

Urgent anthropology
Vol. 3
Problems of
Multiethnicity
in the Western Balkans.
Fieldwork

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2004

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ISBN 954-8872-53-6

Издателско каре

Съставител и научна редакция *Антонина Желязкова*

Проблеми на мултиетничността в Западните Балкани.

Теренни проучвания

Българска

Първо издание

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URGENT ANTHROPOLOGY: METHODS OF CRISIS RESEARCH

Antonina Zhelyazkova

The trials and tribulations in the history of the Balkans in the last decade of the 20 c. and the first years of the 21 c. have played an intriguing trick on anthropology and the scholars of ethnology. The collapse of the Communist regimes in the Balkan countries sucked societies out of the vacuum of dogmatism and restrictions, and plunged them into the chasm of changes ranging from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars, to the massive refugee and migration waves. Ideological and political patterns were also changed; identities were resurrected, neo-irredentist aspirations emerged. All this made field researchers realise that they had to reevaluate their actions and academic approach, their usual philosophy and methods of research, and their research tools. Gone were the times of prolonged scientific meditation on artifacts, ethnocultures and confessional groups that often led to exercises in pure aestheticism and exciting pleasure at doing academic research entirely for the sake of science. Gone were also the exercises in the opposite extreme notably indulging in a pseudo science subservient to ideological dictatorship and censorship. All those were replaced, suddenly and with no time for adaptation, by new approaches complying with the requirements of modern times; by new academic vistas, by geopolitical cataclysms, but above all, by acute awareness of the needs and sufferings of the humans inhabiting the Balkan Peninsula.

Balkan research in humanities needed urgent restructuring. It needed to reconsider without delay its stand, to relinquish its academic alienation and come down to earth, to abandon its guilds and forget its rivalries, and to study and analyse the ongoing dramatic developments by using methods from different social sciences. Scholars were challenged to get orientated as fast as possible in the galloping dynamics of those changes, to assist communities in the region in their painful flight from the prison of old ideologies, myths and mystifications, and to support their introduction - often forcible and involving numerous victims - into new entities characterised by haughty nationalism, political and ideological confrontation, and a restructured foreign policy that had not always been clear; to ease their plunge into so-far unknown economic conditions. It became also clear that they needed to join efforts to counter the expanding zones of conflict, and to identify and enlarge zones of compatibility and tolerance; to appease hostile ethnic and confessional communities, to preserve diverse cultures and historic inheritances; to protect human life whenever could.

Not all research communities and individual researchers conceded to carry the heavy burden of commitment to specific social functions and responsibilities. For many a representative of the historical profession, for many sociologists and anthropologists, this did not happen at all, or happened with a significant delay.

Chronology – Part One. It was in this complex environment that the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) was set up. It attracted kindred spirits from among experts in social sciences and set before them the task to analyse urgently the ruptured relations between Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria, a country with a history of decades of compatibility behind them, as well as the violation of traditional forms and in the rules of parallel and peaceful co-existence of differing cultures.

Later on, the task was expanded in that the experts needed to focus on various ethnic or religious communities in Bulgaria and on regions with ethnically or religiously mixed population; to provide adequate arguments to the civic organizations for protection and safeguarding of the rights of the minorities, and in their humanitarian efforts to oppose and neutralize extreme

nationalistic attitudes and recommend effective practices for prevention of interethnic tensions in the chaos of transition.

From academic point of view this proved a huge challenge, for they needed to understand, describe, analyse and record for the future generations all dramatic events of what amounted to a major social experiment that was radically changing the political and economic pattern of the nations in Central and Eastern Europe, to assess its impact on societies, traditional cultures, religions and ethnic characteristics and their communal responses.

When the interethnic and interreligious relations in Bulgaria had calmed down a bit and were reverting to the established centuries-old pattern of shared or rather parallel, co-existence, and to the rules and norms of multicultural tolerance, the informal, or shall we call it civilian-cum-academic community that was already shaped, redirected its attention to beyond Bulgarian borders, towards the social processes, perturbations and cataclysms occurring in the neighbouring countries and in the entire Balkan region.

In 1993, a team of historians and ethnographers armed with, at that time, still unclear theory and philosophy of *urgent anthropology* was funded by the International Center for Minority Studies to conduct fieldwork in Albania. The results were impressive but it was found out that for the sake of comprehensiveness of the research and analysis the team needed an additional professional dimension, in other words, the team needed to be supported by findings by sociologists, philosophers and political analysts.

In 1994, the European Phare Democracy Programme funded generously an interdisciplinary survey on “Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria”, conducted by the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations. The research teams incorporated historians, ethnologists and sociologists who worked independently for one year, discussing their respective findings at joint working meetings. In the course of the discussions and in the preparation of the results for publication it transpired that the teams of social researchers had been working “incapsulated” in their own methods and tools and had accepted the analyses offered by the “other” researchers with some reservation, especially when the findings had to be compared. On the other hand, it became evident that the specific methods for different research areas had allowed for comparison of the empirical data, and of the final analyses which had resulted in updating of conclusions and a maximum possible degree of accuracy of findings.

From then on, all research teams conducting fieldwork in regions of tension inhabited by people of different ethnic and religious affiliation were formed solely as interdisciplinary teams, with a view of obtaining the best scientific results, i.e. empirical material and analyses of comparatively reliable long-term forecasts with an accuracy of nearly 90%.

By and by, experience taught us that research teams ought to be small-size and flexible, with their composition changing according to the region and target groups, the specific historical experience and culture of the communities studied, and the environment.

Perhaps the most controversial and risky decision had been to include a reporter and a political analyst specializing in the Balkans, in the teams that would normally incorporate an expert on the history of the Balkans, an anthropologist, a sociologist, an expert in philosophy of cultural studies, a political scientist or an expert in economic history, and an occasional sociologist or psychologist. The difference in the approach of the journalist, the quick and aggressive reaction when asking questions from the questionnaire, the professional perseverance, even brutality, in trying to get an insight into the most intimate aspects in the life of the respondent or community, were very much in contrast with the thoughtful and sensitive approach of the researchers, their ability to patiently predispose the respondents to sincerity, and to create an atmosphere of friendliness and trust.

As it happened, the presence of journalists on the team proved to be most useful for research teams and findings alike. It made it possible to accumulate diverse information through alternative techniques and approaches. The abundant information the journalists possessed on current political events, persons and facts of the day, their cultural background and directness, had a positive effect

on research and the parties complemented each other's analysis. Journalists admitted they also benefited from their participation in scientific discussions, and in the presentation of broader historic panoramas, and in sociological and philosophical interpretations of the targets, regions and cultural environment.

Ethical problems of field research. Owing to their insight into cultural environment, and with the help of their psychological skills and ability to adapt, researchers were usually able to go for in-depth studies of the target group occasionally even identifying with it. Then it would be a matter of scientific and human ethics to decide what and how much of the empirical material to analyse and what to publish from field diaries, so that no harm would be done to the target group and no one's dignity would be hurt. It goes without saying that the names of the respondents should never be mentioned in the analyses. This also holds good for secondary indicators, which may reveal the identity or whereabouts of the respondents.

In this connection, the ethics and morals of field researchers are often subject to theoretical discussion by the anthropologists' guild. For there is also the problem of the other extreme, of getting involved, even *falling in love*, with the object of research, which sometimes leads to an overlap of target group, respondents and cultural community that results in a loss of the researcher's own identity, and in alienation from his/her actual social affiliation and functions. This probability is even higher in the case of traditional anthropological research that sometimes continues for years on end. "Emergency" anthropologists, despite their short-term stay in the field, are not protected from this loss of identity either, because of the heavy psychological and emotional pressure they experience during field collection of empirical materials.

An essential segment of this new method of *urgent anthropology* is the issue of the ethics of scientific insight into the nature of field research. Researchers who have joined the scientific community freely, to acquire maximum knowledge about it, face numerous moral problems when this same community undergoes a crisis or collapses. "Emergency" anthropologists often work in crisis situations that surprise and shock them, and are often difficult to overcome. This is so because, on the one hand, researchers work in extreme conditions and are subjected to strong emotional impact as well as various pressures and insinuations. On the other hand, the informants representing target communities undergoing social and spiritual cataclysms subconsciously supply distorted, biased information, or try to influence the perception of the researcher. To use the parlance of the field researchers, *urgent anthropology* is destined to work on *polluted grounds* where respondents and researchers often resort to manipulations - the former involuntarily, obeying their survival instincts, the latter, out of necessity and deliberately.

Moral issues of this kind are specifically complicated when it comes to researchers and leading mediators of double identity, either biological or acquired through family tradition or personal choice, who therefore belong to the culture and philosophy of the target community or group while belonging also to the research community or institute. Such a member of the research team will most probably feel uncomfortable and suffer intellectual withdrawal. Moreover that the decision whether to continue to participate and if so, to what extent, is strictly personal. In all these cases the attitude of the head of team and team members will by definition be one of discreet guidance to the intended path of research and non-interference in the personal ethical problem. H.F. Wolcott suggests that field researchers face moral issues and try to solve them *in situ*. Very often the solution would be a compromise between personal values of the researcher, the values of the society or culture under study and the professional values of the academic institution. Eventually, the decision is the ultimate responsibility of the researcher (Wolcott, H.F. "Ethnography as a Way of Seeing". Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 1999 and Draper, Mustafa, "Ethics and Ethnographic Research in the Context of Sufi Tariqas", "Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice" IMIR, Sofia, 2000, p.77-92).

Bulgarian researchers have accumulated unusually vast experience in that aspect. For decades on end Bulgaria and the other former communist countries had funded and guided research on different cultures – minorities, ethnic, confessional and social groups - solely to use it for

assimilation purposes, and to exercise unacceptable control and repressions. This practice has been usual also in social sciences under other totalitarian, oppressive regimes so the choice of the researcher has obviously never been easy.

Democratic political governments do not make it easy, either. *Emergency anthropologists* repeatedly ask themselves whom should their knowledge and empirical data serve: the community they study; the research community they belong to and with which they identify while it identifies with them; the policymakers, the military or any other formal and informal entities that fund their research expecting to use the findings to their own ends.

One cannot therefore but recall Wolcott's sincere cynicism in that "Altruism and research make strange bedfellows. The dark art is to get others to think that your research is for their good, and perhaps to try to convince yourself of it as well, all the while looking for anything you might do to make this really happen". Or the following outburst revealing the scientist's torment when he would rest in the evening, or thinks of questions and strategies to be used on the next day of fieldwork: "Is seduction one of our darker arts? As craftspeople, are we so crafty that others don't know when they are being seduced? Is there some ethically acceptable approach to, or level of, seduction appropriate for fieldworkers..."(Wolcott, H.F. "The Art of Fieldwork" Walnut Creek. Altamira Press, 1995, p. 148-149)

It is worthwhile probing even deeper into Wolcott's reflections since he, as a *guru* of fieldworkers, voices clearly and accurately the secret thoughts and remorse of every active field anthropologist: "Discomforting as it is, we must face the charge of betrayal head on. I do not subscribe to the idea that field research is always an act of betrayal, but the possibility is ever present. ...[There is] now way we can claim to be in the business of finding things out without finding things out; no way we can report what we have understood without the risk of being misunderstood". (Wolcott H.F. "The Art of Fieldwork" Walnut Creek. Altamira Press, 1995, p.149)

Thus instructed by our teacher *Wolcott*, we, anthropologists try to avoid accusations of betrayal by a self-imposed censorship. Of course in such cases we face a paradox in that the more experienced and talented field researcher is, the more h/she uncovers things that have not been searched for, have not even been meant to be uncovered. When to stop, and how and what to select from the newly established facts in order to announce them, and how to fight the temptation to go on and on? Resistance is difficult just as it is difficult to fight the urge to share every finding with colleagues and scientific opponents.

IMIR *urgent anthropology* teams, which for five years have worked in all Balkan countries populated with Albanians with the aim of studying their cultural differences, attitudes to national unification, modernization and prospects, have faced major ethical dilemmas, since they have had their work assessed by the very targets of their research:

First comment (a respondent working for intelligence service Y of country Z in a region with military tension, says he has been impressed by our ability to undertake a thorough search of the field effectively and speedily collect accurate data): "You cannot even imagine how the knowledge you have acquired and are proudly announcing as scientists in the public space may be used to different ends. Based on your publications, every interested institution and para-structure will be able to develop, for better or for worse, adequate strategies, tactics, and plans of operation".
Second comment (a group of young educated Albanians in Montenegro with whom we have been talking about the possibilities for local Albanians to join the military movements of the extremists of ANA, the Army for Liberation of Kosovo): "Had it not occurred to you that you may be some kind of a catalyst of the rationalization and dissemination of our national idea for unification? You travel for years, polling for the opinions of our leaders from different countries, give meaning to them, classify them systematically, translate them into understandable language, announce them publicly in books and magazines and even discuss them with us, your informers."

Where is *Wolcott* now, to instruct us how to carry the burden of such doubts? It is much easier to impose restrictions on yourself when deciding on the extent to which to infiltrate a community in order to curb the amount of unwanted information. It is much harder to cope with external, and internal suspicion of being an accomplice to, and a factor of, the processes taking

place within the community. Such doubts may dissuade the researcher and push him/her to extreme self-control, in cases where, for example, the researcher blames himself or herself for the environmental pollution in the target communities. In such cases the researcher may even decide to give up fieldwork; this would mean essentially to give up an important part of his or her own intellectual being and the most important, his/her professional identity.

To what extent is the researcher's interference with community acceptable? Should the researcher refrain from understandable human response to crisis situations? Our colleague Mustafa Draper describes the ethical dilemma of a researcher present at a Naqshbandi Order ritual of exorcism of *jinn* possessing the body of a nine-year old child. The ritual was performed by the sheikh directly on the child's body. It involved strong physical pain and even breaking of a finger. Draper poses ethical questions without providing an answer since he has himself repeatedly witnessed similar occasions and has not been able to formulate a straightforward response. "Should the researcher - Draper asks us, his colleagues doing field research and surely facing similar dilemmas, without adequate responses, - have intervened and protected the child? That would certainly have meant to impose cosmological and moral perspective contrary to those of the membership. Should they have informed the authorities? This would have meant imposing a differing set of legal values to the membership."(Draper, Mustafa, "Ethics and Ethnographic Research in the Context of Sufi Tariqas" Cf Antonina Zhelyazkova and Jorgen Nielsen, eds., "Ethnology of Sufi Orders: Theory and Practice", IMIR, Sofia, 2000, p.89).

"Ever mindful of both the noble ideas and the thoughtless consequences ...", writes Wolcott, - "I have no Golden Rule to propose. The guideline I try to follow is the Golden Rule restated in negation, to *not* do to others anything I would *not* want them to do to me. Sometimes that translates simply into *not* saying or *not* telling more than is necessary." (Wolcott, H.F. Ethnography: a Way of Seeing. Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 1999, p.283). We allow no illusions; clearly, moral dilemmas have remained the same since the times of Confucius.

Chronology – Part Two. The first authentic expedition of *urgent anthropology* outside Bulgaria was conducted in the Republic of Turkey starting in 1995 and proceeding, with some interruptions, to 1998. The research was targeted at the Bulgarian Turks – immigrants in Turkey, following the forced migration of thousands; at their individual and collective philosophies, at their mentality, at their efforts to preserve themselves as identities and as individuals in the process of adaptation to a different world, after being chased away by force or fear from their homeland, at that time Communist Bulgaria. (Cf "Between Adaptation and Nostalgia", ed. A. Zhelyazkova, IMIR, Sofia, 1998).

The most complicated and in a way, most unsuccessful *urgent anthropology* work was conducted in Bosnia in 1998. The consequences of the war for the members of the three major ethnic and religious communities were overwhelming: depression, mental trauma, and disintegration of personalities; deep grief and distracting hatred. The team was touring throughout Bosnia and its members were on the verge of nervous breakdown. Upon returning from the fieldwork, we found ourselves unable to write our analyses. For the first time ever. We had lost our scientific objectivity, we were overwhelmed by emotions, we were traumatized by the respondents' tears, by the war damage, by the mine fields, and by what we saw was the most prosperous business in Bosnia at that time, masoning tombstones. The book on Bosnia was published three years later, without any field records or analyses of the empirical material. The net result was that we published a research book entitled "*Bosnia: A Case Apart*" (ed. A. Zhelyazkova, IMIR, Sofia, 2001), in which the authors hardly ever referred to memories or diaries of this painful journey.

The rare significance of *urgent anthropology* as a new method adequate to crisis situations became abundantly clear during the field observations and analyses we made on the Albanian war for independence in rump Yugoslavia. Between the Summer of 1999 and the Spring of 2003, ten field expeditions were organized in those parts of Balkan territory where Albanians are dispersed or live as indigenous population. The findings from the research were published in the two volumes of the "*Urgent Anthropology*" series (Zhelyazkova, A. "*The Albanian National Problem and the*

Balkans”, vol.1 and “*Albanian Prospects*”, vol.2, IMIR, Sofia, 2001 and 2003), to help to analyse the consequences of NATO war against Serbia and Milosevic’s troops, the psychological climate, the attitudes of the Albanian refugees in the camps in Macedonia, Albania and Serbia, and later on their return home. IMIR’s urgent anthropology team endeavoured, in the course of fieldwork, to find evidence of developing pannationalism among some of the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, to record efforts to mobilize the community, despite its fragmentation throughout the Balkan region, Europe and the United States. The research of the “*Albanian*” field showed that at the beginning of the 21c. the Balkan states and the countries in Western Europe were facing the identical need to resolve the issue of Albanian nationality.

The formation and development of Albanian identity, as well as the evidence of national unification of the Albanians are yet to come for the Balkan region. The emergence of nations and the ethnic and cultural processes that had accompanied the development of other nations at the end of the 18c, during the 19c, and even during the first half of the 20c are only taking place in recent years for the Albanians in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the following dramatic cataclysms created for the Albanians the possibility to meet anew and get to know each other closely. This, only to make them aware of how much different they had become in terms of education, religion, culture and mentality, yet still inseparably related by language, ethnic memory, family connections and shared economic interests. (“*Albania and the Albanian Identities*”, ed. A. Zhelyazkova, IMIR, Sofia, 2000).

What is going in the Balkans at present, and what is yet to happen by the end of the first decade of the 21c, is precisely the process of clarifying of, and affirming the awareness of the Albanian national, cultural and civil identity, as well as the approbation, through force and pressure by the national unification forces, of the spiritual center of national awakening, Kosovo. Regrettably, the process of national awakening is too often accompanied by the emergence of a unification doctrine, aggressively outwardbound through fascism-related theories such as, e.g. the theory of the “harmful” Slavdom, or through pejorative clichés for each European nation. This new ideology is also inward-bound aiming to reach the community by cultivating an attitude of national haughtiness and self-indulgence which oust the need for a culture of national dignity and tolerance towards all other communities and nations.

In a foreseeable future, their unabating demographic rise will force the Albanians to face also the problem of territorial expansion. The tradition of the Roman Empire, of uncompromising resettlement of the Albanians on grounds of extreme poverty so well described by the writings of F. Braudel on the Middle Ages, has survived through the life-span of the Ottoman Empire to the present day. (F. Braudel, “*La Mediterranee et le monde mediterraneen a l’epoque de Philippe II – livre 1* also in Bulgarian Средиземно море и средиземноморския свят по времето на Филип II. Книга първа. Абагар, София, 1998).

Another problem that the Albanians are bound to face, regardless of whether or not they live in the Balkans, in Europe or in the USA, are the difficult personal, clan and social choice they need to make between tradition, ethnocentrism and isolation on the one hand, and the rule of law, humanism and human rights as part of the postmodern European values.

All this continues to figure large on the research plans of IMIR and will be followed closely and recorded in the field diaries of the *urgent anthropology* teams.

Synopsis of the urgent anthropology. “Founding Fathers” of the new method of fieldwork and analysis have been our colleagues from “*Ethnologie française*”, the French academic journal for anthropology (No.3 of 2000). In the editor’s note on the publication of the diary and the analysis of the fieldwork conducted in the refugee camps in Macedonia and Albania following NATO air-raids on Serbia and Kosovo, (June 1999), the Editor-in-chief has recommended the Bulgarian research as a model urgent anthropology. This has put an end, to some extent, to a prolonged discussion among anthropologists on the required period of time and the controversial departure from the methods of the traditional anthropological school. It has also removed the predicament of the *urgent anthropologists* team head, who had suggested a descriptive, rather than terminological response,

having been unable to offer a convincing formula to answer the question asked by colleagues all over the world as to which scientific field would she deem possible to classify the field findings.

Completely by intuition, *urgent anthropology* has been seeking admission to the school of structuralism of Levi-Strauss. Understandably enough however - for she typically lacked self-confidence being a researcher from an ex-communist country, only recently released from the Communist grasp, the head of the field team thought it too forward and inopportune to encourage her researchers to identify their work with such well established school of world fame, especially when it concerned a research field that had previously been repeatedly rejected by the indoctrinated social sciences in Bulgaria and had therefore remained incomplete as a system. And anyway, in the course of intense travels when it is necessary to do in situ analyses of the crisis regions and fighting communities, the issue becomes rather academic.

Once again the field findings were valued highly outside the profession at the beginning of 2002, when, in his comments on the results of our research, published in the first volume of "*Urgent anthropology*", Prof. Zygmunt Bauman noted that "...You have set an example for a marriage of thorough fieldwork in a broad theoretical frame, with brilliant interpretation...", and later went on to ask a question which, for the delight of the *urgent anthropologists*, he answered himself: "Levi-Strauss was speaking of two schools of anthropology: one physically close while spiritually remote, and one physically remote, yet spiritually close. Do you belong to the second school? In Kosovo you defied division and managed to benefit from the best of both worlds." (Personal correspondence, 4-15 January 2002, Z.B. to A.Z.).

The urgent need to probe into social crises leads, out of necessity, to a minimum of preliminary preparation of the teams. What Levi-Strauss saw as a shortcoming of the younger generation of anthropologists, was the stand taken by many ethnologists from this same younger generation, who prior to going to the field, deny themselves any insight into the available sources of information and reviews of regional bibliographies under the pretext that they do not want to interfere with the miracle of intuition, which should assist them to achieve immortal dialogue with their small tribe...the eternal truths of nature and the functions of the social institutions. (Levi-Strauss in French *Antropologie structurale* 1958 and also in Bulgarian - Леви-Строс, К. Структура на мита, Издателство София – С.А., с.32).

The inadequate preliminary preparation however is compensated by the presence, on the interdisciplinary team of *urgent anthropologists*, of a historian specializing in the history of the region and possessing detailed knowledge on the historic background of the target ethnic and confessional communities. The adequate selection of researchers of varying backgrounds, approaches, affiliations and personal experience is by definition crucial for success in the fieldwork. Indeed, it would be impossible, in the short periods reserved for collection of empirical field evidence, to undertake analyses and arrive at valid conclusions, without the preliminary background of a wide-scale theoretical framework and historic panoramas. To quote Levi-Strauss again, history, historic knowledge and geology are of vital importance for the validation of structuralism as a science. They supply its truths and serve as its codes. According to him, when confined to the present moment in the life of a community, research falls victim to illusions since everything is history – what was said yesterday is history, what was said a minute ago is history. But above all, research is destined not to know the present, because only historic development allows for measuring and evaluation of the elements of the present. Better a small amount of history (for, unfortunately, this is the fate of the ethnologist) than no history at all. (Леви –Строс, Структура на мита, с.32-33).

The geographic factor becomes for the *urgent anthropology* a major element of the cognitive process on "conscious and subconscious level" (again, Levi-Strauss presents both levels as fundament of "the truth" in social sciences. See *Race et Histoire. Paris, Unesco, 1952* and also in Bulgarian - Раса и история, Изд. къща "Христо Ботев", София, 1997, с.13). In addition, for decades on end the indoctrinated rules in science have forced researchers to underestimate, ignore or at least not mention this factor when announcing their analytical conclusions.

The new methods, as a syncretic form, proved to be an exceptionally accurate research approach and a timely means of information and scientific knowledge in extreme situations, in quickly changing internal political, international, social and public paradigms. In this ephemeral span of history teeming with events, even the most lasting landmarks such as societies, communities, ethnic, religious and social groups, which in peaceful times may stay unaltered for decades and centuries, are bound to undergo fundamental transformations or turn to a necessary daily mimicry. In the face of stress situations or survival crises of individuals or communities, or of preserving civil, ethnic or cultural identities, changes and cataclysms may occur in all layers of the social hierarchy, in *potestal* models, in social thinking, or in ideological superstructures. Enter the various responses, ranging from aggressive or euphoric, to moody, deeply depressive, even maniacal

In such cases of social cataclysms, experience and knowledge, methods and methodology of the humanities cannot cope with the coverage and analysis of the entire range of predictable changes or deformations of traditional layers of society. It requires the abilities and intellectual potential of all members of a joint team of researchers working in different branches of social science with different methods, approaches and instruments. This, despite the fact that, even though it does not work among the target community while on a field expedition, such a team would actually perform the major part of the analysis while seemingly relaxing or travelling. The researchers share their observations, interpret them thanks to their intellectual potential, personal experience, against the background of research marked by specific approaches and methods. That is a “brain storming” event in which opinions are accepted, dogmatic and formalistic stereotypes are rejected, discoveries are shared, curiosity is aroused, debates on specific cases are held. In the course of these untutored debates, which help to bide the time on the long and dusty Balkan roads, new issues are shaping and any concept requiring consensus can be accepted or rejected.

To a certain extent our research approach relates to cultural ecology, allowing for analysis of the functional relations among different categories of any local culture, i.e. productive activities, kinship, political formations, etc. The descriptive and analytical strategies of the cultural ecology have proved particularly versatile as they can be applied diachronically and synchronically. This is an exceptionally usable methodology, adapted to our aims and intentions, though according to A. Baliksi, “cultural ecology in the postmodern period turned out to be a substantial, significant but outdated theory” (A. Baliksi, In: *Cultural Ecology*, p.16, Sofia, 1997).

During the long years of studies on interethnic and intercultural relations in Bulgaria and in the Balkan region, the International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations has applied a complex interdisciplinary approach incorporating a number of sciences, methods and methodologies without depriving them of their own characteristics. We have obtained excellent results and discovered unexpected opportunities for taking this type of social research beyond *ideal* academic contributions to perform important applied social functions. This had secured the place of *urgent anthropology* in the field of practice by promoting timely “integrated interventions” by civil society or state institution aiming at resolving or at least mitigating of conflicts, and at the development of preventive practices for the complex and vulnerable Balkan region.

Bitter experience in unethical use of the findings in social sciences to manipulate both target groups and target societies as mentioned in the previous paragraph, is regrettably a constant companion of *urgent anthropologists*. Therefore, when looking for support in the instructions of Levi-Strauss, we attempt to carefully assess them. With regret, we admit that in his statement that *social anthropology is not isolated from the realities*, he has had in mind a particular element of his coherent philosophical interpretation, while we, anxious not to be misled, think of completely different, potentially brutal material realities. People communicate with the help of symbols and signs; for the anthropology, which is a conversation of a human being with another human being, everything placed as mediator between two objects is symbol and sign, says Levi-Strauss (Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux*, Librairie Plon, Paris 1973; see also in Bulgarian Леви – Строс, Структурална антропология II, Изд.къща Христо Ботев, София, 1995, с.17), but *urgent*

anthropologists know that completely unsymbolic, unspiritual and deadly agents such as weaponry, or hatred, or perfidious forms of violence, can also constitute a party to communication.

However, in our profound disappointment with the cruelty and violation of human values at the end of the 20 c. and the beginning of the 21 c. – the century which we had vainly hoped would be the most civilized one, that would transform human life into an utmost value - are we not exaggerating, are not actually attempting to depart from the school of structuralism? It is worthwhile to try and resume our place in this school through the melancholic philosophy of Levi-Strauss to the effect that anthropology would never manage to make a science as detached as astronomy, the very existence of which results from the fact that it observes its object from a big distance. Anthropology on the other hand results from historic development in which the better part of humanity had been in a position of subordination, and millions of innocent victims had seen their possessions plundered, their beliefs and institutions demolished before they themselves were savagely massacred, enslaved or subjected to contagious diseases against which their bodies had no immunity. Anthropology is the child of a violent epoch; and if it is now able to consider human phenomena in an unprecedented objective manner, it owes this to the epistemological advantage of a status quo where one part of mankind had usurped the right to treat the other part as a possession. (Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux*, Librairie Plon, Paris 1973; see also in Bulgarian - Леви-Строс, Структурална антропология II, с.77).

Still, prompted by the ever-present optimism in our personal and professional life and prospects, let us admit that, while cursing and overdramatizing their profession, field researchers would not survive without their patent sense of humor and the habit to see themselves through the prism of target communities and respondents. This implied that an exchange of roles would be welcome to make anthropology more acceptable to its victim. If we allow to be “*ethnographed*” by those for whom up to that moment we had only been ethnographers, each party would in turn take the leading part and nobody will have reason to feel inferior. We shall gain additional benefits in learning more about ourselves through the opinion of the others and this reciprocity of perspective will be of use for science in general. (Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale deux*, Librairie Plon, Paris 1973; see also in Bulgarian - Леви-Строс, Структурална антропология II, с.76). For those practicing *urgent anthropology* such an exchange of roles proves to be an integral and ultimately necessary segment of fieldwork. It may be that this is where the reliability of our findings lies.

October 2003

Sofia

KOSOVO IN APRIL 2003 – HEADING FOR INDEPENDENCE OR SLIPPING BACK TO ITS MIRROR WORLD

Antonina Zhelyazkova

Research Methodology

The team consisted of five scholars: a Balkan studies historian, a historian-anthropologist, a linguist-anthropologist, a journalist well versed in Balkan affairs, and an interpreter-mediator¹. They represented the main body of the team already specialised in doing field research in the Western Balkans.

Field work was carried out between 31 March and 7 April in the territory of Macedonia and Kosovo, plus a number of additional interviews, conducted in Bulgaria, with family members of the Bulgarian police force contingent, as well as with members of the UNMIK American police force contingent, which were started in Priština and then continued in Sofia. In May, a team member visited Gračanica, Kosovo, again in order to make some more inquiries.

The aim of the study was to define the limits and chances for multiethnic co-existence in Kosovo; to identify the zones of compatibility and incompatibility between the different ethnic and religious communities. We sought to analyse to what extent was co-existence mimicry and an effort to demonstrate tolerance – by way of self-adjustment to the European standards, and to what degree, an existing reality and a potential chance. Would it be possible in the future to expand the tolerance zones, or overwhelming would remain the tendency of a shrinking agreement in all spheres of public, social, and political life.

Like in all previous studies, of course, the subject of our research interest included: the views of the different ethnic communities, as well as of the different social groups, the international administration, and the peacekeeping forces, concerning the Albanians' prospects and the future of the province of Kosovo.

The field study was carried out in Kačanik, Štrbce, Prizren, Priština, Kosovska Mitrovica, and Gračanica. The research strategy envisaged visiting both ethnically pure areas and places where at least some kind of multiethnic environment was present.

Interviewed were about 70 persons – males and females aged 17-80. The respondents were local residents, Albanians and Serbs, Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Selected were members of all social groups – politicians, intellectuals, university students, hired workers, peasants, unemployed persons, clerics. Conducted were interviews and inquiries with members of the UNMIK police contingents – Bulgarians, Americans, Germans, etc., as well as with KFOR army personnel, of different nationalities, based in the large military camp X. near Prizren.

Administration, policy, economy, society – four years later

Quite visibly, life in the province has been normalised, especially when compared with the chaos and tension of the early 2000. The international administration is getting ready for gradually handing over the government to the local politicians and security forces. This is being done even by way of demonstrative acts: the administrative buildings have been vacated of UNMIK officers and personnel of other international offices in order to accommodate their local counterparts. UNMIK officers have been moved to specially equipped transport containers or to other temporary premises.

Currently, there are several officially operating police forces in Kosovo: the one under the UN mission (UNMIK), the military one under KFOR, the Kosovo Police Service (KPS), and the Kosovo Defence Corps (TKM).

Underway since January 2003 has been a two-year transition period during which the international administration is required to hand over, step by step, its powers to the local

¹ A. Zhelyazkova, V. Grigorov, D. Dimitrova, T. Mangalakova, A. Chaushi.

administration and police. The transfer of the administrative and law-enforcement functions has begun from the few ethnically mixed areas, the international forces being expected to have only supervisory and control functions, and, consequently, advise the local government and correct its wrong steps.

The first completely entrusted police station is that in the Štrpce municipality, a place inhabited by compact Serb population. Forthcoming in the next few months is the handover of the police stations in Gračanica, Kosovska Kamenica and Kosovo polje. In the course of this two-year period and alongside with the handover of the stations, the number of the international UNMIK officers, as well as the KFOR military contingents, should be reduced. Determined have been the percentage quotas by which the international presence in Kosovo is to be steadily diminished. In 2000, some 50 thousand KFOR troops were deployed in Kosovo, while in early 2003 their number was brought down to 30-25 thousand; the plans for cutting down the contingents envisage their number to fall down to 15 thousand by the beginning of 2004 and, later, to as low as 7 thousand.

As reported by our respondents – a colonel, a major and several lieutenants from the KFOR mission at the X. base, as well as by a colonel, a lieutenant-colonel, and a major from UNMIK Police Station 1 – the recruitment of local personnel into the army and police forces is going at an extremely high rate. The Kosovo Defence Corps formed in 2000 is already a contingent of 5 400, of which 1000 are women. They have got their own budget, planning, technical equipment, vehicles with licence numbers, etc. They have even a sort of military academy. These troops were largely employed in 2002, at the time of the earthquake that hit Gnjilane. They were the first to arrive on the sites of disaster. They would most likely be the ones to form the core of the future army.

The police forces have been recruited from among the local population – people with high-school education, aged between 21 and 55, psychologically and physically fit, both males and females. The requirement for these forces is to include representatives of all ethnic groups, persons having clean records and possessing valid ID cards issued by the UN administration. Plans envisage that by the beginning of 2005, when the two-year transition period will be over, the number of police officers will reach 7 thousand, and that of the army personnel – 5 thousand, thirty per cent of them expected to be of non-Albanian origin.

At the time of our survey in Kosovo, the international police force had two subdivisions with specific functions: 3 300 police officers (among whom our respondents) served at the police stations in the municipalities and at the Central Headquarters; another 11 thousand, representatives of ten nations, were deployed at 10 bases and enjoyed the status of special police forces – they live at the bases, they are equipped with infantry weapons and armoured vehicles, and are mobilised in special cases alone. They serve as guards of witnesses and magistrates involved in court trials, they guard buildings, they are responsible for keeping law and order during demonstrations and civic disturbances, they escort prisoners.

The local police officers have taken upon themselves, almost fully, the responsibility of road traffic control, public order maintenance, duties on the home front and in the administration. They have not yet been entrusted with criminal investigation functions. However, by 2005/6 only observers are to remain in Kosovo.

