of the overwhelmingly Albanian population.

Moreover, the data relating to the standpoint of the leadership of the National Liberation War in Albania toward all the measures taken in Kosova at that time are both scanty and have not received the attention they deserve¹⁶. It is known that Ramadan Citaku was in Prishtina after the establishment of military rule. According to the testimony of Kosova police chief S. Djakovic, Citaku wished to find out, on behalf of Enver Hoxha, whether "this really means that Kosova and the Plain of Dukagjin will definitively remain within the framework of Yugoslavia". Miladin Popovic, secretary to the Provincial Committee, replied to this enquiry that Enver should roll up his sleeves in order to build socialism in Albania, because the equality of the Albanians of Kosova and Dukagjin with the Serbs, Montenegrins, and others was assured¹⁷.

General Hodgson, chief of the British Mission in Tirana, also showed special interest in the stand of the Albanian leadership toward Kosova. Velimir Stojnic, representative of the Yugoslav federation in Tirana, wrote about this concern in his report of June 1945, "All the British officers are equally interested in Kosova. They are very interested in what the Albanians think about Kosova. Everybody, from the peasants to council chairmen and the government, is determined in this matter. General

Hodgson is amazed that the Albanian Government has so far made any statement on its standpoint toward Kosovo-Metohija"¹⁸. "For this reason", Stojnic continues, "in his view the broad Albanian masses and even the civil service do not know in whose hands Kosovo-Metohija is, nor has it been made clear to them how this matter will be resolved. Hodgson has also stated that Kosovo-Metohija is of greater importance than Northern Epirus"¹⁹.

All the political military measures undertaken in Kosova after November 1944, and especially between February and Lujy 1945, had a single aim. They were intended to prepare the ground for the subjection of Kosova to Serbian rule. Under such circumstances, what was then called the "Meeting of the Provincial Assembly of Kosovo-Metohija" was summoned in Prizren on 8-10 July 1945. Item six on the agenda of this meeting was a "draft resolution for the annexation of Kosovo-Metohija to federal Serbia"²⁰. It was intended that the approval of this measure would bring a legal end to Kosova's independence and would annul the decisions of the Conference of Bujan. However, it could not be denied that the right to self-determination is a permanent and inalienable right of the Albanian people, which they will demand whenever they have the opportunity.

Participants in this meeting who later attended an academic conference devoted to it in Prishtina on 25-26 June 1990 related that the resolution for the annexation of Kosova had been written in Serbian and translated into Albanian in Belgrade²¹. The larger part of the discussion had been devoted to the political report. As can be seen from the published documents from the Prishtina conference, the majority of the speeches had been carefully concocted in order to accomplish the meeting's main purpose. Those present were reminded that the army in Kosova at that time was about 50 000-strong and was ready to defend the fruits of the war²². The resolution for the annexation of Kosovo-Metohija to federal Serbia was passed by acclamation and without a single speech²³. The very fact that such a procedure was followed over an issue of such vital importance for the future of the Albanian people, besides the number of the delegates and their national composition, shows how valid this assembly's decisions were.

Documents in the Archive of Kosova show that only 33 of the 142 delegates and other participants in these meeting were Albanians²⁴. Among them, 28 participants in the Conference of Bujan who had the status of legitimate representatives were absent, while 78 were Serbs and Montenegrins. The overwhelming majority of the 33 office-holders in the districts were also Serbs and Montenegrins appointed to their posts by the military administration²⁵. If we add here the fact that, besides the measures mentioned above, the assembly building was cordoned off by military and police forces, it is clear what circumstances and what kind of atmosphere surrounded this meeting that was to decide the future of Kosova on the basis of the free expression of the people's will.

Tahir Zajmi has correctly assessed this tragic event when he writes, "When matters came to a head, Kosova was denied not only the right to self-determination but the right to form a republic in itself. Kosova and the Plain of Dukagjin became an autonomous province under the government of the Serbian Republic, while the other Albanian-inhabited areas were divided among Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia.

We cannot consider Kosova's annexation by the forces of the Serbian and

Yugoslav Army in 1945 solely as a historical event. It has been experienced in Kosova as an act of ongoing violence and of international injustice perpetuated at the expense of the destiny, lives, and consciences of the Albanian people. This annexation was part of an anti-Albanian policy that was perpetuated for decades and involved the liquidation of about

50 000 Albanians and the forced emigration of hundreds of thousands to Turkey in the 1950s, as well as to the countries of the West today. Finally, Kosova remains under annexation and under a military and police regime today.

