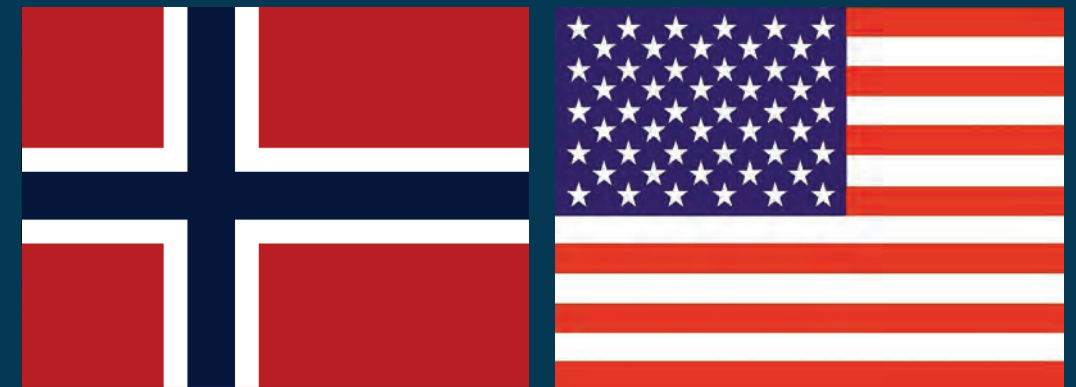


“An important and moving book about the developments in Kosovo throughout the last 40 years. From this book, we learn that humanism was essential when Kosovo gained its freedom - that independence is not won by weapons alone, but also through decency and reconciliation.”

Aage Borchgrevink – Human rights activist, writer, and chairman of the Norwegian Non - Fiction Writers' Association from 2021 to 2025



NORWEGIANS AND OTHER FOREIGNERS WHO GREATLY HELPED MAKE PEACE IN KOSOVA



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NUFRI LEKAJ



Nufri Lekaj

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KOSOVA

Prishtina, 2025

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA Action Norway-Albania project

CSCE The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)

ICJ International Court of Justice

IHF International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF)

KGNNHC Kosova Group within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee

KLA Kosova Liberation Army

KMDLNj Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova

LDK Democratic League of Kosova

LPK People's Movement of Kosova

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NHC Norwegian Helsinki Committee

NMFA Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NORWAC Norwegian Aid Committee

NRK Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

UDB Yugoslav State Security Service

INTRODUCTION

This book is dedicated to Berit Backer, Kristoffer Gjøtterud and all other Norwegians and foreigners from other countries who greatly helped make peace in Kosova.¹ If I were to write in detail about the contribution of all of these foreigners to Kosova, it would result in many separate books. With this dedication, I would like to at least offer a public token of gratitude to some of them who have made a special contribution and whose contribution can be largely documented. Consequently, in this book, based on documents and verifiable sources, I present the important contributions made by Berit Backer, Kristoffer Gjøtterud and other Norwegians, as well as others from foreign countries, that ensured Kosova's future as a peaceful country with equal rights for all of its citizens, regardless of their ethnic affiliation.

More concretely, starting with the main political developments in Kosova during the past 40 years, I focus first on the activity for Kosova of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), namely, the activity of the Kosova Group within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (KGNHC), which was coordinated by Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud. To make it easier for the reader to clearly understand the significance of the activity of the KGNHC, which paved the way for internationalization of the Kosova issue in the framework of the Helsinki Process, I start with a brief summary of this process. Additionally, I continue with an elaboration on the activity of the KGNHC, including the context of its establishment. Furthermore, after a discussion regarding the context of the tragic death of Berit Backer, I examine the impact of the commitment and advice of Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud alongside contributions of other Norwegians and foreigners towards peace-making in Kosova. By the end of this book, I draw a conclusion.

Given that the primary purpose of this book is one of dedication, I have chosen to publish it without any commercial intent and have entrusted it to a publishing house in Kosova. As a gesture of gratitude, it may be presented to international friends and to relevant international institutions

¹ In this book, the term “Kosova” — the Albanian-language form — is used instead of “Kosovo.” However, in direct citations (i.e., those with quotation marks) of other authors' works, the original form “Kosovo” is retained as it appears in the sources

- not solely in my personal name, but also on behalf of Kosova as a whole. The book has been published in English in order to ensure its accessibility to a broad international readership. In addition to the printed edition, it will also be made available online, thereby placing it at the disposal of all interested readers.

Since I have collaborated with most of the individuals mentioned in this book - particularly in efforts to achieve peace in Kosova - I will not refer to myself in first person ("I"), but in third person (by name), in my capacity as both a collaborator and a witness to their contributions.



Berit Backer



Kristoffer Gjøtterud

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE HELSINKI PROCESS

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was the starting point for the Helsinki Process, in the sense that it served as an arena for international conferences between the East and the West, based on the Helsinki Final Act (1975). In fact, the idea originated in 1954 in the Soviet Union, namely, by Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov. He launched the proposal for a security conference between the East and the West, with the United States envisaged as acting only as an observer. The proposal was refused by the West, with powerful Western countries labelling it as an attempt by the Soviet Union to prevent or hinder the rearmament of West Germany and to undermine the relations between Europe and the United States.² Furthermore, Communist Party General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, during the Party Congress of 1966, called upon European countries to jointly address and resolve political and military security issues.³ Moreover, the same issue was further addressed in the Bucharest Declaration of 1966 and the Budapest Appeal of 1969, including specific topics on which the conference could work.⁴ In this regard, Western European countries were open to a potential security conference, while U.S. President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were sceptical of the Soviet Union's initiative. They stated that the leading U.S. position in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and in the bilateral talks with the Soviet Union may be weakened if the United States became part of a multilateral discourse about political and military security issues.⁵

The United States and Canada were related to Western European countries through NATO, the Marshall Plan, and other means, and it was crucial to Western European countries for the United States to be part of the CSCE, to ensure achievement of the military outcome.⁶ Following numerous vicissitudes and initiatives, the Helsinki Final Act was adopted during the CSCE in Helsinki, Finland, in 1975.⁷ Inter alia, this was made

² Kleva 2007: 15

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid: 1

⁷ Ibid: 17

possible by the United States and Canada obtaining membership in the CSCE equal to that of European countries. In fact, this marked the first boomerang against the Soviet Union by Western countries, considering the original plan of the Soviet Union for the United States to possess only an observer status.

Nevertheless, in line with its agenda to prevent the unification of Germany, the Soviet Union insisted on securing the state borders following World War II during the Helsinki Process, resulting in the others' approval of East Germany's equal membership in the CSCE.⁸

It should be noted that the CSCE has played a key role in the further consolidation of NATO and the European Community. NATO member states, also part of the CSCE, operated as a group from the start by consolidating their views prior to and during the CSCE conferences. Actually, upon West Germany's initiative during the CSCE meetings in Madrid (1980–1983), the Lunch Club was established, with representatives of the United States, Great Britain, West Germany, France, Norway and the Netherlands convening regularly for lunch to address various issues deriving from CSCE discussions and negotiations.⁹ Afterward, following Norway's initiative, Canada also joined the Lunch Club.¹⁰ Furthermore, European Community member states developed their political profiles by displaying their abilities to coordinate their views on international issues through the CSCE.¹¹ Additionally, their work in the CSCE also contributed to their goal of the European Community becoming a political union.¹²

The Helsinki Final Act, also known as the Helsinki Accords or the Helsinki Declaration, was not legally mandatory but it was regarded as politically and morally mandatory in terms of establishing norms under the principle related to human rights.¹³ Therefore, the CSCE became the first regional forum in which participating countries, including Canada and the United States, could discuss the status of human rights and receive critiques on human rights violations.¹⁴ This contributed to something new

⁸ Stykket 2010: 34

⁹ Kleva 2007: 24–25, 113

¹⁰ Ibid: 25

¹¹ Ibid: 25

¹² Ibid: 25

¹³ Stykket 2010: 11

¹⁴ Ibid

in the European context. For the first time, human rights were enshrined as a separate principle in interstate relations, and, thus, the CSCE member states agreed that the human rights situation in their own countries could be addressed on different political levels.¹⁵ Two of the 10 principles of the Helsinki Final Act - specifically, the human rights principle and the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs - were identified as two evidently opposite points, with Western countries focused on the former and Eastern countries focused on the latter.¹⁶ In this regard, the human rights issue eventually became central during the Helsinki Process, which was implemented on two interconnected levels: the interstate level, represented by the CSCE member states' delegations, and the civil level. In fact, the Helsinki Civil Process was the main driver of the human rights issue, becoming key to the negotiations between Western and Eastern countries during the Helsinki Process.

The Helsinki Civil Process, also known as the Helsinki Movement, was characterized mainly by the activity of the Helsinki Groups, which later were known internationally as the Helsinki Committees. The activity of the Helsinki Groups in monitoring the observance of the Helsinki Final Act human rights principles marked the second boomerang against the Soviet Union and other totalitarian and authoritarian countries.

The first Helsinki Group, known as the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group, was established in Moscow in 1976 under the leadership of Yuri Orlov for the purpose of monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Final Act human rights principles.¹⁷ This resulted in the establishment of two additional Helsinki Groups in Lithuania and Ukraine.¹⁸ Moreover, in the same year, the Workers' Defence Committee was established in Poland, followed by the establishment of the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights in 1977. The Committee and Movement in Poland resulted in the eventual allegiance of workers, intellectuals and the church, leading to the establishment of the Solidarity movement in 1980 and the Polish Helsinki Committee in 1982.¹⁹ Furthermore, in 1977, Charta 77 was founded in Czechoslovakia by Václav Havel and others; it closely

¹⁵ Kleva 2007: 36

¹⁶ Ibid: 14

¹⁷ Ibid: 30

¹⁸ Ibid: 32

¹⁹ Ibid: 33

resembled the Helsinki Groups and with strong international relations to the CSCE.²⁰ Several opposing voices could be heard in Romania and Bulgaria in the early years following the Helsinki Process, but opposing movements surfaced only in late 1980.²¹

Soviet, Czechoslovakian and Polish state authorities responded to the human rights activists with repression. In particular, Soviet state authorities reacted arrested, imprisoned and internally exiled members of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group. This resulted in strong indignation among CSCE member states and led to the establishment of Helsinki Groups in other Western countries, whose primary aim was to defend human rights in the Eastern countries.²² The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) was among the first committees established, in August 1977.²³ The following year, the Helsinki Group, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee and renamed the Human Rights Watch in 1988, was established in the United States. Due to its reputation as a reliable informant on human rights issues, the U.S. Helsinki Watch has had an ongoing significant advisory impact on American foreign policy with regard to the Helsinki Process.²⁴

Norway, as one of the first countries in which a Helsinki Committee was founded to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, became a pioneering country in the Nordic region. The initiative was taken through a petition in June 1977 and was signed by representatives from almost all Norwegian political parties.²⁵ The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) sought to maintain the necessary contact with the NHC. This committee, then, established requirements for the Norwegian delegation's work in the CSCE and conducted meetings in the NMFA regarding the CSCE. NMFA officials replied that the delegation's work was in accordance with the requirements set by the NHC.²⁶ The NHC also prepared summary reports to inform the NMFA about the human rights

²⁰ Ibid: 33

²¹ Ibid: 34

²² Stykket 2010: 42

²³ Kleva 2007: 34

²⁴ Ibid: 34-35

²⁵ Ibid: 119

²⁶ Ibid: 120

situation in various countries, including Malta, Turkey and Yugoslavia in the early 1980s.²⁷

In 1982, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) was founded in accordance with an appeal by Soviet human rights activist Andrei Sakharov. Czech human rights activist Karl von Schwarzenberg chaired the IHF until 1991. In the framework of such developments, the reformist policies of future Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev were also key to the opening of totalitarian and authoritarian systems to the human rights principle of the Helsinki Final Act.

From the start, the CSCE comprised 33 European countries plus the United States and Canada. These 35 countries included all members of the Warsaw Pact, which were allied with the Soviet Union; all NATO members, which were allied with the United States; and all neutral or non-allied states in Europe except Albania. These latter states were mainly Finland, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, Sweden and Austria. The Helsinki Process expanded after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. At the fourth follow-up meeting in Helsinki in 1992, 52 countries participated as full members of the CSCE, including the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union.²⁸ Therefore, the Helsinki Process must be seen as part of the Cold War, contributing to the significant reduction in importance of the Westphalian principle of non-intervention in terms of the issue of human rights and relationships among European states. This does not mean that the principle governing interstate relations was abolished or disappeared, but its importance was reduced as far as human rights were concerned. That is to say, the Helsinki Process had unforeseen consequences that have contributed to the reduction in importance of the principle of non-interference, since the parties can monitor each other's policies in a number of areas, highlight breaches of mutually binding agreements and when it is necessary, require intervention from established institutions.²⁹

Subsequently, the CSCE, as an arena for international conferences based on the Helsinki Final Act, contributed to the easement and

²⁷ Ibid: 120

²⁸ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia (2021): *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)* <https://snl.no/KSSE>

²⁹ Stykket 2010: 12, 149

improvement of relations between the East and the West, despite the disagreements among CSCE member states. It particularly marked the commencement of a crucial stage in international relations, also known as the Helsinki Process, aimed at the formation of a new Europe and a new world order. After serving as an arena for international conferences for 20 years, the CSCE was institutionalized in 1995 as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Compared to the later establishment of Helsinki committees in several Western countries - including Sweden in 1982, Denmark in 1985 and Finland in 1985 - the founding of the NHC in 1977 can be explained only as Norway's great willingness to commit to world peace and the observance of human rights, in line with the humanitarian tradition of the renowned Norwegian humanitarian, diplomat and scientist Fridtjof Nansen. Leif Mevik, who headed the Norwegian delegation to the CSCE for almost 20 consecutive years and who later served as Norway's ambassador to NATO until 1998, addressed this perspective in his book, *Security in Co-operation: Main Lines in Norwegian CSCE Policy* (1992). He writes, "The Nansen tradition in the Norwegian foreign policy is undoubtedly a significant reason for Norway's preoccupation with CSCE humanitarian issues".³⁰ In other words, Norway, both in the frame of the intergovernmental Helsinki Process through the Norwegian state delegation and particularly in the frame of the international civil process of Helsinki through the NHC, has provided an invaluable contribution to the Helsinki Process in general. Moreover, this explains why the Kosova Group within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (KGNHC), has had an important and direct impact on the internationalization of the Kosova issue in the framework of the Helsinki Process.

In Yugoslavia, the activity against the hegemony of the Yugoslavian authoritarian regime was more powerful in Kosova and Croatia. This activity in Kosova after World War II was especially inspired and encouraged by Adem Demaçi and others. The situation during and after the demonstrations of the Albanians in Kosova in 1981 - with socioeconomic and political demands for the equality of the Albanians with other peoples within the Yugoslav federation - had a gradual effect on the early internationalization of the human rights situation for Albanians in

³⁰ Mevik 1992: 106

Yugoslavia. These demonstrations were even more massive than previous demonstrations with similar demands in 1968. The reaction of Belgrade's government to the 1981 demonstrations in Kosova was much more brutal than that in 1968. However, the activity of the Albanians during and after the demonstrations of 1981 also resulted in the founding in 1982 of a joint organization, the People's Movement of Kosova (LPK), by Jusuf Gërvalla and others. The LPK was known beginning in 1982 as the Movement for the Republic of the Albanians in Yugoslavia, beginning in 1985 as the People's Movement for the Republic of Kosova and beginning in 1993 as the LPK. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Kosova Albanians' opposition to the Yugoslavian authoritarian regime's hegemony was strengthened by way of the establishment of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) led by Ibrahim Rugova. The LDK eventually became the Peaceful Movement of Kosova. In this regard, for their contributions prior to and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the friends of Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud, Adem Demaçi and Ibrahim Rugova, received the Sakharov awards.

In the following photos, Adem Demaçi is receiving the Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament (1991) and Ibrahim Rugova is receiving the Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament (1998):



Backer made an enormous contribution to Kosova beginning in the 1970s. This involvement was particularly strong in the 1980s and the early

1990s, after her collaboration with the LPK in 1987.³¹ In coordination with her Kosova Albanian friends and representatives of the LPK branch in the diaspora, and with the help of her Norwegian friends – Gjøtterud, among others – she established the Kosova Group in 1988, which became an integral part of the NHC. This served as a lobbying sector for several years, having a significant impact on the internationalization of the Kosova issue within the Helsinki Process (IHF, etc.).

In the framework of this activity, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, she guided the delegation of experts from the IHF and U.S. Helsinki Watch (Human Rights Watch) in Kosova in September 1989, with her aide Gjøtterud, to observe the human rights situation.³² Following this, bearing in mind that one of the main concerns of the Helsinki Process was encouraging and promoting democratic opposition forces under repressive regimes, Backer organized, along with her collaborators, the first visit of the Kosova delegation to Western countries; it was headed by Rugova. The delegation visited several Western capitals, including Oslo, Stockholm, and Vienna, with the main visit taking place in Oslo from 14 to 18 February 1990.³³ This took place shortly after the establishment of the democratic and social democratic parties in Kosova. In addition, Backer helped with and was the initiator of the Helsinki Committee in Kosova, in cooperation with Gazmend Pula and Shkëlzen Maliqi.³⁴ Furthermore, soon after the Declaration on July 2nd, 1990, by the Assembly of Kosova, Backer and her collaborators organized the programme for the first visit by the delegation of the Assembly of Kosova to Western countries.³⁵ After being released from prison on April 21, 1990, Demaçi became the chairman of the Council for the Defence of Human

³¹ After the establishment of the LPK in 1982, the first General Meeting of the LPK took place in July 1987 in Switzerland, under the auspices of the LPK diaspora branch; it was also attended by delegates and representatives of the LPK home branch. The meeting contributed to the reorganization of the LPK, in terms of expanding its ranks both in Kosova and in the diaspora, which established branches in almost all Western countries.

³² Kenneth Anderson: *Yugoslavia: Crisis in Kosovo*, International Helsinki Federation and Human Rights Watch, New York, 1990

³³ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*. Introduction of the book: Behind the Stone Walls..., 2003: p. 13.

³⁴ Ibid: p. 12.

³⁵ Kosova – info, periodical newsletter: Information on the Kosova situation from the Kosova – group of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: “*Europe should be concerned*”. No 2 – July 29th, 1990

Rights and Freedoms in Kosova and collaborated intensively with Backer, Gjøtterud and others.

Gjøtterud was a well-known Norwegian physicist and human rights activist, and aside from his commitment to the Jews in the Soviet Union from the early 1970s – especially his dedication to Jewish scientists, who were prevented from leaving the Soviet Union – he was also committed to the Kosova Albanians' cause beginning in 1988. He was an honoured and influential figure, chairman of the Committee for Jews of the Soviet Union since 1982³⁶ and a collaborator of the Moscow Helsinki Group,³⁷ which was founded in 1976 by several well-known Russian human rights activists such as Yuriy Orlov, Lyudmila Alekseyeva, Anatoly Marchenko and Andrei Sakharov.

Gjøtterud, with his influence in the Helsinki Process framework, supported (together with his wife Michaela) the activities of the NHC for Kosova. He even undertook this work officially, in his capacity as the deputy chairman of the committee, in which a distinctive sector for the Kosova issue was created. This sector was called the Kosova Group of the NHC and was later renamed the Balkan Group within the NHC.

In the following, some of the many documents demonstrating the contributions of Backer and her collaborators to Kosova will be presented.

FIRST FACT - FINDING MISSION TO KOSOVA

Before the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was difficult to be objectively informed, based on first-hand data, about the human rights situation in Kosova. At the same time, Kosova lacked the support of foreigners and was in great need of foreign expert voices to inform and persuade the

³⁶ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Kristoffer Gjøtterud (2009): https://nbl.snl.no/Kristoffer_Gjotterud

³⁷ Research Magazine Apollon (1995) *Kristoffer Gjøtterud: An open horizon*: <https://www.apollon.uio.no/portretter/1995/horisont.html>

political and diplomatic chancelleries in the West about the violation of human rights. Backer was almost the only one of these foreign expert voices.

In the late 1980s, the general situation in Kosova worsened because of Milošević's rise to power in Serbia, first as a chairman of the Communist Party of Serbia in 1987. Consequently, Backer with her collaborators, through the Kosova Group (which also became an integral part of the NHC), intensified the work to collect first-hand data about the human rights situation in Kosova. In 1988, with the instructions and advice of Backer and the support of LPK activists in Norway and Kosova, a Norwegian journalist who was a friend of Backer's travelled to and stayed secretly in Kosova. During her stay there, she succeeded in collecting some relevant information regarding the compilation of a report on Kosova's extraordinary political situation.

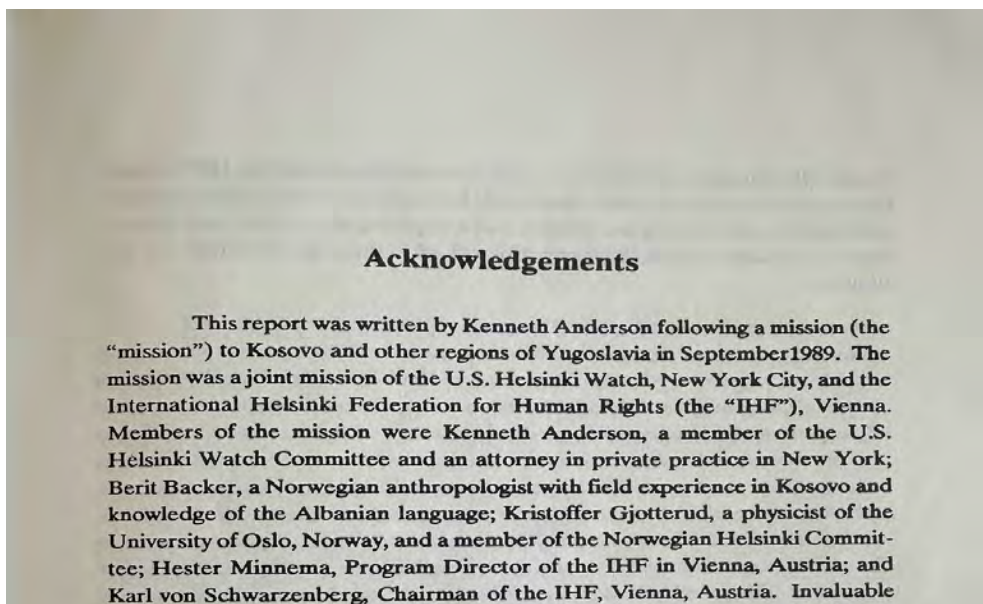
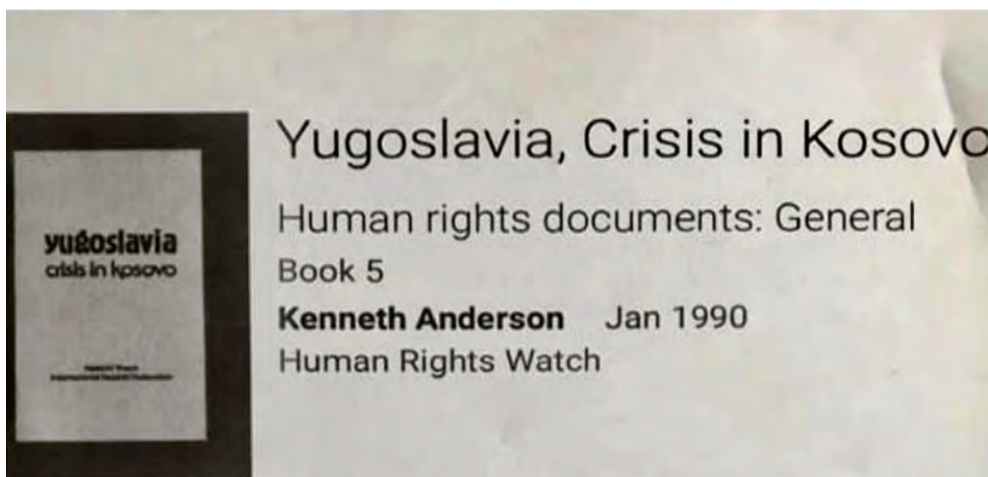
Furthermore, Backer and Gjøtterud managed to encourage the IHF and the U.S. Helsinki Watch (Human Rights Watch) to send a joint delegation of specialists in the field to observe the human rights situation in Kosova before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Backer and Gjøtterud insisted that the Western countries had an erroneous impression of Yugoslavia, because they distinguished it as the best of the worst regarding human rights when compared to other authoritarian and totalitarian states in Eastern Europe. This particularly applied when human rights in Kosova were in question, where even access to information about the status of these rights was difficult compared to other areas in Yugoslavia. During this period, the IHF was led by Karl von Schwarzenberg as chairman and Jeri Laber as vice chairman. Laber was also the executive director of the U.S. Helsinki Watch at that time.

In December 1988, on behalf of the U.S. Helsinki Watch, M. Bernard Aidinoff and Kenneth Anderson visited Yugoslavia. In their report, they recommended that "(...) given the barriers to collecting information in Kosovo, and given the extensive ongoing human rights violations, a special delegation of international human rights monitors should be permitted to investigate conditions".³⁸

Consequently, a joint delegation of the IHF and the U.S. Helsinki Watch (Human Rights Watch), guided by Backer and Gjøtterud, travelled

³⁸ A Helsinki Watch Report (1989): *As the Federation Disintegrates: Human Rights in Yugoslavia*, p.37

to Kosova in September 1989. In January 1990, the delegation's first report on the situation in Kosova was published. Following is a fragment and cover photo from the report of the members of the delegation of the IHF, including members of the U.S. Helsinki Watch (Human Rights Watch) and the NHC. It includes acknowledgments to Backer, Gjøtterud and others in the introduction. It also contains a copy of Pages 43 and 44 of this report, where concrete suggestions are offered regarding the situation in Kosova to foreign policy makers in the United States, European Community and the Council of Europe.



United States And European Community Policies

United States Foreign Policy

The United States in 1988 appointed a new ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmerman, who began his duties in 1989. The Helsinki Watch and the IHF have been pleased with his attention to human rights in Yugoslavia and in Kosovo. Ambassador Zimmerman has visited Kosovo, taking care to speak to persons from all sides of the dispute, despite bitter denunciations from the Belgrade media. He has made it plain that the U.S. is concerned about human rights in Kosovo and, at this time especially, with the treatment of ethnic Albanians.

Despite the increased visibility of human rights in Kosovo on the U.S.-Yugoslavia diplomatic agenda, the Helsinki Watch and the IHF would like to see the issue become still more visible. More attention could be paid to the conflict in Washington, D.C., at the State Department, and more U.S. economic leverage could be brought to bear. What is distinctly not helpful are more U.S. congressional hearings organized by U.S. congressmen who are, in effect, captive to constituencies of either emigre Serbs or emigre Albanians. Rather than hearings aimed to placate constituencies that have become mere propaganda events for one side or the other, it would be useful to have hearings aimed at developing a position designed to protect the human rights of ethnic minorities.

The possibility of opening a U.S. consular office in Pristina in order to raise U.S. visibility there has been mentioned informally on occasion. Although the Helsinki Watch and the IHF recognize the many factors that go into such a decision besides matters of human rights, including budgetary and personnel questions, from the standpoint of human rights in Kosovo it is a useful and constructive idea.

European Community and Council of Europe Policy

Foreign policy of the European Community obviously has an enormous impact on the behavior of Yugoslavia, because of the proximity of markets, the labor pool, and so on. Moreover, Yugoslavia has made it clear that the only road of its economic salvation lies in greater economic integration with Europe. Yugoslavia has also taken first steps to become a member of the Council of Europe, which has as one of its principal tasks the maintenance and further realization of human rights. This goal, which requires true democratization in Yugoslavia and an acceptance of European norms of the rule of law and human rights, is incompatible with the situation in Kosovo. More important, it is incompatible with the vector of the regime now being created in Kosovo. The situation is getting worse, not better. The abuses which this report addresses generally have occurred within the past year and are the result of a new, authoritarian, racist policy by the government of Serbia.

Accordingly, the Helsinki Watch and the IHF call upon the European Community and the Council of Europe to condition any future integration of market and economic access on a full reversal of the human rights course in Kosovo. The European Community might well begin with a demand for an accounting of why the European Parliamentary Commission, which was sent to Kosovo to investigate matters in May 1989, was forced to leave because, as it stated, it was impossible to fulfill its mandate. The reason it was unable to do its work was that Yugoslav troops had sealed off the hotel in Pristina where the Commission was staying to all but a select group of ethnic Albanians approved by the government. After the Commission withdrew, government police and troops dispersed the crowd with tear gas and truncheons, causing various injuries and arresting many. The European Community and the Council of Europe have an obligation to require Yugoslavia to live up to international standards of human rights, standards which Yugoslavia has long pledged itself to follow.

THE FIRST TWO VISITS OF POLITICAL PARTY DELEGATIONS FROM KOSOVA TO WESTERN COUNTRIES

Considering that one of the main concerns of the Helsinki Process was encouraging and promoting democratic opposition forces under repressive regimes, the KGNHC, with the help of Backer, organized the first official visit of the Kosova delegation led by Ibrahim Rugova to the Western countries, on February 14–18, 1990, starting in Oslo, Norway.

The following is a facsimile of the agenda of the first official visit of the Kosova delegation led by Ibrahim Rugova to Oslo, on February 14, 1990.

FROM 47 2 170753 '90.02.14 12:33

MR. MR. RUGOVA'S AND MALIQI'S VISIT IN OSLO
14 - 18.2.90

WEDNESDAY, 14.2.90

15.20 - ARRIVAL TO OSLO
16.30 - INTERVIEW IN THE NORWEGIAN RADIO
19.00 - MEETING WITH PEN-CLUB IN NOBEL INSTITUTE, DINNER

THURSDAY, 15.2.90

9.00 - MEETING IN STATE OFFICE FOR FOR ALIENS
11.15 - LECTURE AT OSLO UNIVERSITY (INST. FOR SLAVIC AND BALTIC
LANGUAGES)
13.30 - LUNCH IN PRESS-CENTER
13.45 - INTERVIEW FOR NORWEGIAN TV
14.00 - PRESS - CONFERENCE
15.00 - EVENT. INTERVIEWS
19.30 - DINNER (INV. BY KRISTOFFER GJØTTERUD AND MICHAELA
SPANDOW)

FRIDAY, 16.2.90

9.30 - SEMINAR IN NORWEGIAN INST. OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
12.00 - MEETING IN MINISTRY OF JUSTICE (RUGOVA)
14.00 - MEETING IN FOREIGN OFFICE (MALIQI)
15.00 - MEETING WITH REIOLF STEEN FROM SOC. DEM. (MALIQI)
16.00 - MEETING WITH NORWEGIAN ADVOCATS (MALIQI)
19.30 - MEETING WITH WRITERS, DINNER (INV. BY TORIL BREKKE)

SATURDAY, 17.2.90

11.00 - DISCUSSION "WHAT CAN BE DONE IN NORWAY FOR KOSOVO"
13.00 - OPEN MEETING IN NORW. HELSINKI COMM.
19.30 - MEETING WITH NORWEGIAN "VIP" (I = INTERESTING), DURING
DINNER (INV. BY BERIT BACKER)

SUNDAY, 18.2.90

SIGHTSEEING, DISCUSSIONS, LUNCH

17.00 - FLY TO STOCKHOLM

Photo below (from the left): Kristoffer Gjøtterud, Berit Backer, Ibrahim Rugova and Shkëlzen Maliqi, during the abovementioned visit, concretely during the open meeting in the NHC on February 17, 1990:



At the suggestion of Backer and Gjøtterud, to reflect the political-democratic pluralism of Kosova, this Kosova delegation was composed of Rugova, chairman of the largest party, Democratic League of Kosova (LDK); Shkëlzen Maliqi, chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Kosova (PSDK); and Nufri Lekaj in the capacity of representative of the People's Movement for the Republic of Kosova (LPK). According to an Albanian - Swedish journalist, Milaim Zeka, they were received by three Norwegian ministers and other senior parliamentary and cultural figures of Norway.³⁹ In this situation, through her contacts, Backer lobbied to open the doors of Western politicians to the Kosova LDK and Peace

³⁹ The Albanian-Swedish journalist, Milaim Zeka, writes in an article for Kosova magazine Exclusive no.7/2000, titled "*Short biography of Berit Backer*", among other things, that Berit Backer: "(...) *with the Albanian collaborators, for the first time brought a high-level delegation from Kosova headed by Ibrahim Rugova and accompanied by Nufri Lekaj and Shkelzen Maliqi. They were received by three Norwegian ministers and other senior parliamentary and cultural figures of Norway (...)*".

Movement's leader, Rugova, aiming to empower Kosova through international cooperation. As a respected personality from the intellectual elite of Kosova, Backer also participated as an encourager and observer in the preparatory meetings for the formation of the LDK.

In the following, firstly, is one of Backer's notes from the preparatory meetings for the formation of the LDK on September 12, 1989. Secondly is the facsimile of the article from Kosova magazine Exclusive no.7/2000, titled "Short biography of Berit Backer", written by Zeka, who accompanied the Kosova delegation led by Rugova during the trip from Oslo, Norway, to Stockholm, Sweden, on February 18, 1990.

Writers Assoc 12/9-89

- Ali Atia - litt
Jusuf Buxhori - jour / poet
Milazim Krasniqi

Ali Atia: Indiv. cases not imp. - but the
coll. consequences.
Many const. rights suppressed.
Intl. unions - when doing refer.
or children not allowed to be
in their own language.
Exp. from party - prohibits TV.

Punished those who

- a) ag. voted const.
- b) talked against
- c) ...

Jetëshkrim i shkurtër i Dr. Berit Backer-it



Backer dhe Demaçi para Komitetit të Helsinkit (1992)

Dr. Berit Backer u lind në vitin 1947 në qytetin Mandal të Norvegjisë. Ajo kreu studimet në degën Sociologji Antropologji në Universitetin e Bergenit. Studimet e larta universitare i mbaroi në Universitetin e Osllos. Temën për diplomim, magjistrim, specializim dhe doktoranturë e kishte nga kultura shqiptare dhe titullohej: «STRUKTURA E FAMILJES SHQIPTARE». Për ta realizuar këtë temë shkoi në Kosovë dhe gjatë viteve 1974-1976 qëndroi në familjet shqiptare në fshatin Isniq dhe në rrethinë e tij të pasur me lëndë burimore konkrete për interesimin e saj. Antropologja Berit ishte përqëndruar me banin dhe studim në familjen e madhe të Kuklecëve. Aty gjeti dhe studioi me kujdes të madh strukturën e trashëguar nëpër shekuj të jetës së familjes shqiptare. Ajo u mahniti me format e jetës, punës, qëndrimit dhe raporteve të familjeve të mëdha shqiptare, struktura e së cilave ishte një eveniment i jashtëzakonshëm. Prandaj studimi i saj bëri një jehonë të fuqishme në Universitetin e Osllos. Mjerisht ai studim dhe vlerat e tij ende nuk njihen nga opinionin lexues, madje as nga opinionin studiues shqiptar, ashtu siç nuk njihet as edhe

Raporti mbi gjendjen e të burgosurve politikë që kjo studiuese e bëri në vitin 1987.

Dr. Berit Backer, kështu u bë e vetmja specialiste në shtetet skandinave që aq mirë e kishte sudjuar dhe e njihje mirë Kosovën. Veçanërisht pas vitit 1990, ajo u bë një ambasadore e vërtetë e Kosovës. Në këtë vit, me bashkëpunëtorët shqiptarë, për herë të parë mundi të sjellë një delegacion të nivelit të lartë nga Kosova në krye me dr. Ibrahim Rugovën që shoqërohej nga Nufri Leka dhe Shkëlzen Maliqi. Ata u pranuan nga tre ministra norvegjezë dhe personalitete të tjera të larta parlamentare dhe kulturore të Norvegjisë. Më vonë, delegacionet që vinin nga Kosova i kishin dyert e hapura në të gjitha rangjet e këtij shteti.

Dr. Berit Backer ftohej, konsultohet dhe i kërkoheshin raporte dhe relacione nga organet qeveritare të Norvegjisë si Ministrisë së Jashtme, Ministrisë së Drejtësisë dhe Ministrisë për Emigracion dhe asociacionet e ndryshme humanitare e profesionale si Amnesty International, Federata e Helsinkit për të Drejtat e Njeriut etj., sepse ishte kompetente profesioniste për çështjen e Kosovës.

Jeta e atropologes së shquar Dr. Berit Backer u shua në mënyrë mizore, më 7 mars 1993. Ajo u vra me armë të ftohtë nga një vrasës shqiptar me emrin Malë Lajçi, i cili studionte në Suedi. Atëherë u fol shumë për mundësinë e motivimit politik të vrasjes, si një atentat politik, nxitur nga UDB-ja mbi miken e madhe të shqiptarëve, dr. Berit Backer-in. Gjyqi norvegjez konstatoi se kriminel shqiptar ka vrarë Berit Backerin për motive të ulëta! Vallë a është kjo e vërteta!

Vrasësi gjendet ende në burg. Ndërsa shqiptarët, Kosova humbi, një ndër përkrahëset konkrete më të spikatura në Evropë, në luftën për liri dhe pavarësi nga Serbia.

The second visit by the Kosova delegations to Western countries took place in Washington, D.C., in April 1990 and was organized by the Albanian-American Civic League (AACL). This occurred with help from Albanian-American Congressman Joseph DioGuardi,⁴⁰ who had started advocating for Kosova earlier. In June 1986, DioGuardi presented a resolution for the protection of human rights for Albanians in Yugoslavia

⁴⁰ Fordham Preparatory School (n.d.); *Hon. Joseph J. DioGuardi, CPA, Class of 1958*: Joseph John DioGuardi was born on September 20, 1940, the son of grocers Joseph (Giuseppe), Sr. and Grace Paparella DioGuardi. Joe's father had immigrated at age 15 from Greci, or Katundi, an Albanian-speaking village near Naples, Italy, that had been settled by the descendants of soldiers who had arrived to defend Italy in the 15th century. As for Joe's mother, she was the daughter of immigrants from Bari, Italy: <https://www.fordhamprep.org/alumni/hall-of-honor/inductees/single-post/~board/hall-of-honor/post/dioguardi>

to the U.S. House of Representatives, while his friend, Senator Bob Dole, presented the same resolution to the U.S. Senate. Serbian officials engaged Russian and Greek sponsors to lobby against this resolution in the U.S. Congress. However, an expanded version was re-introduced in Congress in June 1987 by DioGuardi and Dole and had an even greater effect. Subsequently, the lobbying activity by Albanian-Americans in the United States for Kosova was increased. In January 1989, the Albanian-American Civic League was founded, headed by DioGuardi; despite obstacles, he managed to travel to Kosova in November 1989 to take a closer look at the difficult socio-political situation. In February 1990, he travelled again to Kosova with the human rights staff of the U.S. Congress, led by Tom Lantos and John Porter. In April 1990, along with his collaborators, he managed to organize the first visit of the Kosova delegation to the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus Hearing for Kosova in Washington.⁴¹ This delegation from Kosova – led by Rugova, chairman of the largest party, the LDK – had broad representation, including Luljeta Pula, chairwoman of the LDK Women's Association of Kosova; Shkëlzen Maliqi, chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Kosova; Hivzi Islami, chairman of the Farmer's Party of Kosova; Mark Krasniqi, chairman of the Christian Democratic Party of Kosova; Gazmend Pula, chairman of the Kosova Helsinki Committee; Veton Surroi; Rexhep Qosja; Hajrullah Gorani; and Halil Matoshi.

