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KOSOVA-METOHIA: A NATIONALITY CASE STUDY

The predominantly Albanian-inhabited Kosova-Metohia Autonomous Region of Yugoslavia has assumed the role of a bridge-builder between the various nationalities residing in this area and between Yugoslavia and Albania. This is the central theme of an article which appeared in the Albanian language monthly Perparimi, published in Prishtina.¹ In addition, the journal provides a thorough study of the specifics and characteristics of the Albanian minority group in Yugoslavia. This newly self-assigned task by this large minority group is closely related to the increased demands by the Kosova-Metohia region for expansion of its autonomous rights, functions and responsibilities. No doubt, the decisions of the Brioni Plenum of June 1966 created the conditions for the new political outlook of the Albanian national minority in Yugoslavia. The serious intent of the article in the Perparimi was clearly reflected in a statement issued on October 5 by Fadil Hoxha, the highest representative of the Albanian minority in the Yugoslav Party Presidium. The statement which was published in a number of Yugoslav dailies, including Politika (October 5) also found a widespread echo in the foreign press. Fadil Hoxha disclosed that the Yugoslav Government had taken concrete measures toward the normalization of relations between Albania and Yugoslavia. He added his own personal imprint in support of this policy by asserting that the "Albanians in Yugoslavia wish to become a bridge for closer links between Yugoslavia and Albania." In tying together Fadil Hoxha's remarks with the suggestions made in the Perparimi article one must take note of a significant political development which deserves close attention.

1) Perparimi (Progress), June 1967. The journal is a cultural-scientific monthly.

A number of suggestions intended to help resolve the issue of the expansion of the responsibilities of the autonomous region were raised by the author of the article, Hajredin Hoxha. They are of particular interest because they are directly related to the principle of self-management, one of Yugoslavia's most radical ideological innovations. The article asserts in this connection that the enrichment of the role of the autonomous region cannot be achieved if "statist functions" continue to consolidate, something which would in fact occur if state functions were merely shifted from one center to another. Instead the sole objective of the federative system should be the continuous decentralization and democratization to the point where the state withers away. The article also maintains that the new rights of the autonomous region should correspond to the social role of the nations and nationalities within the framework of the Yugoslav socialist system. Correct relations between various nationality groups in the country, it is pointed out, could be attained only by decentralizing state functions from the federal level to the republican level and from the republican level to the level of the autonomous region. These new forms of decentralization would then assure the independence, sovereignty, full assertion of one's own rights, and the self-management of Yugoslav national collectives and peoples, including the national minorities. Applied to the Autonomous Region of Kosova-Metohia "this process would play a very important role in the overall socialist national recognition of the Albanians in Yugoslavia and would become an instrument for the attainment of complete national equality among the Albanians, Serbs, Montenegrins and the Turks in this region." He, therefore, urges that both, the Serbian Republic hand-in-hand with the federal authorities, take the necessary steps for the transfer of a number of important functions from the jurisdiction of the Socialist Republic of Serbia to those of the Autonomous Region of Kosova-Metohia.

Proof of the progress already made in this direction was provided during Fadil Hoxha's meeting with the local press on 18 October.² He announced that the People's Assembly of the Kosova-Metohia Region had completed the plan for the Assembly's program for the current fiscal year (which comes up for approval at the end of this month). The program calls for changes in the constitution of the autonomous region with respect to its "role, position, jurisdiction and rights." He urged at the same time that the work of the regional commissions dealing with these changes "should be synchronized with the work of the Federal and Republican Commissions, since lack of [corresponding] major modifications in the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Serbia would automatically hinder changes in the Statute of the Kosova-Metohia Region." The depth of these changes were underscored when Hoxha told the journalists that "the new statute must constitute a strong basis for the further development of

2) The Prishtina daily Rilindja published the interview on October 20.

correct relations among the various nationalities and must assure the full recognition of each nation and nationality."

The bulk of the study appearing in the monthly Perparimi was devoted to an examination of some aspects of the Albanian national minority group in Yugoslavia and to certain political characteristics of the Kosova-Metohia Autonomous Region. The author rightly notes that this was necessary in order to comprehend the above-mentioned principles and objectives. To begin with, it was shown that the Albanian national minority in Yugoslavia differs greatly from the other nationality groups in the country, relative both to the total population of Yugoslavia and to the country of national origin. The data provided illustrates the point:

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percent of the Total Yugoslav Population</u>	<u>Percent of Population of the country of National Origin</u>
Italians	0.15	0.35
Czechs	0.16	0.35
Rumanians	0.30	0.25
Bulgarians	0.30	0.90
Slovaks	0.40	2.00
Turks	1.00	0.70
Hungarians	2.90	4.40
Albanians	5.20	38.00

The approximately 1,100,000 Albanian nationals who were living in Yugoslavia in 1961,³ was equal to the combined total of the other national minority groups of the country. Attention is also drawn to the fact that there are few similar cases in the world where the total number of one country's minority group, represents such a large percentage of the total population of the country of national origin.

