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THE ALBANIANS OF PRESHEVE, BUJANOVĆ AND MEDVEGJE

Presheve, Bujanovć and Medvegje are three Albanian communes incorporated in the Republic of Serbia. Under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, these regions have been an integral part of the Kosova vilayet, and Presheve was known as the centre of Zhupa region since the 14th century. Following the Berlin Congress of 1878, the border between the Kosova vilayet and Serbia passed through Ristovac, between Bujanovć and Vranja. Hence, on the basis of the decisions of this congress, the Albanian territories of Toplica, situated in the north of present day Kosova, as well as the regions in the East going up to the vicinity of Nish, were annexed to Serbia. The Serbian occupation of these territories was accompanied by a campaign of genocide against the Albanian autochthonous population and on this occasion over 700 Albanian villages were expropriated and some of the people deported, while other whole families were persecuted and massacred. Before and after the year 1878, according to the administrative and territorial division of the Ottoman empire, Presheve was kaza centre, also comprising the Bujanovć territories. During the Balkan wars (1912-1913) the Albanians of these territories, like all the Albanians in Kosova, were submitted to all-out Serbian terror and genocide. Consequently, almost the whole population of this region was forced to get down to the South, to Skoplje's plain and only after several months returned to its own territories.

After the truncation of the Albanian territories in 1913 and after World War I, Presheva was annexed to Serbia and became the centre of the Zhupa district of Skoplje including Bujanovć and its surroundings. With Yugoslavia's administrative division in banovina (1929), Presheva and Bujanovć were incorporated in Vardar's banovin with Skoplje as its centre. After World War Two, the Albanians of Presheva, Bujanovć and Medvegje were again divided from the Albanians of Kosova and Macedonia. These territories became district or commune centres in the framework of the Republic of Serbia. Henceforth, in the hitherto states, the Albanians of Presheva, Bujanovć and Medvegje had not had the possibility to choose either the state or the federal unit in the framework of which they would like to live.

Since the times of antiquity the region of Presheva, Bujanovć and Medvegje has been inhabited by the Illyrians and has been part of the Dardanian territory. Just like the early inhabitants of Kosova and Western Macedonia, this population constitutes the most ancient ethnos in these territories. It has undergone the same ethnogenetic processes as the Albanians.

Just like in all the Albanian territories, Ottoman rule was accompanied by the Islamization of the Albanians of this region. But despite the religious pertaining of the inhabitants, the administrative divisions imposed by different occupiers, the inhabitants of these territories were and continue to be component part of the Albanian ethnic entity. From the ethnographic viewpoint, they constitute an entity with the Albanians of Kosova and Northern Macedonia. They use the same popular dialect

and the same standard language. In a closer region, they are an indivisible part of the ethnographic, geographic and economic entity of the Karadak zone, which extends into Kosova, Macedonia and Serbia, as well as in the Gollak zone of Kosova. In the course of all the historic periods the inhabitants of these areas have maintained their living links with Podujeva, Gjilan, Kamenica, Kaçanik, Skoplje and Kumanova.

The Presheva, Bujanovc and Medvegje region covers a territory of 1 249 km² and has a population of about 100 000 inhabitants. Albanians account for the absolute majority of the population. Hence, in the Presheva commune the Albanians constitute 95 per cent of the population, in Bujanovc about 65 per cent and Medvegje over 35 per cent of the population, whereas the other part of the population is composed of Serbs and Romanians. A considerable part of the Serbian inhabitants of these communes are colonists, established there after the violent deportation en masse of the Albanian to Turkey (in 1912-1913, 1918-1941, 1953-1966) and during the colonizing agrarian reform (1918-1941).

The Albanians of Presheva, Bujanovc and Medvegje have taken an active part in all the cultural, social, economic, and political processes, etc., of the Albanians as a whole. They participated in the Albanian National Movement and particularly in the Albanian League of Prizren, in the anti-Ottoman uprisings of the beginning of the 20th century, which led to the Proclamation of Albania's Independence, in the struggle of the Albanians of the truncated territories for liberation and national unification during the years 1918-1941, as well as against the reinvasion of these territories by the Serbian, Macedonian and Bulgarian communist forces at the end of World War Two. Likewise, they have made an important contribution to the development of the Albanian national culture.

The territory of these communes is crossed by international railways and highways linking Europe with Asia. Although these communes have favourable natural and geographical conditions, due to continuous national oppression, many Albanians of these areas have emigrated to Kosova and beyond it, to Turkey, Western Europe, etc.

During World War Two, aiming at narrowing the Albanian ethnic territory and at assimilating the population, the Yugoslav leadership separated the inhabitants of these areas from the Albanians of Kosova and Macedonia. Since that time they were incorporated in the Republic of Serbia, and in the districts of Vranja and Leskovc. The Serbian communist totalitarian violence and chauvinistic policy continued even in this period. The most concrete manifestation of this policy was the violent expulsion of the Albanian autochthonous inhabitants of these territories to Turkey. Consequently, in that country there are as many Albanians from these areas as there are here. Deportations were not interrupted even after 1966, because there still existed the factors that had originally brought them about and instigated them. Later there followed the banning of cultural and political activities. These territories were left in a marked economic backwardness, while the prospects for the development of the Albanian ethnic collectivity remained closed.

