

# THE KOSOVO QUESTION— PAST AND PRESENT

*Dimitrije Bogdanović*

**T**ODAY KOSOVO has become a general term denoting a complex problem in which history is being faced with our reality. The Serbs and Albanians, two neighboring Balkan peoples, are weighted down with antagonisms which have been accumulating over the past 300 years. The problem cannot simply be reduced to the legal constitutional status of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo, nor to the position of the Yugoslav Albanians. On the contrary, it is far more a question of the survival and position of the entire Serbian nation—in Kosovo, in Yugoslavia, and in the Balkans. In this respect, Kosovo is just a symptom belying deeper processes, in which it is not the fate of the Yugoslav Albanians that is at stake, but that of the Serbs.

It is, therefore, extremely important, indeed essential, that the Kosovo question should be viewed in a historical light. If it is not, the present political situation is incomprehensible, nor can the real meaning and range of Albanian intentions be grasped. Moreover, the position of the Serbs in the Balkans is much too delicate for it to be examined merely in the light of present events. It is being increasingly concealed under a thick veil of mystification. The historic memory of a whole people is being wiped out, the very foundations of its national consciousness are being undermined, while its conscience is being burdened with a mortgage of fictitious or foreign guilt. For this reason, real and complete historical facts have a reviving effect on the Serbian people, returning to them their sense of identity and enabling them to see matters in their true colors and proportions.

The first task is to dispose of some “carefully cultivated” errors. An example is the formula of artificial symmetry, by which relations between nations are relativized to such a degree that all guilt is concealed and any yardstick of historical events goes by the board. Reference to the violence and genocide being exercised on the Serbs in Kosovo is deemed “unacceptable,” as it “insults” the feelings of the Yugoslav Albanians. The very history of Serbian-Albanian relations is “taboo.” Instead of a real picture of those relations, which for the last three centuries have been characterized by violent treatment of the Serbs by Albanian Muslim converts, we are handed the idea of “reciprocal responsibility,” whereby the supposed 20 year period of “Greater-

Serbian violence” against the Albanian population is equally balanced with the 200 year period of Albanian abuse of the Serbs.

A historian will note that application of the famous “principle” that not all forms of nationalism are equally negative, that the difference should be made between the nationalism of the oppressed and that of the oppressor, leads in practice to a calculated tolerance of megalomaniac myths on the part of those Yugoslav nations of national minorities which were declared “oppressed” in the period 1918–1941. Greater-Albanian mythomania and a marked tolerance of this concept are very symptomatic here.

The questions of ethnogenesis or national origin, for example, offer another case of political mystification. Today, they are of no importance. What does it matter whether the Albanians are descended from the Illyrians, the Thracians, or the Pelasgians? Yet, much insistence is placed on the Illyrian origin of the Albanian people, which only goes to illustrate political aggressiveness. Kosovo has been a Serbian land since the migrations of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This historical fact, which is based on a great and obvious number of sources’ historical, archaeological, linguistic and anthropo-geographic—is now being opposed by what is basically a racist theory of the Illyrian origin of the Albanians in order to prove the claim that the Albanians have a greater right to the territories inhabited by the Serbian people. Scientifically speaking, however, the ethnogenesis of the Albanians is one of the least illuminated aspects of European prehistory, hence categorical claims of this kind are decidedly inappropriate. If we follow the logic of linguistic analysis, the Albanians could equally have descended from the Thracians as from the Illyrians, but in that case the first Albanians also moved around the Balkans settling the territory of Illyrian “Albania” during the great period of migrations. Therefore, their “earliest inhabitant” status is relative. Albanian prehistory definitely goes back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when they are mentioned for the first time. Up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, they do not represent a sufficiently clear historical entity, being nomadic shepherds, highlanders far from the sea, small in number, and with an ethnically vague identity. Finally, what European nation can lay claim to rights dating from that historical maelstrom preceding the

migrations? Claiming historical, and especially territorial, rights on the ethnic map of premigration Europe is simply impossible—for in this period there was no France and no Frenchmen, no Germany and no Germans, no Russia and no Russians, and no Serbia and no Albania. What is important to remember is that the Slavs, when settling in the Balkans, came as crop farmers and mainly stayed in the plains and river valleys of present-day Albania, leaving the mountains to the early Balkan shepherds, who included Vlachs and the ancestors of present-day Albanians. The first contact between the Serbian and Albanian peoples was not a conflict, and relations were to remain peaceable right up to the conversion of the Albanians to Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There was no grabbing of Albanian land, nor were the Albanian people oppressed, driven out, or destroyed. Serbo-Albanian relations in the Middle Ages can be regarded rather as a symbiosis. In the medieval state of Serbia, from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century onward, the Arbanasi (Albanians) were completely integrated, legally and socially, both landowners and citizens and, also, the peasant shepherds who enjoyed the same status as the Vlachs. There was certainly no discrimination or feuding based on nationality. The Serbian Emperor Dušan (1331–1355), in keeping with medieval ideas on the state, which were never national in the modern sense of the word, bore the title “Emperor of the Serbs, Greeks, Bulgars, and Arbanasi (Albanians).”