The journal, in supporting its demands for greater autonomous rights, also makes a comparison between the ratio of Albanians to the total population of Yugoslavia with that of other nationality groups who enjoy republican status:

- 3) The data provided by Perparimi is based on the Yugoslav statistical handbook containing the population census of 1961. Because of the more rapid population growth among the Albanians, their total number should be considerably higher today.

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percent of the Total Population of Yugoslavia</u>
Slovenes	8.6
Macedonians	5.6
Montenegrins	2.6
Albanians	5.2

Following the presentation of these demographic data, the author remarked that they confirm the very close comparability in size of the Albanian national minority group with some of the other peoples of the Yugoslav Republic. He then concludes that, although from a Leninist standpoint minority groups cannot demand rights on the basis of size, place of origin, history and so forth, nevertheless it is precisely because of these elements that the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia "considers it necessary for the problems associated with quantitative relations as well as the achievement of complete national equality to receive due treatment."

Finally, with regard to the major nationalities within the Kosova-Metohia Autonomous Region, the proportions are given as follows:

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Percent of Kosova-Metohia Population</u>
Serbs	23.5
Montenegrins	3.9
Turks	2.7
Albanians	67.1

The study also provides detailed information about the ethnic, social, cultural-educational, historic and economic characteristics of the Albanian national minority group in Yugoslavia. The last two categories are particularly interesting because of the open discussion of them now going on in the country. With regard to economic development, it is pointed out that despite the progress made in this area during the post-war period (1947-1964) the Kosova-Metohia region lagged behind the rest of the country. Taken as a whole, the author continues that the relative position of the developed and under-developed regions remained the same in 1964 as they were in 1947, while the individual position of the Kosova-Metohia and Bosnia-Herzegovina regions have actually suffered a relative decline. Thus the average per capita income in the Kosova-Metohia region has decreased in relative terms -- in comparison with the Yugoslav average -- from 52 percent in 1947 to 36.6 percent by 1964. It was stressed that economic differences have tended to widen significantly.

The author provides a number of reasons for this relative deterioration. These include: objective and subjective policies regarding investments in this region, and the Albanians' very high rate of population growth. Among the objective policies in the investment sector which prevented narrowing of the gap between the developed and under-developed areas of the country the author mentions:

The Cominform conflict and the economic blockade, the policies instituted by the East European countries against Yugoslavia, the tendency of the imperialist powers to extract Yugoslav political concessions in conjunction with social development and the resulting pressures in this sector, higher expenditures for defense, natural catastrophies and so forth.

[Emphasis supplied]

The article does not elaborate further on these points except to note that as a result of these difficulties investments were channeled to the more developed regions of the country. The following subjective reasons were listed: a) The negative influence of great Serbian nationalism (up to 1957) in the field of investments due to the distrustful attitude maintained toward the Albanian nationals in Yugoslavia; b) Insufficient work done in the exploitation of the region's rich natural resources;⁴ c) Bad organizational work in many fields of economic planning.

One additional important factor which has negatively affected the per capita income of this region is considered to be the very high natural growth of the population in this region. The following annual rates of births and deaths per 1000 population are recorded:

<u>Population Sector</u>	<u>Births</u>	<u>Deaths</u>	<u>Percent of Natural Growth</u>
Yugoslav average	22.8	9.0	13.8
Kosova-Metohia Autonomous Region	42.1	12.2	29.9
Albanian nationals	47.0	14.0	32.0

The birth rate in the Kosova-Metohia region is not only much higher than the Yugoslav average but according to the author it represents one of the highest in the world, i.e., fourth after Venezuela, Nigeria, and the UAR.

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- 4) The Kosova-Metohia region possesses 70 percent of the country's lead and zinc deposits and 50 percent of the lignite reserves. It is also rich in other mineral resources. In recent years a number of large plants have been completed for the exploitation of the region's abundant raw materials.

