

**Kosova and Albania in the Future –  
Closer or Further Apart from Each Other?**

Koszovó és Albánia a jövőben –  
Közelebb vagy távolabb egymástól?

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# KKI Policy Brief

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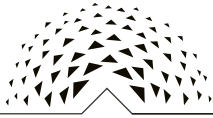
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**Abstract:** This is a study that addresses Kosovar and Albanian identity relationships, highlighting the similarities and differences of these two communities throughout their historical journey on their respective lands. The study identifies the key historical moments that have influenced Kosovar national identity branding and concludes that the occurrence of cultural and political differences within the Albanian ethnicity since the nineteenth century has been instigated by the Serbian stance regarding Kosova. The study substantiates a clear cultural and political identity of Kosova, indicating its forthcoming solidification whilst keeping Kosovar and Albanian differences distinct, despite the eventual change in Belgrade's stance towards Kosova. Concerns are arising from some of the voices in European diplomacy that favour Tirana's official involvement in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. An analysis of the progression of their historical path, however, indicates the opposite, i.e., Tirana's involvement in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue would only benefit Belgrade and consequently have a negative impact on the compromises between Kosova and Serbia that the US and the European Union aim for.

**Keywords:** Kosova/ Kosovo<sup>1</sup>, Albania, identity, ethnicity, nation, history.

**Összefoglalás:** Ez az elemzés a koszovói és albán identitás kapcsolatát vizsgálja. Rámutat a két közösség közötti hasonlóságokra és különbözőségekre a szülőföldjükön megtett történelmi útjuk során, emellett meghatározza azokat a történelmi kulcspontokat, amelyek a koszovói nemzeti identitásépítésre hatottak, és megállapítja, hogy az albán etnikum kulturális és politikai különbözősége a 19. századtól kezdve a Koszovóval kapcsolatos szerb álláspont tükrében fejlődött. A tanulmány világos koszovói kulturális és politikai identitást állapít meg, és előrejelzi annak közelgő megszilárdulását a koszovói és albán identitás különbözőségeinek megtartása mellett, a Koszovóval kapcsolatos belgrádi álláspont további változásaitól függetlenül. Vannak aggódalmak az európai diplomácia bizonyos hangjaival kapcsolatban, amelyek támogatják, hogy Tirana hivatalosan is legyen része a Belgrád-Pristina dialógusnak. A történelmi fejlődés vizsgálata azonban éppen az ellenkezőjét valószínűsíti, vagyis azt, hogy Tiranának a Belgrád-Pristina dialógusba való bevonása kizárólag Belgrád számára lenne előnyös, és így negatív hatással lenne a Koszovó és Szerbia közötti kompromisszumokra, melyek megkötése az USA és az Európai Unió célja is.

**Kulcsszavak:** Koszovó, Albánia, identitás, etnikum, nemzet, történelem

1 The author insisted on using Kosova instead of Kosovo.

## INTRODUCTION

On 21 September, 2020, a statue of Ahmet Krasniqi, former exiled Minister of Defence of the Republic of Kosova was inaugurated in Vushtrri, a town 20 km north of Prishtina. Krasniqi was killed in Tirana 22 years ago. The murder, still unsolved, is supposed to have been committed by his political rivals in cooperation with the state structures of Albania at that time. The Speaker of the Parliament of Kosova, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Defence, the Commander of the Kosova Security Force, and other officials and foreign ambassadors attended the ceremony of the inauguration of the statue. At the end of this event, the city ensemble performed a dance, where dancers waved the Kosova flags. According to the choreography, the flags of Kosova would be lowered to the ground at the end of the dance, and a dancer would appear on the stage raising the flag of Albania.

Everywhere in the world this would have been a big scandal. Had this show been staged on another continent, the Kosova government would have had to make a protest note. In this case, the only reaction came from the author of this paper. All of Kosova's highest state leadership considered this dance "a manifestation of patriotism" ("Ky është skandali i madh kombëtar", 2020).

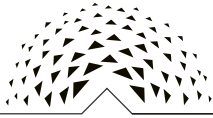
An external observer would likely find it impossible to understand this behaviour unless s/he delved deeply into the genesis of the issues between Kosova and Albania.

Many foreign visitors to Kosova have noticed that there is a greater presence of the flag of Albania in public spaces than that of Kosova. The reasons are manifold.

First, the Albanian national ideology was present in Kosova earlier than in the territory of today's Albania.

Second, every nation evokes its best days in history in its collective memory. The best days in the history of Kosova were those of the Second World War, when Kosova got rid of the Serbian regime, which had aimed to exterminate its majority population by the most brutal methods. The sudden end of poverty and genocide was accompanied by freedom, emancipation, and abundance. Kosova Albanians were the ones who took power in Tirana. This entire booming was accompanied by the presence of the Albanian national flag, and the emotional connection to this symbol is actually the emotional connection to this golden age.

Third, the Serbs have insisted that there is no ethnic connection between the Albanians of Albania and those of Kosova. For the Kosovars, the Albanian flag was a means of resisting the Serbian regime. Fourth, supported by the West, independent Kosova was considered by Serbia to be more dangerous than the idea of an annexation of Kosova to Albania, thus the entire Serbian intelligence network in Kosova opposed the Kosova flag. Unable to compete



against the flag of Kosova with the flag of Serbia, the Serbian intelligence agencies motivated rivalry through the flag of Albania, supported in this activity by the first three reasons described above.

## **THE HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF THE ALBANIAN ETHNIC CORPUS**

**T**he above theses are supported by the historical journey of the Albanian ethnic corpus in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Until the creation of the independent Albanian state, the territories inhabited by Albanians in the Balkans were part of the Ottoman Empire. The ideas of the French Revolution penetrated in the Ottoman Empire after the Crimean War (1853-1856). Here the British and the French helped the Ottoman Empire in the war against Russia; however, through this help they introduced a Western European spirit together with the ideas of the French Revolution. Albanians, divided into four religious communities (Sunni Muslims, Bektashis, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics) found the process of nation-building more problematic than anywhere else in Europe.