While our field study was in progress, a public protest rally was staged by the Serbs against a proposal advanced by M. Steiner (the civilian governor of the protectorate) demanding the transfer of the competences of the international community to the newly created institutions in Kosovo. Some respondents in Northern Mitrovica and Gračanica explained the motives underlying their protest: “First of all, we are against the fact that the existent institutions are made up of persons who are suspects liable to The Hague Tribunal. We don’t believe that similar institutions are prepared to take over the government. Parliament itself has discredited Steiner’s idea, because everybody can see it is a discriminatory institution, which disregards human rights and aims to check any initiative coming from the Serb community or from the other minorities, they are simply dummies. Parliament has already proved it disrespects international law. Steiner can’t fulfill public interests without an agreement between Belgrade, Priština and the international community, without Kosovo’s status being determined. In fact, Mr. Steiner is trying, in a perfidious manner, to pave the

way for the actual implementation and completion of the Albanian project for an independent state.”

The civilian administrators of the province have been judged quite critically from the very moment of the establishment of the protectorate. Kosovo's first governor, B. Kouchner, was ironically dubbed Kouchneri by the Albanians themselves because of his weak-willed policy in making efforts to establish order in the province and check the aggression of the Albanians. The current governor, Steiner, has also compromised himself by his biased policy in favour of the Albanians and by his planned marriage to a local woman and wedding party arrangements. Steiner's love affair with an Albanian beauty, accompanied by all sorts of gossip of personal and political nature, has been the most widely discussed subject among the international missions in Kosovo.

The Albanians' part in political life. On the political scene after the local and general elections held in Kosovo, there are three basic Albanian parties whose influence is disputed by no one: DLK (the Democratic League for Kosovo) headed by Ibrahim Rugova, DPK (the Democratic Party of Kosovo) of Hashim Thaqi, and ADK (the Alliance for Democratic Kosovo) led by Ramush Haradinaj.

Highest, of course, is the popularity enjoyed by leader Rugova and his party; therefore, the answers given by respondents from different social strata were more or less alike. We asked questions about each leader's popularity in Kačanik, in the village of Mušanik, in Prizren, and in Priština. The responses we got were more or less the same, but prejudices were maybe best formulated by three students from the University in Priština, Albanian Catholics, who declared beforehand they were not politically committed and showed little interest in the political life of the province. When we asked them: "Why, after all, do you approve of Ibrahim Rugova most?", they answered: "Both in the past and at this time, Rugova has always acted for the sake of us all rather than to his own or to his party's political benefit. He is the only one who thinks in perspective, with a view to the future. All other politicians are focused on the present day and care about their own, personal interests alone." To all interviewees Rugova still personifies not only the right type of approach applied for achieving Kosovo's autonomy in the 1990s, but also the strategist who plans for the future of the province for decades to come.

In consequence of our conversations on this subject in a number of different localities and with members of different social groups in the population, we have come to the conclusion that there is strong disappointment with the politicians and political life in Kosovo and a process of sobering down and disillusionment with respect to the effectiveness of the new free and democratic political system. We have figured out the approximate proportions of the political leaders' rates of approval as follows: some 15-18 per cent support Rugova, between 12 and 14 per cent favour Hashim Thaqi and over two per cent, representing the most radically-minded Albanians, back Ramush Haradinaj.

Over the past year, the tensions among the three leaders have become obvious. The more radical Thaqi and Haradinaj have teamed up as political opponents of Rugova. For the first time, on 5 March 2003 official celebrations were held on the stadium in Priština in commemoration of "the fourth anniversary of the liberation of Kosovo". There was a military parade of units of the Kosovo Defence Corpse, as well as of Kosovo's newly formed police forces. Our respondents, as well as some outside observers, pointed out the fact that it was only Hashim Thaqi and Ramush Haradinaj, in the company of the guests, members of the military wings of the Albanians from Southern Serbia, Western Macedonia and Greece, who reviewed the troops from the platform. Kosovo's president Ibrahim Rugova did not attend the official celebrations.

Some respondents commented speculations that immediately after the review of the troops the guests from the different regions, together with the two Kosovar party leaders, held a secret meeting of the military wing during which particular resolutions were adopted. According to their presumptions, most urgent were the decisions aiming to renew the tensions in Southern Serbia and thus prevent the negotiations on the status of the province initiated among Priština, Belgrade, and the international mediators.

TMK commander in chief, Gen. Agim Cheku, was said to have made efforts to mediate between the two camps and reconcile Thaqi and Haradinaj with Rugova, but to no avail. The friction between the political leaders obviously worried him, because it had been materialised in covert violence in the province ascribed to the new illegal Albanian National Army /ANA/, which operated not only within Kosovo, but also in Western Macedonia. The existing tension had made I. Rugova begin forming, for security reasons, his own party militia, which was expected to run up to 1000 combatants. A similar militia force had been raised under Thaqi, who already had as much as 1 000 fighters, some of whom had been recruited from Albania. With the help of his militia troops, Thaqi sought to increase his influence in the municipalities of Vuçitrn, Čičevica, Drenica and Kačanik. The leader of the Alliance for Democratic Kosovo, Ramush Haradinaj, too, had under his command about 900 soldiers that were concentrated at, and controlling, the villages in the Unič mountains and operated in the areas of Dakovica, Peč and Dečani. Supposedly, their task was to intimidate Rugova's supporters.

We kept asking the same question: "Who stands behind ANA?" Our respondents varied in their answers, but the overwhelming opinion was that "the ANA troops are under the control of Ramush Haradinaj and his brother Gen. Remi, who is currently under arrest as suspect in one of the "generals' cases". It's thought to be in fact a matter of rivalry between the Albanian leaders about who will take control over the traffic".

To us, as researchers, the borderline between ANA fighters and party militia troops was blurred, but one thing is beyond doubt in our analysis – it will become inevitable after the reduction in the number of peacekeeping forces in Kosovo, that the importance of party militias will grow and they will have a substantial influence on the country's political and economic life.

The *Koha Ditore* newspaper conducted their own investigation and made public the following testimonies:

N. from the village of Luka (near Dečani): "My grandson was taken ill and I went to seek help, although I knew one shouldn't go out after eight in the evening. I was in the car with my daughter-in-law and my grandson, a neighbour was driving. We were stopped by five guys in soldier's uniforms wearing black masks. They asked where we were going and then let us drive on. Some time later three other men wearing masks stopped us again, I knew one by his voice, but dared not ask anything. I was scared, because they were armed with Kalashnikovs."

I. from the same village: "Nobody's complained of physical abuse, but in the villages of Luka, Požar, Ljumbard, Irsnik, Gramačel, Carabrek they would burst into the houses by night. In order to bully people, they sometimes shoot up in the air."

N.R. from the village of Gramačel: "Two guys tried to set my house on fire, but I threatened them I'd pay them back in the same coin. They maybe thought I might have recognised them and drew back, but anyway, out of anger they fired 60-70 shots in the air. I'm a member of Rugova's party. I even reported the incident to the police, although their aim was not to liquidate, but rather to threaten me.

S. D. from the village of Carabrek: "There were three men wearing masks and uniforms drumming on the doors around the village, but only I bothered to lodge a complaint. The others were afraid. These guys move around in a jeep, they are organised. When we were with the Serbs, we knew whom we had to be wary of, but now we don't know where the worst is to come from. Both civilian and police authorities in Dečani say they have no information. They have it, but they don't care, they'd rather not interfere."

B.S., the local leader of ADK (R. Haradinaj) in Dečani, tried to clear ANA of suspicion: "It couldn't be that masked people be soldiers from this army, those are criminal groups. According to ANA members themselves, these are uncontrollable elements who are discontented with the government..."

A.H., a member of Hashim Thaqi's party, went even further in his assumptions: "There have always been collaborationists of Serbia in this area. They were active here during the war as they are now too..."

The police forces in this region have got intelligence that such squads exist. B.B., who is the international observer for the Dečani police station, said they had got only second-hand information – unofficial. It was only C. who had lodged a written complaint, and they could undertake nothing. The police deputy chief feared those people were organised and had lately been expanding their operations throughout Kosovo.

It is true that the margin between the Albanian politicians and the bands involved in political violence and trafficking is very thin. That is most clearly seen in the widely discussed “generals’ lawsuits” against former commanders of the now disbanded UÇK who are still looked upon as heroes of the war of liberation.

Over 50 000 ethnic Albanians in many towns in Kosovo protested against the sentences passed on five members of the group of Davut Haradinaj, Ramush Haradinaj’s brother, who were sentenced to a total of 31 years imprisonment for abuses, abductions and murders of Albanians. During the war the two brothers were in command of UÇK’s Operative Zone 6 and were among the first associates of Hashim Thaqi.

After the war, Ramush Haradinaj himself became Gen. Cheku’s second-in-command in the Kosovo Defence Corpse. During the first local elections in 2000, there was an assault against him. He suffered 7 or 8 injuries in it and was thereafter transported on a helicopter to Germany. After his recovery, he returned home and formed the ADK, which is the third political force in Kosovo’s parliament.

Proceeding at the time of our sojourn in the province was the case against Rustem Mustafa - Gen. Remi, accused of torturing civilian Albanians as well as of murdering an Albanian family of which only two children had survived. Because in November last year the key witness in this case was killed in a blast in the Dardania café, the prosecutors relied only on the testimony of the children-survivors.

In February the International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague announced they would require the extradition of 10 former UÇK commanders some of whom are already party leaders, heading their own parties. Again in February, arrested and brought to the Hague Tribunal were the spokesman of Hashim Thaqi’s party, a war hero, and a general – member of Thaqi’s military staff – Fatmir Limaj (our team had an extensive conversation with him in 2000), as well as the commanders Hairedin Bala, Isak Misliu and Agim Murtezi.

It is possible, at some point in the future, today’s active politicians – Thaqi, Haradinaj and Cheku, be called to account and prosecuted too.

The Serbs and their political views. Kosovo’s Parliament consists of 120 members and according to the electoral system put into effect the Serbs are entitled to 10 seats; another 10 seats are distributed among the rest of the non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo – Turks, Gorans, Bosniaks, etc. The remaining hundred seats are distributed in proportion to the election results.

Our UNMIK respondents refuted the complaints we had heard from the Serb interviewees in Štrpce: “Although the residents of our municipality are mostly Serbs, an Albanian mayor was imposed on us”. Yet, a police colonel denied their statement: “They have themselves to blame. They boycotted the previous elections and didn’t turn up. Of course, an Albanian mayor was elected and he, in turn, brought along 20 people, Albanians, to be appointed in the municipal administration. Ten or eleven Serb parties took part in the latest elections and each of them won some seats, while the Albanians got only four votes. It’s silly, indeed, that the Serbs disperse their vote.”

Another respondent added: “About 200 000 displaced Serbs from Kosovo were enabled to participate in the parliamentary elections, but they didn’t go to the polls at all. They boycotted, and they could’ve taken the second place in parliament, next to Rugova. They could’ve obtained more votes than Hashim Thaqi’s party and thus have stronger influence in political life.”

So, finally, it became necessary to find out the number of Serbs left in the province. We heard from Serb respondents some obviously exaggerated figures – as many as 160 000 throughout Kosovo, a respondent from Kosovska Mitrovica telling us that in the municipalities in Northern

Kosovo alone they numbered nearly 70 000. These assertions all but made an interviewee from the administration laugh; he assured us those figures were biased: “All Serbs in Kosovo are actually less than 65 000. In Northern Mitrovica, including Zvečan, the Serbs are between 12 000 and 20 000.”²

At the office of the Coordinating Centre for Kosovo and Metohia of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia, based in Gračanica, we talked about Kosovo’s parliament with a respondent, Member of Parliament from the Serb group: “We, Serbs, are only dummies, we are present there in order for people to say that it’s a multiethnic parliament. In reality, it functions for the sake of one nation alone – the Albanian. I was among the politicians who were strong supporters of the idea that the Serbs had to take active part in the elections. I was convinced we had to join parliament in order to be able to work for the reconciliation process, for human rights, for bringing everybody’s life back to normalcy, throughout Kosovo and Metohia. In a way, our parliamentary involvement is absolutely pointless – it doesn’t help to bring the communities closer, neither does it lead to the realization of the human rights project. The Parliament disrespects resolution 1244. The institution’s leaders are mostly Albanians who use the multiethnic parliamentary membership to propagandise the one-nation project of an independent state of Kosovo”.

We asked a question about dialogue: “Isn’t it possible to talk to any of the Albanian leaders or MP’s?” Isn’t anyone of them at least more dialogical? Rugova, let’s say? Answer: “I’m sorry that, for some reasons, Rugova has probably gone out of the war frustrated, but his party is the most uncompromising one in pursuing the realization of the independence project. I don’t think we have to talk personally with those liable for crimes – no matter from which side they are, but we are ready to have talks with Thaqi’s and Haradinaj’s parties, which emerged from the former UČK, though talks with them are extremely difficult. The truth is that the Albanians want no contacts whatsoever with Serbia, while the Serbs are not willing to return without having any institutional relations with Serbia in place, which doesn’t mean they have given up their homes in Kosovo and Metohia”.

A question from a team member: “Under what conditions would the Serbs be willing to return?” A female respondent – Member of Parliament – replied: “As a matter of fact, UNMIK are not ready to have the Serbs back home. They know perfectly well that their return would mean the restoration of some Serb institutions, killings of Serbs by Albanian extremists, renewal of problems with Serbia. There is no single Serb living in Kosovo who wants us to be separated from Serbia. Much like in the case of the disputes between Palestine and Israel, not only that the international community is unwilling to have the Serbs back here, it is even not willing to keep home those who haven’t left.”

The problem is that institutional discrimination inevitably leads to radicalization. In the 1960s, before Milosevic stepped in, there was Albanian domination in the administration in Kosovo and, consequently – discomfort for and discrimination towards the Serbs. In those years nearly 150 000 Serbs left Kosovo. Later on, Milosevic established institutions that discriminated the Albanians and deprived the ethnic Albanian community of the possibility to defend their rights at an institutional level. This naturally led to the strong radicalization of the Albanian community.

Currently, a *mirror* political and social conjuncture is being shaped. The Serbs fear to live without any institutional protection, and the tendency with them is to move towards an ever more conscious and extreme radicalization. Criticisms to the international administration consist in that they have failed to alter the causes and factors underlying Kosovo’s ever recurring *mirror worlds*: when the Serbs dominate, they impose their conception of power, when the situation is reversed and the Albanians become dominant – they, in turn, impose their own power conception in which there is no place for the “others”. Based on the same mirror principle one community tried in the past,

² According to UNMIK data the population in Kosovo is between 1,800,000 and 2,400,000 people, i.e. 300 people per sq.m., which is the highest density of population in Europe. More than 500,000 Albanians are living in Pristina now and 170 Serbs only, while in 1999 the population in this city numbered 250,000 people, 40,000 of whom were Serbs.

and the other one is trying now to survive and to feel safe by forming paramilitary troops, as well as parallel institutions. Kosovo has been an international protectorate for four years now, yet, the European administrators allow one ethnic community to dominate over the other and dictate the rules of living in all spheres, being unable to implement if not a multiethnic pattern of co-existence, at least equal participation of the minorities in the government and the economy – *de facto* rather than *de jure*.

A female respondent described the problem in a very conspicuous way: “You can’t imagine at all how difficult and painful it is to come to know as soon as you were born where you belong. One cannot choose where he or she wants to be – left, right, or social democrat, or maybe in the center – you know this kind of thing. You are familiar with political division, but also with the right to have choice, however, there’s no political power in this place, there’s ethnic power and one has no right to choose. Here, in Kosovo, you come into the world a Serb and you join the Serbs, if you were born Albanian – then your place is with the Albanians, no nuances in between, and I’m sorry to say that all these multiethnic projects advanced by the international community have been a grey zone that has ever been doomed, lacking any chance, or future.”

We came to speculate on the question of what were then the most realistic options for the future of Kosovo and which of the scenarios would be the most acceptable one for the Serbs. We suggested some alternatives and waited for the respondents’ answers: “Independent Kosovo with dual self-government – for either community, cantoning, or division of Kosovo through redrawing the country’s borders, or maybe any other alternative?”

The respondents, Serb politicians, summed up the projects for the future status in the following way: “The reality is that in Kosovo there are two major entities, which want to have their own governmental bodies. If some kind of federalisation is implemented, it will be based on the self-government of these entities. At a centralised level, we should have common bodies, the Serb entity would like to maintain close relations with Belgrade, and the Albanians – with Tirana. This won’t be an independent state, but it will be some long-term perspective for stabilization. The other alternative – division of Kosovo, would mean triggering a chain reaction – if a precedent is set, a divided Macedonia will follow, and one can’t say then what kind of developments would follow in Montenegro and Greece. Why not expect that to reflect on Romania, possibly on Bulgaria too, and so the processes of disintegration would be transferred to Europe.”

The economy or its equivalents in Kosovo. The economic reconstruction in the province is in stagnation. The large ore-dressing works of Trepča, where over 2000 workers were formerly employed, have been closed. None of the big industrial enterprises has reopened. There is no official data about the rate of unemployment, but there is no need, because it is obvious. In Kosovska Mitrovica, for example, out of a total population of 130 000 in its urban and rural communities, as many as 53 300 people are unemployed, 42 per cent of which are jobless women.

Labour opportunities are provided mainly by the service, trade, construction, and transportation sectors, and by the small factories making clothes. The average salary is about 120-150 euros, much higher is the pay received by local people employed as maintenance staff or interpreters at the military bases or with the international administration.

With support from some European funds, consultants and NGOs, some of the local businessmen and activists have been trying to set up and develop small and medium-sized enterprises for the production of building materials, sanitary ceramics, and textile.

On the face of it, there is a widespread economic upsurge, but this illusory picture is due to the ongoing large-scale construction, as well as to the lively trade – mainly in imported goods, because of the lacking local production. All money made, legally or illegally, is being invested in the construction of large houses; built are also a great number of new hotels and places of public resort.

In the southern (Albanian) part of Mitrovica, we visited one of our respondents, who ran a small sewing shop providing employment to three women. The dresses and embroideries they make have a good number of women customers, and, what is striking for the situation in this particular

town, divided by the bridge spanning the Ibar river, not only Albanian, but also Bosniak, Turkish and Goran women come into this small shop. This respondent's business is on the brink of survival, because she has begun from scratch, by herself, together with a friend of hers, and pays a rent for the premises where the sewing machines and materials are placed. She dreams of expanding the production shop, of hiring at least 8-10 women, because she firmly believes that the Albanian women need to become emancipated and earn their own money, as well as be less bound to their homes and husbands.

She told us it was impossible for her to get a bank credit, because she had nothing that could serve as a bank guarantee. We asked her: "We've seen many rich Albanians with obviously thriving businesses, couldn't you borrow money from someone of them, under certain conditions?" The woman laughed, free-heartedly and loudly: "Everybody here works for his own family. No one supports anyone else. And, what is more, I'm a woman – no businessman would talk business with me, the less so money and money lending."

For precisely this reason perhaps a female respondent at the town's municipality, a municipal councilor, told us how, using funds from some European projects, they had focused their efforts on women's qualification – namely, dressmaker's, hairdresser's and beautician training courses. The municipal administration had worked out a project to start 9 small production firms: for woodwork, paste products, textile, and sanitary materials. The idea was for a greater number of women to become motivated not only to get employment at the future factories, but also to become owners, to open their own firms. The respondent we interviewed was president of the newly founded "Association of Businesswomen", which sought to unite the efforts of women of enterprise from both sides of the divided city.

Having conducted quite many interviews, we were left with the impression that a common administration, tax collection, registration of businesses – all are a fiction in this divided city, where the bridge has been turned into a high-security site, barred with barbed wire and sacks of sand, and guarded by heavily armed soldiers from the French contingent of KFOR. Communication between the northern and the southern part of the city is so impossible that a municipal officer makes special visits to the northern part, where the Serb businessmen are, in order to collect the necessary information and enter them in the register on the site. There are some Serbs who would themselves cross the Ibar with the purpose of registering their businesses – they are about 300 in number already, but most of them prefer to go escorted by UNMIK soldiers.

The economic unsteadiness was strongly felt by the shortage of electric power supply. There are regular outages throughout the province and this fact has turned power generators into fashionable goods, they are booming outside each shop or café in the streets of the city. We asked some respondents about the state of electric power supply with certain astonishment, because it was known that electricity was imported from Bulgaria and from Serbia even at preferential, lower prices. In some interviewees' opinion, power shortage was caused by the resale in Italy of some of the cheaply purchased electricity at much higher prices.

Naturally, part of the economy in Kosovo is linked with smuggling and illegal trafficking in people, narcotics, weapons and other goods. Two days before our arrival in Kosovo, KFOR soldiers had caught a considerable amount of weapons trafficked illegally from Albania through the "green" border? There is an incredible information deficit – this sort of data are never publicised and no member of the civil society is clear about who transfers the weapons from exactly where and whom it is intended for. The truth is that the population is not interested in this matter, because they regard smuggling goods as part of routine daily life.

According to police officers, after the issuance of the special UN instruction of January 2001, which regulated the activity of the police and the control functions of the International Migrations Organisation, the situation of illegal traffic in women and prostitution has been constrained within certain limits. Most importantly, this instruction has repealed the hitherto effective legislation treating victims of traffic as criminals on an equal base with traffickers and procurers; it states instead that all trafficked individuals are considered victims. This has given the

police a free hand to take action and, certainly, act in the name of saving hundreds of women, abducted or enticed into slavery.

In 2002 several large-scale police campaigns were carried out in Kosovo to check places of resort used as houses of prostitution, which did not stop procurers from their activity, but compelled them to legalise each girl's job. At the moment, the girls work legally, with official documents and contracts, as waitresses, bar tenders, or dancers, and it is not so easy to hold them in captivity.

We interviewed a police colonel, a specialist in this sphere: "A scheme has been created including three routes of trafficking in girls into Kosovo – through Serbia, through Macedonia, and through Albania. Trafficking takes place in three stages: the girls are recruited by means of job advertisements; afterwards they are transported to the three mentioned countries – the intermediate destinations, where they are maltreated and abused until they are bent, and, later, they are sold to other intermediary rings, the girls' value varying between 3 and 5 thousand euros; the third stage is the transportation of the women across the Kosovo border, most often across the "green" border, and their resale to local agents which distribute and once again sell them to the places of entertainment. A striking fact is, according to investigators, prosecutors and police officers, that dramatically rising is the number of Albanian prostitutes – such were unknown until 10 years ago. Largest is the number of prostitutes from the Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Russia, and Bulgaria. The prostitutes coming from Bulgaria constitute 10 per cent, 80 per cent of them being Roma women."

The Bosnian experience has shown that in provinces and states that have in the course of years been the arena of international peacekeeping operations or the field of operation of European civilian administrations and observers, trafficking in women and prostitution become a more profitable business than trafficking in drugs. With the emergence of the first places of resort functioning as houses of prostitution, special bans were introduced for the UNMIK police officers, as well as for the KFOR soldiers. All of them have been given a list of "forbidden" places they are not allowed to visit, places where escort girls are offered. This list is updated each month. Catching any officer of the international missions at some of the places on the ban list is sanctioned seriously and most likely leads to the recalling of the rule-breaker from Kosovo. In the opinion of the respondents from the international missions, these measures have limited the possibility for the members of the international armed forces and the civilian services to get involved in relations of corruption and partnership with the local gangster structures.

The Kosovar aesthetics. Albanians have traditionally been very good builders, that's why the ongoing large-scale construction looks awesome. Perplexing is only the size and overall square surface of the houses built, although the locally typical large patriarchal families do need such almost monumental structures. Apart from this, the Kosovars have been obsessed by the "gangster-baroque" aesthetics and they invest all the money they earn in concrete, in "high-rise" buildings, terraces and an excessive number of ornaments of an obscure style.

An inseparable part of the new architectural aesthetics is the extensive building of mosques. In fact, it meets the needs of the Albanian society for confirming all characteristics of a distinct and strong identity. The result is an ostensible re-clericalisation finding expression in building places of worship and publishing and circulating religious literature. There is another tendency among the young people, namely to turn to religious foundations and organizations for getting employment as assistants or volunteers, as well as to make their educational choice from among the religious schools and universities.

Our conversation with three university students, Catholics, helped us conclude that in the young people's eyes to get familiar with such fields of interest and activities and to assess their pragmatic value is worthwhile. Getting closer to the religious institutions and organizations is something unknown before, something, which is worth trying and learning, because it might turn out practicable. Our observations fully corresponded with the metaphoric statement made by an Albanian leader, who told us several years ago that: "We are like a family in an empty house. We want to have in it everything other people have – tables and chairs and beds..."

One should not overlook the severe confrontation between modernity and the stringent Albanian tradition, where the latter's upholders are trying, with the help of religion, to maintain the *satus quo*, the unequivocal *potestas* model, and the patriarchal hierarchy.

Oppressively ostentatious are the numerous monuments to the liberation war heroes. As a rule, those are two or three metre high obelisks or blocks of black marble on top of which there stands a full-length representation of the hero, "Kalashnikov" in hand, equipped with a whole lot of cartridge-belts and other military attributes. There are also the corresponding heroic inscriptions, sometimes a listing of his merits, sometimes pledges for carrying on the hero's deed, as well as plenty of artificial flowers, even artificial brushes and small trees. This is obviously necessary as part of the creation and establishment of the new myths and the aesthetics of heroisation.

Emanations of the Kosovar fashion style are works devoted to "Liberator" America. The Kosovar Albanians have been infatuated by the United States, while President Clinton has risen to the rank of a national hero. One of the main streets in Priština is named Bill Clinton; the name of Bill Clinton has also been given to a stone-cutter's and a service-station. Near to the same main street there is a Hillary café. On entering the city, the traveller is struck by a huge replica of the Statue of Liberty, overtopping absurdly the roof of the newly built Victoria Hotel.

The local people and all our Albanian respondents are convinced that the Americans are the most steadfast defenders of the Albanian cause and would therefore back their claims for independent Kosovo. They would like the American forces to stay in Kosovo as long as possible, for this makes them feel secure. They were 100 per cent supportive of the war in Iraq, although they were somewhat envious about the fact that attention has been diverted from the Albanian national question and Kosovo's independence over to the Middle East and the oil fields.

During our field work there were commentaries in TV programmes and daily newspapers in Macedonia and Kosovo, as well as in Serbia and Bulgaria, on a prognosis made by professor Francisco Veiga of the University of Barcelona, that the U.S. has decided to find a new loyal ally on the Balkans and will therefore support the establishment of Greater Albania. The agitated Balkan press published some maps. Our team bought for 5 euros a map of Ethnic Albania, which was on sale everywhere in the streets of Priština. This map had spread the ethnic Albanian territories as far as Niš, including the whole of Southern Serbia, Western Macedonia, with the border lying much farther east of Skopje and Kumanovo and touching upon Veles. Of course, it embraced Kosovo, Albania, but also Northern Greece and Çameria (Thesprotia). A great portion of Montenegro, together with the Adriatic coast and the capital Podgorica, were also within the ethnic Albanian borders. As it seemed, poor Montenegrins were actually left with only Cetine and its adjacent villages. This paragraph is not a diversion from the subject of the corresponding section in the present text, but rather part of Kosovo's geopolitical aesthetics.

Public sentiments, myths and anticipations in the two major communities

Albanians – the end of euphoria. During the past four post-war years something happened in the Albanian community, maybe the most tangible change occurred – a conflict of generations, or to put it less harshly, a growing generation gap. To us as analysts this fact is amazing, because we know quite well the stringent patriarchal character and tradition of the Albanians. The causes of the tearing up of the very fabric of the Albanian cultural model in such a short span of time is a challenge to the social anthropologist. Having collected dozens of interviews with men of all age groups whom we could describe in terms of family relations as four generations: fathers – sons – grandsons – great-grandsons, we can already make some assumptions.

It is the attitude to the present and the assessment of the past that are at the root of the thinning intergeneration ties. The generation between 45 and 80 years is affected by certain Yugo-nostalgia, which in the case of the older people has been reduced to extreme mythologisation of Marshal Tito. The middle-aged generation, too, cherishes nice memories of the Yugoslavian past and the autonomy. Both groups have extremely critical attitudes to the current state of affairs in society, politics and the economy in Kosovo. The young generation, on their part, remember only

the humiliation of the late 1980s and the 1990s, the underground schools, the apartheid under Milosevic, the radical philosophies and the accumulating hatred. They were involved, directly or indirectly, in the war. They are happy with the present condition of Kosovo and anticipate the future with optimism.

On an early morning outside the post office in Prizren, we conversed at great lengths with the elderly people, from the town itself and from nearby villages, queuing up to get their pensions. Each of our interlocutors confirmed he was the head of a large family.

A respondent from the village of Opoja: “My family consists of 15 members – I have three sons and a daughter. All of them live with me, along with their daughters-in-law and the children. My sons are jobless, but they don’t want to leave for Europe illegally. They wait for some opportunity to seek a legal job outside Kosovo.” The interviewed old man had worked for three years and a half in Germany and had from there a pension of 45 euros. Before the war, he had received a pension of 800 dinars. This information was accompanied by a remark confirmed by the other old people assembled in front of the post office: “Yugoslavia is no more and the pension is gone too. I don’t care about politics now that I can’t live on my pension. How can I live on 45 euros, with so many people in my family who depend on me?”

Nevertheless, we persisted in urging him to make some political comments and he agreed reluctantly: “I’ve gone through three wars and I know for sure it was best under Marshal Tito. A great man and a big politician! Things might change for the better now too, but when would that be, we won’t be living to see it. Only under Tito people lived properly and with dignity, it’s been all shit from that time on!”

Our respondent got excited and angry, therefore we changed the subject: “Do your sons know the Kanun? And their sons?” Answer: “They not only know the Kanun, but they also stick to it – both my children and grandchildren. I’m the head of the family and everybody should listen to me! Fourteen people in this family can’t make a single step without asking me.” Question: “Do you think this tradition will persist after you death?” The interviewee hesitated: “Who knows if they would obey the Kanun after my death. My eldest son will take my place and I believe he would continue running the family according to the old rules.” We revert to the political topic: “You now have your own parliament in Priština, don’t you expect things to improve, to have jobs and more chances for a better living?” His answer full of anger: “Kosovo’s head is KFOR, parliament can do nothing, and who knows if they want to, the young ones there, for they’ve lost respect for anything.”

One of our respondents drowned us in curses and unusual aggression: “The state’s already gone. Here and now it’s nemechka (German ground). It’s all because of the Serbs. Serbia should be run over by tanks, she won’t listen to anything else. I’d roll tanks over Slavism anywhere. The way UČK did. (Cursing...!)” A member of the research team: “We are Bulgarians, there are many other Slavs beside the Serbs, we are different, do you hate all of us? Answer: “There’s no difference, Slavism is a disease, all Slavs should be done away with...!”

Worried that we had to listen to such a tirade and wild cursing, another respondent from the village of Leskovac broke in: “Don’t pay attention to him, don’t take offence. He belongs to a most disgusting breed the war brought to light. He is a murderer. He killed his wife and a man, her friend. He was in prison for fifteen years and would’ve lain for life, but he was let out during the war together with lots of other convicts. He is now playing the hero – a political convict, a sufferer, he yells all the time, makes threats, he’s a greater extremist than any of the most extremist politicians.” Our tolerant respondent, too, needed informing us: “I have a pension of 35 euros, I barely make both ends meet. What I’m most angry with is that all around is chaos, everything is in mess, the Americans rule us, and we live in fear. Now in Kosovo it’s impossible to speak out and criticise, to say the truth of how we’re living. The moment they hear you, some extremists like this one appear and begin threatening that if you talk too much and don’t keep your mouth shut, they’d thrash you or send you in jail.”

Unfortunately, there is a strange unanimity among all generations in their racist attitudes to and opinions of Slavism. In the café at the Priština University we had a similar conversation,

much calmer and sophisticated, indeed, with a student in literature: "I wouldn't like to insult you, but I don't like Slavs. I totally dislike them. All Slavs are the same. And Bosniaks are a disaster." We felt we were on the track of the fascist-type racial theory spread throughout Kosovo, therefore, we went on with the interview: "Have you any prejudices as regards other nations?" Answer: "Of the European nations, I don't like the Greeks, the French and the Italians." We sought support from another interviewee, student in French philology: "We suppose you, studying the French culture, disagree with the views of your friend?"

Answer: "I don't like the French either, and the Italians as well..." All three interviewees summed up that if they had to choose, they would prefer the English... They thought there was no point at all in discussing Romany people: "The Roma are always with those in power, they're rubbish", but they did not think ill of Gorans, although "they are Slav Muslims and very close to the Serbs..."

In fact, we witnessed the typical symptoms of national arrogance and self-sufficiency. For it became clear from the students' answers to our next questions that they liked most and solely all things Albanian. One of the students, who came from Djakovica, set out his point: "You shouldn't ask us questions about the Kanun in critical light. Those are rules and laws which should be introduced everywhere in Europe. It's a good Albanian experience, an age-old one, which should be adopted by the constitutional and legal systems in the European countries." A scholar from the team: "And what about blood feud, what about the fact that it is your parents who are entitled to say which woman you should marry? You approve of it all and want to spread it throughout Europe, is that so?" Answer: "Let's talk like realists. At the university, I have studied the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini thoroughly and I believe sixty per cent of the rules postulated in it could be applied anywhere, and if so it happens, the world would become a better place. Certainly, forty per cent may be discarded or critically revised before being applied." Question: "At which departments is the Kanun studied?" Answer: "Each student in the humanities can study the Kanun as an optional discipline, for example at the Literature Department, also at the Faculty of Law." Although they spoke as admirers of traditional law, we asked additional questions in order to establish how far the revolt of the young generation against traditions went: "Would you allow your parents to designate the woman you should marry, and how many children would you like to have, or would you listen to you parents' advice?" The answers all students gave were of the same type: "I won't let them arrange my marriage. I'd ask their opinion, of course, but I'll choose for myself. The children will be two, three at the most, no matter what our parents say."

It is absolutely clear that obsession with the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini is part of the process of affirmation of the Albanian identity, part of the cult of Albanianism, and the core of Albanian nationalism. It is not at all a desire to strictly observe the prescriptions and norms the way they were observed by grandparents and parents, on the contrary, it is a matter of modernization and revolt against the rules, there is no denying.

We continued our interviews with the students taking up the topic of the future status of Kosovo. We asked: "Would you like to live in some other place, do you consider emigrating?" Unanimous answers by several of the young people: "To me Kosovo is the best place in the world. Studying somewhere else – yes, but we are going to work in Kosovo." The students told us that their university allowances had been covered by relatives who lived in Europe. The yearly academic fee is 130 euros, and the cost of accommodation is about 50 euros per individual. They had brothers and sisters working abroad and, in this connection, they made the following commentaries: "Our relatives working in Europe invest in us." A literature student having two brothers in Germany: "They have an agreement, and one of my brothers sends me 200 euros each month. Even if there's only one person working abroad, it's enough – he would help."

