
MIRANDA VICKERS (London)

THE ROLE OF KOSOVA IN POST-WAR YUGOSLAV-ALBANIAN RELATIONS

As the Second World War drew to a close, despite the general insurrection throughout Kosova in the winter of 1944-1945, the fate of the Albanians in the new Democratic Federative Yugoslavia failed to burden Yugoslav-Albanian relations. Both leaderships had taken a stand in favour of unification so the problem of their borderland would be resolved most naturally by its inclusion in an Albanian federal unit. Any discussion about returning Kosova to Albanian control was met with fierce opposition from the Serbs. Kosova joined the new Yugoslav Federation as a mere appendage of the Republic of Serbia. The inferior status as merely a minority people within the Serbian republic unnecessarily fostered resentment amongst Kosova's Albanians by not granting them full territorial autonomy.

After 1948, the intended Yugoslav annexation of Albania became impossible. Up to 1948, the ideological bond uniting Yugoslavia and Albania had left the Kosova question out of their respective agendas. Now, however, with Stalin's backing, the Albanian press gave full coverage to the "persecution of Albanians in Yugoslavia", whom it incited to "overthrow Tito"¹. And so began the war of words that would aflame or abate according to specific conditions relating to Yugoslavia or Albania.

A turning point in the status and role of the Albanians in Yugoslavia came in 1966 with the fall of Alexander Rankovic, a leading proponent of Serbo-centralism, the Vice-President of Yugoslavia and heir-apparent to Tito.

The limited measures of liberalization following Rankovic's dismissal were used by Kosova's Albanians to press for greater autonomy. They again raised the question, "Why do 370 000 Montenegrins have their own republic, while 1.2 million Albanians do not even have full autonomy?" Rezak Salja, the Kosova Provincial Prosecutor, called for a separate republic for Yugoslavia's Albanians which would have the rights of self-determination and secession². However Tito, who viewed a favourable some of the proposals for reform remained opposed to granting Kosova republic status. However, in Kosova itself, there were strong signs of a steady deterioration in Serbian-Albanian relations.

As 1968 drew on there were sporadic eruptions of inter-ethnic violence, and by November serious riots had broken out throughout Kosova. Albanian tensions had increased as their newly aroused expectations remained unfulfilled. Their representatives had failed to win the support of Belgrade for their cause of greater autonomy, if not republic status, so they took to the streets. The League of Communists responded quickly and decisively to the unrest by arresting the ringleaders, nevertheless the situation had a disquieting effect on the government. In January 1969, the Serbian Parliament adopted a Constitution for Kosova. The Province received its own Supreme Court together with considerable policy-making rights, and also equality of the Albanian, Serbo-Croat and Turkish languages was recognized. The right was granted to fly the Albanian flag and an independent University of Prishtina was created from

what had, hitherto, been merely a branch of the University of Belgrade. These measures were granted in the hope of appeasing the Albanians because their demand for full republic status was still flatly rejected by the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

The adoption of the basically Tosk literary language by the Gheg-speaking Kosovars in 1968, paved the way for Albanian cultural penetration in Kosova. Albanian textbooks and teaching personnel were imported from Tirana together with an ever-growing number of Albanian publications. During the 1970's, Yugoslav-Albanian relations witnessed a gradual rapprochement, which was paralleled by Belgrade's devolution of powers to Kosova. In February 1974, Yugoslavia's fourth post-war constitution considerably narrowed the powers of the Federation while extending those of the Republics and Autonomous Provinces. Despite Serb objections Kosova, whose role up to 1975, was restricted to cultural exchanges and economic co-operation with Albania, henceforth became a mediator between the two states which were eager to normalize relations.

In comparison to the past, relations between Yugoslavia and Albania entered upon a new phase of improved co-operation. Apart from trade agreements, every month five to ten groups from Albania visited Kosova. An increasingly large number of Kosovars had already been visiting Albania in recent times and heavier tourist traffic was now envisaged. In February two protocols were signed in Pristina in the motion picture field between Kosovofilm and the New Albania Kinostudio, they agreed on the joint production of films from 1981-1985. Therefore, on the surface, things were looking relatively progressive for Kosova, so few people could have been prepared for the vehemence of the riots which shook the Province during the spring of 1981.

To contain the riots, as in 1968, tanks were rushed in and a curfew was imposed throughout Kosova as up to 30 000 troops patrolled the Province. Officially it was reported that 11 people were killed, but Albanians say that almost 1 000 were killed and the subsequent purges and dismissals of Albanians in all walks of life resulted in a steady accumulation of frustration, bitterness and anger. Foreign observers noted the true nature of the unrest, that the riots were not nationalistically inspired, but were economically and socially motivated. As early as 1977, Edvard Kardeli, one of Tito's closest advisors, warned that if the Party failed to adopt a resolute policy to narrow the economic gap to tranquilize inter-ethnic tensions, then Kosova would explode into violence.