All of the ventures that were led by DioGuardi were strongly supported by the Albanian - American community in the United States, in coordination with some of the prominent Albanian - American activists: Brothers Ramadan and Xhim Xhema⁴², Sami Repishti, Bruno Selimaj, Rexh Xhakli, Sergjio Bytyqi, Din Derti, Shaqir Gashi⁴³, Gjeto Sinishtaj, Shyqëri Ismailaj, Shaban Gjonbalaj, Gjergj Kalaj and others.⁴⁴

⁴¹ The albanian american civic league: *changing history for twenty five years*: <https://www.aacl.com/our-25-year-history>

⁴² Dashnor Kaloçi (2018): The secret letter of the Albanian ambassador to the UN, on July 26th, 1986: "*Congressman DioGuardi's campaign was financed by Ramadan Xhema's brother, Xhim Xhema...*" : <https://www.panorama.com.al/letra-sekrete-e-ambasadorit-shqiptar-ne-okb-kongresmenit-dioguardi-ia-financoi-fushaten-vellai-i-xhemes-qe-njihet-si-psikopat/#gsc.tab=0>

⁴³ Interview of Bruno Selimaj on Kosova RTV21 (October 18th, 2023): <https://youtu.be/cfqVMtXV1mw?si=3P3-xR50u5-O9afs>

⁴⁴ Dashnor Kaloçi (2018): The secret letter of the Albanian ambassador to the UN, on July 26th, 1986: "*Congressman DioGuardi's campaign was financed by Ramadan Xhema's brother, Xhim Xhema...*" : <https://www.panorama.com.al/letra-sekrete-e-ambasadorit-shqiptar-ne-okb-kongresmenit-dioguardi-ia-financoi-fushaten-vellai-i-xhemes-qe-njihet-si-psikopat/#gsc.tab=0>

The following is an informative fragment from the official website of the Albanian - American Civic League, regarding the abovementioned visit of the Kosova delegation, led by Ibrahim Rugova:

ALBANIAN AMERICAN CIVIC LEAGUE

[AACL History](#)[AACL Board](#)[Membership/Contributions](#)[BI](#)

HIGHLIGHTS: OUR 25-YEAR HISTORY

THE ALBANIAN AMERICAN CIVIC LEAGUE

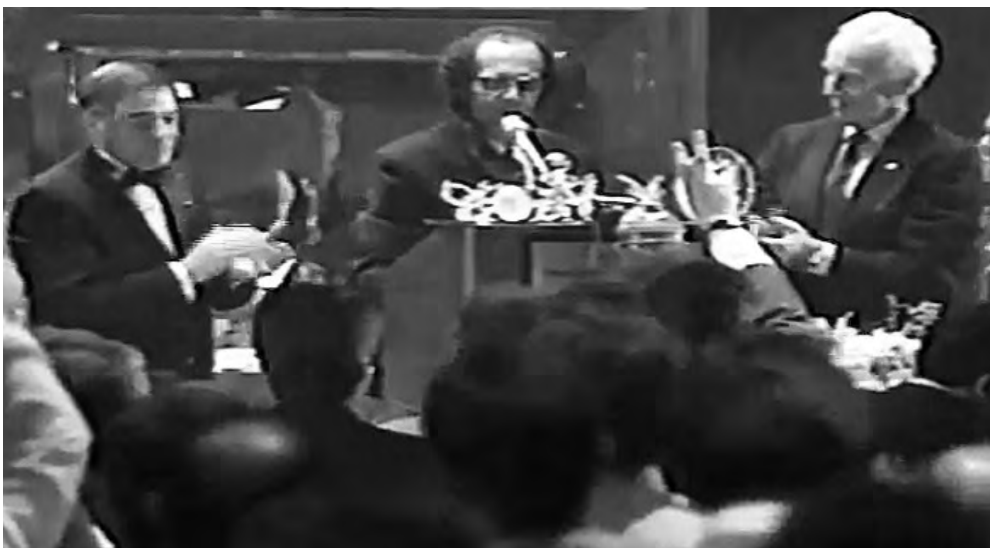
...CHANGING HISTORY FOR TWENTY FIVE YEARS...

Kosova Comes to Washington for the First Time

April 1990: The Civic League sponsors a delegation of ten Albanian leaders from Kosova to testify against Milosevic's occupation of Kosova at an historic Congressional Human Rights Caucus Hearing for Kosova in Washington and to be honored at an historic dinner at the Sheraton Hotel in New York City, attended by 2,700 Albanian Americans, to "Salute Freedom and and Democracy for Kosova."

Photo below (from the left): Joseph DioGuardi, Ibrahim Rugova and Tom Lantos during the abovementioned visit, concretely during the opening meeting organized by the Albanian - American Civic League in April 1990:

www.panorama.com.al/letra-sekrete-e-ambasadorit-shqiptar-ne-okb-kongresmenit-dioguardi-ia-financoi-fushaten-vellai-i-xhemes-qe-njihet-si-psikopat/#gsc.tab=0



During both of these visits, a member of the delegation, Shkelzen Maliqi, wrote the following in a commemorative Facebook post for Rugova and Backer: “In February 1990, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova and I, in the organization of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, visited Vienna, Oslo, and Stockholm, where we were welcomed by government officials, writers’ associations, the Nobel Committee, and NGOs of these countries. For ten days, we had over fifty meetings and presentations at public forums, where we testified about the massive repression of the Serbian regime in Kosova and the liberation and democratic goals of the Albanian resistance. In this photo (author’s clarification: see photo on page 24 of this book), if I am not mistaken, it must be the public debate that took place in Oslo. Dr. Rugova, I, and anthropologist Berit Becker - who had organized this entire trip and the presentations, spoke and answered questions from the public. That same spring, in April, as the largest delegation, we were also invited by the American Congress, which gave a special stamp to the internationalization of the Kosova issue and to the promotion of Ibrahim Rugova as the political leader of Kosova. Glory to Rugova and Berita.”⁴⁵ In a comment on the same Facebook post,

⁴⁵Shkelzen Maliqi, “In February 1990, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova and I, in the organization of the Helsinki Committee...,” Facebook post, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1BFbZqGMCE/?mibextid=wwXIfr>

Maliqi added the following clarification: “This visit was originally supposed to be organized in the autumn of 1989, with Rugova and me as the invited participants. Before our visit someone from the Albanian diaspora insisted that I be replaced by Rexhep Qosja, as the greater authority. Nevertheless, Berita informed me that the visit was being postponed, without giving details about the reason. I do not know whether, in the meantime, she spoke with Qosja, but during the visit in February she told me that she had preferred Rugova and me as a tandem, without going into the details of the influences involved. Nufri Lekaj must have been aware of the details.”⁴⁶

Shkëlzen Maliqi’s Facebook post may be regarded as grounded in the available evidence, including the discussion concerning the invitation of Rexhep Qosja rather than Shkëlzen Maliqi. The organization of the visit and the selection of participants were the responsibility of Berit Backer, Nufri Lekaj, and Kristoffer Gjøtterud. Following internal discussions and at Backer’s insistence, the decision was made to invite Shkëlzen Maliqi, as the primary purpose of the visit and of the meetings held in Oslo, Stockholm, and Vienna was to present and promote the principal political alternatives emerging in Kosova during the early phase of political pluralization. In this context, Rexhep Qosja did not hold a leadership position within any political party in Kosova, whereas Ibrahim Rugova and Shkëlzen Maliqi headed two political formations that came to the fore immediately after the introduction of multiparty politics in Kosova: LDK and PSDK. In order to achieve a representative democratic balance among Kosova’s political currents, and again following Backer’s insistence as well as Gjøtterud’s recommendation, it was decided that Nufri Lekaj would represent LPK in meetings with Norwegian institutions and officials. At the time, LPK operated as a clandestine organization within Kosova and was therefore represented through its structures abroad. This was also due to the fact that the visit to Norway had a more demanding agenda and a higher-level profile. As a result, the meetings conducted in Oslo may be understood as having had a distinct character of advocating democratic pluralism and political representation in Kosova.

⁴⁶Ibid

These two historical visits of the Kosova Albanian delegations to Western countries – namely, the visit led by Rugova in Oslo in February 1990, organized by the KGNHC, and the visit led by Rugova in Washington in April 1990, organized by the AACL – increased Kosova's para-diplomatic ties with Western countries. They also heightened the already growing popularity of Rugova in Kosova and in the Albanian diaspora.

In the same year, the KGNHC organized a joint press conference at the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (an integral body of the International Helsinki Federation) for the chairman of the AACL, Joseph DioGuardi, and the secretary of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova, Zekeria Cana — with the objective of further internationalizing the Kosova issue within the framework of the Helsinki Process. The conference also raised the issue of the entry ban in Yugoslavia, imposed by the Milošević regime against Berit Backer and Joseph DioGuardi. This event took place during Joseph DioGuardi's European visit, accompanied by Osman Osmani and Mehdi Hajdari, from 20 to 25 August 1990. Below is a photograph from the conference held on 22 August 1990, showing, from left to right: Osman Osmani, Joseph DioGuardi, Zekeria Cana, Mehdi Hajdari, and Nufri Lekaj.



It is worth mentioning that, following the 1968 demonstrations in Kosova, a number of activists — including Tahir Kërnađa, Sami Repishti,

Maliq Arifaj, brothers Sergio and John Bitici, Peter Prifti, Rexhep Krasniqi, Safete Juka, and others — initiated efforts to internationalize the Kosova issue in the United States through the organization Albanian-Kosovar Youth in the Free World.⁴⁷ Following the 1981 demonstrations in Kosova, a significant contribution to this effort was made by activists such as Rrok Nikçi, Ahmet Zherka, Gjeto Sinishtaj, Kol Gojçi, Gjokë Martini, Gjergj Kalaj, Ndue Camaj⁴⁸, Naim Balidemaj, Esad Gjonbalaj, and many others, through the Jusuf Gërvalla Club based in New York. This Club, headed by Ramiz Llapatinca⁴⁹, Shpend Haxhaj⁵⁰ and others, functioned for a time as a branch of the LPK, with sub-branches in Detroit, Chicago, and Dallas.

During the 1990s, activism for Kosova among the Albanian American community intensified, and was further strengthened by the support of organizations such as the Albanian American Civic League, Vatra – the Pan-Albanian Federation of America, and the National Albanian American Council, led by Ekrem Bardha, Harry Bajraktari, Ilir Zherka, Avni Mustafaj, and others.⁵¹ These organizations gradually gained access to, and the attention of influential members of Congress and senior policymakers.⁵² In fact, the tradition of Albanian Americans advocating for the rights of Albanians in the Balkans has its roots in the early activities of the Pan-Albanian Federation – Vatra⁵³, established in 1912 and led by Fan Stilian Noli, Faik Konica, and others.

Vatra embraced liberal American political ideals and institutions, expressing confidence in President Wilson’s principle of self-determination.

⁴⁷ Ragip Guraziu: “Rinia shqiptare në botën e lirë” (2019): <https://www.botasot.info/kultura/1034688/rinia-shqiptare-ne-boten-e-lire/>

⁴⁸ Qazim Doda: “Rrok Nikçi...” (2015): <https://qazimdoda.wordpress.com/2015/11/20/rrok-nikci-ishte-kelmendasi-qe-vlente-me-shume-se-qeverite-e-dy-shteteve-tona/>

⁴⁹ Qazim Doda: “Na la Ramiz Llapatinca” (2020): <https://qazimdoda.wordpress.com/2020/04/10/na-la-ramiz-llapatinca/>

⁵⁰ Plava e Guçia Sot: “Intervistë me Shpend Haxhaj – Hoti, AA vision “Me Shqiptarët e Amerikës (Video)” (2018): <https://plavaeguciasot.com/interviste-me-shpend-haxhaj-hoti-dhene-aa-vision-me-shqiptaret-e-amerikes/>

⁵¹ Harry Bajraktari: “National Albanian American Council – White House – March 31, 1999” (2019): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9z4AzcVg-4>

⁵² Elez Biberaj (July 18th, 2015): *Professor Sami Repishti and the Struggle for Kosova’s Freedom and Independence*, <https://gazetadielli.com/professor-sami-repishiti-and-the-struggle-for-kosovas-freedom-and-independence/>

⁵³ Gazeta Dielli: “Conversation with vatra president Elmi Berisha” (2020): <https://gazetadielli.com/conversation-with-vatra-president-elmi-berisha/>

They believed these values could advance the Albanian national cause, especially in efforts to reclaim Kosova, which had been denied to Albania in the territorial settlements of 1913.⁵⁴ For example, Fan Stilian Noli - educated at Harvard University and also a former Prime Minister of Albania for a period, tried his best to internationalize the Kosova issue through the League of Nations.⁵⁵

Similarly, Hasan Prishtina, a political scientist who also briefly served as Prime Minister of Albania, had confidence in Wilson's principles of self-determination and sought his support. He considered that since the Albanian nation was divided in two after 1912, and almost half of the Albanian nation remained under the occupation of neighbouring countries, this presented a unique case of self-determination on the European continent. Prishtina was also preoccupied to ensure that the resistance of the Albanians in Kosova was directed solely against the oppressive Serbian regime, and not against Serbian civilians. On this matter, English historian Noel Malcolm writes, among other things: "Most of the wartime political leaders of Kosovo had left the territory by this time; a group of them, led by Hasan Prishtina, gathered in Shkodra in November 1918 and formed a 'Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo', known more simply as the Kosovo Committee. Hasan Prishtina was actively lobbying the American government for the inclusion of Kosovo in a new Albanian state, and in February the Committee sent a protest letter to the Paris Peace Conference about the killings of Albanians in Kosovo.... (...) In practice, the Kosovo Committee devoted most of its energies to supporting and, to some extent, directing the kacak movement inside Kosovo. In early 1919 it drew up a general set of rules for the movement, beginning with the following two points: 1: No rebel will dare to harm the local Serbs, but only those who stand with weapons in their hands against the will of the Albanians. 2: No rebel will dare to burn down a house or destroy a church".⁵⁶

Below is the letter from Hasan Prishtina sent to President Woodrow Wilson on December 18, 1918.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Guy 2012: 145

⁵⁵ Austin 2004: 239-241

⁵⁶ Malcolm 2001: 283-285

⁵⁷ A letter from Hasan Prishtina to President Wilson; December 18, 1918, p.11. Retrieved from The Institute of Spiritual and Cultural Heritage of the Albanians – Skopje (November 22, 2019).

A LETTER FROM HASAN PRISHTINA
TO PRESIDENT WILSON, DECEMBER 18, 1918

Mr. President, you are preparing to take part in a Congress which shall reconstruct Europe on principles that allow nations themselves to decide their fate. These principles are like a glorious flag what you are waving over the sea of humanity. In this solemn moment, we, the representatives of two and a half million Albanians, the oldest people of the Balkan peninsula, appeal to you to consider the desires of our people with a complete lack of bias, which distinguishes you from the others, and to make it possible that these desires should be presented at the Peace Conference. Throughout many centuries, and through much difficulty we were obliged to face, our people maintained its own language, its originality, and its traditions. For five long centuries our people withstood Ottoman pressure with great resistance. In the end it defeated the Turkish authorities as the empire weakened in 1912. It is true that in the Conference of Ambassadors in London in 1913, independent Albania was created, but most of the Albanians' land was left outside its borders. Therefore, your proclamation related to the rights of nations to determine their own fate was welcomed by the Albanian people as the words of a savior. We do not doubt that you, Mr. President, together with your allies, will afford the Albanian people the same rights as the Armenians, Czechs, Yugoslavs and other nations. The Albanian nation, who sacrificed many victims to realize its national ideals and spilled much blood for this purpose, remains convinced that you and your allies will put an end to the suffering in the name of justice and equality. Being convinced of these premises, we implore you, Mr. President, to use your influence to ensure that the Albanian delegation should be invited to participate in negotiations relating to the future of Albania, so that the Albanian people so might present and argue their aspirations and requests of the Albanian people.



Affording you our deepest respect, in the name of the Albanian people,
HASAN BEY PRISHTINA

Unfortunately, the policies of the Serbian regimes since 1912 - including those promoted through certain cultural institutions - have been marked by persistent efforts to exclude Albanians from the territory of Kosova. This has had major consequences.

According to Malcolm: "Indeed it was the upheaval of the Albanian revolt in 1912 which both persuaded the Balkan states that the time was ripe for an anti-Ottoman war, and so fatally weakened the Ottomans that the war was quickly won. As the English traveler and politician Aubrey Herbert put it six years later in a memorandum on the Albanians: 'In the end, like Samson in the Temple of Gaza, they pulled down the columns of the Ottoman Empire upon their own head. It was the Albanians and not the Serbs or Bulgars or Greeks who defeated the Turks'.⁵⁸ During this period of the First Balkan War, which was preceded by this powerful Albanian uprising against the Ottoman Empire in the spring of 1912, Serbia took advantage of the circumstances to occupy Kosova, including

⁵⁸ Malcolm 2001: 259

areas inhabited by Albanians in Macedonia. Serbian historiography presents this maneuver as “liberation”. Malcolm argues that: “Kosovo remained Ottoman territory until it was conquered by Serbian forces in 1912. Serbs would say ‘liberated’; but even their own estimates put the Orthodox Serb population at less than 25%. The majority population was Albanian, and did not welcome Serb rule, so ‘conquered’ seems the right word”.⁵⁹

One of the few Serbs who protested against violence towards the Albanian population was the socialist leader Dimitrije Tucović. According to Norwegian Balkanologist Svein Mønnesland: “He regarded the Serb occupation of Kosovo as a classic colonial war, as an attempt to “commit premeditated murder against an entire nation” Tucović was in favor of a socialist federation in the Balkans..(...), he feared that Serbian politics would create such hatred that co-operation between Albanians and Serbs would be impossible in the future”.⁶⁰ In addition to Dimitrije Tucović’s courageous reaction against crimes against Albanians, there were responses from others who had the opportunity to follow the situation closely. Lev Trotskij, who during this period was a correspondent in Vienna for the Ukrainian newspaper *Kievskaja Mysl*, was terrified by the barbarism of the Serbian forces. Meanwhile, the publicist Leo Freundlich, based on multiple evidence, published the book *Albaniens Golgotha* in 1913. At the end of 1913, the European press reported a death toll of 20,000 Albanians. Then, in 1914, the International Commission of Inquiry into the Balkan Wars (of the American Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) published a report confirming systematic violence against Albanians with the purpose of ethnic cleansing.⁶¹ The scholar Edith Durham, secretary of the Anglo-Albanian Society, also wrote about these barbarisms against Albanians in her memoirs, and she joined Aubrey Herbert as champions of the Albanian cause.⁶²

The colonization programmes, which started with the decree of February 1914, were redoubled after 1918 and lasted until the Second

⁵⁹ The Guardian (2008): *Is Kosovo Serbia? We ask a historian, Noel Malcolm*. <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/26/kosova.serbia>

⁶⁰ Mønnesland 2006: 150

⁶¹ Malcolm 2001: 264-265

⁶² Robert Elsie (s.a.): *1912, Aubrey Herbert: A Meeting with Isa Boletini*; 1912 | Aubrey Herbert: A Meeting with Isa Boletini (albanianhistory.net)

World War, aiming to make life difficult for the Albanians and force them to leave. Despite this, a significant number of Serb intellectuals were dissatisfied with the scale of the colonization process, regarding the oppression as insufficient to influence a larger mass exodus of Albanians from Kosova. This topic was prominent between 1937 and 1939 among the members of the Serbian Cultural Club in Belgrade:⁶³ According to Malcolm: "One of the most distinguished members of this club was Vaso Čubrilović, a former member of the 'Mlada Bosna' group of young terrorists who planned the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914; he was now a respected historian at Belgrade University. His own contribution to this debate took the form of a long policy paper, which he submitted to the Yugoslav government in 1937. Recognizing the limitations of the colonization programme, he wrote: 'If we assume that the gradual displacement of the Albanians through our progressive colonization is ineffective, then we are left with only one course - that of their mass emigration'. As he pointed out: 'At a time when Germany can expel tens of thousands of Jews ... the shifting of a few hundred thousand Albanians will not lead to the outbreak of a world war.' Čubrilović proposed a whole range of methods to induce them to leave: The law must be enforced to the letter, to make staying intolerable for the Albanians... such as punishment for smuggling, for cutting the forest, for damaging agriculture, for leaving dogs unchained... any other measure that an experienced police force can contrive. From the economic aspect: the refusal to recognize the old land deeds ... the requisitioning of all state and communal pastures ... dismissal from state, private, and communal offices ... When it comes to religion, the Albanians are very touchy. Therefore, they must be harassed on this score too. This can be achieved through the ill-treatment of their clergy, the destruction of their cemeteries ... There remains one more means, which Serbia had employed very successfully after 1878: secretly burning down Albanian villages and city quarters".⁶⁴ Malcolm considered that, "We may suppose that the figure for the emigration of Albanians and other Muslims from Kosovo in the entire period 1918 - 41 was in the region between 90,000 and 150,000".⁶⁵

⁶³ Malcolm 2001: 290-291, 295

⁶⁴ Ibid: 295-296

⁶⁵ Ibid: 298

During the Second World War, the Albanian communists, who founded the Communist Party of Albania at the end of 1941, were determined to fight against the Italian–German occupying forces, because they found the solution to the Albanian national question to be in harmony with Leninists standing for the right of people to self-determination.⁶⁶ Malcolm argues that many officials and functionaries in Serbia continued to work for the new regime of the occupying forces during the Second World War. The reason that a significant number of Albanians cooperated with the occupying forces in Kosova was that the Albanians saw them, at least potentially, as liberators from the former Yugoslav occupation. Consequently, the number of Kosova Albanians in the Communist Party was small, even though the first groups of Kosova Albanian partisans were formed in September 1942 and early 1943, into the Zenel Hajdini and Emin Duraku units, respectively. However, as the Yugoslav Communist Party tactically made some concessions to Albanian nationalism, the number of Albanian communists increased. This culminated in a strong official statement, issued by the Communist Party in Albania in December 1943, calling for self-determination even if it meant the partition of Kosova from Yugoslavia. This statement led to the mobilization of Albanians in the communist movement, and, at the same time, the Albanians' demands were secured at a meeting held in the village of Bujan in Albania, at which the two local committees of the Yugoslav Communist Party in Kosova adopted a resolution.⁶⁷ During that meeting, delegates agreed to set up a committee for all of Kosova, and the Bujan resolution remained the official policy of this committee. The main section of the resolution states the following: “Kosovo-Metohija is an area with a majority Albanian population, which, now as always in the past, wishes to be united with Albania... The only way that the Albanians of Kosovo-Metohija can be united with Albania is through a common struggle with the other peoples of Yugoslavia against the occupiers and their lackeys. For the only way freedom can be achieved is if all peoples, including the Albanians, have the possibility of deciding on their own destiny, with the right to self-determination, up to and including secession”.⁶⁸ Albanians in Kosova

⁶⁶ Lekaj 2021: 117

⁶⁷ Malcolm 2001: 309, 313, 320

⁶⁸ Ibid: 320-321

were not allowed a referendum, despite the Bujan resolution, and Kosova was formally reoccupied by Yugoslavia. In the context of these developments, the Yugoslav communist government aimed to avoid any strong anti-Yugoslav resistance in Kosova by launching a campaign to mobilize Albanians. In December 1944, some 30,000 to 50,000 Albanian soldiers were recruited to be stationed at the front to meet the needs of the Yugoslav armed forces in Serbia, Vojvodina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia. A considerable number of these recruits were mistreated and killed by the Yugoslav communists, as was the case at the Bar tragedy.⁶⁹ Therefore, anti-communist resistance after the Second World War in Yugoslavia lasted the longest in Kosova.⁷⁰ Even at the end of the war, one of the most influential partisan commanders, Shaban Polluzha, who had led approximately 8,000 fighters and is estimated to have been joined by about 20,000 others,⁷¹ resisted the reconquest of Kosova.

After the Second World War, the Belgrade regime began to implement a new multi-dimensional hostile approach towards the Albanians in Yugoslavia: Albanians in Kosova and the Albanians outside the shrunken administrative borders of Kosova who were left within the borders of the Republics of Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro. Aleksandar Ranković, the vice president of Yugoslavia and second in command after President Josip Broz (nicknamed Tito), and simultaneously the minister of the interior and the head of the State Security Service (Uprava Državne Bezbednosti or UDB), had used repressive measures to instill fear throughout Yugoslavia. However, Ranković, being influenced by Čubrilović, was particularly violent towards the Albanians, intending to displace them from Yugoslavia.⁷² In addition, other methods were used to manipulate and displace Albanians, including creating significant structural ethnic inequalities. On this subject, Malcolm writes: “The leading advocate of such a policy in the pre-war period, Vaso Čubrilović, had made a seamless transition in his own career from Serbian nationalist to Communist adviser, and had submitted another report to the Communist leadership

⁶⁹ Robert Elsie: “Kosovo and the Bar Tragedy of March 1945”, p.3-4 (2012): <http://www.elsie.de/pdf/articles/A2012BarTragedy.pdf>

⁷⁰ Lekaj 2021: 120

⁷¹ Malcolm 2001: 324 -325

⁷² Lekaj 2021: 122 - 123

in November 1944 urging that 'The only correct solution of the question of minorities for us is emigration'. Large-scale emigration began in 1953 with, according to some reports, 13,000 'Turks' leaving Yugoslavia for Turkey. It has been estimated that between 1945 and 1966, roughly 246,000 people emigrated to Turkey from the whole of Yugoslavia. More than half of that total was probably from Macedonia (where the recorded population of 'Turks' had jumped from 95,940 in 1948 to 203,000 in 1953); some of those who left may have been Muslim Slavs, and some, indeed, may have been ethnic Turks. Detailed figures for Kosovo are not recorded, but a total in the region of 100,000 for the whole of that period may not be an unreasonable guess. The 1950s and early 1960s formed, from the Albanian point of view, the nadir of the whole period of Tito's rule. A strong ethnic imbalance remained in place: Serbs and Montenegrins, who were 27 per cent of the population of Kosovo according to the 1953 census, accounted for 50 per cent of the Party membership and 68 per cent of 'administrative and leading' positions. In the factories, they also made up roughly 50 per cent of the workers...(...)

The overall imbalance in public employment was never overcome: In 1980, it was calculated that one in five Serbs had a state-salaried job, but only one in eleven Albanians".⁷³

In 1968, the demonstrations were initiated by a group of Albanian students in Prishtina, who were, in fact, the youth cell within a larger revolutionary clandestine group founded in 1963, led by Adem Demaçi, with the main demands being, "We want a republic", "We want a constitution", "We want a university", and the like. Moreover, these demonstrations had an indirect impact in the context of a political process that had begun under the Yugoslav leadership in 1966, resulting in the new Yugoslav constitution of 1974. The root cause of this process was Aleksandar Ranković, who had become very powerful using his high positions in the Yugoslav leadership and his neo-Stalinist approach. The UDB was accused of abuses, namely, terrorizing the people and eavesdropping on Tito, which resulted in the removal of Ranković from all leadership positions.⁷⁴ Regarding the impacts of this process and the demonstrations of 1968, Mønnesland writes: "After the war, Albanians

⁷³ Malcolm 2001: 336-337, 340

⁷⁴ Lekaj 2021: 125 - 126

were more exposed to oppression than any other nationality. After the fall of Ranković, the Albanians gained a certain kind of freedom for the first time. Although some Serb nationalists protested against the ban on Serbian domination, accusing Albanians of “irredentism” and “separatism”, the reformation process did not stop. In November 1968, powerful demonstrations erupted against the Serbian regime in Kosovo. One was killed, and 37 were injured. The demonstrators demanded the republic status for Kosovo. The demonstrations were opposed by the communist party, and the leaders of the demonstrations were sentenced to long prison terms. However, in the same year, constitutional amendments were adopted that made Kosovo an “autonomous socialist province”, and the Serbian name Metohija was removed from use, as requested by the Albanians. The advancement of the status of Kosovo and Vojvodina to “autonomous socialist provinces” gave them the right to have their own constitutions and parliaments and the greater rights of economic self-government. The period from 1968 to 1980 was increasingly characterized by cultural prosperity. In 1969, an independent university was established in Prishtina, dominated by Albanian students and teachers”.⁷⁵

The cultural–political progress of Albanians during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the introduction of the Kosova Constitution in 1974, was a major achievement. However, at the same time, there was no guarantee of a solution to the Albanian issue in Yugoslavia, because Kosova had not evolved into a formal republic that could guarantee political security to its citizens after the death of Tito, whose priority was political power and stability and not the political future of the Albanians in Yugoslavia.⁷⁶ Even Tito’s rapprochement with Albania’s leader, Enver Hoxha, was strategic. Malcolm argues that Yugoslavia’s reconciliation with Albania was because Tito had previously feared the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union and needed the support of all anti-Russian states in the Balkans. Albania, during that time, had broken relations with the Soviet Union and did not receive subsidies from that nation.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Mønnesland 2006: 223

⁷⁶ Lekaj 2021: 129

⁷⁷ Malcolm, 2001: 339

One of the main justifications for why Kosova could not have the status of a republic was based on a doctrine developed in the Soviet Union, which also served as a cornerstone of the Yugoslav federation. According to this doctrine, republics were designated for nations, not for nationalities. However, this criterion was not consistently upheld. For instance, the Romanian-speaking population of Moldova, bordering Romania, had its own republic within the Soviet Union.⁷⁸

Therefore, the 1981 demonstrations, in addition to demanding equality and security for the Albanians of Kosova, were also a consequence of the broader socio-political context in Kosova. In this regard, Mønnesland writes the following: “The rebellion of the Albanians may seem strange at a time when they had managed to acquire more rights than ever before. But the “boom period” in the ’70s influenced the raising of national awareness, especially among young people, which inevitably resulted in increased political demands. Why should Kosovo not have republican status when it has more inhabitants than Montenegro or Slovenia? The dissatisfaction was also fed by the fact that Kosovo was still the poorest territory in the country”.⁷⁹ These demonstrations were even more massive than the demonstrations in 1968, and the Serbian government’s response to the 1981 protests was significantly more brutal. Police forces injured hundreds of demonstrators, while dozens were killed. Moreover, after Milošević came to power in Serbia in the 1980s, the plan of dismantling Kosova’s institutions, established under the 1974 Constitution, began.

THE FIRST VISIT OF THE DELEGATION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF KOSOVA TO WESTERN COUNTRIES

On March 23, 1989, the abolition of Kosova’s autonomy was imposed under the police and military siege of the Assembly of Kosova. This aroused great indignation among the Kosova Albanians, which resulted in mass demonstrations and protests during 1989 and 1990. In addition to imprisonment and persecution, dozens of the Kosova Albanians were killed by Milošević’s police and military forces during these demonstrations.

⁷⁸ Ibid: 341-343

⁷⁹ Mønnesland 2006: 239

On July 2nd, 1990, the Albanian delegates of the new legislature of the Assembly of Kosova, which began its work on December 4, 1989, took the courageous decision to adopt a declaration proclaiming Kosova an equal and independent political entity within the Yugoslav federation.

The proclamation took place at the entrance of the Assembly building because delegates were not allowed to enter the Assembly, which was surrounded by numerous police forces, a special unit and the Serbian army. The statement was read by Muharrem Shabani and was signed by all Albanian delegates of the new legislature of the Assembly of Kosova.

At that time, immediately after the Declaration on July 2nd, 1990, the most active delegates of the Kosova Assembly moved into exile in Slovenia to avoid arrests and torture, while the Migjeni Association in Ljubljana took care of their placement and accommodations. The delegates chose Muharrem Shabani, Skënder Skënderi and Bujar Gjurgjeala to represent them as a delegation of the Kosova Assembly in international meetings during their visits to Western countries. In this regard, Backer and her collaborators organized the visit of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosova to Oslo. The delegation of the Assembly of Kosova was accompanied from Slovenia by the activist of the Migjeni Association, Fadil Demiri.

Both before and after this visit of the delegation, Backer lobbied for the Kosova issue not only within the IHF but also through direct mutual correspondence with the diplomats of the Western countries and with the European Parliament. In fact, the programme of the visit by the delegation of the Assembly of Kosova to the Western countries was organized by Backer and her collaborators at the KGNHC. The delegation was received not only by national Helsinki committees in each of the countries they visited but also by government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and members of the media, both print and broadcast.

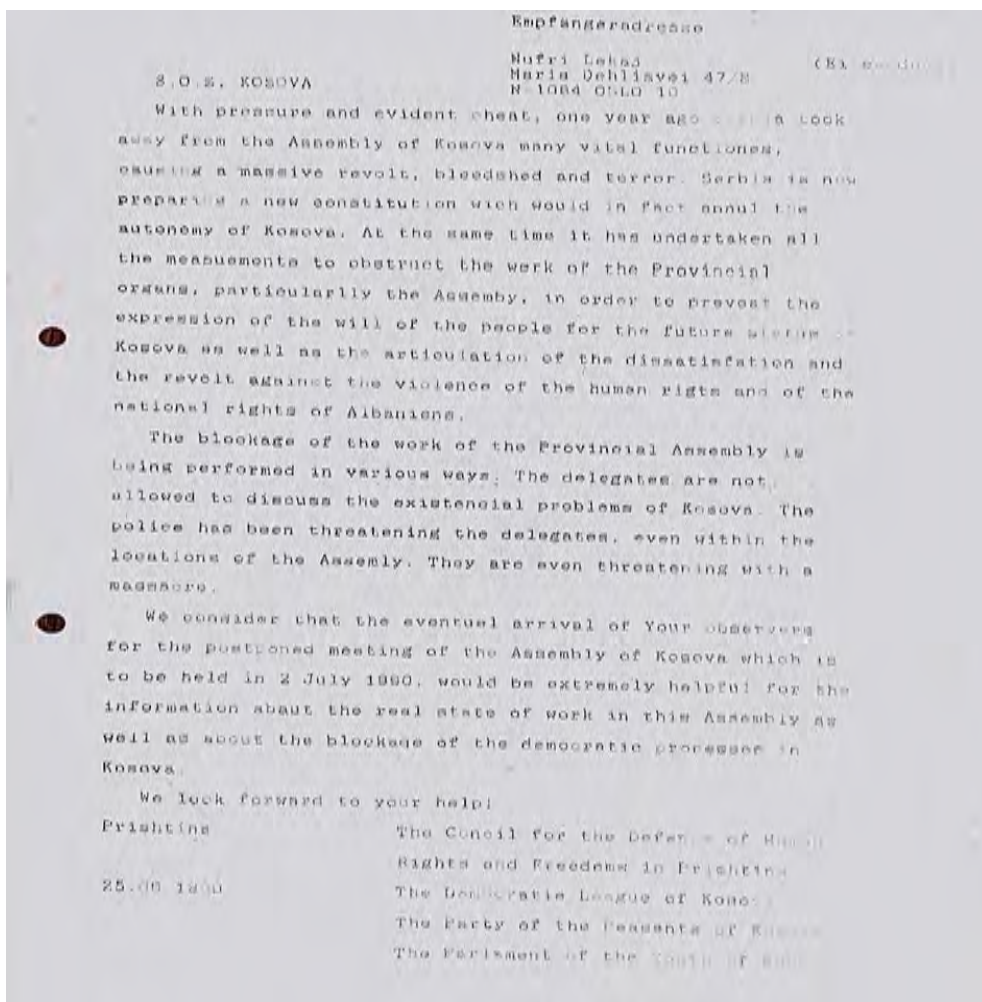
To illustrate this, eighth facsimile of documents will be presented. The first facsimile is a letter from the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova, and three political parties from Kosova, sent to Nufri Lekaj. The second, third, fourth and fifth facsimiles are Backer's communications with the European Parliament, with the Helsinki Federation, with the U.S. Helsinki Watch (Human Rights Watch) and one

of Backer's correspondences with diplomats of Western countries. The sixth facsimile is a letter addressed to the delegation of the Assembly of Kosova by Kristoffer Gjøtterud, in his capacity as Deputy Chairman of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. The seventh facsimile is a fragment of the Kosova-Info newsletter regarding the programme of the Assembly of Kosova delegation's visit to Western countries. Kosova-Info was a newsletter published at irregular intervals by the KGNHC and distributed through the Helsinki Federation. In the framework of cooperation between the KGNHC and the LPK, the newsletter Kosova-Info was also distributed by LPK activists (Rexhë Ibërdemaj and Ibrahim Kelmendi) in the relevant German institutions. In fact, even when KGNHC organized the first visit of the Assembly of Kosova's delegation to Western countries, the LPK activists in Germany (Ibrahim Kelmendi, Sabri Kiçmari and Rexhë Ibërdemaj) accompanied the delegation to the meetings with the German parliamentarians.

The eighth facsimile is an article by Backer published on the front page of *Appell*, the official newspaper of the NHC, edition no. 3/4 1990, regarding the visit of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosova to the Western countries and the worsening of the general situation in Kosova. In this article, titled "Kosova under the full police control", she provides information about human rights abuses in Kosova and at the end of this article she suggests, "It is important that the Norwegian authorities address the abuses in the international forums in which the country participates". A photograph accompanying the article depicts the delegation of the Assembly of Kosova (from left, Skënder Skënderi, Muharrem Shabani, Bujar Gjygeala, accompanied by Fadil Demiri), during their visit to the Norwegian Human Rights House in Oslo.

Furthermore, the ninth and tenth facsimiles are from edition no. 3/4 of *Appell* (edited by Ole Drolsum). The ninth facsimile states that, "A delegation from the International Helsinki Federation was arrested in Kosova in early September. The delegation was interrogated, had all its papers confiscated and was then placed under house arrest in the provincial capital, Prishtina. They were expelled from Yugoslavia for 3 years. The delegation collected information on the human rights situation in Kosova. Six weeks later, general secretary Bjørn Cato Funnemark of the NHC was arrested in Kosova". The tenth facsimile includes the names

of the representatives of the Board, Secretariat and Council of the NHC. Not only were the Board and the Secretariat represented by personalities with socio-political influence – such as Stein Ivar Aarsether, Gjøtterud and Bjørn Cato Funnemark – but also the Council of the NHC was represented by highly influential people, including Council Chairman Reiulf Steen, who, during his political career, had served as a leader of the Norwegian labour party in 1975–1981, as parliamentarian in 1977–1992 and twice as a minister, and Deputy Council Chairman Jan Petersen, who, during his political career, had served as a leader of the Norwegian conservative party, Høyre; as parliamentarian; and as foreign minister. During this period, Jens Stoltenberg, currently the secretary general of NATO, was also a member of the Council of the NHC.



To:
The European Parliament
Brussels Headquarters
Rue Belliard 97-113
B-1040 Brussels
Belgium

Oslo June 26, 1990

Re: The parliamentary situation in Kosovo

The following statement has been transferred to me from the undersigned delegates of the People's Assembly of Kosovo with the request to translate it and send it on to the European Parliament.

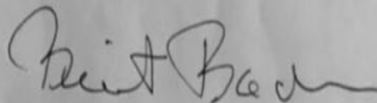
As can be read it contains a request to the European Parliament for sending observers to the session of the Kosovo People's Assembly at July 2, 1990. The former session was suspended and the chairman of the assembly refused to put on the agenda a proposal for an initiative to draft a new constitution for Kosovo. The delegates question whether the change of the constitution made in June 1989 was lawful, as it was done while there was an emergency situation.

The undersigned is a social anthropologist who happened to meet several Albanian intellectuals from Kosovo at a meeting in Ljubiana on June 22 and 23 at which time the suspension of the Assembly's procedures took place. These intellectuals were very worried about the situation, and I share their concern.

Therefor I implore you to take this request seriously and react in some way. It is very important that the legal bodies of Kosovo can work in peace and according to the laws and regulation, otherwise the situation might deteriorate and serious confrontations might occur, more grave than experienced until now.

Please excuse this rather untraditional approach. It is the situation in the Kosovo People's Assembly and the limited time at disposal that causes these procedures. Otherwise the contact person among the undersigned delegates is Muharrem Shabani, who may perhaps be reached through the People's Assembly. His phone and address will be forwarded later.