The region of Kosovo and Metohija has been settled since the early Middle Ages by a homogeneous Serb population. The first Serbian states of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries leaned toward Kosovo. Under Byzantine rule, right up to its final incorporation into the Serbian Nemanjić state in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Kosovo was, ethnically speaking, a Serbian land when political integration began. This is borne out by historical documents (the charters of Serbian rulers), particularly by a study of the anthroponyms (first names) they contain, and the original toponyms (place names)—for in Kosovo and Metohija these are all mainly of Slav origin. Nomadic groups of Albanian shepherds, mostly of the Roman Catholic faith, made up a negligible two percent of the overall population and were concentrated in the mountainous west, around what is today the Yugoslav-Albanian border. There were also a few Albanian craftsmen, miners, and merchants in the towns.

It was the ethnic homogeneity of this densely populated medieval territory that led to its rapidly becoming the state, political, economic, and cultural center of the Serbian nation. The Serbian Orthodox Church, the national religious organization since the birth of the state in 1219, played its part in maintaining Kosovo as a Serbian territory. The leading monasteries founded by the Nemanjić dynasty (Gračanica, The Mother of God of Ljeviša, Banjska, Dečani, and Holy Archangels) with their icon paintings showing the sovereignty of the state and continuity of Serbian rule, relics of canonized rulers, and its Great Church (the Peć Patriarchate)—whose relics of canonized leaders

of the national Church, together with many other monasteries and a dense network of small parish churches all over Kosovo and neighboring regions, represent the basis on which the Serbs formed and consolidated their national consciousness and built up a national and cultural identity. These monuments, then, concentrated and deployed over one territory, are national boundary-stones. The only intact survivors of the Turkish-Albanian Muslim devastation of these parts, they are still active centers of Serbian spiritual and national consciousness. Serbia’s architectural and art monuments in Kosovo rank among the finest achievements of medieval Europe, while the literary creations from this region represent the very foundations of the Serbian written word, which helped form a national consciousness during this period. It was rightly said (in the Serbian Memorandum to the ambassadors of the European Powers in London in 1913) that this territory is a kind of “Holy Land” for the Serbian people for it was here in the Middle Ages that they attained a high degree of civilization and it is on the achievements of this period that their European identity rests.

The situation in Kosovo did not essentially change even in the course of the Ottoman invasions in the last two decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century—that is to say, ethnic relations were unaltered and the region retained its Serbian character. Unlike Albania, where Djordje Kastriot Skanderbeg, relying on the Albanian people, tried to unite the Albanian feudal landowners to resist the Turks in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, Kosovo remained Serbian, sharing the political fate of the other Serbian regions in the despotic domains of the Lazarević and Branković families. The areas in which there existed a Serbo-Albanian ethnic symbiosis at that time lay far to the west of Kosovo, in lower Zeta, the Scutari Plain, and the northern Albanian mountains. Anthroponymic study of original Ottoman *defteri* (censuses) in the 15<sup>th</sup> century shows that the line of the present-day state border between Yugoslavia and Albania, in its northern sector, chiefly coincides with today’s ethnic boundary between the Serbs and Albanians.

The loss of independence and freedom suffered after the Ottoman invasions caused a radical change in the living conditions of the Serbian people. Marking the transition from Serbian freedom to Ottoman oppression stands an event which was to become the very symbol of Serbian history—the Battle of Kosovo fought on June 15/28, 1389. In terms of historical significance and the place it assumed in the national memory, the battle is one of the greatest armed confrontations in Europe and can be compared to the Battle of Kulikov (1380), the Battle of Poitiers (732), or, even farther back in history, to the Battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.). The strong resistance offered by the Serbs in the face of the Ottoman hordes was put down in the physical military sense, but the deaths of Prince Lazar and his soldiers were in the minds of the people martyrs’ deaths for “the Kingdom of Heaven” and thus a spiritual triumph,

a heroic sacrifice for the ideals of Christian civilization. For the Serbian people Kosovo put the seal on its identity, became the key to its history, and the banner of national freedom. We are not dealing here with a myth, but a historical idea, which helps a nation to forge a link with its real historical past. The lively memory of its own medieval state was an active factor in the Serbian struggle for liberty and unity centuries later, and an inseparable part of the awareness is that Kosovo is the home of the Serbian nation. However, the Serbs' attitude to Kosovo is not merely based on memories of the past, nor is the mythical factor important in that attitude. The same can be said of our historiographic or political reflections on the problem. Kosovo is not some imaginary legend of the past, but a real historical destiny that continues today.