Economic growth in the districts of these communes are part of a display of sensible disparity. Vranja, which is inhabited by Serbs has reached another degree of development, and its industry works with raw materials extracted from Presheva and Bujanovc, which in the meantime remain the most backward and poorest communes.

Due to the low-level economic growth, national incomes per capita in Presheva are 5 times lower than the average in the Republic of Serbia. Likewise, in 1988, the investments scale in Presheva was only 6.2 per cent of the average in the Republic, and the index of employed people was three times lower than in Serbia. In the territory of this commune, all the Serbian inhabitants are employed, whereas the few new jobs are reserved to the Serbs coming from other communes. In Presheva, one out of 18 Albanian inhabitants is employed, in Bujanovc one out of 22, whereas in Medvegje this ratio is a little more favourable. Although in the Bujanovc commune the Albanians account for the absolute majority of the population, they have only 30 per cent of the delegates of the communal Assembly, constituting its minority.

Injustices, segregation and oppression are particularly grave in the field of education. In the territories of these communes, the programs, texts and extension of the network of Albanian education are determined by the responsible organs of the Republic of Serbia. In the history of these areas the first parallel of the secondary school in the Albanian language was opened only in 1961, but recently after two decades of activity, the Albanian secondary schools in Bujanovc and Medvegje were closed down. Even the "May 25" elementary school, with about 700 pupils was closed in Bujanovc. The education of children in the Albanian language was banned in the creshes and kindergartens of Bujanovc and Medvegje. All materials of the Albanian national history have been removed from the didactic programs of the Albanian schools of these communes. The subjects of literature, music and arts have been fully divested of national content. After a barbarian undertaking over 2 000 by the most renowned Albanian authors, were removed from the libraries of the school and the town. Over 100 Albanian teachers were dismissed using violent measures and ideopolitical differentiation from the Albanian schools.

The Albanian cultural and informative activity in these communes has become almost impossible. Meanwhile, by closing down the mass media organs in the Albanian language in Kosova, these areas have remained in thick darkness. Long ago it was not allowed to issue any kind of newspaper in Albanian in these territories. The low level of economic growth, the low standard of living, and shortages in health service have led to a drastic spread of contagious diseases, while the infant mortality rate is 80-100 per thousand; the highest in Europe.

Like elsewhere in Yugoslavia, every manifestation of the Albanians' free thinking has been severely punished, followed imprisonment and police persecution and by the loss of the right to schooling and employment. The Albanians of these communes have been deprived of the right to contact and communication with the motherland, Albania. The exodus of the Albanians, particularly of youngsters, has assumed new proportions as an effect of the freshest developments following Yugoslavia's dissolution, the war in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ever greater impoverishment, and the attempts to mobilize and send the Albanians of these zones to various war fronts. The banning of circulation in the former Republic of Macedonia had a negative effect on the further deterioration of the Albanians' situation in these communes.

The general situation in these communes has led to increased dissatisfaction, the strengthening of the Albanians resistance and organisation to face the repressive regime, segregation and apartheid. Recently, two political parties pursuing democratic

programs have been created there. Their programmes are an embodiment of the basic demands of the Albanians in these areas, such as those of free economic organization, liberty of thinking and organization and in general the known internationally recognized standards of human rights. Apart from these values, these parties, charity and intellectual societies that have started operating in these communes, have as their principal goal the political, economic, cultural liberation, the doing away with segregational relations, henceforth, the unobstructed development of all the Albanian national cultural values on a common ethnic basis. These parties have underscored that in order to attain a relatively satisfactory degree of development in these communes on a social, economic and national plane, they must not be separated from the Serbian state hegemony. Their division from the natural geo-economic, national, communicative, ecological, and urban, etc., spheres has been one of their main hindrances. For this reason, since 1968, the public demand has been raised in this region for its unification with Kosova, the creation of an entity that would ensure optimal possibilities for allround development and that would help to extinguish the permanent sources of inter-ethnic conflicts in these areas.

At the time of former Yugoslavia's destruction, the Serbian state power intensified their endeavours to implement the Serbian allnational project through war, violence and ethnic cleansing. Under these circumstances, facing the danger of national assimilation and forcibly imposed realities, aware of the major problems the European Union, CSCE and UNO are facing to resolve the problems among the peoples in the territories of former Yugoslavia, the Albanians of this region participated en masse in the Referendum of March 1 and 2, 1992. They declared that they are for political and territorial autonomy, for enjoying the right to join Kosova. In the most democratic form, in the documents of the Peace Conference of Hague and Brussels, the Albanians of Presheva, Bujanovc and Medvegje that it was the most suitable democratic situation that would enable free economic and cultural circulation within their ethnic entity in the framework of the state community that they were actually in.