A question from the team members: "Are there any fears in your life? What are you afraid of most?" Answer: "There's disappointment with Thaqi and Haradinaj, many people say they back and support them out of fear. If a politician speaks against another politician, he may be killed, but in politics it's like that in the other parts of the world too." Another young man breaks in making a topical remark: "We're afraid of the war in Iraq most, because it's possible for the American

contingent to draw out of here. Then the Serbs will be back.” “We worry about many things – about unemployment, about being forced to live together with the Serbs, sometimes we fear that Kosovo might be divided, that some part of Kosovo might be given to Serbia.”

One of the youths summed up judiciously: “The truth is that both we and the Serbs in Kosovo still live with our illusions. We, Albanians, are waiting for independence, while the Serbs want Kosovo to be Serbian or something like that.” Question: “Imagine you fall in love with a Serb girl, what would happen then, would you marry her? Answer: “Should I fall in love, I would make love to her, but marry her – no, never!

We also talked at great length about Macedonia, about the Albanians, wherever in the Balkans they live, and about Greater Albania, of course. An argument started among the students on the subject of whether they would fight for Greater Albania. The result was two to one in favour of those who were not willing to go to war. “If I’m supposed to defend the independence of Kosovo, I would fight in battle and I would give my life. But if someone decides to raise an army in the name of Greater Albania – I wouldn’t enlist as a volunteer, I wouldn’t sacrifice myself for such a cause.” And the opposite opinion expressed with pathos by a young man from Djakovica: “The Motherland is beautiful even if you are killed for her sake, I would go fighting and give my life for the ethnic Albanian boundaries. Albania’s borders should be those of the time of World War II – then the Albanian territory was 60 000 square kilometres; should America help us, in less than an year and a half Kosovo’s status and the frontiers will be settled.”

The men of the 40-50 age group whom we interviewed in Prizren, Kačanik and other places, presumed that Kosovo would be cantoned: “Write it down – we are going to have an independent and cantoned Kosovo.” They also believed that nothing depended on the parliament in Priština, that it was the U.S. and the international community that made the decisions.

The young people we conversed with in Kačanik added to the theme of independent Kosovo the following statement: “This thing, about the independence status, is inevitable, because we have already settled the problem – in ten years Kosovo is to become the biggest state in the Balkans – with a population of 10 million. Love with someone of another ethnic origin is not quite acceptable, it might be possible for a man, but for a girl to have an affair with a member of another ethnos – no.” They burst in a friendly laughter: “It may be acceptable, though, for us to marry Bulgarian, or Turkish, women.

The village of Kačanik is a very big one – 8-10 thousand residents. A countless number of children crowd the local school during the breaks. The Christians’ church is guarded by KFOR as are all other Christian sites in the territory of Kosovo. Our interviewees kept family memories of how a hundred years ago there were Bulgarians in Kačanik and, in this connection, they made an ironic remark concerning Macedonia: “There is no such state. Those living in Macedonia are Bulgarians, Albanians, Turks, Serbs, and Gypsies. No other people.”

The Serb enclaves, the frustration and radicalization of the Serb community. At the border checkpoint on entering Kosovo we met a UNMIK police officer who asked us different questions and, having realised that we were scholars, made some comments on the situation in Kosovo. With the cynicism typical of a long serving and, therefore, tired soldier, he told us: “If you want to know how the Serbs feel, just visit the village of Štrpce –they hang about in the pub from the morning – drinking, cursing, crying, singing...” That made an impression on us and, before heading for Štrpce, we asked: “And what would you say about the Albanians, what do they do?” Answer: “The Albanians? The Albanians make babies and that’s it... Well, of course they do business too. They are pragmatic.

Štrpce is a large village – as many as 13 000 residents, the school is crowded, it is named “Jovan Zvijic”. The small gardens in front of the houses are cultivated, a mountain river flows through the village. In a central place on the façade of the municipal building there is a sign plate reading: “The Republic of Serbia/Autonomous province of Kosovo and Metohia/Skupština Štrpce”. Next to the municipal building there is a monument commemorating the victims of the Balkan war and World War I – inscribed in it are the names of all soldiers and officers who had lost their lives.

OSCE's offices are accommodated in the same building. One or two KFOR armoured vehicles could be seen along the main street, but things had obviously been left to OSCE, because there were more of their automobiles.

It goes without saying that we stopped at the tavern first; it is also situated right in the central part of the village, just next to the school and the municipal building. Not long before, we were already talking with two pensioners, who hurried to express their worries: "We are living as if we are under occupation. It's not democracy, it's cultural occupation. Only under Tito we had true democracy." One of the pensioners, who had worked for nearly ten years in Germany, received a pension of 1000 euro and therefore generously treated his friends in the pub to a drink of cognac: "I have a good pension, but even if I got one million euro, what would I need it for, what would I do with it, when we live like prisoners here – we can't go anywhere. I can't travel even to Skopje and Belgrade. I can't start a business!"

The Štrpce municipality is part of Sirinička župa, near the border with the Republic of Macedonia, and includes 12 villages inhabited by Serbs. During the war, a numerous Serb military unit was deployed in the vicinity, and immediately after the withdrawal of the Serb army, the area was put under KFOR control, which protected the population from the UČK attacks. At present this Serb-populated enclave lives absolutely isolated from the neighbouring municipalities of Kačanik and Prizren, densely populated by Albanians. The local population maintains contacts with Serbia, there are passenger bus lines, Serbian newspapers are delivered daily and the elderly people get their pensions in dinars from Serbia. The basic monetary unit in the municipality is the dinar. Within the boundaries of the municipality people feel safe, but they are afraid to work on their fields. About 4 or 5 kilometres away from Štrpce, there is a well-known mountain resort – the local hotels accommodate Serbs that have chosen to return, but their homes are in ethnic Albanian localities and already inhabited by Albanians. The native residents feel depressed and cheer themselves up by hopes that the Serb state would be restored in the province: There will never be an Albanian Kosovo. Our great-grandparents lived here. This is Older Serbia, not Belgrade! What do we want? To live in a Serbian state, to move and work freely and not feel as if we are under occupation.

The only Serb enclave immediately bordering on Serbia is situated in the Northern part of Kosovo – Northern Kosovska Mitrovica, Zvečan, Trepča and Leposavić. Half of the Serb population that has remained in the province is concentrated here. The status of the divided town is a special one – for example, goods imported from Serbia are registered and relevant custom-duties are collected not at Kosovo's administrative border, but only after they pass through the divided Mitrovica. The local Serbs take part in Kosovo's political life, but they are also activists in Serbia. The northernmost municipalities are de facto ethnically and economically separated from Kosovo. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the Serbs in Northern Kosovo are most radically minded and convinced that whatever resolution is passed on Kosovo's status, they will be able to uphold to the last their self-government which resembles autonomy and which, in their views, should lead to an independent Northern Kosovo.

In February, the Union of the Serb Municipalities and Communities in KOSMET (the name used by the Serbs to designate Kosovo) was founded. We interviewed the leader of the Serbian National Council in Northern Mitrovica and he told us that the newly formed and newly elected Kosovo institutions are positively defined as Albanian. The Serbs are not interested in participating in them, therefore they trust in self-government. To them, any resolution that does not guarantee full self-government of the Serb communities is unacceptable and would mean continuation of the process of emigration of the Serbs from the province. When in February the Union of Municipalities was founded, i.e. an institution which in practice offered an alternative for the reorganization of Kosovo into two separate entities, M. Steiner commented that it was an attempt to establish a new parallel structure based on monoethnicity and directly contradicting the international multiethnic conception of Kosovo. Our respondent, a Serb leader, declared: "There isn't any willingness on the part of the Albanians themselves for living jointly. According to the Albanian conception, multiethnicity means an ethnically cleansed society, and 90 per cent of the

areas you have traveled and visited demonstrate this.” He also explained that their suggestions for united Serb municipalities aimed solely at the self-protection of the Serbs and were the only chance for bringing some of the refugees back to the province.

A respondent, a chairwoman of the Association of Women in Northern Mitrovica, brought us to the top of a tall hill in the highest part of the urban area, pointed down to an entire quarter of demolished houses and said: “This is what multiethnic Kosovo means according to the Albanians. When the KFOR troops drew out, the Albanians pulled down dozens of homes of Romany people and Serbs in order to drive them away for good.” The Serbs from Northern Mitrovica live isolated from the other enclaves and travel to the other Serb-populated towns and villages on buses bearing special signs called “blue corridors”. Our interviewee declared: “I want reconciliation, but should an independent Kosovo be proclaimed, I’ll leave!”

Lying nearby Priština is the village of Gračanica, which is divided in two – an Albanian and a Serb part, where about 2-3 thousand Serbs live much like in an enclave. Situated in this Serb enclave is the Gračanica Monastery built in the 15th century under King Milutin and his wife Simonida, daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II Palaeologus. A remarkable fact is that Gračanica is a favourite place where the UNMIK police officers operating in Priština rent homes. We did not wonder the Bulgarians preferred the Serb enclave, but we were surprised that the place was a kind of oasis for the American police officers. The latter offered an explanation: “There’s no sense to pay 800 euro for a nasty flat in the dirty Priština. It’s clean, quiet and tidy here and you can rent a house with a garden for 500-600 euro.”

We inquired other Serb activists too about what we saw as an apparent intention and a political perspective before them. We asked quite directly: “Aren’t there parallel Serb structures being set up in Kosovo and won’t this impair the process of normalization of interethnic relations?” An angry radical retorted: “Let them take a dose of their own medicine. Haven’t they won through parallel structures, through paramilitary formations? It’s our turn now – we are going to make a parallel state, we’ll rely on Serbia the way they received assistance from Albania, we’ll also form our own Kosovo Serbs Liberation Army if that be the trick...”

The same question on our part caused irritation in our female respondent, a Serb politician, but she answered with restraint: “Yes, such private units, supported by Serbia, in the sphere of health care and education do exist. But everybody should know these are life-saving institutions. Not a single Serb works or is a patient at the hospital in Priština, only Albanian is spoken at the post office, on the television too. The Serbs don’t go to the theatre, because the plays are performed in Albanian, it’s the same in the cinemas, nor do they dare use the city transport. Naturally, this made it necessary to open three small hospital wards for medical care in Gračanica, the Serb children already go to private schools where they are taught in Serbian, and some of them have lessons at private homes.

Lying in the outskirts of Priština is the village of Kosovo polje, in which a very small number of Serbs have remained. They work at the Health Centre, which is under the control of the Russian international contingent. Our respondent is from the village of Lipljan, but he runs a tavern in Kosovo polje. It is not quite clear what keeps the business above water, because hardly any other customers were seen in the pub but Bulgarian officers or Russian soldiers occasionally dropping in. The Serbs that go there are as few as to gather at a single table. The interviewee related how, in order to supply his restaurant, he would go shopping to the Shkriptari shops under KFOR escort: “We’re done and over here. I’d sell my house in Lipljan, should anyone pay adequately. Should the Russian step out, we’re leaving too. Only 300 Serbs live in Priština – all of them old men and women. For now, the score is 1:1, we need another war...”

It was only in the city of Prizren that the atmosphere of multiethnicity could be slightly felt, since ethnic Albanians and ethnic Turks when living side by side get along relatively well. The population in the city itself and the nearby villages runs up to nearly 200 000 people of whom 20 000 are ethnic Turks. We were struck by the fact that many of the Albanians speak the two languages – they have a good knowledge of Turkish. The instances of intermarriages are not rare. However, there are as little as 63 Serbs, while their pre-war number was 12 000. All churches in

Prizren are enclosed, there are strict premonitory signs forbidding getting close to them, and they are secured by KFOR guards and armoured vehicles. On top of one of the hills is the “Saints Cyril and Methodius” theological school, where 10 to 12 Serb refugees have been hiding. Most dramatic and emblematic is the case of a married couple – an Albanian husband and his Serb wife: “We live against our will. We can’t find a shelter anywhere. It’s good we have no children.” Terror-stricken, they are waiting for Australian emigration visas – they want to escape as far away as possible, preferably to another continent.

The refugees live on 35 euro a month: “We are like prisoners”; along the way to their asylum one could see graffiti reading: “We’ll kill you, nits!”

In the St. George church built back in 1856, we met the priest who had tried to collect from all places possible icons that had survived - in order to save them. He told us: “I can’t abandon them, no matter they’re only about 60 people. It’s been four years now and I’m still waiting for some of them to come back, but there’s nobody. I travel occasionally to Belgrade, where my family lives. And it’s the fourth year in a row that I ride home on a tank...”

The fate and views of several women living in their mirror world or the distorting glasses of Kosovo’s political perspective

Two emancipated Albanian women from the diaspora. The two Albanian women, about 45 years old, whom we met in Prizren, are nurses by training. When they were students, they took part in the 1981 demonstrations and were compelled to emigrate for political reasons. They had worked in Frankfurt on the Main, Germany, in the course of 20 years. The people of their generation emigrated most often to Germany, Switzerland, and the Arab countries, to Libya, for example.

They had returned to emancipated Kosovo in order to help – but it appeared to them that at this point there were many uncertain things which might frustrate the chances of independent Kosovo: “Most of the leaders from the diaspora should come home and work in the concrete political situation. Although the Albanians abroad, anywhere around the world, work for the cause too.”

We, as a research team, have known for several years now that the Albanian diaspora in Western Europe and in the United States has been one of the most important factors influencing the developments in Kosovo, as well as in Macedonia. First of all, the diaspora possesses significant financial resources, attachment to the family structures, and commitment to the national cause. It was in the midst of the diaspora that the core group of ideologists of the future of the Albanian national idea and the strategies for its realization was formed. In consequence of the fact that the members of the Albanian immigration have lived for a long time away from their native places, they are much less susceptible to regional disagreements and rivalries stemming from the level of cultural differences, identity characteristics, and family interests. Albanians’ intra-community relations are charged with similar conflicts, no matter where in the Balkans they have been dispersed. From the perspective of time and from a long distance, the Albanian diaspora can more clearly see the future prospects of the Albanian national and political unity.

During the last several years the Albanian leaders living in Western Europe have increasingly taken the role of a driving force for the organization and funding of the military campaigns of the Albanians in Macedonia, Southern Serbia, and Kosovo itself. In the opinion of both commanders and combatants who have participated in armed clashes in the three regions, the important decisions concerning the military and political planning are produced by the Albanian national strategic center (traditionally called the Elders’ Council) whose headquarters have been kept secret, but are probably based in Germany or Switzerland. The Albanians who have taken part in fighting in different parts of the Balkans, say they would not have been as effective were it not for the considerable logistic assistance, money, weapons, medicines and military experts coming from abroad.

The drawing up of plans has also been ascribed to this Albanian strategic center based abroad.

In a sense, our respondents from Prizren once again confirmed everything we had heard until that moment, except for certain nuances and some hitherto missing details. In Germany, the two women are members of the Albanian National Democratic League (BKDSH – Beselidhya Kombetare Demokratike Shiptare), which was registered in Germany; it represents an association of all Albanians, not only the Kosovars. The league was founded in 1928 as the successor of the political ideas of the Prizren League of 1878. In the late 1930s it discontinued its activities and resumed them after the end of World War II, in Germany. It has representative offices in Albania and Kosovo. At present, its formal leader in Germany is Emin Fazlia, known by the name of Emil Kastrioti. The League has taken care of the Albanian immigrants in Western Europe – accommodation, employment, etc. As for its influence in the province, the [two] respondents asserted that “the statutes of all Albanian parties in Kosovo have been borrowed from the League’s statutes, and what is more, all parties and many of the leaders have been trained by it”.

Naturally, we asked them questions about their political views and intentions. In a nutshell, they profess several ideas: “KFOR is unable to do for Kosovo what the Albanians themselves, our party followers, can. The major problem is that the Serbs destroyed the intelligentsia in Kosovo. Some of them emigrated and are still abroad, others have become Belgrade’s collaborationists. The Serbs had made life intolerable for almost all ethnic Albanians – we could not have meals together with the Serbs, nor work with them, we were separated in all spheres of everyday life. The situation today is better and we want to live and work here.” Question: “And what do you think of the status of Kosovo?” Answer: It’s too early to discuss Kosovo’s status, because the wound is still running and it’s impossible to consider multiethnic co-existence yet. One thing is definitely clear – we won’t ever allow anybody to rule us, we won’t ever be ordered about by anybody!” In connection with our observations, we were certainly interested in the views held by our interviewees concerning the possible unification of the ethnic Albanians: “There is a patch of land in Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, all this is Albanian land. The Albanians, too, should get their own.” One of the respondents stamped her foot on the ground and insisted: “Everybody who was born in this land has a right over it. The Albanians in Macedonia should also get their own. They even may not speak their own language there and they have both economic and political problems. I don’t mean aggressive acts, but given that there are problems, they should be resolved calmly and each one should get his own...” Question: “Is there a possibility for the unification of Kosovo and Western Macedonia at a certain point?” Answer: “And why not. We don’t have problems between us. We don’t want to take another nation’s land, we just want our people and our land, we want our own territory, where Albanians are present, and to live in peace with all other Albanians.” Question: “Yet, you obviously want unification of all Albanians, i.e. Greater Albania?” Answer: “The Serb propaganda has contrived the Greater Albania thesis. We would like to live together – all Albanians in one place. It would be then that the Albanians of the diaspora, who are now living at their homes here and abroad, would return and would help for the implementation of a correct policy.”

When we talked about the Albanian traditions, we heard from them something that surprised us, because it fully coincided with the views held by our respondents-students from the Pristina University: “You shouldn’t perceive the Kanun only as something negative – those are wise rules that have made people’s lives easier and have maintained order. The Kanun is great and it is currently being studied in the United States. It should be practiced, some of its chapters and paragraphs, while the negative substance should be abandoned. No matter what, be sure that God is kind to the Albanians. We have been visiting various places around the world for decades and praying in all churches for freedom, independence and unification. And God has heard us, because each temple is a place of worship for the Albanian – be it a church or a mosque.”

A Serb woman from Priština and an Albanian woman from Southern Mitrovica looking at their destinies in the distorting mirror of “new, independent Kosovo”. Both of them are beautiful and strong-minded women around 45 years of age. Their laughter is much the same –

loud and infectious. They themselves are very much alike – both physically and mentally, although they are separated by a distance of many kilometers, by plenty of armoured KFOR equipment and numerous KFOR guards. They are also separated by what one of them described as follows: “Here, in Kosovo, your place is determined the moment you come into the world - a Serb belongs to the Serbs, an Albanian – to the Albanians.” Both of them do not want to accept this rule and are so similar in the way they think, that it is just impossible not to make a parallel and present them side by side.

The Serb woman R.’s account: “I spent all my life in Priština. I was with my parents first, then I got married, later I gave birth to my three children and brought them up, all in this city. I read lectures at the University, I worked as ward chief at the hospital. Today I can’t go freely to my house any more, I live in the X. enclave, at some other people’s place.³ In Priština, and in Kosovo as a whole, the international community has been in place for four years now and what does it matter for me and for my family, when I don’t even know the people who are living in my house. I don’t want anything exceptional but just be answered why I can’t go to my place where I have reared my children. Not because I’m better or worse than the Albanian women, not because I’m more intelligent or more stupid than they are, not because I work harder or lie idler, but simply because I’m a Serb woman. I’m sorry to say that after these four years the answer is but ethnic discrimination. Thank God, my children are already grown-up and independent. They study in Europe, you certainly don’t think that, as a mother, I could tell them: “come back here!”

We inquired about the new army of which we had heard to be operating within Kosovo and Macedonia – ANA, as well as about what we had heard from the ethnic Albanians on the subject of Greater Albania. Our interlocutor examined the Ethnic Albanians Map, which we unfolded in front of her, and laughed: “Just look how far they have spread out! But you put the question about Greater Albania in an unwise way. It’s just normal for anybody [of them] to declare this to be Serbian propaganda. In fact, the aspiration for a new status, for a State of Independent Kosovo, is only a mask put on to cheat the international community, to conceal the Greater Albania project. The Albanians are a nation that has never been and is not willing to live with anyone else. Take a look around the Balkans, the ethnically purest areas are to be found where Albanians live. It’s the same even with resort places – the ski resort near Štrpce used to be visited by Serbs, and by Macedonians, but it is now crowded with Albanians alone; isn’t the situation in some areas of Montenegro’s Adriatic coast the same? Anything that has been taken under control by Albanians mustn’t be frequented by “others” any more.

They make changes in everything – from changing the signs to destroying anything indicative of “stranger’s” presence – architecture, gravestones, and places of worship.

It’s no use asking again and again about the differences between KLA, ANA, AOPBM, – those are different names of the same thing. It’s not even certain that these armies spring up as a result of various group interests. This is rather a way of confusing the observers and sweeping up the traces. The same is valid of the parties. In order to divert the attention from the ADK and their radical positions, suddenly a new nationalist Albanian party is proclaimed – Bali Kombetar, which is active in the same territories – in Kosovo, in Albania, and in Macedonia, and which voices the same platform – unification of all Albanian territories. What’s the new then?

I have a theory, maybe because I’m a doctor. Natality is the most primitive way of conquering territories. The real problem wherever Albanians live is the total enslavement of their wives and turning them into breeding machines. I have interviewed Albanian women – all of them say that after the birth of their first child the family demands of them to give birth, without delay, to more and more children. Nobody asks them if they want it, or not. It’s an absolute violation of human rights, trampling of their human dignity all taking place within the confines of their walled

³ According to data of the international administration in Kosovo Albanians have settled in 77,000 somebody else's houses, flats or other possession and more than 37,000 premises have been destroyed by fire.

and shut up houses. There's help from nowhere. As a matter of fact I feel sorry for them, they need support in order to get emancipated. This is the real problem, and it is a civilization problem.⁴

The Albanians' birthrate was taboo, a topic that was never commented on in Serbia and Yugoslavia. The problems were examined from all possible angles, but there never was a single word spoken about the emancipation, about the liberation of the Albanian women. It seems to me the international community now finds it disgraceful and impolite to discuss this issue, it is considered a racial prejudice. And what if a poor community has 5-6-10 children. No wonder, they can't provide education for them, nor easily ensure a normal standard of living, and this brings about criminal behaviour. I remember my childhood years ago – we were two kids and our parents provided us with everything we needed. It's quite normal to provoke envy when riding on a bicycle, while the neighbour's ten kids, my peers and schoolmates, wonder how to still their hunger on bread alone. So a time comes when my neighbours turn up at my place, enraged and armed, to kill me, to rob me, to take all nice things I've got, which they haven't.

In a way, this overwhelming birthrate threatens the Albanians themselves, because there is huge unemployment, they transmit criminality to Europe – to France, Germany, and Sweden. Aren't the Western societies aware of how endangered they are by the Albanian gangster rings and criminal activities. They are aware, of course, because they have their intelligence services, they have observers, and analysts like you. The truth is that Europe wants to create an independent Albanian state, they will concentrate the Albanians in one place, as in a ghetto, by promises that all will be integrated into the EU and Europe will be cleansed. The bad thing is that these plans are being made to the detriment of the Serbs and our Serb lands and homes, because they deprived us to produce this "black zone" in the Balkans with a nice sanitary cordon around."

The Albanian woman, F., whom we interviewed in Southern Mitrovica: "My parents come from Dolno Studime, they're workers, a decent family, we've never been committed to politics. My father had some chances, he had helped Tito's guerrillas, and he was offered different posts, but he didn't accept. He also used to tell my brother that "politics is great trouble and one can always tarnish one's good name". That's why I'm trying now to expand my business, I'm offered various European projects, but they're all tied one way or another to politics and I wouldn't like to get committed. I take a human to be a human, I don't care about what one's religion or nationality is. I also want to have knowledge of all languages, in order to be able to comprehend and communicate with people directly, without an interpreter. This is how I talk with my customers – with each woman in her own language.

I spent my life in Northern Mitrovica, we had a large house and a workshop, and our five kids were brought up there. During the war, I thought to stay, I wanted to keep living along with my neighbours, but that proved to be impossible. There were bands that kept threatening us and we fled as far as Albania. Two weeks after the war was over, I went to my house and there was already a Serb family living there. They didn't let me take anything of our belongings, they gave me only my kids' pictures. They took away from me everything else and I keep wondering how is it possible to use another's belongings, especially personal ones... What I hated most was that I knew the people who had accommodated themselves in my house. I think it might've been easier for me if they were some strangers, but it was a man I had worked with over the years...

I'm not one of those who keep complaining. I moved to the southern part of Mitrovica and started my life from scratch. I live in a rented house and it was most difficult for me to set up a new home – beds, coverings, chairs and so on. I love stylish things, things beautiful and I've been accustomed to a high standard. We were quite rich. I'm poor now, but life is still interesting. I've rented this premise for a dressmaker's shop, and I pay 350 euro a month. I once used to work as a secretary of the chief of the "Smelting" division of the metallurgical works in Zvečan. Quite an important job I had. It was a large plant, I worked with Serbs, neighbours, colleagues. Dressmaking was my hobby, and now I'm living on it. Sewing has been my leisure pursuit for 30 years now. I

⁴ The highest birthrate in Europe is registered in the province of Kosovo - 27 per mille. According to UNMIK data, between 55,000 and 57,000 children have been born since 2000 in the province.

had even specialised in making traditional wedding costumes, today they are in demand only by folk ensembles.

I started with a single sewing machine, my sister's, but then I realised that my friends and other Albanian women also needed to earn their own money in order to be independent. Later I made up a good project and a German organisation supported me. However, their requirement to me was hiring Albanian women returning from Germany. I didn't mind and so I did, but now I dream of expanding my business, because I want to give jobs to more women who are trying to emancipate themselves. This is a very important issue for Kosovo – women's emancipation. You just can't imagine what it means to be closed up, dependent and all your life bear and look after children.

I have five children, two of my sons are in France. I love them all, I wouldn't give up anyone of them, but if I could choose, I would certainly have had fewer kids. Now I have the feeling that I've lost quite many years of my life. I have my dreams, it doesn't matter that I'm older now – I want to have money, to live, to travel around the world, I want very much to be able to travel. I wouldn't like to be rich the way Albanians get rich nowadays. There's something disgusting in it – they're doing wholesale trade, they're either laying up money or building huge houses. I don't even know what they do with their money.

I've changed a great deal after all that. I wouldn't built a house now, I wouldn't be piling up furnishings, because I already know how easy it is to lose everything in an instant. We, Albanians, are both Catholics and Bektashi, and me, I'm Muslim. I'm not a devoted believer, I know what the most important things are: don't steal, don't kill, and don't lie. I saw them during the war: a devout person, but stealing and killing. No faith teaches one to hurt others. And we all did much harm to each other. I'm an optimist, however, we'll be living together again. If only the extremists don't take the upper hand – they are to be found among the Albanians too, but more radical at the moment are the Serbs. If only could they get to peace..."

Conclusion

As in the field studies published in the two volumes of the Urgent Anthropology series entitled *The Albanian National Problem and the Balkans*, IMIR, 2001 and *Albanian Perspectives*, IMIR, 2003 – the objective of the present field diary is, on the basis of the rich source material, to make comprehensive interdisciplinary conclusions without imposing the author's opinion.

Even so, two points stand out perfectly clear in all the interviews, inquiries and observations:

- The political and social environment now witnessed in Kosovo represents, in a certain sense, a distorted mirror reflection of the ethnic apartheid and segregation of the Milosevic's era. This will naturally lead to the gradual self-organization of the Serbs, isolated in several enclaves; it will make them radicalise their ideas and political actions, establish their own parallel administrative structures in the name of surviving and, in effect, struggle by all means against the federalization of the province.
- There is some tension among the three major political agents of the Albanian majority in Kosovo and it has led to the formation of almost equal in number and armament party militias exerting, by force and in a destructive way, their influence on political and economic life in Kosovo. After the eventual withdrawal of UNMIK and the reduction in the number of KFOR contingents, the presence of these militias as well as of the troops to be raised in the Serb enclaves, will become a factor that will undoubtedly lead to a sort of permanent guerrilla war.

THE KANUN IN PRESENT-DAY ALBANIA, KOSOVO, AND MONTENEGRO

Tanya Mangalakova

During one of the fieldwork expeditions carried out in Macedonia in the autumn of 2002, the team came across the Macedonian edition of the *Kanun of Lek Dukagjin* amidst piles of books on Islam at the “Donika” bookshop in the town of Tetovo. On noticing the team members’ joy and excitement, a young Albanian was so pleased to find out we were familiar with the Kanun that he presented us with two copies. This present is especially dear to me and every time I set out on a journey to regions inhabited by Albanians, I leaf through the book to refresh my knowledge of the norms of the five-century-old customary law. It is difficult to comprehend the character, mentality and pattern of behaviour of Albanians without taking into account the Kanun [Code]. While interviewing ethnic Albanian respondents during expeditions conducted between 1999 and 2003 in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro, we often touched upon the subject of Kanun and blood feud in the context of the modern times. We found out that not only was the Code far from being eradicated, but that, down to the present day, its norms continue to regulate many of the Albanians’ daily life matters.

THE CODE OF LEK DUKAGJIN

The most common version of customary law among the Albanians is the *Kanun of Lek Dukagjin*. The Albanian Gëgs inhabiting the territories north of the Shkumbin River had lived for long centuries in large clans observing the code of the Kanun – a primitive constitution regulating not only their community life, but also their private lives. The norms were passed on from generation to generation by an oral tradition and were decreed by the council of elders. It is considered that the Code was rationalised by despot Lek III Dukagjin (1410 – 1481). This code was compiled throughout the centuries chiefly by adding new norms. It was studied by folklorist Shtjefën Gjecov and was published as late as 1933. The text was systematised into 12 sections – “*The Church*”, “*The Family*”, “*Marriage*”, “*The House, Cattle, and Property*”, “*Work*”, “*Loans*”, “*Pledge*”, “*Honour*”, “*Damages*”, “*The Kanun against Harm*”, “*The Kanun of Judgement*”, “*Exemption and Exceptions*”¹.

In some of its sections, the Kanun included an elaborate legal code trying to regulate blood feud (*gjakmarrja*) – a system of reciprocal “honour killings”. According to the Code, if a man is deeply affronted, his family has the right to kill the person who has insulted him. However, by doing this, the family will become a target for revenge on the part of the victim’s family. The victim’s closest male relative is obliged to kill the murderer of his family member. The pattern of reprisal killings thus formed has been passed on for generations of families and has been manifested up to the present day in Albania, Kosovo, and, partly, in Montenegro. “*Blood is never lost*”, states the Kanun². The perpetrator is entitled to ask through the agency of a mediator – a well-respected member of the community, for a *besa* – a vow that no one would hurt him. Those who have not taken revenge, fall into social disgrace. At public gatherings they are served coffee or brandy in cups and glasses with a bullet put inside, in order to be urged to avenge the injury. The Code does not allow the murdering of women or children. The only place where blood should not be shed is the house of the marked victim. Because of the ruthlessness of blood feud, most of the houses in Northern Albania look like fortresses built of stone, with small apertures serving as windows. Even

¹ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА Тетово, 1994.

² Ibid., p. 179.

to date many Albanians shut themselves inside their houses where they remain isolated for life in order to escape from blood vengeance. In the past, they used to hide in towers as well. Under the regime of Enver Hoxha, the Kanun in Albania was banned, but after 1991 it returned in a most brutal form not only in the North, but also in the South, and in the central parts.

As stated by Ferad Muhic, intellectual and author of the foreword to the Macedonian language edition, *“For at least four centuries, the Kanun has de facto been an internationalised form of Albanians’ social consciousness. It has been a symbolic framework within which the ethnic and cultural substratum of the Albanians of that period has been identified, and its regulations are also an expression of an organised mode of social response to the external factors, as well as a strategic programme for preserving their own identity irrespective of all such external factors”*³.

ALBANIA: 1376 FAMILIES ARE IN BLOOD FEUDS

Since 1991, Albania has experienced a revival of blood feuds. Figures on cases of vendetta are discrepant depending on the sources – police statistics, mass media, or non-governmental organisations. In any case, they are horrifying. Some 3000 families are in blood feuds and have been hiding confined within their homes, writes the *“Shekulli”* newspaper⁴. According to data reported by the Committee for National Reconciliation based in Tirana, 1376 families from 23 regions, 7 villages and 17 towns have become targets for blood vengeance and hence live isolated in their houses. Between 1991 and 2000, there were 2500 feuding families that lived restricted within their homes, but in the period 2000-2002 some of them were reconciled and their number has consequently fallen.

Greatest is the number of families in blood feuds in Shkodër – 400, which is easy to explain, since the Code’s historical tradition is most powerful in this major city of Northern Albania. According to the local press, they are as many as 600. The Institute for Democratisation and Mediation functioning in Shkodër estimates the number of feuding families to be 250. In some other towns in Northern Albania the figures are as follows: 81 in Tropojë, 11 in Krujë, 18 in Lezhë, 49 in Kukës, 13 in Puk, 28 in Has, 12 in Kurbin, 48 in Burel, 17 in Bulchiza. There are families victims of vendetta and living isolated, without ever leaving their houses, not only in the north, but also in the south and in the central parts of Albania – for example, in the capital Tirana there are 144 such families, in Durrës – 98, in Vlora – 111, in Malsija-e-Madhe – 67, in Berat – 62, in Fier – 49, in Korça – 15, in Pogradec – 6, in Tepelena – 16, in Gjirokastër – 9, in Librazd – 4, in Lushnjë – 33, in Elbasan – 29. The enumerated towns have traditionally been outside the zones of influence of the Code of Lek Dukagjin. Why is it that the geography of vendetta has spread to include now the country’s central and southern parts too? This is a consequence of the migration from northern to central Albania of part of the rural population living in a state of vendetta, confined within their homes, is the opinion expressed by Neritan Ceka, head of the Parliamentary Committee on Public Order and Security. The authorities have registered a decrease in the number of murders in the period of 1998-2003, when the total number of murders related to the Kanun was 330. In 1978 there were 573 murders of which 45 were related to the Kanun; in 1979, linked with the Kanun were 41 out of 497 murders; 18 out of 275 murders in 2000, were related to the Kanun; 19 of 208 murders in 2001 were related to the Kanun; 12 of all 179 murders in 2002 were connected with the Kanun. During a police campaign in 2002, as many as 77 perpetrators of vendetta were detained. Somewhere about 10 000 individuals were subjected, in varying degrees, to the harmful consequences of the Kanun⁵.

According to data released by the Ministry of National Education, late in 2002 there were 147 children who did not go to school because they were isolated at home with their parents by

³ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. Тетово. ФИ & ГА. 1994, с. 15.

⁴ Burimi, G. Albanie: Le Kanun ou l’Europe? Shekulli, 10.02.2003, Le Courrier des Balkans, www.balkans.eu.org/article2275.html.

⁵ Le Kanun et la vendetta en Albanie: du mythe à la réalité . Le Courrier des Balkans, 13.02.2003. www.balkans.eu.org/article2784.html.

reason of vendetta. As reported by a non-governmental organisation engaged in reconciliation, the number of home-confined children is 400, and the mass media have reported the number of such children to be 800. As stated by the Committee for National Reconciliation there are 282 children aged between 1 and 10, and 429 children aged 11-18, who have been prevented from attending school on account of family blood feuds.