The Ottoman invasions set in motion great ethnic masses in the Balkans and caused upheavals with lasting, frequently tragic results. Yet, where Kosovo is involved, the first Serbian migrations in the 15<sup>th</sup> century did not affect this region to any great degree, nor did they bring the Albanian shepherds down from the Prokletije Mountains. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century official Ottoman records put Christians in a continuing absolute majority over Muslims (Turks and converted Albanians). Together with the other Christian peoples, who still survived as small groups of town-dwellers and shepherds (Orthodox Greeks and Vlachs and Roman Catholic Arbanasi/Albanians), the Serbs made up 97 percent of the total population.

Consequently, the territory of Old Serbia (the historical name for the region of Kosovo, Metohija, and neighboring areas) existed as a Serbian land in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The restored Peć Patriarchate (1557) not only played an enormous part in linking up the Serbs scattered over the Balkans and even the Pannonian Plain, it was also instrumental in organizing Serbian resistance and the struggle against the Turks, especially in Kosovo. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century this region had reopened its former religious centers, and Serbian power to resist grew apace. The Serbs were in a desperate position under the Turks. The effect of Turkish government and forced conversions to Islam, as Ivo Andrić wrote in his doctoral thesis, was "absolutely negative." All historical sources support him. Ottoman rule reposed on the law of discrimination and the absolute authority of Islam, with legal permission to commit acts of individual or mass violence up to total annihilation of people or whole areas.

These reasons governed the continued resistance and struggle of the Serbian people for national freedom and a return to European civilization, but at the same time were also at the root of those significant demographic changes which occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and which gave rise to the problems we face in Kosovo today. From the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward the Serbs' fight for liberation grew into a form of continued resistance by a whole people determined not to accept Turco-Islamic overlord-

ship. At the head of the people stood the Church. In the great Austro-Turkish wars of 1683–1690 and 1717–1737, Serbs took part in fighting all over the Balkans, joining in a common struggle against the Turks and the north Albanian Roman Catholic tribes. The victims of ruthless reprisals at the hands of Turks and Tartars after the defeat of Austria, the Serbs migrated northward in waves to areas reaching from the wide spaces of central Macedonia to the Danube. The two "great migrations" of the Serbian people into Austria, led by Patriarchs Arsenije III Crnojević (1690) and Arsenije IV Jovanović-Šakabenta (1737), are indisputable historical facts. It is not possible to calculate exactly how many Serbs moved out altogether—but it is known that in the first migration of 1690, 185,000 Serbs migrated to Austria. Certainly, these mass moves weakened the Serbian ethnic element in various regions, not only Kosovo. Yet, later events, rebellions, and uprisings show that those Serbs who remained in these regions and were constantly reinforced by Serbs migrating from other parts of the Ottoman Empire were still sufficiently strong to offer armed resistance. In fact, up to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Kosovo was an ethnically homogeneous and densely populated Serbian territory, just as it had been before the Turkish invasion. It was only at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the Albanians started penetrating into the lands of the South Slavs, singly or in groups, on a wide front stretching from Polimlje to Ohrid.

The reason for this penetration derived from the past. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century at least 50 percent of the total Albanian population in Albania had been converted to Islam, a process that was followed by the forced conversion of the Serbs. The result for the Serbs was a loss of national identity and Albanization. The course taken by this colonization, which can be called anything but "natural," is described in all historical records of the time, especially, "on the spot" reports by Roman Catholic bishops and archbishops and other missionaries, including Albanians, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These reports, most of them published and preserved in the Vatican archives, were the result of the great interest shown in Balkan affairs by the Holy See, and more particularly the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Congregatio de propaganda fide*), given the bright prospects afforded the Roman Catholic missions in regions where Turkish violence had weakened or destroyed the organized structure of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Likewise, anthropo-geographical exploration of the settlements and origins of the population, started by Jovan Cvijić in 1900, and carried on by a large team of scientists up to the present day, gives strong support to these historical documents. The overall result is a convincing picture of the time, place, manner, and causes of invasion by the Albanians and their colonization and oppression of the Serbs.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Albanians made their deepest inroads—to Niš and Sofia (coming within 50 kilometers of the second town) in the northeast, Skoplje and Veles

in the west, and northward toward Bosnia via the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, thus revealing the Balkan dimension of this specific form of Ottoman expansion. Poor economic conditions in the rocky, infertile mountains of central and northern Albania merely provided the initial impetus for this great migration, but combined with Islam and Turkish policies it came to mean the mass colonization of Kosovo and Macedonia and genocide for the Slav population. It was precisely political, and not economic, reasons which brought the Albanians to the new territory, but also to the position of a ruling, privileged class in relation to the deprived Christian masses. Therefore, the subsequent migration of the Serbs and other Balkan Slavs from their lands was not a natural process, as is so often insisted in a certain biased quarter today, but the consequence of the violence to which they were subjected.