As proposed by the Hague document, through autonomy or special status, and under respective international control, the Albanians hoped to realize the right of using national symbols, the right of autonomy in education, culture, economy, health services etc., the right of having a lawmaking organ, administrative structure, including regional police and courts, which would treat cases that had to do with the territory. The composition of these organs would reflect the composition of the population of the territory.

The presentation of these demands was closely linked with the way autonomy was realized in the framework of Serbian state power and policy, which, as it is already seen, use force, violence and terror as the main argument to solve problems.

Knowing the history of international relations in the Balkans, particularly in centralized and non-democratic Serbia, it is absurd to expect that the solution to the question of autonomy of the Albanians of these zones can be realized by changing the laws of the constitution through a regular procedure. Likewise, the possibility that this solution be attained through interstate bilateral cooperation is actually excluded. Under these conditions, the only way to deal with this question is by negotiations and agreements between the Albanians representatives of Presheva, Bujanovc and Medvegje and those of the Serbian state power, but with international mediation.

The future work of drafting the documents of autonomy will be of great value, not only regarding the definition of the physiognomy of this autonomy, but also regarding their presentation and endeavours to arouse the awareness of international institutions.

THE ALBANIAN QUESTION IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Kosovo, respectively the Albanians' question in former Yugoslavia, is at present one of the hottest issues in Europe. This situation is undoubtedly a consequence of the Albanians' willingness for self-determination and independence, to live free and united in their ethnic territories. The Albanian people have clearly articulated their aspiration for self-determination and national unity since the time of the League of Prizren in 1878-1881 and with the proclamation of the independence in Vllam in 1912. But this right was snatched by Europe through the decisions of the London Conference of Ambassadors of the years 1912-1913, thereby the Versailles Treaty of 1919-1920, the Paris Peace Conference of 1945 and the current London acts of London and Geneva on former Yugoslavia.

Naturally the Albanian people never reconciled with this arbitrary decision, but continued the armed struggle for liberation and national unity. Nevertheless, our ethnic and historic territories were further fragmented, and at present are more minutely partitioned than ever before. As a result of this division, the Albanian people in the past, but also at present, have been subjected to heinous attacks.

Currently, our nation is being crushed historically, following that of World War I and World War Two, as well as their regional and national rights. This historic moment was created over the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation and the reorganisation of Yugoslavia's territory. Our public opinion was the viewpoint that neither west nor east had organised this first as the situation demanded. It is thought that we did not succeed in imposing the recognition of our political will on Europe and the world. This embarrassment on the future of our ethnic prospects from the time really can have been facing for these years, since Serbia occupied Kosovo. The Albanians in Macedonia, the region of Preshevo, Tuzenovo, Novi Selo and Montenegro, too, are in an unclear situation.

The question arises, will the international Conference on former Yugoslavia recognize our political will, diplomatically and diplomatically, declaration in favour of Kosovo's independence, the equality of the Albanians with the Macedonian people in Macedonia, and the sovereignty of the Albanians in their ethnic areas, territories. What shall we do if this new, but legitimate requests are ignored again? Well, we, perhaps, extremely proud in our dramatic quest we go for a new, more radical and extreme application of the ethnic territories with the Albanians state.

In the solution of the numerous questions and demands, facing not only in the Balkan region, but also in the world, Kosovo's question is set forth as the primary and crucial problem to the gradual solution of our question. At present it is evident that with the Albanian people in Kosovo have democratically, legally and legitimately

The future work in building the documents of the development of the Albanians of this region will be to ensure their presentation and realization in the framework of international law and international treaties that have already been signed in these communities. These parties have understood that, in order to attain a relatively satisfactory degree of development in these communities on a social, economic and educational plane, they must not be separated from the Serbian state hegemony. Their division from the natural geo-economic, national, governmental, religious, and urban, etc., spheres has been one of their main handicaps. For this reason, since 1968, the public demand has been raised in this region for its unification with Kosovo, the creation of an entity that would ensure a better development for all-around development and that would help to extinguish the potential sources of inter-ethnic conflicts in these areas.

At the time of former Yugoslavia's destruction, the Serbian state power unilaterally started endeavours to implement the Serbian national project through wars, sieges, and ethnic cleansing. Under those circumstances, facing the danger of national annihilation and forcibly imposed realities, aware of the major problems the European Union, OSCE and UNO are facing to resolve the problems among the peoples in the territories of former Yugoslavia, the Albanians of this region participated on 1992 in the referendum of March 1 and 2, 1992. They declared that they are for political and territorial autonomy, for enjoying the right to join Kosovo. In the most democratic form, in the documents of the Peace Conference of Hague and Brussels, the Albanians of Presheva, Bujanovac and Medveđa that it was the most sensible proposition, a solution that would enable free economic and cultural circulation within their ethnic entity, in the framework of the state community that they were actually in.

As proposed by the Hague document, through autonomy or special status and under cooperative international control, the Albanians hoped to realize the right of using various resources, the right of autonomy in education, culture, economy, health services etc., the right of having a law-making organ, administrative structure, including regional police and courts, which would treat cases that had to do with the territory. The composition of these organs would reflect the composition of the population of the territory.

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