## **ALBANIAN NATIONAL IDEA**

**I**nfluenced by the millet system in the Ottoman Empire, Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian nation-building took place on the basis of the confessional community. The battle for Church autocephaly and the country's independence were promoters of each other. The Greeks gained the independence of the country in 1829/30 and gained autocephaly of their Church in 1850. The Serbs gained the independence of their country in 1878 and the autocephaly of their Church in 1879, while Bulgarians gained the autocephaly of their Church in 1870, while the autonomy of their country in 1878 and independence in 1908. The other religious (non-Christian-Orthodox) communities of these ethnicities were exterminated during the national revolutions. Some were killed, some were forced to convert to the Orthodox religion, and others were forced to migrate within the remaining territories of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Greek Muslims, Serb Muslims, and Bulgarian Muslims were present in insignificant numbers in the respective newly independent countries.

The national ideas of the Muslim population in the Ottoman Empire were a reflection of national ideas in the territories that were pulling out of it. The Turkish national idea included the ethnicities that had already been Islamized in the majority (Turks, Bosnians, Albanians, Kurds, Arabs, etc.) as well as the small Muslim communities of Hungarians, Romanians, Croats, Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks, etc.

since they were excluded from the coexistence with the Christians in their respective countries. Living together for several centuries, a common religion had created a symbiosis and a sense of belonging which the national ideologues within the Empire defined as a Turkish nation.

In this atmosphere, the first Albanians who spread the spirit of the French Revolution (1789) did not proclaim ideas for an Albanian nation but ones for a Turkish nation. The Albanian national idea was started by members of the Orthodox community (Naum Veçilharxhi (1797-1846), Jeronim De Rada (1814-1903)) and then by members of the Catholic community (Zef Jubani (1818-1880), Pashko Vasa (1825-1892)). Sami Frashëri (1850-1904) who would later be called the ideologue of the Albanian national awakening, worked for the Turkish national idea and the Albanian national idea at the same time. The strongest evidence for this is that in 1937 Ahmet Zogu (1895-1961), the King of Albania, asked Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) to move the remains of the Frashëri brothers (Abdyl (1839-1893), Naim (1850-1900), and Sami) from Istanbul to Tirana. The Turkish government handed over the remains of the two older brothers, but not those of Sami Frashëri, on the grounds that Sami belongs more to the Turkish culture.

However, the Albanian national consciousness proclaimed by some educated individuals from the Albanian religious communities could not spread to the mass of the population for several reasons.

In the Albanian Orthodox Christian community, the priests were predominantly Greek and sought to promulgate the Greek national ideology. Some priests did belong to the Albanian national movement, but they were persecuted, poisoned, and killed by their Greek superiors. The Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church would only be recognized late in 1937, twenty-five years after the declaration of Albania's independence.

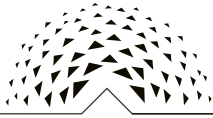
In the Albanian Catholic community, the priests were educated either in Italy or in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. These powers, although interested in creating an Albanian national consciousness, were rivals, and what one did the other undid, and vice versa.

The Muslim community (85% of the Albanian population) was dominated by the Turkish national idea in schools and religious institutions.

Only the Albanian Protestant community was completely involved in the Albanian national idea, but this community was small, almost negligible. Albanian national mass awareness took place ahead of the Berlin Congress (1878). This awareness mainly affected the population of the Vilayet of Kosova and partially that of Shkodra.

About 200,000 Albanians of the Sandzak of Nish (today Niš in Serbia) were persecuted by the Serbian army in 1877 and 1878 (Destani, 2019).<sup>2</sup> The arrival of such a large number of refugees in the territory of Kosova raised concerns about the further fate of Albanians in this territory, and this was converted into the awakening of the Albanian national consciousness. As a result, the League

2 Pages 237-255 contain tables that specify the number of murders, family expulsions, and confiscated properties for each town and village separately.



of Prizren was founded on 10 June, 1878. This was an organization of noble, religious, and military leaders, mainly from Kosova, the Sandzak of Novi Pazar, and the North of Albania and made the first attempt to create an Albanian state. The organization was forcibly extinguished in 1881, and its leaders were imprisoned by the High Porte.

Although the first Albanian school was opened in 1887 in Korça (southern Albania) by a small Albanian Protestant community, most Albanian schools were opened in Kosova (Mehmeti, 2019). According to Ottoman statistics, Kosova was the Ottoman Vilayet with the highest percentage of educated people in the entire Ottoman Empire at the time (Karpát, 1985).

## **KOSOVA UPRISING ON THE EVE OF THE BALKAN WARS**

In the spring of 1912, the most important Albanian delegates in the Ottoman Parliament, Hasan Prishtina (1873-1933) from Kosova, Esad Toptani (1864-1920) from central Albania, and Aziz Vrioni (1859-1919), Mufit Libohova (1876-1927), and Ismail Kemal Vlora (1844-1919) from southern Albania, met in Taksim, Istanbul, where they swore an oath to organize a general uprising to seek a unification of four Albanian vilayets into an Autonomous Entity, with an ultimate aim to establish independent Albania in the near future. Unfortunately, all of them betrayed the oath except Hasan Prishtina, i.e., they did not join the uprising (Prishtina, 2010).

In June-August 1912, Hasan Prishtina organized an uprising comprising 40,000 fighters, and he took control of almost all the cities of the Vilayet of Kosova, including Skopje, then capital of this vilayet (Prishtina, 2010).

