YUGOSLAVIA (Kosovo-Metohia)
Internal affairs
Nationalities

24 July 1968

KOSOVO-METOHIA PLENUM DEMANDS LANGUAGE EQUALITY

Summary: Strong opinions regarding the problem of language equality for the Kosovo-Metohia Region were voiced during the 15th Plenum of the Province's League of Communists. The reports and statements given by a number of Party officials were marked by their outspokenness in demanding complete equality for the Albanian language as a means of achieving national equality in the Province. The participants were unanimous in demanding a break with outdated policies on the question of the employment of the Albanian language in all spheres of activity. In particular, the Serb and Montenegrine speaking inhabitants of the Province were called upon to take a different stand on the language issue by getting rid of the forces still obstructing this process. The point was also made that the solution of the language problem in the Province is more than of local interest. The authoritative manner in which the speakers voiced their viewpoints was further evidence of the quasi-republican status achieved by the Province, a fact which was publicly acknowledged by one of the participants.

The achievement of complete language equality in the Kosovo-Metohia Autonomous Region, one of the most complex nationality issues still to be resolved in this heterogeneous community, was the main topic discussed at the 15th Plenum of the Province's League of Communists. The importance of this issue was underscored by the stress put on terms like "essential, obligatory and imperative" to indicate the urgency of the problem at hand. The protraction of the Plenum, which was in session between July 3-11 and was interrupted a number of times, was an indication of the difficulty of dealing with this topic. The session was reportedly marked by animated marathon debates, lasting into the late night hours.
The main opening address, which dealt with the ideological aspects of language equality in the province, was delivered by one of the province's leading crusaders for language equality, Ismail Bajra, a member of the Executive Committee of the Regional Committee of the League of Communists. The Plenum was also addressed by Xhavit Nimani, Vice-President of the Yugoslav Federal Assembly. In addition, the Party session was provided with interesting and contrasting viewpoints on the language issue by 28 Party functionaries, turning the meeting into a veritable democratic platform.

Ismail Bajra's Opening Report

The new democratic trend of dealing with difficult and complex problems, in this case the language equality issue, was strongly upheld by Ismail Bajra in his opening speech. He supported this trend by noting that issues which were considered "tabu" in the past are today discussed in public. According to him, the nationality policy in this region has been marked during the past two years by its dynamic pace. The treatment of the language issue is one facet of this process. On the other hand, Bajra is equally direct in pointing out that up until now an incorrect attitude has been maintained regarding the language equality problem. Even today, he stresses, while the principle of self-management is being steadily enforced, the consistent use of nationality languages leaves much to be desired. The fact that today in the province one cannot speak of a bilingual or trilingual (in cases where the Turkish language is also applicable), administration, but one which utilizes translation from Serbo-Croatian into Albanian is proof of continued linguistic inequality. Bajra concludes:

The application, therefore, of the principle of the equality of languages in administration and other spheres of activity is an OBLIGATION which does not depend on the whims of an individual or of an office.

Bajra also asserts that whereas in the past resistance to this process of equality was "active," "passive" resistance has become predominant today. He even goes so far as to charge the highest regional Party and state organs with inability to get rid of these forms of resistance and considers them "morally and politically" responsible to the society. The writing on the wall for the obstructors of this process could have not been made more specific.

1) Rilindja, July 12.
In view of Nimani's high official position in the Yugoslav state leadership, his remarks must be considered to carry considerable weight. The viewpoints which he presented to the plenary session are not of mere local interest. Nimani considers the proposals made regarding language equality and the success or failure of their implementation to be of both national and international significance. He states:

The principled and effective solution of the nationalities problem would, by its fine example, serve to enhance our country's image on a world scale. In fact, in this field our country and our Party have indeed made a firm impression on the progressive world. If we take into consideration that most of the nations of the world lack homogeneous populations for historical and other reasons, the solution of the problem of national equality and of nationalities languages becomes even more important.

Nimani's remarks have a dual purpose. Locally, they serve to strengthen the impression that the Province has a world role to play on the question of language equality. Nationally, on the other hand, the public can be convinced that success in this field would be of great advantage to the whole nation in terms of international prestige.