Despite the conflict with the Albanian Muslims, which grew stronger as their numbers in Old Serbia increased, insurrectionist and revolutionary Serbia (after 1804) did not forget the former Arbanasi and made room in its Balkan program for a free and independent Albania as part of a planned confederation of Balkan states. This idea, formulated already in Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije* (Plan) (1844), and particularly later in the 1860s, was given precedence over other plans to divide up Albania with Greece. Of course, what was meant here was Albania itself with its Albanian population, while Kosovo was the objective of the Serbian liberation movement and part of the program of national unity and there could be no talk of conditions or bargaining in relation to the liberation of this territory and its return to Serbian rule.

This problem was underlined in the First Serbian Uprising of 1804–1813, as well as a series of rebellions, insurrections and outlaw raids in Old Serbia itself. As the chief and cruelest weapon of Turkish repression were Albanian Muslim settlers, all liberation movements by Serbs in Kosovo automatically became a struggle against Albanians. At the time of the Serbian uprisings terror already reigned in the Belgrade pashaluk clearly aimed at exterminating the Serbs or else driving them out of Old Serbia altogether. Another, new, factor was at work, too. Reform of the Turkish administration and the first attempts at introducing a European influence into the empire (Tanzimat, 1839) aroused resistance among Albanian Muslims who, with the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina, turned against the reform to protect their old privileges, religious, and national discrimination, and, as they said, the "true faith."

Thus, the Christian masses became the chief victims of an Albanian anti-reformist, conservative, and financial movement in a series of local rebellions and pogroms. The genocide committed on the Serbian population in the '50s and '60s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is recorded in a large number of documents, complaints to the Turkish administration about Albanian atrocities, and reports by European consuls (in Bitola, Skoplje, Prizren, and Priština). This reign of terror by

Albanian Muslims extended over the entire territory from the Sanjak to Macedonia and from Metohija to the South Morava River.

The two liberation wars fought by the Serbs and Montenegrins against the Turks in 1876–1877 and 1877–1878 signaled the first serious head-on conflict between Serbs and Albanians. The Muslim Albanians of Old Serbia fought Serbian troops to defend the integrity of the empire and the lands they had usurped. The ensuing defeat of Turkey in the wars meant a loss of these possessions: about 30,000 Albanians left liberated areas like Toplica, Leskovac, and Vranje. Under the Russo-Turkish armistice of 1878, the Serbian army was forced to retreat from those parts of Kosovo it had just liberated. In the fight over the new borders and Russian claims at Serbian expense in the Treaty of San Stefano, Serbia managed to hold on to only some of its war acquisitions at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The Serbs in Old Serbia were then put to terrible and bloody revenge, organized by the Albanian League, founded the same year, and sanctioned and supported by the Sublime Porte.

The Albanian League was an important factor in building up an Albanian national ideology. The obvious inability of Turkey to defend its empire led not only to an eruption of ideas about an independent struggle by the Albanians against Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece, but also a search for new ways of protecting Turkish interests against the new Balkan states. For the first time we meet the notion of "Greater Albania," in the name of which League members sought to sanction former ethnic changes and conquests at the expense of the Balkan Christians, to return the regions they had lost, and extend the areas under Albanian domination far beyond the borders Albanian migrations had already reached. The League's program was directed against the Balkan states, and indirectly against those European states which had in any way at all approved the aspirations to freedom of Serbia, Montenegro, and Greece, and also against Turkey if its weakness threatened the imagined integrity of "Greater Albania." Aggressive, greedy, revenge-seeking, conservative, and nationalist, the League managed to bring together Albanians of all three religions despite internal differences. The League's anti-Serbian and, indeed, anti-Slav tendencies had a lasting negative effect on relations between Serbs and Albanians.

The 30 years after the Congress of Berlin, 1878 to 1912, were colored by the deliberate persecution and physical extermination of Serbs and their forced migration from Turkey. It was not until this period that the ethnic balance in Old Serbia—that is, Kosovo and Metohija and north-west Macedonia—was finally destroyed. In those 30 years about 400,000 people left this region for Serbia, at least 150,000 of them from the area north of Mt. Šara—Kosovo and Metohija. This pogrom took on tragic proportions after the war in Crete between Turkey and Greece in 1897. Diplomatic measures taken by the Serbian government to protect Serbs from Albanian terror bore no fruit, but at

least authentic documents remain to testify to crimes committed against the Serbian population in the then Kosovo Province. These crimes included murder, the plunder and desecration of churches and graves, the rape and kidnapping of Serbian women and girls, even children, attacks, and robbery and looting, all aimed at destroying the Serbs or driving them from their land and all with the tacit permission of the Turkish authorities—from the Sublime Porte to local governors and police.

Albanian movements directed against Turkey, especially after their failure to agree with the Young Turkish revolution of 1908–1912, came to involve the vital interests of the Serbian people, even its very survival, revealing the long-term plans and effectiveness of these movements. Even Skoplje fell into the hands of the Albanian rebels in 1912, a town in which the Albanians represented a very small minority. So it transpired that at its southern borders Serbia finally faced a new, young, actively anti-Serbian state, which was to prove a convenient tool for Italian and Austrian aspirations in the Balkans.