The Ottoman government was forced to accept the terms of the Kosovar insurgents, but once this was understood by the Balkan governments, the latter formed an alliance with each other and on 8 October, 1912, Montenegro, Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria attacked the Ottoman Empire with about 1 million soldiers. The Albanian territories, after an insufficient resistance, were occupied by the neighbouring countries, and only two or three towns around Vlora remained unoccupied. Among the Balkan allies, Serbia took the lion's share of the Ottoman territories in Europe.

After the decisions of the Conference of Ambassadors in London on 29 July, 1913, where the existence of the Albanian nation was recognized and the borders of Albania were defined as they are today, the Serbian, Montenegrin, and Greek armies were forced to withdraw from the officially recognized Albanian territory.

Kosova, Macedonia, and the Sandzak of Novi Pazar were subjected to Serbian extermination terror, which was interrupted by World War I but continued again after it until 1941, when Hitler destroyed Yugoslavia.

## **EXPULSION OF KOSOVAR POLITICIANS FROM TIRANA**

Once Albania was established as a state, the most important Kosovar politicians left their properties in Kosova to engage in political activity in Albania. The rest remained in Kosova to protect the Albanian population and their properties under the Serbian state.

As explained above, Hasan Prishtina was betrayed in 1912. In fact, the conflict between the politicians from Kosova and those from southern and/or central Albania continued in independent Albania. This conflict is best reflected in the words of Prime Minister Ahmet Zogu (later President between 1925-1928 and King between 1928-1939) in his Proclamation to the Albanian People of 7 January, 1925, when he declared: "Albania cannot make progress without good relations with neighbours. In order to have good relations with our neighbours, we must get rid of the turbulent elements that disrupt these relations" (Vlora, 2001, p. 247).<sup>3</sup>

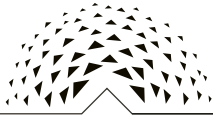
It is evident that Zogu was referring to the politicians from Kosova and Macedonia (Elez Isufi (1861-1924), Bajram Curri (1862-1925), Zija Dibra (1890-1925), Hasan Prishtina (1873-1930), Bedri Pejani (1885-1946), Dervish Mitrovica (1878-1935), Rexhep Mitrovica (1888-1967), etc.). Out of these seven prominent politicians from Kosova and Macedonia, three were killed within a year, while the fourth was killed five years later. The other three managed to take refuge in Italy.

Only after a decade, when King Zogu strengthened his power by eliminating all Kosovar politicians in Albania, did he begin to establish contacts with Ferat Draga (1880-1944), the principal political leader of the Albanians in Yugoslavia. This was a relationship between the mother country and the ethnic minority in the neighbouring country to the extent that it did not jeopardize relations with Belgrade. Following the Italian army's attack on Albania on 7 April, 1939, after a day of resistance, King Zogu fled to London. The Albanian Parliament decided to unify the royal crown with Italy. When in the spring of 1941 Hitler destroyed Yugoslavia, most of Kosova, part of Macedonia, and part of Montenegro joined Albania. For Kosova, this was a real renaissance. Education in the mother tongue, administration in the mother tongue, business opportunities, and many other benefits were symbolized by the Albanian national flag.

After the admission of Italy's defeat, it was the Kosovar political leaders who reorganized the Albanian state. The most prominent figure of this time, Xhafer Deva (1904-1978) from Mitrovica, Kosova, became the Minister of Interior of Albania, while he reserved the post of Prime Minister of Albania for

3 Albanian State Archive, section of Parliament, cited as an entire document at the footnotes in Vlora, E. B., & Koçi, A. (2001). *Kujtime: Vëllimi II (1912-1925)*. Tirana: Shtëpia e librit dhe komunikimit.





his oldest compatriot, Rexhep Mitrovica (1888-1967). Mitrovica had signed the independence of Albania in 1912 and became the first Minister of Education of Albania in 1920.

Before taking over the task of reorganizing the Albanian state, in 1943 Xhafer Deva put forward to the German representative for the Balkans, Herbert Neubacher (1893-1960) the condition that if Germany wanted its army to be received amicably by the Albanians, it should enable the province of Mitrovica and Novi Pazar to separate from Serbia and join Albania. The second condition was that the Germans would not interfere in the internal affairs of Albania.

## **SECOND PRIZREN LEAGUE AND CIVIL WAR, 1943-1944**

**T**he first condition was accomplished with the Second League of Prizren (16-20 September, 1943). The second condition would also create an advantage for the Albanian state compared to other countries where there was a presence of German forces. The Albanian government had not been forced to hand over the Jews to the German army, and as a result many Jews fleeing Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece, as well as other European countries, found refuge in Albania. In 1945 the number of Jews in Albania (which included Kosova and parts of Macedonia and Montenegro) increased fivefold compared to the beginning of World War II (Asani & Ramaj, 2017).

Although the creation of "Ethnic Albania" was accompanied by a prosperity in education, cultural emancipation, sports, and economy that was incomparably better than in previous periods (e.g. during King Zog's reign and during the Italian occupation), part of the political class, foreseeing that Germany would lose the war, was lined up on the side of the Anglo-Americans because they wanted to take advantage of the Anglo-American victory. These forces were concentrated mainly in southern Albania (the republicans of the "Balli Kombetar"/"National Front") and central Albania (the monarchists of the "Legality"). Serbian communists, worried about losing Kosova, founded the Communist Party of Albania on 8 November, 1941.

By 1943, the communist-led partisan guerrilla movement was concentrated in southern Albania, while in Kosova and other territories of Albania, which until 1941 were part of Serbia (Yugoslavia), the partisan movement was negligible.

Exactly when the dream of the forefathers of the Albanian nation was realized, when most territories with an Albanian-majority population were included in one state, when the welfare of the citizens was making the greatest progress in history, civil war broke out. The war was caused by a

misunderstanding between the Albanians of “Old Albania” (the territories of the Albanian state in the years 1913-1941) and “New Albania” (Kosova and the other territories annexed in 1941 and 1943).