It might be said with total justice that the annexation of Kosova by Serbia had very tragic consequences for the destiny of our people. This measure concealed only temporarily and by force majeure the problems and contradictions that have once again come to the surface with all that they entail, and which threaten a new explosion in Kosova.

1. *Këshilli Popullor i Krahinës Autonome të Kosovës e Metohisë (1943-1953)*, Prishtinë, 1955, p.10. *Ibidem*, pp.7-16.

3. Dr.Ali Hadri, *Këshillat Nacional-Çlirimtare në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, 1974, pp.83-84.

4. Dr.Ali Hadri, *Lëvizja Nacional-Çlirimtare në Kosovë*, Prishtinë, 1971.

5. Lefter Nasi, *Tetë muaj nga historia e popullsisë shqiptare në Jugosllavi (nëntor 1944 - korrik 1945)*, in: "E vërteta mbi Kosovën dhe shqiptarët në Jugosllavi", Tiranë, 1990, p.409.

6. Tito, as commander of the Supreme Staff of the Yugoslav National Liberation Army, ordered a military administration in Kosova and the Plain of Dukagjin under Instruction No 31 of 8 February 1945, under the command of Colonel Sava Drelevic and with Colonel Medenica as staff commissar.

7. Jusuf Bajraktari, *Viktimat shqiptare në Kosovë 1945-1966*, in: "Ora", No.1, Prishtinë, May 23, 1991, p.63.

8. Besim Kajtazi, *Gjurmëve të Komitetit Nacional Demokratik Shqiptar*, in: "Ora", No.14, Prishtinë, 1991, p.49.

9. Dr. Vasa Cubrilovic, *Problem nacionalnih manjina u novoj Jugoslaviji, document found in the Yugoslav archives by Dr. Seit Lima*.

10. Quoted by Dr. H.Islami in: "Kosova dhe Shqiptarët - Çështje demografike", Prishtinë, 1990, p.82.

11. Dr. M.Pirraqu, *Ripushtimi Jugosllav i Kosovës më 1945*, Prishtinë, 1992, p.55.

12. Radoshin Rajoviq, *Autonomia e Kosovës*, Prishtinë, 1987, p.333.

13. B.Kajtazi, *Gjurmëve...*, in: "Ora", No.7, Prishtinë, 1991, pp 46-47.

14. B.Kajtazi, *op.cit.*, pp.46-47.

15. R.Rajoviq, *op.cit.*, p.337.

16. Some reports from the Shkoder District Command and the from the Third Corps of the Albanian National Liberation Army mention the maltreatment and murder of Albanians by the Yugoslav National Liberation Army, but do not mention what stand was to be taken toward the many demands raised every- where by the Albanians.

17. Spasoje Djakovic, *Sukubi na Kosovu*, Beograd, 1984, p.277.
18. Report by V.Stojnic, *Yugoslav representative in Tirana*, in June 1945, quoted by V.Dedijor, *Jugoslovenske-albanske odnose (1939-1948)*, Neograd, 1949, p.134.
19. *Ibidem*, p.134-135.
20. *Këshilli Popullor i Krahinës Autonome të Kosovës e Metohisë...*, pp. 19, 46, 47. The use of term "annexation" in contemporary documents is noteworthy. The term best defines an act of violence such as the one we are dealing with.
21. Statement by Xhavit Nimani, Fadil Hoxha, Ymer Pula, Shaban Kajtazi, and Xhevdet Hamza were also present at this meeting, and none of them denied this fact.
22. *Këshilli Popullor...*, p.21.
23. *Ibidem*, p.46.
24. Archive of Kosova (uncatalogued deposits) Oblast Narodnog Odbora AKMO (zapisnici i materijali sa zasedanja), 1945.
25. Dr. Jusuf Bajraktari, *Rrënjët historike të autonomisë së Kosovës*, in: "Rrjedhat", No.1, 1990, pp.9-15.
26. Tahir Zajmi, *Lidhja e Dytë e Prizrenit*, Bruksel, 1968, p.68.