K.G., lecturer at the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilisations, translator of the Code into French, thinks that during the modern period (that between World War II and the end of the 20th century) the basic features characterising the *bloody recurrences* in Northern Albania evolved into greater brutality, rather than tolerance. The application of the ancient Kanun has been ousted by a distorted use of a modern Kanun in favour of personal revenge and settling old gangster scores. The range of vengeance killings now covers all members of Albanian society, including women and even children. The legal organisation prescribed by the Kanun has been unable to channel destructive energies⁶.

Some concrete cases of atrocious murders committed on suspicion of adultery have been reported in the journal of the Committee for National Reconciliation, "*Ligji dhe jeta*" (*Law and Life*)⁷. The Code does not provide for revenge in cases of murdering an adulterer: "*Those who commit adultery, if killed in the act of adultery, shall remain unavenged*"⁸.

On 5 January 2002, 40-year-old Sh. H. from the Rom neighbourhood of the city of Fier walked into his ex-son-in-law E. M.'s house and killed his brother A. and his brother's wife H. M. He also injured his son-in-law and his three children – 12-year-old E., 2-year-old D., and 15-year-old G.A. The motive for the act was that his son-in-law had divorced his daughter. Finally, Sh. killed himself.

On 30 March 2002, in the village of Priske e Vogel, near Tirana, P.N. killed in the nuptial bed his wife N. and her sister's husband A. M. Two children were left without a parent, and the murderer was sent to prison. Motive – adultery.

On 5 April 2002, in the *Kombinat* quarter, following a quarrel, H. T. killed his wife M. T. in the presence of their 5 children. While he was in prison, the children were left without anyone to provide for them.

On 10 April 2002, following his divorce, B. S. killed his wife E. and his father-in-law H. B. and seriously hurt his mother-in-law V. B. using a Kalashnikov rifle. Then the killer took his own life.

On 15 April 2002, in Kashar, 50-year-old L. R. killed her husband M. R. in order to save her son, deadly threatened on the morning of 15 April by her father claiming that her son had stolen 30 000 old *leks*.

On 22 April 2002, in Patos, 41-year-old F. S. stabbed to death his 37-year-old wife J. with a kitchen knife and injured her 20-year-old daughter D., because he had caught his wife sleeping with D.'s boyfriend. On attempting to save her mother and D., the second daughter, 16-year-old I., was hurt, suffering 8 knife stabs, and later died in hospital. J.'s two other daughters were left orphans.

On 23 April 2002, 31-year-old D. Z. (a Roma) from Vlora killed his younger daughters, injured his wife and later attempted suicide. The underlying reason – alcoholism and jealousy of his 27-year-old wife. Two days after the tragedy the spouses buried their dead children.

On 2 May 2002, M. Ch., from the village of Osoje in Shrapar, killed his wife with a pickaxe because "*for long 10 years she has been unfaithful to him [having an affair] with the village packsaddle-maker*". The family has 8 children aged between 8 and 12.

During the fieldwork period in October 2003, two horrible murders rooted in customary law were widely discussed in Albania. In Tirana, a father had killed his engaged daughter because she had gone out to a discotheque and had come back home at about 4 o'clock in the morning. Having

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Ligji dhe jeta* (Law and life), No 1, 2002, p. 28-29, the cases are given below – editor's note.

⁸ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА Тетово, 1994, с. 180.

killed her, he had dug a pit in the courtyard and buried her there. In Elbasan, a woman with a jealous husband had killed her children and then taken her own life.

The conciliator's authority

In Krujë, while doing fieldwork at the time of the parliamentary elections in July 2001, absorbed in conversations with some interesting interlocutors, I missed the day's last fixed route taxi travelling to Tirana. I asked for help one of my respondents, D. Ch, who was running for Member of Parliament at that time. He not only found a car, but sent his son and his nephew to accompany me on my trip to Tirana. It is from Krujë, the place where the castle of the legendary Skanderbeg is located, that Albania's northern parts begin. The local population knows and observes many of the Kanun's norms. After D. Ch. received me in his office, I became his guest according to the traditional Albanian customs. A guest is held in particularly high respect among the Albanians. The Code ordains that "*The Albanian's house belongs to God and the guest*"⁹, "*You shall see off a guest as far as he wants you to*"¹⁰. According to customary law, I enjoyed the status of my interviewee's guest and if something would happen to me en route, he was expected to take revenge on my account. D. Ch. knew the Kanun's rules observed by the people in the Krujë area. He had been a conciliator in cases of blood feud. "*We call conciliator in [cases of] blood feud that one who takes it upon himself to reconcile the victim's house with the killer*"¹¹.

"In the Malësia region, near Krujë, comprising 8 villages inhabited by some 3500 people, there are cases of blood vengeance and people who live in isolation inside their homes for fear of vendetta. They maintain contacts with the other family concerned through mediators who help them go out to work, guaranteeing them something like a wok permit, in order to be able to provide for their families. But in certain cases such people live absolutely isolated, without ever going out. Since I've been director of the local electrical equipment plant for 8 years, I've acted as a go-between in some reconciliation cases. I've not always been successful", D. Ch. told me in 2001.

In 2003 I met D. Ch. again, he had become an MP and we had a long and thorough conversation on the subject of Kanun and conciliation. The motives for most of the murders in the Krujë area had been associated with quarrels over land. Until then D. Ch. had been able to reconcile 3 out of 8 feuding families in Krujë. In these 3 families, the same number of murders had been committed by the two conflicting sides. Coming to terms is very difficult when the number of victims is different for the two families.

What persons can become conciliators? D. Ch. recounted that in Krujë there was a special group consisting of men of senior age, well-familiar with the Kanun. The group's members should include influential figures – for example, members of Parliament, ministers, etc. Negotiators are elected among the inhabitants of the region once in 5 years. In the course of reconciliation, an agreement is signed between the two feuding sides, as well as by the warrant group, affirming that no one would break the arrangement. No compensation is paid for the victims. The people involved in blood feuds stay confined within their homes, but after a certain period the peace-maker group allow them to go out, in order to work on their land plots, for example, but without leaving the village or the town.

Marriage and women's status

The majority of marriages in modern Albania are still arranged by the families in accordance with the Code's prescriptions. "*All men here seem to have been born married*", joked A. Ch., an educated nice-looking young Albanian woman, living in Tirana, who was on the look out for a

⁹ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА Тетово, 1994, с. 139.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 141.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 185.

husband. Her chances of marrying for love were not very great so that eventually she had to ask her family to have the matter settled. I vividly remember the sight of the angry old man, a shepherd, near the village of Këlcyrë (Southern Albania), who began scolding me in a loud voice when we asked him whether the village dwellers used to marry for love. *“It’s for us to decide about our children’s marriages... I have six girls and I won’t hear of a marriage for love. Marriage is agreement between the families”* yelled the old man. According to the Code, *“a boy who has parents has no right to: think of his marriage, to choose matchmakers, to concern himself with his own engagement...”* In turn, *“a maid, even if she has no parents, has no right to think of her getting married, this is her brothers’ and cousins’ entitlement. A maid has no right to choose a husband; she shall marry the one she is betrothed to...”*¹²

Not each murder of a woman is punished by the family. D. Ch. explained that if the woman killed had had an affair with another man, then her family had no right at all to take revenge. *“The Kanun requires that the bride’s family put a bullet in her dowry – for her husband to kill her with should she be unfaithful.”* The Kanun demands that *“the parents of the disgraced ones shall not seek blood [vengeance], but shall give the bullet back to the killer pronouncing the words: “May your hand be blessed.”*¹³ As prescribed by customary law, *“Widows or unmarried women that have been dishonoured shall be set on fire alive on a dunghill. Or shall be put between two piles of burning wood and required to tell who their accomplice is, or else be left to burn to death between the two fires. If made to say who has disgraced them, then the accomplice is caught and they both are killed.”*¹⁴

D. Ch. told me how a girl in Krujë had killed her lover because he was married and, although he had promised he would get a divorce, he had abandoned her expectant. The girl had given birth to the child while in prison. *“The boy’s family has no claims at all”*, D. Ch. concluded.

The geographical factor has an impact on the way Albanians get married. In Northern Albania, the engagement is arranged by the families, while in the South marriage for love is also possible. In Northern Albania it is the families that arrange marriages in order to exclude any blood ties and genetic diseases. *“In the south, infants won’t be engaged, but in northern Albania an engagement is made even during pregnancy, even before the child was born... Divorce is virtually impossible, it is granted only on grounds laid down in the Kanun”*, explained G.M., chairman of one of the non-governmental organisations based in Tirana and engaged in conciliation activities. Divorces are still a rare phenomenon. I asked G. M.: if Albanians divorced in cases of unhappy marriage, wouldn’t that be a way of preventing the horrible murders out of jealousy which also involved taking children’s lives. *“If divorce was something acceptable, the murder cases would be much less in number. We have even demanded that public brothels be set up in order to make people more open. In Albania, prostitution is prohibited by law. So that such cases will keep occurring as long as the laws are so strict. You can’t punish a woman because she is a prostitute. This law is primitive and absurd”*.

Yet, the Code has also a positive impact on everyday life. It prescribes respect to a woman’s dignity when she lives alone in the mountains and this requirement has been preserved in contemporary life as well. *“On no account should you provoke a woman, even if she’s by herself in the highlands. You’ll be executed right away. Women in Northern Albania are, therefore, very much protected in terms of their dignity”*, said G.M.

T. H. is a picturesque Albanian from Vlora who knew very well the traditions of the Albanians in the South. When we met, the first thing he did was to ask whether I was married, because if I were not, he was going to find me a good match for a husband. In his view, the Albanian tradition has kept the blood tie to the present day. He described in superlatives what good wives Albanian women made: *“Everywhere in the Balkans, in Turkey, Italy, Greece, Montenegro, all families who have sons dream of a daughter-in-law from Albania. This is because the Albanian*

¹² Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА Тетово, 1994, с. 40.

¹³ Ibid., p. 180.

¹⁴ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА Тетово, 1994, с. 181.

family has principles. A problem for us are the influences from Europe that come with drugs and trafficking. Pornographic films are another problem, they were banned in Albania. Our traditions are better. We Albanians treasure integrity and morality. Albanian women are very thrifty; they have a strong character, and care about the family very much."

Southerners – more brutal in vendettas

The prevailing view is that the Kanun is applied in the northern parts of Albania exclusively, but it is only on the face of it. Blood vengeance is known in the South too. Near Berat, a bloody vendetta took place, entailing 28 murders committed in consequence of a 4-year old feud between the families Y. and K. The first murder was committed in 1997, when L.K., chief of the secret police in Berat and member of the Democratic Party, endeavoured to pressurise the Y. family to vote for Berisha. However, the Y.s did not yield to the pressure. One day, during the insurgency events in the country's southern parts, L.K.'s nephew killed L.Y., the staunchest Socialist in the family. A few weeks later, the K. family killed two other members of the Y. family. In response, on the eve of the parliamentary elections in October 1997, Y. killed Sh. K. So, what followed were 28 murders.

Another instance of a never-ending vendetta is the war between the C. and H. families from Berat, which has been going on for 3 years now and has taken 28 human lives. The first killing was committed by reason of drugs; one of the criminals is already in prison. *"One of our objectives concerns combating trafficking in drugs and women, for they are the major cause of conflicts resulting in blood feud"*, said G.M., the head of a non-governmental organisation engaged in conciliation since 1996. He explained how half of the C. family members and half of the H. family had left to live in Fier, but the conflict had been transferred together with them. *"The pattern in Southern Albania is much more dangerous than in the North. In Northern Albania they know traditions and the Kanun better, and when some big conflict arises, the two sides meet to talk in order to be able to settle it. While in Southern Albania this can't happen, because people in those parts are not familiar with traditions and the Kanun, so they can't have a dialogue with each other and things come to the worse"*, concluded G.M.

The mysterious Code of Zuli

A. L., a journalist from Tirana, thinks that in the mountain region of Kurveleshi, Southern Albania, blood revenge is practised too, and the Kurveleshi Albanians are much more brutal in their vendettas than the northerners. The research team decided to verify this hypothesis in the field.

Kurveleshi is an ethnographic region comprising not only the highlands of the same name lying in the south, but also adjacent regions – Bolena, Vranishti, Kuci, as well as parts of Progonati, Gjirokastrë, Tepelena, Vlora, Labëria, and Delvin. Kurveleshi includes 2 boroughs and 7 municipalities of the Saranda region, part of the Lukova municipality, from Borshi to Nivica. The Kurveleshi villages are Chora and Fter. Many heroes were born in this particular region, Seljam Musai, for example. Ali Pasha of Tepelena concluded an agreement with the Kurveleshi population, which at that time inhabited a larger territory than the one of today, not to trespass their territories. The central Kurveleshi town was Himara. Nowadays, the number of Kurveleshi people living in the region of Saranda is about 2000-2500.

Following on the track of the hypothesis of Kurveleshi, we stopped at Vlora with the intention to consult with T.H. who in 2003 was already manager of one of the largest investment projects – a brewery worth 15 million euro. He told me in 2001 that *"Kurveleshi is one of our purest [most authentic] regions, a source of national pride. It was a land of manly heroes, brave men who fought against a range of empires. They are stock-breeders, craftsmen, and singers; they perform polyphonic songs without accompaniment; they have a lot of respect for women but won't let them sit at the table in their company. They are the heaviest brandy drinkers that we know of; they are the best at festivities and singing"*. During our second meeting, T. H. called in R. G. – the

deputy-prefect of Saranda, whose father was a Kurveleshi, assuming that he could tell us more about this particular region. T. H. thinks that a specific local code has been compiled and applied in the entire region: *“Just like the way northerners have the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin, the men in this region have created the Code of Zuli. The Kanun of Zuli includes regulations which govern one’s life from birth to death. Naturally, the Kanun of Zuli hasn’t now that much influence as it had before because society progresses”*. According to R. G., who is half Kurveleshi and knows the region’s local tradition well, the Code of Zuli is only familiar to the people living in Vlora or the central part of Kurveleshi. It is unknown in Saranda and the region’s southern part. There is no blood revenge tradition among the Kurveleshi, they settle their disputes by civil law. While travelling the interminable roads of Southern Albania on our way from Saranda to Korça – through Gjirokastër, Tepelena, and Prmit, none of the people whom we inquired had ever heard of the mysterious Code of Zuli. In all probability, it has already been erased from the collective memory.

The Kurveleshi – the Malësori of Southern Albania

And so, in October 2003 we set out from Vlora on our way to Saranda following on the track of the mysterious Code of Zuli. We were to cross the Lungara Mountains first. The road was in deplorable condition; the car could simply not steer clear of every hole there and was bumping all the way through. The first village we passed through was Dukati, and as dusk was falling, we remembered the words we had heard from a respondent in Vlora, who had made a slighting remark about the Kurveleshi saying that they were *“wild and dull mountaineers who live without electricity”*. Very rarely were villages seen by the road, the mountain was all in darkness. The houses had tall walls and looked like those of the Arvanitis that we had seen in Greece. Only here and there were lights glimmering in some of the houses and, certainly, in the village tavern, where the men would talk daily matters. In the mountain town of Himara, where the population predominantly consists of members of the ethnic Greek minority, one could not see any women after nightfall. There are many chapels along the road. And Himara is not Kurveleshi yet. *“The Kurveleshi have a very strong character, maybe because of the place where they live. They’re people who have lived in deplorable conditions and have survived”* was how T.H. from Vlora put it.

One of the stereotypes about Albanians is that while northerners, Gegs, are rough people because of the inaccessible mountains, southerners, Tosks, are gentle because of the Mediterranean influence. However, in the south, in the wild and remote highlands, the landscape is equally austere. We asked R. G., deputy prefect of Saranda, whether it was possible to compare the Kurveleshi with the Malësori (Catholic Albanians from the far North) in terms of the harsh environment in which both groups lived. *“They are called the Malësori of Southern Albania”*, R. G. replied and went on with his story about the region.

“Kurveleshi is the last area where religion changed. I’m from Chora and half of the people there are Muslims, half are Christians. The Islamicisation of Albania reached as far as my village in the 18th century. That’s why we say that the Kurveleshi are the greatest fighters – they refused to adopt a different religion. There is a song my grandmother used to sing to me:

*“All villages changed their faith,
Chora alone remained Orthodox Christian”.*

Reconciliation initiatives

Under Ahmed Zogu, the Code had the status of informal law alongside with the constitution. Such is the case again in the present day, because the Albanian government is so corrupt that law as a mechanism of society's functioning has been discredited, states the *Koha Jone* newspaper¹⁵. How is modern Albanian society going to resolve the "Kanun-or-Constitution" dilemma? In order to become integrated into Europe, Albania has to eradicate blood vengeance as a means for settling disputes. Going on for two or three years now has been a long legislative procedure of increasing the measures for combating the weaknesses of the rule-of-law state. Article 78 of the Criminal Code has been amended. Added to section 17 has been a text on "*murders on account of [loan] interests, vengeance, or vendetta*", carrying sentences of up to 20 years in prison. Article 83 of the Criminal Code dealing with vengeance or vendetta threats addressed to children, provides for fines and punishment that may run up to 3 years imprisonment¹⁶.

The fight against blood feud should be waged by the institutions and by non-governmental organisations. Active in Paris is a cultural association named "*Albania*", founded in 1997 by a number of intellectuals, actors, and officials serving at the French Ministry of Culture. Its chairman, Pascal Hamon, has been decorated for his activities by the President of Albania. In February 2003, he demanded that the French authorities intervene and make their colleagues in Albania's Parliament and administration counteract blood feud more actively. On 10 February 2003, a debate took place in the French Senate on the subject of "*The Kanun and Vendetta: from Myth to Reality*", in which MPs from Albania and France and representatives of some non-governmental organisations discussed the possibilities of putting an end to this sinister practice¹⁷.

During the discussion there were voices raised in favour of a general amnesty. But what would the efficacy of such amnesty be? "*In Northern Albania, seeking revenge according to customary law already co-exists, in an intricate way, with another, more "up-to-date" form of vengeance thus uniting in a perfect confusion a minority of Kanun nostalgists, mafia members, and traffickers, with all the obedience with which people use to punish in the country's North and South*", observes the *Shekulli* newspaper¹⁸. Parliament could issue a decree granting pardon for all murderers, but this won't do unless the victims' families, in turn, forgave them. The Code does not state anything else – it is only the victim's family or a catholic priest that help in initiating the process of reconciliation with the enemy's family.

The Albanian women cannot wait any longer. Women widowed in consequence of blood feud have no right to be married again and those who take the risk of doing it, are denied the right to take care of the children born during their first marriage and such children, having lost their father, are deprived of their mother as well.

Non-governmental organisations, too, work for the cause of conciliation. One of them is an association of women who have become victims of blood feuding and have lost their husbands, brothers, and fathers. Founded on the initiative of the incumbent Prime Minister Fatos Nano's ex-wife, this association brings together young girls and adult women, dressed in black – the typical attire of an Albanian woman in mourning.

Reconciliation should assume the pattern of a general movement in which all feuding families would follow the same pace. The code of blood vengeance is a collective code, which means it should be collectively rejected, appeals the *Shekulli*¹⁹.

¹⁵ Erebara R. L'Albanie: le Kanun et la Constitution. *Koha Jone*, 08.07.2003, *Le Courrier des Balkans*, <http://www.balkans.eu.org/article3305.html>.

¹⁶ Le Kanun et la vendetta en Albanie: du mythe à la réalité. *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 13.02.2003, www.balkans.eu.org/article2784.html.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Burimi, G. Albanie: Le Kanun ou l'Europe? *Shekulli*, 10.02.2003, *Le Courrier des Balkans*, www.balkans.eu.org/article2275.html.

¹⁹ Burimi, G. Albanie: Le Kanun ou l'Europe? *Shekulli*, 10.02.2003, *Le Courrier des Balkans*, www.balkans.eu.org/article2275.html.

That is how matters stand in theory. Practice has indicated, however, that reconciliation will be implemented in a very painful and difficult effort and will take time. There are feuds that have lasted for decades. In Krujë, for example, there is a 20-30-year-old feud, which has arisen on account of a land dispute, and there is another 50-year-old feud over violating morals, infringement on a woman's dignity. This is almost as long a span as a human's life and has affected three or four generations.

Is there future for the Kanun in Albanian society, or it should be replaced by a modern jurisdiction? *"Sorry to say, but because of the low quality of legislation, people act according to the Kanun's regulations. They don't trust justice and that's why they return to the Kanun. The Kanun existed in the period of dictatorship too, but wasn't practised, because then it was under ban and the state's laws were applied. The main reason for people to turn to the Kanun is lack of confidence in the possibility of their problems being solved by legal means. The fact that MPs and ministers are engaged in conciliation shows that they, too, accept the Kanun"*, says D. Ch., Member of Parliament from Krujë and conciliator. In his opinion, the Code and the official jurisdiction will exist side by side until the time comes when people will begin to trust the law in full. At present, it is only by means of the Kanun that, for example, disputes over land involving murders are settled. People would rather rely on the Code than on public legislation.

There are cases in which a person that has become a target of vendetta leaves Albania. Such is the case of the director of the Migjeni Theatre in Shkodër, N. C. He had remained confined within his house, fearing for his life on account of a crime he had not committed. His nephew had killed a man. N. C. had been head of the town council in Shkodër. *"He had come only two or three times to town council meetings after clan members of the man killed told C. that he was a possible target for revenge"*, said a Shkodër official. On 29 January 2003, Associated Press reported that N. C. had left Albania for "somewhere in the U.S."²⁰.

Ironically, N. C. was the first director who staged in 1992 French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre's play *"In Camera"* or *"No exit"*, the local press mentioned²¹. In Sartre's play, a group of individuals are trapped in a cave amidst never-ending bombardment and are finally "transferred" to a long-term detention centre – Hell. Could possibly director N. C. imagine in this first year of Albania's opening to the West that he, himself, would come to know not only from the stage, but from his own life experience, and like thousands of Albanian families in Northern Albania too, the strange nightmare like the one represented in Sartre's *"No exit"*? Where is he now and has he been able to escape for good from the clan's terrible verdict?

KOSOVO: THE RETURN OF BLOOD FEUD

In the period between 1990 and 1997, members of the intellectual elite of the Albanian Kosovars carried out a countrywide campaign for reconciling families in blood feuds, in order to save their strength and energy to fight against the Serbs. Participants in this movement were university undergraduates, professors, students, and other young people. In the course of about 2 or 3 years large groups of conciliators, including renowned intellectuals, were making tours, visiting house after house, to persuade people in feuds, to make peace and grant blood pardon. The reconciliation movement was headed by Prof. Anton Cetta – lecturing in literature at the Albanian Language Department of the University of Pristina. The campaign was also joined by Kadrija Alimi – ethnologist and professor in Albanian language at the University of Belgrade, author of a book on Lekë Dukagjin and the Albanian traditions, who was in the Goli Otok jail in the 1960s, as well as Mehmet Halimi – a well-known scholar in the field of Albanian studies. Reconciled in the course of several years became hundreds of families involved in 1200 blood feuds, as well as people drawn in daily life conflicts. Published was a book on the *"Agreement on Ending Blood Feud 1990-1991"* in

²⁰ Albania: blood feud forces municipal official to flee country, say colleagues. AP, January 29th 2003, http://news.serbianunity.net/bydate/2003/January_29/0.html.

²¹ Burimi, G. Albanie: Le Kanun ou l'Europe? Shekulli, 10.02.2003, Le Courier des Balkans, www.balkans.eu.org/article2275.html.

which some concrete instances of conciliation were reported including the names of the persons reconciled. *“It was done in response to Serbia, i.e. we put an end to internecine killings. Now this page seems to have been turned over and there are only occasional attempts by some people here and there to take the law into their own hands, but it is not as widespread a phenomenon as it used to be”*, told me A. D., one of the participants in the Albanian Kosovars’ resistance against Serbia who had spent 28 years in a Serbian prison. *“We made peace unconditionally, for the sake of unification, liberation, and the future. Reconciling is more difficult now, because there’s no more threat to [one’s] life and future. They have to be persuaded as people, neighbours, brothers, mothers-in-law, in the name of, let’s say, our dignity as a nation, and the besa which we have kept as a heritage from our ancestors”*, reported M. H., participant in the pre-war conciliation movement.

During the war, there were few cases of blood revenge. *“People could see the great danger to their own existence and a common enemy; they joined forces and relied more on one another. It was easier to make peace then”*, M. H. attested.

From the end of the war in Kosovo in 1999 until 2003, about 40 murders related to blood feuds were recorded in Kosovo, according to data reported by the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms. Cases of blood vengeance have reappeared as a consequence of the poor functioning of law and order and the institutions that regulate the law, was the opinion of Pajazit Nushi, president of the Council²³.

“During the war the families were reconciled and fought together against the Serbs, but at the moment, they are feuding again”, relates N. M, former KLA commander, who had fought in the Dukagjin region and who is now deputy leader of one of the parties represented in Parliament and MP in Pristina. *“Kosovar Albanian society stands between the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin and the state based on the rule of law. We have never had our own state; Kosovo had autonomy, had its own judicial system, but Albanians never accepted that as their own, and so they had to follow their own law. It was law within the law, state within the state; although the court might have sentenced someone to 15 years in prison on a murder charge, the Kanun was much more powerful than the court. Now, little by little, Albanian society has to embrace the idea of implementing our own judicial system. There is a parliament in Kosovo, but UNMIK functions as a Ministry of Justice. Kosovo is going to have its own Minister of Justice and then Albanians will see they don’t need the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin.”* N. M. reconciles families that are in blood feuds. He has failed to make peace between two families from the village of Nec in the region of Dakovica.

“Some parts of the Kanun should be practised, but the negative things ought to be rejected”, this is a view expressed by two Albanian women (K. T. and Z. Sh.) from Prizren who have been living in Germany for 20 years now.

Conciliator M. H.’s account

“Mediators are those people who go to the victim’s parents and relatives in order to ensure a besa for the killer and his house, they are protectors of the killer and of his household members preventing that something should happen to them while the besa lasts”, states the Kanun²⁴. In July 2003, I met conciliator M. H. considered to be an elder, a dignified and respected Albanian from Pristina – a 67-year-old professor at the Institute of Albanian Studies with the University of Pristina, author of about 400 studies and four books. As he answered my questions, he would often quote the Code. Already at the beginning of our meeting he remarked that the general reconciliation had stopped being effective after the end of the conflict. At present, in all highland regions of Kosovo there are cases of blood vengeance.

²³ Bytyci F. Blood Feuds revive in Unstable Kosovo. IWPR, 19.02.2004, http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/bcr3/bcr3_200402_481_4_eng.txt.

²⁴ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА, Тетово, 1994, с. 170.

“Today more acts of revenge are witnessed in the villages, less so in the towns, and most of all in the mountain areas, in the remote countryside – in the mountain region of Karadak (on the border with Serbia, near Preshevo, Bujanovac, near the Macedonian border – Kumanovo, Skopje) in the Golak area (from Kamenica to Vrana), in the mountain areas around Leposaviç; in the vicinity of Rugova, Peç (the Montenegrin border); around Dakovica, Prizren as far as Dragash (the mountain massif on the Albanian border); in the area of the Shar Mountains near Tetovo (the border with Macedonia)”, reported M.H. He gave an example describing a case witnessed in the area of Karadak where a blood feud between two families had existed for 80 years and had entailed 32 instances of revenge so far. According to him, nowadays the Code is known in Northern Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro

What are the people that conciliate families in blood feuds nowadays? Becoming a conciliator is a responsibility handed down from father to son; a conciliator works without monetary interest, said M. H. The families cover only the conciliator’s travelling and living expenses. M. H. gave also the names of other men acting as conciliators. Most of them are professors and intellectuals – K. R. from Drenica, who lives in Dragodan, Pristina, a conciliator, whose role has been handed down to him by his ancestors; Professor M. R. from Drenica who now lives in Pristina; Dr. M. P.; Dr. Z. A. – a historian; Professor T. G.; Professor J. K. from Prizren.

The Besa as a Final Institution

Reconciliation may last as short as an hour, it may continue all night through, or go on for days and months on end. Each side has to state its arguments. The first one to be visited is the murderer, then the victim’s family. Both families are repeatedly visited. The most important thing in reconciliation is the *besa*. *“The besa is a kind of temporary exemption and security which the victim’s house grants the killer and his household members ensuring that for some time they shall not be persecuted for the blood shed”* says the Code²⁵.

M. H. explained in detail the role of *besa* in contemporary life. *“With us a man who has got a besa has got dignity. People should be reconciled, there should be reconciliation. Lek Dukagjin says: “A bent head turns away wrath” ... The besa is the institution of last resort with Albanians. A murderer may be taken into custody by the government authorities, or he can in some cases give himself up, but traditionally he seeks a besa. A besa may be given for a week up to 2-3 months, sometimes even 6 months; it depends on the dignity or willingness of the people that have lost a relation, on the status of the family. When granted a besa, the murderer together with his family is free. As soon as the term of the besa is over, he and all his family remain isolated in their house. Then, again, he sends envoys to ask for besa, and this is how besa is repeatedly requested. Those who respect their folk’s traditions wouldn’t send back anyone without giving a besa. Provided besa is granted 2 or 3 times, and provided the family asks for besa, provided the man repents and observes traditions, reconciliation may be reached. This is required. If the perpetrator and all his relatives fail to observe these traditions, if they don’t seek besa, the killer is deemed guilty and responsible. His family – required to kill in revenge, regardless of the official sentence”*.

M. H. said that in the summer of 2003 there was a murder of a policeman and the suspect was unable to find 24 old men to swear that according to the Kanun he was not guilty. In case the killer is unknown, 24 old men of high repute and dignity should take an oath before the victim’s family that the suspect is not guilty. *“The old men are either fraternity elders or tribal elders and their work is based on the Kanun’s regulations”*²⁶.

²⁵ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. ФИ & ГА, Тетово, 1994, с. 170.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 189.

Blood is never lost

I asked M. H. whether monetary compensation is to be paid to the victim's family in the case of reconciliation. "*Blood should be paid for, it's never lost. It should be paid with a penny, with money or in kind*", M. H. said. "*Blood is never lost*" says the Kanun²⁷.

"Decent families are reconciled unconditionally, without paying any money. There were in the past and there are now families reconciled by paying money. I don't know how much they pay today, I conciliate unconditionally. Now there's no difference between whether you pay for a woman or a man. That one who has committed the murder should leave his native place go far away in order not to come across the victim's kinfolk every day. Lek Dukgjin says: "If you've killed him once, you shouldn't kill him every day". If the victim has a wife and his children are left orphans, they should be paid something", explained M. H., conciliator from Pristina.

The Kanun and murdering leaders

In early January 2003, killed in Pec were three ethnic Albanians, members of the disbanded Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and functionaries of the Democratic Union of Kosovo (DUK) – a party led by Ibrahim Rugova, the President of Kosovo. One of the victims was T. Z, prosecutor's witness in the much talked about court case against Daut Haradinaj and another four Albanians, also members of the disbanded KLA. Observers commented this was account settling between followers of the Rugova party and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo – the party of former KLA commander Ramush Haradinaj, brother of Daut. Some time earlier there had been a bomb attack against Adem Zekaj, another former KLA member.

According to one of the versions, it was a matter of interpersonal conflicts, strife for influence, settling of old scores. Many of the murders had been committed in the Dukagjin region, a territory controlled by Ramush Haradinaj. There is another version associated with trafficking in drugs. Is it possible that these leaders' murders had to do with the Kanun as well? "*The Kanun is applied, but it's connected with criminal murders, not with murders for political reasons. Blood vengeance as prescribed by the Kanun tradition is present in Kosovo, although to a lesser degree than the situation 10 years ago*", remarked A. D., an intellectual, who thought the reason for these murders was "personal revenge". He also mentioned the role of the UDBA, the Serbian secret service.

Some Albanian politicians in Kosovo deny that the Code is so powerful today. "*In 1991 there was a reconciliation movement in Kosovo. You couldn't say the Kanun is still active in Kosovo, it's already in the museum and people don't know what it implies*", said K. B., deputy chair of one of the leading parties, Member of Parliament in Pristina, native of Klina. When I met K. B. in the summer of 2003, I was assigned to invite him on behalf of a German foundation to take part in a Round Table on the Albanian national question to be held in Sofia. Much to my surprise, he asked that a bodyguard be in charge of his personal safety in Bulgaria and that he travel by air. On no account would he accept to travel through Macedonia or Serbia by car. What was K.B. afraid of, he who had lain several years in a Serbian prison? Sh. M., intellectual from Pristina, mentioned that K. B. was born in the Dukagjin region, the native place of Ramush Haradinaj as well. There is a fierce inter-clan feuding in Dukagjin, there were assaults against DUK members in the same area, so that K. B. actually feared an attempt on his life, thought Sh. M. In fact, my interviewee K. B. never reached Sofia, because he had no passport but only an UNMIK-issued permit²⁸.

It is possible that political strife implies, among other things, elements of the Kanun, but such assumption requires a new and more thorough research.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

²⁸ In 2003, Albanian Kosovars were not allowed to enter Bulgaria with the temporary UNMIK permit – author's note.

MONTENEGRO: THE KANUN IS SIMILAR TO THE BRDJAN CODE

Ethnic Albanians in Montenegro are a small minority and live in three regions with predominant Albanian population – Malësia (including the town of Tuzi and bordering on Albania through Lake Scutari), Ulcinj (a town on the Adriatic coast), Plav and Gusine (a northern territory adjacent to Kosovo). Based on the respondents' identity reported in the 2003 census, 40.64 per cent of Montenegro's total population of 672 656 were Montenegrins, 30.01 per cent – Serbs, 9.41 – Bosniaks, 7.09 per cent – Albanians, 4.27 – Muslims, 1.05 – Croats, and 0.43 per cent – Roma. The Albanian population in Montenegro comprises Catholic Albanians (Malësori) and Muslim Albanians. Nowadays, blood feud and the Kanun are known in this small republic too. *“The cases of blood revenge are rare. You can't say it's been done away with, but it's not a pronounced practice. There are old people who conciliate”*, observed M. B., an ethnic Albanian Deputy to the Skupshtina of Montenegro. One of the stories of modern-time vendetta has been told by Monique Dolmieu, Director of a cultural association of actors from the Balkans to the Caucasus, relating the case of an actor from the Montenegrin theatre: he had been compelled to emigrate in order to escape from vendetta like the one targeting N. C. in Shkodër. L. Sh, a Malësori Albanian from Ulcinj, working as manager in the tourist sector, told us about a blood vengeance case proving that there was no term of limitation for the Kanun-based verdicts. An Albanian who had lived long years in the United States, returned to Ulcinj and was killed on account of a vendetta that had started 20 years before.