Having lived for three decades in an independent Albanian state on one side and in a Serbian (Yugoslav) state as citizens exposed to extermination on the other side, made the citizens of these two Albanias have different views. These disagreements also had their political representatives. This crack in the Albanian society was instigated by the Serbian emissaries at the Communist Party of Albania, e.g., Miladin Popović, Dušan Mugoša, Tihomir Stojinić, Svetozar Vukmanović–Tempo, etc.

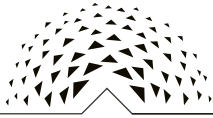
Most Albanian politicians did not see the communists as a threat as Xhafer Deva did. Even Prime Minister Rexhep Mitrovica himself ignored the danger communists posed. The clearest example of this was his intervention to get the young communist, Bujar Hoxha out of prison on account of his friendship with his late father. Having been released from prison, Bujar Hoxha assassinated Member of Parliament Ilaz Agushi, who represented Prishtina in the Albanian Parliament and was also the Deputy Speaker of this Parliament, in his apartment in Tirana.

After a series of misunderstandings originating in the different mentalities of Old and New Albania, a conflict broke out between Minister of Interior Xhafer Deva and Mehdi Frashëri (1874-1963), who held the post of Chief Regent of Albania.

Prime Minister Rexhep Mitrovica could not endure the conflict between Xhafer Deva and Mehdi Frashëri. Mitrovica resigned, followed by Xhafer Deva. The following government of Fiqiri Dine (1897-1960) was completely disoriented and without effective control over the country. Ironically enough, Fiqiri Dine was known in public as a philo-Serb (“Vrasja e Hasan Prishtinës në dosjet italiane”, 2021). After these events, the way was cleared for the Albanian communists to come to power.

The Germans already knew that they were losing the war and were withdrawing from Greece, and apparently not wanting to risk the lives of their soldiers, they flirted with the communist partisans, as described by British agents Harold William Tilman (1898-1977), Julian Amery (1919-1996), and Peter Kemp (1913-1993) in their memoirs (1997)<sup>4</sup>. As soon as the Germans withdrew from an Albanian town, partisan forces entered the town and massacred all their potential opponents. On 17 November, 1944, the communist partisans entered Tirana after it was abandoned by the Germans the day before. Thus, the communist partisans, already concentrated in southern Albania, suited the way the Germans withdrew. Being more Machiavellian and led by Serbian emissaries, the communist partisans managed to defeat the forces of the Balli Kombëtar (National Front) in southern Albania, which was the main pro-Anglo-American organization. The further they headed to the north, the stronger they

4 Tilman, H. W. (1946). *When men and mountains meet*. Cambridge: CUO., Amery, J. (1973). *Approach March*. London: Hutchinson., Kemp, P. (1990). *The thorns of memory*. London: Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd. Albanian translated version published by “Toena” in Tirana:1997.



became. Their arrival in Kosova (in Prishtina on 19 November, in Mitrovica on 23 November, and in Novi Pazar on 28 November, 1944) was accompanied by the Serbian and Bulgarian forces, with whom they cooperated. The democratic and nationalist forces were alone.

## SERBIA'S RE-ANNEXATION OF KOSOVA, 1945

On 8-10 July, 1945, under the weight of the weapons of the communist partisans, a meeting of delegates from Kosova was held in Prizren where it was decided that Kosova should separate from Albania and re-join Serbia (Yugoslavia). It is understandable that there were objections, as a number of delegates did not come out alive from the meeting (Halimi- Cërница, 2000).<sup>5</sup>

After this assembly, a military regime was established in Kosova by Comrade Tito. Kosova came under Serb rule at both the provincial and the local level, and the few Kosovar Albanian communists (no more than 20) were placed in peripheral positions.

Communist violence and terror in Kosova continued until 1966, when the President of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980) removed Vice President Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) from his party and state posts. The use of the Albanian national flag in Kosova throughout this period (1946-1966) was considered illegal and a hostile act. However, Kosovar youth and intellectuals did not give up this flag, although many people were killed or imprisoned.

One aspect of life that the Serbian government had not been able to bring back before World War II was education in the Albanian mother tongue in Kosova. Prior to World War II, the Albanian language was strictly forbidden in schools and public life. After the re-conquest of Kosova by Serbia, Albanian teachers were mistreated, but Albanian schools were not closed. In contrast, in the Sandzak of Novi Pazar the Albanian schools that were opened in 1941 were completely closed in 1945, including the one "Naim Frashëri" in Novi Pazar.

On the other hand, in communist Albania everything Kosovar was treated as Nazi-fascist and fought against fiercely.

## THIRD PRIZREN LEAGUE, 1966

At the same time, what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean? The politicians who managed to escape the bullet, persecuted by the communist occupation of Albania and the Serbian occupation of Kosova, fled to all four corners of the democratic world. Most of them were concentrated in America. They belonged to different political streams, with an

5 The victims included delegates Ramiz Cërница, Adem Stançiqi, and Hasan Dylgjeri.

extreme hostility to each other that even anti-communism could not unite. It took the hard work of the Americans and the British to create a unique anti-communist front aimed at overthrowing the communist government in Albania.

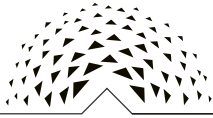
In 1949, the Americans and the British openly expressed their support for Chairman of the Balli Kombëtar (National Front) Mit'hat Frashëri (1880-1949) to become the next Prime Minister of Albania, after overthrowing the communist regime. Shortly after this decision, Frashëri was found dead by poisoning in a hotel room in New York. The case has never been solved, but it is supposed that the poisoning was done by Soviet counter-espionage or by one of its Albanian rivals.