Yours sincerely



Berit Backer

T E L E F A X E S

FRA: Berit Backer
Balderøgt. 1a, 0263 Oslo 2
Tel: 02-44 94 47 Fax:02-44 95 79

TIL: The Helsinki Federation
Attention: Christina von Kohl
Fax:(43 222) 48 74 44

DATO: 26/6-90

SIDER TOT.: 5

KOMMENTAR: This is a translation of a fax sent me last night from the delegates of the Kosovo assembly. It explains what has happened and expresses the delegates wish for the arrival of observers on the 2nd of July. It is addressed to the European Parliament and has been passed on to it. But neither I, nor the delegates have any specific name of a person who might take action in some way or other. Can the Helsinki Federation be helpful to pass it on to someone who might take it seriously? It is important that the legal bodies of Kosovo should work normally, otherwise the situation might deteriorate and very serious confrontations may occur, according to my judgement of the present state of affairs. Otherwise the police has requested that another charge should be raised against Cekrija Cans on the grounds of "misinforming the public". He thinks it is due to the fact that he is invited to the USA in July, and that they try to delay returning his passport.

T E L E F A X E S

FRA: Berit Backer
Balderøgt. 1a, 0263 Oslo 2
Tel: 02-44 94 47 Fax:02-44 95 79

TIL: Ken Anderson
Fax: (1 212) 558 3588

DATO: June 25, 1990

SIDER TOT.: 5

KOMMENTAR: This is the translation of the text faxed to me from the

DEN NORSKE HELSINGFORSKOMITE
Urtegt. 50
0187 Oslo 1, Norway
Phone: 47 2-570070 Fax: 47 2-570088

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
East European Section
Att: Mr. Charles Grey - Deputy Head
Fax: 4471-2702152

Oslo July 17, 1990

RE. VISIT OF KOSOVO PARLIAMENTARIANS

Dear Mr. Charles Grey,

Thank You for Your kind reasons to our request for the Kosovo parliamentarians, Mr. Shabani, Mr. Skenderi and Mr. Gjergjeala to visit the Ministry of Foreign affairs (see enclosed description). The date July 30th, and 31st if necessary, has been reserved for London, and we would suggest for them to see Your section on the morning of the 30th. Hopefully that is suitable for you.

They shall also meet members of human rights organizations as well as members of parliament and the press.

They are much concerned about presenting the problems Kosovo as they have developed lately. Our concern is the importance for this conflict to be chanelized through suitable democratic channels, so that more serious confrontations than have been seen so far will not develop. The development of the human rights situation in Kosovo at present, is worrying.

As you are well informed about the genereal development, we assume that there is no need for further bakcground material. The parliamentarians will bring documentation on recent violations of human rights in Kosovo.

Please respond to the above listed fax number.

Yours sincerely
For the Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Berit Backer

Mr. Muharrem Shabani
Mr. Skender Skenderi
Mr. Bujar Gjurgjeala

Oslo July 15, 1990

Dear Sirs,

With this the Norwegian Helsinki Committee has the pleasure of wishing you, delegates from the Kosovo Parliament, welcome to Norway as one of your first stays on your travel in Europe. We shall be your hosts and accompany you in your talks with Norwegian authorities. We expect you on Wednesday the 18th of July. Please inform us about the time of your arrival.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is much concerned about the present situation in Kosovo, in particular about the worksituation for governmental bodies and the Parliament. This is a concern shared by other European institutions as well.

Upon your arrival we hope to have the schedule ready for your continued trip to the following countries:

Denmark
Germany
Great Britain
Hungary
Italy
Netherland
Poland
Sweden
Tschechoslovakia

Besides meeting local Helsinki Committees, you will have talks with foreign ministries and parliamentarians in these countries

Hopefully a meeting with The Council of Europe's reportgroup on Yugoslavia can be arranged as well. They are very much interested in the parliamentary situation in Kosovo.

Yours Sincerely

Christoffer Gjterud
Deputy Chairman

KOSOVA - info

Kosova-Info NEWSLETTER: Information on the Kosova situation
from the Kosova-group of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee
No 2 - July 29, 1990

"Europe should be concerned"

- To deprive a people of its civil and political rights never creates stability, says Kosova parliamentarian Dr. Skender Skenderi travelling in Europe with two other Kosova MPs, Munarrem Shabani and Bujar Syrgjjeala.
- The totalitarian nature of the Serbian regime, lack of democracy, violations of human rights as well as the explosiveness of the situation should make Europe react. There is an end to Albanian patience.

KOSOVA TURNS TO EUROPE

Kosova Albanians were largely out of communication with the outside world until a year ago. Except for some odd specialists on Albanian language and culture, few knew about the province. Ironically Serbia drew the world's attention to Kosova through a massive campaign in 1988-89 against alleged harassments of the Slavic speaking minority in Kosova, some 10 percent of the population.

Today the Albanian Kosovars are actively exercising in diplomatic skills, seeking contact with international organizations and governmental bodies in various countries in order to discuss the tragic situation in the province.

Parliamentarians travel

The three members of the Kosova parliament are presently on a tour in Europe. It started in Austria on the 16th of July, and continued to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Great Britain and

Belgium. They also intend to visit other European countries. They have been received by government officials, parliamentarians, press and NGOs, as well as radio and television.

The program has been organized by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, and they are received by national Helsinki committees in all the countries where they travel.

The delegates seek European support for solving the Kosova problems in a peaceful, constitutional and legal way.

No free elections

- The situation is very tense and the danger for the outbreak of a civil war is present, says Skender Skenderi in an interview given in Norway. - To deprive a people of all civil and political rights, does not create stability. Albanians have been extremely patient, but there is an end to this patience. When channels of democratic political procedure

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Kosova-Info is a newsletter from the Kosova-group of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee which is published at irregular intervals. It shall bring the inside-Kosova news as a supplement to other news media.
Address: Kosova-Info Den Norske Helsingforskomite, P.b. 8261 Hammersborg, 0129 Oslo 1, Norway. Tel: 47 2-570070 Fax: 47 2-570088

NEWSLETTER

APPELL

Utgitt av Den Norske Helsingforskomité

NR. 3/4 1990

Kosovo under total politikontroll

Av Berit Backer, DNH

Situasjonen i Kosovo er blitt drastisk forverret de siste månedene etter at republikken Serbia frakot Kosovo all autonomi den 5. juli 1990. Provisjonen er under total politikontroll, og mange frykter hva utviklingen vil ende med. Parlamentarikere, regjeringsmedlemmer og menneskerettighetsaktivister er blitt fengslet. Det er reist siktelse, som kan gi opp til 10 års fengsel mot de andre provinspolitikerne som befinner seg på flukt i ulike andre deler av landet og i utlandet. Den Norske Helsingforskomité har derfor intensivert sitt arbeid for menneskerettigheter i Jugoslavia.

Siden november 1988 er den politiske situasjonen i Kosovo blitt gradvis forverret. Da ble de lokale partiene Azem Vllasi og Kacusha Jashari avsatt, fordi de gjorde motstand mot de forfatningsmessige endringene som skulle komme. Store deler av provinsens befolkning samlet seg i protestmøter i Prishtina.

Fra masseprotester til unntakstilstand

I mars 1990 gikk gruvarbeiderne i den store Stari Trg-gruven i byen Mitrovica til sultestreik, og det ble opplyst til unntakstilstanden som kun formelt ble opphevet en tid. Kosovo ble beleiret av pansrede kjøretøyer og veltrente styrker med automatgeværer.

Ungdommen demonstrerte våren 1989 og 1990 for autonomi og demokratiske reformer, og man kjenner navnene på omkring 80 som er blitt drept av ulike væpnede styrker i perioden mars 1989 til september 1990. 300 sårede er blitt registrert av ulike menneskerettighetsorganisasjoner som er aktive i provinsen.

Tidligere på åttitallet var det i hovedsak opprørske ungdommer som ble rammet av de politiske paragrafer i den jugoslaviske straffeloven, som gir svært vide fullmakter til å fengsle og dømme opposisjonelle. I prinsippet kan alt fra private samtaler til systematisk organisering gi fengsel i opp til 10-15 år.

Paragrafene har nesten bare vært

anvendt mot albanere i Kosovo de siste årene. Nå er imidlertid hele befolkningen rammet av en brutal overmakt fra de serbiske myndigheters side. Serbias politistyrker har helt tatt over kontrollen etter at Serbias parlament opphevet provinsens autonomi 5. juli i år. Etter den tid virker det som om de vil slutte den kosovoalbanske befolkning til underdanighet. Albanerne, som utgjør 90 prosent av innbyggertallet i Kosovo, stes opp i tusensvis. Til i dag har minst 35.000 mistet jobben fordi de på en eller annen måte ikke ville godta de nye maktøverne.

Leger under angrep

Visse grupper er spesielt rammet. Det gjelder tidligere myndighetspersoner som har støttet kravet om autonomi. Og det gjelder ikke minst medisinsk personale. Den arbeidsplass som ble angrepet tidligst var Universitetssykehuset i provins-hovedstaden Prishtina.

Farlig medisinsk etikk?

I dag er omkring 200 leger sagt opp fra sine stillinger, og 800 sykepleiere og annet medisinsk personale. Spesielt kirurgene har vært angrepet for blant annet å hjelpe demonstranter som ble såret. Partimøter og kommisjoner fra sentralt hold prøvde tidlig å få de aktive avsatt, men hadde ikke noe legalt grunnlag for de spesielle serbiske unntakstilstandene ble vedtatt. Andre klinikker der alle albanske leger er blitt oppsagt, er gynekologi og indremedisin. Legene ved institutt for folkehelse har også blitt sagt ut av funksjon. I disse dager har samme prosess startet på barneklippen ved at direktøren er blitt avsatt.

Universitetssykehuset var det hospital som kunne ta mer kompliserte og alvorlige sykdommer. De resterende sykestuer og sykehus har altfor dårlig bemanning og utstyr. Resultatet er at befolkningen ikke har skikkelig legetilgang, ettersom den mangler tillit til de serbiske legene som er blitt igjen.

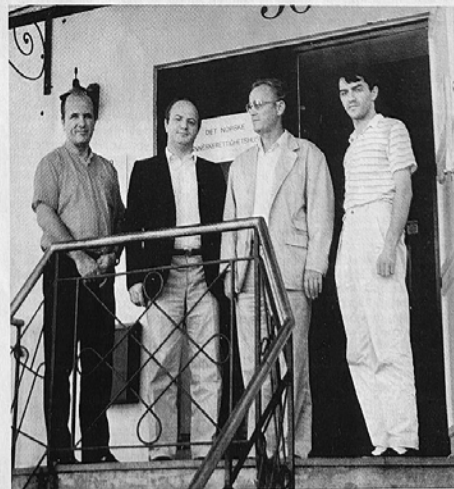
En teori om grunnen til de harde sanksjoner mot nettopp det mest kompetente medisinske personalet er at de engasjerte seg aktivt da det foregikk noe som kan ha vært en masseforgiftning av albanske skolebarn. Legene var aktive når det gjaldt å yte assistanse til pasientene, og de tok blodprøver som senere skulle analyseres.

Myndighetene var raskt ute med å erklære de mange tusen skolebarns krampes, kvalme og pustebesvær for skuespill og massehysteri. Blodprøvene ble konfiskert av politiet, og innrull resultatene fra internasjonale team som kom til foreligger, vil man ikke ha endelige laboratorieanalyser av hva som har skjedd.

Det uttrykkes imidlertid sterk tvil om den offisielle forklaringen fra flere utenlandske observatører. At det dreier seg om skuespill utelukker flere. Det er vanskelig å tro at så mange barn på samme tid og på ulike steder skulle koordinere et slikt skuespill. Noen av dem var bare seks år gamle.

En utfordring til Europa

Både leger og menneskerettighetsaktivister oppfordrer europeiske land til å sende kommisjoner og team til Kosovo for å rapportere om situasjonen. Det er viktig at norske myndigheter tar opp overgrepene i de internasjonale fora der landet deltar.



Albanske parlamentarikere fra Kosovo på besøk i Det Norske Menneskerettighetshuset.

10 års jubileum for Solidaritet

Landsstyremedlem i Solidaritet, Bogdan Karauda kom til Norge som Helsingforskomiteens gjest, blant annet for å delta i Solidaritets 10 års jubileum. Dette ble feiret i Det Norske Menneskerettighetshuset 31 august. Kunstneren Marek So-bocinski fra Solidaritet Norge-Polen laget en kopi av porten foran Leninveftet i Gdansk slik den så ut for 10 år siden. Karauda hadde under sitt besøk i Norge først og fremst samtaler med represen-tanter for flere fagvegelser.

Kosovo-albanere risikerer 10 års fengsel

Medlemmene av det oppløste parla-mentet i Kosovo-provinsen i Jugoslavia, Muharrem Shabani og Gjurgjala besøkte Norge i juli. I Jugoslavia idag står de sammen med en tredje parlamentariker Adem Mikdoci tiltalt for å ha «satt Jugo-slavias territorielle integritet i fare». De risikerer for dette opptil 10 års fengsel.

Helsingforskomiteen arrestert i Kosovo

En delegasjon fra Den Internasjonale Helsingfors Føderasjonen ble primo september arrestert i Kosovo. Delega-sjonen ble avhørt, fikk alle sine papirer konfiskert og ble deretter plassert i husarrest i provinshovedstaden Pristhi-na. De ble utvist fra Jugoslavia for 3 år. Delegasjonen samlet inn opplysninger menneskerettighetssituasjonen i Kosovo. Seks uker senere ble generalsekretær Bjørn Cato Funnemark fra Den Norske Helsingforskomite arrestert i Kosovo.

Protest mot Jugoslavia

D.N.H. protesterer overfor jugoslaviske myndigheter mot arrestasjonen av den Kosovo-albanske fagforeningslederen Hajrullah Gorani (leder for albanernes fagbevegelse). Etter det Helsingforsko-miteen erfarer har 15.000 Kosovoalbane-re mistet arbeidet bare i løpet av de siste 3 ukene i august mnd. d.å.

Besøk fra Tsjekkoslovakia

Lazlo Dobos som er representant i det slovakiske parlament og tidligere med-lem av Dubcek-regjeringen besøkte Norge i oktober etter invitasjon fra Den Norske Helsingforskomite.

Dobos er talsmann for den ungarske minoritet i Tsjekkoslovakia.

Den Norske Helsingfors-komite i 1990

Styret
Stein Ivar Aarsæther – formann
Kristoffer Gjetterud – viseformann
Tor G. Burkland – styremedlem
Ole Drolsum – styremedlem
Aleksander Gleichgewicht – styremedlem
Ingunn Jordheim – styremedlem
Ellen Inul Andersen – styremedlem
Inge Mannsåker – styremedlem
Sverre H. Smebye – styremedlem
Astrid Øverbye – styremedlem

Sekretariatet
Bjørn Cato Funnemark – generalsekretær
Jaroslaw Pawlak – organisasjonssekretær

Rådet
Rolf Steen – formann
Jan Petersen – viseformann

Liv Andersen
Frode Bakken
Bjarne Botnen
Ingeborg Botnen
Andes Bratholm
Bernt Bull
Johan Buttedahl
Kjell Bækkelund
Asbjørn Eide
Grete Færevmo
Osmund Færevmo
Arne Fjeld
Per Kristian Foss
Anne Fossum
Dankert Freilerm
Aase Gjerdrum
Fredrik Grønningseter
Knut M. Hansson
Ingvar Helle
Bente Heuch
Johan Hjort
Bjørn Hoelseth
Tora Aasland Houg
Leif Hovelsen
Ragnhild G. Haarstad
Ottar Julsrud
Michael Konupek
Kåre Kristiansen
Berit Kyæven
Anne Enger Lahnstein
Aase Lønæs
Anette London
Egil Nansen
Pål-Erik Plaum
Viktor Roddvik
Jon Skard
Marianne B. Skov
Victor Sparre
Jens Stollenberg
Bjørn Stordange
Elif Straume
Ragnar Udjus
Skrid Utklen
Leif Vetlesen
Wieslaw Wika-Czarnowski
Svein Wilhelmsen
Jacob Aano

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Postboks 8261 Hammersborg
0129 Oslo 1
Tlf.: (02) 57 00 70
Fax.: (02) 57 00 88

Redaktør:
Ole Drolsum

Sats og paste up:
A/S Frysja Fotosetteri

Trykk:
Spesialtrykk A/S

The eleventh facsimile that follows is a press release issued by the Information Secretary of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Aleksander Gleichgewicht. In this statement, released immediately after the proclamation of the 2 July Declaration in Kosova, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee reiterates its position in favor of a peaceful resolution of the Kosova question, and issues a strong appeal to the Norwegian state to engage in halting the violence of the Milošević regime in Kosova.

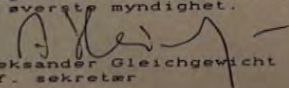
Den Norske Helsingforskomité
tel. 570070
fax. 570068

5.7.90

PRESSEMELDING

I går, torsdag 5.7.90 slo republikken Serbia tilbake mot Provinsen Kosova som hadde erklært seg republikk på lik linje med de andre republikkene innen federasjonen Jugoslavia. Klokken 16.00 i går slo serbisk politi til mot Folkeforsamlingen, fjernsyn, radio og albanske aviser. Spesialpolitiet, som var blitt forsterket de siste dagene, overtok mediene og kastet journalister og andre ansatte ut med makt. Nå tiltales kun nyheter på serbokroatisk av journalister som er lojale mot partisjefen for Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic og hans regime. Politiet inntok også bygningen til Kosovos Forfatterforening, som hadde vært hovedsete for de nye demokratiske organisasjonene og for Komiteen til Forsvar av Menneskerettigheter og Frihet. Mange ble arrestert.

Den Norske Helsingforskomité gjentar igjen at Kosovoproblemet kan løses bare med fredelige midler og at den politiske striden blir utkjempet innen de legale organene. I dagens situasjon med demokratisering i resten av Øst-Europa, er Serbias reaksjoner overfor Kosova en farlig anakronisme som tilhører andre tider. Den Norske Helsingforskomité ber om at den norske regjering reagerer skarpt mot Serbias voldelige politikk mot Kosovos folk og øverste myndighet.


Aleksander Gleichgewicht
inf. sekretær

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HELSINKI COMMITTEES IN KOSOVA AND ALBANIA

In response to leading the successful lobbying activity and the informal diplomacy of the Albanian political emigrants, Backer was barred from entering Yugoslavia in early 1990;⁸⁰ that prohibition applied to Joseph DioGuardi in July 1990.⁸¹

However, this pushback was all in vain, because after the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), there was no stopping the Kosova human rights and

⁸⁰ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*. Introduction of the book; Behind the Stone Walls...: 2003: p.13

⁸¹ The albanian american civic league: "changing history for twenty-five years": <https://www.aacl.com/our-25-year-history>

diplomatic activities. Regarding this, it is worth noting that the KGNHC encouraged and supported the establishment of civil society in Kosova, namely, the Kosova Helsinki Committee, through concrete cooperation between Backer and Gazmend Pula. They also continuously supported the activity of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova, where Gazmend Pula was also a founding member. The Kosova Helsinki Committee was founded in April 1990, under the leadership of Gazmend Pula, chairman; Ekrem Beqiri, vice chairman; Agni Dika, secretary and members Shkëlzen Maliqi, Veton Surroi, Arbër Xhaferi, Drita Mekuli, Muhamedin Kullashi and others. Before this, by the end of 1989, the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova was established. This was led initially by Bajram Kelmendi, Zekeria Cana, Zenun Qelaj and others. Indeed, the Council's endeavours only increased under the leadership of Demaçi, after his release from prison on April 21, 1990.

In fact, the establishment of the Council for Human Rights and Freedoms, the Kosova Helsinki Committee, the Kosova charity association Mother Teresa (1990) and the organization for the rights of women and marginalized groups known as The Qiriazis Sisters (1990), which also were the nucleus of civil society in Kosova, further helped the affirmation and support of the peaceful resistance in Kosova led by LDK behind the leadership of Rugova. In addition to Rugova and his fellow party members - such as Edita Tahiri, Alush Gashi, Avni Spahiu, Skënder Hyseni, and Shaqir Shaqiri - other activists in Kosova also played a crucial role in strengthening diplomatic ties with Western countries. In particular, the chairman of the Kosova Helsinki Committee, Gazmend Pula, and its members - Veton Surroi, Arbër Xhaferi, and Shkëlzen Maliqi - were instrumental. Their collaborator, Muhamedin Kullashi, emigrated to Paris and made a significant contribution to the internationalization and broader understanding of the Kosova issue in France, both through the Kosova Committee in Paris and as a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris 8. It is worth emphasizing that the chairman of the Kosova Helsinki Committee, in addition to being a member of the delegation, also served as a key companion to Ibrahim Rugova during the first official visit of the Kosova delegation—led by Rugova—to the U.S.

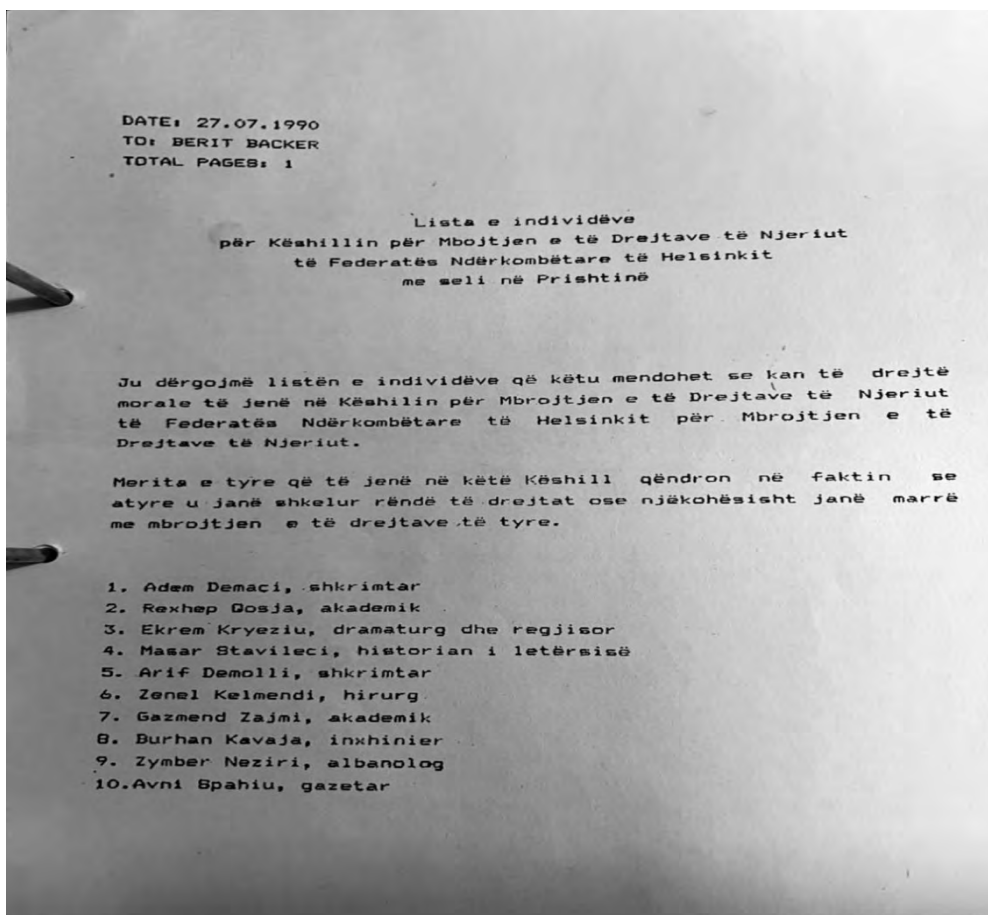
Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearing for Kosova, held in Washington in April 1990.

The organization within the framework of Albanian political emigration was also strengthened. On October 19, 1991, the government of Kosova was established in exile, headed by Bujar Bukoshi, who first settled in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and then from 1992 in Bonn, Germany. Until that time, LDK branches were established in Western countries and coordinated by the LDK Office in Stuttgart, Germany, headed by Hafiz Gagica. In this regard, most meetings between Rugova and representatives of the German state, along with representatives of other European states, were coordinated through the LDK office in Stuttgart, which played the role of a liaison office for Kosova.

By 1978, Backer had been contacted by Amnesty International, namely, by her friend Melanie Anderson, about one particular prisoner of conscience, Demaçi, who became the best-known Albanian dissident in Yugoslavia. During this period, Backer worked at the Peace Research Institute Oslo as a researcher, specializing in the Albanian population in Yugoslavia and Albania. Amnesty International, with a range of other international organizations (PEN writers' associations, etc.), demanded freedom for Demaçi. However, Demaçi was not released until April 21, 1990. He spent 28 years in various prisons in former Yugoslavia for his passionate advocacy of Kosova Albanian rights, later becoming a symbol of the Kosova Albanians' freedom and equality struggle, despite which he remained a sworn opponent of the politics of revenge and national hatred. In December 1991, he was awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament. He was also nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1994. Demaçi was one of the closest friends and collaborators of Backer. Until 1996, he was the chairman of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova.

The importance of Backer's cooperation in the field of building civil society in Kosova is also reflected in the following letter from 1990, sent by the initiators of the establishment of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova. Backer's opinion was requested concerning the members of the Board. Additionally, as one of the examples of continuous moral and financial support from the KGNHC for the civil society development and activities in Kosova, is a document

from 1993 sent as a gratitude letter from the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. Three photographs are also included. The first shows Backer and Demaçi at one of the working meetings at the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in 1990. The second depicts the chairman of the Kosova Helsinki Committee, Gazmend Pula, and the chairman of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosova, Adem Demaçi, during a visit to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. The third photograph shows the chairman of the Kosova Helsinki Committee, Gazmend Pula, accompanying the chairman of the Democratic League of Kosova, Ibrahim Rugova—who was also the head of the delegation—during the first official visit of the Kosova delegation, led by Rugova, to the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearing for Kosova, held in Washington in April 1990.





Këshilli për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave
dhe Lirive të Njeriut në Prishtinë

Council for the Defence of Human
Rights and Freedoms in Prishtina

address: Xhavit Mitrovica nr 15

39000 Prishtine-Kosovo

tel/fax: 30-36-80469

KOMITETIT TË HELSINKUT, Oslo

fax: 9947 22570088

Prishtinë, 6 maj 1993

Të dashur Miq,

Letrën Tuaj të dërguar më 4.05.1993, të nënshkruar nga zoti Nufri Lekaj në lidhje me kërkesën tuaj për lëshimin e një dëshmie nga ana e Këshillit për Mbrojtjen e të Drejtave dhe Lirive të Njeriut në Prishtinë, për të hollat në shumë prej 10.000 \$ US (dhjetë mijë dollarë amerikanë), të cilat i ka dorëzuar z. Tomas Wacko në muajin prill të vitit 1992, ne ju njoftojmë me sa vijon:

Në prill të vitit 1992, z. Tomas Wacko i dorëzoi z. Zenun Çelaj, sekretar i Këshillit tonë një shumë të hollash prej 17.000 DM (shtatëmbëdhjetë mijë marka gjermane), të dedikuara për të burgosurit politikë shqiptarë në Kosovë.

Të hollat e përmendura janë shpërndarë gjatë vitit të kaluar, për çka është njoftuar edhe zonj. Guri Rusten me rastin e vizitës në Kosovë, në fillim të këtij viti.

Ne posedojmë me listën e njerëzve të cilëve u janë shpërndarë këto ndihma, të cilën me kërkesën Tuaj mund t'ua dërgojmë në çdo kohë.

Njëherë, Miq të dashur, ju lutemi t'i përgjigjeni përsëritetshëm tonë të përzemërtë për kujdesin Tuaj ndaj personave të cilët, me shumë se ndihmë materiale këtë e konsiderojnë si përkrahje morale. Ju lusim miqësisht që t'ua përcillni përsëritetshëm dhe falënderimet tona të gjithë atyre që kanë marrë mundimin të ndihmojnë njerëzit në nevojë.

Me përshëndetje
Në emër të Këshillit
Sami Kurrushi

Sami Kurrushi



The influence and support of the KGNHC was not absent for Albania either. This support was provided within the framework of an additional project of the KGNHC, known as the Action Norway–Albania project (ANA), directly supported by the NMFA, namely, Minister Johan Jørgen Holst. Under the leadership of Backer and with Nufri Lekaj as the coordinator, the project facilitated the provision of emergency aid from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway to Albania. In this context, with the assistance of the project, the Centre for Human Rights and the Rehabilitation of the Politically Persecuted by the Totalitarian Regime was established as the first NGO in Albania and served as the initial foreign-supported organization for human rights and democratization in Albania. This NGO continued its operations beyond 1994 under the

leadership of Kozara Kati and others. Additionally, the ANA project facilitated the establishment of the Albanian Helsinki Committee through cooperation with individuals such as Arben Puto and Kujtim Çashku. The commitment of the KGNHC, particularly with the support of Backer, helped Albania secure representation at the meeting of CSCE experts. Furthermore, in 1993, in the framework of the activity of the ANA project, Lekaj, as part of the coordination between the Centre for the Rehabilitation of Political Prisoners in Tirana and the Balkan Centres, took the initiative during a meeting in Greece to establish a centre in Kosova for the rehabilitation of former Albanian political prisoners, which began its activity in 1999, led by Feride Rushiti. In this context, this activity was also supported by Adem Demaçi, in his capacity as Chairman of the Board of the KRCT – the Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims.

On the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, professor Shaban Sinani published an article on December 8, 2015, titled, “The Albanian Helsinki Committee, the first swallow of democracy in Albania”. Sinani wrote: “The Albanian Helsinki Committee, today remembers and honours its 25-year path of action as an organization for the protection of citizens’ rights in the country. This committee is the first non-governmental organization that was created in Albania, precisely in the first days on the threshold from the vigilance society to the society of basic human freedoms (...). Its establishment was immediately greeted by Western press agencies and European and American radio and television programs, which had intensified their broadcasts on the developments in Albania.

“Today, we pay homage to all those who encouraged its establishment and raising, in particular to the well-known activist, researcher, humanist and benevolent of the Albanians Berit Backer, the end of which remains obscure even today; or to the determined activist Christine von Kohl, who over time had become a worthy spokesperson for the great concerns that Albania had gone through in the conditions of the control society and the lack of recognition of individual freedoms (...).

“There have been quite a few achievements in the activity of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, but on this jubilee day let’s single out three events – signs of his life; 1. The request for the release of political prisoners

only one day after the establishment, resulting in the earliest voice uttered within the country in defence of this layer that had been deprived of freedoms and existential rights, precisely because it had dreamed of them; 2. Contributing participation for the conception and inclusion of an essential chapter on human rights in the Basic Provisions, which played the role of a constitution in the first transition towards a liberal democratic society; 3. Special role for the abolition of the death penalty. In all three of these issues, the advocacy of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, in sync with European and international factors, has been more than important”.⁸²

The Danish–Austrian journalist, Christine von Kohl, was one of the international contacts of Berit Backer. She worked in Vienna as a foreign correspondent and in Belgrade from 1968 to 1985. She contributed to a variety of media across Europe. Back in Vienna, from 1990 to 1994, she worked as a consultant for the Helsinki Federation and established the Association for Refugees and Displaced Persons from Bosnia–Herzegovina in Austria. During the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, she was recognized across Europe as one of the most reliable radio and newspaper reporters on the Balkan conflicts.⁸³

The first regional workshop, offering a perspective of Albania, Kosova and Macedonia, was conducted in Tirana on December 8–10, 2000. This workshop was organized by the Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Survivors in Tirana in collaboration with the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims. The chairman of the centre, Adrian Kati, referred to Backer and Lekaj during the opening speech, saying, “We express our special gratitude for the work of Mrs. Berit Backer in the service of Albanian culture and in aid of the former politically persecuted. We also want to greet Nufri Lekaj, one of the creators of this collaboration”.

Below are a facsimile of Shaban Sinani’s abovementioned article in the Albanian newspaper *Telegraf* and a facsimile of a document describing the workshop, including Kati’s opening speech:

⁸² Shaban Sinani: *The Albanian Helsinki Committee, the first swallow of democracy in Albania* (December 8th, 2015): <https://telegraf.al/opinion/shaban-sinani-komiteti-shqiptar-i-helsinki-dallendyshja-e-pare-e-demokracise-ne-shqiperi/>

⁸³ Austrian Broadcasting / Österreichischer Rundfunk (April 8th, 2017): Ein fast unbemerkter Abgang: Christine von Kohl gestorben / *An almost unnoticed death: Christine von Kohl died*: <https://oe1.orf.at/artikel/214323/Christine-von-Kohl-gestorben>



Ballina > Opinion > Shaban Sinani: Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit, dallëndyshja e parë e demokracisë në...

Opinion

Shaban Sinani: Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit, dallëndyshja e parë e demokracisë në Shqipëri

Nga **tg** - 8 Dhjetor, 2015

743



Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit, sot kujton e nderon rrugën e vet 25-vjeçare të veprimit si organizatë për mbrojtjen e të drejtave të qytetarëve në vend. Ky komitet është organizatë e parë joqeveritare që u krijua në Shqipëri, pikërisht në ditët e para në kapërcyell prej shoqërisë së vigjencës në shoqërinë e lirive themelore njerëzore. Ishin një grup intelektualësh të njohur: akademikë, gazetarë, regjisorë, diplomatë, që paraqitën me shkrim dhe zyrtarizuan për herë të parë në Shqipëri kërkesën për themelimin e një shoqate që do të merrte përsipër mbikëqyrjen dhe raportimin mbi gjendjen e të drejtave të njeriut dhe do të bënte të mundur marrjen e tyre nën mbrojtje qytetare, morale dhe ligjore, në kuadër të Federatës së Komitetit Botëror të Helsinkit. Nismëtarët e kësaj organizate meritojnë sot nderimin tonë, meritojnë nderimin e gjithë shoqërisë shqiptare, për këtë hap të rëndësishëm, që çonte drejt një koncepti të ri për liritë dhe të drejtat e njeriut. Do të merrte fund me këtë hap koncepti i mëparshëm, që liritë individuale burojnë e sigurohen prej lirive kolektive dhe që shteti vetë është garant i këtyre lirive. Do të promovohet për herë të parë koncepti, se liria e një shoqërie përcaktohet jo nga pikëpamja e klasës, por nga liria e gjithsecilit. Me themelimin e të parës organizatë të të drejtave të njeriut, Shqipëria e asaj kohe, megjithëse ende nuk e kishte nënshkruar Aktin Final të Helsinkit për një Europë të Re, mbi bazën e së cilës do të krijohej OSBE-ja e sotme, do të hidhte një hap historik evropianizues të mendimit qytetar. Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit, qysh në ditët e para gjeti mbështetje dhe solidaritet të menjëhershëm prej veprimtarëve të mirënjohur të të drejtave të njeriut në Europë. Themelimi i tij u përshëndet menjëherë prej agjencive perëndimore të shtypit dhe emisioneve shqip të radiove dhe televizioneve europiane e amerikane, që kishin intensifikuar transmetimet e tyre për zhvillimet në Shqipëri. Homazhi ynë shkon sot tek të gjithë ata që inkurajuan themelimin dhe mëkëmbjen e tij, në mënyrë të veçantë tek aktivistja e njohur, studiuesja, humanistja dhe dashamirësja e shqiptarëve Berit Backer, fundi i së cilës edhe sot mbetet i errët; apo tek veprimtarja e vendosur Christine von Kohl, që me kohë ishte bërë një zëdhënëse e denjë e shqetësimeve të mëdha që kishte kaluar Shqipëria në kushtet e shoqërisë së kushtetutit dhe të mosnjohjes së lirive individuale. Nderimi ynë u rezervohet gjithashtu veprimtarëve kurajozë, vullnetarë që u bashkuan veprimit të Komitetit të Helsinkit në gjithë Shqipërinë, në kushtet kur emri i tij ishte ende i frikshëm dhe duhej guxim e qytetari për t'iu bashkuar. Pasi prej atyre që bashkudhëtuan me Komitetin në kohë të vështira dhe më vonë ua lanë vendin aktivistëve më të rinj, por pati dhe nismëtarë që nuk u ndanë asnjëherë Komitetit Shqiptar të Helsinkit për asnjë çast gjatë një çerek shekulli, duke dëshmuar se liritë dhe të drejtat qytetare për ta ishin një vokacion i brendshëm, si akademik Arben Ploto dhe regjisor Kujtim Çashku, dhe mjaft të tjerë. Një nderim i merituar u drejtohet sot intelektualëve dhe aktivistëve të shquar të Komitetit Shqiptar të Helsinkit, të cilët punuan me gjithë energjitë dhe dijet e tyre për të drejtat e qytetarëve derisa u ndanë nga jeta: studiuesit Jorgo Bulo, përkthyesit Jusuf Vriani, shkrimtarit Dhimitër Xhuvani, juristëve Manol Konomi e Neshat Tozaj. Përgjatë 25 vjetëve, Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkut është shndërruar në një pikë reference themelore brenda dhe jashtë vendit si organizatë që vepron në mbrojtje të të drejtave dhe lirive qytetare. E nisi rrugën e vet mes vështirësish të mëdha e të jashtëzakonshme, u bë shumë shpejt një monitorues i vendosur i raporteve të njeriut me pushtetet e institucionet e tyre; i situatave të lirive dhe të drejtave të shtetasve në institucionet e mbyllura, si burgje, paraburgime dhe komisarate të policisë; mundësoi njohjen e pjesës më të errët dhe më rezikuese të lirive qytetare duke i kthyer ato në çështje publike; bëri të ditur në botë dhe fitoi mbështetje dhe solidaritet ndërkombëtar për kauzat më të rëndësishme; përfaqësoi të pambrojturit; ofroi ndihmë juridike për grupimet më të rezikuara, shërbeu si opionencë e procesit të ligjërbës në Shqipëri; luajti një rol parësor për të formuar brezat e rinj me vetëdijen e lirive themelore; u bë një avokat i pazëvendësueshëm për grupimet më të ekspozuara ndaj përdallimit; u shndërrua në një partner të efektshëm të organizatave të mirënjohura europiane për mbikëqyrjen e proceseve zgjedhore dhe ushtrimin e lirive bazë që e bëjnë qytetarin pjesëmarrës në mirëqeverisje dhe në rrugëtimin e vështirë drejt shtetit të së drejtës – të vetmit ideal strategjik të shoqërive liberale. Ka pasur jo pak arritje në veprimtarinë e Komitetit Shqiptar të Helsinkut, por në këtë ditë jubilear le të veçojmë tri ngjarje-shenja të jetës së tij:

1. Kërkesa për lirinë e të dënuarve politikë vetëm një ditë pas themelimit, duke rezultuar zëri më i hershëm i shqiptarëve brenda vendit në mbrojtje kësaj shtrese që ishte privuar nga liritë dhe të drejtat ekzistenciale pikërisht sepse kishte ëndërruar për to;
2. Pjesëmarrja kontribuuese për konceptimin dhe përfshirjen e një kreu thelbësor për të drejtat e njeriut në Dispozitat Themelore, që luajtën rolin e një kushtetute në tranzicionin e parë drejt shoqërisë së demokracisë liberale;
3. Roli i posaçëm për heqjen e dënimit me vdekje.