Ethnic Albanians and Montenegrins in Montenegro do not have problems living together, such as can be witnessed in the other parts of former Yugoslavia inhabited by Albanians. Montenegrin Albanians and Montenegrins are similar in that they both have patriarchal clan societies, both put great value on large families, friendship, and honour, both remember the laws of honour and blood vengeance. Blood feud is familiar in the Malësia region of Montenegro, but it is not as widespread a phenomenon as it is in Northern Albania. There have been only several cases of blood vengeance and they have occurred among the Albanians living in the villages around Lake Scutari. According to Albanian and Montenegrin respondents from Montenegro, the Code of Lek Dukagjin and the unwritten Montenegrins' Code of Brdjan are similar. I heard this theory for the first time while doing fieldwork in Montenegro in 2001 from an interviewee, L. Sh., a Catholic Albanian (Malësori), member of the party leadership of the Democratic Party of Socialists and manager of one of the big hotels in the town of Ulcinj, as well as from his fellow party member B. B., a Montenegrin. Even nowadays, among the Catholic Albanians there are elders - heads of *fises*²⁹. These are usually people who have settled the problems in their own families. B. B. told about a blood feud episode that had taken place in Malësia, when, in a blood revenge series, out of a whole large family of Malësori Albanians only a little boy survived, saved by certain Montenegrins. The Albanians who hunted for the child asked the Montenegrin saviour to deliver the boy, just let him out of the house. But the Montenegrin took outside his own son in order to save the other child.

“God forbid you curse a Montenegrin or pull him by the moustaches, you'll enrage him. Montenegrins are known for their caring attitude to women, for their love for the sister and the mother. One cannot lift a hand against a woman. I'd say we Montenegrins, like the Albanians, are also accustomed to keeping our women within the house. When getting married, we, too, always watch for what kind of family we are making kin with. We, Brdjans, are like the Malësori Albanians in our attitude to our friends, family and guests – they are of absolute value. When a guest comes to my house, I'll treat him to brandy. Coffee is always served by the women. I've read the Kanun several times and I think there are similarities with the traditions of Montenegrins”, affirmed B. B., a Montenegrin from Ulcinj.

29 *Fis* (modern Greek – character, nature) – the larger family, kin in the male line. All of them are descended from a common ancestor and observe a pattern of exogamy. According to the traditions of the northern Albanian highlanders, two lines of kinship are distinguished: paternal – the “tree of blood”, and maternal – the “tree of milk”.

Again in Ulcinj, a town with predominantly Albanian population, I met with a member of the Serbian People's Party who confirmed the theory of the similarities between customary law of Montenegrins and that of ethnic Albanians in Montenegro. *"There are many common things between the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin and the Brdjan Montenegrin law. While the Kanun is written, the Brdjan Code is unwritten law. Both are characterised by a marked presence of the kinship principle. In old-time Montenegro there used to be blood feuds. In the 17th and 18th centuries there used to be blood vengeance. There was in the 18th century a Law of Petr Petrovic, there was a book called "Stega". Yet, Montenegrins are more refined than Albanians, but a Montenegrin shouldn't be teased."* At the same time, M. C., an elderly man who had taken part in the anti-fascist struggle and was member of the same party, demonstrated strong dissent and challenged what his fellow party member had stated. M. C. argued there was no Brdjan Code.

Montenegrins like to point out that their country is tolerant. At a Round Table on the Albanian national question held in 2002 in Sofia, M. I., Member of Parliament in Podgorica, who believed that the future of the small republic lied in an independent statehood, also elaborated on the theory of the similarities between the Code of Lek Dukagjin and the Brdjan Code. *"The greatest advantage of Montenegro is its wealth including various cultures. I'll mention some positive examples like the law of Lek Dukagjin, which was equally valid among Montenegrins and Albanians in Montenegro, especially those in the region bordering on Albania, stretching from Plav, through Podgorica as far as Ulcinj. While compiling the general property laws of Slovenians in the modern times, the great Slovenian jurist Vogišič studied customary law among Montenegrins. The survey questionnaire contained 2000 items 660 of which concerned the customs, habits, modes of trading and inheritance among Albanians. The legislators wanted to combine modern European law with the native peoples' customary law."*

MACEDONIA IN APRIL 2003. DIAGNOSIS: ‘CANCER WITH GALLOPING METASTASES’⁵

Antonina Zhelyazkova

Methodology and Parameters of the Study

This field study, conducted in the Republic of Macedonia from 30 March to 6 April 2003, was designed to establish the progress and stages in the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement, the state of interethnic relations, and the developments and changes in the contact zones where there are both Macedonians and Albanians. In addition, the object of the study was to identify Macedonia's political, economic and social prospects, as well as the attitudes of the two ethnic communities to the near future of Macedonia and of the Balkan region as a whole.

The fieldwork was carried out by a team of scholars specialized in Albanian Studies: an expert in Balkan history, a Balkan linguist, an archaeologist-anthropologist, a journalist specialized in Balkan affairs, and an interpreter-mediator.⁶ The methods employed were anthropological interview, group interviews, and an adapted system of questionnaires combined with observations.

The study was conducted in Tetovo, Mala Recica, Skopje, Gostivar and Struga, and covered approximately 30 male and female respondents aged between 20 and 60. The respondents were Macedonian and Albanian members of the political elite, intellectuals, journalists, randomly selected urban and rural residents, and Muslim clerics.

Politics, Economy, Society: A Snapshot

Events and Politicians. In spring 2003 Macedonia's former prime minister Ljubco Georgievski announced that he was resigning from the VMRO-DPMNE leadership and published a series of articles about the situation in the Republic of Macedonia. In a style of emotional analysis, irrespective of the obvious bitterness, dramatic exaggerations and partisan bias, the former VMRO-DPMNE leader formulated candidly the truth about the present state of relations between the two main ethnic communities and the future of Macedonia.

Georgievski voiced bleak truths – truths that everyone in the small country knows but is reluctant to admit even in private, and that are also very well known to international observers and peacekeeping missions, which likewise prefer to keep their real analyses and forecasts confidential.

In fact, perhaps what sounded most shocking was Georgievski's proposal for ending with protectorates, semi-protectorates, institutionally blocked states and experiments of all sorts, and convening a special Balkan conference to redraw the existing borders on the Balkans and to establish ethnically clean states. On the Balkans, where the inviolability of borders has been assigned cult status, and where the mere thought of their revision and exchange of population and property is tabooed this, admittedly, sounded too extreme. Simply because there have been too many historical precedents, which have inflicted wounds that are festering to this very day.

Moreover, the former prime minister took advantage of the Bulgarian Prime Minister's visit to Skopje in April to publish in his regular column in the *Dnevnik* daily 'Theses on the Survival of the Macedonian Nation and State,' where he called for more serious consideration of Macedonian academics' proposals for territorial and population exchange, separation of Macedonians and Albanians, and ethnic salvation of Kumanovo, Skopje, Kicevo and Struga.

⁵ This metaphor is from Ljubco Georgievski's article 'Агонията на Балканот' ['The Agony of the Balkans'], in *Dnevnik*, March 21, 2003.

⁶ Antonina Zhelyazkova, Donka Dimitrova, Valeri Grigorov, Tanya Mangalakova and Alma Chaushi.

The debate fired by Ljubco Georgievski's articles set the agenda of the political debates in March and April. The Socialists (SDSM) qualified the ex-prime minister's ideas as a 'typical case of anachronism,' whereas their partner Ali Ahmeti, leader of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), called them 'alarming.' On the other hand, the Albanian opposition parties partly or fully supported the former prime minister. The leader of the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), Abdurrahman Haliti, congratulated Georgievski on his 'courage to voice that which is on the mind of many people and which has been officially announced by the MASA' (Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts).

The leaders of the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), Xhaferri and Thaqi, partly supported Georgievski's projects, and readily expounded their new radical views to us because they are likewise in opposition: 'If we hadn't given up power, there could have been a civil war between the Albanians themselves.'

The problem with the ID cards of Albanians in Macedonia, which heightened tensions in the country during the dispute over whether they should be issued in Albanian, was criticized sharply by the Albanian opposition leaders: 'The SDSM and DUI made a big compromise by adopting the decision that the ID cards be issued in the Albanian language only at the card-holder's request. What's the point: we are a two-nation state and the future belongs to the two official languages. The Law on Amnesty was likewise vitiated by the amendments.' We asked a series of questions to find out precisely which provisions had vitiated the law. Our respondents from the DPA explained: 'All participants in the war, with the exception of those summoned by the Hague Tribunal, should have been amnestied. With the interference of the Macedonian secret services the formula prescribed by the Ohrid Agreement was revised and now no one is amnestied. We have young boys in prison who have been sentenced to 15, 10 or six years. The crisis and mistrust are being recycled.'

A female Macedonian MP from the SDSM is not optimistic about the cohabitation of the two ethnic communities: 'The Albanians identify themselves as victims only. They have a political and cultural problem with double standards. They don't want to accept that where they are a majority they must observe the same norms and relations that they are demanding for themselves where they are a minority. This doesn't even hold for the Macedonians only, but also for the Turks, the Roma, the Torbeshi and other ethnic groups. The obvious intolerance towards the Macedonians gives rise to scepticism about whether this is the end of their demands. The truth is that we are living as complete strangers in parallel worlds...'

Divided Society. Perhaps the estrangement and incompatibility between the two ethnic communities are most palpable in the educational system. Our fieldwork coincided with an endless and heated debate about segregation in schools, which was covered by all media. The prime target for criticism was Minister of Education and Science Azis Polozani from the DUI quota, a former MP from the PDP, who was accused of trying to 'ghettoize schools.'

We spoke with the Minister and he expounded his view about the educational disputes in Kumanovo: 'This is a typical post-conflict process, where emotions overcome common sense and stoke the mistrust between the communities. Besides, there are forces that are deliberately exploiting people's feelings. Students in Kumanovo are divided into groups and this reflects the division in society: the Albanians are on one side and the Macedonians are on the other. The media are accusing us of striving to establish ethnically clean schools, but that isn't true. Integration in the educational system is possible step by step only. At present we have the absurd situation in which Albanian and Macedonian students go to the same school but are divided, the ones in one corner and the others in the other. The ones go to school in the morning and the others in the afternoon, doing their best to avoid each other. Are those really mixed schools – aren't they segregated schools in their own way?'

An Albanian leader referred to another critical case in education to give us an example of the division in Macedonian society: 'For more than six months now there has been a dispute over a school in the village of Semsevo, near Tetovo. Eighty per cent of the residents there are Albanian and 20% are Macedonian. The school was called "Nikola Kalev" for years, but the Albanians have

now renamed it after an Albanian hero. As a result the Macedonian students, supported by their parents, are refusing to attend the school in question, whereas the Albanians are insisting that it is their right to have the school named after an Albanian considering that the village is predominantly Albanian. No one will make concessions, the educational process is blocked and there are tensions.'

In Struga we spoke with two young Albanian girls, one in the 5th and the other in the 3rd grade, and they told us the following: 'They are sisters, and they have a younger brother. Their parents have two bookshops in which, apart from stationery, there is Albanian literature only. The elder sister speaks Macedonian and plans to learn English too, because she wants to become a lawyer. There are 36 students in her class, all of them Albanian. There are no Macedonian students. They study history and geography in Albanian and have only one hour of Macedonian a week.'

Another highly controversial issue concerns the legalization of the Albanian university in Mala Recica, which has been operating illegally for more than eight years now. This university has been a source of political capital for all Albanian politicians over the years, and has on the whole invariably been the bone of contention that reflects all controversies between the Macedonian and Albanian communities. Over the years the university has produced hundreds of graduates whose university diplomas are not recognized anywhere and who cannot find a job on the basis of the education they have received there, while another several thousand are currently studying at the said university. At the political level, as well as within the government, there are lengthy disputes about the precise way of legalizing those diplomas, because the Albanians urgently need university graduates to fill the quotas at all levels of administration set by the Ohrid Agreement. Admittedly, our respondents from Macedonia's educated elite, irrespective of whether they are Macedonian or Albanian, were unanimous about the quality of education at the university in question: 'The quality of education is like that in the erstwhile *rabfaks* [lit. 'workers' faculties,' educational establishments from the period of early socialism set up to prepare workers and peasants for higher education]: upon graduation they are semi-literate but, on the other hand, politicized to the extreme.' The issue is so delicate that the OSCE and the Dutch Government have appointed a working group to consider the way in which the diplomas should be legalized.

Question from our team: 'Is it possible, by means of political and government resolutions, to mitigate confrontation, to reduce the spheres of division and marginalization?' Answer from an Albanian government official: 'We have no illusions that we can make people live in brotherly love, but they will have to resign themselves to the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement and the government resolutions because cohabitation and integration have no alternative.' Question: 'While travelling around the country we have seen many villages where people are completely divided. They are practically segregated, whereas the villages and regions are federated because people obviously feel more comfortable that way. How would you comment on this fact, which exists in real life and not in theory?' Answer: 'In a democratic society such as that in Macedonia people are free to choose their way of life. As power-holders we don't intend to create conceptually new people and a new way of life. Our purpose is to create institutional mechanisms that are adequate to the social realities. If multiethnicity is a characteristic of a particular society, we must use institutions to avoid discrimination. And, besides, we must use the laws and their application to build an adequate environment for multiethnic cohabitation.'

We got a different answer from an Albanian politician from the opposition: 'On the Balkans there is disintegration of multiethnic states in which the three conditions for the functioning of the modern state are violated and not observed: loyalty of citizens, strong economy and liberal democracy. Those three factors are absent in part of the Balkan states. Bosnia is regarded as a multiethnic state. This is simply ridiculous: Bosnia is a zoo with different cages, there is no integration and all ethnic communities have been squeezed into their enclaves. It's the same in Kosovo: ethnically clean territories and barbed wire guarding the entities. On the Balkans there's hypocrisy: in theory, everyone is for multiethnic cohabitation but in practice everyone works for ethnically clean states. In all probability, this will be the fate of Macedonia too.'

The Macedonians and the Albanians have their own ways of marking their territory by demonstration of identity. For the Macedonians the ethnic markers are huge Orthodox crosses

raised almost across the country, the largest one being a towering metal cross installed on Vodno near Skopje last summer. The Albanians strike back by means of the real demographic ethnic marker. All Albanian or mixed population centres are bustling with life and full of young people. Besides, people are building nonstop: huge Albanian houses, most of which have not been plastered yet but are full of people. Obviously for the moment this battle of identities is in the Albanians' favour, because the large crosses visible from kilometres look quite meaningless and helpless compared to the big houses and large families.

Macedonian bookshops are likewise assigned the mission of demonstrating identity: the window displays abound not so much in books as in bibles, crosses, flags and maps of Macedonia. The titles of the books are also of the most patriotic type. All taxis display smaller, but more often larger crosses on their windscreens. The crisis of Macedonian identity is depressing.

An Albanian official from the municipal administration in Struga answered our questions briefly: 'Albanians and Macedonians can live next to, but not with each other.' Whereas a Macedonian craftsman in the same town said: 'The goal of the Albanians is Greater Albania. Ahmeti is a common crook. The Albanians have money from emigration, prostitution and drugs. Our life is hard, we have nothing left. All bad things are their fault.'

That evening we had free conversations in an Albanian coffee-shop in Struga: 'Want to know what divides the Macedonians and Albanians? Everything: the language, culture, way of life, parents... Macedonians and Albanians don't know each other. As regards the Bulgarians, we hold them in high esteem, they read a lot and they are civilized. In Skopje I had fellow students from Bulgaria at the faculty of medicine – they used to read a lot. People who have been to Bulgaria say that the Bulgarians read constantly, even on the bus. Besides, the Bulgarians are hospitable: when an Albanian in Varna asked someone where he could buy bread, the guy handed him his own loaf and that was it, he didn't charge him anything... Sometimes, to taunt the Macedonians we deliberately tell them that the Bulgarians are by far smarter and more civilized, and they go mad...'

An Albanian intellectual added to the reflections on the vulnerable identity of the Macedonians: 'Macedonia has no traditions in statehood, no intellectual elite or political elite, and that's where the problems come from. Their identity is uncertain – they weren't Bulgarians. So what if you *are* Bulgarians? You used to be but no longer are. There's no need to Serbianize their language deliberately. I write in four languages and I find it hardest to write in Macedonian, which is my second native language. Because it is made up, both phonetically and lexically. You can't build a state when you're afraid of everybody – of the Greeks, of the Bulgarians, of the Serbs, of the Albanians. Those who are afraid of the neighbours can't build a house.' After a complicated commentary on the quality of politicians in Macedonia, the respondent concluded as follows: 'You wanted to know why we're divided. Because the Macedonians say "that's our country" – which is very well, but that's my country too and I don't have any other. Albania is not my country. We want the same thing as they do, but it's impossible for us to come to an understanding. If it wasn't alarming it would have been comic because both peoples can fit into a single pocket' (i.e. are pocket-sized).

We heard something similar from the currently most popular Albanian political leader when we asked him 'how would he identify himself: as an Albanian from Macedonia, an Albanian from Yugoslavia, an Albanian from Western Macedonia, or simply as an Albanian?' His reply: 'My country is Macedonia. Here I have a grandfather and great-grandfather... Neither Albania nor Kosovo are my fatherland. There is one language: Albanian. We don't have problems in communicating, but Alma from your team wouldn't understand what my mother's saying because she speaks a dialect (our colleague comes from Tirana). There are also differences in the traditions and culture, but they aren't significant. We have three religions – Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims – but there have never been religious controversies among the Albanians, irrespective of their religion, because Albanianism is above all. I think Albania is like Germany, Kosovo is like Austria, while Macedonia is like Switzerland. There's nothing to stop anyone from having their own culture and traditions.'

In everyday life the passions of incompatibility flare up in fights on buses or in the streets, occasional torching of houses in villages – especially where they would like to stop displaced people from returning and to keep their villages ethnically clean⁷ – or attacks on police patrols. It is usually Albanians who beat Macedonians, but sometimes it is the other way round.

A Macedonian respondent, a journalist, recounted the following story in horror even though he admitted that he had become radicalized himself: ‘The victims are usually innocent people. In the centre of Skopje a group of Macedonians noticed a man in rubber boots, and because such boots are usually worn by Albanians, they beat him black and blue. It eventually turned out that the victim was Muslim. Shame on them! Shame also on those who torched mosques in Bitolja! This is the dark Macedonian side from the war. But there’s also a dark Albanian side from the war.’

The Ohrid Agreement: The Peace Treaty That Can Spark Another War. All our discussions in Macedonia with politicians, intellectuals and members of the public – both Albanians and Macedonians – sooner or later boiled down to commentaries, reflections and disputes on the Ohrid Agreement.

The Ohrid Agreement consists of ten sections. The main principles underlying the fragile peace between the two large ethnic communities are several:

- Renunciation of the use of force for achievement of political goals;
- Building a multiethnic Macedonian society by extending the rights of the Albanians;
- Preserving the borders and territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia;
- Constitutional amendments declaring Albanian the second official language in municipalities with more than 20% Albanian population and allowing its use in Parliament, etc.

The Ohrid Agreement guarantees the Albanian minority, which according to the 1994 census comprises approximately 23% of Macedonia’s population, proportional representation in the public administration, army and police. In essence, this Agreement must serve as a basis for an entire system of institutional changes designed to create a functioning multiethnic society in Macedonia.

We questioned all respondents about the results of the latest census, held in 2002. We were told by respondents even at the highest parliamentary and government level that the results were not ready yet and that they did not have the practice of taking a preliminary two-percent sample. The anticipation of the release of the census results, which we believe might be delayed because of strategic and tactical considerations, gives rise to significant tensions and various myths in society, e.g. that the Albanians have exceeded 40%. Depending on the respondents, this mythical percentage varied drastically up or down. An Albanian respondent from Struga said: ‘I know the results for Struga only, because the census-takers are friends of mine. In the previous census in 1994 the Albanians in Struga and the municipality were 40%, but now in 2002 census they exceed 60%. There is probably a similar increase throughout Macedonia.’

It would be much more advisable to release preliminary data, thus bringing clarity and defusing tensions in society.⁸

In 2001-2002 the Albanian political leaders and the Albanian community as a whole were happy about the Ohrid Agreement, reached through the use of military force, their commentaries ranging from moderate to extremist: ‘For the Albanians the Ohrid Agreement opens a broad opportunity for the actual federalization of Macedonia’; ‘We have achieved more than we ever

⁷ For the moment (April 2003), in Macedonia there are 8,000 displaced Albanians who have not yet returned to their homes, and 3,000 displaced Macedonians. People are returning in the Tetovo region, whereas in the Kumanovo-Lipkovo region and Aracinovo there are problems with their return because of the traumas of the war. The Macedonians are living in collective centres and are afraid to return. The Albanians are staying with relatives until their houses are repaired.

⁸ A Macedonian respondent cited a reporter from *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, according to whom the census was genuine and the Albanians did not exceed 20%. This figure seems unrealistic even to the most radical Macedonians, who think that the Albanians are 23%, the same as the published data from the 1994 census.

hoped for'; 'The Albanians will now have 4,000 policemen, 3,500 soldiers and officers, and more than 18,000 people in the public administration'; 'Ohrid has laid the beginning of the solution to the Albanian problem...' In 2002 the agreement was condemned only by the ANA (Albanian National Army), which identified as its goal the secession of Western Macedonia and its unification with Kosovo – a goal renounced as extremist by the legitimate Albanian factors.

On the whole, the Albanians were consolidated for the purpose of achieving their goals: to isolate the extremist elements and to motivate the Albanians to unite around legitimate Albanian political actors. On the very eve of the elections the Albanian bloc fell apart because partisan passions, personal hostilities and economic interests took the upper hand.

In the same period, except for some politicians and experts, the Macedonians as a whole regarded the Ohrid Agreement as 'capitulation, national treason, signed under pressure from the great powers': 'Ohrid did not seek a permanent solution to the problem but its postponement in time. This was the signing not of peace but of a truce.'

Two years later the attitudes to the Ohrid Agreement have been reversed. The Macedonians are trying to accept it and to adapt to its stipulations, offensive as some of them might be to their national pride. The public realizes that the resolutions and their implementation are in a sense 'the bad peace that is better than war.' Macedonian politicians and experts attribute the slow implementation of the Agreement to objective reasons: 'lack of sufficient financial support, the small number of educated and qualified cadres among the Albanian community, escalation of the Albanian demands in contravention of the Agreement.'

Among the Albanian community, however, there is already an opinion that the Ohrid Agreement was an attempt to cheat them, that the new power-holders are deliberately resorting to demagoguery for the purpose of postponing the implementation of the provisions concerning equality, integration and more rights for the Albanians. We were repeatedly told by Albanians from all walks of life: 'Our patience is running out, there will be a new war and this time it will be fought not for agreements but until the breakup of Macedonia or until the achievement of cantonization.'

Young Albanians from Gostivar, supporters of Ruzi Osmani in the 90s, recalled: 'All of Macedonia [i.e. the Albanians] was for him. When he was arrested and we were beaten badly, we blocked Gostivar in his support.'⁹ Back then we weren't ready for war and they crushed us easily.' Question: 'Did you take part in the NLA (National Liberation Army) during the clashes in 2001? And would you fight again now?' Answer: 'Yes. We did and we are ready to do so again if necessary. The Ohrid Agreement is not being implemented, therefore in the new war we will demand Albanian cantons and such a development [cantonization] depends 90% on us. We will put up [with the present state of affairs] for another two or three years at the most.' Question: 'What do you think about a possible unification of Macedonia and Kosovo? Would you give your life for a united Albania?' Answer: 'That would be good, it's normal for us to unite. I would fight for a united Albania with all my heart.'

The loss of confidence in the Ohrid Agreement intensifies radicalization among the Albanians, which is all too welcome for the commanders of the ANA or, as they are known among the Albanians - the newly emerged units of the AKS/ANA (Albanian National Army), which is operating on the territory of Kosovo too, as well as the difficult to identify liberation division 'Skenderbeg,' whose traces lead to the village of Lipkovo. Part of the ANA leaders are campaigning for continuing the armed revolutionary struggle, and for new military offensives centred in Kicevo. The main political parties in Macedonia claim that the ANA's supporters are too few to cause concern and that they are incapable of launching a large-scale military campaign.

Our team, however, registered growing discontent among the Albanian population, which creates favourable psychological readiness for inclusion in a new military offensive. The young men from Gostivar were extremely resentful about the fact that they had started 'studying Albanian

⁹ As mayor of Gostivar Ruzi Osmani was the first Albanian politician to hoist an Albanian flag and he was arrested in July 1997. At present Osmani teaches at the University of Tetovo and is a very authoritative figure in the Albanian community.

history only in the past two years, that until recently they hadn't known anything even about Skenderbeg, that in population centres with an Albanian majority most signs are still in Macedonian, that the Macedonians, even when they are a minority in a given population centre, refuse to speak Albanian although they know the language, that they were university graduates but there were no jobs for them.' In conclusion, our respondents in Gostivar declared: 'We are ready for the war – we are waiting for orders!'

Our respondents suggested that the most reliable sign of whether there would or wouldn't be a military offensive was the intensified collection of a 3% tax for the 'Motherland Calls' fund. The media claim and it is rumoured that the collection of the tax in question has intensified: the political front of the ANA, the Front for Integration of Albanians, had undertaken to collect the tax from the diaspora in Italy, every Albanian passenger of the air carrier SWISS AIR made his or her 3% contribution to the Albanian cause before take-off or landing, etc.

Respondents said that the new Albanian politician and former ANA commander Ali Ahmeti had travelled to Switzerland at the beginning of the year to persuade the elders from the mythical underground strategic Albanian national centre to restore their confidence in him, to persuade them that he had not made big compromises and that he was not a 'collaborationist,' as well as to refrain from launching the military offensive precipitately in late spring 2003.

It is already known that after the experience acquired in 2001, Macedonia has been divided into four operational zones with five military formations to be deployed in the villages of Poroj (central command), Srbino, Papradiste, Belica, Lojane and Sipkovic. The names of the new strategists are pronounced with respect: Ekrem Mustafa and Kudri Veseli. We are left with the impression that there already is an operational action, but that its execution may be expected only when there is a serious occasion for that. The Albanian political leaders demonstrate a high level of adaptability and react depending on the current political situation.

A graffiti in Skopje also suggests what the expectations are: 'Branco – Ahmeti – Greater Albania.'

Clericalization of Albanians or Political Use of Religion?

We asked an Albanian politician and philosopher the following: 'In view of the war in Iraq, which we are witnessing at the moment, and the tensions in Macedonia, please tell us something about religion and Albanians.' Answer: 'Iraq has confused our Albanian positions considerably. Even Kosovo has lost its charm for the international community and the people there must now resign themselves to the fact that they are a common backwater province. As regards religions, especially Islam in relation to the Albanians, we must realize that intensive processes of clericalization in the world are coming to an end and that they are associated with globalization. In the globalized world of the 21st century there is no place for our petty ethnic disputes. Boundaries will be drawn on a large scale, outlined by the big religions, and everybody must choose which side to take. Us Albanians are in a weak position, because culturally we belong to three religious denominations. Eventually all empty niches in the Albanian communities will be filled by means of clericalization. This could divide us.'

We chanced precisely upon such division among the Albanians in Tetovo when we went to interview people in the Bektaşi centre Arabati Baba *Tekke*. Before we realized what was actually going on, we were pleasantly surprised by the excitement around and in the *tekke*. We told each other that peace is peace regardless, and that its positive impact had promptly increased the activity of worshippers. We quickly realized that we were wrong when we heard the voice of a muezzin rising from the interior of the *tekke* which, according to the tenets of mystic Sufism, is neither a mosque nor has a minaret or calls for prayer. This did not stop large groups of worshippers from lining up on the long narrow terrace of the *tekke* or from filling the hall for ritual contemplation, ready for prayer. They did this five times a day, as one of the *derişes* explained to us. We were obviously witnessing the takeover of the *tekke* by the Sunnis, above whose gate the flag of the feast *Nevruz* (celebrated throughout the month of *Muharrem* to mark the advent of spring) was still

flying, with the typical of the Bektaşi Order white 12-pointed star with a green ritual Bektaşi cap in the centre.

We asked the *Baba* of the *tekke* about the problem with the Sunnis: ‘They occupied the sanctuary seven months ago, in August. The mufti’s office sent its guards, primitive people who are armed and harass me and the *dervişes* in the monastery, as well as the worshippers who come from all over the country. Some of them have travelled a day or two to take part in our rituals, but they are threatened with weapons, their way is blocked, and they don’t muster the courage to come in for the rituals.’

According to the records and the numerous historical and cultural anthropological studies conducted to date, this is one of the oldest and largest religious sanctuaries on the Balkans, which was built in the Ottoman period and has belonged to the mystic Sufis from the Bektaşi Order for centuries. The Law on Denationalization of Property in Macedonia has not yet entered into force in the case of this particular *tekke*, although the lawyers of the Order have been negotiating with the authorities for almost four years now. The *Baba* thinks that the Sunni Muslims might have occupied the *tekke* to assert a *status quo* once denationalization proceeds.

The *Baba*, his *dervişes*, and the women caring for the *tekke* were all upset, especially after the brutes in the *tekke* courtyard threatened us with weapons too: ‘In Macedonia there is no rule of law, no one comes to throw out those primitive folks, the institutions are not doing anything. At present a kind of primitivism with no precedent in any Balkan land reigns supreme.’ We still want to know what kind of people are these – people with whom even we who are professionally trained to talk with every human being are incapable of engaging in dialogue and are on the verge of being lynched: ‘Those are remainders of the UCK (NLA), not of the fighters who fought in the mountain but of those who came towards the end to loot and plunder. In 2001 they looted the *tekke* and torched the hotel. They have now opened a coffee-shop in the *tekke*. They don’t drink alcohol because they pretend to be Muslim fanatics, but they do other evil things. Islam has remained a primitive faith. At present in Macedonia there are Wahhabites, they can also be found in Albania and in Kosovo, but the official Muslim religious community does not distance itself from them. It tacitly supports them.’

The *Baba*, as well as his *derviş* followers, are especially shocked by the substitution and contempt for the philosophy and meaning of the rituals: ‘The *tekke* is for Bektaşi rituals, not for mosque rituals. Only Bektaşi participate in the mystic rituals, they alone are qualified to participate in the “*meta*” prayer. This is not a mosque, and there is no mihrab and actually the Sunnis break all their rules. In our philosophy it is important to have eye contact – we pray face to face, and not behind one another as they do.’

Bektaşi from Gostivar who were on a pilgrimage came to bid the *Baba* farewell. They kissed his palm and he told each one ‘*eyvallah*,’ which could be translated as ‘reverence.’ We promptly asked him why they were kissing the *şeyh*’s palm: ‘How observant you are,’ he laughed good-naturedly. ‘This means that the worshippers respect my soul, the beauty and purity within me, and not the external, not appearances.’

We were rescued from the armed guards, on whom we stumbled in the *tekke*, by a police inspector whom the *Baba* called by phone. The inspector on duty was Albanian, he walked us to the car and guaranteed that we would be alright. We, however, were amazed that he did not even take down the names of the armed brutes who had laid siege to the holy place, screaming at and threatening the *dervişes*. But he did take down our passport data.

In the next few days we asked all politicians and ministers whom we met to take care of the *tekke* as a cultural monument and of the life of the *Baba*, because we realized that greed and the desire to impose a form of religious extremism had placed the *şeyh* and the Bektaşi Order and its *dervişes* at enormous risk. All promised half-heartedly, and some even made a note to take measures.

Friends of ours, Albanian and Macedonian intellectuals, told us: ‘Don’t expect anyone to help the *Baba*. This is a dispute over significant property and no one will interfere; they will seize

everything that belongs to the Bektaşi Order. Besides, this dispute involves covert political interests and a struggle for superiority.’

It became entirely clear to us that the struggle of the *dervişes* and the *şeyh* is doomed in advance. Perhaps the Albanian houses of worship in Macedonia should be guarded by the APCs of the multinational forces, just like the Serb monasteries and churches in Kosovo. The only difference is that here they need protection against their own kind, i.e. the Albanians.

Most of our Macedonian respondents were indifferent to what was going on, and a large part did not even know about this economic-religious dispute even though they were from Tetovo: ‘This is an internal Albanian affair and we needn’t interfere. That’s the kind of people they are – there’s nothing holy for them as you’ve seen for yourselves...’

All Albanian politicians without exception claimed that the Albanians have always been united and that there couldn’t possibly be religious disputes among them. They tried hard to persuade us that the dispute was ‘commercial only, and certainly not religious.’ Our conclusion is clear: as long as it brings certain gains, be they political or commercial, the Albanian politicians and official Muslim community would not hesitate to use extreme Islamic instruments to achieve their goals.

The Bektaşi *tekke* in Tetovo is a true oasis of spiritual peace and calm, of tolerance, goodness and contemplation and, most importantly, it believes in and advocates a philosophy of non-aggression, it condemns aggression and respects every individual, other cultures and outlooks. In Macedonia there is obviously no place for a worldview that affirms universal humane values. That is precisely why during the communist regime the *tekke* functioned semi-legally, whereas in the 90s, when Macedonia took pride in its newly acquired independence, on the *tekke* premises there were restaurants and pubs in which drunken wedding guests fired guns. Then came 2001, and armed vandals used the *tekke* alternatively as police or ANA headquarters, until they finally desecrated and looted it. The time has now come to dispossess the peaceful Bektaşi Order of the *tekke*, thus obliterating all traces of one of the invaluable religious monuments of understanding on the Balkans.¹⁰

The Macedonians

The Macedonians are suffering from apathy and scepticism. Compared to last year, when they grieved and complained about the Ohrid Agreement, or hoped for revenge – even military revenge, today the indifference of the doomed prevails. The Macedonians harbour no illusions: they are patiently enduring the implementation of the Agreement because whatever it might be, it offers hope that the ethnic conflict might be overcome. At the same time, it is clear to everybody that the Albanian demands will escalate and periodically destabilize the country. It is also obvious that the Agreement might also serve as a good excuse for a new military offensive, when a decision for launching such an offensive is taken on the grounds that its provisions are being violated or that its implementation is being delayed deliberately.

The Macedonians also feel uncomfortable on the foreign policy plane, i.e. in relation to the neighbours: with Greece they are still disputing the name of the country; with regard to Bulgaria there is an, albeit hidden, identity complex about the historical legacy and language; with Serbia relations are extremely strained because of the problem of the independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church; with Kosovo they have constant problems concerning the border, as well as concerning control over people trafficking and smuggling.

A respondent who is a junior aide in the ruling political party said: ‘Life shows that the Macedonians and the Albanians have lived separately both before and after the war. We are now

¹⁰ Arabati Baba *Tekke* was built and extended from 1773 to 1854. Numerous travellers and Orientalists have described the *tekke* as an architectural and spiritual achievement: the French traveller Ami Boué, the German scholar V.W. Hasslück, the Turkish scholars and travellers E. Ayverdi and N. Bilmenoglu, and many others. The *tekke* was renowned for one of the richest libraries in this part of the Balkans: philosophy, religion, poetry, music, literature. Today the *tekke* in Tetovo is the largest surviving architectural complex of its kind on the Balkan Peninsula.

witnessing ethnic differentiation and capsulation: Macedonians are being driven out of the regions with a compact Albanian population. Macedonians are selling their houses and moving eastwards. It is a pure illusion to assume that a multiethnic Macedonia is possible in practice.'