The Balkan war of 1912 was fought by Serbia along with Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece for the liberation of its own people and to secure such conditions as would ensure that this people could maintain its political, economic, and cultural life as a whole. True, one of the main drawbacks of Serbian policy, which was to prove fatal, was that it lacked clear ideas as to how to find a lasting and just solution to the Albanian question. The vague notion that “some combination will be found for the coexistence of Serbs and Albanians as it was before Turkish rule” (Milanović, 1906) was no substitute for a well-thought out policy toward the Albanian people based upon reality. Ideas of peaceful integration, including assimilation, of the Albanians were completely illusory, even if they did not oppose the existing or later views and practical experience of European states in international and national relations. All such hopes were bound to founder in the end, which they did during operations by the Serbian and Montenegrin armies on the Scutari battlefield in 1912, where, instead of the naively expected cooperation, they met the open enmity of the Albanian tribes and armed resistance. On the other hand, an autonomous Albania was supposed to be created at the insistence of Austria-Hungary and Italy, but also with the agreement of England, France, and Russia. In the complex events of 1912–1913, Serbia was forced into a determined struggle to hold on to the liberated territory of Kosovo and Metohija, where Austrian pretensions were particularly noticeable.

Thus, a second Battle of Kosovo had to be fought and won on the diplomatic plane. The London Conference of European Powers (1912–1913) created a political and legal basis for the demarcation and future of relations between the Albanian and Serbian peoples, between Albania and Serbia, and later Yugoslavia as the successor to the Serbian state. The Serbian government was not prepared to make concessions over Kosovo and Metohija: “No Montenegrin

or Serbian government would want to or be able to hand over this “Holy Land” of the Serbian people to the Albanians or anyone else.” This was stressed in the Memorandum to the European powers of 8/12 January, 1913. On this point, it said, “the Serbian people will not and cannot make any concessions, transactions or compromises, and no Serbian government would want to do this either.”

Pressure on the Serbian people was renewed immediately after the retreat of the Serbian and Montenegrin armies and Austro-German and Bulgarian occupation of Kosovo in 1915. This pressure was maintained right up to liberation in 1918. Albanian units also took part in the bloody suppression of the Serbian uprising in Toplice in 1916–1917. The first few years after liberation and the creation of the state of Yugoslavia saw a continuation of armed struggle in Kosovo and Metohija and in Macedonia, for Albanian, “kacaci” (terrorist saboteurs), relying on the Albanian masses, tried to keep up an atmosphere of permanent rebellion. Their activities were more or less suppressed by 1924, but an underground, semi-illegal political struggle went on—via party organizations like the Muslim “Dzemijet” or those of illegal groups, such as the student “Besa” in Belgrade. The status of the Albanian national minority, like other minorities—German, Hungarian, Italian, and Rumanian, was regulated by the St. Germain Treaty of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), signed with the Great Powers (the United States, England, France, Italy, and Japan) on 10 September, 1919. Contrary to some interpretations, the Albanians were not excepted from this internationally approved system of defense. Slogans about a special legally-approved lack of protection and discrimination against the Albanian minority in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, regardless of real political circumstances and relations in that state, have absolutely no legal or historical foundation.

Attempts by the then government to establish an ethnic and national balance in Kosovo and Macedonia through agrarian reforms and colonization only created bad blood. The results of this ill-advised action, which was badly organized and clearly infringed the law at times, were worst in precisely that sphere they were designed to improve. During the entire period when the agrarian reforms and colonization were carried out, in the '20s and '30s, about 600,000 Serbs and other Yugoslavs arrived in Kosovo and Metohija, but they mainly took over uncultivated, vacant, and, often, infertile land, obtained through the dissolution of feudal estates, and only a small number moved into Albanian settlements—onto Albanian farm estates (mainly the holdings of outlaws). The agrarian reforms in Kosovo, as in the other liberated territories in Yugoslavia, did, indeed, do away with feudal relations, but this colonization had a “springback” effect, on a small scale at least, and was very unpopular even among the Serbs, especially those native to the region. The policy of moving out the Albanian population, again, right up to the end of the Kingdom of Yugo-

slavia did not manage to become a systematic campaign like that carried out after World War II in Poland, Czechoslovakia, or Yugoslavia in relation to the German national minority. There is no accurate record of how many Albanians were moved out, but it is estimated that this figure is less than 45,000, including other Kosovo Muslims (Turks, Romanies). The initiative for resettling the Muslims, including the Albanian Muslims, came from Turkey, which had already organized an evacuation of Muslims from the Balkan states (Rumania, Bulgaria, and Serbia) in 1914. An agreement between Yugoslavia and Turkey in 1938, like other resettlement plans, laid down measures of economic stimulation and security in the land of immigration, instead of administrative coercion, although these were sometimes also used in practice.