Në të tria këto çështje advokimi i KSHH, në sinkroni me faktorët evropianë e ndërkombëtarë, ka qenë më se i rëndësishëm. Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit prej kohësh nuk është më i vetëm, as si subjekt joshëtar, as në kuadër të gjithë rregullimit shtetëror të jetës politike dhe shoqërore të vendit. Ka ndryshuar gjithashtu dhe pamja e përgjithshme e rrjetit evropian të organizatave në mbrojtje të të drejtave të njeriut. Mundësitë e veprimtarisë në këtë fushë janë gjithnjë e më të kufizuara, brenda dhe jashtë vendit. Roli i shtypit është rritur dhe asistencja juridike si marrëdhënie e qytetarit me institucionet gjithashtu. Komiteti Shqiptar i Helsinkit, i mbështetur në përvojën e vet 25-vjeçare, si një organizatë me ndërtim vertikal dhe e pranishme në shkallën vendore e qendrore, me rrjetin e bashkëpunëtorëve dhe korrespondentëve kudo në Shqipëri, me ekspertizën e specialistëve të njohur nga disa fusha të së drejtës dhe të jetës publike, është në gjendje të përballë me sfidat e kohëve të reja dhe të kryejë detyrat e veta e të ushtrojë funksionet që i takojnë duke modernizuar edhe vetveten. Me modesti ai e sheh veten tashmë jashtë protagonizmeve, si një aktor specifik i një rrjeti prej mbi 3500 subjektësh që veprojnë zyrtarisht në Shqipëri për mbrojtjen e të drejtave dhe lirive themelore njerëzore

Shkrimi u botua në Gazetën Telegraf të datës 09.12.2015



Qendra Shqiptare e Rehabilitimit për të Mbijetuarit e Torturës

WORKSHOPI I -RË RAJONAL

“Trauma, Faktorët, Pasojat dhe Përballimi”

Një Perspektivë Rajonale: Shqipëri, Kosovë dhe Maqedoni

Tiranë
8-10 Dhjetor, 2000

Organizuar nga:
Qendra e Rehabilitimit për të Mbijetuarit e Torturës-QSHRMT
Në bashkëpunim me:
Rehabilitation and Research Center for Torture Victims-RCT



Tiranë

FJALA E HAPJES NË WORKSHOP-IN E PARË RAJONAL

Të nderuar miq, të ftuar pjesëmarrës në këtë takim pune, mirë se keni ardhur! Në mënyrë të veçantë përshëndesim miqtë tanë të ardhur nga Prishtina dhe Tetova.

Do të doja të hapnim punimet e këtij workshopi duke nderuar viktimat e torturës kudo në botë me një minutë heshtje.

Jemi mbledhur së bashku, këtu në Tiranë, për të shkëmbyer mendime dhe përvoja lidhur me punën tonë fisnike për të lehtësuar dhimbjet e për të rehabilituar të mbijetuarit nga tortura. Në përputhje me nevojat për një punë të përbashkët midis qendrave të Tiranës, Prishtinës, dhe departamentit përkatës në Tetovë, kemi menduar që të koordinojmë punën në mënyrë që të ndihmojmë këtë departament të ngrihet në nivelin e një qendre dhe kështu të mund të krijojmë një lidhje koordinuese të bashkëpunimit midis tyre. Ne e kemi emërtuar atë Network-u Rajonal Mbarëshqiptar i Qendrave për Rehabilitimin e të Mbijetuarve nga Tortura. Ndoshta ky emërtim nuk është shumë i goditur dhe nuk i përgjigjet si duhet pikësnyimeve tona, por mendoj se nuk është kjo gjëja më kryesore. Ne dëshirojmë të ecim përpara dhe të zhvillohemi nga pikëpamja institucionale, duke rritur kapacitetet në funksion të realizimit sa më të mirë të misionit tonë fisnik.

Jemi të mendimit se e gjithë kjo punë që do të bëjmë së bashku në këtë workshop është në logjikën e punës sonë, përfshirë këtu edhe atë në kuadrin e Network-ut Ballkanik si dhe të veprimtarisë ndërkombëtare për të realizuar stabilitetin në gadishullin ballkanik.

Ne shpresojmë që në këtë punë do të kemi mirëkuptimin dhe ndihmën e të gjithë miqve dhe kolegëve tanë, në veçanti të atyre të rrjeteve të Qendrave të Rehabilitimit të të Mbijetuarve të Torturës. Gjithashtu, duam të përshëndesim Z. Nufri Lekaj nga Kosova, një nga ideatorët e këtij bashkëpunimi.

Shprehim mirënjohjen tonë të veçantë për veprën e Znj. Berit Backer në shërbim të kulturës shqiptare dhe në ndihmë të ish të përndjekurve politikë.

Në emër të Qendrës Shqiptare të Rehabilitimit të të Mbijetuarve të Torturës, ju falenderoj dhe njëherë për pjesëmarrjen tuaj dhe shpallim të hapur këtë workshop dhe i uroj atij punime të mbara!

It is worth noting that the Kosovar Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT), founded in 1993, and led by Feride Rushiti since 1999,

was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2025 on January 16 by Swedish parliamentarian Magnus Jacobson. Below are four facsimiles. The first, second and third facsimiles are about the establishment of the KRCT, and the fourth facsimile is Jacobsson's proposal to the Nobel Peace Committee to nominate KRCT.

MEDICAL
REHABILITATION CENTER
FOR TORTURE VICTIMS

***Minutes of BALKAN MEETING at the
Medical Rehabilitation Center
for Torture Victims***

ATHENS, 13 NOVEMBER 1993

AGENDA

1. Presentation of Maria Piniou-Kalli:
Aims - goals and current realities in the wider district.
Discussion - Propositions - Decisions
2. Structure. Election of the network's membership
Election of Executive Secretariat
Election of General Secretary
3. Time of meetings
4. Functioning
Place, Name
Personnel
5. Work to be carried out: Short - term
Long - term

PRESENT: Albania - Kozara Kati
Bulgaria - Evgeni Guentchev
Kroatia - Suzana Kulovic
Kosovo - Nufri Lekaj
Hungary - Lilla Hardi
Maria Frank
Turkey - Zuhail Amato
Turkcan Baykal
Metin Basoglu (as individual researcher
residing in London)

2 PLYCABETTOUS STREET, ATHENS GREECE. TEL. 36 04 967 FAX 36 42 073

This Declaration has been adopted in Athens on November 13, 1993 by the following:



Maria Piniou-Kalli
Medical Director
Greece

Veli Lök
Turkey

Lilla Hardi
Hungary

Nufri Lekaj
Kosovo (Serbia)

Suzana Kulovic
Kroatia

Kozara Kati
Albania

Evgeni Guentchev
Bulgaria

The General Meeting of representatives took the decision to elect a Secretariat which is composed of 3 members and will have a mandate of 3 years.



MEDICAL
REHABILITATION CENTER
FOR TORTURE VICTIMS

Nufri Lekaj
Aksjon Norge Albania
Urlegata 50, N-0187
Oslo

Athens, 8 February 1994

Dear friend,

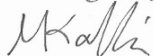
Enclosed please find the text of the *BALKAN'S DECLARATION* for your signature, as well as the Minutes of the Balkan Meeting.

Please let us know within two days if you have any observations.

In case we do not receive anything within this period we will consider that we have your full agreement.

In any case please return, within two days, dully signed by you a copy of the text of the Declaration and the organizational principles needed in order to present an operational budget to the appropriate authorities on behalf of the Network. (The Network has to look as one entity).

Best regards,



Maria Piniou-Kalli
Medical Director

16 January 2025

Stockholm

Nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize: Dr Feride Rushiti and
Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT)

Dear Nomination Committee,

I wish to nominate Dr. Feride Rushiti and the NGO Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT) for the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of their extraordinary contributions to the advancement of human rights, the dignity of survivors, and the healing of communities scarred by war. Dr. Rushiti's and the KRCT's work exemplifies the power of compassion, courage, and relentless advocacy in the face of unimaginable adversity.

As a medical doctor and human rights activist, Dr. Rushiti has dedicated her career to addressing the devastating effects of torture, sexual violence, and other wartime atrocities. Following the Kosovo War (1998-1999), she founded the Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (KRCT), the first organization of its kind in Kosovo. Under her visionary leadership, KRCT has provided critical medical, psychological, and legal support to thousands of survivors, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met.

Dr. Rushiti's groundbreaking advocacy for the recognition of survivors of wartime sexual violence has transformed the national discourse in Kosovo. Her tireless efforts led to the establishment of a legal framework that recognizes these survivors as civilian victims of war, enabling them to access long-overdue reparations. This landmark achievement, realized in 2017, has brought dignity and financial support to many survivors and stands as a beacon of hope for post-conflict justice worldwide.

Beyond her work with survivors, Dr. Rushiti has championed the humane treatment of prisoners and detainees, advancing legal and ethical standards in Kosovo's justice system. Her commitment to fostering a society rooted in respect for human rights has had a profound impact, inspiring both national and international stakeholders.

Dr. Rushiti's unwavering dedication has not gone unnoticed. In 2018, she was honored with the U.S. Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award, an acknowledgment of her transformative impact on the lives of survivors and her role as a global leader in human rights advocacy.

The Nobel Peace Prize is intended to celebrate individuals whose work fosters peace, justice, and reconciliation. Dr. Feride Rushiti and the KRCT embodies these ideals through their lifelong commitment to supporting the most vulnerable, healing the wounds of conflict, and building a foundation for lasting peace in Kosovo and beyond.

For these reasons, we strongly endorse Dr. Feride Rushiti and KRCT as a deserving recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Her/Their work is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the profound impact of compassion in creating a more just and peaceful world.

Sincerely,

Magnus Jacobsson, KD

Member of Parliament • Swedish Parliament
Mobile: +46 70 255 11 69 • E-mail: magnus.jacobsson@riksdagen.se

THE SWEDISH PARLIAMENT SE-100 12 Stockholm • www.riksdagen.se

THE COMMITMENT OF BERIT BACKER WITH HER FRIENDS AND HER INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS, PAVED THE WAY TOWARDS INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE KOSOVA ISSUE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE HELSINKI PROCESS

It is worth noting that Backer's suggestions and advice regarding the Kosova issue have been appreciated not only by certain political and diplomatic circles in the West but also by experts in the field, such as Harry Hodgkinson. Hodgkinson, who was an intelligence officer, was also an expert on the Balkans. He visited Albania before and during World War II, joined the Anglo - Albanian Association on his return to England, and corresponded with Edith Durham for many years.⁸⁴ The Anglo-Albanian Association supported the Albanian cause beginning in 1912, but after the World War II, its prime concern was for the fate of exiles from Enver Hoxha's Albania.⁸⁵ In 1985, Hodgkinson was appointed chairman of the Anglo-Albanian Association and was in correspondence with Backer. He appreciated her advice that the association should focus more on the situation of the Albanians in Yugoslavia. In fact, according to scholar James Pettifer, "Hodgkinson had foreseen the disintegration of Yugoslavia long before the foreign policy establishment in Britain and was not slow to point out the years of fatal ignorance of Balkan realities in official circles that [have] led to so many tragic policy errors. Although strongly pro-Europe personally, he had no illusions about the role of the European Community in the Balkan crisis, or the fatal complacency the Maastricht process had engendered in Foreign Office thinking about the region".⁸⁶ When Hodgkinson died in 1994, he was the first Englishman buried with the Albanian flag.⁸⁷ He demonstrated his great respect for Backer in a letter written to her in 1987: "It was a pleasure to meet you at Doreen and Anton Logoreci's, and a great privilege to be able to profit from your immense stock of knowledge and compassionate understanding of the Kosovars. I very much fear that we all took advantage of your kindness and must have

⁸⁴ James Pettifer (October 1994) *Obituary: Harry Hodgkinson*. Obituary: Harry Hodgkinson | The Independent | The Independent.

⁸⁵ Anglo - Albanian Association: *Anglo-Albanian Association* | London

⁸⁶ James Pettifer (October 1994) *Obituary: Harry Hodgkinson*. Obituary: Harry Hodgkinson | The Independent | The Independent.

⁸⁷ Interview with Bejtullah Destani (August 2023): Bejtullah Destani | PRIZMA | T7 - YouTube

exhausted you by our questions and speculations. It was forbearing of you to undertake that impromptu seminar with such goodwill and kindness (...). When next you visit your friends in Manor House, perhaps we might arrange a luncheon party round the corner here with Anton and Doreen and Ishan Toptani (...)" ⁸⁸ Ihsan Toptani, a political scientist, ⁸⁹ and Anton Logoreci, a writer and for many years head of the Albanian Service of the BBC in London, ⁹⁰ were two of the leading Albanian veterans in exile in London. Together with some isolated examples of other Albanian veterans in exile, such as Professor Sami Repishti in the United States, ⁹¹ they were not only preoccupied with fighting the dictatorial regime of Enver Hoxha in Albania but also provided their valuable contribution to the internationalization of the Kosova issue. For this reason, with the aim of coordinating and strengthening the broader activity of the Albanian political emigration in relation to the stronger internationalization of the Kosova issue, Backer organized a meeting in London in 1988 between Toptani and one of the representatives of the LPK. In this context, Toptani also supported the activity of KGNHC by offering his valuable advice.

Professor Sami Repishti, a dissident from Albania, initiated a petition in 1986 in the United States signed by him and by a dissident from Serbia, professor Mihajlo Mihajlov, who was a friend of Demaçi's. This petition

⁸⁸ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*: Introduction of the book; Behind the Stone Walls...: 2003: p. 12 ; Letter from Harry Hodgkinson, London, 22nd of April 1987.

⁸⁹ Andrew van der Beek (June 13th, 2001): *Ihsan Toptani Albanian champion of his country's freedom*: "Ihsan Bey Toptani, who has died aged 92, was prominent in the war-time Albanian resistance to Italian and German occupation, and gave invaluable help to the British military missions. He went on to become the doyen of the Albanian community in this country, a keen member of the Anglo-Albanian Association...": <https://amp.theguardian.com/news/2001/jun/13/guardianobituaries>

⁹⁰ Anton Logoreci (April 1982): *Riots and trials in Kosova: Why the Albanian population in Yugoslavia took to the streets*: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/03064228208533359>

⁹¹ Elez Biberaj (July 18th, 2015): *Professor Sami Repishti and the Struggle for Kosova's Freedom and Independence*. "...Professor Repishti cooperated closely with and was an authoritative source for human rights and democracy promotion organizations, such as Freedom House, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights. He also published numerous articles in the U.S. press as well as in the émigré Albanian newspapers (...). Similar to many other ethnic groups, the Albanian-American community was politically fragmented. Professor Repishti displayed an ability to work with people across the political spectrum – political party leaders, clerics, scholars, students, and businessmen – and succeeded in building significant support from the community. He was instrumental in the creation of three organizations that played a critical role: The Albanian Kosovar Youth in the Free World, the Albanian-American Civic League, and the National Albanian American Council (...)": <https://gazetadielli.com/professor-sami-repishti-and-the-struggle-for-kosovas-freedom-and-independence/>

was personally delivered on September 4, 1986, to U.S. Vice President George H.W. Bush.⁹² It read, in part: “The situation in Kosova remains very tense. Yugoslavia is going through a political, economic and social crisis which threatens its very foundations. Yugoslavia is a very sensitive spot in the divided continent of Europe. An American Consulate in Prishtina would generate a feeling of security among the local Albanian population, it would reduce the existing tensions, it would contribute to the political stability of the region, and consequently of Yugoslavia itself. An American Consulate in Kosova would definitely serve peace in the area by defusing a potentially explosive situation which could greatly complicate the present delicate balance of the historically turbulent Balkan Peninsula...”.⁹³ It is important to mention Backer’s role in this request to open a consulate in Prishtina, because her opinions about the situation of Albanians in the Balkans were highly appreciated by experts in the field, including human rights activists within the Helsinki Process. Therefore, her suggestions supporting an American consulate in Kosova were part of the aforementioned report by the delegation of the first fact-finding mission in Kosova, organized by Karl von Schwarzenberg, chairman, and Hester Minnema, programme director of the Helsinki Federation; Kenneth Anderson, a representative of the U.S. Helsinki Watch; and Gjøtterud and Backer, representatives of the NHC. This was of great importance, especially considering the significant advisory impact of the U.S. Helsinki Watch (as a part of the Helsinki Federation) on American foreign policy. According to one of Backer’s closest friends, Ann Christine Eek, the report of the first fact-finding mission in Kosova “.... was to a great extent based on the information gathered by Berit Backer. It details the cunning methods used by the Serbian authorities against Albanian intellectuals and politicians, in the process of reducing the autonomous province of Kosovo to a mere part of Serbia in March 1989”.⁹⁴

In other words, Backer, as a foreigner and as a well-informed and highly regarded person regarding the Albanian issue and politics in Yugoslavia in general, was able to convince many with objective arguments, including

⁹² Sami Repishti (2022): *Petition for Kosova - 1986*: <https://gazetadielli.com/peticioni-repishiti-for-kosova/>

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*: Introduction of the book; Behind the Stone Walls...: 2003: p 12

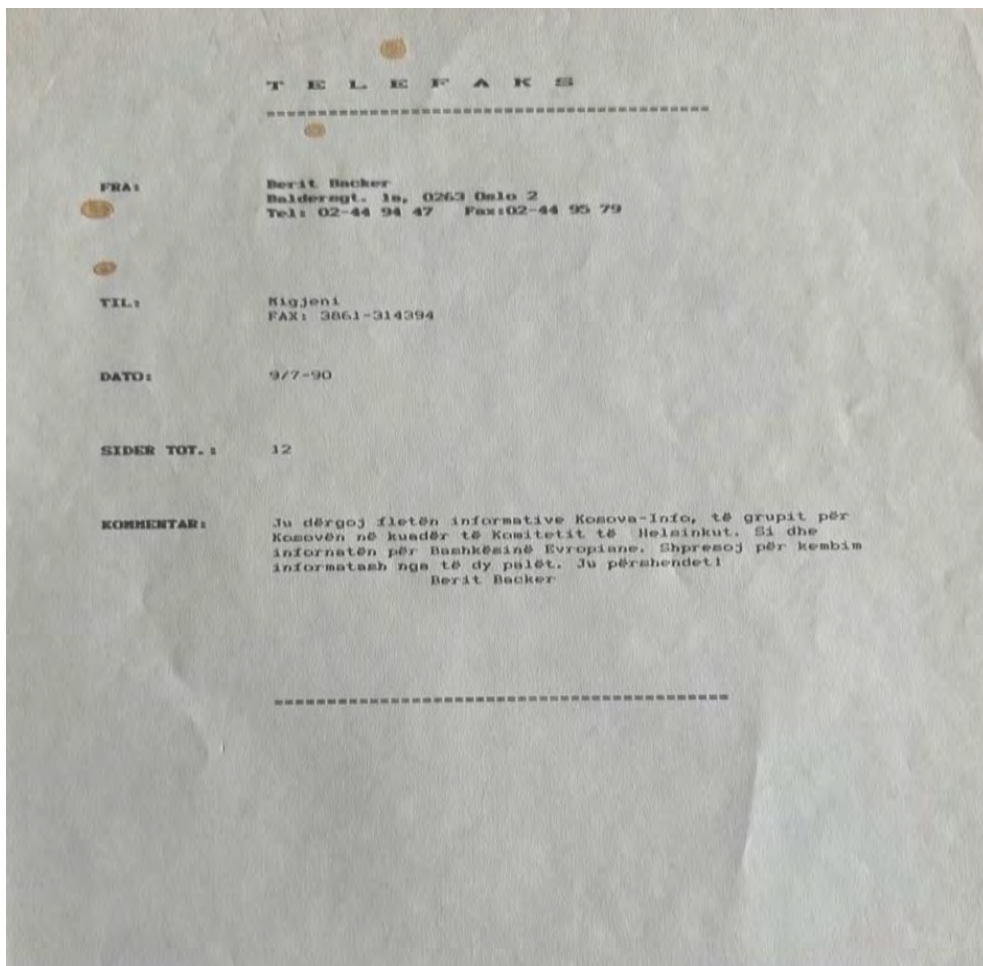
that an American consulate in Kosova would serve to stop the further deterioration of human rights in Kosova. Another argument of hers was that the American consulate would serve to stop a potential war in Kosova, and that, unlike other areas in Yugoslavia, the eventual outbreak of war in Kosova had the potential to expand the war beyond Yugoslavia and Albania. In January 1990, this delegation's first report on the situation in Kosova was published, in which it stated that, "The possibility of opening a U.S. consular office in Prishtina in order to raise U.S. visibility there has been mentioned informally on occasion. Although the Helsinki Watch and the IHF recognize the many factors that go into such a decision besides matters of human rights, including budgetary and personnel questions, from the standpoint of human rights in Kosovo it is a useful and constructive idea".⁹⁵

Six years later, in 1996, the situation in Kosova had deteriorated greatly, and the U.S. State Department estimated that the time had come to open the American Consulate/Office in Kosova. The office was opened in the capital of Kosova, Prishtina, with open celebration and the participation of many local and international authorities, among them, Kosova President Rugova and U.S. Congressman Elliot Engel.

Moreover, Backer also cooperated with the Migjeni Association in Ljubljana, Slovenia headed by Sali Kabashi, with the aim of coordinating and strengthening the general political activity of the Albanians around the Kosova issue. In response to the political developments in Yugoslavia in 1989, numerous constitutional amendments were passed in the Republic of Slovenia, introduced parliamentary democracy to the country. On December 30, 1989, Slovenia officially opened the spring 1990 elections to opposition parties, thus inaugurating multi-party democracy. The activities around the Kosova issue undertaken in Slovenia by the Migjeni Association during this period were important, as this was the first Albanian association in former Yugoslavia. A facsimile of a fax sent by Backer to the Migjeni Association, in the Albanian language, will in the following be presented as an example of the cooperation between Backer and the Association. The facsimile reads: "I am sending you the informative newsletter Kosova-Info, of the group for Kosova within the

⁹⁵ Kenneth Anderson: *Yugoslavia: Crisis in Kosovo*, International Helsinki Federation and Human Rights Watch, New York, 1990, p. 43

Helsinki Committee. As well as information about the European Community. I hope for an exchange of information from both sides. Regards, Berit Backer”:



In other words, from 1987 to 1993, Backer made a special contribution to the internationalization of Kosova's issue within the framework of the Helsinki Process. Additionally, the role of NGO (Helsinki Committees) gradually became a central one in the development of the Helsinki Process.

Based on the Helsinki Declaration (1975), also known as the Helsinki Process, the CSCE appeared structurally different from the Council of

Europe and the United Nations (UN). These differences were less bureaucracy and greater involvement of human rights NGOs such as the Helsinki Groups (Helsinki Committees). Therefore, the Helsinki Process was implemented on two interconnected levels: the interstate level, represented by the CSCE member states' delegations, and the civil level through the activities of the Helsinki Committees on human rights, which led to the founding of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights in 1982. Consequently, the Western countries' main criticism of Eastern countries expressed in the CSCE's meetings (with follow-up meetings) held in Belgrade (1976–77), Madrid (1980–83) and Vienna (1986–89) was related to human rights violations. Hence, the role of NGOs (the Helsinki Groups) gradually became a central one in the development of the Helsinki Process.⁹⁶ In fact, when the Conference of Vienna began in 1986, Sakharov was still in so-called internal exile, and most of the human rights activists in the Soviet Union were either interned or persecuted by other state means.⁹⁷ Anatoly Marchenko, a dissident and one of the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group, managed to secretly send an appeal to the CSCE's delegations at the Vienna meeting, requesting support to improve the conditions of detention in the Soviet Union. Through this appeal, Marchenko requested, *inter alia*, that the prisoners should be provided with food more often than every two days. Marchenko died in prison on December 6, 1986, after 20 years of imprisonment. His death was honoured with a moment of silence initiated by the head of the American delegation to the CSCE, Warren Zimmermann, which prompted the Soviet delegation to the CSCE, as well as those from Bulgaria, East Germany and Czechoslovakia, to leave the meeting. The delegation from Hungary did not act in the same manner during that meeting, symbolizing the first disruption to the cohesion of the Treaty of Warsaw.⁹⁸ Sakharov was released in December 1986, due to pressure from the West. Hence, during the process of CSCE's regular meetings in Vienna from 1986 to 1989, the principles of the CSCE regarding the increased participation of NGOs in the process were established.

⁹⁶ Maria Raquel Freire 2003: 71-72.

⁹⁷ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Andrej Sakharov (2005): http://snl.no/Andrej_Dmitrije_vitsj_Sakharov

⁹⁸ C. Van Esterik and H. Minnema 1991: 2-7

In the framework of this political context after 1986, when the Helsinki Committees were granted the opportunity to have influence over the Helsinki Process, Backer founded the KGNHC with Albanian and Norwegian collaborators. This was for the purpose of internationalizing Kosova's issue in the framework of the Helsinki Process.

Backer had many international contacts, and her advice was appreciated not only by experts in the field of Albanian studies, such as Hodgkinson, but also by influential personalities in the fields of human rights, politics and diplomacy who were interested in Kosova and Yugoslavia in general. Among them were Karl von Schwarzenberg, Jeri Laber and Warren Zimmermann. As chairman of human rights for the IHF in the 1980s, Schwarzenberg especially pushed for adherence to human rights in Europe. He contributed significantly to issues of human rights in the former USSR, Bulgaria, Kosova and the Czech Republic.⁹⁹ For his contribution to the IHF as a chairman until 1991, Schwarzenberg and Polish activist Lech Walesa shared the European Human Rights Award in 1989.¹⁰⁰ Schwarzenberg also played a key role in the Velvet Revolution (1989) and served as a chancellor under his friend Vaclav Havel when the latter was elected president of Czechoslovakia. Later, beginning in 2008, he served twice as his country's foreign minister,¹⁰¹ he is also known as a supporter of Kosova's independence.¹⁰²

Laber was the co-founder of the IHF and served as its vice chair from 1988 to 1995. In the 1970s, she was an Amnesty International activist as well as the co-founder of the U.S. Helsinki Watch, later known as the Human Rights Watch. She served as its executive director and senior adviser from 1979 to 2001 and was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City and a board member of PEN America.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Government of the Czech Republic (13th of July, 2010): *Karel Schwarzenberg - Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs*: <https://vlada.gov.cz/en/clenove-vlady/karel-schwarzenberg-74276>

¹⁰⁰ RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty (May 12th, 2016) *Forty Years Of The Moscow Helsinki Group*: <https://www.rferl.org/amp/russia-moscow-helsinki-group-timeline/27731056.html>

¹⁰¹ New York Times (20th of November, 2023): *Karel Schwarzenberg, Renegade Czech Prince and Politician, Dies at 85*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/19/world/karel-schwarzenberg-dead.html>

¹⁰² Radio Prague International (22nd of February, 2008): *Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg wants Kosovo recognized*: <https://english.radio.cz/foreign-minister-schwarzenberg-wants-kosovo-recognized-8450209>

¹⁰³ Pen America, press release (June 22nd, 2011): *Human Rights Pioneer & Author Jeri Laber to Join Board of PEN American Center*: <https://pen.org/press-release/human-rights-pioneer-author-jeri-laber-to-join-board-of-pen-american-center/>

Furthermore, Laber established the practice of human rights fact-finding missions; had friendships with dissidents from Communist countries, including Vaclav Havel; raised awareness through the media about human rights abuses; and lobbied the U.S. government on human rights,¹⁰⁴ including the situation in Kosova. As an example, Laber testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations' subcommittee on European affairs on February 21, 1991, saying that, "We urge that the U.S. government use its economic leverage against the federal government of Yugoslavia because we judge the situation in Kosovo to be a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. And specifically we would like to urge that pressure be kept up between now and May with regard to the provision of the foreign assistance law that bars bilateral financial assistance to Yugoslavia and requires United States representatives to international financial institutions to oppose loans to Yugoslavia. I would even urge that this probationary period be extended if there is no real improvement seen by May".¹⁰⁵

In a report from the U.S. Helsinki Watch dated October 1, 1992, titled "Yugoslavia: Human Rights Abuses in Kosovo 1990–1992" and edited by Laber, she writes the following: "Since the government of Slobodan Milošević assumed direct control of Kosovo's governance and security in 1990, the human rights situation has worsened dramatically. Although 'ethnic cleansing' practices employed by Serbian forces in Croatia and Bosnia–Hercegovina are not as brutally pronounced in Kosovo, the deliberate economic and social marginalization of Albanians in Kosovo has less overtly forced the emigration of Albanians from the province. While Albanians are being forced to leave, Milošević's government has provided incentives and encouraged the settlement of Serbs in the province – a practice conducted throughout Serbian-occupied areas of Croatia and Bosnia–Hercegovina. Indeed, Serbian policy in Kosovo has been described by Warren Zimmermann, the former U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, as 'a typical colonial situation'. Moreover, the increasing presence of the Yugoslav army and Serbian paramilitary groups and the

¹⁰⁴ Columbia Harriman Institute (October 26th, 2016): *The Reminiscences of Jeri Laber*: <https://api.harriman.maptian.com/sites/default/files/2018-04/LABER1-2.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Hearing before the subcommittee on European affairs of the committee on foreign relations united states senate, one hundred-second congress, first session, February 21st, 1991: *Civil strife in Yugoslavia: The United States response*: <https://li.proquest.com/elhpdf/histcontext/HRG-1991-FOR-0002.pdf>, p. 116

arming of Serbian civilians in Kosovo raises serious concern that the province may be the next scene of bloodshed in the Balkans”.¹⁰⁶

In other words, Laber, Kenneth Anderson, Fred Abrahams and other activists of the U.S Helsinki Watch (Human Rights Watch) were important informative and advisory voices for the American government and the international community in general regarding the issue of Kosova. For example, the Helsinki Watch report of December 1, 1996, titled “Persecution Persists: Human Rights Violations in Kosovo”, written by Fred Abrahams and edited by Jeri Laber, stated, “Human Rights Watch/Helsinki calls on the international community to maintain the outer wall of sanctions and make human rights conditions on the ground in Yugoslavia a central component of bilateral and multilateral relations. Specifically, the international community should: Deny Yugoslavia membership in the United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe, International Media Fund and the World Bank until the Yugoslav government respects human rights without regard to ethnicity, cooperates with the War Crimes Tribunal, and allows the OSCE monitoring mission in Kosovo to return; and Refrain from offering any preferential trade status to Yugoslavia until human rights abuses desist”.¹⁰⁷

As for Zimmermann, he was an American career diplomat best known as the last U.S. ambassador to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia before its disintegration. He was a highly influential figure within the Helsinki Process because he previously (1986–1989) had led the U.S. delegation at the CSCE. According to Hella Pick, a British–Austrian journalist who was the UN correspondent for *The Guardian*, “Zimmermann resigned from the diplomatic service in 1994 in protest at President Bill Clinton’s reluctance to intervene in the Bosnian war; but he did not leave matters there. He campaigned ceaselessly to persuade America that it must act to end Serbian aggression in the killing fields of Bosnia, and wrote

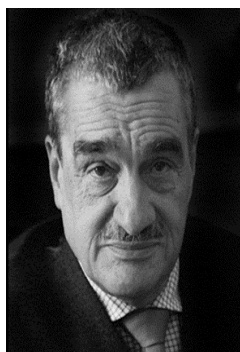
¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch (October 1st, 1992): *Human Rights Abuses in Kosovo 1990 – 1992*: <https://www.hrw.org/report/1992/10/01/human-rights-abuses-kosovo-1990-1992>
<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1992/yugoslavia/>

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch (December 1st, 1996): *Persecution Persists: Human Rights Violations in Kosovo*: <https://www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/hrw/1996/en/21888>

a perceptive, and deeply moving, account of his experiences in Yugoslavia, *The Origins of a Catastrophe* (1996) ...”¹⁰⁸



Harry Hodgkinson



Karl Schwarzenberg



Jeri Laber



Warren Zimmermann

The activity of KGNHC was also supported by Backer’s close and influential friends in Norway, including Marianne Heiberg, a well-known researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, and her husband, Johan Jørgen Holst, a political scientist with scientific research experience at Harvard University and the minister of defence and minister of foreign affairs of Norway during the 1980s and early 1990s. Additionally, Holst was internationally recognized for his influence on the achievement of the Oslo Agreement between Israel and Palestine in 1993. Through the lobbying of Backer’s friend, Heiberg, a meeting was held between Minister Holst and one of the LPK representatives in 1989, who informed Holst in detail about the serious situation of the human rights in Kosova, arguing that the “Kosova Republic is the best solution to the serious human rights problem in Yugoslavia”. Minister Holst demonstrated understanding regarding the difficult situation of human rights in Kosova, and even indicated to a certain extent a perception of the necessity of advancing the political status of Kosova within the framework of the Yugoslav Federation. Before and after this meeting, Backer also organized meetings between one of the representatives of LPK with some of her other friends in Norway: Reiulf Steen, Torkel Opsahl, Per Schreiner and Kjell Høybraaten.

¹⁰⁸ The Guardian (10th of February, 2004): *Warren Zimmermann: Principled US diplomat who resigned in protest at the west's failure to intervene early in former Yugoslavia*. <https://amp.theguardian.com/news/2004/feb/10/guardianobituaries.hellapick>

It is worth mentioning that during Rugova's first official visit in Norway, he also met Reiulf Steen, among others, through an arrangement made by Backer.

In fact, besides Heiberg and Holst, other influential Norwegian friends of Backer who supported the work of the KGNHC were Reiulf Steen, a politician and leader of the Labour Party in 1975–1981, parliamentarian in 1977–1992, and twice minister,¹⁰⁹ including being a chairman of the Council of the NHC in 1990;¹¹⁰ Per Schreiner, a principal officer, director general and senior advisor at the Ministry of Finance in 1963–1992;¹¹¹ and law professors Torkel Opsahl and Asbjørn Eide, founders of the Institute for Human Rights in Norway in 1987. In 1992, Opsahl was appointed by the UN Secretary General as a member and then chairman of the UN Commission on Crimes in Yugoslavia.¹¹² Meanwhile, Eide led the working groups at the UN regarding the issue of indigenous people and national minorities in the periods 1982–1983 and 1995–2004 and was the president of the advisory committee of the Council of Europe for the protection of national minorities in 2003–2006,¹¹³ including being a member of the Council of the NHC in 1990.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, among Backer's friends were Kjell Høybraaten, a former politician and businessman, and Jan Egeland, a political scientist, deputy foreign minister of Norway in 1992–1997 and a humanitarian leader.

Egeland was the first Norwegian official to visit Albania together with Backer and approve the Action Norway Albania aid project. Moreover, Egeland was an internationally well-known diplomat; he coordinated the first direct secret talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization that led to the Oslo Agreement of September 13, 1993. The same year, he participated in the UN's work for the release of prisoners of war and peace negotiations between Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. In 1997, Richard Holbrooke, President Clinton's special emissary for Cyprus, asked Egeland to assist in the work.

¹⁰⁹ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Reiulf Steen (2023): https://snl.no/Reiulf_Steen

¹¹⁰ Newspaper "Appell" of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (1990): *Board, Secretariat and Council of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee*, p. 4

¹¹¹ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Per Schreiner (2023): https://nbl.snl.no/Per_Schreiner

¹¹² Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Torkel Opsahl (2022): https://nbl.snl.no/Torkel_Opsahl

¹¹³ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Asbjørn Eide (2022): https://nbl.snl.no/Asbjørn_Eide

¹¹⁴ Newspaper "Appell" of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (1990): *Board, Secretariat and Council of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee*, p. 4

He did that until 1999, while he was an advisor to Colombia's president and foreign minister and the advisor for the high commissioner for peace in the peace process with the guerrilla groups FARC and ELN.¹¹⁵ Egeland was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2006 and also served as a special adviser to the general secretary of the FN in 2007.¹¹⁶ From 2007 to 2011, Egeland served as the director for the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs; from 2011 to 2013, he was the European director at Human Rights Watch; and since August 2013, he has been the secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council.¹¹⁷

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Norway has demonstrated a special commitment to peace and human rights in the world. In fact, this dedication by Norway is based on a long tradition, since the time of the great humanitarian activist, diplomat, academic and Nobel Prize winner Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930). In addition to being the symbol of the Norwegian humanitarian tradition, Nansen became an important point of reference for the direction of Norwegian foreign policy in the 1990s.

According to historian Ingrid Olstad Busterud, the political scientist Jan Egeland became one of the most central actors in shaping the new direction, with a footing within both voluntary organizations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In his master's thesis in 1985, Egeland argued that small states such as Norway could play important roles in promoting peace and human rights throughout the world. As state secretary in the Foreign Ministry, Egeland maintained his clear belief that Norway could act as a moral and humanitarian champion and that Norway had "a mission to carry out in the service of world development". The desire to be a morally great power grew ever stronger. Despite changing governments, there was broad cross-political agreement that Norway had the resources and traditions needed to achieve international influence.¹¹⁸

According to Ann Christine Eek, one of Backer's closest friends, "Berit Backer was hired in the spring of 1987 by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a translator of Albanian documents and as an advisor on questions

¹¹⁵ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia; Jan Egeland (2022): https://nbl.snl.no/Jan_Egeland

¹¹⁶ Norwegian Encyclopedia; Jan Egeland (2023): https://snl.no/Jan_Egeland

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ Olstad Busterud 2010: 2 – 3

concerning Kosova. In 1988, she was also working for the Ministry of Justice to provide information about the difficulties the Albanians in Kosova were experiencing under the policies of the new leader of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević. Berit Backer's written reports to the ministries reveal that she had connections to well-informed sources, who knew in detail what was happening in the province, even in the courts and prisons".¹¹⁹



Marianne Heiberg and Johan Jørgen Hølst



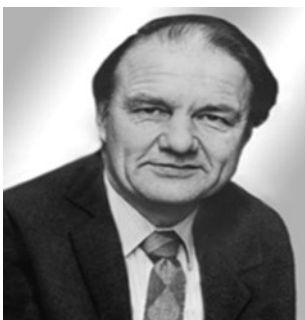
Reiulf Steen



Per Schreiner



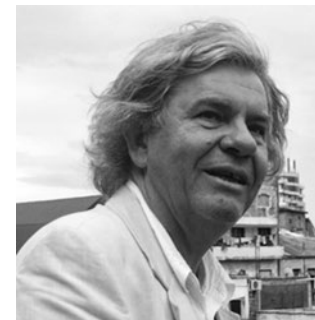
Jan Egeland



Torkel Opsahl



Asbjørn Eide



Kjell Høibraaten

¹¹⁹ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*: Introduction of the book; Behind the Stone Walls...: 2003: p. 12

THE CONTEXT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KOSOVA GROUP WITHIN THE NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE (KGNHC)

The establishment of the KGNHC in the framework of the NHC, a semi-state organization and an advisory one for the NMFA, was a challenging project, especially considering the strong, amicable relations between Norway and former Yugoslavia. After World War II, Serbian–Yugoslavian propaganda gradually gained influence in Norway and extended this effect to other Nordic countries as well. This Serbian–Yugoslavian propaganda was initially successful, using the story of Yugoslav prisoners in Norway during World War II as a biased tool implying that only Serbs were devout anti-Nazis and anti-fascists: on the one hand connecting the Serbs, partisans, anti-Nazis, anti-fascists and Yugoslav, and on the other hand suggesting that other people in Yugoslavia, particularly Albanians and Croats, were more likely to collaborate with the Nazis and fascists rather than oppose them. Building on this propaganda, Serbia fostered an amicable relationship with Norway, particularly because the latter emerged as the most proactive Nordic country in foreign policy after World War II and the most influential in international relations.¹²⁰ Due to this relationship between Norway and Yugoslavia, coordinators of the KGNHC, such as Gjøtterud and Backer – who, in reality, was the leader of KGNHC – proposed that Nufri Lekaj, who was already recognized in the Norwegian media as a verified victim of torture by the Yugoslavian regime, be responsible for the KGNHC.¹²¹ Nufri, having been portrayed in the Norwegian media as a politically persecuted former prisoner, was seen as a compelling example.¹²² As a result, the Norwegian members of the KGNHC could not be directly accused by the Yugoslavian diplomacy of being anti-Yugoslav or of jeopardizing the Norwegian and Yugoslavian state relations. Their support for the KGNHC was legitimized through adherence to a crucial

¹²⁰ An interview of Nufri Lekaj based on documents about his activity in Kosova from 1978 and in the framework of Albanian political emigration in the period 1987 – 2008 (2014) p. 54: <https://www.scribd.com/document/557546433/Politika-Nordike-dhe-Levizja-Popullore-e-Kosoves-LPK>

¹²¹ Ibid: 68-69, 126

¹²² Ibid: 109-117

principle of the Helsinki Declaration: the principle of respect for human rights. Given that Yugoslavia was one of the signatory states, that nation was morally and politically obligated to uphold the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration (1975). Even during the period of 1976–1977, meetings of the CSCE were held in Belgrade, based on the Helsinki Declaration. The Belgrade regime persistently attempted to maintain a false representation of Yugoslavia in the international arena. Among other things, they portrayed Yugoslavia as a state that supposedly, in contrast to authoritarian and totalitarian states in Eastern Europe, adhered to the principle of human rights based on the Helsinki Declaration. In this context, the activity of the KGNHC was also in coordination with the LPK.