The chapter dealing with the historical details of this region is by far the most significant primarily because it contains views never before put into print for the general public. This is partially a direct outcome of the post-Brioni atmosphere which enables a freer and more open discussion of one of Yugoslavia's most pressing issues, namely the nationality problem. According to Hajredin Hoxha, one of the essential premises in resolving nationality problems is the principle of self-determination. This principle of self-determination should be approached as a long-range process of giving equitable treatment to nationality rights emphasizes Hajredin Hoxha and not as some authors insist as merely a short-range project to define state borders. • He goes on to say:

Insisting that national relations or the problems of national minorities should be settled by a forceful demarcation of frontiers is in substance unacceptable today. In the present phase of social development in general and of socialism in particular, it is all the more necessary for national minorities to become bridge-builders between nations and states and a factor in the gradual elimination of borders. In this way, the national minorities -- as their contribution to the rapprochement and cooperation between states and nations -- provide the essential component of the implementation of the principle of self-determination for themselves.

When applying this principle to the Kosova-Metohia region, the author mentions two extreme views held with regard to the status of this territory. One, which is held by the Albanian nationalists, insists that this territory is an integral part of Albania proper. The other view, which is held by the Serb nationalists, maintains that the Kosova-Metohia region is Serbian territory. Hajredin Hoxha concludes that both these views are erroneous and asserts:

We believe that, from the Marxist point of view these extreme positions must be eliminated. We must replace them with the principle that the Kosova-Metohia is a territory which belongs to the people who live in this region, i.e., to the Albanians, Serbs, Montenegrins and Turks. The people are determined to carry out collectively their socialist and national affirmation in the spirit of solidarity, fraternity and cooperation. Furthermore, they wish to become a bridge for the unity among Albanians, Serbs, Montenegrins and other Balkan people.

The emphasis placed on the principle of unity, fraternity and cooperation in the role which the nationalities of this region are to play is in actuality the outgrowth of the program of the League of Yugoslav Communists which aims at achieving precisely this goal. Therefore, the author's emphatic views on the question of self-determination should not be construed as representing some sort of misguided deviation on the part of an individual. The same can also be said about his ideas on the bridge-building role which this region should play between Albania and Yugoslavia because these views appear to have the wholehearted support of Belgrade. This was evidenced in the recent extensive debates in the Yugoslav National Assembly regarding this issue.⁵

In dealing with the improvement of relations between Albania and Yugoslavia the article first examines the present international situation, particularly as it affects both nations, namely the deterioration in the political situation in this area due to the new Greek situation. The following constitutes an unprecedentedly glowing Yugoslav statement of solidarity vis-a-vis Albania:

In connection with the Greek situation and the fascist pretensions being expressed by the reactionary circles in general, it has become evident today that the independence and the national interests of the Albanian people are endangered more than at any other time during its recent period of existence. At the same time, one cannot deny the fact that the Albanian people have no better friend and supporter today safeguarding the independence and territorial integrity of Albania than the Yugoslav people and Yugoslavia which holds more than one third of the people of Albanian extraction. [Emphasis supplied]

This rare expression of all-out support from Albania's northern neighbor appears to have had some effect on the Tirana leaders. If the persistent ideological attacks on Yugoslavia emanating from Tirana are set aside, a recent speech made by Enver Hoxha (on 14 September) dealing with the country's defense is of interest. In it Hoxha directed the bulk of his attack against Greece and the Soviet Union, and as a departure from previous behavior, the Yugoslavs were spared the usual vindictive statements.

The Yugoslav monthly, in addition to the above-mentioned expressions of solidarity, proceeds to offer a number of reasons in support of closer relations between the two countries: proximity, the common past of the two countries, the present common

5) Tanjug, October 25, 1967.

objectives in building socialism, and above all the necessity for closer cooperation between the Albanians living in the two countries. For the realization of closer cooperation the author makes the following suggestions:

Numerous possibilities exist for cooperation between the Albanians in Yugoslavia and those of Albania. Both sides can benefit from resolving the problems of textbooks for all levels of education. They can benefit in the field of Albanian literature and in enriching the Albanian language. They can collectively carry out scientific work dealing with the problems of national history and the national culture of the Albanian minority. Cooperation can also occur in the exchange of Albanian language publication, in the exchange of visits between cultural-educational and artistic groups, in the field of music, radio and television, in the exchange of sports activities, in the field of tourism, etc. Within this framework of great importance are the contacts between the higher institutes of learning and cultural institutions in Kosova-Metohia and in Albania.

As nationalism has experienced a revival throughout East Europe, Yugoslavia's Albanians have been drawn into the vortex of this movement and now view themselves as carriers of an expanded understanding between Albania and Yugoslavia. Encouraged by the results of the Brioni Plenum, which inter alia brought the Yugoslav nationalities question into the open, the Yugoslav Albanians seek an expansion of their autonomous status which they consider essential to their newly-assumed role of bridge-builders and the full attainment of their own national aspirations.