The collapse of Yugoslavia in April 1941 heralded a new era of Albanian terror and genocide against the Serbs. Most territory having an Albanian national minority was annexed by the Italian vassals in Tirana, leading to the creation of "Greater Albania" under the auspices of Italian Fascism. Members of the Albanian minority (which numbered no more than 500,000 in the whole of pre-war Yugoslavia) looked on the occupation of Yugoslavia as their liberation. The "2<sup>nd</sup> Albanian League" (1943) took advantage of the German occupation after the Italian capitulation to carry out a systematic reign of terror over the Serbs, with mass and single killings (Peć, Uroševac, Priština, etc.), deportations, and forcible resettlement. It has never been exactly determined how many Serbs were driven out of Kosovo and Metohija at that time, but estimates put the number of Serbian colonists and indigenous Serbs who left the territory between 1941 and 1944 at around 100,000. It is well-known that even the Germans tried to halt and return this great stream of refugees, as they blocked the roads. Armed resistance to the Italian, German, and Bulgarian occupiers was rather specific in regions of Yugoslavia inhabited by Albanians. Attempts to organize a national liberation movement in such regions met with great obstacles, chiefly large-scale anti-Serb and anti-Yugoslav feeling.

This situation only started to improve in the second half of 1944, when it was clear that Nazism would be defeated. Moreover, partisan detachments in Kosovo and Metohija up to autumn 1944 tended to operate outside this territory, in Macedonia, since they could not survive on home ground. Documents dealing with the national liberation war in Kosovo and Metohija testify to this without exception.

Yet, despite the hostile, or at least passive, behavior of the Albanian national minority during the war, Kosovo and Metohija entered new Yugoslavia in 1945 as an autonomous region, with prospects of complete national, constitutional, economic, and cultural independence.

If we want to seek the origin of this solution, we must go back to the policy of the Serbian Social Democrat Party on the eve of World War I and, through this, to the views held by Austrian Socialists and Marxists. The Albanian

question was considered in this light by Serbia's leading socialist, Dimitrije Tucović. In his pamphlet *Srbija i Albanija* (Serbia and Albania) (1914) he presented the general condemnation of Serbia's national and liberation policy in the Balkan wars as reflecting ideas of Greater Serbia, hegemony, and conquest. Disregarding the genuinely tragic position of the Serbian people under Turkish rule, the victim of Albanian terror in Kosovo, Tucović paved the way for the slogan about "the aggressive annexation of Albanian territory" and the right of the Albanian population to secede and join their national state. His judgment of "Greater-Serbian hegemony" at no time took account of the crucial difference existing between national consciousness, national identity, and the vital needs of the Serbian people, on one hand, and the attitudes and actions of certain Serbian politicians and political parties, on the other. Generalization and idea-twisting of this sort resulted in an unjust and unfounded burden being placed upon the entire Serbian nation, where behind the Austro-Marxist truisms of the Serbian Social Democrat Party we cannot help seeing the Austro-Hungarian basis for an argument against Serbian national policy. In fact, this judgment would throw doubt upon the entire program of national liberation and unity which began to be implemented in 1804 and which was finally formulated in 1915, as well as the achievements of the Serbian revolution and the liberation wars. The idea of small, weak Serbia, consisting of the "Belgrade pashaluk and 6 districts," which the Treaty of Berlin (1878) barely granted the right to its own borders, meant identifying a dismembered Serbian state territory, in which every step taken over the state-lines toward freedom and unity was pronounced aggression. In 1914, the hypothesis of this concept was that the Serbian people who lived outside the Serbia of the Berlin Congress—that is, more than half the existing number of Serbs at the time—no matter how ethnically compact or spiritually integrated, could not and must not be regarded as anything else than a national minority in diaspora, with no right to self-determination, to secession and unity with its national state.

The policy of the Yugoslav Communist Party on the ethnic question was partly inherited from the heterogeneous socialist movement of Yugoslavia's nations and partly based, at least up to 1935, on the views and decisions of the Communist International (Comintern). A "section of the Comintern," as the YCP was once officially called, it was duty-bound to follow the line adopted by this international organization which was exclusively controlled by the USSR. The Yugoslav Communist Party was in a position, however, in the relatively short inter-war period, to make important changes in its policy on the ethnic question in Yugoslavia. At its second congress, in Vukovar, in 1920, the YCP proclaimed as its main objective the creation of the Soviet Balkans, i.e. the Soviet Republic of Yugoslavia as part of a Soviet federation of Balkan and Danube states, which itself would be one element in an international federation of So-