Nufri Lekaj - Muriqi, hails from the Muriqi brotherhood family in the village of Koshutan in Rugova (Kosova), tracing his lineage to Gjekë Preni (also known as Gjekë Stanishi - Rugovalia) who had the four sons (Dedë, Lekë, Lucë, and Palë) of the Muriqi brotherhood with whom he led the initial resistance in Rugova against the Ottoman Empire approximately 400 years ago.¹²³ Being a descendant of Lekë Gjeka, Nufri proudly bears the surname Lekaj combined with the surname of the Muriqi brotherhood (Lekmuriqi). The Muriqi brotherhood of the village of Koshutan in the province of Rugova in Kosova has continuously provided important figures behind Albanians' quest for freedom and equality: Sali Jaha, a member of the Albanian League of Prizren; Zhuj Selmani; Kajë Galja; Kadri Bajri; Sak Faslia; Rizë Zymeri; and many others, until the liberation of Kosova in 1999.¹²⁴

Nufri's father, Rexhep, participated in the Kachak Movement in Rugova against the Serbian reinvasion of Kosova. Following the end of the Second World War, to evade imprisonment, he went to the province of Plavë-Guci¹²⁵, where his uncles (descendants of Alush Smajli Hoti) and nephews from the Hakaj family lived.¹²⁶ Here, he married Nufri's mother,

¹²³ Muriqi - Alias Bajraktari 2018: 18-22, 115-122

¹²⁴ Muriqi - Alias Bajraktari 2016: 5 - 30

¹²⁵ Until 1912, the Plavë-Guci region formed part of the Kosova Vilayet within the Ottoman Empire. The region's population was predominantly Albanian. During the Balkan Wars, Plavë-Guci was militarily occupied and subsequently annexed by Montenegro. This annexation was internationally recognized in 1913 through the Treaty of London.

¹²⁶ Muriqi - Alias Bajraktari 2018: 110-114

Hasnije Ferataj, the daughter of Ramë Ferataj, who, along with some of his family members – including An Ferataj and Medi Ferataj – were killed, injured, and persecuted due to their engagement in the self-defence resistance of the Albanian people of Plavë - Guci in 1912 - 1913.¹²⁷ The son of Hasnije's uncle, Mustaf Shala, was the first editor and then editor-in-chief of the first Albanian-language newspaper in Yugoslavia after the Second World War, called *Rilindja*.¹²⁸

In the 1960s, Rexhep returned to Kosova with his family, initially settling in Rugova before later moving to Peja. While attending high school in Peja (Kosova) in 1978, Nufri began demonstrating solidarity with the operations of the revolutionary clandestine Movement of Kosova. In the early 1980s, he was imprisoned by the Yugoslavian regime. After his release, apart from being denied the right to continue his studies at the University of Prishtina, he was the subject of a second indictment brought by the Yugoslavian regime. However, Nufri managed to escape, and at the suggestion of his friends at the LPK, he emigrated to Norway where an organization of Albanian emigration was needed. Thus, around 1987, he was one of the political emigrant leaders of the LPK and the co-founder of the KGNHC, later renamed the Balkan Group within the NHC.¹²⁹ In terms of higher education, Nufri studied electrotechnical engineering in Kosova at the University of Prishtina, where he also participated in the demonstrations in 1981 and was arrested. In Norway, he continued his studies in sociology at the University of Oslo and in journalism at the Norwegian journalist school. At the same time, he gained experience as a co-author of research reports exclusively developed for Norwegian ministries, including an engagement with Amnesty International in London, and as a co-author of a research report on former political prisoners during the totalitarian regime in Albania.¹³⁰ Since the late 1980s, he has served as a certified interpreter in Norway.

¹²⁷ Cana 1996: 174 -177

¹²⁸ Fjalori Enciklopedik i Kosovës / The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Kosova: p.193; <https://www.scribd.com/document/395724819/Fjalori-Enciklopedik-ZERAT-2014-3-4-Fjalesi-534298>

¹²⁹ An interview of Nufri Lekaj based on documents about his activity in Kosova from 1978 and in the framework of Albanian political emigration in the period 1987 – 2008 (2014) p. 61 - 65, 109 - 121, 126 - 127, 261 – 267: <https://www.scribd.com/document/557546433/Politika-Nordike-dhe-Levizja-Popullore-e-Kosoves-LPK>

¹³⁰ Ibid: 66 - 68, 73, 122-127, 245

In the following, some facsimiles of articles published in Norwegian, Serbian and Albanian newspapers in 1987–1991 are presented. Seven of them describe the organization of demonstrations in Oslo and other Scandinavian capitals with the demand of the Kosova Republic and Nufri's appearances in the Norwegian media.

On September 29, 1987, Nufri gave a statement to the Norwegian press that posed a significant challenge to the friendship between Norway and Yugoslavia. Through this statement, Norwegian readers were informed about the use of torture against Albanian political prisoners in Yugoslavia and about the political persecution of Albanians in Yugoslavia. This included the Kosova Albanians' demand for the Republic of Kosova and a historical resumé of the Albanian people as a people of Illyrian origin. As a reaction to this statement, the Yugoslav Embassy in Norway influenced the Norwegian state bodies to question the truth of this statement in the Norwegian press by using the Yugoslav–Norwegian friendship formed during World War II as a tool to achieve this. In particular, this criticism was made by the deputy foreign minister of Norway at the time, Helga Hernes, who, on behalf of the NMFA, declared that the use of torture and violation of rights by the Yugoslav government in Kosova did not occur. In this context, Nufri insisted even more, through the Norwegian media, the veracity of the violence by the Yugoslav regime against Albanians in Yugoslavia. He received public support from Amnesty International in the Norwegian press and from his lawyer, Arild Farstadvoll, which weakened the influence of the propaganda issued by the Yugoslav Embassy in Norway. The Embassy's main goal was that the Norwegian state would deport Nufri. This would allow the Yugoslav authorities to imprison him again. However, Nufri's activity in the media urged the Norwegian Foreign Ministry to reevaluate the authenticity of his statements regarding the violations of Albanians' rights by the Serbo–Yugoslav regime in Kosova. Consequently, Thorvald Stoltenberg, the foreign minister of Norway at that time and an experienced diplomat, corrected his deputy minister, Helga Hernes, in a public statement: "Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg in the newspaper *VG* has corrected the statements of Deputy Foreign Minister Helga Hernes regarding the circumstances in the province of Kosova in Yugoslavia. He clarifies: Of course we cannot rule out the possibility of political persecution in Yugoslavia. I am happy to admit that we have a very special relationship with

[illegible]

Torturoffer KASTEBALL



AV
HARALD BRUG RØYVINKRIG

Tar ikke Norge lenger gi politisk asyl til søkere fra Jugoslavia? Spørsmålet er relevant, mener advokat Arild Førstadvoll, etter at alban-jugoslaven Noufri Lekaj (26) er blitt en «kasteball» mellom Justisdepartementet og Utenriksdepartementet.

I snart to år har Lekaj ventet på en avgjørelse på søknaden om politisk asyl i Norge.

Noufri Lekaj ble internert i den som årene han satt fengslet, da ble politisk asyl søkt i utlandet. I dag har Lekaj fysisk og psykisk skader som følge av torturen.

— Hvis ikke Noufri Lekaj blir kvittert for det som har skjedd, så har jeg på hva som i det hele tatt gjelder. Jeg synes behandlingen av ham som er uakseptabel, og det er grunn til å lure på om det er andre forhold som kan rent juridiske vurderinger som blir sagt til grunn, sier advokat Førstadvoll.

Godt forhold

Norge kjempe og gode forhold til Jugoslavia skriver seg fra de store vennskapet som ble bygget mellom jugoslaviske arbeidere i Norge og nordmenn som hjalp dem under nazistenes okkupasjon. Sentrale norske politikere for fremtiden stor sympati for Jugoslavia.

— Vi er på ville veier om vårt vennskapsforhold til Jugoslavia skal komme i veien for å gi torturoffer politisk asyl, fordi det kunne betynte at i siste de jugoslaviske myndighetene, sier Arild Førstadvoll.

Amnesty International kjenner godt til at Noufri Lekaj og hans kamerat Galip Chalivda ble drept i en fengselsstrafte i Jugoslavia for politisk aktivitet. Galip Chalivda er død i en annen fengselsstrafte i år, og han har også søkt om politisk asyl i Norge. Ingen de to søkerne kommer fra Kosovo-provinsen i den jugoslaviske.

— Vi kan ikke se at det foregår politisk torturing av albanere i Kosovo-provinsen, og vi har heller ikke fått noen indikasjoner på at det forekommer tortur, sier statsadvokat Helga Mørne i Utenriksdepartementet.

— Hvor kommer LID om tortur



FORUNDRETT Advokat Arild Førstadvoll har mistenkt seg at norske myndigheter legger andre forhold enn de juridiske til grunn ved behandlingen av Noufri Lekaj's asylsøknad.

Foto: TROND LØVSTAD

moen om forholdene i Kosovo (s).

— Vi baserer oss på det grunnleggende forhold som vår ambassade i Beograd gjør i denne saken, sier Helga Mørne. Hun vil ikke gå inn på noen enkelttilfeller, og viser til Justisdepartementet, som tar den offisielle avgjørelsen om hvorvidt Noufri Lekaj skal få politisk asyl eller få bli i Norge på humanitært grunnlag.

— For en søker er det ikke forskjell på å få politisk asyl eller bare opphold på humanitært grunnlag. Ko som har fått politisk asyl, har lang fører rettigheter. For Lekaj vil det bety at han kan komme i gang med studier, og få hjelp til å starte seg et skolekurs utad å ha, sier advokat Arild Førstadvoll.

Justisdepartementet kan ikke si noe svar på hva utsett av Noufri Lekaj søknad om politisk asyl vil bli. Saken har de som 40 behandling i over et år, og den har gått i «stillestående» mellom Justisdepartementet og Utenriksdepartementet.

STOLTENBERG KORRIGERER

AV HARALD BERG SÆVEREID OG LAGE STORLØKKEN (foto)



Utenriksminister Thorvald Stoltenberg har overfor VG korrigert uttalelsene fra statssekretær Helga Hernes om forholdene i Kosovo-provinsen i Jugoslavia. — Forholdene her er meget vanskelige, og vi utelukker ikke at det kan forekomme politisk forfølgelse, sier Stoltenberg.

Thorvald Stoltenberg ønsker å presisere at UD ikke beskylder kosovo-albanerne Nufri Lehaj og Gailip Zhilvoda for å fare med løgn. De ble begge fengslet og torturert og har nå søkt politisk asyl i Norge fordi de frykter for sine liv om de blir sendt tilbake til Jugoslavia.

— Men om vi ikke utelukker at politisk forfølgelse fore-

kommer, kan ikke den norske regjering gå ut med en slik påstand uten å kunne dokumentere den. Det har vi ikke kunnet, men dermed er det ikke sagt at det ikke skjer, sier utenriksministeren.

— Gjør den norske regjeringen nok for å finne ut hva kosovo-albanere som har søkt politisk asyl i Norge er utsatt for?

som gjøres i de andre nordiske landene. Nettopp fordi vi ikke utelukker politisk forfølgelse, så har vi individuell behandling av søknadene om oppholdstillatelse i Norge, sier Stoltenberg.

— Det er blitt hevdet at Norges nære og spesielle forhold til Jugoslavia gjør at vi ikke tør gi politisk asyl til jugosla-ver av frykt for å støte de jugoslaviske myndighetene?

vene. Det går an å uttrykke seg presist og direkte til venner. Forholdene i Kosovo er meget innviklet. Der er stor fattigdom og mye politisk uro, og vi har fått oppgitt spesielle tilfeller hvor navngitte mennesker er blitt fengslet. Men hverken Norge eller noen av de andre nordiske landene har kunnet påvise dette, sier utenriksministeren.

Amnesty International rapporterer om fengsling og tortur av kosovo-albanere. Stoler ikke UD på Amnestys opplysninger?

— Vi har stor tillit til Amnestys tall og rapporter. Det er i stor grad Amnestys arbeid vi bygger vårt materiale på.

PRESISERER: — Selvsagt kan vi ikke utelukke at det forekommer politisk forfølgelse i Jugoslavia, men den norske regjering kan ikke påstå noe som ikke har blitt seg dokumentert, sier utenriksminister Thorvald Stoltenberg.

God vilje

— Det skorter ikke på viljen. Vi støtter oss på opplysninger fra offisielle kanaler i Beograd og i Kosovo, på opplysninger fra folk som kjenner området godt, og på arbeidet

Innløst

— Jeg innrømmer gjerne at vi har et meget spesielt forhold til dette landet og nettopp dette gode forholdet bruker vi i våre samtaler med jugosla-

Due to activities in Norway – such as the organization of demonstrations and statements in the Norwegian media against the Belgrade regime – Nufri was threatened in various ways by the Yugoslav Embassy. In one case, he was told, “Don’t play with fire”. This happened after a clash in a debate on Norwegian radio and television between Nufri and a representative of the Yugoslav Embassy. This threat was somehow repeated through the Serbian newspaper *NIN* on April 23, 1989, in the following: “Albanian separatists enjoy a dose of support from Norwegian newsrooms(...), but the other side has also been heard. The January demonstrations (number 4) did not have such a stir among Norwegian journalists(...), they were held on the occasion of the anniversary of the murder of three well-known Albanian intellectuals on January 17th, 1982, in Stuttgart, by the Yugoslav police, convincing passers-by that Germany had become a private hunting ground for the Yugoslav state. The fifth demonstration in the friendly country was massive(...), it had attracted attention with their strength and massiveness. The presentation on

нистарства, незванично се објављивања жељом да се не оживе сећања на некадашње министарство пропаганде и Хитлеровог човека од поверења министра Јосефа Гебелса.

Клајн не имати нимало лак задатак да новој влади обезбеди нови, бољи имидж. Многи, међутим, унапред сумњају у успех ове акције већ и зато што је Клајн такође из ЦСУ, а искуства из ранија два случаја, када представник за штампу није био припадник исте странке као и канцелар, нису били најбоља. Наравно, Клајнов (не)успех понављаће ће зависити од успешности владе, односно од резултата које ће дати Колов „нови поглед“.

Аналитичари последњих неуспеха коалиције на покрајинским изборима тврде да се добар део њихових бирача окренуо крајњим екстремима – и на левици и на десници. Тако се и објављивања да је главна опозициона странка – социјалдемократи, на чијем је челу сада Ханс Јохан Фогел – тек мало профитирала од осипања коалиције.

„ДРУШТВО ДВЕ ТРЕШИНЕ“

Зна се и које се групе становништва у последње време све више окрећу левици, односно „зеленима“ – то су, најчешће, боље стојећи и боље образовани бирачи. Крајњој десници гласове су дали људи са друге стране друштвене лествице – мање образовани, они који не живе у насељу, као и млади. Иза оваквих анализа многи виде и социјалне проблеме.

Све чешће се, наиме, говори о „друштву две трећине“, односно о једној трећини становништва коју чине незапослени, свиранци и сви они који не уживају благодети „друштва изобила“. Трећина становништва од укучно шездесет милиона и није тако мало, па многи управо у овом податку и траже узроке пада популарности владе која је – ако се земља гледа у целини – остварила заиста импресивне економске резултате.

Да ли ће Хелмут Кох са новом владом успети да нађе решење и за многе друге проблеме – политичке, социјалне, еколошке, међународне – који све више оптерећују животне земље стајног привредног просперитета, треће економске силе света, „земља благодана“? Очигледно је да благоданство није више успешна предизборна паролa, то је нешто што се већ само по себи подрива.

Зато су вероватно у праву они који тврде да ће вођа Хришћанско-демократске уније и њен шеф Хелмут Кох морати да понуде много више нових, свежих идеја, јасан правца и визију, неопорни ауторитет руковођа. Да ли ће Хелмут Кох, коме као највеће врлине истичу смиреност, солидност и приврженост традицији, успети да врати поверење бирача?

Многи верују у Колов „нови поглед“. Али, има и немало оних који овет сећају на Харолда Макмилана. Он је, наиме, пре него што је морао да напусти место премијера, такође, извршио велику реконструкцију владе – променио је чак тринаест министара.

Но, можда оваквом историјском пољењу изак нема места.

■ ХАРИ ШТАЈНЕР

НОРВЕШКА

ћошак поларног круга

Албански сепаратисти уживају извесну наклоност норвешких редакција, али се последњих дана чула и друга страна

Традиција је изневерена узнемирењем из увода. Осло није био метропола уобичајеног ускршњег спокоја дан после сагласности Скупштине Косова са Предлогом амандмана на Устав Србије и само неки дан уочи свечаности проглашења новог републичког Устава. Норвешка празнична тишина је нарушена демонстрацијама албанских сепаратиста у познатом знаку покаяња и транспарента против Југославије, непосредније против Србије, најизричитije против Београда, „Београдска полиција мора са Косова“.

Пете демонстрације у пријатељској земљи биле су најмасовније. Југословени албанског порекла, како себе легитимишу у поворици дуго четири стотине демонстрација прошлих су главном улицом Карл Јохан гате, и другом Драмменсвелл, сединтем неколиких дипломатских мисија, до амбасале СФРЈ.

Каменовали су зграду, поделом је неколико помова, гађао се и поштом стигла из Шведске (шведске су биле металне паре). У гомили су били рутинирани крстарећи демонстранти из Данске, Швајцарске, Аустрије. Рутајући се, фућкали су или, како извештава „Аftenposten“, „на крају су одржали концерт змијањања“.

ПАРАТОС ПОД МАСКАМА

Норвешки полицији на лицу места морали су да траже појачање како би обуздали демонстранте, што се раније није дешавало. Подривају се да су демонстрације организоване легално, уз формални параф власти.

Иако у маси већој него икад у норвешкој престоници, неки су се плашили својих погледа на Југославију и себе, па су били сакривених лица. Гротеска слика је имала преминују на демонстрацијама с почетка године када је неколицина била под маскама. Маскенбалски паратос је темниран на „годинињу смрти тројице познатих албанских интелектуалаца које је убила југословенска полиција 17. јануара 1982. године код Штутгарта“ (1), како су убеђивали пролазнике штампаним летком који су делили уз пут – као да је држава Савезна Република Немачка приватно ложиште државе СФРЈ.

Јануарске демонстрације (број 4) нису одјенуле међу норвешким новинарима. Ускршњи случај је скренуо пажњу масовношћу и жешћином. Уследили су од-



ИСКРИВЉЕНА ИСТИНА. ИЛУСТРАЦИЈА ИЗ ЧЛАНКА „БЕС СРБА“ ОБЈАВЉЕН У ДНЕВНИКУ „ДАГБЛАДЕ“ 30. МАРТА 1989.

једи на радију и телевизији, али који правичније сервирају косовску истину и фалсфикат. Помак је вредан уочавања, јер се чула и друга страна.

Други програм Радина смитовао је разложу речи приг секретара амбасале Милорада Ђуровића. Сидефег дана огласио се реалном политиком азијант Нурфри Лека, не саучећи да се понтирао бумерангом кога је „дротиварументом“ јавно вређао југословенског дипломату за кога је рекао да „даже, даже“. Испрве и спонтано реаговао је неколико гастарбјутера, југословени југословенског порекла.

АЗИЛАНТИ

Југословени албанског порекла који се надују азили нису малобројни, али их нема колико их је било. Не бирајући изговоре, мање је приликом из Југославије вапило за останком у Норвешкој 1988. г. (455) него 1987 (1238), али више него 1986. г. (177). Збир белосветских азиланата 1989. у Норвешкој износи 6602. Стрепјећи да не буде праћена кућма, чланска група притиска истрајком главу. Норвешка је на муци, иако је смирила увод странаца.

Југословенски азиљанти су предсметљиво дочекали у редакцијама које нису презале да на целим странцима објаве свакојаке њихове изјаве: и да се албанским мајкама на Косову вале материне како не би рађале и да се за нонетне нечета наје на робљу, и тако даље фалси-

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Nufri was optimistic until the Dayton Conference that the Kosova issue could and should be resolved peacefully with the help of the international community. For this reason, he was highly motivated to contribute in this direction. As co-founder of KGnHC, he had the opportunity as a delegate from the NHC to meet personalities with political influence at international conferences on human rights, such as the founding meeting of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly in Prague

(October 18–21, 1990)¹³¹ and a forum for peace and reconciliation of ex-Yugoslavia in Verona (September 17–20, 1992), which was led by a committee of 13 members chaired by Marijana Grandits (Austria) and Alexander Langer (Member of the European Parliament).¹³² Nufri used informal conversations to provide details about the violations of the rights of Albanians in Yugoslavia and argued that the recognition of the Kosova Republic (declared on July 2, 1990) was the best solution to the serious human rights problem in Yugoslavia, including political stability in the region.

It is worth mentioning that at the founding meeting of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly in Prague (October 18–21, 1990), the sponsor and initiator of this meeting, Vaclav Havel, was, like Czech dissident Jaroslav Shabata, implicitly in favour of the creation of new pan-European structures. This included a pan-European reorganization that would be started through the Citizens' Assembly of Helsinki. Even the KGNHC supported this idea, hoping that Kosova could be factored politically through the concept of human rights, and in that way be decolonized from Serbia, based on the principle of self-determination. Nevertheless, Slovenian Tomazh Mastnak's idea received more support, which meant that the Civic Assembly of Helsinki remained an organization of various non-governmental associations of citizens. In the framework of this meeting, on October 20, a special tribune was held for Kosova, Northern Ireland and Transylvania. In his speech for the tribune, Nufri criticized the approach that dominated the discourse of Western politics where they called for a united and integrated Europe and simultaneously undermined the right to self-determination for Kosova Albanians in Yugoslavia. Nufri described and characterized the hope for a united and integrated Europe, which envisioned including the Balkans and which did not take into account the solution of the Albanian issue in Yugoslavia, as a utopian euphoria. He said that this only replaces the utopian euphoria of socialism from which they had barely emerged and that they dare not be deceived again. This was especially true because, without solving the unsettled

¹³¹ Shkëlzen Maliqi (November 3rd, 1990) *The Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Prague*. Newspaper – Koha, p. 2 – 3

¹³² Newspaper "Appell" of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (1992): *Conclusions from the Verona - Conference*

national issues in Europe – particularly the Albanian issue in Yugoslavia – one could not hope for a united and integrated Europe.

Also present at this meeting was a Kosova delegation headed by Shkëlzen Maliqi, who, in connection with this founding meeting of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly in Prague, which included Nufri's speech, wrote and published an article in the newspaper Koha on November 3, 1990. To illustrate more concretely Nufri's participation in international and domestic conferences, two facsimiles are presented below. The first consists of a text by Shkëlzen Maliqi (3 November 1990) concerning participation in the founding meeting of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly in Prague. The second shows the participation in a session of the Human Rights Forum in Oslo focused on the Balkans/Yugoslavia.



tuaj që ankoi, prej deri dy vjetra, në Prishtinë mbledhja themeluese e Asamblesë Qytetare të Helsinkit (Helsinki Helsinki). Në të njëjtën kohë, më shumë se 700 pjesëmarrës të gjitha vendet e Evropës, nga Shqipëria, Asambleja u konvokua në mbledhjen e parë të Prishtinës së ish-disidentëve të Evropës Lindore, të disa intelektualëve të angazhuar në lirinë dhe demokracinë organizative që mirren me mbrojtjen dhe avancimin e të drejtave të qytetarëve dhe të pakicave të të gjitha gjinorë, emigrantët dhe azilantët, të hendikepuarit, homoseksualët, të krishterët, të krishterët të këtij viti e shpallën Apelin e Pragës 1990 të Qytetarëve të Helsinkit. Porosia Kryesore e këtij apel ishte se të gjithë duhet të kishin kështu, gjegjësisht i sigurishte dhe i bashkëpunim të Evropë, është tejprerë, që të gjithë duhet të duart e qeverive dhe të politikave, të cilet në përvojën dhe vendosjen të tyre janë kufizuar nga obligimet dhe prioritetet nacionale. Asambleja u piramenduar si një forum i përhershëm dhe publik për të diskutuar dhe diskutuar qeveri civile, si dhe i individëve dhe institucioneve që reprezentojnë qytetarët dhe individët në ndryshme qytetare. Në projektin e konvokuesve të Asamblesë thuhet se kapërcim i ndasive në Evropë dhe në të gjithë botën, të vërtetë obligim i qeverive, por i të gjithëve, sidomos shoqërisë civile dhe individëve, është të marrë hëqveprojnë në shoqata, lëvizje, institucione, iniciativa dhe klube të veoranzhuara që synojnë kaq shumë si qytetarët dhe individët.

mimin e raporteve të reja shoqërore dhe të forumeve për dialog dhe negociatë me qeverinë dhe të tjerët, duke përfshirur edhe presionet ndaj institucioneve politike që të zgjidhen çështjet jetike me vetëiniciativë dhe pa përzjerje direkte të pushtetit, dhe, më në fund, që të angazhohen për zhvillimin e sferës së aktiviteteve publike (d.m.th. joshitëtorë dhe joprivate) dhe të opinionit publik evropi-

Vaclav Haveli, njëri nga iniciatorët e këtij forumi dhe sponsor kryesor politik i tij, në hapjen e seancës së parë plenare u deklarua për krijimin e strukturave të reja panevropiane, duke i dalur në krah idete të «shtetësisë evropiane», për të cilën shtet Gorbacëvi, apo konfederatës së Miteranit, pra të një Evropë të re që do të jetë «koazë e paqes».

Organizație qeveritare apo qytetare?

Nisma e Asamblesë, megjithatë, nuk ishte aspak e mbarë. Madije para se ajo të konstituhej si parlament dhe se të paktën të paktën të parë vetë, anëtarët e Këshillit organizativ kishin mosmarrëveshje konceptuale se çfarë duhet të jetë ky forum i qytetarëve të Evropës. Jarosllav Shabata, disidenti i njehur çek, duke vlerësuar ndryshimet në Evropën Lindore, doli me konstatimin se këtu shoqëria civile ka ardhur në pushtet dhe se është futur demokracia. Ndërkëll pohimi reagoi ashpër. Tomazh Mastnak nga Sllovenia, duke thënë se shoqëria civile nuk është

Shaka me se jo nuk mund të identifikohet me shoqërinë ekzistuese, e që më pak me pushtetet dhe strukturën e saj. Në të vërtetë, nënien e një sistemi totalitar dhe zgjedhje të lira nuk janë bërë ndryshime radikale, dhe tashtë të tilla të shprehura në ligje dhe qarta të vendosjes së totalitarizmit të ri nacional (nacionalizant) kundër të tjerëve, të cilët në të vërtetë ndryshe, këtu janë bërë vetëm hapat e parë drejt demokracisë së ri të tërësisht demokratike, duhet dalluar pushtetin nga shoqëria dhe tërësinë e saj. Në të vërtetë, Shabota përparaqet një qëllim të mirë, i cili shpreh idetë që se me tërësi të shoqërisë të zgjedhjeve që thyen sistemin njëpartak dhe tërësinë e demokracisë parlamentare. Më tej, Mastnaku e mohon edhe vullnetin e shoqërisë që të qetësohet në Evropën Lindore.

Prapavija e këtij konflikti kishte të bëjë me dilemat rreth strukturës organizative të AQSH, se a do të përbehet kjo Asamblee vetëm nga individë të cilët janë në fuqi dhe jopolitike (në kuptimin e ngushtë të fjalës) apo edhe nga përfaqësuesit e partive politike, meqë edhe të këta do të jenë në pushtet. Konflikti i dilemës shtrhehej rreth disidentëve të dikurshëm që tani kanë ardhur në pushtet. A duhet përjashtuar ata nga kjo Asamblee? A duhet të kenë vullat ata tashmë për reprezentueskan ideale të ndryshme dhe të kundërtë nga ato kur kanë qenë të ndjerë? A duhet të kenë rëndësi dhe para të luftës për të drat njëri dhe shoqërinë civile?

Shënohet civilizet?
 Analitikisht më të tholla në tendencën e bashkimit të strukturave legale dhe qeverive në këtë Asamblë Qytetare identifikuan tendencën e shndërrimit të kësaj iniciative në një institucion të parë të integritit shtetëror gjithë evropian, gjegjësisht ambiciet e Havelit dhe të Shabotës që Praga të marrë primatin nga Helsinki dhe sidomos nga Brukseli. Kështu, këto qytetarë gradualisht Asamblën Qytetare në Parlamentin e Konfederatës apo Federatës Evropiane e Pragën nën kyeqytet të Evropës...

Megjithatë, kjo polemikë përtundoi me floren e vijnë së Martinak, sepse në këtë tubim kishte pak qeveritarë: AQSH-ja mbeti organizatë e asociacione të ndryshme joqeveritare, qytetarë, forum i përherëshëm me seli në Pragë që do të merret me çështjet e sigurisë dhe të paqes në Evropë, të çarmatimit dhe demilitarizimit, të drejtave të njeriut duke përfshirë këtu edhe të drejtat e pakicave kombëtare, të zhvillimit ekonomik dhe problemeve të ruajtjes së paqes dhe të bashkëpunimit, të zgjidhjes së konflikteve të ndryshme shoqërore e nacionale (naci-

onalizmat e të tjera), të shoqërisë civile dhe të institucionalizimit të proceseve të integritetit të Evropës, të pozitës së femrës, të shtresimit social, të emigrantëve etj.

Ëndrrat dhe ëndrrallat e Evropës

«Ëndrrat janë pjesa esenciale e realitetit» thotë Haveli. Çfarë është realiteti i Evropës dhe çfarë është ëndrra mbi të? Nga fjalët e shumë diskutuesve si në mbledhjet plenare, ashtu edhe në ato të komisioneve dhe nënkomisioneve të shumta, del se ky realitet, megjithatë është më i hidhur se sa duket dhe se ëndrrat mbi Evropën ndeshen me ëndrrallat të shumta. Në Asamblenë e Pragës u qënë pothuajse të gjitha hallat dhe problemet që politika zyrtare nuk i sheh apo i minimizon dhe i zbulon me shifra mashtruese të nyesatave statistikore e që në jetën e përditshme krijojnë atë tablo të zymtë të fatalitetit të shtrësve shoqërorë të marginalizuar. Mbase edhe nuk ka mundur të gjendet vend më i përshatshëm për t'u ambientuar në atë njëkohësi të madhështisë dhe të zymtësisë së Evropës, siç është Praga sot me bukurinë e papërshkrueshme të godinave, të kishave, të pallateve dhe të urave të saja të vjetra dhe me zbrazëtinë e Varshavës e jetës së njerëzve që jetojnë këtu dhe që sillen si fantazma të pashpirta, të ngrysur, me lëvizje rrobotike që të lënë përshpëlljen e kotësisë dhe të anemisë së përgjithshme. Socializmi dhe pushtimi gjakprirës 45-vjeçar sovjetik i Pragës vërtet e shndërron në atë këshqëllo të ankthit nga ëndrrat e këqia letrare të Franc Kafkës, qytet

tat i këtij vendi përallor, ku bukuria e sendeve duket aq e llahtarshme.

Vetë çekët dhe sllovakët ankoheshin: një vit pas revolucionit këtu asgjë esencialisht nuk ka ndryshuar. Po kështu ankoheshin lituanezët, ukrainasit, rumunët, hungarezët, por edhe uelsët, basçët, irlandezët nga Alsteri... Se edhe Evropa Perëndimore nuk është parajsë e demokracisë fuqishme dëshmoi pakistanezja, Roshan Dhunijboi, gazetare dhe regjisore e filmi, duke folur për dekolonizimin e papërfunduar dhe katastrofën psikologjike të qyteteve industriale në Evropë, të getove të zezakëve, të arabëve, të indusëve e të refugjatëve, emigrantëve ekonomikë dhe azilantëve politikë të ndryshëm që asesi nuk mund të integrohen në Evropën dhe asesi nuk mund të bëhen evropianë deri sa dominon mentaliteti racist evropocentrik sipas të cilit këta ardhacakë përgjithmonë mbesin «të huaj».

Kosova, Irlanda veriore, Transilvania

Më 20 tetor në mbledhje u mbajt një tribunë e veçantë kushtuar problemeve të Kosovës, Irlandës Veriore dhe Transilvanisë, ku morën pjesë ndër të tjerët, shkrimtarja e re Nerimanja Kamberi dhe autori i këtij shënimi. Nerimanja prezantoi gjendjen aktuale në Kosovë (shih tekstin në kornizë), e dëgjuesit kërkuar sqarim dhe plotësim rroth rezistencës së padhunshme: si është e mundur një rezistencë e tillë në kushtet e represionit aq të ashpër, dhe a është kjo një gjë e rastit apo

e programuar? Qytetarët e Evropës, aktivistët e lëvizjeve paqësore, shprehin një admirim të thellë ndaj rezistencës së tillë shqiptare. Kjo tribunë e mbledhjes, sikur edhe e gjithë puna e Asamblesë, bari vetëm një inventurë të problemeve dhe përcaktot format e para organizative, dhe kornizat e para të drejtimeve të zhvillimit të punës së këtij forumi të parë të lirisë evropiane, që u quajt edhe institucion i lirisë, sepse, siç u tha jo një herë, edhe liria kërkon institucionet e veta.

Takimi në këtë tubim edhe një shqiptar të arratisur nga Kosova, Nufri Lekaj, azilant në Norvegji, ish i burgosur politik dhe ish – anëtar i lëvizjes marksiste – leniniste, intelektual brilant dhe aktivist i Federatës së Helsinkit për të drejtat e njeriut, i cili po ashtu, duke shikuar gjithë atë turmë të-reprezentëve të marginalëve të Evropës, vërtetoi fjalët e pakistanezës, Roshan Dhunijboi dhe na tha një mendim të nollit – të cilin duhet mbajtur mend: «Gjithë kjo eufori mbi Evropën e bashkuar dhe të integruar më duket si një utopi e re që po e zë vendin e ëndrrës së socializmit nga e cila merr dolum të gjithë! Mos të mashtrohemi edhe nga kjo ëndërr sidomos në shqiptarë!!!»

Po e përfundoj këtë shkrim me një grafit nga një muri i qytetit të vjetër Hradcani, që shpreh po ashtu shqetësim të ngjashme dhe frymën e përgjithshme të kohës dhe ambientit ku u mbajt Asambleja Qytetare: «Porazyt e ne byt porazeny?» (Të ngjadhënesh e të mos jesh i ngadhënyer?).

A është e mundur, pra, të ngadhënjesh Evropën e të mos jesh të ngadhënyer qytetarët e saj?

FRID 47 2 1991

T NORSKE MENNESKERETTIGHETSHUSET

THE NORWEGIAN HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE

Kjære medlemmer og andre interesserte!



Den Norske Helsingforskomité
Solidaritet Norge - Polen
Norsk PEN

Oslo, 26. april 1991

MØTE I MENNESKERETTS FORUM. TEMA: BALKAN. 30/4 KL. 17.30

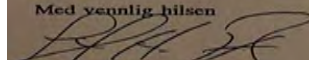
Vi minner om vårt anonserte møte (i nyhetsbrev nr. 2/1991) et møte i Menneskeretts Forum 30. april klokken 17:30. Tema Balkan.

Som innledere om Balkan/Jugoslavia problematikken er professor Svein Mønnesland fra Universitetet i Oslo; Ivan Poljac representant for Kroatisk Forbund Norge; Nufri R. Lekaj fra Den Norske Helsingforskomité Kosovo-gruppen; Halvor Tjønn fra Aftenposten og Stein Ivar Aarsæther styreleder for Det Norske Menneskerettighetshuset som ordstyrer.

Det blir adgang til å kjøpe øl, mineralvann, rødvin og noe å spise.

Alle er hjertelig velkommen til en frisk debatt og sosialt samvær.

Med vennlig hilsen



Sissel H. Føyen
Daglig Leder

In his writings, Nufri posited that the European Community, during the initiation of negotiations to resolve the crisis in Yugoslavia, should include the Republic of Kosova in these negotiations alongside other republics in Yugoslavia. He believed that the exclusion of Albanians from the negotiations risked an armed conflict that could be even more dangerous for peace in the region. In one of his articles published in the NHC's official newspaper *Appell*, no. 2 1991 – in which some of the articles regarding the Kosova issue were translated into English and distributed as part of the information for the IHF – he wrote, “...Recently we have seen many news images from the conflict areas in Yugoslavia with particular emphasis on what is happening in Croatia and Slovenia. In this connection, it is pointed out that the conflict is a threat to security in the area and Europe in general. When it comes to Kosova, we think of what we have previously read and heard: violence, terror and murder, and as Professor Vojin Dimitrijevic from Belgrade recently stated at an open meeting in Oslo: ‘In Kosova, we now have a strong racist attitude from the Serbian side against the Albanians’.

“We get far too little information in the Norwegian media about what is happening in Kosova, because it comes in the shadow of the war in Croatia. The West and especially the EC [European Community] are committed to a peaceful solution to the conflict, but one becomes uncertain about the possibilities of such a solution when one underestimates Albanians and their desire to be present during the negotiations. A peaceful solution to the conflict in Yugoslavia will not succeed if one does not take into account what the Albanians in Kosova today demand, and these are moderate demands. The Albanians demand equality in a ‘New’ Yugoslav Union. The union agreement must secure the union’s borders and form the basis for a common economic market.

“Albanians know today that it is completely impossible to form a state that can unite an entire nation. The ethnic groups in Yugoslavia are determined that they can live in different Yugoslav republics. An agreement, based on international law, is required, which will form the basis for an assurance of the rights of the minorities. As an example, we can refer to the ‘New Constitution of the Republic of Kosova’ which was adopted by the Parliament of Kosova on the 15th of September, 1990, and which is not recognized by the Serbian occupying power in Kosova: ‘Kosova is a

democratic republic consisting of Albanians (90%), Serbs and other (10%) people groups (this has been used instead of minorities), who bear the sovereignty of the republic’.

“It must be pointed out that the Albanians do not demand secession from Yugoslavia and that their struggle has been aimed at independence and equality within the Yugoslav Union. However, this requirement has become a costly requirement for Kosova and the Albanians in the last 10 years. A few hundred have been killed during demonstrations and public meetings, several hundred have been injured and thousands have been imprisoned on political grounds and detained. About 100,000 have been dismissed from their positions on political grounds (postal service, judiciary, administration, health care, police, university, school service, etc.). In these positions, only Serbian colonialists now receive twice as much salary as when there were Kosova Albanians in these positions. (...).

“After an effort from the West, the Albanians again began to hope for a better future. The Council of Europe has condemned Serbia for gross violations of human rights in Kosova. The Congress in the USA and many others have done the same, both political parties and human rights organizations. The Albanians with their democratic leadership and the ‘Gandhi of the Albanians’, Ibrahim Rugova, have earned a lot on the political line against the harsh Serbian repression. Regardless of the provocations from the Serbian side in Kosova, no Serb has been harmed or wounded by the Albanians. This shows the type of conflict one is dealing with here: a pure liberation struggle by democratic means against a colonial power.

“The hope that the Albanians have had in relation to Europe and the world community at large has now begun to fade. The EC has summoned all the Yugoslav republics to negotiations in The Hague, but they forgot to summon the seventh Yugoslav republic, republic of Kosova (...). If the Albanians continue to get excluded, they may be forced into, what we must all try to prevent, an armed conflict with the Serbian colonial power. This in turn could lead to Albania intervening to stop the slaughter of the Albanians in Kosova (what military technology Serbia possesses is shown through their export of weapons to Iraq). It is obvious that such a development is not desired in the Balkans. It is therefore very important

for all parties at the negotiating table to not forget the Albanians who are willing to cooperate and want to participate in negotiations”.