Before receiving American and British blessings, Mit'hat Frashëri was forced to publicly give up his party program, which consisted of Kosova and other Albanian-majority territories being part of Albania. Clearly, the Americans and the British did not want trouble with Tito's Yugoslavia, which had already distanced itself from the Soviets.

Even after Mit'hat Frashëri's death, the Americans and the British did not give up on overthrowing the communist government in Albania. The closest American collaborator in this regard was Xhafer Deva. In the period 1949-1953, the Americans launched several saboteur missions in Albania (most of them through collaborators of Xhafer Deva). All of these missions failed because the communist regime of Albania always had accurate information about the operations. Kim Philby, the British agent discovered to have defected to the Soviets, was suspected of this leak, but the leaking of secret information continued even after he was removed. Xhafer Deva suspected his fellow politicians from "Old Albania", who, by becoming jealous of Deva's authority over the Americans, thwarted his (and CIA's) missions. When in 1953 the Americans gave up on overthrowing the communist government in Albania, Deva continued his activity in exile but gave up on cooperating with politicians from "Old Albania". He remained focused on cooperation with the politicians exiled from Kosova and Macedonia.

When a group of activists initiated the founding of the Third League of Prizren and offered Xhafer Deva the post of president of the organization, he accepted it only on the condition that there would be no activists from "Old Albania" in this organization (Lamaj, 2002). Xhafer Deva thus became the father of the idea of Kosova's Independence. The founding assembly of the Third League of Prizren was held in New York on 27 November, 1966, and Deva was elected its President. He led the League until his death in 1978. During all this time in Albania and Yugoslavia pupils and students were told that Xhafer Deva was the greatest enemy of Yugoslavia and communist Albania.

In the same year, when the Third League of Prizren was founded in New York, a dramatic change took place in Yugoslavia. Tito dismissed Yugoslav Vice President Aleksandar Ranković from all party and state positions. Ranković was a symbol of violence against Albanians (Vllasi, 2017). His dismissal paved the way for Kosova to enjoy Tito's policy of equality between the "nations and



nationalities” of Yugoslavia. For the first time communists of Albanian ethnicity were appointed to the leadership of Kosova (previously only Serbs had been appointed).

## THE BIRTH OF KOSOVA’S AUTONOMY

In 1968, Kosova attained its constitution and together with the province of Vojvodina became a constituent part of the Yugoslav Federation. This was then reinforced by the constitutions of Kosova, Serbia, and Yugoslavia in 1974, when Yugoslavia was de facto con-federalized.

In 1972 an orthographic congress of the Albanian language was held in Tirana, attended by representatives from Kosova. The Albanian language had been standardized in 1916 with the dialect of Elbasan, a city in the navel of Albania, where the two dialects of the Albanian language meet. This linguistic standard was respected by all Albanian governments between 1916 and 1945, but with the arrival of the communists, the majority of whom were from southern Albania, including 90% of the main leaders, they began to disrespect the linguistic standard of the Albanian language. The linguistic standard of 1916 had been in use in the Albanian schools in Kosova and Macedonia since 1941, and although it did not correspond much to the sub-dialects of Kosova, it was still respected.

## NEW ALBANIAN LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION

In 1972, the communist dictator of Albania, Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) initiated a congress that imposed a standard of the Albanian language which corresponds to the southern extreme dialect of the country. The most eminent Albanian linguists, both within the country and those in emigration, opposed this, but it did not stop the initiative. Representatives from Kosova at this congress were instructed by the Kosova political leadership to accept the standard proposed by their counterparts in Tirana.

The political leader of Kosova of the time, Mahmut Bakalli (1936-2006) claimed that he had instructed the Kosovar representatives to accept this standard of the Albanian language, out of patriotic motives, because he felt humiliated when the “Serbs insisted that the Albanians of this side and those on the other side of the border were two different peoples”.

The imposition of the Albanian language standard from 1972 in Kosova put Kosovar Albanians in an inferior position. This resulted in the paradox that while Albania was immersed in economic, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual suffering (in 1967 the practice of religions was banned and churches and mosques were destroyed), Kosova was opening up to the world along with all of former

Yugoslavia. The citizens of Kosova, with their Yugoslav passports, moved around the world freely and without visas (both in the West and in the East, as well as the countries of the Third World). Kosova acquired the University of Prishtina, the Academy of Sciences and Arts, and unprecedented economic progress and prosperity, and although it was last in the former Yugoslavia in every aspect of life, it was far ahead of Comrade Enver's Albania.

At this time, when Kosova's superiority over Albania was appearing in almost every field of life, Kosova was becoming culturally inferior through the imposition of the Albanian language standard. Unfortunately, while the language standard of 1916 had applied only to the administration, the police, the army, and the courts, the standard of 1972 was also imposed on prose, poetry, theatre, and musical texts. Thus, through Bakalli's gross political mistake Kosovar culture was placed in an inferior position. In addition, unfortunately Kosova imported history and literature textbooks from Tirana with falsified and overly ideologized historiography favouring isolationist, anti-Western and anti-religious policy of Comrade Enver.

After Albania and Yugoslavia had parted ways ideologically after the Information Bureau of the Communist Parties Resolution 1948, the images and deeds of Comrade Enver in the history books in Kosova were replaced with those of Comrade Tito, but the rest of the historiography remained completely unchanged, the same as in Tirana.

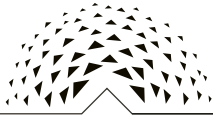
The same thing happened with literary texts. The poems about Comrade Enver were removed and poems by Kosovar poets about Comrade Tito were added, but the rest remained almost the same as the textbooks of Tirana. The most prominent Albanian poets and writers were ignored, especially the northern ones, including the bard of the Albanian literature, Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940), whom the Italian Academy of Sciences and Arts nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature. In Kosova, Fishta and other writers were banned because they were banned in Albania.