A young activist from the opposition VMRO-DPMNE expounded his own view: 'A large part of the blame for the crisis with the Albanians lies with the President, who behaved as a nongovernmental organization rather than as head of state. He did not send the army against the terrorists, whereas the police were inadequately trained and weak. Us people from the two main parties succumbed to partisan passions instead of working together to deal with the crisis. We should have united against the Albanian aggression, but it didn't work out because all the ex-communists cared about was our failure and they deserted, pouring scorn on us. Now it is impossible for the SDSM and VMRO to unite against the Albanians, who will naturally demand more and more. Their purpose is not to defend human rights but to separate Western Macedonia so that they can live by their own rules, which rules are to live against the law.'

According to a respondent who works for the International Organization for Migration, women trafficking and transiting is hardest to control precisely in the regions in Western Macedonia with compact Albanian populations.

Police are incapable of conducting operations there for fear not to provoke some tension among the Albanian majority and that is why the presence of enslaved girls from Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Albania and elsewhere cannot be controlled or restricted. The victims of trafficking who have ended up in this part of the country have little if any chance of being rescued and transferred to rehabilitation centres or repatriated, as is done periodically in other parts of Macedonia.

Conclusions

For objective reasons the field diary on Macedonia in spring 2003 is shorter than the previous ones. That is because this time the team, which has been following the developments in Kosovo and Macedonia for five years now, did not register manifold opportunities, individual and public plans and prospects that could be analyzed, discussed and used as a basis for a constructive policy.

For the first time the scholars on the team – who are in principle trained to identify all overtones, to hear the voices of even the most marginal strata, to analyze projects on the future developed by eccentric intellectuals and scandalous politicians, and not to miss the opportunity of building realistic but also optimistic theories about the future – were confronted with a black-and-white snapshot of society in Macedonia:

1. The Macedonians have developed fatalistic attitudes and have sunk into apathy: there is no longer any patriotic fervour, or hope for an optimistic future as a nation and state. In fact, the Macedonian public is already becoming used and reconciled to the federalized structure of the territory, as well as of political, economic and public life in the country.

Among the Macedonian public there is widespread demographic, political, geopolitical and economic pessimism. The Macedonians feel that, in all spheres, they are gradually being ousted in an unknown direction.

Psychologically, the outside observer is left with the impression that the Macedonians have distanced themselves from their own country and from everything that is happening in and to it, as well as to them as individuals and communities. They are as if watching themselves from the sidelines, expecting the final result.

2. The Albanians are self-confident, their life is normal, calm and optimistic. They are in no doubt that the future is theirs. They are advancing slowly but surely in all spheres of life: demographic, political, economic and social.

The Albanians no longer hesitate to declare that Macedonia is their motherland and that they have no other. They are calmly expecting a certain type of decisions from their leaders, politicians

and centres abroad – they are ready for peace and they are also ready for war. They are ready to work hard, but they are also ready to take part in trafficking. They are ready to live in their places of birth divided regionally, and they are ready, if necessary, to cooperate for unification of different territories populated by their compatriots. The Albanians are very young and are in a constant state of readiness.

3. The most unexpected conclusion that we had to make after our fieldwork in Kosovo and Macedonia was that on the Balkans at the beginning of the 21st century natality is just as effective as a weapon as biological weapons.

All respondents, friends or colleagues we spoke with invariably brought up the subject of high birth rates or negative growth rates. The subject of natality or the absence of natality haunted us throughout our travels. *This* is the factor that will change the Balkans (including borders) in the next five to ten years, and probably this is a factor that will also change Europe and the US.

ALBANIA: LANDMARKS OF TRANSITION

Valeri Grigorov

In late October 2003, an IMIR research team carried out a follow-up field study in Albania¹¹. It continued the topic of “Albanian Communities in the Balkans” elaborated during the last few years. Applied was the “urgent anthropology” method including various techniques of quick collection and analysis of data: anthropological enquiries and observations, adapted semi-standardised sociological interviews, statistical data, and scholarly experts’ opinion. The aim of the study was to take a snapshot of the situation in this country. The team’s efforts were focused on getting a deeper insight into the political and economic processes, the specific cultural and ethnographic characteristics of the population, the discrepancy between the North and the South, the processes of migration, the family, and the different minorities.

Within the span of four years, it was the second field study conducted in Albania. Because of the still unstable situation there, during the 1999 expedition the researchers failed to fulfil the team’s initial intentions to carry out a survey in Northern Albania and efforts were limited to the area of the so-called security triangle of Elbasan–Tirana–Durrës. Today (four years later), the situation has improved a great deal. This has allowed the team to complete the plans for conducting a survey in Southern Albania. In the course of a week, the fieldworkers travelled more than 800 km along the extremely difficult mountain roads in Central and Southern Albania and succeeded in carrying out dozens of interviews in Tirana, Vlora, Saranda, Korça, and Pustec, as well as in Pogradec and the villages of Dragot, Këlcyrë and Vrbnik.

THE LOCAL ELECTIONS

In October 2003, the recently held local elections were the major political event. Analysts described them as normal – having taken place in the context of a low level of electoral participation. The results had shown the existing balance between the two major political forces – the candidates of the Socialist Party had received 42 per cent of the vote and the candidates of the Democratic Party – 36 per cent, respectively. The lower turnout could be explained by the high percentage of émigrés, as well as by the voters’ withdrawal from extreme politicisation. A comparison with the preceding elections showed a tendency towards a decrease in support for the ruling Socialist Party, but that was considered to be natural following a six-year rule and in view of the growing conflict within this party’s parliamentary group during the past several months. The victories won by the Democratic Party in the cities of Elbasan, Saranda, Lushnjë and Korça, where the Socialist Party had traditional majority in the past, were given particular importance. The success achieved was deemed to be the first serious breakthrough of the Democrats in Central and Southern Albania since 1997.

As there is no unified system of population registration and data administration, nearly 10 per cent of the electorate had not been registered and were not on the voter lists which necessitated entering their names on Election Day. This fact was used by the Democratic Party as a reason for contesting the results in Tirana and some other cities thus causing a general delay in the publishing of the official election results by the Central Election Commission. According to Remzi Lani from the Albanian Media Institute, the political class in Albania had considerable problems with what he called the *culture of losing* – the non-acceptance of defeat in elections.

A subject of intra-party commentary was the crisis in the governing Socialist Party. It was connected with the formation within the parliamentary group of a faction, around former Deputy

¹¹ Antonina Zhelyazkova, Valeri Grigorov, Donka Dimitrova, Tanya Mangalakova, Alma Çausi.

Prime Minister and Minister of foreign affairs Ilir Meta and Pandeli Majko, severely criticising the authoritarian style of party leader and Prime Minister Fatos Nano. Prevalent in number in the splinter group were young members of Parliament who wanted to introduce a new line of conduct and bring about the replacement of the old nomenclatura. In the opinion of people familiar with the subject, the contradictions between Meta and Nano were mainly associated with the parcelling of economic influence in the country, while political strife was only an element. As a result of intraparty feuding, the Premier's ministerial nominations were rejected by his own parliamentary group. According to the opposition Democratic Party, the fact that the country had been governed for months on end by deputy ministers was non-legitimate and early parliamentary elections had to be considered.

CORRUPTION, TRAFFICKING, AND CLANS

In the opinion of most of the interviewees, corruption in Albania had reached incredibly high proportions and had become a problem for the nation's development. People mentioned as causes of this phenomenon both the internal socioeconomic processes and some negative factors linked with the transition period in the countries of Eastern Europe. As some respondents put it, "much of the illegal trade today goes through Albania". Geographically, this country is the final gateway to Italy. Furthermore, it is the loose border security and control that make Albania a preferred and convenient stop for international trafficking.

People said that in the period of the economic embargo on Yugoslavia hundreds of petrol stations were built in Northern Albania within the span of only a few months, and the daily amount of petrol sold could meet the nation's overall monthly needs. Despite the strict sanctions, every day dozens of tons of fuel were smuggled across the border through various channels, and, to this end, an illegal pipe-line was specially laid in the bottom of Lake Scutari. In some experts' opinion, the profits from this illicit trade exceed profits in the official economy, involving at the same time almost half of the active population¹².

One can judge about the existence and size of profits from illegal and semi-legal business by the amazing scope of construction activities throughout the country. In the city of Saranda alone, where there was a single hotel in 1989, some fifty new hotels have since been built, two of which with over 2 100 beds. In Durrës, the built-up areas have reached the beach destroying the tropical coastal vegetation. Of course, most stunning is the scale of construction activities in the capital city of Tirana, filling up every vacant spot in the suburban areas. It would be naïve to believe that the financial resources behind this wave of unprecedented countrywide construction come from Albanian emigrants' savings or from cross-border peddling, the less so from public servants' salaries. In the respondents' view, "Albania has become a world money-laundering place" where powerful criminal structures invest their illegal trade capital.

A salient conclusion from the interviews has been that not only is the Albanian political system closely interrelated with the economy, but also that it is a function of the economic and clan groupings that emerged in the 1990's. These formations were successful in accumulating considerable financial resources during the embargo on Yugoslavia getting involved in illegal trafficking in fuel, weapons, narcotics, and humans. A widespread practice was to evade paying customs duties on imported goods. In the interviewees' opinion, this was usually done with the assistance of customs officers and under political protection.

A member of Parliament from the Democratic Party was categorical that every minister belonged to some of the big clans having monopoly over a particular economic sector. "As a rule, ministers are also chiefs of these same clans." In his opinion, the most influential and economically powerful clans in Albania today are: the Ruchi clan, whose patron is Secretary General of the Socialist Party; they have monopoly over the production of and trade in building materials. The

¹² Казер, К. Приятелство и вражда на Балканите. Евробалкански предизвикателства. София, Военно издателство, 2003, с. 182.

Duka clan run the food stuffs business. The Mayor of Durrës is one of them. The Andjeli clan have established control over the gas and fuel supply. The Nano clan manage the mobile-phone operators. A striking fact is that the economically powerful clans come from Southern Albania and are connected with the Socialist Party. By their structure and mode of action they follow a distinct subordination, one of the centres of control being attributed to the Nano clan ranking higher than the rest – “Nano’s the Boss”. Their major rival is the Meta clan to which belong ex-President Rexhep Meidani, Skender Jenushi – former deputy leader of the Socialist Party, and Fatos Klosi – former chief of the secret services. Similar economic clan structures exist in Northern Albania too. Usually, they are closely linked with the Democratic Party. In the political observers’ opinion, this is where one of the fundamental shortcomings of Albanian society lies: “the government system imposed on Albania in the 1990s was such as to serve directly the economic interests of the big clans thus weakening the public institutions and defrauding government revenue.”

SOCIAL STATUS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

One of the indicators of human growth and social status is the national income level. The average monthly salary for those employed in the public sector and the administration is about €150-160, the minimum pay – €90, the average pension amounts to about €50, the maximum – €100. Paradoxically, given the low levels of income in this country, quite expensive cars run in the streets, the most preferred brand being Mercedes. As put by a respondent, “an Albanian wouldn’t count as a car anything but a Mercedes”. Unlike four years earlier, when the number of vehicles in Albania was small and the drivers, ever so happy with their new acquisitions, would enthusiastically honk their horns to salute one another, what one can normally see today in Tirana are constant traffic jams.

Among the major daily life problems experienced by the population are the ongoing electrical power outages. Most drastic are the power cuts in the villages, but even in the capital city of Tirana people live in the rhythm of imposed power curbs. By way of a protective measure against a dramatic rise in the price of electric power during the current winter season, about 800 thousand individuals (nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the population) were supposed to get social assistance. The problem of accurate measurements of electricity consumption has not been adequately resolved either. Some of the households are equipped with watt-hour electric meters, others are not, the latter paying no more than a base amount of €20 a month. The high prices of electric power induce the households that have electric meters installed to save, while those with no such devices would consume power uncontrollably, especially during the winter months.

In some urban areas there is a water regime as well. In Tirana water is available for only an hour in the morning, at noon and in the evening. This is a consequence of the too old water-mains which have not been designed for the large consumption of the city today. One of the election promises of the old new mayor of the capital has been that by the end of his new term of office “water will be available round the clock”.

Another troublesome subject is the road problem. Roads are in very poor condition, in some places there is no pavement at all. The Vlora – Saranda stretch turned out to be especially difficult for the team. The building of new roads has proceeded at a relatively slow pace. We noted that now, four years later, the much talked about Corridor 8 project was still at an initial stage of construction. A new road segment has been built from the border checkpoint at Kakvil to Gjirokastër.

Because of the reduced passenger flow from Bulgaria, the direct bus line Tirana – Sofia has been cancelled. Small retailers that used to be its chief customers have already become rich enough to use mostly their own transport.

The past years have seen social differentiation growing deeper. One of the interviewees gave the following example by way of illustration: “the rich in Albania are now 10 per cent – they speak over mobile phones, while the rest of the people talk to themselves”. A café owner in Vlora complained of people’s low incomes which had made many establishments close up. The decrease in the number of customers was also caused by the high percentage of emigrants (predominantly

young people) from the city itself. He, too, intended to close up his café not only because of the lack of clientele, but also because he was afraid of being robbed or killed. He wanted to get away from Vlora and emigrate to America.

An Albanian from Gostivar told us that during the recent years the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia had been developing active trade relations with Albania. He himself was selling stone-crushers used in gravel production. Entrepreneurs in Gostivar had opened many confectioneries in Elbasan, Tirana and Durrës. Comparing the economic conditions, our Albanian interlocutor described the business relations with Kosovo as the most promising and reliable ones. In his opinion, the current situation in Macedonia is peaceful, but there is much uncertainty concerning the future of this state. Conditions in Albania were seen as improving, though much was still needed to be done in terms of infrastructure. On hearing that we planned to travel around Southern Albania, he was horrified and admitted that he himself would not risk undertaking this route. The problem comes not only from poor roads, but also from fears concerning safety. Although the present situation in Albania is incomparably calmer, Albanians still avoid making trips in the countryside, anywhere far from the big cities.

In Vlora, the team talked with the former city prefect, now director of a brewery. We learned that a local businessman had invested 15 million euros in the plant's construction. During our visit there, the newly purchased machines and installations were being fixed in the spacious shops. The production process was intended to be fully automated, and the product quality to be monitored by a laboratory in Germany. The management of the brewery had ambitions to put on the market a new brand of beer, named after the investor Argon, but spelled backward – "Nogra". What shocked the team most, however, was the architectural design of the administrative building. In its exterior, it is a multi-storey modern edifice, with rows of sculptures of young girls, boys, eaglets, and lion cubs mounted on the flat roof. Still greater was the team's surprise when we entered the building: instead of the customary desk places, before us were large offices supplied with modern office furniture, computers, luxury leather armchairs and reproductions of works of Rubens, Renoir, Caravaggio, Dali and the like. The central lobby was designed after the fashion of luxury hotels – there were clocks hanging on one of the walls, telling the exact time in the big capitals round the world.

The special attention given to this episode is not accidental. In the first place, the case of an ex-politician, now manager of a brewery, is indicative of the natural government-to-business transformation that occurred in the beginning of the transition period in Albania. At various levels, the *power-business/business-power* symbiosis has already established a solid and indissoluble link and has formed the backbone of the Albanian economy. Of interest is also the architectural representation of the environment. It is a particularly exciting experience for a researcher travelling in Albania to see the alternating sights of strangely mixed architectural styles, bleak buildings with peeling walls built during the socialist period, and next to them renovated or newly constructed mansions with bright-coloured fresh-painted facades, fashionable hotels and small private castles representing bizarre designs based on heterogeneous conceptions. The ambition has been to have something different from the old way and, if possible, to have every bit of everything – drawing lavishly on world examples. And, suddenly, there it is - a fresh masterpiece, a brewery with elements of classic, of baroque, with sculpted figures and ornaments, with an art gallery – all that suggesting vanguard aesthetics of the work place. The aim has been for art and luxury to become an inseparable part of business. Obviously, the long years of total isolation have produced a strong hunger for variegating socialist bleakness by including new elements, by experimenting with different styles, very often producing some really shocking patterns – entirely in the fashion of the modern so-called "gangster baroque".

THE AGRARIAN REFORM

In contrast to the rest of the East-European countries, Albania's agrarian reform of the early 1990s counted on the principle of egalitarianism – each individual was supposed to get an equal

share of the land. The underlying reasons for this approach resided in the fact that before its nationalisation the land had been owned by only several hundred big landlords, while the vast majority of the rural population were just tenant farmers. The aim of the agrarian reform carried out in the beginning of the 1990s was to give land to all peasants while observing the principle of “the land belongs to those who till it”. Based on the number of adults, the arable land pertaining to the domain of each village was parcelled into equal-value plots and each family, depending on the number of its members, was given the corresponding amount of land. So, parallel with the transformation of the state-owned lands into privately owned ones, the reform sought to put all farmers on an equal footing allowing the harmonisation of agrarian relations. The process of farm land privatisation was more or less complete by 1995 when 95 per cent of the agricultural land became private property¹³, and the results were soon felt – the production of almost all agricultural crops experienced considerable growth.

Of interest, in connection with certain problems in agricultural development, are some data published by Albanian sociologist Artan Fuga in the metropolitan newspaper “Koha jona”. In his view, ten years after the onset of the agrarian reform, some regional problems began to surface more clearly. Because of the poorer quality of the soil and the local climate characteristics, yields in North-eastern Albania and the mountain areas are much lower. The land in those parts has been parcelled into very small plots preventing the efficient use of mechanised equipment. During the team’s first expedition to Albania in 1999, the common sight would be the ploughing of the land using draught animals and the wide application of manual and inefficient labour. The growth of regional differences has also been determined by the entire lack or the poor quality of roads. Under socialism, the state used to make investments mainly in the fertile lowland areas and this practice has been going on to the present day. All these circumstances have provoked certain tension between people living in the highlands and those inhabiting the lowlands. According to the research data presented by Fuga, only 10-15 percent of the agricultural produce from the mountain regions is sold on the market, the remaining part is consumed by the producers’ households. This deprives farmers of motivation to develop production. It is much better for a family to send its younger members to work in the large cities or abroad rather than keep them on the farm.

MIGRATIONS – EMIGRATION

Over the past 13 years, Albania has experienced unprecedented internal and external migration of the population. With the fall of the communist regime, the severe restrictions on the freedom of movement were eliminated. The economic crisis, the mass closure of loss-making state-owned enterprises and the drastic shrinking of the labour market brought about in the early 1990’s an avalanche of migration of the population from the rural areas towards the larger cities. The capital city of Tirana became a particularly attractive place with its most dynamically growing economy. Within only five years (from 1993 to 1997) its population increased from 242 000 to 568 758 inhabitants¹⁴. In our previous study (1999) this phenomenon was often described by the respondents as an “invasion”. The local urban residents felt definite resentment towards the newcomers. Some adherents of the Socialist Party would even blame Sali Berisha for deliberately populating the capital with scores of thousands of his followers from Northern Albania.

On the principle of the pendulum, following the long years of Albania’s isolation and total enclosure during the communist regime, nowadays Albanian society demonstrates certain openness. A new and particularly important circumstance for Albanians today is the possibility to emigrate. In the beginning of the 1990s, in an absolutely spontaneous urge, and very often in an act of despair, they were heading en masse towards either Greece or Italy. Despite the lack of accurate statistics, observations have shown that the percentage of economic emigrants from Albania is

¹³ *Bobev B.* Albania in the Difficult Years of Reform (1989-1996). – In: *Albania and the Albanian Identities*. Sofia, IMIR, 2000, p. 230.

¹⁴ *Karaj, T., A. Tamo.* Some Tendencies in the Modern Albanian Family. – In: *Albania and the Albanian Identities*. Sofia, IMIR, 2000, p. 266.

among the highest in Europe. Experts estimate their number to be between 500 thousand¹⁵ and 1 million.

The surveys we carried out have made it possible to distinguish two major migration waves. The beginning was set in the summer of 1991 – a month after the Albanian Labour Party (later renamed The Albanian Socialist Party) won the parliamentary elections. Driven to utter despair by their thwarted expectations of political changes, the Albanians swarmed into the port cities with the intention of leaving the country. The lights of the Italian ports Bari and Brindisi became a dream for tens of thousands who risked their lives absolutely determined to reach the “opposite shore or get drowned and sink to the sea bottom”. Others headed for the Greek border with the purpose of trying to cross into Greece illegally.

A characteristic feature of this first emigration wave was that it took place under extreme circumstances. One of the participants said he could not even call his family when he decided to start for the border in order to cross over into Greece. Desperation caused by the dire living conditions had reached its ultimate point of endurance and even the smallest incidence was sufficient to trigger off a mass exodus. As put by a respondent, “the communists had driven us to the point of dreaming about fleeing our own country”. A specific aspect of the first wave of emigration was the involvement of men alone. The intention of most of them was to work for several years abroad and return to Albania with the money earned.

In 1995-1996 there was a process of return of emigrants who invested the money they had made in the construction of houses, new shops and restaurants. It was a period of dramatic economic upsurge and a rapid improvement in the standard of living. According to a group of men from Vlora, it used to be quite common for a person to have “2000 [Deutsche] Marks for pocket money”. Data on the national economic indicators in the first half of the 1990s fully confirm the respondents’ accounts. Especially remarkable was the rate of growth of the national income – it ran up to 9.3 – 9.6 per cent in 1993 and 1994, to reach the record level of 14 per cent in 1995¹⁶.

All that lasted till the collapse in 1997 of the so-called fraudulent pyramid investment schemes, in which most people lost their life savings. The drastic impoverishment of the population generated a second large wave of emigration. Nearly 1 million people fled the country. In order to limit the uncontrollable influx of immigrants, the Greek authorities concentrated additional gendarmerie force along the Albanian border. The lack of official statistical data makes it difficult to establish the exact number of émigrés, and, yet, the research team succeeded in obtaining some fairly accurate percentages: Krujë – 21 per cent; Vlora – 50 per cent; Saranda – 50 per cent. Korça – 32 per cent, the village of Dragot – 30 per cent. In spite of the tendency to occasionally exaggerate the number of emigrants, the information collected shows that those who have left the country account for between 20 and 25 per cent of the population. In Italy alone, the Albanian students are already 8 000, as many as they are in Tirana.

The different thing in the second wave was that entire families became emigrants, with the aim of settling in the new place. Many of them had completely lost their confidence that it was possible to build a normally functioning state in Albania. At the same time, their ties with the relatives left behind remained very strong – some of the money earned was regularly sent home, new houses were built. This has put the emigrants in a specific position – on the one hand, they are making every effort to obtain permanent residence abroad, they send their children to Greek and Italian schools, but, on the other hand, they also feel obliged to maintain contacts with their kinfolk back in Albania. According to estimates by economic experts, emigrants put about one milliard US dollars into the Albanian economy each year.

¹⁵ *Karaj, T., A. Tamo.* Some Tendencies in the Modern Albanian Family. – In: *Albania and the Albanian Identities.* Sofia, IMIR, 2000, p. 266.

¹⁶ *Смирнова, Н.* Албания върви към еднопартийно управление. – Сп. “Новое время”. Москва, 1996, бр. 32.

THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH – THE TWO FACES OF ALBANIAN IDENTITY

The *North-South* differentiation has been traditional for Albania. It has been determined, above all, by the so-called “geographical” factor responsible for the formation of numerous ethnographic groups within a relatively small territory. In the course of history, two of them eventually incorporated the smaller ones and imposed their cultural domination – the *Gegs* in the north, and the *Tosks* – in the south. The borderline between these is the Shkumbin River dividing modern Albania into two parts, approximately equal in area.

It is not always possible for an outside observer’s eye to discern what are the similarities and differences between the *Gegs* and the *Tosks*. The Albanians themselves do not like being divided. Very often, however, in discussions on various subjects, certain tension and even open resentment to some group of Albanians could be felt. As a rule, the dividing line is that of North and South, rather than that of particular local groups.

Smaller subgroups, with their own specific regional features, can be differentiated within the larger ethnographic communities. Such are the people from Malësia (*Malësori*). They live in the Malësia region around Lake Scutari. In the respondents’ view, “Malësori are the most backward of all people in the country – wild and uncivilized”. Their southern counterpart are the *Kurveleshi* living in the mountains south of Vlora, in the villages of Nivicë, Fterrës, Corraj, Ramicë, Vërniku, Bolena, Progonat, etc. Both groups are characterised by their stern character, often also described as “primitive”. Some of the interviewed laid special emphasis on the fact that many of Albania’s national heroes are of *Kurveleshi* origin. Although the former live in the northern mountains and the latter in the southern highlands of the country, opinions of them are quite similar. So, along with the traditional north-south distinction, there is yet another distinction in Albania – that of highlands-lowlands. Widespread is the view of those living by the seaside that Albanians from the mountain areas are “wild”, “uncultivated”, “conservative” and governed by the norms of the Code, “once they live at 1700 m above sea level, they are like the *Malësori* and the *Kurveleshi*”.

An attempt was made under the communist regime to reduce the cultural and economic differences between the individual ethnographic groups and between the North and the South. Conducive in this respect were also the accelerated processes of industrialisation and urbanisation – the concentration in the urban areas of large masses of people, members of various social and cultural groups. As reported by the interviewees, “in the communist times everything was mixed up, the communists made a Russian salad and it was difficult to speak of *Gegs* and *Tosks* any more”¹⁷.

Nevertheless, some long-established stereotypes characterising the two major regional groups are still alive. In the respondents’ opinion, northerners and southerners are distinguished in the first place by their dialect – “you can tell right away whether you’re talking to a *Geg* or a *Tosk*”. Anthropologically, people from Northern Albania are taller (Dinaric type), they have strongly marked features and a stern look, while those from the South are shorter (Mediterranean type), with more delicate facial appearance. “In the south, they sing without accompaniment, but in the north they always sing to the accompaniment of *çifteli*”. Quite common is the view that *Tosks* are “more educated – most of the intellectuals, men of the arts, and politicians come from the South”, while *Gegs* are said to “have always been soldiers – people of honour”. In economic terms, the South has developed more dynamically and has dominated over the North – the vastest and most fertile plains and the large seaside urban centres are located there. Besides, *Tosks* have a large immigrant community in Italy with whom they maintain close contacts. All these circumstances make them “more open to the world”. *Gegs* are described as “more conservative and uncommunicative” – “they live in small mountain villages and remote tribal hamlets”. *Gegs* point out as their advantage the fact that the Code of Lek Dukagjin is part of their cultural tradition, while it is only little known in the south. Southerners argue back that the standard contemporary language has been developed on the basis of the southern dialects.

¹⁷ Желязкова, А. Албанският национален въпрос и Балканите. Теренни проучвания. Спешна антропология. Том 1, София, IMIR, 2001, с. 72.

Historically, the relations between the two regions have been characterised by a constant rivalry for domination. Thus, for example, during World War II the guerrilla squads of the Communist Party had an active role in the southern parts, while the nationalists were dominant in the north. Collaboration of the chiefs of the northern clans with the German occupation authorities was used as a pretext for the offhand imposition of communist power in the autumn of 1944, an act associated with mass killings. Some contemporary studies point out that the guerrillas exterminated just about 1/3 of the adult male population in Northern Albania¹⁸. During the following years, thousands of people were sent to labour camps or interned to other parts of the country.

One of the contemporary “projections” of regional antagonism can be perceived in the multi-party system established in the 1990s. The nation’s two most influential political parties were differentiated on geographical rather than on ideological grounds. Based on the strong anti-communist sentiments, the Democratic Party gained support in Northern Albania, while the Socialist Party (successor of the former Communist Party) preserved its traditional influence in the South.

As reported by the respondents, under Sali Berisha the southerners were completely ousted from the key public offices and replaced with people from the North. The victory of either the Democratic Party or the Socialist Party was in fact the victory of the North or the South, respectively, the triumph of some clans or others, ensuing reshuffles in the public administration at all levels. Thus, political life in Albania was involved in a vicious circle periodically nourishing the traditional regional rivalries. Based on this division, the turbulence in the autumn of 1997 was perceived, in a sense, as “a revolt of the South against the rule of the North”. There were even appeals by activists of the Democratic Party for the formation of armed troops of the North in order to bring under control the riots in Vlora and the other southern towns. Albania was faced with the danger of a civil war which could not only deepen the gap between the North and the South, but also result in the actual break-up of the country.

Among the factors determining people’s rising discontent were the spreading rumours that the entire network of pyramid schemes was run by the secret police backed by the then Prime Minister Sali Berisha. The country was flooded with mass protests and looting. In the course of 8 months chaos was complete – no police and no administration in place. In response to the insecurity and pillage, the population began mass seizure of weapons from the military depots in order to be able to defend themselves. An example of an extraordinary civic consciousness was given by some of the History Museum personnel in the town of Korça who drove along a tank to protect the building during the riots. In the end, the crisis was overcome – the desire to keep the state’s integrity prevailed in Albania’s society. Not least in importance was the political elite’s interest - although actively capitalising on the existing discrepancy between the North and the South, the elite’s immediate concern was to preserve the integrity of the country.

One of the aftermaths of these events was that the Albanian population armed themselves on a mass scale. The repeated campaigns organised by the government in an effort to buy up the weapons seized from the depots, achieved only limited success. Even to date, a considerable amount of this weaponry is still in the hands of the population. According to the respondents’ reports, there is no Albanian family out of possession of at least one or two assault rifles. The fact was explained by the precarious times, the high crime rate, and the weak public institutions unable to protect the citizens in an adequate way. Yet, there is clearly something else beneath this development too. The requirement for every man to possess some kind of weapon has deep roots in the Albanian tradition – it symbolises his independent spirit and capability of defending his family honour. Under socialism, for nearly half a century, the right to arms possession was taken away. In 1997, however, chaos and banditry opened up the opportunity for most Albanians to have their own guns again. Paradoxically, even women who had never before touched an automatic weapon, told us how thrilled they had been firing an entire cartridge in the air – “just like that, out of joy”. Unlike

¹⁸ *Krasztev, P.* The Price of Amnesia. Interpretations of Vendetta in Albania. In: - Albania and the Albanian Identities. Sofia, IMIR, 2000, p. 194.

the way things were in the past, when guns used to be prominently displayed, occupying the most conspicuous position in the house – hanging on the wall by the fireplace, today they are hidden and taken out only when necessary or on festive days.

The 1997 events have shown that regional antagonism in Albanian society, especially in a period of crisis, could rapidly re-activate the old rivalry stereotypes. At the same time, in consequence of the dynamic migration processes witnessed in the recent decades, the significance of this opposition has considerably decreased. Nowadays, almost 2 million people, out of a total population of 3.5 million, live in the central parts of the country. In demographic terms, the influence of Northern and Southern Albania is already very small. In contrast to the widespread view of the North-South dividing line, political scientist Remzi Lani launched the thesis of the new integrating role of “Central Albania, no Gegs, and no Tosks”. The population in those parts is mixed and to a lesser extent influenced by the cultural and political differences underlying the confrontation between the two Albanian peripheries.

ÇAMS

One of the objectives of the survey was to establish to what extent the Çam population group, a community on which there were rather contradictory reports and which had been the subject of various political speculations had been preserved¹⁹. Today the Çams are compactly settled in the municipalities of Komispol, Markat and Ksara (Southern Albania) and in Filiates (Greece). In relatively large groups, some of their descendants have also resettled in the towns of Saranda, Vlora, Fier, and Durrës. A distinctive characteristic of Çams, according to the interviewees, is their stronger religiousness and the observance of the Ramadan fast. When introduced, “they say their family name first and next their given name”. Widespread is the view that Çams are “very hard-working”, that they are chiefly engaged in business and are wealthier than the rest of the Albanians. We often heard the statement that “there’s no such thing as a poor Çam”. Those living along the coast are engaged in fishing and in transportation services – they live in a separate quarter in the city of Vlora²⁰.

During the last few years, there was quite a stir about the issue of Çam claims for restoring their ownership of estates abandoned during World War II in Greece. The reason for their fleeing to Albania en masse in the autumn of 1944 is to be found in the accusations of collaboration with the fascist occupation forces. Faced with the pending threat of acts of bloody retribution, several dozen thousands of families fled the country together with the withdrawing German troops. The lands owned by some 1700 Çams accused of collaborationism were confiscated by the Greek government. Exposed to constant pressure and threats until 1946, almost all Muslim Çams, constituting about 90 per cent of this population, emigrated. The legal status of their abandoned properties, however, remained unsettled. Fifty years later, their successors believed it was their right to be restored to ownership of their ancestors’ lands.

In the beginning of the 1990s, seeking a wider international response, the Democratic Party brought a claim against Greece for the resoration of Çams’ estates in Epirus, a claim which the Greek side left without any answer. Later, the Socialist Party suggested that the problem be resolved by means of pecuniary compensation. The Greek side countered with a claim for money compensation in return for the nationalised Greek-owned properties in Albania. During the ongoing dispute, each side began to present its own data on the number of Çams: according to the Greek authorities, they were about 80 000 persons, while according to the Albanian authorities their number was about 500 000. The figures cited were absolutely arbitrary, not based on any statistical

¹⁹ For further historical and demographic data see: *Zhelyazkova, A.* Albanian Prospects. Fieldwork. – In: *Urgent Anthropology*, Vol. 2, Sofia, IMIR, 2003, pp. 202-209.

²⁰ The respondents’ estimates are that the number of Çam residents in the city is about 35 thousand.

surveys but rather seeking a suggestive impact. The team members repeatedly heard statements made by different politicians, not only in Albania, but also by representatives of Macedonia and Kosovo, who were apparently delighted to give plainly inflated figures about the number of Çams in Greece and who were gloating over the neighbouring nations' fear of the rapid growth of the number of ethnic Albanian population. For the Albanians, "it's people's number that determines everything". Some of them even go so far as to draw a parallel and claim that "Çameria could become a second Kosovo"²¹. In response to the overstated and apparently unrealistic data on Çams presented by the Albanian side, the Greek side reports similarly inflated and unreal figures concerning the Greek minority in Albania. As a result, the problem of the property and number of Çams has been directly linked with the property and number of Greeks in Albania. According to the team's approximate estimates, today the Çams living in Albania must be around 120-150 thousand²².

Until now, all attempts to find a political solution to the dispute have failed. The issue has been drawn into the sphere of political speculations and is, therefore, only destructive to the bilateral relations. Many of the interviewees think that the question should be referred to an international court which should rule independently on this controversial case. The Albanians believe that (kept in the archives) in Turkey are the old title-deeds certifying Çams' land ownership and this circumstance is to be used as a key argument.

BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY – THE PLACE OF CUSTOMARY LAW

One of the challenges to Albanian society is how a tradition involving a number of medieval elements will be woven into the modern standards. For centuries on end, in the mountainous areas difficult of access, customary law played the part of an alternative, even sole institution, symbolising not only a particular way of life, but also the actual independence of the population. Albanians have found in its rigid rules the fundamentals underlying their unique spirit and their strong sense of honour.