viet republics. The notion of a “3-tribe nation,” of the unity of the Yugoslav “tribes,” and their aspiration toward unity, had already been changed by 1923 to the idea of Yugoslavia as the fruit of the “imperialist war” and the “Versailles system” according to the views of the Comintern and the Balkan Federation, a branch of the Comintern, in which the Bulgarians played a leading role. Not five years after the creation of Yugoslavia, the Third National Conference of the YCP formulated a definite thesis on “Serbian hegemony” as the internal imperialist basis and essence of the Yugoslav state, where all non-Serbian nationalities (Albanian was mentioned as one) were being oppressed and destroyed. Emphasizing the right to self-determination, in principle the right to “uniting with one’s national state,” was also recognized. The 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Comintern in 1924 passed a decision dissolving Yugoslavia as a state and opposing its future constitutional revision or reorganization, considering that Yugoslavia was one of the spearheads of anti-Sovietism and counter-revolution. Under the Comintern decision, the solution lay in secession by Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia, and their formation as independent states. True, on the intra-Party level, the YCP did oppose this, but never once did it, or any faction within it, dispute the initial premise, especially where it touched on Serbia as an “oppressor.” The Comintern decisions contain calls for tactical differentiation between the nationalism of “oppressed nations” and that of “oppressor nations” with the result that the fight against “Serbian nationalism” becomes the main task of the Yugoslav Communist Party, and particularly the Serbian Communists in Serbia. At the same time, help should be given to every separatist, anti-Yugoslav and anti-Serbian nationalist movement in Yugoslavia (5<sup>th</sup> Expanded Plenum of the Comintern International Committee, 1925).

The idea of dissolving Yugoslavia was worked out in fine detail in decisions of the YCP’s 4<sup>th</sup> Congress (Dresden, 1928). According to these decisions, Yugoslavia was to dissolve into individual separate states—Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Slovenia, (Serbia was not mentioned), while the Hungarian and Albanian national minorities were to break away, because their lands had supposedly been “annexed” by the Serbian bourgeoisie. Cooperation was sought with the Greater-Albanian Kosovo Committee (just as support was offered to the Croatian Ustashas in Lika, 1932). Thereafter, combinations of the number of “independent” states and the manner and consequences of the dissolution of Yugoslavia constantly altered, but even in 1934 the Serbs in Yugoslavia outside Serbia (and explicitly in Kosovo) were still looked upon as “occupiers” who must be “driven out.”

The turnabout in Comintern, or rather Soviet policy, in favor of a “Popular Front” in 1935, when the danger from Fascism became all too apparent, also led to changes in YLC policy toward the Yugoslav state in order to reach a coalition of anti-Fascist forces: the integrity of Yugoslavia had to be protected, future relations between the Yugoslav

nations were to be put on a federal basis, and the Fascist separatism of the Ustashas and pro-Bulgarian VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) was now condemned. This change of tactics (as this turnabout was defined in the YLC of the time) still did not mean any revision of the basic tenet that the chief enemy was “Greater-Serbian hegemony.” In distancing itself from the Comintern, the Yugoslav Communist Party was slow to abandon the cornerstone of its views on relations between the Yugoslav nations. This was evident at the 5<sup>th</sup> National Conference of the YCP in Zagreb (1940). Achievement of the right to self-determination, with the right to secession, was reserved for the future, yet the Albanians of Kosovo and Metohija and even those of the Sanjak continued to be considered an “oppressed minority,” a people tyrannized by the Serbian bourgeoisie.

In the course of the National Liberation War the whole complexity of the League’s political inheritance, including the Albanian question, was thrown into relief. Since 1939 the YCP had been trying to help the Communists of Albania to organize their own party—which came into being in 1941. However, in late 1943 there was already a visible penetration of ideas on a Greater Albania in the Albanian Communist Party leadership and the country’s National Liberation Army, but also in the movement led by the Yugoslav Communist Party in Kosovo. The attitude of Albanian Communists toward the nationalist and quisling organization Balli Kombetar, which was founded on the idea of gathering together all Albania’s national forces under German occupation and on such slogans as “an ethnic Albania,” was echoed in the conclusions of the Conference of the Provincial National Liberation Committee for Kosovo and “Dukadjin” (the Albanian term for a territory wider than Metohija). This meeting was held outside Yugoslavia in the town of Bujan in northern Albania over New Year, 1944. Threading its way through these conclusions was the old formulation about the desire of Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija for secession, or, more precisely, for union with their national state Albania.

The conclusions from this Conference were opposed to the decisions of the 2nd Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation (AVNOJ) held in Jajce on 29 November, 1943. Criticized by the YCP’s Central Committee in March 1944, they were, nonetheless, at no time explicitly revoked. At the time the YCP pursued a policy based on the constitutional and territorial integrity of Yugoslavia as an international subject. Between the 1st (1942) and 2<sup>nd</sup> (1943) Sessions of AVNOJ, we learn from sources available today that there was already a clear prospect of disagreement with Stalin’s policy. Consequently, the Yugoslav line followed by the YCP during the war was not an implementation of a new Soviet tactic, but the expression of its own emancipation. Both legally and politically, the decisions of AVNOJ, refusing to recognize the occupiers’ partition of Yugoslavia, while making no mention of the future autonomy of

“minority” regions, ought to have put an end to speculations as to the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia in the future. For this reason, in correspondence with the Albanian Communist Party at the end of 1943 the Yugoslav Communist Party treats the question of the Albanian minority as Yugoslavia’s internal affair.