## **ATTACK ON KOSOVA'S AUTONOMY**

**K**osovar political leader Mahmut Bakalli fell from power in 1981 as a result of the mistake he had made in 1972, when he agreed to Prishtina's cultural subordination to Tirana. Due to the political changes in Yugoslavia (Ranković's downfall, the 1974 constitution, etc.), Kosova experienced rapid prosperity in comparison with neighbouring Albania, despite its cultural inferiority. This made the communist dictator of Albania Enver Hoxha jealous.

In Kosova, Comrade Enver had already set up a nursery of militants manipulated by his propaganda and was waiting for the moment to sacrifice them in order to overthrow the autonomy of Kosova. This moment came when Tito died on 4 May, 1980, and Serbian nationalists were strengthening their position in the





Yugoslav federation. Two of the Kosovar politicians who were active in Belgrade at that time, Azem Vllasi (1948- ) and Dr. Muhamet Mustafa (1950- ) described the political strengthening and nationalist character of Serbian general Nikola Ljubičić in their memoirs. His political strengthening took place even before Tito died, managing to separate 85-year-old Tito from his wife, Jovanka Broz (1924-2013), who was 32 years his junior.

There has been no material published documenting the direct or indirect cooperation between Enver Hoxha and Nikola Ljubičić, or their subordinates. With the opening of the archives, perhaps some documents can be found. One thing is clear, and that is that there was a form of cooperation between them. The actions they took in the field corresponded to their mutual interests, and the final goal was the dissolution of Kosova's autonomy achieved after 1966.

The mass demonstrations of 1981 in Kosova with the seductive slogan "Kosova Republic" shook the autonomy of Kosova. Those killed and injured in the demonstration enabled Belgrade to demand the resignation of Mahmut Bakalli and other Kosovar leaders. Thus, the most capable Kosovar politicians, who were synonymous with the development of Kosova's autonomy, were removed. On the other hand, the most energetic part of the Kosovar population, the intellectual youth, was sent to prisons with draconian sentences. The photos of Stalin and Enver Hoxha, found by Yugoslav police in the shelters of Kosovar Marxist-Leninist groups instigated by Tirana, terrified liberal and democratic public opinion, both within Yugoslavia and in the West. This situation is best described in the memoir "Kosovar Resistance Between two Fires" by Sabri Maxhuni-Novosella (1943- ) (Maxhuni – Novosella, 2010), political prisoner and later an exile in Albania, Turkey and Sweden.

Belgrade's ruination of Kosova's autonomy was backed by Tirana who branded as stalinism Kosova's natural intent (to strengthen subjectivity). After Mahmut Bakalli's exclusion from the political scene, political power in Kosova was taken over by Azem Vllasi, who hoped that the Serbian nationalist forces, already consolidated by their charismatic leader, Slobodan Milošević, could be restrained through an alliance with Slovenian, Croat, and Bosniak politicians.

Azem Vllasi pursued a policy of opposing Milošević, but the flaw of this policy was that it was defensive in anticipation of Slovenian-Croat-Bosnian support. In the spirit of dismantling Kosova's autonomy was the idea of banning the Albanian national flag again, which had been allowed in Kosova three years after Ranković's downfall (when the use of flags was allowed for all ethnic minorities).

When the use of flags was allowed for the Hungarian, Italian, Turkish, and other minorities (in 1969), they were required to put the communist star on the flag, thus the flags they used were different from the flags of their home countries, which did not have this star. In fact, Hungary had the star on the flag from 1949 to 1956, but it was removed in 1957. The flag of Albania included the communist star, and when the Albanians in Yugoslavia were allowed to use

the flag, they adopted this without change because they were outraged by the Serbian insistence that the Albanians in Kosova were a different ethnicity from the Albanians in Albania.

In 1986, Serbia's political leadership insisted that since other ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia had their own flags that were different from their home countries, Albanians in Yugoslavia should also have one that was different from the flag of Albania. Azem Vllasi then came up with the idea that the Albanians in Yugoslavia would use the flag where the star would not be between the two heads of the black double-headed eagle, like in Albania, but on the side. This idea was accepted without discussion by the provincial bodies. There was a silent resistance by the youth indoctrinated with Tirana propaganda, but it was welcomed by Kosovar anti-communist nationalists. Since the star on the flag was already in the corner, they usually folded it in a way that the star did not appear at all.

Despite this deft manoeuvre by Vllasi, the expected support from Slovenians, Croats, and Bosniaks did not come, and thus Vllasi ended up in prison in 1989. This came shortly after Slobodan Milošević had promised it to the crowd of one million Serbs gathered in Belgrade.

After Vllasi's imprisonment, his political garrison was completely dismantled, just like that of Bakalli eight years earlier. Autonomy had already been stripped off and its formal abolition was not a problem. The Provincial Assembly of Kosova, accustomed to Vllasi's charismatic leadership, surrendered cowardly after his imprisonment. Out of the 180 members of the assembly, only ten took the courage to oppose the abolition of autonomy ("Këta janë deputetët shqiptarë", 2017).

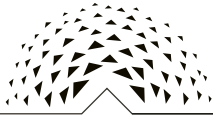
This went along with the suppression of each provincial institution such as the police, territorial defence, and the looting of Kosova's property. The next composition of the Kosova Parliament was more representative of Kosova's interest, but it was already too late, as Serbia had achieved the goal of dismantling Kosova's autonomy before democratic winds blew in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

## ON THE EVE OF THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall found Albania isolated with a communist dictatorship, in poverty and suffering, and Kosova with a lost autonomy and a Serbian communist regime. In Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia, changes had already begun towards pluralism, but the idea was that if pluralism was applied in Yugoslavia, Kosova would be an exception because here "interethnic relations were endangered and the situation could spiral out of control" (Rilindja, 1989, p. 5).