The following is a facsimile of this article:

APPELL

Utgitt av Den Norske Helsingforskomité

APPELL NR. 2 1991

Kosovo og albanerne glemt av Europa

Av Nufri R. Lekaj

Den siste tiden har vi sett mange nyhetsbilder fra konfliktområdene i Jugoslavia med spesiell vekt på det som skjer i Kroatia og Slovenia. I den forbindelse påpekes det at konflikten er en trussel mot sikkerheten i området og Europa forevrig.

Når det gjelder Kosovo tenker vi på det vi tidligere har lest og hørt: vold, terror og drap, og som professor Vojin Dimitrijevic fra Beograd nylig utalte på et åpent møte i Oslo: «I Kosovo har vi nå en sterk rasistisk holdning fra serbisk side mot albanerne». Vi får allfor lite informasjon i norske media om hva skjer i Kosovo, fordi det kommer i skyggen av krigen i Kroatia. Vesten og særlig EF er engasjert for en fredelig løsning av konflikten, men man blir usikker på mulighetene til en slik løsning når man undervurderer albanerne og deres ønske om å være tilstede under forhandlingene. En fredelig løsning på konflikten i Jugoslavia vil ikke lykkes hvis man ikke tar hensyn til det albanerne i Kosovo dag krever, og dette er modererte krav. Albanerne vil at Jugoslavia skal bevare innenfor dagens grenser og omorganiseres til å bli en løs union av suverene stater med selvstendig utenriks- og innenrikspolitikk. Albanerne krever likestilling i en «Ny» jugoslaviske Union.

Unionsavtalen skal sikre unionens grenser og danne grunnlag for et felles økonomisk marked. Albanerne vet idag at det er helt umulig å danne en stat som

kan samle en hel nasjon. Folkegruppen i Jugoslavia er innstilt på at de kan få leve i forskjellige jugoslaviske republikker. Det forutsettes en avtale, med hjemmel i internasjonal lov, som skal danne grunnlaget for en forsikring om minoritetenes rettigheter.

Som eksempel kan det refereres til «Den nye Kosovo republikkens grunnlov» som ble vedtatt av parlamentet i Kosovo den 15.09.90 og som ikke er anerkjent av den serbiske okkupasjonsmakten i Kosovo. «Kosovo er en demokratisk republikk bestående av albanere (90%), serbere og andre (10%) folkegrupper (man har benyttet dette isteden for minoriteter) som bærer republikkens suverenitet». Det må påpekes at albanerne aldri har krevd løsrivelse fra Jugoslavia og at deres kamp har vært rettet mot selvstendighet og likestilling innenfor den jugoslaviske union. Dette kravet har imidlertid blitt en kostbart krav for Kosovo og albanerne de siste 10 år. Noen hundre har blitt drept under demonstrasjoner og folkeskatter, flere hundre har blitt skåret og tusenvis har blitt fengslet på politisk grunnlag og internett. Ca. 100 000 har blitt oppsøgt fra sine stillinger på politisk grunnlag (postverket, rettsvesen, administrasjon, helsevesen, politi, universitet, skoleverket osv.) I disse stillingene er det nå bare serbiske kolonialister som mottar dobbelt så stor lønn som da det var kosovo-albanere i disse stillingene. Kosovo er idag et «autonomt område» som

okkuperes av en kolonimakt med navnet «Den Serbiske stat». Kosovo og albanerne har blitt ekskludert av andre republikker i Jugoslavia i de resultatene forhandlingene om en løsning av konflikten i Kosovo. Albanerne har forstått denne holdningen fra de andre jugoslaviske republikkene (alle av slaviske opprinnelse) slik at de ikke er villige til å ha albanerne i et nytt Jugoslavia og at disse skal etterlates i en serbisk koloni på Balkan. Etter en innsett fra Vesten begynte albanerne igjen å hlpe på en bedre fremtid. Europarådet har fordømt Serbia for grove brudd på menneskerettighetene i Kosovo. Det samme har Kongressen i USA og mange andre, såvel politiske partier som menneskerettighetsorganisasjoner. Albanerne med sin demokratiske ledelse og «albanernes Ghandi» professor Ibrahim Rugova har tjent mye på den politiske linje mot det harde serbiske undertrykkelsesapparatet.

Uansett provokasjonene fra serbisk side i Kosovo har ingen serber blitt skadet eller skåret av albanerne. Dette viser hvilken type konflikt man har å gjøre med her: en ren frigjøringskamp med demokratiske midler mot en kolonimakt. Det hlp som albanerne har hatt i forhold til Europa og verdenssamfunnet forøvrig har nå begynt å svinne. EF har innkalt alle de jugoslaviske republikkene til forhandlinger i Haag, men de glemt å innkalle den syvende jugoslaviske republikken Kosovo. Hvorfor?

Skal Kosovo ofres for serbiske og kroatisk interesse? Skal Europa forsøke å gjenta London- og Versailles-avtalen om Jugoslavia, og igjen ofre albanerne for Serbia?

Denne neglisjeringen av albanerne i Jugoslavia viser at EF forbereder en ny avtale om Jugoslavia uten å ivareta albanernes interesser. I London og Versailles var dette dengang lettere å gjøre. Men nå når situasjonen er en helt annen i et Europa hvor demokrati og frihet er de mest elskede ord for undertrykte nasjoner, blir det vanskelig for en hvilken som helst stat eller EF å neglisjere de enkelte folkegruppers skiebne. Ikke minst når det gjelder albanerne er dette et farlig spill. Man skal ikke glemme at albanerne er det tredje største folkeslag i Jugoslavia (3 millioner). Det er like mange som hele befolkningen i Albania. Hvis man setter albanerne utenfor kan de bli tvunget til, hva vi alle må forsøke å forhindre, en væpnet konflikt med den serbiske kolonimakten. Dette kan igjen føre til at Albania griper inn for å stanse nedslaktningen av albanerne i Kosovo (Hvilken militærteknologi Serbia besitter vises ikke minst gjennom deres eksport av våpen til Irak). Det er innlysende at man ikke ønsker en slik utvikling på Balkan. Det er derfor meget viktig for alle parter ved forhandlingsbordet å ikke glemme albanerne som er samarbeidsvillige og ønsker å delta i forhandlinger.

Borgerkrigens glemte politiske fanger

Mens Europa glemt å innkalle albanerne til forhandlingsbordet i Haag, har jugoslaviske myndigheter glemt sitt lefte overfor Vesten om å løslate alle politiske fanger i Jugoslavia. Det viser seg at det fremdeles sitter rundt 50 politiske fanger, alle albanere, i serbiske- og makedonske fengsler. De har blitt dømt for å ha deltatt i demonstrasjoner mot de serbiske myndigheter eller være medlemmer av forbudte albanske

organisasjoner. De albanske samvittighetsfangerne har blitt arrestert i tiderommet fra 1982 og fram til idag. Mange er dømt til høye straffer. Et eksempel er Rafi Halili skiebne, den ca. 40 år gamle læreren fra Tetova i Makedonia som først ble dømt til 10 års fengsel i 1971 for «verbal propaganda» og deretter til 15 år i 1982 for forsøk på å organisere en illegal politisk opposisjon. De politiske fangerne soner lange straffer. Gjennom-

snittstraffen er på 6 år. Albanske menneskerettighetsforkjempere i Kosovo og Makedonia frykter idag for livet til de politiske fangene. Flere av dem har den siste tiden blitt truet på livet i serbiske fengsler.

Disse politiske fangene soner dommer på 10 år eller mer:

Riza Xhaxhi (20), Abdylxhemali Alimani (20), Rifat Kafexholla (15), Shagrir Ruanhi

(15), Nuh Bunjaku (15), Rafi Halili (15), Adil Arifi (15), Sadik Jashari (14), Emin Krasniqi (14), Muslim Dobruna (14), Pazait Aliu (13), Afrim Mehmeti (13), Nahit Thaqi (13), Hoxhi Seritili (11), Xhavit Marjai (11), Nazim Krasniqi (10), Avdi Lajci (10), Riza Zeciripi (10).

In addition to being one of the political emigrant leaders of the LPK and responsible for the KGNHC, Nufri served as a representative and spokesperson for the Albanian Association in Norway (AAN). The following is a letter from February 1991, sent to the representative of AAN from the Royal Secretariat, which reads, "Their Majesties, the King and Queen, have given me the task of thanking you for your participation and friendly attention during the funeral of His Majesty, King Olav. Best regards, Carl-Erik Grimstad".

H. M. Kongens Kabinettsssekretariat

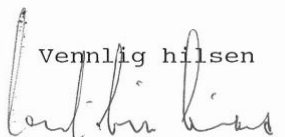
Det Kgl. Slott, Oslo

Februar 1991

Albansk Riksforbund i Norge
v/Nufri Lekaj
Enerhauggaten 3
0651 OSLO 6

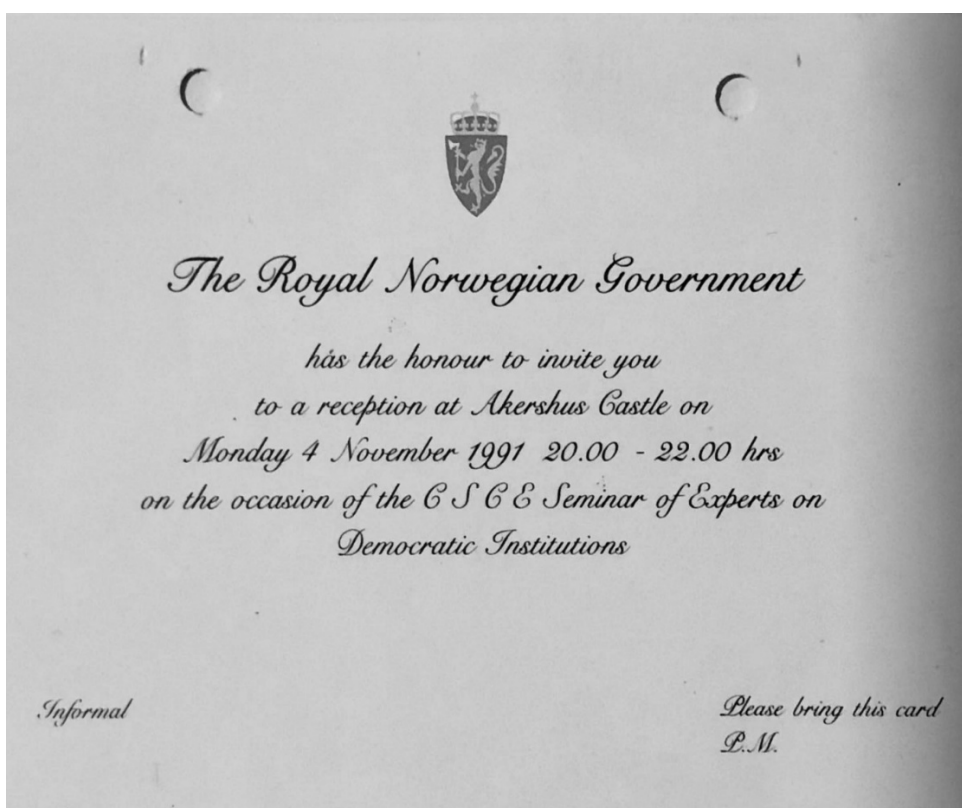
DD.MM. Kongen og Dronningen har gitt
meg i oppdrag å takke for vennlig
deltakelse og oppmerksomhet ved
H.M. Kong Olavs bortgang.

Vennlig hilsen



Carl-Erik Grimstad

In the realm of human rights activities, Nufri also gained recognition when, in November 1991, at the invitation of the NHC, he and his collaborator, Ole Drolsum, were invited to a solemn dinner at Akershus Fortress, Oslo, hosted by the former Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The dinner was also attended by a significant number of international experts, where the Prime Minister wanted to share her gratitude to them, for their collective contributions to human rights and democratic institutions at a global level. The following is a facsimile of the invitation to this event, from the Royal Norwegian Government:



Upon Backer's initiative, the KGNHC, established in 1988, continued its activity as the Balkan Group within the NHC (BGNHC). They did this to ensure that the information and activity of this group would not be completely prejudged as subjective to Kosova but would be as accessible, convincing and acceptable as possible for the chancellors' offices in

Western countries. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that, around 1990, the BGNHC managed to hold an official status in the framework of the NHC and the IHF. In other words, the NHC, as an integral part of the Helsinki Federation, supported the activity for human rights in Kosova through the BGNHC, as it previously supported activity of the Polish Solidarity movement. One of the dissidents of the Polish Solidarity movement, Aleksander Gleichgewicht, was even employed by the NHC.¹³³

The BGNHC gradually reached an understanding within the NHC, as a semi-state organization, about the following demand: “A Kosova Republic is the best solution to the serious human rights problems in Yugoslavia”. Thereafter, it continuously lobbied for an understanding of this request within the Helsinki Federation. Later, this request also resulted as the official position of the NHC. Accordingly, at the annual meeting of the NHC, held in the building of the Norwegian Parliament on March 19, 1991, NHC Secretary General Bjørn Catto Funnemark publicly proposed as one of the advisory points of Norwegian foreign policy the following: “A Kosova Republic is the best solution to the serious human rights problems in Yugoslavia”. This amendment by a semi-state organization, which was approved unanimously, was important, being perhaps the first case when proposals for political solutions were made.

Following are three facsimiles of documents. One is a list of the names and addresses of the leaders of the KGNHC, then called the BGNHC, alongside those of some members of the board and leadership of the NHC, who jointly supported the activities of the NHC for Kosova. The BGNHC also had other internal supporters and collaborators who are not on this list, such as Aage Borchgrevink, and also other external supporters and collaborators, such as Shkëlzen Kukleci.¹³⁴ The second facsimile is the information in the Kosova Albanian media regarding the official position of the NHC that was one of the advisory points of the Norwegian foreign

¹³³Inlandsarkiva (Maihaugen), biographical profile of Aleksander Gleichgewicht, online exhibition, <https://www.opam.no/nettutstillingen/polen/no/1970-1990/gleichgewicht>

¹³⁴ Shkëlzen Kukleci was one of the earliest Albanian friends of Berit Backer, who lived with Shkëlzen Kukleci's family in Kosova, in the early 70s, during the period of her studies on Albanians, in the field of social anthropology. Some other external supporters of KGNHC, residing in Norway, have been Ali Aliu, Hajrie Aliu, Isa Thaçi, Blerim Rexhepi, Jashar Etemaj, Afet Ismajli, Gëzim Haklaj, Anila Hyka, Anila Nani, Rrahim Përçuku, Qani Dehari, Jonuz Emini, etc.

policy: "A Kosova Republic is the best solution to the serious human rights problems in Yugoslavia". The third facsimile proves that, from 1990, the KGNHC managed to have an official status within the NHC, renamed as the Balkan Group within the NHC (BGNHC). At the same time, this facsimile document proves that the additional project of the BGNHC, known as ANA, had official status as an integral part of the NHC, directly supported by the NMFA.

Adresse liste for Kosovo-gruppen

Pp

Navn	Adresse	Telefon
Berit Backer	Baldersgt. 1 A 0263 Oslo 2	P.449447 A.530890 F.449579
Kristoffer Gjøtterud	Jacob Aallsgt. 45 A 0364 Oslo 3	P.699715 A.456457 F.456422
Nufri R. Lekaj	Enerhauggt. 3 0651 Oslo 6	P.572977 P. Søker. 096 90022
Tore Lindholm	Institutt for Menneskerettigheter St. Olavsgt. 29 0166 Oslo 1	P.146262 A.111052 F.364801
Pål Haugland	Grev Wedels plass 4 0151 Oslo 1	P.299087 A.335815 F.335819
Svein Mønnesland	Univeritetet i Oslo p.b. 1028 Blindern 0315 Oslo 3	P.461571 A.456351 F.454310
Aleksander Gleichgewicht	Stasjonsveien 43 0385 Oslo 3	P.140669 F.570088
*****	*****	*****
*****	*****	*****
Stein-Ivar Aarsæther	Fagerborggt. 40 A N - 0360 Oslo 3	P.606709 A.363500 F.363509 P. Søker 096 76725
Bjørn Cato Funnemark	Ludvig Karstensvei 11 1064 Oslo 10	P.326334 A.570070 F.570088
Jaroslav Pawlak	Elgtråkket 7 C 2014 Blystadlia	P.326334 A.570070 F.570088

ENKAS PËR «SHKËNDIJËN»

NORVEGJIA FILLON TË REAGOJË

Populli shqiptar në Jugosllavi publikisht dhe juridikisht bëri deklarimin e vet rreth zgjedhjes së fatit të vet, zgjedhje që në mënyrë paqësore dhe njerëzore u kurorëzua me shpalljen e Kosovës shtet të pavarur në kuadër të federatës apo konfederatës jugosllave.

Këtë vendim historik të shpalljes juridike të shtetit të dytë shqiptar, politika serbe shpejt e shpalli jo të ligjshëm, sepse qenka bër në ilegalitet, por ato vendime historike bota i regjistroi me një interesim të madh dhe me simpati ndaj luftës paqësore të popullit shqiptar në Jugosllavi. Si rezultat i kësaj ishin shumë deklarata e rezoluta nga të gjitha anët e botes.

E tillë ishte Rezoluta e miratuar më 19 mars 1991 në Oslo të Norvegjisë prej anës të KOMITETIT KOMBËTAR NORVEGJEZ TË FEDERATËS SË HELSINKUT — për të drejtat dhe liritë e njeriut.

Kongresi KKNH u mbajt në sallën e plotë të Parlamentit Norvegjez (Stortinget). Për të treguar për rëndësinë e këtij vendimi duhet shpjeguar se çfarë roli luan KKNH në relacion me politikën e jashtme të Norvegjisë në përgjithësi e në fushën e të drejtave të njeriut në veçanti të cilat shikohen përmes prizmit të Marrëveshjes së Helsinkit, që në realitet është një akt politik dhe çdo shtet që bie nën thumbin e kritikës të KKNH vëhet për refleksin e politikës norvegjeze ndaj atij shteti (kush-tuta Norvegjeze ndërtohet në tri themele kryesore e njëri ndër to është e drejta dhe liria e plotë e njeriut). Në anën tjetër, KKNH në radhët e veta ka personalitete të rëndësishme politike (P.sh Reulf Steen, nënkryetar i partisë në pushtet Arbeiderpartiet) që është zgjedhur kryetar këshilli të KKNH-s, njerëz nga jeta kulturore, e humanistë të njohur që deri dje kanë qenë në Komitetin për dhënien e Çmimit Nobël për paqe.

Prandaj, rezoluta e miratuar është një vendim dmth. si fillim i reagimit zyrtar të shtetit norvegjez në lidhje me Republikën e Kosovës.

Për ta bërë të njohur këtë rezo-

lutë po e shënojmë të përkthyer nga norvegjishtja:

«IV rezolutat

JUGOSLLAVIA/KOSOVA: Kongresi i KKNH-së kërkon që të gjithë të burgosurit politikë të lirohen menjëherë. Tani gjenden më shumë se 100 të burgosur politikë në Jugosllavi — që të gjithë shqiptarë nga Kosova.

Kongresi i KKNH kërkon nga Qeveria (norvegjeze) ta diskutojë këtë dhe shkeljet e tjera të rënda të njeriut në mënyrë direkte me pushtetin në Beograd. Kongresi posaçërisht veçon sjelljen e gjendjes së urisë të shqiptarët në Kosovë dhe mbylljen e shkollave dhe të universitetit në gjuhën shqipe.

Kongresi i KKNH-së mendon se shqiptarëve duhet t'u jepen të drejta të barabarta si popujve të tjerë në Jugosllavi. KKNH mendon se ky është kusht i domosdoshëm, i cili do të sjellë deri zbutjen e situatës në vend. Kongresi i KKNH-së mendon se kërkesa për Republikën e Kosovës në kuadër të federatës apo konfederatës jugosllave është një kërkesë e drejtë, e cila do ta zbutë situatën e tendosur në Jugosllavi».

Nga kjo Rezolutë shihet se Evropa përkrah ngadalë kërkesat tona dhe ngadalë ia paguan borxhet e veta popullit shqiptar. Mirëpo, ne duhet të përgatitemi mirë që të jemi ata të cilët kurorëzojnë fitoret e bota duhet t'i përkrahë, sepse ne jemi ata që duhet përkrahur, se bëjmë luftë paqësore dhe të drejtë. Kushti kryesor për t'ia dalë punës në fund është vendosmëria jonë për të shkuar më tutje dhe jetësuar vendimet e Kaçanikut. Posaçërisht kjo vendosmëri na duhet tani kur si shumë herë më parë fatin e Jugosllavisë e vendosin serbët dhe kroatët, por tani s'ka vendim që do të jetë koherent pa dëshirën e popullit shqiptar. Këtë e ka kuptuar bota e shpresojmë se do ta kuptojnë edhe serbët e kroatët.

Nufri R. LEKAJ
Oslo, Norvegji



Den Norske Helsingforskomité

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee
Member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

Oslo, January 2000

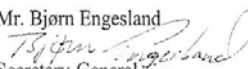
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Mr. Nufri Lekaj worked with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in the period from 1990 to 1994, as a project-coordinator, establishing the so-called Action Norway-Albania, together with Ms. Berit Backer. In their work they succeeded in establishing a rehabilitation-center for victims of torture in Tirana, made a survey of living-standard among former political prisoners, organized humanitarian assistance, and established human rights education. The human rights education project later developed into the Albanian Human Rights Education Center in Tirana.

Mr. Nufri Lekaj was for a period responsible for the Balkan-group within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, which established the basis for the later human rights engagement of the Committee in the Balkan area. During the period Mr. Nufri Lekaj worked for the Committee, he traveled extensively within the Balkan area, including up to 4 months every year in Albania.

In 1994 did Mr. Nufri Lekaj leave his position within the Committee to start studies at the Norwegian School of Journalism.

We strongly appreciate the work Mr. Nufri Lekaj did within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. The work of Mr. Nufri Lekaj was always done according to the highest standards and he showed a remarkable high quality of understanding concerning the Balkan situation.

Mr. Bjørn Engesland

Secretary-General
Norwegian Helsinki Committee

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THE CONTEXT OF THE TRAGIC DEATH OF BERIT BACKER JUST BEFORE THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE DAYTON CONFERENCE

Backer enjoyed great respect and trust among the Albanian political elite of Kosova. Consequently, she was the only adviser who could ensure the proper coordination between the two main political forces of the Kosova Albanians, namely, the LPK, which was headed by its spiritual leader, Demaçi, and the LDK, which was headed by its spiritual leader, Rugova. This coordination between the LPK and the LDK was seen as a significant danger by the Serbian–Yugoslav State Security Service (UDB) because it strengthened the Kosova Albanians' fight for the liberation of Kosova. This was also the reason why Backer was banned from entering Yugoslavia in February 1990.

In fact, Backer, being previously identified as an associate of the LPK, was also identified as a coordinator between the LPK and the LDK. This happened after the organization of the first official visit of the Kosova delegation, led by Rugova, to the Western countries. The visit took place on February 14–18, 1990, starting from Oslo. Moreover, this visit coincided with one of the LPK demonstrations in Oslo on February 17, 1990, where repeated indignation was expressed against the Yugoslav government for the violence against Albanians in Yugoslavia alongside the demand for the Republic of Kosova. Regarding this visit, one of the members of the delegation, Shkëlzen Maliqi, was interviewed by the Klan Kosova television station on January 18, 2022. Maliqi said he noticed UDB surveillance during the first official visit of the Kosova delegation, led by Rugova; he added that he and Rugova were stopped upon their return to Yugoslavia, with Rugova held and interrogated longer than Maliqi himself.¹³⁵ This UDB threat to Rugova was made to prevent any cooperation between the LDK and the LPK, since the Serbian regime did not assign legal status to the LPK as it did for other Albanian political parties in Kosova after the Berlin Wall fell. The Serbian regime continued to imprison and torture not only the leaders and activists of the LPK but also ordinary members of the movement, sentencing them to long prison terms.

¹³⁵ Shkëlzen Maliqi's interview for the television "Klan Kosova", on the 18th of January, 2022: https://youtu.be/Sbn_tAwjTLc

[illegible]

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Backer did not stop supporting Kosova and Albania, which she loved so much, until her tragic death in 1993, when official news sources reported that she was killed by a person with a psychotic disorder. Specifically, she was killed by a mentally ill person of Albanian origin, who was manipulated and used by the UDB. They had previously banned Backer from entering Yugoslavia while at the same time trying to portray her through sophisticated propaganda as a spy and an anti-Albanian person.

Backer's collaborators both inside and outside of Norway, and all those who knew her personally and were aware of her essential role – as well as all Albanians who were more or less aware of her important role in the 1980s and early 1990s – were deeply shocked and affected by her death. In other words, her killing was severe, because in addition to the violation of Albanian traditions regarding the murder of a woman, Albanians lost a dedicated and important idealist and friend to Kosova and Albania. Moreover, her murder was an attempt to sabotage the Kosova issue in the eyes of Western countries, meaning that the UDB's sophisticated propaganda sought to misuse her death to distort the perception of Kosova Albanians in the view of other nations. Although this brutal killing unavoidably resulted in the distortion of the image of Albanians, the important takeaway was that Albanians managed to respond appropriately, by turning out in massive numbers for Backer's funeral. A particular presence of the Albanian diaspora in Norway was noticed.

Among Backer's many collaborators both inside and outside of Norway who attended her funeral were the close collaborators from Kosova, Demaçi and Gazmend Pula, and Ibrahim Kelmendi, one of the founders of the LPK. During a specific period, Kelmendi was appointed by LPK as the responsible for contacts with foreign authorities and organizations. Bardhyl Kokalari, the Albanian ambassador for Sweden, was also present, while other dignitaries sent telegrams of condolences, including Albanian President Sali Berisha. Kosova President Rugova requested that a declaration be made on his behalf through the NHC in the Norwegian media to publicly express his condolences to the Norwegian people.

That Backer was a friend of all Albanians was confirmed in many ways, as indicated by these words from a letter of condolence on March 9, 1993,

to the NHC from Milaim Pejsi, chairman of the Democratic Forum for Human Rights in Gostivar/Macedonia: “Her death is such a loss for the cause of human rights that we feel we have lost one of the great crusaders for humanity”.¹³⁶

In her letter of condolence regarding Becker’s tragic death, Yadjia Zeltman, director– representative of the IHF, wrote inter alia, “Her unrelenting work and dedication to the cause of the Albanian communities fostered greater understanding for the needs of those communities, especially those in Kosovo, and the need for a greater involvement of the international community in the defence of their basic human rights”.¹³⁷ The Swedish ambassador to Yugoslavia and Albania in 1987–1992, Jan Af Sillén, published the following about Backer’s tragic death in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* in March 1993:



Berit Backer

Det är med djup bestörtning som jag och min fru mottar budet om att Berit Backer mördats av en kosovoalban.

Ingen i Norden har förmodligen gjort mer än Berit Backer för att sätta sig in och förklara albanernas situation. Hon var en mycket kompetent forskare om det albanska folket och en välinformerad och objektiv iakttagare av situationen på Balkan, särskilt i Albanien och Kosovo.

Jag har träffat henne åtskilliga gånger under de senaste åren i framförallt Albanien, och ofta kunnat dra nytta av hennes djupa insikter om det politiska och ekonomiska läget där. Jag har ibland också haft tillfälle att läsa hennes intressanta analyser.

För mig, min fru och andra kolleger som kom i kontakt med henne, var hon en härlig människa – modig, kunnig, öppen och vänlig.

Med Berit Backers bortgång har de nordiska staterna förlorat en forskare och observatör om den albanska situationen som vi inte kan ersätta utan vidare.

Hon gick bort i en tid när hennes kunskaper behövdes mer än någonsin.

Våra tankar går till dem som stod Berit Backer nära och de många albaner i Albanien och Kosovo som nu måste uppröpas över illdådet och sörja en nära vän och insiktsfull hjälpare.

JAN AF SILLÉN
Sveriges ambassadör i
Jugoslavien och Albanien
1987–92.

¹³⁶ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*. Introduction of the book; Behind the Stone Walls...: 2003: p. 7, 12; Letter of condolence to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, from the president of the Democratic Forum for Human Rights in Gostivar – Macedonia; Milaim Pejsi, 9th of March 1993.

¹³⁷ Ibid: Letter of condolence from the director - representative of the International Helsinki Federation, Yadjia Zeltman, to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, dated 9th of March 1993.

Berit Backer

With deep sorrow my wife and I received the news on the killing of Berit Backer by an Albanian from Kosovo.

No one from the Nordic Countries has done more than Berit Backer to recognize and explain the Albanians' situation. She was a very competent scientist for the Albanian people and a well-informed and objective observer of the Balkan situation, especially in Albania and Kosovo.

I met her several times in recent years on her way to Albania and I often had the opportunity to benefit from her in-depth knowledge on the political and economic situation there. I also had the chance to read her interesting analysis.

She was an incredible, brave, agile, open-minded and friendly person to my wife and I, as well as to other colleagues that were in contact with her.

With the death of Berit Backer, the Nordic Countries lost an irreplaceable observer of the Albanians' situation.

She left when her knowledge was needed more than ever.

Our thoughts are with all those who were close to Berit Backer and with many Albanians in Albania and Kosovo who are affected by her tragic death and are grieving the loss of an irreplaceable friend and supporter.

JAN AF SILLÉN,

Swedish ambassador to Yugoslavia and Albania, 1987–1992.

This photo published in *Aftenposten* depicts Adem Demaçi, Gazmend Pula, Nufri Lekaj, Shkëlzen Kukleci, Qani Dehari and Musa Ramadani carrying Berit Backer's casket.

The LPK condemned Backer's murder through a declaration, and the president of Kosova, Rugova, did so as well through a message in the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*. The following are a copy of the declaration of the LPK and a copy of the article:

LAJMËRIM

Me keqardhje të madhe e morëm lajmin mbi vrasjen e Berit Backerit, aktiviste e shquar për të drejtat e njeriut pranë Komitetit të Helsinkit dhe mikesh e popullit shqiptar.

Barit Backer ishte një ndër figurat e shquara norvegjeze e cila e kuptoi drejt çështjen shqiptare dhe u angazhua me forcë për internacionalizimin e saj. Atëherë kur më së tepërmi populli ynë kishte nevojë për miq, ishte Berit Backeri e cila iu gjend popullit tonë për parashtrimin real të gjendjes në Kosovë. Pikërisht për këtë, vrasja e Berit Backerit përveçse është një akt kriminal, njëherit është edhe një atentat mbi çështjen shqiptare në opinionin evropian!

Armiqtë e kombit tonë, ata që na mbajnë të pushtuar dhe veglat e tyre, do të propagandojnë te opinionin i huaj se kështu i «shpërblejnë» shqiptarët miqtë e tyre, ata që i dalin krah popullit shqiptar! Ne e dimë se kjo nuk është e vërtetë. Populli shqiptar i ka nderuar dhe respektuar në mënyrë të veçantë miqtë që e kanë ndihmuar atë.

Por ja si ndodhi! Një shqiptar (sipas informatave të pavërtetuara deri më tash - i sëmurë psikik) vrau një veprimtare të shquar për çështjen tonë kombëtare! A u bë kjo nga marrëzia, nga interesat e ngushta egoiste apo të shtyrë nga pushtuesit, në fund të fundit, kjo pak çon peshë. Fatkeqësia është aty se dyfish u dëmtua çështja jonë: *së pari*, humbëm një përkrahëse të zellshme të çështjes sonë dhe një mikeshë të mirë që zor e kemi ta gjejmë një tjetër si ajo, dhe *së dyti*, kjo ka lënë përshtypje aq të keqe te opinionin i huaj dhe veçanërisht te opinionin norvegjez, i ka indinjuar ata pa masë, sa çështja jonë në këtë opinion do të pritët me akullsi!

Ditën e mërkurë, më 17 mars 1993, në ora 11.00 do të bëhet varrimi i së ndjerës Berit Backer në Oslo. Shkuarje për t'i bërë homazhin e fundit Berit Backerit për shqiptarët kudoqofshin dhe në mënyrë të veçantë për shqiptarët në Skandinavi është një **OBLIGIM MORAL**. Masoviteti ynë sa më i madh është mirënjohja jonë më e thellë për Berit Backerin si mikesh e popullit tonë dhe kështu, njëherit, do të diferencoheshim dhe do ta dënonim aktin kriminal dhe vetë kriminelin shqiptar para opinionit norvegjez!

PJESËMARRJA NË VARRIMIN E BERIT BACKERIT ËSHTË NJË KONTRIBUT I MADH PËR TË TREGUAR RESPEKTIN E POPULLIT TONË NDAJ SË NDJERËS!

- Lavdi Jetës dhe Veprës së Berit Backerit!
- I përjetshëm qoftë kujtimi për Të!

Lëvizja Popullore e Republikës së Kosovës

Telegramet e ngushëllimit Komitetit të Helsinkit në Oslo mund t'i drejtohen në këtë telefaks: (0047) 22 - 57 00 88 (në Oslo).

Komititi të Helsinkit mund t'i drejtoheni edhe gojarisht (në shqip) përmes telefonit (0047) - 22 - 57 00 70.

Kosovos president beklager drapet

- Jeg kan ikke forstå at en person med albansk blod i årene kan drepe et menneske som Berit Backer, sa den kosovoalbanske presidenten Ibrahim

Berit Backer var en av de viktigste ambassadørene i Vesten for både Albania og de to millioner albanerne i Kosovo.

Hun var nær venn både av den albanske presidenten Sali Berisha, og av pre-

sidenten for den provisoriske regjeringen i Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova.

Også den albanske forfatteren Ismail Kadare, som i mange år har vært en av de fremste favoritterne til Nobels litteraturpris,

Rugova til Nutri Lekaj i går ettermiddag. Rugova ringte selv og sa, han var sjokkert over drapet, sier Lekaj.

var blant hennes venner.

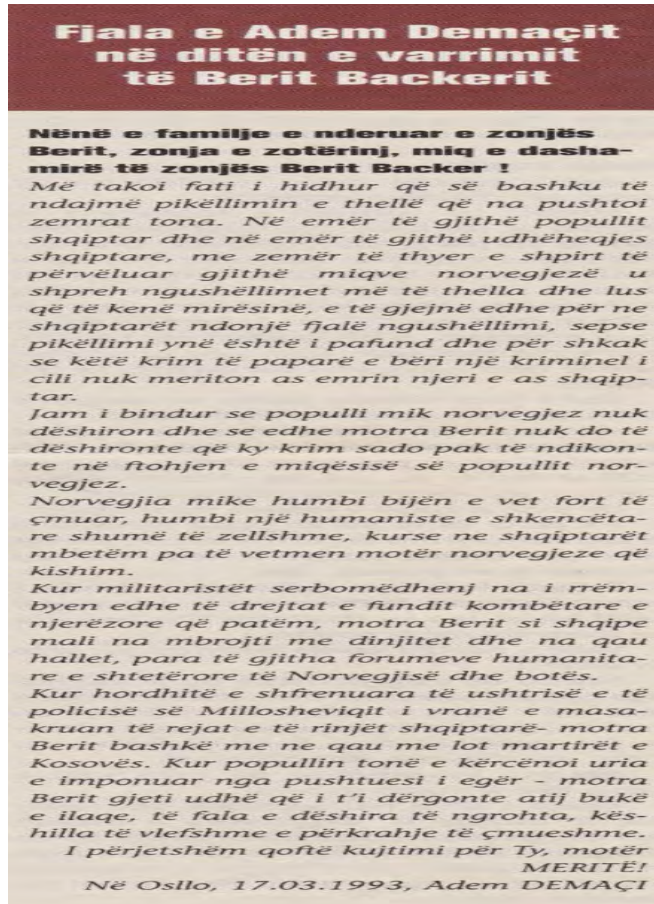
I bøker, radioprogrammer og avisartikler har Berit Backer i snart 20 år vært en av de viktigste informatorer om forholdene i Albania og det tidligere Jugoslavia. Hun var en av

meget få som har hatt kontakter i det som før var den politiske opposisjonen. Og hadde derfor meget gode kontakter med dagens ledere.

Berit Backer snakket både albansk og serbo-kroatisk flytende.

Dagbladet mars 93

The following is a fragment from an Albanian newspaper, translated into English, recounting Demaçi's remarks on the day of Backer's funeral, March 17, 1993, in Oslo:



“Greatly honoured mother and family of Madam Berit, ladies and gentlemen, friends and others who revered Madam Berit Backer!

“I have the painful duty to share the deep sorrow that took over our hearts. On behalf of the Albanian people and all Albanian leadership, I express the deepest condolences to all Norwegian friends with a heavy heart and a broken soul. At the same time, I pray that they find in them some words of condolences for us Albanians, as our sorrow is deep and

everlasting, even though this heinous crime was committed by a criminal who does not deserve to be called Albanian.

“I am convinced that our friends, the Norwegian people, do not wish, as even sister Berit herself would not have wished, for this crime to impact our friendship with the Norwegian people.

“Norway lost her highly valued daughter, a committed humanist and scientist, while we Albanians lost the only Norwegian sister we had.

“When militaristic Serbs robbed us of the last national and human rights we had, sister Berit protected us with dignity like a mountain eagle and spoke strongly for our issues in all humanitarian forums of Norway and the world. When the relentless hordes of Milošević’s military and police murdered and massacred Albanian young men and women, sister Berit cried and mourned the Kosova martyrs alongside us. When our people were threatened by hunger imposed by the cruel invader, sister Berit found ways to send the people food and medicine, warm greetings and wishes, and to give the people valuable advice and support.

“May your memory be with us forever, Sister!

“MERITA!

“In Oslo, on 17.03.1993, Adem DEMAÇI”

According to some hypotheses about Backer’s tragic death, the killer could have been used by the UDB because of his mental problems; consequently, in some degree, he was therefore also a victim who was manipulated in a sophisticated manner to kill Backer. The UDB’s supposed aim was to achieve the double effect of discrediting or weakening the activity of Albanian political emigration in Western countries, because Backer’s killer was of Albanian origin, and discrediting or weakening the possibility that the Kosova issue be imposed for solution within an international agenda. In fact,

the Kosova issue was not addressed at the Dayton Conference (1995), eliminating the possibility that peace would be achieved through this meeting.

Just as the cause of Backer's murder has remained enigmatic, so has the case of the killer; after he was released from preventive detention inside the psychiatric health service, he was declared a missing person, and his body was found four years later. When Backer's death is viewed in the context of the UDB's murders and attempted murders of Albanian political emigration activists in the 1980s and 1990s, the suspicion grows that the UDB played a role in her murder. The Amnesty International Report of 1985 regarding the assassinations of the leaders of Albanian political emigration, including the assassinations against the leaders of the Croatian political emigration, it is among other things, stated, "Emigre circles have frequently claimed that Yugoslav State Security Service (UDB) agents were responsible for these murders. The Yugoslav authorities, however, have attributed them to rival emigre groups. Allegations of UDB involvement have been supported by the evidence presented in several cases tried by courts outside of Yugoslavia".¹³⁸ In other words, the UDB not only organized the assassination against the main founders of the LPK but also engaged in other such assassination and assassination attempts before and after this event. Below, in addition to the targeting of the main founders of the LPK, five other cases of assassinations and assassination attempts will be presented, although there are others that will not be mentioned here. LPK did not publicize these cases, and they were not covered in the Western media. This strategy was undertaken to avoid scaring and discouraging the broad membership of the LPK, especially with regard to the liberation of Kosova.