For the moment it is still not sufficiently known whether or not ideas of state integration, that is, the incorporation of Albania into a Yugoslav federation, as a united Schiptar-Albanian republic (with Kosovo), were present at the time in Yugoslav-Albanian relations. Enver Hoxha’s account of his talks with Tito (*Avec Staline, Souvenirs*, 1979) comes down, in the end, to an indirect rejection of Hodzha’s territorial demand under the pretext that “the Serbs would not understand it.” Yet, it must be admitted that even this elusive and unproven circumstance, along with the old promises—at least the one from 1935—could have encouraged Albanian pretensions to Kosovo and Metohija and Albanian nationalists in what was now known as the Yugoslav League of Communists and outside it in Kosovo itself to demand that the national rights of the Albanian majority should be legalized constitutionally, if not by secession from Yugoslavia and union with Albania, at least as the foundation of a separate statehood, first in the form of an autonomous region, which would progress to a province, and ultimately to a republic. It is precisely this path which was followed by Albanian nationalism, overcoming the first obstacle after 1966 (the Plenary Session of the YLC’s Central Committee on Brioni) only to show its true colors in the 1968 demonstrations (a republic for Kosovo). In the period of constitutional reforms from 1971–1974, the province was established as “a constituent element of the Federation,” with no mediacy, whereby membership of the Socialist Republic of Serbia appeared as a kind of ambiguous constitutional link.”

No lessons were drawn from the mass organized demonstrations in Kosovo and the Socialist Republic of Macedonia in November 1968, in spite of previous warnings about the escalation of Albanian nationalist feeling and the serious consequences which could ensue (for example, Dobrica Ćosić and Jovan Marjanović at the 14<sup>th</sup> Session of the Central Committee of the Serbian League of Communists in May 1968). Events in Kosovo in 1981, with much larger demonstrations and an eruption of illegal activities involving a large section of Kosovo’s Albanian youth, as well as young Albanians in some parts of southern Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro, underlined the danger of shutting one’s eyes to real political events and movements. However, it is important to point out here that all these events were accompanied and marked by increasing persecution of the Serbs living in Kosovo and Metohija. The same methods were applied as were recorded in 19<sup>th</sup> century documents and spoken tradition: murder, rape, beatings, psychological and moral pressure, illegal possessions, land-stealing, destruction of crops, livestock and forests,

social and legal discrimination, outvoting and abuse of privilege, attacks on churches, and desecration of graves, monuments and any other symbol of the national identity of the Serbian people. Organized Albanian terror produced an unbearable atmosphere of vulnerability and fear and compelled growing numbers of Serbs and Montenegrins to leave. Thus in one part of its own republic the Serbian people was reduced to the status of a minority (but without minority rights), while its percentage in the ethnic structure of Kosovo rapidly dwindled—from 27.4 percent in the 1948 population census to 14.9 percent in 1981, the greatest fall occurring between 1961 (still 27.4 percent) and 1981 (14.9 percent). During this period, Albanian population rose at a great pace, due firstly to a very high birthrate, but also artificially—through uncontrolled mass immigration from Albania and juggling with statistics. For example, in the last census in 1981, Romanies, Muslims and Turks, and even Macedonians living in Macedonia, were still listed as being Albanians.

The policy of “ethnic purity,” if we take a look at history, is always racist in character. Nothing can justify it or “explain” it, no matter who pursues it. Least of all can it be justified by pseudo-historical mystification. On the other hand, it cannot be hushed up by a simple tale of peaceful, harmonious, and idyllic relations between nations and nationalities in the region. There again, the logic which says that the status of a region depends on the current situation and demographic ratio, regardless of how, when, and in what circumstances that situation arose and those relations were established, is absolutely untenable in human, moral, and historical terms. The right of the Serbian people to live in its own country was first disputed through the many years of terror under the Turkish yoke, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, terror whose methods, proportions, and consequences bore all the marks of genocide. To stress the present demographic picture in Kosovo and maintain that these regions are Albanian simply because a large number of Albanians lives there today is to overlook the fact that this land is inhabited primarily by the Serbian people, as its heartland and, historically speaking, its motherland, so there has never been any break in Serbia’s attitude toward Kosovo as a Serbian national territory, no interruption in the struggle to liberate Kosovo’s Serbs and make them part of the Serbian community in the whole country. Failure to observe real historical facts could result in the legalization of the consequences of genocide. And this, of course, would mean attacking an ethical principle at its very roots. It would mean sanctioning the use of violence against the Yugoslav nations and trampling on their right to self-determination in their own state and to live as free and sovereign citizens in their own country—and all this in the name of the right of Yugoslavia’s Albanian national minority to “self-determination, with the right to “secession.”

*Kosovo*, Ed. ed. B. W. R. Jenkins,  
Serbian Western American Diocese 1992, pp. 145–153.