In the hall of the Parliament of Kosova, the Conference of the Socialist Youth League of Kosova was held with the slogans and clichés typical since the end of World War II. One discussant took the risk of being jailed for making the blasphemous statement that "Kosova must not be a reservation where animal





experiments are carried out. We must have freedom of expression, political pluralism with multi-party democracy, the release of political prisoners”(Rilindja, 1989, p. 5).<sup>6</sup> In the hall where there were about 300 young people and guests from the highest political structures of Kosova (about 80% of whom were Albanians), suddenly frantic applause of the majority of the Kosovar Albanian youth erupted. That was it. A desperate reaction of the young Serbs ensued, who were shocked more by the applause than by the speech “*of a nationalist who should not have been in that room*”. The newspapers devoted more space to this speech than to the rest of the conference. “Voice of America” in particular, as it was the only medium that people secretly listened to in Albania. Even Radio Tirana (“Evening News”, 1989) could not ignore this but wanted to disguise it by presenting it as a verbal confrontation between Albanian and Serbian youth in Prishtina.

In Kosova, the path was open for the formation of non-communist organizations, from the Council for Human Rights and Freedoms headed by Dr. Zakeria Cana to the Democratic League of Kosova (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*, LDK) headed by Dr. Ibrahim Rugova. The open American support for Rugova and his policy caused uneasiness in Tirana to both the government and its people. The populace saw this as an opportunity for reformation whereas the government felt threatened and as a result democratic change was imposed there. Kosovars began to visit Albania by going to Greece and continuing from there to Albania. After Macedonia’s independence in 1991, they travelled through Macedonia. The Kosova-Albania border could only be crossed with exit visas, which the Serbian regime had not issued since 1948.

The period of 1991-1999 was a time when Albania was in a difficult situation, while Kosova was plunged into deep captivity with apartheid and ethnic segregation, unprecedented in Europe. Kosova was waiting for Albania’s help, but Tirana had its own problems that it considered more serious than those of Kosova. Albania had information about Kosova only through a limited number of Kosovar visitors. For example, a well-known TV journalist from Tirana was surprised how during her visit to Ulqin/Ulcinj (a town in Montenegro) all “Yugoslavs” spoke Albanian. She had no idea that ethnic Albanians constituted 90% of the people living there. On the other hand, Kosovars were shocked that in Tirana there was a lack of respect for the national flag, which they considered sacred.

## KOSOVO WAR

**A**wareness only rose when almost one million Kosovar refugees took refuge in Albania during the 1999 war. Of course, this social contact enabled them to mutually understand that they shared the same language and origin

6 This speech was made by the author of this paper and published in the daily Kosovar newspaper “*Rilindja*” on 26 December, 1989.

but that they had different habits and worldviews about life and society. They could understand each other well only during great disasters, such as the war in 1999. The Kosova war of 1999 had a tendency of elements of civil war among Kosovar Albanians. In this respect, the government in Tirana played a negative role. Credit for why the civil war did not occur at the same time as the war for liberation from Serbia goes to the United States and its allies but also to the political philosophy of President Rugova.

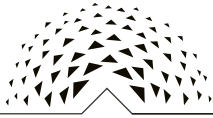
Since the founding of the LDK, its leader, Rugova, has stood for two things. First, he accepted Kosovar Albanians from the entire ideological spectrum as his collaborators, including liberals, democrats, nationalists, Enverists, Titoists, and even recent collaborators of Milošević. Second, he was a pacifist and avoided conflicts not only within Kosova but also violent confrontations with Serbia.

Rugova initially cooperated well with Dr. Sali Berisha (1945-), the Democratic President of Albania, but at the end of 1996 he broke relations off due to the insistence of the President of Albania that Kosovars participate in the elections in Serbia ("Viti 1996", 2020), opposing Rugova's struggle to prove that the Serbian government in Kosova was illegitimate and illegal. The lack of communication between them continued until the death of Rugova in 2006.

Rugova's communication with Albania's socialist leaders, who were former communists and came to power in 1997, was also strained. He had a liberal democratic and anti-communist spirit. The socialist government in Tirana separated from the Enverist part of the LDK. Formed in 1998 as a rival party of LDK, the United Democratic Movement (Lëvizja e Bashkuar Demokratike, LBD), led by Dr. Rexhep Qosja (1936- ), was committed to Tirana, while Rugova was committed to Washington.

However, when war in Kosova was imminent in 1998, pacifist Rugova feared the Americans would leave Kosova in the lurch and did not dare to lead the war as Slovenian President Milan Kučan had done (1941- ), as did Croatian President Franjo Tuđman (1922-1999) and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović (1925-2003).

Still, when they realized the inevitability of the war, some of Rugova's supporters did not wait for his command and started the war with Serbia. Rugova's rivals, who had the support of official Tirana, also joined the war. The insurrections and killings of President Rugova's supporters became a feature of this war, which NATO ended with a 78-day bombardment of Serbian targets. The most grievous murder was that of Ahmet Krasniqi, Minister of Defence of Kosova, on 21 September, 1998, in Tirana. Assassinations against Rugova's closest associates continued even after NATO troops entered Kosova. Assassinations against Rugova's closest associates continued even after NATO troops entered Kosova ("Të gjithë zyrtarët e LDK-së", 2017).



## INDEPENDENCE

It was US President George W. Bush who chose Tirana in 2007 to state that “[a]t some point in time, sooner rather than later, you’ve got to say, ‘Enough is enough. Kosovo is independent’” (Stolberg, 2007). This was not only a message for Serbia; this was primarily a message for Albania. The day this statement was made is also significant: 10 June, the day the League of Prizren had been held in 1878, and the day the Serbian rule over Kosova ended through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 in 1999.