- On January 17, 1982, the UDB assassinated brothers Jusuf and Bardhosh Gërvalla and their friend Kadri Zeka, all of whom were main founders of the LPK. During the late 1980s, when Backer prepared a report for the Scandinavian foreign ministries regarding the situation in Kosova ("Politics and Punishments in Kosovo"), she also travelled to Switzerland to gather information and met the brother of Jusuf and Bardhosh, Hysen Gërvalla. On this occasion she also met with some of

¹³⁸ Amnesty International Report (1985): *Yugoslavia: prisoners of conscience*. Printed by Shadowdean Limited, Mitcham, Surrey, p. 8

the leaders of the LPK's diaspora branch, including Mustafë Xhemajli.¹³⁹ The following fragment is retrieved from the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* (January 25, 1982) regarding the assassination in Stuttgart, Germany, on January 17, 1982. In the photograph, two German police officers are seen near the bodies of the Gërvalla brothers and Kadri Zeka. This assassination was organized by the UDB in a professional manner, and the perpetrators have never been apprehended. According to other sources regarding this and other assassinations and assassination attempts against Albanian and Croatian political emigration activists, the UDB hired Serbian criminals, who, during the 1970s and 1980s, engaged in criminal activities in Germany, Belgium, Scandinavia. They included Ljubomir Magaš-Zemunac, Željko Ražnatović-Arkan, Rade Čaldović-Čenta and Dragan Joksović-Jokso.

„Das ganze sieht nach Hinrichtung aus“

Massaker an Albanern: Wie der jugoslawische Geheimdienst Killeraufträge in der Bundesrepublik besorgt

Unbekannte Mörder erschossen in der Nähe von Heilbronn drei Jugoslawen. Für deutsche Sicherheitsbehörden ist das Massaker ein neuer Höhepunkt im Untergrundkrieg, den sich jugoslawische Geheimdienstler

Der grüne BMW 316 fuhr rückwärts aus der Garage. Der Fahrer wollte im Schnee nicht wenden und steuerte den Wagen im Rückwärtsgang 40 Meter weiter bis zu einer Kreuzung.

Als das Fahrzeug unter einer Straßenlaterne kurz gestoppt wurde, trat aus einer Baustelle ein Mann an die rechte

und Regimegegner des Vielvölkerstaats in der Bundesrepublik liefern. Nach den Exil-Kroaten hat die Belgrader Regierung jetzt offenbar auch den Exil-Albanern aus der Republik Kosovo blutigen Kampf angesagt

sen getroffen, tot hinter dem Lenkrad.

- ▷ seinen Beifahrer Zeka Kadri, 28, durch zwei Einschüsse im Oberkörper getötet, und
- ▷ den Bruder des Fahrers, Jusuf Gërvalla, 36, von ebenfalls zwei Schüssen lebensgefährlich verletzt.

Tatort Untergruppenbach: Zehn Treffer in Herz, Lunge und Genick

Seite und schob aus etwa drei Metern Entfernung ins Wageninnere.

Ein zweiter Mann schoss ebenfalls, blieb dann neben dem Wagen stehen, um sich durch die zerplitterten Seitenscheiben hindurch von der Trefferwirkung zu überzeugen. Nachbarn, vom Lärm der Schüsse aufgeschreckt, sahen die beiden Männer fliehen.

Gespensisch, was die Anwohner der „Häbichtshöhe“ in der Gemeinde Untergruppenbach bei Heilbronn dann, in der Nacht zum Montag letzter Woche, zu sehen bekamen: Der Vierzylinder lief hochtourig weiter, der Fahrer hatte noch den Fuß auf dem Gaspedal. Dann ließ er offenbar die Kupplung los, er starb. Das Auto rollte führerlos im Halbkreis nach links und prallte gegen ein geschlossenes Garagentor. Die Antriebsräder fraßen sich im Schnee fest, der Motor ging aus, es wurde still.

Im Wageninnern fand die Polizei

- ▷ den Fahrer Bardhosh Gërvalla, 31, Der Jugoslawe hing, von sechs Schüs-

tödlische Nachschuß“. Auch das deutete auf den SDB.

Seit vielen Jahren liefern sich jugoslawische Geheimdienstler und Regimegegner blutige Auseinandersetzungen im Ausland. In vielen Fällen haben militante Exil-Jugoslawen Botschaften, Konsulate und Repräsentanten ihres Landes gewaltsam angegriffen. Belgrad reagierte auf Mord und Terror stets mit Gleichem. Schauplatz des balkanischen Shoot-out ist immer wieder die Bundesrepublik gewesen, und die Polizei war bislang machtlos, dem Treiben ein Ende zu setzen.

Dabei liegen die Verantwortlichkeiten zutage. Belgrad fürchtet die engagierten Exil-Gruppen als Unruheherd im Vielvölkerstaat – und bekämpft sie. Vor allem auf die Auslandskroaten haben die Geheimdienstler bislang die Pistolen gerichtet. In mehreren Fällen von Mord an Exil-Kroaten ist die Belgrader Beteiligung klar erwiesen.

Beispiel: Als der Kroat Franjo Goreta, selbst ein ehemaliger Geheimdienst-Mann mit Mordauftrag in der Bundesrepublik, absprang und einen Leitoffizier erschoss, schickte Belgrad ein Kommando los. Kaum hatte Goreta seine Freiheitstrafe verbüßt, vollführten SDB-Leute ein Attentat, dem Goreta nur knapp entging.

Im folgenden Prozeß gegen die drei Täter schrieb der Richter einen allerdings bislang vergeblichen Appell an Bonn ins Urteil: „Es kann nicht hingenommen werden, daß auf unserem Boden Killeraufträge ausgeführt werden, die von fremden Staaten zur Lösung ihrer innerstaatlichen Probleme veranlaßt werden.“

Neben den Kroaten sind mittlerweile auch die Exil-Albaner ins Visier der jugoslawischen Staatssatellen geraten. Seit sich im letzten Frühjahr der Widerstand in der jugoslawischen Albaner-Provinz Kosovo zu blutigen Unruhen aufschaukelte, hat Belgrad ausländische Drahtzieher ausgemacht. Vom albanischen Nachbarstaat und von Moskau treuen kommunistischen Diensten werde der Konflikt gesteuert, aber auch, so Belgrader Politiker, maßgeblich von der Bundesrepublik aus.

Tatsächlich leben allein in Baden-Württemberg an die 2000 jugoslawische Exil-Albaner, die meisten von ihnen mit politischem Asyl. Über deren Aktivitäten hatte das Stuttgarter Generalkonsulat nicht selten zu klagen.

Im Frühjahr 1981 beispielsweise gab es eine ansonsten kaum beachtete Demon-

¹³⁹ Kosova magazine: Exclusive no.7, 2000: “Short biography of Berit Backer”, p. 52

- The following is a fragment from *Der Spiegel* (Nr.4, 1982) reporting the attempted assassination of the Albanian activist Rasim Zenelaj in Frankfurt, Germany, on April 14, 1981. With the instructions and help of UDB agents Svjetozar Mirjačić, Rade Surla and others, the assassin Zorica Aleksić tried to escape, but she was caught by the German police at the Frankfurt airport. With the influence of the state propaganda of the UDB, there were rumours that the case involved a broken love affair. Nevertheless, the assassin's reluctance to speak was met with determination by the German investigative team, and she admitted that she committed the assassination at the behest of the UDB. Therefore, she was sentenced to 7 years in prison. Zenelaj was seriously injured and ended up in a wheelchair.



In der Untersuchungshaft gab die mutmaßliche Täterin Zorica Aleksić dem Rührigen Geheimdienst-Beamten Rade Tuta (l. v. l.) preis, Deutschland und dementst gleich anschließend im Balkan, auch, wie Tuta aus Mitteilungen der Anzeiger der jugoslawischen Generalinspektion.

Ein Prozeß durchbricht das große Schweigen über die Verbrechen an Exil-Jugoslaven in Deutschland

Die mörderische Zärtlichkeit der dunkelhaarigen Zorica

Von Claus Biehn

En junger Mann, querschnittsgelähmt, der immer, wenn er sich verbiegen will, das als Dauerthema seiner Woche Gegenstand eines aufsehenerregenden Prozesses sein wird, wird in der jugoslawischen Hauptstadt (34) wieder ins Rollstuhl aus der Verhandlung entlassen, sondern in die als Nukleozelle wirkenden

Nicht ohne Verzweiflung oder Verharmlichung kann man nämlich behaupten, daß sich seit Mitte der sechziger Jahre mindestens zwei- bis dreihundert Exil-Kroatien - und -Serben und -Albanen eines gewaltsamen Todes gestorben sind. Sie wurden erschlagen, ertränkt, erstickt, die Frauen erstickten, die Kinder erschossen. Die meisten dieser Mordfälle sind einmalig, laienhaft, nicht organisiert, sondern die jugoslawische Geheimdienst- oder Mordorganisation hat, aber immer fehlte es an schlüssigen Beweisen.

Daß es diesmal anders zu kommen scheint, verdanken die Behörden einer Reihe von Zufällen: Wie durch ein Wunder überlebte das Opfer den Anschlag, die Tat wurde auf die Flucht in die Schweiz verlagert. Sie und einer ihrer Hintermänner haben in die

Die Anliegerin bricht sich wie ein billiger Krimineller, und doch wird es bei der Verleumdung schwerfallen, sie zu überzeugen, daß sie schuldig ist. Während der Unruhen im Kosovo Anfang vorigen Jahres, die den Völkermord zugunsten der Albaner in der Provinz Kosovo schwer erschütterten, erhielt in Deutschland der damals blühende Hainz Emami anonyme Drohbriefe, in denen er aufgefordert wurde, in Belgrad separatistische Kräfte zu unterstützen. Emami beschuldigte, die rassistischen Kräfte in der Provinz Kosovo zu fern zu steuern, erhielt die Frankfurter Polizei über einen Informanten von einem deutschen Journalisten, einem Zeman (Zs), der aus dem Raum dort an der Grenze zu Albanien stammt und als Mitglied in der Kollaboration mit der albanischen Truppe sich langsam aktiv mit-

Warum ließ Staatsanwalt Verdächtige laufen?

Die Krieger nahen die Sachse ernst. Zornig erhielt eine kugelsichere Weste, und mehrere Beamte führten ihn vor dem jugoslawischen Generalkonsulat in der Thüringer Straße spazieren, um so zu demonstrieren, daß sie unter Schutz stünde. Zwei unbekannte Männer verfolgten die Gruppe durch den nahe Zoo und wurden ihrerseits von anderen Polizisten in Zivl beschattet.

Letztendlich jedoch nützte die Korrosion gar nichts. Zu gering nämlich wußten Zentrale HA

Über ihrer ersten Liebe, die sie nicht
heiraten konnte, weil sie nicht
mit Schöne Fama, und so legte
Zenaidi am 14. Mai des vergangenen
Jahres freiwillig ab, als die die
Tiere in der Zucht, die sie
genau wie seine Bekanntschaft
gemacht hatte, in einem Alter
von 10 Jahren, die sie
Tiere miteinander die Frau
nicht, die sie nicht, die sie
und so wie wieder ins Zügel
wurde, die sie nicht, die sie
und von fünf Schüssen ge-
bracht wurde.

Dad die Täter in ihre Aufregung
die Tür zum Fluß zu schließ-
en, die sie nicht, die sie
hingegen wurde. So wurde Zenaidi
in der Zucht, die sie nicht, die sie
entdeckt und konnte, bevor er
Bewußtlosigkeit, dem Notarzt
wurde, die sie nicht, die sie
"Toten" und wie "Welch!"

Dad aus diesen dürftigen Infor-
mationen nach eine breite Infor-
mation, die sie nicht, die sie
einem Kriminalpsychologen,
Freunde seit dem Scheitern von
dem Kommissar, für einen
Kriminalpsychologen, die sie
zu sehen: Flug 13 531 nach
Hamburg, die sie nicht, die sie
die Altkolonien bei der Padua,
die sie nicht, die sie
nach dem Rhein, die sie
habe, die sie nicht, die sie
nach 1100 Mark Heller-Honorar

Während von ihren beiden männlichen Mitangeklagten da eine auch im Gefängnis beharrlich schweigt, der andere in der Hoffnung auf ein mildes Urteil seine Aussagen ständig korrigiert und ergänzt, packte die 24 Jahr-

alle Zorla-Akteure von vornherein von grundsätzlich aus. Sie gab den jugoslawischen Geheimdienst-Residenten preis, seine Namen nannten Rado Burić, der sich noch am Abend der Tat übertrieben elegant hatte und sich als „Häufchen“ gezeichnet wurde. Auch belastete sie zwei Angehörige des Generalkommando als Auftragsgeber des Mordanschlags: Ilija Marjanović, der offiziell als stellvertretender Leiter des Sicherheitsbüros der als Hausbesitzer fungierte. Beide sind inzwischen nach Jugoslawien zurückgekehrt.

Ihr Chef, der Generalkommandant, war seine, angeblich „russische“ Abteilung von seinem Posten, jede Stellungnahme zum Fall Zvezda abgelenkt und nur zurücksenden lassen, mit „terroristischen Umtrieben“ und „schwachsinninge Organisations“ hatte

Die Wahrheit sieht aber wohl anders aus. Sie wird im Prozess eines jungen Jungs, der sich in einem Brief an die Anklage um die Darstellung der Täterin glaubhaft machen: Bevor sie mit Zorlie Alkeke eingewunden, hätten die beiden Konsultanten (um als Mörder gewonnen werden. Dieser Anwerbsversuch will er in diesen Einheiten schildern.

In ihrem Abschlussbericht habe die Kriminalpolizei bereits strafrechtliche Maßnahmen = „Observation, Haftbefehl, Durchsuchung“ ausdrücklich angeregt. Aufgrund der bisherigen Ermittlungen ergibt sich der Verdacht auf Mirjane und Salim an dem Mordanschlag auf den Rastin. Es ist ein „offener Fall“, wird es darin. Dennoch ließ die Frankfurter Staatsanwaltschaft die beiden beschuldigten Konsultanten ge-



Gerade noch mit dem Leben davongekommen: Basim [Ibn] al-
 ein Regimes, das seine Gegner im Ausland unerbittlich verfolgt

[illegible]

- The following is a fragment from the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* (October, 1981) reporting the assassination of the Albanian activist Vehbi

Ibrahimi in Brussels on October 10, 1981, titled "Who's next?" Ibrahimi died on the spot while his wife was seriously injured. The killer has never been arrested.

LE CHABANAIS ALBANAIS

A qui le tour ?

● Six coups de feu dans une cage d'escalier, l'autre samedi à Bruxelles. Un meurtre froidement exécuté : celui de Vehbi Ibrahimi, 43 ans, numéro deux de la Ligue Démocratique Albanaise, une organisation de nationalistes albanais originaires de la région du Kosovo (Yougoslavie). Sa liquidation n'est certainement pas la dernière mort de la série noire qui a déjà fait trois victimes en cinq mois, rien qu'à Bruxelles. C'est en effet surtout chez nous que se règlent actuellement, de manière violente, les séquelles des troubles sanglants qui ont agité le Kosovo au printemps dernier.

D EPUIS ces événements, et la répression féroce qui a suivi (des centaines d'années de prison ont été infligées), Bruxelles et surtout Schaerbeek voient arriver chaque semaine des autocars entiers en provenance de cette région de Yougoslavie, dont les trois quarts des habitants sont d'origine albanaise. Ils sont déjà ici une dizaine de milliers, dont près de la moitié Albanais de Yougoslavie. Autant dire que s'accumule peu à peu à Bruxelles un énorme potentiel de haine vis-à-vis de l'« oppresseur » yougoslave et que, la tradition de la vengeance aidant, il n'y a pas de raison que ça cesse. La balle, si on ose dire, est à présent dans le camp des Albanais anti-yougoslaves...

Le pourrissement du régime est inéluctable

Car pour ceux-ci, sans aucun doute, ce sont les « barbouzes » des services secrets de Belgrade qui ont liquidé Ibrahimi.

Une seule « preuve » leur suffit : son nom était régulièrement cité par Politika Express, un journal yougoslave, qui voyait en lui un des « terroristes fascistes » ayant commis les attentats de l'été dernier contre les locaux des organisations culturelles yougoslaves en Belgique. Et selon certaines informations, c'est en Allemagne que pourraient être portés



Vehbi Ibrahimi, comme tous les exilés, gardait religieusement intactes les traditions de la terre natale.

les prochains coups contre certains opposants à Belgrade d'origine albanaise. Comme d'habitude en pareil cas, les rumeurs les plus folles circulent...



- The following is a fragment from *Le Soir* reporting the assassination of Enver Hadri, chairman of the Kosova Committee for Human Rights and

Freedoms, based in Belgium, on February 25, 1990, in Brussels, Belgium. Along with his collaborators, Hadri had managed to establish direct contact with some of the European parliamentarians and was able to report on human rights violations in Kosova. Almost a year earlier, in May 1989, Hadri and his collaborators encouraged a visit to Kosova of a delegation from the European Parliament, to observe the human rights situation.

Milošević's regime created obstacles for this delegation to properly conduct its work. This is reflected in the abovementioned report of the joint delegation, which was composed of the leadership of the IHF, a representative of the U.S. Helsinki Watch and the representatives of the NHC. In January 1990, this delegation that had travelled to Kosova in September 1989 on their first fact-finding mission there, guided by Backer, mentioned these obstacles orchestrated by Milošević in their report, "(...) the International Helsinki Federation call[s] upon the European Community and the Council of Europe to condition any future integration of market and economic access on a full reversal of the human rights course in Kosovo. The European Community might well begin with a demand for an accounting of why the European Parliamentary Commission, which was sent to Kosovo to investigate matters in May 1989, was forced to leave because, as it stated, it was impossible to fulfil its mandate. The reason it was unable to do its work was that Yugoslav troops had sealed off the hotel in Prishtina where the Commission was staying to all but a select group of ethnic Albanians approved by the government. After the Commission withdrew, government police and troops dispersed the crowd with tear gas and truncheons, causing various injuries and arresting many. The European Community and the Council of Europe have an obligation to require Yugoslavia to live up to international standards of human rights, standards which Yugoslavia has long pledged itself to follow".¹⁴⁰

The Belgian police eventually discovered that Hadri was assassinated by the criminals Veselin Vukotić, Andrija Drashković, Andrija Llakonić and Darko Ashanin, who were following the instructions of the UDB.

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth Anderson: *Yugoslavia: Crisis in Kosovo*, International Helsinki Federation and Human Rights Watch, New York, 1990, p. 44

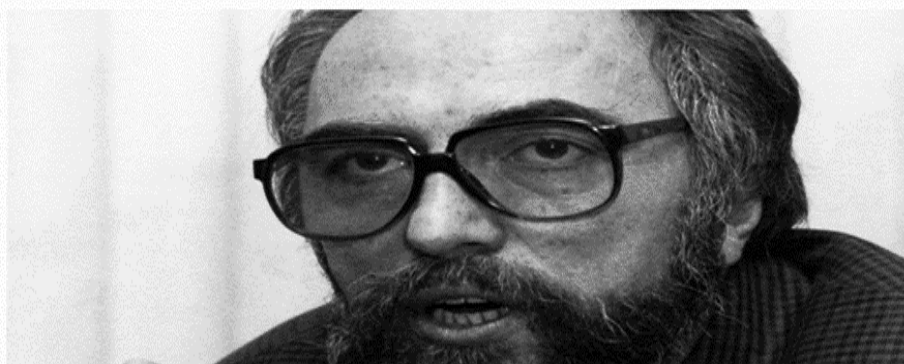


Un assassinat politique commis en 1990 jugé aux assises de Bruxelles

Publicité

Enver Hadri, militant indépendantiste kosovar, avait été abattu à Saint-Gilles, le 25 février 1990. L'enquête avait rapidement conduit aux services secrets yougoslaves.

Article réservé aux abonnés



January 2025, the second instance of the court in Brussels confirmed the guilt of the two Serbs - Veselin Vukotić and Andrija Drasković - convicted in absentia, for the murder of activist Enver Hadri. The two, along with Bozidar Spasić, were sentenced in 2016 to life imprisonment for the murder of Enver Hadri in 1990 in Brussels. Unfortunately, as well as the initial trial, the Serbian authorities refused to hand them over to the justice authorities in Belgium. Regarding this sentence of the Belgian court, journalist Alain Lallemand, writes the following in the fragment of the Belgian newspaper Le Soir, dated the 14 of February 2025: "The assassination of Enver Hadri in St-Gilles in 1990 was indeed a "state crime" committed by the Serbian mafia on the orders of high-ranking pro-Serb officials in the former Yugoslavia. 35 years later, in the assizes, the perpetrators were again sentenced to life imprisonment":



ACCUEIL • POLICE ET JUSTICE

Enver Hadri : trois perpétuités pour un crime d'Etat

L'assassinat d'Enver Hadri à St-Gilles, en 1990, était bien « un crime d'Etat » commis par la mafia serbe sur ordre de hauts fonctionnaires pro-serbes de l'ex-Yougoslavie. 35 ans plus tard, en assises, les auteurs écopent à nouveau de la perpétuité.

Article réservé aux abonnés



Journaliste au pôle Culture
Par **Alain Lallemand**

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- The UDB also organized an assassination attempt against Xhafer Shatri in Switzerland. Shatri was one of the most skilled leaders of the revolutionary activity for the liberation of Kosova in the early 1970s. After his escape from prison and his emigration in the early 1980s, he had a significant impact on the framework of Kosova Albanians' political emigration. Initially, he did so by consolidating and co-directing the LPK diaspora branch and later in the capacity as chairman of the Kosova Committee for Informing the World Public in Switzerland (KKIOB).

Furthermore, he was the minister of information in the Kosova government in exile, based in Geneva.

With the aim of coordinating and strengthening the general activity of Albanian political emigration, Backer travelled to Switzerland in 1988 to meet Shatri, who was engaged in similar activities as the chairman of KKIOB. Although the circumstances before the fall of the Berlin Wall were complicated regarding such collaborations, there nevertheless was a partnership between the KKIOB and the KGNHC regarding the violation of basic human rights in Kosova.

The following is a fragment from a Swiss newspaper regarding another assassination attempt against Shatri in 1998.

Un attentat vise le très discret Ministère kosovar de l'information

Etienne Dubuis

Genève a connu hier, selon toutes apparences, un épisode de la guerre du Kosovo. Peu avant 15 heures, deux hommes armés ont tenté de pénétrer de force dans les locaux du Centre d'information de la République de Kosove (le Ministère de l'information du gouvernement clandestin), situés depuis six ans à la ruelle des Templiers numéro 4. Un employé, Naser Berisha, s'étant interposé, les agresseurs lui ont tiré dessus deux ou trois fois à l'abdomen, avant de s'enfuir sans demander leur reste. Et surtout sans avoir pu atteindre leur cible très probable, l'influent maître des lieux, Xhafer Shatri.

«Je dis seulement ce que je pense»

Le blessé, transporté aux urgences de l'hôpital cantonal où ses jours ne paraissent pas en danger, a eu la force de raconter à ses collègues ce qui lui était arrivé. «Naser a entendu sonner, ra-



Xhafer Shatri, militant d' longue date de la cause indépendantiste, avait déjà été victime d'un attentat à Genève en 1989. Une grenade de guerre avait été lancée contre son appartement.

DANIEL WINTREGER

GENÈVE, 1 JUILLET 1998

- In 1990, the UDB organized an assassination attempt against Backer's friend and collaborator, Xhavit Haliti, in Switzerland. Haliti was one of

the most skilful leaders of revolutionary activity in Kosova during the 1980s. In 1986, after he managed to avoid arrest during an exchange of gunfire in Kosova, he escaped at the suggestion of the organization and with the help of his friends. After his emigration in Switzerland, he was the co-head of the LPK diaspora branch and head of the special sector within the LPK, which became the central staff of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA) on November 17, 1994, and the general staff of the KLA in 1998. Haliti was the first KLA representative who began collaboration with Western countries.

Fred Abrahams, associate programme director and special advisor at Human Rights Watch – who worked for 20 years in areas marred by political crises and armed conflict, including the Balkans – wrote about Xhavit Haliti in his book, *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*: “Haliti had spent time in prison for his pro-Albanian activities and had fled to Switzerland. In early 1990 a bomb exploded outside his apartment in Zurich, and he blamed the Serbian secret police. In Albania, he thought, Enver Hoxha had built a thriving state. Unable to visit Albania during communism, Haliti’s generation had absorbed the propaganda: diligent workers building a socialist paradise, intellectuals enriching Albanian culture, and Hoxha ruling with a wise and benevolent hand. They had no idea that behind the TV cameras lay crumbling factories, prison camps and, by 1990, a desperate embassy siege. Haliti regrouped. The thirty-four-year-old was intelligent and mature. He moved slowly and with purpose. His eyes were dark and narrow, and far apart on his face. As if to compensate, his eyebrows slid together when he listened with focus, which was most of the time. Above all, the man called “Zeka” had a mission, a fact that others could sense and sometimes feared.

“His main goal, and the reason for his visit to Tirana, was to win Kosovo’s independence from Yugoslavia, and he wanted to do it with force. He would soon become one of the key founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (...). By spring 1998, the U.S. government had two contradictory concerns. First, was the KLA a Marxist–Leninist group? Second, was it cooperating with Islamic states or groups? Haliti tried to assuage both fears. The affinity for Enver Hoxha was a relic of the past, he explained, a result of propaganda and Kosovar dreams. Only Kosovo’s liberation guided the group. As for Islamic aid, the Iranian government

and others had approached the KLA, and some foreign fighters had come to help, he said. But the KLA was determined to cut all ties with enemies of the United States.

“To win trust, Haliti said he opened the books. He shared information on KLA bank accounts and promised to buy guns from U.S.-approved sources, even if that cost more. In April 1998, the KLA and CIA, with facilitation by SHIK (Albanian National Intelligence Service), reached an agreement on three essential points, Haliti and Klosi separately said. First, the KLA agreed not to use violence outside of Kosovo, including attacks in Serbia proper. Second, it promised not to cooperate with armed Islamist groups. It would refuse fighters, arms, and funds. Third, Haliti promised to block funds from drug trafficking and other illegal sources”.¹⁴¹

In the case of the assassination attempt against Haliti in 1990, the two Serbian assassins, Miroslav Paravnja and Branko Grgic, were discovered based on camera footage, and one of them was arrested. Below are photos from the Swiss TV news regarding the assassination attempt against Haliti, where the two assassins caught on camera are also seen in the second photo.



Side note: The complete information from Swiss television regarding this case can be found at https://youtu.be/967nEf8r_2g?si=6DaLBxN_KG-a3W2H <https://youtu.be/fMz3vEZJvII?si=oJ2cd4EzeuCrmiqE>

¹⁴¹ Abrahams 2015: 247-248, 259: <https://archive.org/details/FredCAbrahamsModernAlbaniaFromDictatorshipToDemocracy/page/n271/mode/1up>

Khavit Haliti wrote the following in a commemorative Facebook post dedicated to Berit Backer:

“Berit Backer holds a special place in the formative period of international solidarity with Kosova. I had the privilege of knowing her personally in 1987–1988, when the activities of the LPK in exile were expanding, particularly in Norway, at a time when the Kosova issue had not yet attracted structured international attention.

Her contribution to Kosova during the 1980s and the early 1990s was extraordinary. Her engagement intensified particularly after she began collaborating with the LPK, immediately following the First General Meeting of the LPK in 1987, marking a new phase in efforts to internationalize the Kosova issue.

Thanks to her persistence, credibility, and professional integrity, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee became the first Western organization to place the Kosova issue on its official agenda. This represented a historically significant moment, as for the first time efforts to internationalize the Kosova issue became part of the formal agenda of a Western organization with real influence in international human rights discourse.

In this context, Berit Backer, together with her close collaborators Kristoffer Gjøtterud, Vice-Chair of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, and Nufri Lekaj, a member of the General Council of the LPK, established the Kosova Group within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. With the Committee’s full support, the group soon became a key platform for international engagement in support of Kosova, creating lasting channels of communication between Kosova’s political structures and Western institutions.

In addition to its general activities, the Kosova Group undertook a series of initiatives of considerable strategic importance. Even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, it encouraged and guided the journey of the first fact-

finding mission concerning the human rights situation in Kosova. It also organized the first visit of a Kosova political delegation to the West, led by Ibrahim Rugova, which began in Oslo, Norway, in February 1990. Furthermore, the Group arranged the visits and programs of the Delegation of the Assembly of Kosova to several Western countries immediately following the proclamation of the Declaration of 2 July 1990. In parallel, it encouraged and supported the emergence of the first structures of civil society in both Kosova and Albania.

Berit Backer, in particular, played an important advisory role by offering valuable advice to key figures across Kosova's political spectrum, including Adem Demaçi, Ibrahim Rugova, and others. Through these contributions, she helped shape a strategic approach to the political resistance of Kosova Albanians, grounded in a long-term vision and international legitimacy.

Berit Backer's contribution remains eternal in the history of Kosova's struggle for freedom. She represents a rare example of principled international solidarity at a time when Kosova stood largely alone and when it was vitally important that independent, professional, and trustworthy international voices inform and convince Western political and diplomatic circles about the harsh political and social reality in Kosova.

In honor of her memory.”¹⁴²

¹⁴² Xhavit Haliti, “In Honor and in Memory of Berit Backer,” Facebook post, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1XpxKmyPZj/?mibextid=wwXIfr>

According to Ann Christine Eek, one of Backer's closest friends, "Not only did Berit Backer's life end in the most tragic way, but she seemed destined for dramatic events long before she was born. A young woman, who later became Berit's mother, was arrested together with a group of radical students in April 1941, during the German occupation of Norway in World War II. German forces found out that the young architect Ina Margrethe Danielsen happened to be the daughter of Admiral Edvard Christian Danielsen, who had managed to flee to Britain during the occupation and remained there as part of the Royal Norwegian Navy, cooperating with the Admiralty of the British Home Fleet. She was therefore incarcerated at Grini, a prison on the northwestern outskirts of Oslo, which the Germans had in reality converted into a sort of concentration camp. Her four-year imprisonment turned her into a dedicated communist (...).

"Ole Friele Backer met Ina Danielsen through her brother Per Danielsen, with whom he had shared many experiences during the war. They married after the war, and on the 3rd of August, 1947, their daughter Berit was born. It has been said that when Berit's father received the news of her birth in Oslo, while on assignment on Svalbard, he rejoiced as if he was the happiest man in the world. However, he was unable to spend much time with his daughter as he, unfortunately, died suddenly a month later. Berit thus grew up under difficult circumstances, as she and her mother first went to live in Kirkenes in northern Norway and later moved several times, due to the mother's work, documenting buildings destroyed during the war. For some periods Berit also lived with close relatives in Oslo and in Mandal.

"Being the young daughter of a communist, Berit was sent to 'pioneer' camps during summer vacations, and possibly as a consequence of her mother's political views, she was sometimes put into awkward situations. Children can be painfully cruel to each other, and that might have been another reason for giving her political schooling an early start. After completing secondary school, she took a course at the Nansen School in Lillehammer in 1965–1966, and later, in the spring of 1968, she registered as a student at the University of Bergen. During the following years she studied statistics, social anthropology, philosophy, and sociology. In opposition to her mother, Berit joined ranks with other young radicals

towards the end of the sixties. Her interest in Albania was ignited when she visited the so-called 'Lighthouse of Socialism' for the first time in 1969. Another student remembers the years in Bergen, where the student movement bloomed and political discussions prospered: 'Berit Backer was central in many of the exciting activities, and even those who didn't agree with her politically, enjoyed her great intellectual capacity and warm-hearted commitment (...)'.

"During her first visit to Albania, Berit was fascinated by the Albanians, their culture and their continuous struggle for independence. She therefore decided to dedicate her research, for a scholarly degree in social anthropology, to the Albanians (...). After demonstrations in Kosovo in 1968, the situation of the Albanians had improved. Prishtina University was founded in 1970, and a new constitution granted the province autonomous status in 1974. Berit Backer was accepted as the first foreigner to do field work in the region for one year, in 1974–1975. Responsible for her permission to do research was the Minister of Culture at that time, the Albanian political scientist Ukshin Hoti, but she also received much help from the Director of the University, Professor Idriz Ajeti, as well as from scholars, professor Fehmi Agani and Mark Krasniqi.

"In the introduction to her thesis, Berit Backer tells about the beginning of her field work in the village of Isniq (...). The correspondence that Berit Backer left behind bears witness to her close contact with scholars, writers, journalists and others who were interested in various aspects and regions of Albania, politically, economically and socially. Her growing insight also led to a more profound understanding of the abuse of the human rights of the Albanians, particularly in Yugoslavia. By 1978 she had been contacted by Amnesty International about one particular prisoner of conscience, Adem Demaçi, the Kosovar Albanian writer who had been incarcerated for most of the period since 1958 (...).

"The experience Berit Backer had gained in Albania in the period 1975–1981 was, in many ways, very discouraging. Being under constant surveillance, she had come to realize that the 'People's Socialist Republic of Albania' was no paradise and she drew a line under the political views she had held as a youth. Her fascination with the Albanian people was, however, by no means diminished, and she continued her research efforts, but from outside, turning her attention to groups of Albanians closer to

home. She was also invited to give papers at international conferences and lectured in Norway about the Albanians in Albania and Kosovo (...).

“Berit Backer, whose name is pronounced ‘Berita’ by Albanians, gradually received the nickname ‘Merita’ because of the reputation and respect in which she was held by Kosovar Albanians for her profound knowledge of their people, and for her unrelenting work to inform the rest of Europe of their situation (...). Berit Backer had a very strong desire to tell the world about the Albanians (...), she was later denounced in the Serbian press as a ‘Kosovar Albanian separatist’, alongside Demaçi who was still in prison (...).

“During her lifetime, Berit Backer accepted many commitments and had many international contacts. As she had been politically active since childhood, not always without complications, she learned the virtue of discretion from an early age. People need not know more than necessary. She therefore divided her life into pieces, like a cake, and the people who constituted the pieces of the cake hardly knew about the existence of one another, or how numerous they were. Some of them were politically active or humanistically dedicated, others were colleagues in different projects, and still others were simply friends she spent some good times with (...).

“She rarely mentioned setbacks in her work, but during the last years, it was obvious to the present writer that Berit had experienced things that had hurt her deeply. Her understanding of the situation in the Balkans was so acute that she often provoked people who had accepted the ‘official’ views by the dominating Slav and Greek populations. The resistance she met while trying to report on the situation of the Albanians was sometimes so hard that she often felt that all her knowledge was worthless, and that all her efforts had been in vain”.¹⁴³

The following is a photo from 1976 when Backer was conducting research in Kosovo, having a conversation with a shepherd. She spoke not only to people with political power or academic backgrounds but also to regular people, to better and more fully understand the socio-political situation and culture.

¹⁴³ Ann Christine Eek: *Berita - the Norwegian Friend of the Albanians*: Introduction of the book; Behind the Stone Walls...: 2003: p.7-8, 9, 11-14



Two of Backer's friends mentioned above by Eek – Ukshin Hoti and Fehmi Agani – significantly influenced the development of political processes in Kosova, and they both suffered a tragic ending. Hoti studied political science at the University of Zagreb and the University of Belgrade and undertook postgraduate studies in international relations and political science at the University of Chicago, Harvard University and the University of Washington. In addition to his contribution as a professor at the University of Prishtina, he also served as the provincial secretary of Kosova for foreign relations (foreign minister). Hoti became a symbol of Kosova's academic courage because, almost as an isolated example, he sacrificed all careerist positions and privileges, placing himself and his academic knowledge entirely at the service of the realization of the Republic of Kosova, in continuity from the 1981 demonstrations until his assassination ordered by the neo-fascist Milošević regime in 1999.

For Hoti, the demand for a republic of Kosova during the 1981 demonstrations was a starting point for the internal democratic processes

– authentic democracy – in Kosova. In his book, *The Political Philosophy of the Albanian Cause* (1995), he states that, “Democracy in Kosova was not conceived by others, nor was it born for their pleasure. It was intertwined with the democratic processes in Europe and with similar humanitarian goals. Democracy in Kosova was born in 1981; it will grow on its own, together, equal and interconnected with others”.¹⁴⁴

Similar to Demaçi, Hoti was one of the most influential encouragers of LPK. He was arrested several times by the Serbian regime. The aforementioned report of Amnesty International regarding Yugoslav prisoners of conscience and the assassinations of Albanian and Croatian activists in Western countries, stated the following: “Ukshin Hoti, an ethnic Albanian charged with political offenses, was sentenced to nine years imprisonment. In December 1982 [Amnesty International] wrote to the Federal Secretary of Justice mentioning that it had received information that ethnic Albanians charged with political offenses had been ill-treated. The organization referred to three specific cases and urged him to conduct a judicial inquiry into the alleged ill-treatment of Hydajet Hyseni, Halil Alidema and Ukshin Hoti”.¹⁴⁵ Hoti was arrested for the last time in 1994 by the Serbian police on the charge of exercising hostile activity against Yugoslavia and for his participation in the movement for the Republic of Kosova (LPK), in which case he was sentenced to 5 years in prison. On May 16, 1999, after his release and after leaving the Dubrava prison cell, he disappeared from the Serbian police without a trace and is still considered missing.

Fehmi Agani, although very young, aligned himself with the anti-fascist alliance during World War II. During the 1960s and early 1970s, he completed his studies in philosophy and post-graduate studies in political science at the University of Belgrade and earned his doctorate in sociology at the University of Prishtina. He was the founder of the Institute of Sociology at the University of Prishtina. The major political events in Kosova, especially those from 1981 onwards, made his political views and attitudes gradually take the form of modern Western social democracy. He was considered the leading thinker and political strategist

¹⁴⁴ Ukshin Hoti (1995): *The Political Philosophy of the Albanian Cause*. Tirana., p. 76

¹⁴⁵ Amnesty International Report (1985): *Yugoslavia: prisoners of conscience*. Printed by Shadowdean Limited, Mitcham, Surrey, p. 50

of the LDK in the 1990s. During the late 1990s he supported the KLA and, as a result, he became very hated by the neo-fascist regime of Milošević. He was murdered, apparently by Serbian security forces, during the war.¹⁴⁶

As Eek mentioned above, regarding Backer's field work in the village of Isniq in the Municipality of Deçan in Kosova in 1974, it is worth noting that, during this period, Backer lived with the family of Selim Kukleci. He initially served as Backer's mentor, helping her to quickly understand the traditions of Albanians and the political reality in Kosova. Selim Kukleci was one of the first intellectuals in the municipality of Deçan in Kosova. After World War II and after the 1980s, he was persecuted alongside some of his family members by the Serbian regime in Kosova. For this reason, some of Selim's family members emigrated, among them his son, Shkëlzen Kukleci, who also was a collaborator of Backer within the BGNHC. Furthermore, he also supported Backer while she guided the first fact-finding mission delegation in Kosova in September 1989. Some of the Kukleci family members are well-educated people in Kosova and outside of Kosova. Even in Norway, the granddaughter of Selim Kukleci, Teuta Kukleci, has worked at the Peace Research Institute Oslo and the Directorate for Integration and Diversity.



Ukshin Hoti



Fehmi Agani



Selim Kukleci

¹⁴⁶ Donika Hoti (23rd of January 2024): *On the life and work of academician Fehmi Agani*, Newspaper KultPlus.

Ten years after the murder of Backer, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh was killed. She was stabbed by Mijailo Mijailović at the NK department store in central Stockholm, on September 10, 2003, and died the next morning at Karolinska University Hospital. The killer was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 6, 1978, to Serbian parents.