Xhavit Nimani also takes pains to explain that the question of language equality in this particular region is by no means a purely local problem or simply a constitutional matter but something which is much more profound. He goes on to point out that the country's nationality problem, as reflected also by the language equality issue, "is a very important element in establishing correct relations, in stabilizing the internal situation of the country, in improving international relations and in building socialism." This, according to him, is the national aspect of this issue. The individual aspect of this problem he explains by noting that the language equality for the peoples of this province is not simply a constitutional principle, a national and political right or an existentialist element of a people but a vital necessity resulting from the multi-nationality aspect of this province. He adds furthermore that "language equality presupposes a true equality among diverse national communities, presupposes the right of a citizen as an administrator and producer."

2) Rilindja, July 13, 1968.
The very difficult nature of the problem tackled by the plenum is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the problem of language equality was not given a chance for success only until the recent 15th Plenum of the Serbian Central Committee. At that session, it will be recalled, two chief opponents of the new nationality policy, Central Committee members Dobrica Cosic and Jovan Marjanovic came under heavy censorship, thereby giving the green light to the further democratization of the national equality process. Still, according to Nimani, one must admit, as revealed during the plenary debates, that there still exist "misconceptions, dilemmas and passive or active resistance to the new process." The speaker goes on to note that these obstacles are reflected in the denial of nationalities rights in terms of language rights as well as "through the glorification and the struggle for the affirmation of one's own nationality at the expense of the rights of other nationalities living in the same territory."

While admitting that obstacles to this new process have been serious and numerous, Nimani at the same time urges a still greater determination in carrying out the unfinished tasks. He warns that it would be wrong to confine oneself in the future to mere declarations and adds that the criticisms voiced at the plenum should be "transformed into concrete action in order to assure language equality in the province." Otherwise, he concludes, the Party would "compromise its stature and would lose the people's trust."

This high state official is quite specific when stating his opinion about the proposed changes. He declares that equality must be complete and must "not take into consideration the size of the nationality group living in a particular territorial community in Yugoslavia." He explains that the solution of the problem of language equality also depends on the specific conditions of a country and on the dynamics of a particular language. By dynamics of a language, in this case of the Albanian language, the author refers to the numerical composition of the Albanian speaking populace, a strong force which cannot be ignored. He concludes that the question of assuring the equality of the Albanian language must be taken up on the republican and on the federal level, and adds:

The existing shortcomings in the field of language equality must also be eliminated during the forthcoming changes in the federal constitution,


4) According to the Yugoslav statistical handbook containing the population census of 1961, the number of the Albanian nationality group for that year was 1,100,000.
which must assure the complete equality of the nationalities, languages, and alphabets with the languages and the alphabet of the Yugoslav peoples. This is imperative and is a realistic demand. The same position must be reflected in the constitution of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, that of the Province, of the communes and of the producing enterprises.

Xhavit Nimani is also unequivocal with his demand that language equality must be complete in the full sense of the word when he declares that "translation alone is inadequate" and that "equality must be thorough both in administration and in all other social spheres." Equally significant is his emphasis that language equality should be achieved according to the principle of "voluntarism" and on the assumption that it will meet the "real needs of the young generations."

Finally, Nimani calls upon all Communists and progressive forces of the province to wage a resolute struggle in introducing the teaching of an additional local language to all members of nationality groups in all the province's schools. This demand affects primarily the children of Serb and Montenegro nationality groups, who constitute approximately 30 per cent of the population of the province and who until now were not compelled to learn the other spoken languages of the province, i.e., Albanian or, to a much lesser extent, Turkish.

The Plenum Hears Strong Viewpoints

The 15th plenary session also heard the opinions of 28 other high regional Party functionaries on the topic under review. In general, their statements were blunt to the point of ultimatum. Their outspokenness tends to magnify the complexity of the equality issue, which the officials of this region have set out to attain regardless of the distress which it will cause among foot-draggers. The following is a cross-section of statements made during the plenum. Rabije Shaban, in support of his premise that the individuality of a person is expressed better in his own mother tongue, first rejected the thesis that there are "big" and "small" languages, and then directed himself to his Serb colleagues, saying: "I can speak Serbo-Croatian, but I would like to have the Serb comrades speak Albanian too." Dusan Mugosha, who during the war played an important role in setting up the Albanian Communist Party and then as a military advisor to the Albanian Communists, emphasized his point by repeating it twice in what sounded like an ultimatum: "If a political-social activist wants to play a role in this province, then he certainly should speak the language of the territory in which he resides." In other words,
the future looks quite bleak for those who refuse or hesitate to learn a second language. It must be noted that this warning is primarily directed to the Serb speaking community, because the Albanian population of this province, without exception, is already bi-lingual (Albanian-Serbian). The fact that Mugashe is himself a Serb shows that the demands for language equality are not voiced by the Albanian element alone.