In its most widespread version, customary law has been known as the *kanun* (code) of Lek Dukagjini – after the name of the feudal lord Lek III Dukagjin (1459-1479). It has not been preserved in its original version. In the early 20th century the Franciscan priest Shtjefën Gjecov collected and published some customary law rules applied by the Albanian mountain dwellers near Shkodra²³. The edition included moral norms and rules regulating social and interpersonal relations. Its key points were: keeping personal and family honour, collective responsibility, the pledge (*besa*), and blood revenge. Along with the Code of Lek Dukagjini known from the Shtjefën Gjecov edition, in some parts of Albania the memory of some other versions of customary law codes has been preserved such as the Kanun of Skanderbeg in the regions of Debar and Mat. Near Vlora and Tepelena in Southern Albania, in the Labria region, still living is the memory of a local variant of the Code different from that of Lek Dukagjin's. Among the Kurveleshi, the so-called Code of Zuli (kanuni Zulit) was applied. It is quite possible that other local variations and versions have existed, the memory of which has already faded out or has been completely lost.

The communist regime of Enver Hoxha undertook drastic measures for eradicating customary law. The subject of *kanun* was banned and, instead, the socialist legal system was implemented. The aims of this tough and uncompromising policy were two: to obtain full control of the population hitherto accustomed to an independent status (untouched by anyone's authority), as well as to overcome the utter primitiveness and cultural isolation of the highlanders.

²¹ Сп. Балканите+. Албанският национален въпрос. Брой 23, декември 2002 г., с. 16.

²² Zhelyazkova, A. Albanian Prospects..., p. 209.

²³ Gjecovi, St. Kanuni i Lëke Dukagjinit. Skoder, 1933.

One of the paradoxes of contemporary Albanian society is that in spite of the very long period of total restriction, the spirit of customary law has not completely lost its influence. With the fall of the communist regime, customary law norms rapidly found a medium for new development. In the Albanians' view, the revival of the Code has been a reaction on the part of society to social insecurity, inefficient laws, the weak state and the high incidence of criminality. In the emerging legal and social void of the early 1990s, people would ever more often refer to customary law norms for resolving the concrete cases of their daily interrelations. As a result, older feuds were resumed and hundreds of new ones were triggered off. Paradoxical as it may sound, in the late 20th and the early 21st century Albania was yet again faced with the nightmare of vendetta which threatened the safety and the lives of tens of thousands of men and children dooming their families to constant fear and economic ruin.

The largest number of blood feuds is present in Northern Albania where tradition is deep-rooted. In order to survive, many of the endangered families seek to escape by moving to other towns in Central and Southern Albania, or even abroad. The number of feuds in Southern Albania is lower and often has no direct relation to the prescriptions of the Code. In general, these feuds are actually rivalries between competing criminal structures. Having gone beyond the rules of customary law, they are much more difficult to put under control, and the conciliatory approach provided by the Code most often proves to be inapplicable.

We can conclude that blood feuds rise to the surface especially in times of "crisis" in society, when the public institutions are too weak to manage the deep-going and dynamic social transformations. Coming as a natural alternative to the "missing state", the rules of customary law have regained a medium for development within the framework of a society that has preserved its patriarchal traditions.

‘THE RELIGION OF ALBANIANS IS ALBANIAN-NESS’

A distinctive feature of contemporary Albanian society is its high level of religious tolerance. Against the background of the severe ethnic and religious clashes seen in the Western Balkans during the past years, this sounds truly astonishing. Many of the respondents explained the phenomenon with the rigorous religious restrictions imposed during the communist regime. In 1967 Albania was proclaimed to be the first atheist state in the world. Under a special law, the religious institutions were suspended, their property confiscated, and the places of worship were converted into sports halls, shops, holiday rest homes, or simply destroyed²⁴. Fear of persecution was so strong that within the lifespan of a generation religious practices were entirely abandoned.

Some important historical prerequisites were also conducive to the formation of certain indifference to religious doctrines in the Albanians. Even the Code of Lek Dukagjin itself specially mentions that the church is a separate institution from the commune²⁵, and the priest is not allowed to take part in the assemblies of the village commune even when they are held in the church yard. In one of Skanderbeg's instructions to his son Gjon Kastrioti, too, stress is laid on the necessity of a distanced attitude to the church institution and on brooking no interference in politics²⁶. This theme was given special place in the works of the great national poet Pashko Vasa. His legendary motto, "*Rise, Albanians, wake up from your sleep, all like brothers pledge to one religion, and mind neither church, nor mosque, the religion of the Albanians is Albanian-ness.*"²⁷, became a slogan of the Albanian revival. This definition of Albanians' religion is of key importance for the

²⁴ Eldarov, S. Eastern Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics in Albania. – In: Albania and the Albanian Identities. Sofia, IMIR, 2000, p. 102.

²⁵ Used is the Macedonian translation of the Code by Kim Mehmeti: Канонот на Лек Дукагини. Тетово, "ФИ&ГА", 1994, p. 23.

²⁶ Zhelyazkova, A. Albanian Identities..., p. 25.

²⁷ Vasa, P. Vepra letrare. V. I. Tiranë, 1987, f. 39. Cited after: Hristova-Beyleri, R. Myth and Reality in Albanian Literature. – In: Albania and Albanian Identities. Sofia, IMIR, 2000, p. 172-3.

understanding of a unique characteristic of the Balkans, namely, the peaceful co-existence of three religions – Islam, Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

On the other hand, the inaccessible mountains were the reason why none of the religions imposed by external pressure succeeded in taking deep root in the Albanian mind and soul. As Fernand Braudel wrote, “the mountain world as a whole was only remotely committed to the dominant religion of the sea”²⁸. A mountain is a world that has always stayed apart from civilisation, preserving its own specific spirit. With the Albanians, tradition (in the form of customary law) has often had the significance of both law and religion, sometimes wholly substituting religious rules imposed from outside. Remarkably, this tradition has proved to be so resilient that neither Christianity, nor Islam, nor even the regime of Enver Hoxha, could erase or replace it. Even today, when the rules of the Code have to some degree been obliterated, its spirit could be found in a whole range of behavioural patterns. It seems the Albanian has been cradled in these prescriptions and bears them as part of the genetic code. If you ask a contemporary Albanian whether he knows and observes the Code, the most frequent answer will be that its rules have already lost their significance for the young people. And immediately after, he will explain how his parents have chosen him a wife (in conformity with the Code rules), assert that if someone kills, he should be paid back in blood – “blood is blood, it’s not water, blood is repaid in blood alone”. To the Albanians, Islam, Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy are only elements of tradition, a historical nuance. They are built in the Albanian cultural model in a way allowing one to preserve the community’s unity without destroying one’s sense of belonging to the Albanian ethnos.

With the elimination of all restrictions after 1990, a rapid process of reinstitutionalisation of religious cults began. Hundreds of new temples – mosques and churches, were built with funding chiefly from foreign sponsors. Especially active in this process have been the Arab countries, the Vatican, and Greece. In order to stimulate Catholic propaganda, Pope John Paul II made an official visit to Albania in September 1992²⁹. With the help of various Islamic organisations, scores of religious schools have been opened, and an enormous bulk of religious literature has been published. The world headquarters of the Bektashi order, too, are based in Tirana³⁰.

In the first years after the ban on public religious worship was lifted, people availed themselves of the opportunity to exercise their right in a very adaptive way. Some of them, who had previously belonged to the Muslim tradition, came to believe it especially “chic” to go to Catholic churches, because they identified these churches with “things European”³¹, others were baptised in Orthodox churches. For most of the interviewed, religion was something secondary, “a matter of personal choice and judgement”. In the conversations, the respondents usually described themselves as Muslims, Orthodox Christians, or Bektashi, but most often they had no particular knowledge of the essence of their respective religion. In this sense, the data released by the Vatican in 1995 stating the Catholics in Albania to be 492 021 (14.8 per cent of the total population), and the Orthodox Christians to number about 615 000 (18 per cent of the population)³², could be accepted only with the reservation that they imply populations with presumed religious preferences rather than believers engaged in active religious practices.

In downtown Tirana, the research team came across a group of women dressed according to all strict prescriptions of the Islamic tradition, and men wearing thick waist-length black beards – the “Taliban” style. Against the background of the secular appearance of the other Albanians around, the team members presumed these were probably foreign Islamists. It turned out they were Albanians from the villages near the city of Shkodër who had come to attend a course held at one of

²⁸ *Бродел, Ф.* Средиземно море и средиземноморският свят по времето на Филип II. Книга първа. София, 1998, с. 31.

²⁹ *Eldarov, S.* Eastern Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics...., p. 103.

³⁰ In the early 20th century about 20 per cent of the Muslim population in Albania belonged to the Bektashi order. After the Order was banned in Turkey under Kemal Ataturk, Albania became the last stronghold of this religious tradition. Today most of those familiar with religious practices are gone, which makes the revival of the cult difficult

³¹ *Казер, К.* Приятелство и вражда..., с. 135.

³² *Eldarov, S.* Eastern Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics...., p. 104-105.

the new Islamic schools in the capital. We pause on this particular example in order to draw attention to the fact that in order to spread its influence religious propaganda, in this case Islamic one, would most easily find vacant niches in the poor rural areas that had remained apart from modern tendencies and the modern value system. It is no accident that the most intensive processes of re-Islamicisation over the past years have been witnessed in these particular areas. This is a phenomenon caused by the difficulty of providing some kind of *raison d'être* and prospects for development to these more conservative communities, which have not yet crossed the “borderline” of modernity and feel it ever more difficult to adapt to the dynamics of transformations. The lack of “the future” results in turning to “the past”, already perceived as a super-value, and the consequence is returning to the most conservative religious forms. This further extends the marginalisation of these communities deepening their alienation from the rest of society. It may well be that in the next few decades, when the processes of re-clericalisation will have advanced, the idyllic “religious tolerance”, now present in Albania, will take a sharp turn, while the tendencies of religious confrontation will start increasing.

THE ALBANIAN FAMILY

According to Shtjefën Gjeçov, a family consisted of the people in the household. When their number increased, they would part and form *vlaznijas* (fraternities), several *vlaznijas* would form a *djin* (kin group) and the latter, in turn, would form *fises* (clans) and *bajraks*. All *bajraks* together formed a larger family, called a people, which shared one land and had common blood, common language and customs³³.

Historically, the clan system began disintegrating as early as the Middle Ages. After the restoration of the Albanian state, many fraternities and families found themselves living in different countries, others emigrated to Western Europe and the United States. All these circumstances led to the gradual breaking up of the old clan structures and to a certain erosion of patriarchal relations.

The major changes in the structure of the Albanian family were associated with the period of the communist regime. Following the example of the other socialist countries, the modernisation of social relations became, within a short term, a priority task for the Albanian communists – so that one of their objectives became to eradicate the archaic patriarchal tradition and to create a new type of “socialist family”. The processes of urbanisation during the second half of the 20th century largely contributed to the gradual establishment of the nuclear family as the basic social unit in the urban centres. Only in some of the rural and mountain areas, certain elements of the extended family have persisted and are still found.

One of the most important indicators of the level of development of social relations is the status of women. In this respect, the communist regime in Albania pursued a purposeful policy of guaranteeing equality between the sexes in public life. Unlike the cases of Kosovo and Macedonia, women in Albania were granted much larger opportunities for participation in the spheres of education, science, and administration. Nevertheless, persistent in the Albanian society was also the conviction regarding the subordinate position of women, whose role should be limited to their functions within the family. Over the past years, this tendency seems to have become ever more dominant strengthening the impression of a growing inequality between the sexes. One of the team’s observations was that even in the big cities one could very rarely see women walking in the streets – females should in any case be accompanied by a male (a husband or a relation). The restaurants and cafés are full of men, while women’s attendance is very low. All this creates a feeling of a “male” world in which a woman’s exclusive place is the home.

An important aspect of tradition is connected with finding a marital partner. “Intermarriages” (in terms of creed) in Albania are quite common and are accepted by all religious communities without any prejudice. As a rule, (in accordance with the Code) the head of the family

³³ Канонот на Лек Дукагини. Тетово, “ФИ&ГА”, 1994, с. 33

is the one who should make the choice and give permission for a marriage. This requirement is explained by the desire to prevent marriages between close relatives. Before the engagement, it is a must to make sure there is not anyone of the other family who suffers from a genetic disorder. It is not uncommon for the heads of the two families to arrange a marriage between their children while the latter are still very young, and it is absolutely unthinkable to break one's pledge. This practice is strictly observed in the villages, especially in Northern Albania, but it is not rare in the cities either. As prescribed by tradition, a marriage is considered contracted after the engagement and neither side has the right to break it off. Should the girl's family go back on their word, they risk getting involved in a blood feud with the boy's family and losing the bride-price paid in advance. Paradoxical as it may seem, in Albania, where the population is among the youngest in Europe, the possibilities for an individual's own independent choice are only limited. Observing the strict prescriptions of tradition, it is very difficult to come to dissolving a marital union. As a rule, divorce is seen as unacceptable by both sides, each of the families considering it their duty to help the young couple keep the marriage. This is the major reason for the relatively low incidence of divorces in Albania.

In contrast to the ethnic Albanian communities in former Yugoslavia, there has been a steady and clear-cut tendency in Albania itself to a drop in the birth-rate. Statistically, this process can be traced back to 1960 when the birth-rate was the highest – an average of 6.5 births per woman, dropping down to as low as 2.7 births in 1995³⁴. The reduction in the number of births is a complex issue. It is influenced, on the one hand, by various social and cultural factors, and, on the other, by purely medical ones – the legalisation of abortions³⁵ and the wider use of contraceptives. In addition, witnessed during the recent years has been a tendency to an increase in marriage age – about 28 years for males and 23.3 years for females³⁶. Experts explain the phenomenon with the high level of unemployment, the economic insecurity and the large size of emigration which stop young people from early marriages. In some cases, the long period of university studies is also a reason for delaying marriage.

The nation's strongly shrunk labour market has been responsible for an ever greater number of women losing their jobs and being compelled to assume the role of housewives. The family's priority is to have the husband employed, "because he is better paid". This circumstance inevitably makes many women economically dependent on their husbands. Ultimately, they have begun losing their social status and their social function is limited to the family sphere alone. This growing tendency puts to the fore the question of the economic factors underlying women's emancipation and the modernisation of social relations.

The loss of the sense of social security and government protection after 1992 is considered to be one of the greatest drawbacks of the country's democratic development. As put by a shepherd from the village of Këlcyrë "under communism, we had no money, but we had bread, and now we've got no money to buy bread". On the other hand, chances to emigrate, be it illegally, provide new economic opportunities not only for surviving, but also for raising the family's standard of living. At the same time, living outside the native land confronts thousands of Albanian families with the necessity of making a choice: be separated or leave the country together thus allowing their children to attend foreign schools. This is a process affecting nearly 1/6 of the Albanian families, and the consequences are to be observed and analysed during the years to come. Many of the emigrants think that the attempts to establish a democratic and strong state in Albania have failed. One of them shared his distress: "Albania has no future, it doesn't function as a state, people in the villages raise hashish, and the country is turning into the Balkans' Columbia"³⁷.

In the context of a weak and "corrupt" government, the Albanian comes to seek foothold in the family again. The vast networks of family and peer ties by means of which each individual is

³⁴ Karaj, T., A. Tamo. *Some Tendencies...*, p. 267.

³⁵ Abortions were legalised as late as 1991.

³⁶ Karaj, T., A. Tamo. *Some Tendencies...*, p. 270.

³⁷ Григоров, В. Икономическите имигранти в Гърция. – В: Да живееш там, да се сънуваш тук. Емиграционни процеси в началото на XXI век. София, IMIR, 2003, с. 238.

able to find ways and channels for economic survival have been restored and reactivated. Since the adequate government mechanisms for protection and assistance are missing, the family has proven to be that Albanian institution which continues to ensure permanent and efficient protection and mutual support for its members.

MINORITIES

The issue of minorities in Albania is ambiguous and quite difficult to elucidate because of the lack of statistical data. In the latest population census, taken in 2001, there were no entries for ethnicity, language and religion. The official Albanian position maintains that the country's population comprises 95 per cent Albanians, 3 per cent Greeks, and 2 per cent other ethnic groups (Wallachians, Gypsies, Macedonians, and Serbs). These data are not based on any serious studies and are released for propaganda purposes. It is by the specific characteristics of the Albanian national and religious feelings that scholars (sociologists and political scientists) explain the reluctance of those in power to include questionnaire items that would give information on the number of ethnic and religious minorities. The religious "mimicry" of Albanians has been historically determined and is a phenomenon known in historiography. It has been motivated by pragmatic reasons alone and has not been in conflict with ethnic origin. During the Ottoman period, a substantial majority of the Albanian population used to present themselves as Ottomans maintaining, however, their Albanian identity. Nowadays, it is a common practice for the Albanian immigrants in Greece to identify themselves as Orthodox believers, to be baptised in church and change their names in order to obtain a more favourable status in that country³⁸. Such acts, however, serve strictly pragmatic purposes and do not impair the immigrants' manifest affiliation to the Albanian ethnic community.

It is the Greek, Wallachian, Romany, Montenegrin, and Macedonian communities that are recognised as ethnic minorities in Albania. For the present, the recognition of the Bulgarian ethnic minority has been deferred because of the dispute between Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia over the identity of certain groups of Slavic population. The issue is further complicated by the lack of stable ethnic consciousness of this population who easily change their allegiance to either Bulgaria or the Republic of Macedonia depending on the benefits expected.

There is a certain discrepancy in the data concerning the number of the individual minorities. In principle, each country tries to present higher figures for its respective minority. Greece, for example, insists that its ethnic minority numbers 300-400 thousand³⁹. Today most members of the Greek minority of active age live and work in Greece their aim being to obtain permanent residence there. Still living in the Albanian villages are mostly elderly people. On its part, the Greek state makes every effort to keep the ethnic Greek population back in Albania. To this purpose, it funds projects for building schools, production enterprises, and infrastructure. Irrespective of the regularly insufficient number of students in Gjirokastër, a Greek university has been opened in this city. In many places, new churches and chapels have been built, and a huge illuminated cross towers above the town of Korça – a prototype of the cross rising over Skopje. In spite of the special concerns of the Greek state, the chances for young people to return to Albania are not great. They travel back home only during the annual holidays to see their relatives, or during elections. A desperate attempt by the Greek nationalists to strengthen the national spirit and more seriously engage the population in withstanding the Greek character of particular regions was manifested in the provocative anti-Albanian slogans raised during the latest elections in the town of Himara. They have been widely discussed by the public and perceived as an attempt at aggravating interethnic relations.

A focus of special attention in the study was also the Slav population identifying themselves as ethnic Bulgarians or as ethnic Macedonians. Three regions compactly inhabited by such

³⁸ *Zhelyazkova, A.* Albanian Prospects..., p. 215; *Грузоров, В.* Икономическите имигранти..., с. 237.

³⁹ According to some other estimates, the actual number of the Greeks in Albania is between 100 and 150 thousand.

population may be recognised in Albania: in North-eastern Albania – around the town of Kukësi, known as Gorens; in Central Albania – in the area of the Golo Brdo Mountains; and near Lake Prespa. Curiously, the three groups are isolated and do not have contacts with one another. They also differ in the dialects they speak, as well as in their religious faith – the Gorans and the Golo-Brdans are Muslims, while those inhabiting the area around Lake Prespa are Orthodox Christians.

Existing estimates with reference to the number of this population are contradictory. The Bulgarian side insists on a figure of about 100 000, but it is obviously quite exaggerated. The interviewees in our inquiry were ethnic Bulgarians from Golo Brdo, citizens of Tirana, and Bulgarians (Macedonians) living in the Prespa area. According to the latest census, the number of the population in Golo Brdo is about 8200. Ethnic Bulgarians live in the municipalities of Trebišt, Ostrenje, and Stebljevo: compactly in 17 villages, and mixed with Albanian population in another 23 villages. Alive among the elderly residents is the memory of the population in Golo Brdo being of Bulgarian origin, as well as of the local Albanians calling them “Bugars”.

Over the last two decades, the majority of people of active age have moved to the cities of Elbasan, Tirana, and Durrës populating entire neighbourhoods in compact masses⁴⁰. An association named “Prosperity – Golo Brdo” with as many as 168 members was founded in Tirana, where the largest group is concentrated. A similar association was set up in Elbasan. Both associations engage in various cultural and educational activities; they actively support the sending of students to Bulgaria, and contribute to the organisation of Bulgarian language courses. An initiative has also been launched for the opening of a Bulgarian college in Tirana. Intensified cultural relations with Bulgaria play an important part in reawakening Bulgarian consciousness among the younger generation. Over 50 students have completed their higher education at and graduated from Bulgarian universities in the recent years.

The other group, comprising those identifying themselves as Macedonians, less often as Bulgarians, live in the area around Lake Prespa. This region was annexed to Albania after the Italian protectorate of 1921-1924 was terminated. The proximity of the border has made it possible for the population to keep alive the cultural ties with their co-nationals in Vardar Macedonia. In the 1940s Yugoslavia carried out an active policy of affiliating this population to the newly emerged Macedonian nation. During that period, many teachers from Macedonia were sent to the villages in the Prespa area, and they engaged in wide-ranging educational and propagandist activities.

The proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 paved the way for a more active cultural policy among the population from the Prespa region. This population became a key priority for two reasons: because of its closeness to the border with Macedonia and because of its preserved Orthodox tradition. In the height of the military conflict in 2001, the question of the Prespan villages, inhabited by a “Macedonian” population, acquired a new implication. The proposal by the Chairman of the Skopje Academy of Sciences Efremov for exchanging territories and populations between the Republic of Macedonia and Albania received wide publicity. The claims of the Macedonian side were chiefly focused on the Prespa Lakes region. The number of this population has been estimated at over 5000 people living compactly in the villages of Pustec, Ostec, Galičica, Suva gora, Golem Grad, Mali Grad, Progun, Blaca, Crnava, Krušja, and Vrbnik. The people in these villages speak in the Vardar region dialect, while the inhabitants of Vrbnik use the Kostur dialect. Today, a prevalent number of the population have Macedonian consciousness, and a small minority of the intelligentsia describe themselves as Bulgarians. This is the reason why there are two cultural societies: “Prespa”, where members are people of Macedonian identity, and “Ivan Vazov”, members of which are those of Bulgarian identity.

⁴⁰ In Tirana, the Golo-Brdan Bulgarians live in the Kodra e priftit (Popovo brdo) neighbourhood.

KOSOVO AND THE ALL-ALBANIAN PROSPECTS

Invariably present in each of the team's trips around the Balkans were the themes of Kosovo's status and the all-Albanian prospects. Naturally, they were a subject of discussion in this Albanian expedition too. The thesis that there is no other outcome for the Albanians but independent Kosovo has been fully confirmed. This option is seen as the only one that could stabilise the Balkans and, at the same time, be a counterpoint to the fears of the neighbouring countries about the establishment of a single larger Albanian state. None of the Albanian politicians thinks that the question of a union of Albania and Kosovo is part of the agenda. What is more, the majority of the respondents categorically denied any such possibility. The team's observations in Kosovo have also shown that the predominant number of ethnic Albanians consider the establishment of an autonomous and independent state as their major priority. The natural aspirations for Albania's closer integration with Kosovo are seen as a matter of long-term development within the framework of the all-European integration process.

Irrespective of the belief in the common ethnic roots with their co-nationals from Albania, the ethnic Albanians in former Yugoslavia have gone through a number of processes of formation among of their own specific ethno-cultural community and national consciousness for the past 80 years, a development which presumes the need for an independent political course. The prospects for the emergence of a second Albanian state do not contradict the historical tradition. The periods of political unification of the Albanians were too short and transient and it was regionalism that prevailed in the long run.

Furthermore, the thesis that Tirana does not function as a centre of the Albanian national ideology has been confirmed. As a rule, people here take small interest in any forms of nationalism. According to Eva Hiskaj, lecturer in Balkan history at the Tirana University, during the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha, it was not possible to speak of nationalism, and "in general, Albanians imply a different content in this concept". Even today's university students mix up nationalism with the history of the national-liberation army⁴¹. At present, the ideological centres which promote the all-Albanian national idea emerge exclusively in the periphery – in Kosovo and in Macedonia, the Albanian diaspora in Western Europe and in America proving to be especially influential and active. Living away from the motherland, the old-time Albanian emigrants are much less influenced by regional differences and confrontation. Through their eyes, the prospects for an Albanian national and political unification seem much more realistic. Possessing considerable financial resources and a sense of national commitment, they actively intervene in all developments within the Albanian communities in the Balkans.

Being aware of the regional differences, either inherited from the historical past or reinforced by present political divisions, the Albanians of today are certainly trying to find what brings them closer together – their language, tradition, and customs. As put by the respondents, "there are certain differences between us (Albanians), but what's more important is that we're of the same blood". Revived is also the memory implying that the Albanians from Northern Albania are descended from the same clans as their fellow-countrymen from Kosovo, Macedonia, and Montenegro.

Discussed in connection with the subject of the all-Albanian future was the issue of ethnic Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia. There is a common view that Macedonian society is faced with a difficult test – to prove that a multi-ethnic state can exist in the Balkans, or else show that things will follow the path of ethnically pure states. The second option is considered to be less favourable because it will lead to new tensions and antagonisms between the neighbouring countries and, as a whole, will impede the integration of this region into the EU.

For the Albanians, the state does not have the significance it has for the Kosovars, for example. In a quite businesslike manner and free of unnecessary emotions, many of the interviewees explained they did not mind if any of the Great Powers should protect them. Albanians

⁴¹ Сп. Балканите+. Албанският национален въпрос. Брой 23, декември 2002 г., с. 16.

have a pronounced respect and high regard for the big nations and states. In the past, these were the USSR and China, now they are the United States and the EU. Widespread is the wish that “Italy and Albania unite, Albania become a quarter of Italy”. Italy is an example to follow – the Italian TV channels are among those most preferred, and the Italian goods are described as being of the highest quality. We were told of an episode at a chemist’s shop: A woman wanted to buy a medicine produced in Italy. However, an analogous drug from Belgium was available in the pharmacy, at the same price (and with even better characteristics). Still, that woman insisted on purchasing the Italian drug, because she was convinced it was of the best quality.

The Albanians’ special attitude to Italy has been noticed by other researchers too. In this connection, Petar Chaulev writes: “there are Serbophobes in Albania, there are Graecophobes, but no Italophobes”⁴². This special attitude was also manifested during World War II, when the Italians came as occupiers, but were nevertheless welcomed by the native population. In turn, the Italian occupation authorities were actively engaged in the development of the Albanian economy. Many of the public and government buildings in the central part of Tirana date from this period. As an Albanian said, “out of a village, such as Tirana was, the Italians made a city”. Still living is the memory that the Italians did never keep distance from the Albanian population, but rather treated them with respect, in contrast to the Germans. After Italy’s capitulation, many Italian soldiers found shelter and refuge from the *Vermacht* troops in Albanians’ homes. Against this historical background, it is hardly by chance that nowadays the country’s major trade and investment partner is Italy again.

The dozens of interviews conducted and the possibility to travel in the Southern Albanian parts has made it possible for the team to come up with a more comprehensive picture of the ongoing processes. It may well be said that the country is developing with an extraordinary dynamics and is now rushing to make up for the delay in its social development. Naturally, Albania has not evaded a high incidence of criminal acts and a growing illegal trafficking, which, as a matter of fact, are developments characteristic of Eastern Europe in general. However, their forms here are more aggressive, and the criminal groupings are much more influential because of the weak government institutions. The dispersion of Albanians to Albania’s neighbouring countries and their extreme mobility are further contributing to the organisation of illegal trafficking.

Counting mainly on intrafamily mutual support, Albanians do not feel any particular affinity to their own state. What they are emotionally attached to is their native place and their kin. This is both an advantage and a drawback. Albanians are very active in their quest for various opportunities for personal prosperity without expecting much from the state. At the same time, their distanced attitude does not contribute to strengthening the authority of public institutions and allows the establishment of powerful clan and economic structures functioning as a state within the state.

Present are conditions for overcoming the traditional North-South division. In periods of crisis, however, the old stereotypes of confrontation may easily be revived. The political parties themselves play a particular role to this effect. Formed largely on a regional principle, it is quite convenient for both major parties in this country to maintain and use this confrontation for political purposes.

Following the long-lasting total isolation of Albanian society during the communist regime, the subsequent “shock-like” opening of the country has caused significant shifts in the social layers which are now trying to find their new place under conditions of ruthless competition. This reflects, above all, on the extreme dynamics of the economic and migration processes, on the vigorous nationwide construction activities – an unceasing rat race for new breathing space, economic resources, and power.

⁴² Чаулев, П. Скипния (Албания). Цариград, 1924, с. 23.

ETHNIC BULGARIANS IN MALA PRESPA AND GOLO BRDO

Tanya Mangalakova

Lake Prespa is situated in the territories of Albania, Greece, and Macedonia. At present, there are 9 villages in the Mala Prespa area inhabited by 5-7 thousand people some of whom have Bulgarian, and some – Macedonian consciousness. Ethnographer Vassil Kanchov cites Pouqueville mentioning that “*in the early 19th century, Prespa was populated with Bulgarians alone. Arnaut migrations to Prespa began from the village of Trn or Tern, lying between the Devol River bed and Lake Mala Prespa, and then moved up further to the north*”¹.

These villages are Eastern Orthodox and have both Bulgarian and Albanian names – Gorna Gorica (Gorica Madh), Dolna Gorica (Gorica Vogel), Tuminec (Kalamas), Glubočani (Golumboc), Šulin (Belas), Pustec (Likenas), Tzerie (Cerie), Zrnovsko (Zarosh), and Lesko (Lepis). This is where the scene is laid of “*The Prespa Bells*”, a novel written by Bulgarian author Dimitar Talev, a native of Prilep (modern Republic of Macedonia), which depicts the struggle of the Bulgarian population in Macedonia for liberation from Ottoman rule in the 19th and 20th centuries. The mythical town of Prespa portrayed in Talev’s work is fiction; existent in reality is only Lake Prespa.

MALA PRESPA

Lake Prespa lies 30 km north of the town of Korçë, a distance travelled for about 45 minutes on a narrow road meandering up in the mountain. The village of Pustec is situated in the middle of Mala Prespa, on the Lake Prespa shore; it has around 300 houses and as many as 1200 inhabitants. On the mountain top, next to the traditional Albanian pillboxes, an Eastern Orthodox chapel has been erected.

We entered the village on an October early afternoon², along with a rickety bus arriving from Korçë, a vehicle which seemed to be about to fall apart any moment. Seen around were neat houses with dried red peppers and ropes of onions hanging on the walls. We walked past friendly-looking women in cotton-print skirts, wearing white or patterned head scarfs; the men were doing their daily jobs outside the houses, some were occupied with work by their boats. Local people catch dace in the lake. As we toured round the muddy village streets, we enquired people what their origin was. We asked them in Bulgarian, they answered in their own dialect. “*We are all Macedonians*”, was the most common answer. “*In 1920, when Greece came over, it was Greek rule here and we studied Greek. When Ahmed Zogu came in 1924, we studied Albanian. In 1945 teachers came from Macedonia and we began having classes in Macedonian. We start learning Albanian from the 4th grade of the elementary school, until then we have lessons in the Macedonian language*”, explained L. B., a 73-year-old man.

We inquired whether life was better now than in the Enver Hohxa era. “*Life is better now. You can go and work wherever you like*”, responded the old man who was satisfied with his pension of 7000 leks (around 50 euros).

An aged woman told us about her difficult life. “*We keep working, but the land isn’t good here. Many of our people work in Greece and in Macedonia. All of us have Macedonian passports; it’s easier for us to gad about Macedonia. Why go to Bulgaria, when we’ve got no money*”, said the old woman who had a pension of 20000 old leks (2000 new leks, the equivalent of about 15 euros). “*How do you live on that little money, I say, sister?*” she complained.

M. M. (a 45-year-old female) told the team that all village dwellers had Macedonian passports. She and her husband had travelled to Skopje and submitted an application for Macedonian citizenship; they had paid DM 100 and a month later they were Macedonian citizens.

¹ Кънчов, В. Избрани произведения. Т. 2, Наука и изкуство, София, 1970, с. 385.

² Fieldwork in Albania, 25-31 October 2003: A. Zhelyazkova, A. Chaushi, V. Grigorov, D. Dimitrova, T. Mangalakova.

There is no employment available in the village. Using their Macedonian passports, Pustec people leave the place to earn their living in Macedonia. When asked what kind of jobs they found there, since in Macedonia itself unemployment was quite high, their reply was short: “*As day-labourers*”. For a week-long work there, they receive 10-20 euros. Other people travel to Korçë or Greece to earn their livelihood - cutting wood, or working in construction for a small pay.

The construction of a church of St. Michael the Archangel had been started in the centre of Pustec. At the time we visited the place, the construction was “frozen”, because there were no funds. The villagers would not accept assistance from the Greek Church; they believe they belong to the Macedonian Orthodox Church³. Under Enver Hoxha, the local church building was transformed into a shop. There was a school where classes until the 4th grade were in Macedonian. In Pustec, Radio *Prespa* has begun broadcasting in Macedonian since 2002. News and music have been on the air in four neighbouring villages. This radio station is owned by the *Prespa* Association, the Pustec-based organisation engaged in protecting the rights of ethnic Macedonians in Albania, and the equipment has been donated by the Council of Radio Broadcasting of the Republic of Macedonia.

D. is a seventh-grade student. He studies Albanian, English, and Macedonian. He said there were students from the village at the Bulgarian universities in Sofia and Veliko Tarnovo. “*When I finish school, I’ll go to Korçë and then to Bulgaria or Skopje to get a university degree*”, was how he summarised his plans for the future.

With support from Canada, three years earlier the Church of St. Athanasius had been built, while the new church was being erected with funding from the Republic of Macedonia, explained teacher S. The local people depend for their livelihood on raising sheep, goats, cows, and on growing wheat and maize. On the outskirts of the village, on the lake shore, a Christian cross is visible – as evidence that “*the old village had lain there and there had been a church*”. According to S., the island in Lake Prespa is named *Male grad*, standing there is a church which King Samuel attended in his day; there had been a burial ground too. Pieces of ceramics from the Bronze Age have been found there.

Twenty-year-old A., who studies law at the University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, explained how in the local elections held in the autumn of 2003 they had re-elected their old mayor, a Socialist, because he had promised to repair the road leading to the village, as well as the village streets. In the Prespa region everybody knows everybody; the young people are married at 21-22 years of age. “*In Prespa, you’re already an old bachelor at the age of 25-26. People begin to gossip about you, for there must be something wrong with you if you haven’t got married by that age*”, said A. His parents work in Lerin, Greece.