After some time the Yugoslav leaders identified Tirana as the instigator of the troubles, though there was no direct proof of Albania's involvement in events of 1981.

Enver Hoxha could not have wished to actively encourage the Kosovars' ultimate desire, knowing that a Republic of Kosova within Yugoslavia could develop into a rival and potential adversary of Stalinist Albania. The Kosovars were not that enamoured of Hoxha's condescending attitude towards them. This was reflected in a saying widely heard in Kosova - "Enver Hoxha should remember that he is the head of a State and the head of a Party, but he is not the head of a nation". The idea of two Albanian states with strongly contrasting ideo-political systems could not have appealed to Hoxha. If Kosova had managed to secede from Yugoslavia and join Albania, Hoxha would have found it difficult persuading the predominantly Muslim Kosovars to

abandon their religion and their own land in favour of Albania's enforced atheism and agricultural collectivization. Any union of Kosova with Albania would have meant the end of Hoxha's ideological purity, therefore, he abandoned the notion of national unity, and kept his state's interest in Kosova limited to cultural relations.

Following Enver Hoxha's death in 1985, the world has witnessed Albania trying hard to shed her fortress image. Some progress had been made in Yugoslav-Albanian relations after they had been brought to a dramatic halt by the 1981 riots. An agreement on culture and education was signed in 1988 and in 1989 the Deputy Foreign Ministers of the Balkan countries met for the first international political gathering of its kind to take place in Tirana.

In February 1989, Albanian miners from the Trepca mine in northern Kosova went on strike. They demanded the resignation of three Provincial officials imposed upon them by the Serbian Party and considered "uncle Toms" by the Albanians because of their excessive deference towards the Serbian Party leadership. The miners also asked that any Constitutional limitation of Kosova's autonomy, which Belgrade had been pressing for, should be subject to democratic debate. On 23rd February, Serbia's National Assembly passed the controversial amendments that would, in effect, hand Kosova back to Serbian control.

By March there was widespread rioting which left at least 27 Albanians dead, shot by troops during the latest "state of emergency" imposed by Belgrade on the Province. This latest crisis in Kosova put severe strains once more on Yugoslav-Albanian relations, which in turn, had an adverse effect on the spirit of Balkan cooperation that had been painstakingly built up over the previous year. Albania's reaction was swift and unusually extensive. Belgrade's response to Albania's barrage of propaganda was to accuse Tirana of a "dual track policy" of preaching good-neighbourliness on the one hand, while in practice, conducting a hostile policy against Yugoslavia.

For Tito, Kosova had served as a "bridge" to Albania, for the Tirana leadership Kosova was their stake in Yugoslavia - a kind of buffer zone. There had always been a fear of invasion from the Soviet Union, and more than once Tirana had gone so far as to say that if Yugoslavia was attacked, Albania would come to her aid. The Albanian government had never pleaded the Kosovar cause before such international forums as the United Nations European Commissions on Human Rights or interfered directly in Kosova's politics. Whenever persecuted members of illegal Kosovar groups sought shelter in Albania they were promptly handed back to the Yugoslav authorities.

As Slobodan Milosevic consolidated his power base in Serbia, the anti-Albanian campaign gathered momentum. Kosovars were depicted as barbarian predators whose goal was the expulsion of Slavs from Kosova and the mutilation of the Serb republic.

In July 1990, the Serbian government amended Serbia's constitution so as to remove the legal basis for Kosova's autonomy. Kosovo's parliament was suspended and direct rule was imposed from Belgrade. Serbs occupied Kosova's radio and television stations leaving no broadcast media in the Albanian language. With the exception of "Bujku" the newspaper offices were taken over by Serbian journalists after the sacking of their Albanian colleagues. Rilindja publishing house came under Serbian management. At the same time, Kosova's Albanians established an "Assembly

of the Republic of Kosova" with the headquarters in Zagreb, where it was decided to hold a referendum on Kosova's sovereignty. Just over a year later, on 30th September 1991, Kosova's Albanians voted in a referendum to endorse overwhelmingly Kosova as a "sovereign and independent state". Although forced to go underground, the Serbian authorities were not able to prevent the activities of the various Albanian political groups, the most important being the Democratic Alliance with over 700 000 members, headed by Dr. Ibrahim Rugova.