One of the League's educational spokesmen for the province, Fehmi Agani, was very critical of the situation in the region's schools with regard to the teaching of languages. He declared: "The current situation is entirely unsatisfactory. I do not want to deny the progress made during the past two years. What I have in mind is the twenty year period of our development." Agani in fact demands a radical change in existing educational policy, something which even the new political atmosphere of the past two years has not yet been able to bring about.

Another speaker, Gazmend Zajni, provided the first direct reference made by an official to the partial republican status which the province is to obtain in the near future. This appeared, inter alia, when Zajni stated:

This time we must be careful not to violate the principle according to which national languages are equal to the languages of nationalities. At the same time we must take into consideration the size of a nationality group. We also demand that laws issued even by the highest offices of the Federation must be published in the languages of nationalities too. If the problem of laws on the regional level is to be solved then this must be settled right at its source (the federal level). We will be faced with this problem in the future, under the new autonomous conditions, when the new normative acts of the Province have a legal character, when the Province also possesses some Republican features. (Emphasis supplied).

One of the most difficult aspects of the language equality issue, namely how it will affect the positions of individuals who do not master two or more languages, was discussed by Rexhaj Surroi. As an illustration he gave the example of Radio Prishtina,

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5) See Background report, Yugoslavia, "Virtual Republican Status for the Socialist Autonomous Region of Kosovo," 2 May 1968, by 1z.
where this problem has already been settled. According to him, positions requiring the knowledge of two languages must be clearly specified. For those who are already employed and who do not speak two languages "internal transfers must be made." In addition, he proposes the setting up of language courses for those who do not speak a second language and of setting a deadline for learning this language. This program is unprecedented not only for Yugoslavia, but for any country with similar political and cultural characteristics. The experiment being tried in Kosovo-Metohia bears watching.

A leading Party functionary of Serbian origin in the province, Blazho Radonjic, provided an equally strong argument in demanding a clear-cut and uncompromising stand on the part of the Communists in the struggle for national equality as reflected in the language equality issue. He then supported his stand by reasoning: "We cannot demand the equality of Yugoslav nationalities beyond our borders, if we cannot first solve our own nationality problems."

Other speakers were remarkably frank and challenging in their declarations, which surely must have raised some eyebrows at the plenary meeting. Some examples of brief summaries read:

There is no individual freedom without national freedom.

The present situation regarding language equality, in terms of high-level official materials being issued, is intolerable.

Why shouldn't students of Serb and Montenegrine nationality learn as much Albanian as is the case vice-versa?

If I am a constituent element of the Serbian state, why shouldn't I at the same time be a constituent element of the Yugoslav state?

About 90 percent of the Serb and Montenegrine youths have declared themselves in favor of learning the Albanian language in school. The higher educational authorities are to be blamed for the failures in this field.

It is wrong to consider the Albanian language as a second-rate language.

The concluding address was delivered by the Chairman of the regional League of Communists, Veli Deva. He stressed that the Province finds itself today in an entirely new position and at the crossroads of achieving national equality, which presupposes also language equality. On the one hand, he admits that the solution of the question of national equality is a "very delicate matter," while on the other hand, he is quite resolute in his instructions to the non-Albanian community of the Province.
In emphasizing the role to be played by the Communists of the province in the struggle to achieve this equality, Deva declares:

On this matter I must speak very clearly and to the point. We are going to achieve the objective of the employment of the Albanian language in the full sense of the word, if only our Serb and Montenegrine comrades are able to lead and win the battle against all the negative tendencies in their ranks, and when these comrades succeed in purging all those who continue to oppose equality.

Veli Deva is by no means as unreasonable or as doctrinaire as the above remarks may lead one to believe. He displays his talents as an effective moderator by disagreeing with the "doubters" who maintain that very little can be achieved on the principle of voluntarism. He concludes by giving support to the chosen line which, although it can guarantee only limited success, nevertheless is preferable to a purely administrative principle.

The manner in which viewpoints were expressed at the 15th Plenum of the Kosovo-Metohia League of Communists on the issue of the language equality is sufficient proof of the huge progress already made by the Province in its quest for acceptance as an equal member of the manifold community of nationalities of the Yugoslav Federation.