One of those living in Pustec is uncle S. who is the head of the *Mala Prespa* section of the *Ivan Vazov* Bulgarian association. He organises Sunday schools in Bulgarian held on Saturdays and Sundays, two hours per week, in the nearby town of Pogradec and in Prenjas. Bulgarian is not taught in the Albanian public schools, but only in some private language schools in three Albanian towns – Tiranë, Elbasan, and Korçë. We asked him what the people in Prespa were – Bulgarians, or Macedonians. “*Some believe themselves to be Macedonians, some believe they’re Bulgarians*”, uncle S. answered. “*105 villages are willing to study the language. Courses are being organised*”. He continued with his account how on three occasions the authorities had summoned him to inquire why he was organising Bulgarian language courses. “*The Mala Prespa section works to prevent us from forgetting our tongue, our letters, our culture. We have a folklore group, we have kept our costumes, We maintain contacts with Bulgaria*”, he recounted. In his opinion, all the villages around Lake Prespa have Bulgarian place names, and the local people speak a Bulgarian dialect. “*The Pustec village was earlier called Ribartzi; it was near the river and people caught fish. Then, the second name became Rekartzi, because of its vicinity with the river [reka]. And so it is, little by little, the Ignatia road goes right to Manastir and the Lerin parts and Salonika; here, by the riverside, the town even grew into two quarters: Mali grad – Mali Pazar, Golem grad – Golem*

³ The Macedonian Orthodox Church has not been recognized as autocephalous. – Author’s note.

*Pazar, that's how the place near Tumbinec was called. But today it's Tumbinec. Its name used to be Golem Pazar. Well, they even built a large hotel near Mali grad and King Samuel, his daughter named the hotel "Prespina". So, this large lodging place [prespalishte] got its name Prespina from the Bulgarian language"*⁴.

According to uncle S., many places in Albania have Bulgarian toponymy. He enumerated the names of the villages lying beyond Moravia, with their Albanian and Bulgarian designations – Vrbnik, Bilishta (Biglishta), Znblak (Sonblak), Hocishte, Poloska (Ploska), Kapshtica (Krapešnica). Within the Korçë area are Borja, Drenovo, Dvorani; in Moravia – Podgorje, Alarup (*"This one is made up of two words "God's urop". "Urop" means God's little hammer. Fine ore was found here, that's why they called it Alarup – Allah – of God"*), Charava (Chernava), Pretusha, Gribec, Girk, Mochani, Malik, Krushova, Vinchani (*"A lot of grapes were grown here"*, uncle S. said), Voskop, Gergevica, Moskopoje (Moskopoli), Vitkuchi (Viskok *"visokii skok"* [high jump], the respondent specified), Lubonja, Pepalash, Nikolicha (Nikolica), Shtika, Vodica, Luarasi, Gostilisht, Erseka, Borova, Barmash, Kovachica, Radini, Petrini, Furka, Charshova, Leskovik. *"Then it's Berat – Beli grad, and Durrës – Dobrinija, and so on. The toponyms have all been changed"*, uncle S. went through them name by name.

People in Prespa are not familiar with history

We visited 30-year-old B., born in Pustec, but living in Korçë, and became acquainted with her family's history. B.'s mother was born in Pustec, and her father is an Eastern Orthodox Albanian. They had moved to town when B. was 4 years old. B.'s grandmother, aged 78, recalled that in her day there was not any Macedonian school. *"When I came to Korçë, I couldn't even buy myself bread, I didn't speak Albanian. I learnt it from my friends"*, she droned on in an old-time Bulgarian dialect.

We wanted to know why most of the people in Mala Prespa thought themselves Macedonians. *"I've learnt Macedonian from my grandmother in whose house only Macedonian was spoken. It was difficult for me when I arrived in Sofia to study law. I lived 10 years in Bulgaria, I came to know history and I'm aware I'm Bulgarian and the people in Prespa are Bulgarian too. But they're not to blame for not knowing history. Besides, Bulgaria has done nothing for these people. Whereas Macedonia is concerned about them, gives them textbooks, it's natural for these people to have Macedonian rather than Bulgarian consciousness. All Macedonians in Macedonia know about Prespa and say: "You're our folk", while in Bulgaria they don't know much about Bulgarians in Prespa"*, explained B.

B.'s family visits Pustec only in summer, during holidays. None of those who have moved to the towns want to sell their houses in the village. Prespa's population earn just enough to keep body and soul together, there are no jobs; the younger people go away to work in Korçë and they support the older ones. In spite of migration from rural to urban areas, the Mala Prespa region is not as depopulated as the mountain villages in Bulgaria, where only elderly people have remained. Many children are seen pottering about in the narrow, mud-covered streets of the hamlets of Mala Prespa.

Vrbnik Settlers in Korçë

Some of the residents in the town of Korçë are migrants from the village of Vrbnik, situated on the Albanian-Greek border. There is a four-grade school in Vrbnik, where lessons are in Macedonian. One of the Vrbnik settlers is D. B., a 37-year-old professor in Albanian, Balkan languages and culture at the University of Korçë. He has graduated from the Southwestern

⁴ Uncle S.'s account is given unedited. – Author's note.

University of Blagoevgrad with a degree in Bulgarian philology. *“At present, there are only 2 or 3 Bulgarian families in the villages of Boboshtica and Drenovjane (Drenova in Albanian), the others have either been assimilated or have moved to Tiranë and Korçë. Those who are familiar with the specific local dialect know it’s very close to the standard Bulgarian language. My village, Vrbnik, lies by the border with Greece, in the Kostur region, known from Vassil Kanchov’s travel notes. Only the old people have remained to live there, the young ones have been migrating either to Greece or to Albania’s towns; only those occupied with cattle-raising have remained, because it’s a mountain village”*, recounted D. B. The fieldworkers asked him what the difference between the dialect spoken in Vrbnik and that spoken in the villages around Lake Prespa was. *“The Old Bulgarian nasal sounds (nasals) have been preserved in the dialect of the village of Vrbnik, it differs phonetically from the dialect spoken in the Lake Prespa area, which’s close to the Vardar dialect”*, specified D. B. What is this language – Bulgarian or Macedonian? *“It’s Bulgarian! To me as a philologist, there’s no Macedonian language”*, was his answer. In his opinion, only people who want to study at universities in Bulgaria show interest in the Bulgarian language.

In the courtyard of the University of Korçë, we made acquaintance with E.M., a student in economics, born in the village of Dolna Gorica, and we talked about the population in Mala Prespa. In his view, its inhabitants are about 5000, *“nine purely Eastern Orthodox Macedonian villages”*. In the village of Dolna Gorica, consisting of about 80 houses and 300 dwellers, *“all Orthodox Christian”*, children go to elementary school where the medium of instruction is Macedonian. Twenty families have emigrated to Greece; others have migrated to some of the Albanian towns. *“Our elderly people speak in Macedonian. We are entitled to instruction in Macedonian until the fourth grade of the primary school and later, optionally, from the 4th to the 8th grades – for as much as 60 per cent of the matter studied we have the right to classes in Macedonian, as well as for some particular subjects.”*

E. M. had finished high school in the town of Bitola, the Republic of Macedonia. The team members were interested whether people from his village travel frequently to Macedonia. *“We all have Macedonian passports, we don’t need visas. I got my passport in 1998, but most of the people did in 2000.”* We asked E. whether he knew if there were ethnic Bulgarians in Mala Prespa. *“I haven’t heard of any Bulgarian population in Albania.”* According to him, there were ethnic Macedonians in Golo Brdo. *“In Debar, in the village of Vrbnik and in the towns of Kukës, and Tiranë, there are Macedonians. The overall number of Macedonians in Albania is 100 000”*, he said.

“I don’t have any hopes for the future. I mean to emigrate. Things in Albania aren’t going to change for the better soon”, was how E. described his plans for the future.

My first meeting with a Mala Prespa local was in February 1998. In a Tiranë street, I asked a young man, aged 30 or so, to show me the way to the Bulgarian embassy. He suggested that he should accompany me, since he was going the same way. When I learnt he was a native of the Mala Prespa region, I asked him to talk in his mother tongue. The man said he was a teacher and showed me a book he had written and published in Albanian. He himself was surprised we understood each other without an interpreter. *“Until now I thought I spoke in Macedonian, but now I see this language is also Bulgarian”*, that is what the teacher from Prespa found out, all by himself, at the conclusion of our conversation.

GOLO BRDO

Golo Brdo is a mountain region in north-eastern Albania, part of the Bulciza and Librazhd provinces. It borders on the Republic of Macedonia. According to data from the 2001 census, the number of the population in its municipalities is 8200, including 1800 families. The local people are Muslims. The men are known for their building skills, the best builders in the whole of Albania, and traditionally work for a living abroad. The roads in Golo Brdo are in poor condition, there is no sewerage, no telephones, no jobs; the region is economically underdeveloped. In October 2003,

Boris Zvarko, an engineer from the village of Stebljevo, drafted a project worth 200 000 dollars for the installation of telephones in Golo Brdo.

Administratively, Golo Brdo includes three municipalities comprising 26 villages: Trebista (Trebisht in Albanian), Ostrene, and Steblevo.

The municipality of Trebishta consists of the following villages: Trebishta (Muchin) – the administrative centre with 135 families, 600 inhabitants; the village of Trebishta (Balja) with 100 families, 470 inhabitants; the village of Trebishta (Chelebie) with 140 families, 650 inhabitants; the village of Klenje with 30 families, 120 inhabitants; the village of Ginovetz with 3 families, 10 inhabitants; the village of Ostren (Ostrene) and the village of Vrnica with 4 families and 15 inhabitants.

The Ostrene municipality includes the following villages: the administrative centre is the village of Golemo Ostrene (Ostrene i Madh) with 300 families, 1200 dwellers; Lešničane (Lechan) with 20 families, 90 dwellers; Orzanovo with 20 families, 80 dwellers; Golemi Okštun with 65 families, 300 dwellers; Oresnie with 20 families, 100 dwellers; Malo Ostren (Ostren i Vog) with 100 families, 540 dwellers; Tuček with 190 families, 540 dwellers; Lodomirica (Lodomirice) with 190 families, 540 dwellers; Pasinke with 190 families, 540 dwellers; Trbače with 190 families, 540 dwellers.

The municipality of Stebljevo includes the following villages: Stebljevo, as administrative centre – 35 families, 120 dwellers; Zabzun with 100 families, 470 dwellers; Borovo (Borovë) with 100 families, 550 dwellers; Lange with 30 families, 120 dwellers; Sebište with 15 families, 150 dwellers; Moglica with 4 families, 15 dwellers; Prodan with 20 families, 80 dwellers.

Bulgarian is spoken in 23 villages, 17 of them are purely Bulgarian, and the rest are mixed, according to H. P., head of the *Prosperitet Golo Brdo* Association. The ethnic Bulgarian villages in Golo Brdo have both Albanian and Bulgarian place-names – Steblena (Stebljevo), Klenja (Klenje), Trebisht (Trebishta), Ostreni i Madh (Golemo Ostrene), Ostreni i Vogel (Malko Ostrene), Gjinavec (Ginovetz), Tucepe, (Tucep), Sebisht (Sebishta), Borove (Borovo), Zabzun (Zabzun). The population in the last two villages includes Bulgarians and Albanians.

The *Prosperitet Golo Brdo* Association is concerned with the preservation of the traditions, folklore and customs of the Bulgarian population; it organises Bulgarian language courses. Its activities are basically focused on establishing cultural and economic contacts and relations with Bulgaria; among its objectives is also the opening of a Bulgarian college in Tiranë.

S. H. P. is a native of the village of Stebljevo and we talked without an interpreter. He told us about their collaboration with Bulgaria dating from 1992. In the preceding period, for years on end they had had no information and contacts whatsoever. On the beach at Durrës, four women from Stebljevo, residents of Elbasan, met some women from Bulgaria. They found out they spoke the same language. After the Bulgarian women returned to Bulgaria, VMRO representatives – Spas Stashev, Krassimir Karakachanov and Ewegeni Ekov, visited Golo Brdo. An association named *Stroitelite ot Golo Brdo [The Builders of Golo Brdo]* was registered, and, later, another one – *Prosperitet – Golo Brdo*. “I’ve been to the court four or five times in order to register the association”, reported H. P.

The Bulgarian language in Golo Brdo has been preserved, although the people do not know Bulgaria. “We speak Bulgarian at home, we sing and dance; it’s from our infancy that we’ve begun speaking Bulgarian.”

In no single school in Golo Brdo is the Bulgarian language taught. Before going to school, most of the children already speak the language which they learn at home, and only after the age of 6 do they begin to speak Albanian.

In the village of Vrnica, there were Bulgarian teachers in 1912-1914, H. P. said. “In this place, the Serbs [are said to have] had many problems with the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians had a frontier between Stebljevo and Klenje. Our village had been driven away from Serbia three times. We say “madjiri” (migrants), “muhacir” in Turkish. All were Christians, and there are many people that have two names. For example, Gjon and Kostadin have also Muslim names.”

H. P. elaborated on what awareness the people in Golo Brdo had of their identity. “At first,

we didn't know who we were, what our origin was. We were self-aware, but we didn't know Bulgaria. We started the association with 168 people, all intellectuals. We want contacts with Bulgaria not for the sake of assistance alone, but in order to have her come here and be involved with some economic projects. Bulgaria could never become related with us unless this is done."

In addition to ethnic Bulgarians, in Golo Brdo there are people who have Albanian consciousness, as well as such of Macedonian identification. *"Those ones, the Macedonians, are more powerful, more aggressive; Macedonia itself works more aggressively among us... Bulgaria has a different state conception. It's better for us to work with Bulgaria, in a more normal, more composed, more peaceful way, free of any complexes. We don't have here in Golo Brdo many of the things Albanian, we don't have blood feuds, nor Kanun."*

The men in Golo Brdo travel abroad to Greece, Italy, and Germany to earn their living. Currently, the population keeps migrating to the large towns – Tiranë, Durrës. Now, only 20 out of 200 houses are populated. *"From Stebljevo alone there must be some 720 households in Tiranë"*, said H. P.

A Steblevo-born Bulgarian woman's account

A. C. was born in the village of Stebljevo where she lived until the age of 2 and a half years. *"People in Stebljevo speak a dialect they haven't studied at school. We don't sing in Albanian at our wedding celebrations, but in Bulgarian"*, explained A. C. who had graduated from the Faculty of Law at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, Bulgaria, and currently worked at a state institution in Tiranë. She lives in the *Kodra e Priftit* neighbourhood of Albania's capital, 20 minutes from the city's centre, together with many other migrants from Golo Brdo – from the villages of Stebljevo and Trebishta.

"The people in our neighbourhood speak their own dialect; the children speak Bulgarian [too]. In my uncle's family, they speak only Bulgarian, and in our family we speak Albanian. My grandmother, who doesn't speak Albanian well, was eager to listen to the Bulgarian language; when I used to come back from Bulgaria on vacations and when I read her some book, she said she didn't understand anything. But she could understand the words of the Bulgarian songs", recounted A. C.

In her opinion, Golo-Brdans assume they speak a dialect, but do not know what it is. *"My grandmother told me we spoke "in Bugarski", she never mentioned our dialect as being Macedonian. When Macedonians come to Golo Brdo, they say people speak Macedonian; when Bulgarians come over, they say this dialect is Bulgarian"*, she specified. *"My idiom is closer to the Prespa one, rather than to the standard Bulgarian language"*, concluded A. C., who traveled to the Mala Prespa region together with the team. During her university studies in Bulgaria she mixed with Albanians exclusively. She mentioned as a reason for this the fact that she was older than her fellow-students. Besides, she believed Bulgarians were prejudiced against Albanians.

A. C. told us about the festivities of Golo-Brdans – they sing, play *zurnas*, beat drums, and dance *horos*. Until 6-7 years earlier, they used to intermarry in Golo Brdo. A. C.'s mother and father are fifth-generation cousins. The female wedding costume consists of a pleated white blouse, belt buckles, a red sleeveless jacket, a red *shamliya* (head scarf) with silver threads, and many-coloured woolen socks. The male costume includes a white cap, a yellow belt, a long, pleated, white shirt, a sleeveless jacket, and a red coat worn over it. When a bride comes to the house, she dips her finger into honey and butter and smears the door with a light touch. The bride and the bridegroom are given pieces of the wedding round loaf. On Sunday, they shut the bride and the bridegroom in a room. The bridegroom is ritually beaten with a piece of wood, as if he was reluctant to stay closed in with the bride. The wedding-guests sing by the door. On Saturday afternoon, they take out the drums and the wedding banner. On the tip of the banner pole there is an apple and it is decorated with flowers and the boy's cloth. It is considered a great honour to carry the banner and the latter is conferred to the groom's closest friend. Tuesday begins with the preparation of a round loaf at the bridegroom's place, while the women go to inspect the dowry. The dowry items are washed before

the festive day; Thursday is the day the dowry is taken in. The region's culinary specialty is *komat*, a dish prepared of nettle – “*they dry the nettles, boil them, add curds, leave them to ripe, and cover them with sheets of pastry*”. When a child is born, they make *baklava* and *maznik*, with sheets of pastry, adding only butter and sugar.

THE POLICIES OF TIRANË, SOFIA, AND SKOPJE

Albania has a population of 3 087 000, according to the 2001 census data. The ethnic composition of the population is as follows: Albanians – 95 per cent, Greeks – 3 per cent, and others – 2 per cent (Wallachians, Roma, Serbs, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Bulgarians). These figures are questionable, since in the April 2001 population census questionnaire forms there were no entries for religion, language, and national identity.

On 25 November 2003, during an international scholarly conference held under the auspices of the German Embassy in Tiranë, an Albanian geographic and demographic atlas was presented. This encyclopaedic work has been the result of the co-operation among the University of Tiranë, the Centre for Geographical Research at the Academy of Sciences, the University of Pristina, the University of Potsdam and the Higher School of Technical Sciences in Karlsruhe. The Atlas provoked a debate among the Albanian intelligentsia whether the Aroumanians in Albania are a cultural or an ethnic minority. “*The conclusion of this atlas is surprising, to say the least, because for the first time ethnic minorities have exceeded 10 per cent – the official figure is 2-3 per cent, in particular zones predominantly, like the one in Gjirokastër. What's more, in contrast to past practice, some cultural groups such as the Aroumanians, the Roma etc. have been defined in the Atlas as ethnic minorities ... When the matter in hand concerns minorities in Albania, surprises never end – the Macedonians in 9 villages near Prespa realised they had run up to over 500 000, the Roma concluded they were at least 300 000, the representatives of the organisations of the Greek minority didn't present any figures. In this Albania, with a population of 3 million, the Albanians have remained the only minority not claiming large numbers, perhaps because if all minority claims were taken into account, there would be no place for them left in this country*”, writes the Albanian “*Klan*” magazine⁵.

Tiranë shows concern about the protection of the national rights of Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia, but in Albania itself there are no accurate data on the number of minorities. In 2001, when the population census in Albania was taken without recording religious and ethnic identification, many politicians and administrators in Albania raised their voices in favour of including forms in Albanian in the census to be taken in the Republic of Macedonia. In a conversation with R. L., chief of a non-governmental organisation based in Tiranë, the team members expressed their opinion that the situation is rather paradoxical. “*You are quite right when saying there should be minority statistics in the census. I'd like to see religion... I think that Muslims are not 65 per cent and, in my opinion, the census should clarify this question. To identify, for example, if I am a Muslim and my wife an Orthodox Christian, and what my daughter is, etc. In my view, the most important characteristic in the census is the religious and not the ethnic one*”, he remarked.

Albania admits the presence of minorities by bilateral international agreements. However, there is no agreement between Tiranë and Sofia settling the issue of the Bulgarian minority. Tiranë acknowledges there is a Macedonian minority in Mala Prespa entitled to instruction in their native tongue until the fourth grade. “*In my opinion, the population in Golo Brdo is also a minority, but you yourselves should say whether they are Bulgarians, or Macedonians. They themselves don't know whether they're Bulgarians or Macedonians. The way there's no problem with recognising Montenegrins as a minority, there will be no problem at all to acknowledge a Bulgarian minority. We aren't neighbours, and we have no problems with the borders. During the communist era they*

⁵ Shameti, S. Quelle place pour les Aroumains d'Albanie? *Klan*, Décembre 2003, Le Courrier des Balkans, <http://www.balkans.eu/article3938.html>.

simply didn't know they were a minority, and, after all, everybody calls himself as he likes, they identify themselves as Macedonians, so we accept them as such. If it turns out they are Bulgarians, we'll accept them as Bulgarians", R. L. said.

The joke about the Bulgarian and the Macedonian ambassadors

In Albania, it is only non-governmental organisations that study minorities. In 1999-2000 the Albanian Helsinki Watch Committee (AHC) carried out two surveys in the region of Mala Prespa, where, according to its report, the population is a Macedonian minority. *"The minority we describe as a Macedonian one, lives in the areas around Prespa and Korçë and numbers 5-7 thousand people inhabiting the territory of 9 villages. The region is prospering, and these people are allowed to maintain contacts with Macedonia, from which they largely benefit. There are primary schools in the 9 villages inhabited by a Macedonian minority; in two communities there are high schools where Macedonian is taught. All the schools have established contacts with schools in Macedonia. The students continue their studies at universities in Tiranë, Skopje, and Bitola. Members of this minority travel to Macedonia for medical treatment which is free. In Pustec a church has been built. The minority population in Prespa can travel visa-free to Macedonia paying only a monthly fee",* said A. P., expert in international law, member of AHC Managing Board⁶.

Prof. A. P. commented on the thesis maintained by the Bulgarian historians that the minority living in the Prespa area is Bulgarian, offering a standard answer commonly given by many Albanian observers and politicians on the subject of ethnic Bulgarians in Albania. *"We call this minority Macedonian, and I believe there is a very strong affinity between Bulgarians and Macedonians. You are to decide what it is. To us this population is a minority with its own characteristics"*⁷.

In conversations with politicians from Albania on the subject of a Bulgarian minority, several respondents related the same episode – about how the Bulgarian and the Macedonian ambassadors visited Golo Brdo and Mala Prespa, and the local people would change their identification as the occasion required. These respondents suggested, by way of a joke, that we – Bulgarians and Macedonians – should get to terms over the issue of what the national identity of the population in these regions was. *"It's difficult for us to differentiate between Macedonians and Bulgarians in Albania. Around Prespa Lake there is a community of very nice people and our party has followers there. I'd like to make a joke by saying that when the Macedonian ambassador to Tiranë makes visits to those quarters, they tell him they are Macedonians, and when the next week the Bulgarian ambassador visits them, they say they are Bulgarians. Now we come to the question of the identity of Slavo-Macedonians, of the Pirin Mountain – is it Macedonian or Bulgarian. There's history and there're dialects, and it's not for Albania to settle this issue",* remarked G. P., party leader in Tiranë, in the summer of 2001. *"If they are Bulgarians in Golo Brdo, what on earth is the Macedonian ambassador doing there?"* wondered R. L.

Official representatives in Tiranë also mentioned the story of some envoys from Sofia and Skopje both claiming that the minority is *"theirs"*. Is Albania ready to grant more rights to the Bulgarian population living around Lake Prespa and in Golo Brdo? In 1998, Pascal Milo, the then foreign minister of Albania, gave the following answer: *"Two years ago, during the Congress of the Socialist International held in New York, a friend of mine – Secretary of the BSDP, asked me this question. In ten minutes, another friend of mine from the Republic of Macedonia posed the same question. My response was: You are to determine whether this minority in Albania belongs to Bulgaria or to Macedonia and then come back to me to discuss its rights. After World War II, we know this minority is Macedonian. I'd rather not elaborate on why we chose this way, but the*

⁶ Mangalakova, T. Prof. Arben Puto denies there is Bulgarian ethnic minority in Prespa. In: сп. Балканите, бр. 18, 2001, с. 5.

⁷ Ibid.

*Communist regime made this decision and it's difficult for us now to change that and say this minority is Bulgarian, and not Macedonian. This is a serious dispute between Bulgaria and Macedonia. The Albanian government is ready to grant this minority the largest possible cultural autonomy, educational rights based on the international standards*⁸.

The only Albanian politician, who straightforwardly admitted the presence of ethnic Bulgarians in Albania, was former Prime Minister Aleksander Meksi: *"I wouldn't like to offend anyone who would call himself a Macedonian, but in the territory near Lake Prespa there is a school instructing in Bulgarian"*⁹.

50 000 Bulgarians, or 350 000 Macedonians?

The official Bulgarian policy pursued after 1989 has avoided making declarations on the status of the Bulgarian minority in Albania. Donation campaigns in favour of the Bulgarians in Golo Brdo, carried out under the patronage of the President, provided the occasion to speak out about this population. The Ministry of Education and Science and the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad are the government institutions committed to the Bulgarian minority in Albania. During his visit to Tiranë in March 2003, Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha met with representatives of the Bulgarian non-governmental organisations active in Albania. Discussed during the meeting was the opening of a Bulgarian secondary school in Tiranë. Released on the official web site of the Bulgarian government has been information stating that *"The "Ivan Vazov" and "Prosperitet Golo Brdo" associations are legitimate representatives of the Bulgarian community in Albania and the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad maintains close contacts with them. They play an intermediary role in the selection of students applying for higher schools in this country, and issue documents certifying Bulgarian origin... At present, the Bulgarian community in Albania numbers about 50 000 persons. They inhabit the areas of Golo Brdo, Mala Prespa, the villages of Drenovo, Boboshica and Vrbnik, as well as the municipality of Korçë."*¹⁰ For the present, this is the only official position Sofia has declared on the subject of ethnic Bulgarians in Albania.

In 1993-2003, over 200 Albanian young people of Bulgarian origin studied at universities in Bulgaria. Greatest was the number of students from Golo Brdo, followed by those from the region of Gora and Mala Prespa. Education in Bulgaria is free, Bulgarian diplomas are recognised in Albania. After returning to Albania, these graduates come to work successfully as teachers, university lecturers, journalists, servants in the public administration, or employees in the banking and business sectors.

Many Bulgarian respondents in Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo insisted that Bulgaria should enforce a visa-free regime for ethnic Bulgarians in Albania or alleviate the procedure for getting Bulgarian visas and Bulgarian passports. This issue was discussed at a round table organised by the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA) on 18 March 2003. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that making Bulgarian passports and visas available is a complex problem because of Bulgaria's commitment as a state responsible for the Schengen area border control. Representatives from non-governmental organisations, from the Ministry of Education and Science, from SABA, and researchers ascertained that the Republic of Macedonia worked quite actively among the population of Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo, entitled to travelling visa-free to Macedonia, and that for the last several years the Macedonian ambassador to Tiranë had repeatedly toured Mala Prespa handing out Macedonian passports. As a result of the conservativeness and bureaucratic attitude of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ethnic Bulgarian communities in the Balkans, including ethnic Bulgarians in Albania, are not supported by the Bulgarian state, was the opinion expressed

⁸ Мангалакова, Т. Паскал Мило, министър на външните работи на Албания: Албанците трябва да участват по-широко в управлението на Р. Македония. – *Ип: Македония*, бр. 22, 1998, с. 4.

⁹ Иванова, Т. Македонското правителство трябвало да даде повече права на албанците. Смята албанският премиер Александър Мeksi – *В: Македония*, бр. 47, 1993, с. 2.

¹⁰ Prime Minister Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha has received a letter of grateful acknowledgement from Bulgarian associations in Albania, <http://government.bg/PressOffice/News/2003-10-03/7476.html>.

by B. E., former ambassador to a Balkan country.

Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia have different conceptions of both the ethnic identity and the number of the population of Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo. According to Skopje, this is a Macedonian population speaking Macedonian language, and the number of Macedonians in Albania amounts to 350 000 people. According to Sofia, there are 50 000 ethnic Bulgarians in Albania. Although some Albanian politicians and administrators declare that there are ethnic Bulgarians in Albania, no agreement has been signed between Sofia and Tiranë stating the presence of such a minority. Minorities in Albania are recognised by intergovernmental bilateral agreements. For the present, only a paper released by the Ministry of Economy of Albania and related to the work of a round table under the Stability Pact, mentions that there is a Bulgarian minority in Albania. *“The overall number of minorities in Albania accounts for about 2 per cent of the population. The principal minorities are those of Greek, Macedonian, Russian, Bulgarian, and Italian nationalities, and a very small number of other countries’ nationals”*¹¹. A Bulgarian diplomatic source commented on this fact as a *“great achievement”*.

The most active Macedonian association in Albania is *“Prespa”*. According to its leader, Edmond Temelkov, the interest of the Macedonians in Albania requires that the Macedonian prime minister lobby with his Albanian counterpart for establishing a free-transborder movement zone and for providing identity cards for the Macedonians in this area.

Macedonia observes the status of the population in Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo with particular attention. Skopje wants that Macedonians should have the right to form political parties in Albania, as well as that Albania should officially that the population in Golo Brdo is Macedonian. On 12 October 2003, during the local elections in Albania, one of the accents in the commentaries published in the Macedonian mass media was that among the candidates of the 39 political parties there were Macedonians, mainly members of the Macedonian association *“Prespa”*, who, not being allowed to found their own party, ran in the elections as candidates of other parties¹².

Skopje draws a parallel between the rights of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and the rights of ethnic Macedonians in Albania. *“What Albanians in Macedonia have, and what Macedonians in Albania could get, is the objective of the existing four Macedonian associations in Albania which have recently founded a Union of Macedonians in Albania seeking to create an all-Macedonian party intended to defend the interests of nearly 300 000 Macedonians in our western neighbour country. They have been discriminated in terms of adhering to the international agreement on minorities, report the Macedonian representatives in Albania.”*¹³

Covering the meeting on 13 November 2002 between Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano and his Macedonian colleague, Branko Crvenkovski, the Macedonian media made commentaries that in Albania only the Macedonians in Mala Prespa enjoy the status and rights of a minority. For many years, the Macedonians in Golo Brdo and Gora have insisted on being granted minority status and rights, but they have not obtained them yet¹⁴.

King Samuel

For their lessons, the children attending Macedonian language schools use textbooks translated from Albanian. *“In the history textbooks, King Samuel is described as a Bulgarian, something one can’t keep silent about”*, was a commentary heard during a discussion held in Pustec

¹¹ Ministria e bashkëpunimit ekonomik dhe tregtisë Secretariati Shqiptar per Paktin e Stabilitetit, Tryeza Kombetare I – Demokratia, 3.

¹² Тодоровска, В. Локални избори во Албанија. Вести, Телевизија А 1 – Македонија, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/vest.asp?VestID=2467>.

¹³ Стоилова, М. Македонците во Албанија се стремат кон семакедонска партија. Вести, Телевизија А 1 - Македонија, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/vest.asp?VestID=21842>.

¹⁴ Средбата Нано – Црвенковски со посебен третман во албанските медиуми. Телевизија А1 – Македонија, Вести, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/vest.asp?VestID=14832>.

on 7 April 2002 on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of the “*Prespa*” association¹⁵. The debate whether King Samuel was Bulgarian or Macedonian is parascholarly because historical documents show there was no Macedonian state in those times. The identity crisis of the young Macedonian state has manifested itself, among other things, in Skopje’s attitude to the population in Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo.

The young people from Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo who study at universities in Bulgaria or in Macedonia are not indifferent to the debate over history between Bulgaria and Macedonia. Samuel is a Bulgarian king for students in Bulgaria, while for students in Macedonia he is a Macedonian king. Albanians look with indifference, sometimes mockingly, upon the debate over Samuel’s identity.

Extending relations with Bulgaria

Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo are economically underdeveloped regions and for the past several years the population has migrated to Albania’s larger towns. Some of the younger people work abroad, mainly in neighbouring Macedonia and Greece. Bulgaria is yet to attract ethnic Bulgarians from Albania as a tourist destination and a place of residence, as a country of employment opportunities on account of the advantages it offers – no language barrier, good education, chances to obtain Bulgarian citizenship. Since April 2004 Bulgaria has become an actual NATO member country, and in 2007 it is expected to join the EU. From now on, the contacts of ethnic Bulgarians in Albania with Bulgaria are to grow. The current tendency is for an ever increasing number of people in Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo to become aware of their Bulgarian origin, and the main factor in it are the students at Bulgarian universities. This will lead to closer cultural and economic relations with Bulgaria. A major role in this process could be played by non-governmental organisations in Bulgaria and in the Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo regions, but the level of contacts between them is still unsatisfactory. Ethnic Bulgarians in Albania have lived in the course of long years in isolation, without maintaining any relations and contacts with Bulgaria and now they have to make up for lost time and missed opportunities.

One of the unresolved problems is the lack of an alleviated procedure for obtaining Bulgarian visas by ethnic Bulgarians in Albania. For the present, the Bulgarian institutions do not plan changes in the regime.

Over the last years the Republic of Macedonia has worked very actively among the population in Mala Prespa, chiefly in the sphere of cultural co-operation. As a result of the deepening crisis faced by the Macedonian state and its uncertain future, expectations are that the population of Mala Prespa will turn their eyes to Bulgaria. At the moment, many people in Mala Prespa have Macedonian passports along with their Albanian ones, but the Bulgarian passports will become more attractive because with them one will be able to travel visa-free to the EU countries. After 2001, there has been an influx of Macedonians that have obtained Bulgarian passports attracted by the possibility for a legal 3-month stay in the EU during which they could work illegally there. An analogous rush for Bulgarian passports might be seen in the next few years among the population of Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo. A greater number of people in Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo are going to apply for Bulgarian citizenship. The procedure lasts for about a year. There are two points of view in Bulgarian society concerning the matter of Bulgarian passports for ethnic Bulgarians living outside Bulgaria. VMRO (an opposition party describing itself as nationalist) has given the example of the Macedonian ambassador who toured Mala Prespa to hand out Macedonian passports. VMRO criticises the Bulgarian institutions on account of the cumbersome procedure by which ethnic Bulgarians apply for Bulgarian citizenship.

¹⁵ Македонците во Албанија до правата со протести. Вести, Телевизија А 1 – Македонија, <http://www.a1.com.mk/vesti/vest.asp?VestID=7615>.

The second view is more conservative and it is largely maintained by top Bulgarian officials – the procedure should not be revised because Bulgaria cannot receive large numbers of emigrants. Ethnic Bulgarians living outside Bulgaria who have no documents certifying their ethnic origin have to present a certificate of Bulgarian origin issued by the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA) and required in applying for Bulgarian citizenship. The papers are submitted to the Ministry of Justice; some other state institutions, too, should make certain inquiries. *“I cannot agree we should issue a certificate based on an [individual’s] signature alone, and a passport with just two signatures. This is in contradiction to the elementary logic of the state’s commitments and our confidence that we are a normal administration... There is no collective procedure in resolving this problem, the approach is individual. I cannot agree that the approach of the Macedonian administration whose representatives are said to have been going about with suitcases full of passports and handing them out, is the better one. In terms of Bulgaria’s authority and positions lately, I can’t see anyone giving Macedonia as an example for us”*, pointed out S. H, top SABA administrator.

Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo are going to experience depopulation. Migration processes will lead to the obliteration of language and culture as major characteristics of population’s identity. It is possible that in one or two generations the Bulgarian language now spoken at home will be used only by the elderly people. The way of life, the customs and manners of the population in Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo should be studied and described by researchers and scholars. So far, none of the non-governmental organisations of the ethnic Bulgarians in Albania has its own web site. Because of the geographic isolation of these regions and the poor transport links and communications, one of the ways to increase contacts is to launch an internet portal or a web site where various information will be published – for example, details about the application procedure for Bulgarian universities, different ways and channels for studying Bulgarian (even via Internet), etc.

Increasing the contacts of ethnic Bulgarians in Albania with Bulgaria will lead to enriching Bulgarian culture and language in Bulgaria itself. However, this is a topic which is yet to be investigated.