By the end of 1991, more than 75 000 Albanians had lost their jobs, these included at least 6 000 teachers who refused to give up the Albanian curriculum in favour of a Serbian-imposed curriculum. Since then over 400 000 Albanian pupils and students at all levels have boycotted classes and instead attended, where possible, secret underground schools set up by unemployed teachers. On May 24th, 1992 the Assembly of Kosova held a Presidential election, Ibrahim Rugova was duly elected President of the "Republic of Kosova" with 99,5 percent of the vote. But the opening session of the "Kosova Parliament" had to be postponed due to the arrest, by Serbian police, of a number of the Parliament's deputies. In addition to the purely administrative measures enforced by Serbia, weapons have been distributed to Serbs and Montenegrins and thousands of Serbian reservist militiamen have been brought to Kosova. Displaced Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia are being resettled in Kosova, yet employment prospects are poor as the economy has all but collapsed. Since the start of the Yugoslav conflict an estimated 500 000 ethnic Albanians have left Kosova.

In October 1991, Albania officially recognized the "Republic of Kosova" as a sovereign and independent state. By November movements of artillery and motorized units of the Serbian army were reported in all Kosova's main towns and Serbian reservist forces had been considerably expanded with many being deployed along the Albanian border. Following the withdrawal of the Yugoslav Army, the JNA, from Macedonia, a large majority of the forces were redeployed in Kosova. The serious escalation of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, led Albania's politicians to fear a massive influx of Kosovar refugees. The Tirana government issued statements containing by far the strongest criticism yet of Kosova's Serbian leadership, and Albania's armed forces were put on alert following incidents between Yugoslav troops and Albanians on the Kosova border.

At the end of January 1992, a large rally was held in Tirana in support of the Kosovars. Demands were made within Albania for more forthright government action on the issue of Kosova, and Serbian warnings against Tirana's involvement in Yugoslav affairs became more strident. In March, Dr. Sali Berisha told DPA supporters of one of their Party's aims - "Regarding our brothers living in their territories in the former Yugoslavia, the DPA will not stop fighting until her great dream of uniting the Albanians nation comes true"³. Later that month the DPA swept to victory in the elections and Berisha was elected to the Presidency. Apart from the dire economic situation in Albania, the new Democratic government faced the ever increasing prospect of the savage conflict to the north threatening to engulf Kosova and Macedonia. It is possible that now, for the first time since the war, Albanian politicians genuinely wish to offer a full commitment to help the Kosovars, but they are severely limited in their options, and can only hope to persuade the international community to intervene on their behalf

1 "Zëri i popullit", 25th September 1949.

2 "Borba", 7th December 1968.

3 BBC, SWB, EE/1336 B/3, 23rd March 1992.

The Kosovo question is a requirement of the time

Right after the Balkan wars of the years 1912-1913, the emperor and the known politician of Serbian imperialism Nikola Pašić had said: "It is in our interest that now Austria-Hungary should survive thirty-five or thirty years, until by the time when we shall occupy the territories of the south, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the meaning of this saying for the intensifying of the Albanians' desire for the colonization of Kosovo, it seemed as if Pašić himself had defined the essence and urgency of the Kosovo question. He dealt with it as a question of the occupation of a territory or territory in a territory with other ethnic groups and a composition and predicted what would happen later on but did not happen, the final mental changing of the ethnic structure of Kosovo in the favour of a Serbian majority."

The discordance between the ethnic composition of the population of a territory with its own features and its ethnic pertaining of the power struggle about it a political endogenous way like question of the position of the territory, both as a question of under-ethnic neo-imperialism, as a state framework and as an international one. This means that this question exists even if the international power was not characterized by ethnicistic severity as it is in the case of Kosovo with Serbia. The ethnicistic severity expressed through the transgression violation of the rights of man through the deprivation of national rights in the aspect of nationality of national cultural inheritance as well as in the social discrimination, was aggravated the question. This policy on a socio-psychological ground gives both strengthens the consciousness and the impact of the people in changing the dangerous situation. On this basis, the desire of a people of a territory exists always. The desire is born in respect the master of its own national destiny in its own country. In the historical crossroads, the strong historical collective position of the principle of self-determination becomes stronger in the basis of a people and the question of the people and of a certain territory it is not only an objective question with the possible potential of political transnational acrimonial but it is becoming an ethnic-territorial question with a powerful enemy too.

The situation in Kosovo today is that the question is characterized by the collective requirements of the Albanian people of Kosovo for complete political-institutional equality. For the equal Republic of Kosovo in the constitutional federal-confederative framework and by the deep need for national unification, which have never failed away since the time of National Renaissance. But all these occurred at a time when the decomposition of the Yugoslav Federation did not appear in the political horizon. The forthright reorganizing of the Kosovo question started when there were seen the first serious splits in the multinational body of Yugoslavia, originating from the rise of territorial structured creation of the Yugoslavia of Yugoslavia.

of the Republic of Kosovo" with the aim of holding a referendum on Kosovo's independence. In 1991, Kosovo's Albanians wanted to declare Kosovo as a "sovereign and independent state" which, if forced to go underground, the Serbian authorities were not able to prevent the activities of the various Albanian political groups, the most important being the Democratic Alliance with over 700,000 members, headed by Dr Ibrahim Rugova.

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