The coming to power of Hashim Thaçi in Kosova in 2007 was characterized by a conflict with Dr. Sali Berisha, who returned to power in Albania. Even when the Socialists returned to power in Albania (2013), led by Edi Rama (1964- ), relations with all Kosovar leaders who had come to power in Kosova in the meantime, Isa Mustafa (1951- ), Ramush Haradinaj (1968- ), Albin Kurti (1975- ) and Vjosa Osmani (1982- ), continued to worsen.

The relationships reached the lowest level when the Prime Minister of Kosova Ramush Haradinaj addressed the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama with Albanian banal words in the presence of French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Pajaziti, 2019).

It is also interesting to note that Kosovar Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti (1976-) signed a declaration of commitment on 4 September, 2020 in Washington in front of US President Donald Trump for the acceptance of the Mini Schengen Agreement. Shortly before going to the Oval Office, he published an article listing 14 reasons against this agreement between Prime Minister Rama and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić (and Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Zoran Zaev), claiming that Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama was acting against Kosova’s interests.

Whilst the relations between the political classes of Kosova and Albania are more or less balanced, in the cultural field Kosova continues to behave inferiorly due to self-discrimination.

The problem of the Albanian linguistic standard remains the most crucial issue. For more than two decades there has been an initiative for Kosova to either negotiate an Albanian linguistic standard that would be more acceptable to Kosovars or to create a standard of its own. However, this has only remained an idea without further steps. There are some authors who try to write fiction in the northern dialect and translators who translate from foreign languages into this dialect, but their number is small. There are also attempts to return the local dialect into musical texts and theatre. Recently, there has been a tendency for the lyrics of popular music created in Albania to be in the dialect of Kosova. This is because this genre of music has progressed more in Kosova than in Albania, where it was banned during the communist dictatorship.

Albania’s greatest cultural supremacy over Kosova appears in the field of the media. Albanian television stations enter the Kosova media market without the need for licensing and without any fees, while domestic television stations

are required to have a license and pay taxes in order to operate in their own country in Kosova. This absurd policy of the media licensing agency in Kosova (“Independent Media Commission”) has its roots in the cultural inferiority of Kosova to Albania that was set in the 1970s.

## KOSOVAR NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Despite the cultural inferiority in many fields, Kosova strongly disagrees with Tirana’s narrative of the recent history. There are many historical personalities who are considered official heroes in both Kosova and Albania. However, there are also some others who are officially considered heroes in Kosova but are treated as traitors in Albania, such as Rexhep Mitrovica (former Prime Minister of Albania), Xhafer Deva (former Minister of Interior of Albania), Iljaz Agushi (former Deputy Prime Minister and former Deputy Speaker of the Albanian Parliament).<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, some of the Serbian personalities that Kosovars consider Kosova’s greatest enemies, such as Aleksandar Ranković (former Vice President of Yugoslavia), Ivan Milutinović (Serbian General), Miladin Popović (founder of the Communist Party of Albania), are in the official register of the heroes in Albania.<sup>8</sup>

However, the national consciousness of Kosova awoke to a large extent after the admission of the Kosova national football team to FIFA and UEFA.<sup>9</sup> The successes of the Kosova national team (e.g., the transition from League D to League C, coming very close to qualifying for the 2021 European Championship), resulted in Kosova’s stadiums being decorated with yellow and blue, the national colours of Kosova.

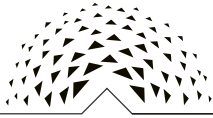
Prior to these successes, most Kosovars played for the Albanian national team. When the national team of Albania played a match in Belgrade with Serbia on 14 October, 2014, out of the eleven players on the field eight were from Kosova. Of course, the fans from Kosova supported Albania and the stadiums were decorated with red and black, the national colours of Albania. However, when the Kosova national team started to become successful, and in the absence of a proper stadium that complies FIFA standards, it played its matches in Albania, the Albanian fans’ interest was low, and the Kosovar fans returned to the yellow and blue colours.

A personal story should illustrate the conclusions of this paper. A friend of mine from Tirana who has been working for UNMIK in Kosova for a long time told me in great confidence: “Although both of my parents belong to patriotic families,

7 Presidente e Republikës së Kosovës - DR. VJOSA OSMANI - SADRIU, *Dekoratat*, <https://president-ksgov.net/sq/dekoratat>

8 *Kërko Dekorime Archives*, <https://president.al/category/kerko-dekorime/>

9 Kosova gained UEFA membership at the summit meeting in Budapest in May 2016.



I am ashamed to admit that I enjoy talking to Serbs more than Kosovars". I replied that this is natural, since he was born in an independent country, like his father and his grandfather. Serbs were also born and raised in their own country, as were their fathers and grandfathers, while Kosovars were born into captivity in the same way as their fathers and grandfathers. It is thus naturally easier to understand Serbs than Kosovars. His response was: "I have noticed that with Kosovars younger than 25, I comprehend them more easily."

## CONCLUSION

Serbia's stance towards Kosova (including that of the former Yugoslavia) is the main factor that throughout modern history has politically distinguished Kosova from Albania. This difference has left deep marks and created a distinction between the Albanian and the Kosovar national identities.

Whether these identities will be closer or further apart from each other will depend on the Serbian (friendly or hostile) attitude towards Kosova, although in both cases they will be two separate national identities. Surely, the mentality of the generations that are up to 25 years old now will dominate the mentality of the Kosovar society as a whole when they become 55 years old, and they will communicate more easily with Albania, but also with Serbia.

The anticipated common future of the Balkans in the European Union will bring Kosovars closer to their brothers from Albania, and it will also make them friends with the hitherto hostile Serbs; however, their unique past will serve as a stamp of identity.