In her chronicle from 2023, regarding the murder of Anna Lindh, Ann-Sofie Dahl – a docent in international politics, a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a (U.S.) and NATO expert, who, together with Henrik Landerholm, founded the Swedish Atlantic Committee in 1996 – wrote, among other things, that, “The description of the murder of Anna Lindh as an act of insanity, carried out by a mentally disturbed recluse, has prevailed for 20 years. But the explanation ignores the political motive of the murder; that Anna Lindh expressed her support for NATO’s intervention in Kosovo. The murder of Anna Lindh in 2003 is usually described as an act of madness. It ignores the political context (...). Mijailovic’s attack on Anna Lindh took place only a few years after she had given her support to NATO’s bombing of Kosovo in the spring of 1999. Like her boss, Prime Minister Göran Persson, she realized that the abominable Serbian ambitions of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo had to be stopped (...). Giving her support and Swedish backing to NATO’s Operation Allied Force in Kosovo was brave by Anna Lindh, and it was morally right. But it probably cost her, her life”.¹⁴⁷

In the following is a facsimile of Ann-Sofie Dahl’s chronicle in *Smedjan*, which is the think tank Timbro’s magazine for opinion-forming journalism with a liberal starting point:

¹⁴⁷ Ann - Sofie Dahl (9th of October 2023) *Anna Lindh’s killer had a political motive*: <https://timbro.se/smedjan/anna-lindhs-mordare-hade-politiskt-motiv/>

In the end, the possibility that the UDB was behind Lindh's murder cannot be ruled out, in the sense that the killer could have been directly or indirectly recruited or encouraged by the UDB to kill her. In other words, on the one hand, the killer might have been instructed by the UDB to simulate the role of a mentally ill person and to then kill Lindh, as in Scandinavia it is the lowest criterion to declare someone mentally ill, and the punishments for the mentally ill are lower than those in other countries. Or, on the other hand, the killer might truly have been a mentally ill person, and the UDB might have perfidiously incited and encouraged him to kill Lindh.

Consequently, in the context of Backer's murder, the UDB might have managed, in a sophisticated way, to manipulate a mentally ill person to kill Backer, with the aim of achieving the double effect; to discredit or weaken the activity of Albanian political emigration in Western countries, because Backer's killer was of Albanian origin, and especially to discredit or weaken the possibility that the Kosova issue would be imposed for a solution within an international agenda. In the context of Lindh's murder, the UDB might have incited and encouraged a mentally ill person to kill her with the purpose of scaring other Western politicians with other arbitrary killings in public areas, if they supported the path to independence for Kosova in the future.

In fact, although Sweden was not a NATO member until 2024, it actively supported efforts to achieve and strengthen peace in Kosova. An example of this can be seen in the former Swedish government headed by Prime Minister Göran Persson, who served from 1996 to 2006, and Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, who held office from 1998 to 2003. They were instrumental in establishing the Independent International Commission on Kosova to evaluate the situation and propose future status solutions for the region. They expressed deep concern over the absence of independent analysis regarding the Kosova conflict and were consequently preoccupied with any real effort to explore the lessons to be learned from it.

On October 23, 2000, the International Commission on Kosova presented its report to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in New York. In this report, the Independent International Commission shed light on many factors comprising the Kosova crisis and concluded that the most

viable path for the region's future was supervised independence, wherein the international community would assume responsibility for guaranteeing initial security, overseeing the protection of minority rights and facilitating Kosova's integration into an effective stability pact.¹⁴⁸ Through this credible international report, it was considered for the first time that Kosova's path towards independence was a legitimate process. This may have been the reason that the Serbian regime took revenge on Lindh, especially to implicitly warn other Western politicians that anyone who supported Kosova's path to independence may face arbitrary killings such as that of Lindh. Therefore, like Backer, Lindh's unwavering commitment to achieving peace in Kosova ultimately took her life.

Another murder that may have been orchestrated by the Serbian secret service is the assassination of Jill Dando. Dando was a prominent British television presenter and journalist that was found murdered outside her home in Fulham, London, on April 26, 1999. For years, suspicions have persisted that she was targeted by a professional assassin, possibly in retaliation for her involvement in a BBC-appeal supporting Kosovar refugees during the Kosova War (1998–1999).

Jill Dando's case illustrates that the purpose of the Serbian state security service may have been to intimidate influential foreign journalists who were reporting on the humanitarian crisis in Kosova, and calling for international action against the individual responsible for it, Slobodan Milošević himself.

On April 25, 2025, British media outlets, including LBC (London Broadcasting Company), reported that, according to eyewitness accounts from the day of the murder, Milorad Ulemek had been identified either as the perpetrator or as someone closely connected to Dando's killing.

Ulemek is notorious for his involvement in organized crime, including high-profile assassinations, and for his collaboration with the Serbian state security apparatus during Milošević's regime. He is also known for the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić on March 12, 2003, who had been a political opponent of Slobodan Milošević.

Below is an excerpt from LBC, relating to this recent development.

¹⁴⁸ The Independent International Commission on Kosovo (23rd of October, 2000): *The Kosovo Report*: <https://reliefweb.int/report/albania/kosovo-report> <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/784047f3-501d-3af1-a1a9-31498003d4a5/6D26FF88119644CFC1256989005CD392-thekosovoreport.pdf>



New clues unveiled in mysterious Jill Dando murder case as second witness links 'Serbian assassin' to TV star's death

25 April 2025, 02:48



A Serbian assassin may prove to be a key suspect in the murder of TV star Jill Dando in 1999, an investigation has revealed. *Picture: Getty/Alamy*

By Shannon Cook

A Serbian assassin may prove to be a key suspect in the murder of TV star Jill Dando in 1999, an investigation has revealed.

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A van driver who spotted a man running near the scene where Jill was killed said he looked like assassin Milorad Ulemek.

The witness was driving near where the TV star, 37, was shot dead at her home on April 26, 1999.

After The Mirror showed pictures of the assassin to the key witness, he told the paper "he does look like the man I saw."

Following the van driver's initial sighting of the man, he told the police two days later that he had seen a man wearing a dark suit running in front of his Ford Transit on the Fulham Palace Road, South West London.

In the following, is a further elaboration regarding the journey towards achieving peace in Kosova after the Dayton Conference (1995).

THE IMPACT OF THE COMMITMENT AND VALUABLE ADVICE FROM BERIT BACKER AND KRISTOFFER GJØTTERUD, THE COMMITMENT OF OTHER NORWEGIANS, INCLUDING THE COMMITMENT OF OTHER FOREIGNERS, TOWARDS PEACE-MAKING IN KOSOVA

Backer and Gjøtterud offered highly important advice to the leaders of the two main political forces of the Kosova Albanians, LPK and LDK. They advised them to focus on peaceful efforts for the liberation of Kosova and not to give reasons for the Serbian regime to pull Albanians out of tact, to prove to the world that Albanians do not want a peaceful approach to resolving the Kosova issue through democratic means and without violence. This advice was particularly important for the LPK, because it was the only powerful political organization of Albanians in the former Yugoslavia and in the diaspora that, in its programme, did not exclude armed uprising as a last resort for the liberation of Albanians in Yugoslavia.

It is worth mentioning that at the open meeting of the first visit of the Kosova delegation to the NHC on February 17, 1990, LDK leader Rugova expressed his highest regard for Backer and Gjøtterud and their advice during his speech.

In fact, peaceful efforts and passive resistance, led by Rugova, the Sakharov prize winner, played a crucial role in avoiding war between the Albanian people of Kosova and the neo-fascist regime of Milošević at the beginning of the 1990s. Otherwise, there was the possibility that genocide of the same dimensions as in Bosnia or even greater could also happen in Kosova. Unfortunately, the issue of Kosova was not included within the framework of the Dayton Conference (1995), and this demonstrated no hope that the Kosova Albanians could achieve freedom solely through peaceful efforts. However, the peaceful efforts for the liberation of Kosova as an internal factor and the genocide in Bosnia as an external factor, which deeply affected the conscience of Western countries, influenced the international legitimacy of the following war of the KLA. This was in the sense that the Kosova Albanians, in cooperation with the international community, had attempted for years to resolve the Kosova problem without war but were rebuked by Milošević. The West could not tolerate

another genocide such as the one in Bosnia, especially considering the peculiar geopolitical circumstances and the potential for an armed conflict in Kosova (unlike in Bosnia) to expand beyond Yugoslavia's borders.

As a chairman of the Council for the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Prishtina (KMDLNJ) in the early 1990s, Demaçi had continuously appreciated the advice from not only Backer but also Gjøtterud, who was an honorary member of the KMDLNJ.¹⁴⁹ It was of particular importance that Demaçi – who was considered the spiritual leader of the LPK and was regarded by many of his associates as self-willed – especially appreciated the advice of Backer. Not only did Demaçi say this in his remarks on the day of Backer's funeral, when he emphasized "her valuable advice", he often repeated it privately, that for the freedom of Kosova that we enjoy today, Backer's advice had been invaluable. It is significant that Backer had convinced Demaçi that if Kosova Albanians could not be freed through peaceful efforts or passive resistance, this would legitimize other forms of active resistance, and the international support for Kosova would not be lost. In other words, although Demaçi was not optimistic that Kosova would be liberated only through peaceful methods, he had been persuaded that these methods would have a legitimizing effect for other eventual methods for the liberation of Kosova, with the support of the international community. Therefore, he remained loyal to this political approach until the Dayton Conference.

As an example, in an interview from 1992, Demaçi stated the following: "Peaceful resistance is a modern method, but I am afraid that Serbia is trying to pull us out of tact to 'prove' to the world that Albanians do not like solving problems by democratic means without violence. Nevertheless, thanks to the help of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK), the people are keeping their calm, wisdom, peace and patience. As things are going further, time will require other forms of resistance, which I don't know what will be, but the people will look for them in one moment and will find those forms. If the international community will support us energetically for the realization of our goals, then the sacrifices will be smaller (...)".¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Research Magazine Apollon (1995) *Kristoffer Gjøtterud: An open horizon*: <https://www.apollon.uio.no/portretter/1995/horisont.html>

¹⁵⁰ Gashi 2010: 98

Fortunately, although Demaçi spent 28 years in Yugoslav prisons, he remained a sworn opponent of the politics of revenge and national hatred. Despite the great struggles and tension in the 1990s, he often used the description “our brothers, the Serbian people”, when he talked about Serbs in public appearances.¹⁵¹ Immediately after his release from prison on April 21, 1990, he declared that he would be on the side of all those who were in danger, no matter what this might cost: “I might go to prison. I could even die, not because I love Serbs and Montenegrins more, but because I love Albanians very much. I am against the idea of revenge, because I have plenty of scores to settle, but I don’t want to settle them. I want to turn my back on revenge”¹⁵².

Demaçi believed the Serbian people were being manipulated by the authorities and that an entire group of people should not be identified with any political class in power: “For me, all people are good. There are no bad people. Those bad things that are being done to us today are being done by the Serbian authorities, who could do the same thing to their own people. So, we should make a distinction between the Serbian people and the class in power. Albanians shouldn’t muddle these up, even though I understand those who aren’t in a position to make the distinction, because the terror being exercised by the Serbian authorities has no equal in the recent history of mankind”.¹⁵³

He also praised Serbian intellectuals who were bold enough to find ways to articulate their opposition to Serbian authorities, among them Bogdan Bogdanović, Milan Nikolić, Zagorka Golubović, Srdjan Popović and Lazar Stojanović. Demaçi said, “For me, these are the true sons of the Serbian people”¹⁵⁴. He added, “I don’t think that my people are an ideal people, a chosen people, who don’t do things that others do. Albanians haven’t done what Serbia is doing because they have never been in a position to do so. They have always been occupied, have always been oppressed”.¹⁵⁵

After meeting again with Demaçi in the United States in 1992, the Serbian dissident and intellectual Mihajlo Mihajlov – who was in the

¹⁵¹ Ibid: 99

¹⁵² Ibid: 101

¹⁵³ Ibid: 99-100

¹⁵⁴ Ibid:100

¹⁵⁵ Ibid: 100

Zabela Prison with Demaçi in Yugoslavia in the 1960s – wrote, “Today I met and hugged Adem Demaçi. In the American capital, he gave interviews to the most respected newspapers, talked to congressmen and senators, met with representatives of various foundations and associations for human rights. Everyone, of course, knew and emphasized that Demaçi was the writer of the first novel in the Albanian language in Yugoslavia, a recent winner of the prestigious Sakharov Prize awarded by the European Parliament, and a man who spent 28 years in prison. Say once – ‘Kosova’s Mandela’ (...). He did and is doing everything that he can to not let the struggle of Kosovars for political and civil equality be infected with hatred towards the Serbian people. And he, who was imprisoned for 28 years, can fight against international hatred. They wouldn’t trust anyone else like that (...)”.¹⁵⁶

Demaçi was especially admired by Albanian political prisoners in Yugoslavia. It is estimated that approximately 80% of political prisoners in the former Yugoslavia were Albanians, who were subjected to severe torture, including murder. Hundreds of Albanian soldiers were also imprisoned, and many Albanian soldiers were killed in the Yugoslav army for so-called hostile activities against Yugoslavia. The official version of the Belgrade regime regarding these murders was that the Albanian soldiers committed suicide. Even before 1981, there were cases of murder of Albanian soldiers in the Yugoslav army, but after 1981 these cases increased in number. Albanian political prisoners were violated, traumatized and some were even killed, and their family members suffered from the crimes committed against their loved ones.

In an interview on BK television in Belgrade in 1993, Demaçi stressed that, “As a man of peace I’m against war, but if Serbia threatened Kosova with war, it would lose”.¹⁵⁷ Be aware, he said, because, “Albanians are not a cowardly people who do not know how to fight”.¹⁵⁸

Although the Kosova Albanians, in cooperation with the international community, sought for years to resolve the Kosova problem without war, they were rebuked by Milošević. As a result, the LPK home branch in

¹⁵⁶ Mihajlo Mihajlov – *From Zabele to Washington* (26th of March 1992); Mihajlo Mihajlov-OD ZABELE DO VASINGTONA - drago boric - Blog.hr (dnevnik.hr)

¹⁵⁷ Gashi 2010: 111

¹⁵⁸ Ibid: 111-112

Kosova – namely, some of the LPK councils in Kosova – were gradually transformed into armed units. During this period, the emblematic leaders of the LPK home branch (in fact also some of the main founders of KLA) were Xhavit Haziri, Ahmet Haxhiu and Bejadin Hallaqi, who, along with several other activists, were arrested by the Serbian state security service, in 1993¹⁵⁹. As the LPK - home branch, and especially its leadership, was constantly hit (with imprisonment, torture, and murder), the LPK - diaspora branch (within the Albanian political emigration) had the powers, in certain situations, to take over the overall political leadership of the organization. This transfer of competencies took place in 1993, because the Serbian security service (in the context of the arrests), had managed to arrest the central leadership of the LPK in Kosova. Some of the activists who escaped arrests in Kosova immigrated abroad, while others, already operated within the armed units, and because of their insistence, the LPK diaspora branch decided to start issuing military communiqués, and the first was released on November 17, 1994. Thus, the exact date of the naming or formal establishment of the KLA is considered to be the date of the first military communiqué, when the leadership of the LPK diaspora branch decided to call the military units led by the LPK, the KLA. In this period the LPK's headship of the diaspora branch, was composed by Fazli Veliu, Muhamet Kelmendi, Emrush Xhemajli, Ali Ahmeti, Xhavit Haliti and Gafurr Elshani.¹⁶⁰

After the non-inclusion of the Kosova issue in the Dayton Conference, the KLA's armed operations escalated. In return, the KLA also suffered many blows, especially in 1997, when some of its main military

¹⁵⁹ Ramadan Avdiu, who was part of the central leadership of LPK-home branch, during and between the two general meetings of LPK (1991 - 1993), gives special importance to the contribution of three emblematic leaders of LPK-home branch: Xhavit Haziri, Ahmet Haxhiu and Bejadin Hallaqi: Ramadan Avdiu: "*Bejadin Hallaqi – a leader with high intellectual, political and patriotic qualities*" (2016): <https://pashtriku.org/ramadan-avdiu-behajdin-allaqi-udheheqes-me-kualitete-te-larta-intelektuale-politike-e-atdhetare/>

Ramadan Avdiu: "*Paper on the 30th anniversary of the Third General Meeting of the LPK*" (2021): <https://gazetalevizja.com/ramadan-avdiu-kumtese-ne-30-vjetorin-e-mbledhjes-se-trete-te-pergjithshme-te-lprk-se/>

Ramadan Avdiu: "*Ahmet Haxhiu, liaison of the generations of anti-occupation liberation resistance*" (2021): <https://gazetalevizja.com/ramadan-avdiu-ahmet-haxhiu-nderlidhes-i-brezave-te-qendreses-antipushtese-clirimtare/>

¹⁶⁰ Emrush Xhemajli (2002): *People's Movement of Kosova 1982-2002*: <http://lpk-kosova.com/historiku.html>

commanders – Zahir Pajaziti, Edmond Hoxha, Hakif Zejnullahu, Luan Haradinaj and Adrian Krasniqi – fell heroically. Prior to this, one of the primary leaders of one of the first armed units of the KLA, Qerim Kelmendi, was wounded in an action. In addition, the KLA coordinator in Kosova, Nait Hasani, was sentenced to 20 years in prison, the maximum penalty according to the Yugoslav penal code of that time.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the LPK in Western countries intensified their efforts to convince the Albanian diaspora of the necessity to support the KLA. As a result, on November 9, 1997, the representatives of the LPK in Germany – Fehmi Lladrovci, Ibrahim Kelmendi and Sabri Kiçmari – held a public conference with other compatriots. At the end of November and the beginning of December 1997, two public statements were offered on behalf of the KLA inside the country and abroad, in accordance with Xhavit Haliti, head of the Sector of Special Importance of LPK and Central Staff of the KLA, since it was still doubted that the KLA existed. Specifically, on November 28, 1997, in Llausha, Drenica, three KLA military commanders – Rexhep Selimi, Muj Krasniqi and Daut Haradinaj – announced the existence of the KLA in the presence of hundreds of people during the funeral of the teacher, Halit Gecaj, who was killed by Serbian forces.

On December 9, 1997, Nufri Lekaj – one of the close collaborators of the Sector of Special Importance of LPK and Central Staff of the KLA, and a political representative of the KLA in Scandinavia during the war in Kosova – publicly stated to the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) that the KLA existed and that Albanians in the diaspora had begun mobilizing to support the KLA both financially and militarily. The intention was to shape the international media discourse, emphasizing that the KLA served as a last resort to take Kosova's question onto the international agenda for resolution and act as a catalyst for Kosova's liberation. Moreover, the statement aimed to encourage fellow Albanians in the diaspora to recognize the importance of supporting the KLA. This initial statement supporting the KLA made through a foreign state media was also broadcast in other Scandinavian media and beyond, including the Kosova Albanian media, and was titled "Scandinavian media about the existence and actions of the KLA". At the end of 1997, Lekaj, along with his collaborators Fatmir Zymberaj, chairman of the Norwegian

branch of the LDK, and others, initiated the reconsolidation of the Albanian Association in Norway (AAN). At the same time, Lekaj served as the spokesperson for the AAN, which, as a unique case within the Albanian diaspora, successfully unified and included all political and cultural Albanian subjects in Norway. Irrespective of their political and religious beliefs, they had a common goal: providing logistical, political and diplomatic support to the KLA.

Below (after two photos), are two facsimiles of Lekaj's statement published in the two main Albanian newspapers, *Bujku* in Kosova and *Rilindja* in the Albanian diaspora. In the first photo are three representatives of the LPK in Germany, from the left, Fehmi Lladrovci, Sabri Kiçmari and Ibrahim Kelmendi, during the public conference in Köln, Germany, on November 9, 1997, at which they encouraged support for the KLA from other compatriots. In the second photo are three KLA military commanders, from the left, Muj Krasniqi, Rexhep Selimi and Daut Haradinaj, who announced the existence of the KLA in front of the audience in Llausha, Kosova, on November 28, 1997.



MJETET SKANDINAVE TË INFORMIMIT RRETH EKZISTIMIT DHE AKSION-
EVE TË UÇK-SË

Edhe durimi e ka fundin

Siç thekson gazeta norvegjeze "Dagens Nytt", në këtë shtet shqiptarët kanë filluar të grumbullojnë mjete dhe të regjistrohen vullnetarisht në radhët e UÇK-së

Stokholm, 9 dhjetor
Ka disa ditë rresht që gati në të gjitha mjetet skandinave të informimit është duke u folur e shkruar për aksionet e ndërmarrta të UÇK-së në disa mjedise të Kosovës, të cilat ishin të drejtuara kundër stacioneve dhe policëve serbë si dhe të bashkëpunëtorëve shqiptarë të kësaj policie. Edhe sot, duke shikuar lajmet e byrove të ndryshme informative, vërehet një interesim i shtuar i keqre agjencive hulumtuese të ndryshme apo mosekzistimin e UÇK-së. Po ashtu, sot në Kanalën e

parë të Radio Suedisë dhjetë minuta u trajta kjo çështje, e cila si epilog pati faktin se dalja në sipërfaqe e UÇK-së është pasojë e një status kuoje që mbretëroi deri më tash si dhe të një dhune të paparë që po ushtron regjimi i Beogradit mbi popullin e pafajshëm shqiptar. Me një fjalë, u tha në këtë emision, edhe durimi e ka fundin. Ndërkaq, gazeta e përditshme autoritative norvegjeze "Dagens Nytt" shkruan sot se shqiptarët e Kosovës me banin në këtë shtet nordik po tubojnë mjete materiale dhe po regjistrohen vullnetarisht në radhët e UÇK-së.

Në këtë informate, të cilën e konfirmuan edhe mjetet suedeze të informimit, thuhet se Nufri Leka është njëri ndër ata që bën pjesë në udhëheqjen e kësaj organizate, i cili për këtë gazetë thekson se UÇK-ja synim kryesor dhe të vetmin ka çlirimin e Kosovës nga Serbia. Po kështu bëhet me dije se edhe në një tubim të mbajtur në Malme të Suedisë rreth 200 bashkatdhetarë tubuan rreth 12 mijë korona për UÇK-në.

Do theksuar se sot në emisionin informativ në gjuhën shqipe "Ditari" të Radio-Suedisë u zhvillua një bisedë me një anëtar të Shtabit Qendror të UÇK-së, i cili u përqendrua në aksionet e fundit që i ndërmori kjo ushtri, me theks të veçantë në aksionin e 12 nëntorit në Llaushë të Skënderajt, në të cilin, siç tha ai, armiku pati humbje në njerëz dhe dëme të mëdha materiale, por, si gjithëherë ai këto nuk i qiti në sipërfaqe nga frika që pati prej popullit të vet.

XH. ÇITAKU

"BUZKU"

10.11.97

MJETET SKANDINAVE TË INFORMIMIT
RRETH EKZISTIMIT DHE AKSIONEVE TË
UÇK-SË

EDHE DURIMI E KA FUNDIN

Rilindja 11.12.97

Siç thekson gazeta norvegjeze "Dagens Nytt", në këtë shtet shqiptarët kanë filluar të grumbullojnë mjete dhe të regjistrohen vullnetarisht në radhët e UÇK-së

Ka disa ditë rresht që gati në të gjitha mjetet skandinave të informimit është duke u folur e shkruar për aksionet e ndërmarrta të UÇK-së në disa mjedise të Kosovës, të cilat ishin të drejtuara kundër stacioneve dhe policëve serbë si dhe të bashkëpunëtorëve shqiptarë të kësaj policie. Edhe sot, duke shikuar lajmet e byrove të ndryshme informative, vërehet një interesim i shtuar i këtyre agjencive lidhur me ekzistimin apo mosekzistimin e UÇK-së. Po ashtu, sot në Kanalën e parë të Radio Suedisë dhjetë minuta u trajta kjo çështje, e cila si epilog pati faktin se dalja në sipërfaqe e UÇK-së është pasojë e një status kuoje që mbretëroi deri më tash si dhe të një dhune të paparë që po ushtron regjimi i Beogradit mbi popullin e pafajshëm shqiptar. Me një fjalë, u tha në këtë emision, edhe durimi e ka fundin. Ndërkaq, gazeta e përditshme autoritative norvegjeze "Dagens Nytt" shkruan sot se shqiptarët e Kosovës me banin në këtë shtet nordik po tubojnë mjete materiale dhe po regjistrohen vullnetarisht në radhët e UÇK-së. Në këtë informate, të cilën e konfirmuan edhe mjetet suedeze të informimit, thuhet se Nufri Leka është njëri ndër ata që bën pjesë në udhëheqjen e kësaj organizate, i cili për këtë gazetë thekson se UÇK-ja synim kryesor dhe të vetmin ka çlirimin e Kosovës nga Serbia. Po kështu bëhet me dije se edhe në një tubim të mbajtur në Malme të Suedisë rreth 200 bashkatdhetarë tubuan rreth 12 mijë korona për UÇK-në.

Do theksuar se sot në emisionin informativ në gjuhën shqipe "Ditari" të Radio-Suedisë u zhvillua një bisedë me një anëtar të Shtabit Qendror të UÇK-së, i cili u përqendrua në aksionet e fundit që i ndërmori kjo ushtri, me theks të veçantë në aksionin e 12 nëntorit në Llaushë të Skënderajt, në të cilin, siç tha ai, armiku pati humbje në njerëz dhe dëme të mëdha materiale, por, si gjithëherë ai këto nuk i qiti në sipërfaqe nga frika që pati prej popullit të vet.

XH. ÇITAKU

The appearance of the KLA was a new challenge for the international community regarding security in the Balkans. After the Dayton

Agreement, many Western diplomats had rehabilitated Milošević, and they regarded him as a constructive force in the region whose removal might lead to instability. This was despite the fact that the Kosova issue was not resolved within the framework of the Dayton Agreement, and the general socio-political situation of the Albanians in Kosova continued to be very difficult. The Dayton Accords were a peace agreement reached on November 21, 1995, by the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia, ending the war in Bosnia and outlining a general framework agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

According to historian Noel Malcolm, "The ending of the war in Bosnia brought no end to the crisis in Kosovo. This fact alone was a blow to Rugova's prestige: He had spent four years telling his people, in effect, that they must be patient until the international community imposed a final settlement on ex-Yugoslavia, in which their interests would also be respected. But that settlement, worked out by the Americans at Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995, left the Albanians of Kosovo exactly where they were. The only nod in Kosovo's direction was an agreement by the UN Security Council that the 'outer wall' of sanctions against Serbia (involving such things as denial of access to the International Monetary Fund) would remain in place until Belgrade reformed its human rights record in Kosovo. Otherwise, the Dayton settlement had the general effect of strengthening Milošević's rule in Serbia: Western diplomats made it clear that they were grateful to him for his 'peace-making' efforts, and that they regarded him as a constructive force in the region, whose removal might lead to 'instability' (...).

"The basic policy pursued by Rugova and the LDK since 1990 has been a three-fold one: to prevent violent revolt; to 'internationalize' the problem, which means seeking various forms of international political involvement (ranging from diplomatic mediation to the setting up of a UN Trusteeship over Kosovo); and to deny systematically the legitimacy of Serbian rule, by boycotting elections and censuses and creating at least the outlines of the state apparatus of a Kosovo 'Republic'. The first of these three aims has been successful to an extent that could hardly have been imagined by anyone who knew the warlike traditions of the Albanians and their long history of armed uprisings. The second has involved Rugova in innumerable visits to foreign capitals, but has achieved little beyond some

resolutions by bodies such as the United Nations or the European Parliament. Both the second and third policy aims are directed against the idea – which is still accepted in principle by all the major Western powers – that the status of Kosovo is just an internal question for Serbia. By setting up the institutions of a separate republic, the Albanians of Kosovo have engaged in a strategy of political ‘as if’. To behave as if Kosovo were not part of Serbia, might seem, in the short term, sheer make-believe; but if the strategy were persisted in for long enough, foreign governments might eventually feel obliged to admit that they were the ones who were engaging in fiction when they continued to treat Kosovo as a mere region of the Serbian state.

“The question for the Albanians, therefore, was: How long was long enough, and how much suffering would they have to endure during that time? (...). Arbitrary arrest and police violence have become routine. Serbian law allows the arrest and summary imprisonment for up to two months of anyone who has committed a ‘verbal crime’, such as insulting the ‘patriotic feelings’ of Serbian citizens. It also permits a procedure known as ‘informative talks’, under which a person can be summoned to a police station and questioned for up to three days; in 1994, 15,000 people in Kosovo were questioned in this way, usually without being told the reason for the summons. Serbian law does not, of course, permit the beating up of people in police custody; but many graphic testimonies exist of severe beatings with truncheons, the application of electric shocks to the genitals, and so on. Also widely violated in Kosovo are the official rules for the lawful search of people’s houses: Homes are frequently raided without explanation, and goods and money confiscated (i.e. stolen) by the police. In 1994 alone, the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms in Kosovo recorded 2,157 physical assaults by the police, 3,553 raids on private dwellings and 2,963 arbitrary arrests”.¹⁶¹

Within this political context, there was a tendency to neglect the existence of the KLA, and there were even speculations that the UDB could be behind the KLA or that the KLA was a terrorist organization, as propagandized by the Serbian regime to hinder international support for the KLA. These speculations had the effect of demotivating the support of the KLA amongst the Kosova Albanians in Kosova and the diaspora as

¹⁶¹ Malcolm (1998): 363-365, 368-369

well as internationally. In fact, the KLA was the last hope and last resort of the Kosova Albanians to be freed from occupation and oppression by the Serbian state regimes ever since 1912. It was especially important that the KLA had full legitimacy, in the sense that the Kosova Albanians, in cooperation with the international community, had attempted for years to resolve the Kosova issue without war but were prevented from doing so by Milošević. Additionally, they could not endure the systematic violence of the Serbian regime in Kosova for decades, including arbitrary raids and the violence of Milošević's police in Albanian families.

Consequently, it was of particular importance that credible foreign organizations did not ignore the existence of the KLA and its self-defence liberation character. In this context, it is worth emphasizing the important role of the NHC, an advisory organization for the NMFA and influential within the IHF. Specifically, its secretary general Bjørn Engesland was precisely informed by visiting the fighting zone in Kosova during this period. He also explained to the Norwegian newspaper *Dagsavisen* that the possibility of the UDB being behind the KLA was small. According to Engesland, the odds were greater that the KLA was characterized by small, armed groups who wanted to protect their homes and families. In this regard, the *Dagsavisen* edition of February 1, 1998, reported, "(...) 'The encounter at Lausha on the 26th of November last year indicates that a well-organized group is behind it, an organization that succeeded in stopping Serbian forces', says general secretary of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Bjørn Engesland, who was recently in the area. He continues with: '(...) I do not have documentation to say that the KLA exists, but the encounter at Lausha suggests that some organization on the Albanian side is behind it, and they succeeded in a military attack. (...) Whether it is the KLA that is behind these acts or there are small, independent armed groups that want to defend their homes and families (...)'"

Engesland was the chairman of the NHC for 25 years, from 1995 to 2020. In 1995–2002, he often risked his life with visits to Kosova and other areas of the former Yugoslavia, just to testify to the truth of the human rights situation and political developments in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁶² Along with Gjøtterud, Backer and some other prominent examples,

¹⁶² Norwegian Helsinki Committee (16th of October, 2020): *Bjørn Engesland – 25 years as general secretary*: <https://www.nhc.no/bjorn-engesland-25-ar-som-generalsekretaer/>

Engesland is one of the prominent activists of the Helsinki Civil Process, also known as the international Helsinki Movement. In fact, he started his activity in the 1970s by demonstrating in front of the Soviet embassy for the release of Yuri Orlov and other political prisoners in the Soviet Union.¹⁶³ Among others, he was honoured with an award commemorating his contribution to human rights defence in Russia. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, a historian, prominent human rights activist and one of the last Soviet dissidents active in post-Soviet Russia – who founded the Moscow Helsinki Group alongside Orlov and others in 1976 – said the following in a greeting statement to Engesland: “Your life is a brilliant example of serving a higher purpose and the rare conjunction of idealism with high professionalism. The members of the Moscow Helsinki Group have been unanimous in their will to award you with this symbolic sign of recognition of your outstanding input into the development of the human rights movement in Russia. I will always be grateful to you for being among the very first Westerners to express their solidarity with a tiny group of Moscow dissidents challenging the totalitarian Soviet system, as well as for being among the founding fathers of the international Helsinki Movement for human rights”.¹⁶⁴ As a *persona non grata* unwelcome by Russian authorities because of his engagement in human rights, Engesland received the award at a conference on human rights in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he met with members of the Moscow Helsinki Group. He stated the following: “I am deeply humbled by this honour from the bravest and most hardworking human rights defenders in Europe. I share this award with all the Russian activists who sacrificed their lives, those who are still risking their lives against injustice and my fellow dedicated colleagues at the NHC”.¹⁶⁵

The following is a facsimile of the above-quoted fragment from the Norwegian newspaper *Dagsavisen*, dated February 1, 1998:

¹⁶³ Norwegian Newspaper “Universitas” (5th of May 2010): *Interview with Bjorn Engesland*: <https://www.universitas.no/nyhet-studietid/sorgenfri/238243>

¹⁶⁴ Norwegian Helsinki Committee (29th of May 2018): *Bjorn Engesland receives award*: <https://www.nhc.no/en/bjorn-engesland-receives-award/>

¹⁶⁵ Ibid

Her ble serberne stanset

— Trefningen tyder på at en godt organisert gruppe står bak

LAU SHA (Dagsavisen). — Her skjedde angrepet, forteller en representant for det lokale mennesskerrettighetsrådet i Serbia. Han peker oppover skråningene noen kilometer utenfor landsbyen

Lausha som på begge sider ender i bakketopper et stykke unna veien. Det ideelle stedet for et godt planlagt angrep. Bakkeskråningene er tett kledd med løvtrær et stykke opp i lia, mens veien ligger

åpen og ubeskyttet. Og ennå ligger tomme patronhylser spredd over et større område, to måneder etter angrepet som den mystiske organisasjonen, Kosovos frigjøringshær (KLA), skal ha stått for.



— Angrepet mot serbisk politi og pansrede kjøretøy på akkurat dette stedet, må ha vært godt planlagt, sier Bjørn Engesland, generalsekretær i Den norske Helsingforskomiteen. (Foto: Elisabeth Salvesen)

INGEN DOKUMENTASJON

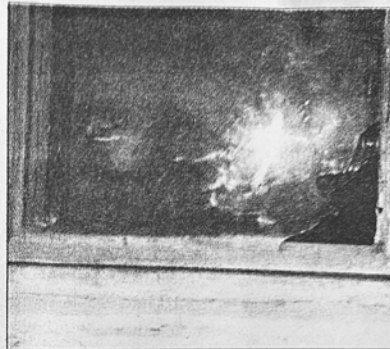
Trefningen ved Lausha 26. november i fjor tyder på at en godt organisert gruppe står bak, en organisasjon som lyktes i å stanse serbiske styrker, sier generalsekretær Bjørn Engesland i Den norske Helsingforskomiteen som nylig var i området.

Jeg har ikke dokumentasjon for å si at KLA eksisterer, men trefningen ved Lausha tyder på at en eller annen organisasjon på albansk side står bak, og de lyktes med et militært angrep.

17 DRAP

Hittil har KLA tatt på seg ansvaret for minst 17 drap på serbere eller albanere som har samarbeidet med serberne.

Enen det nå er KLA som står bak disse voldshandlingene eller det er små, uavhengige væpnede grupper som vil forsvare sine hjem



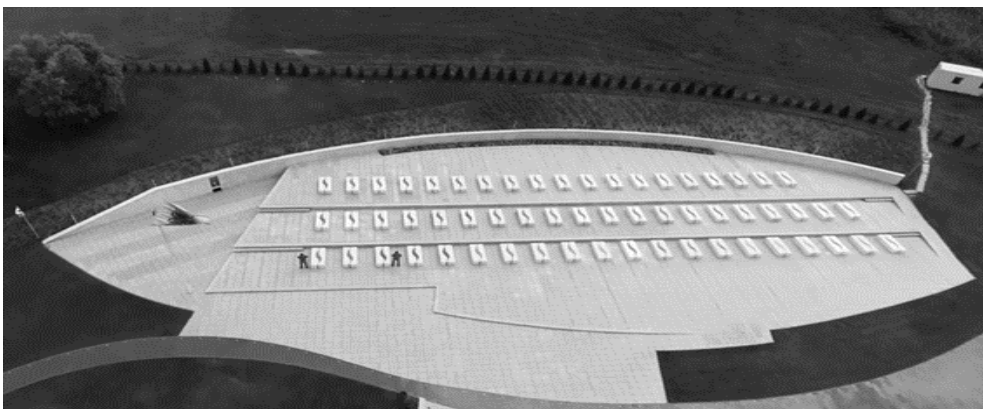
Etter at de serbiske styrkene måtte trekke seg tilbake fra bakholdet ved Lausha, skjedde blant annet mot bolighus og en skole i området. En lærer som oppholdt seg i et kontor på skolen, ble drept da serbisk politi skjøt gjennom skolevinduet. (Foto: Elisabeth Salvesen)

og familier eller det tredje alternativet som forklarer hendelsene som provokasjoner iverksatt av det hemmelige serbiske politiet for å få et påskudd til å sette i gang en

større militæroffensiv, så er resultatet en svært spent situasjon med nye drap på begge sider snart hver uke nå, sier Engesland bekymret.

On March 5–7, 1998, Serb forces blockaded Adem Jashari's family compound in the village of Prekaz, Kosova, and killed Jashari and 58 of his family and relatives, including women, children and the elderly. Jashari had been the emblematic military leader of the KLA. In reaction to this barbaric action by the Serbian forces, the AAN organized the first demonstration in the Albanian diaspora, in Oslo, to express deep indignation against the Milošević regime and support for the KLA. The organization of this demonstration and following protests in the capitals of Western countries, including Oslo and Washington, D.C., was important to inform the international community about what was happening in Kosova, since the Milošević regime sought to censor information about the killing of women, children and the elderly in Kosova, and attempted to characterize the KLA as a terrorist organization. The demonstrations in support of the KLA contributed to stronger military - political mobilization and legitimization for the KLA.

Below are three photos. In the first photo is the memorial complex for Jashari's family in Prekaz, which is often visited by numerous people from public life, whether Albanian or international. Many have left notes in the book of impressions. What is greatly remembered is this note by the Frenchman Bernard Kushner, who wrote, "If there was a Nobel Prize for freedom, it would surely go to the Jashari family". In the second and third photos are the first demonstrations in the diaspora in support of the KLA, namely, in Norway and Germany, in March 1998:



On March 24, 1998, Serb forces surrounded the village of Gllogjan in Dukagjin (Kosova) and launched an attack on the Haradinaj family, who were already on alert for a possible assault and who, along with other comrades-in-arms, waged successful resistance that led to the repulsion of

Serbian forces. The resistance of the Jashari and Haradinaj families inspired other Albanians in Kosova and in the diaspora to mobilize more actively within the framework of the KLA. Nevertheless, the KLA was in a highly asymmetrical position, relative to the armed forces of the Milošević regime (resembling David against Goliath), and unfortunately, international political institutions continued to hold a dismissive and prejudiced attitude toward the KLA. Therefore, the consolidation of the KLA's Diplomatic Group - comprised mainly of well-educated activists from prestigious Western universities who represented the KLA in nearly all Western countries - played a decisive role in the KLA's initial diplomatic achievements.

In this period, the LPK's leadership was composed of Bedri Islami, Jashar Salihu, Bardhyl Mahmuti, Sejdi Gega, Agush Buja, Ibrahim Kelmendi and Ali Ahmeti.¹⁶⁶ On August 13, 1998, the political statement No. 7 of the general staff of the KLA made the names of the political representatives of the KLA, public – Jakup Krasniqi, Bardhyl Mahmuti, Xhavit Haliti, Hashim Thaçi, Faton Mehmetaj and Sokol Bashota – and gave full confidence to Demaçi to take the leading role in this process.¹⁶⁷ On June 29, 1998, an important meeting took place between Mahmuti and Richard Holbrooke, at the Crans Montana International Forum in Switzerland¹⁶⁸.

According to Mahmuti, "...The publication of the names of political representatives removed a number of dilemmas that arose either during press conferences with journalists from various international media, or in expanding contacts with diplomats from different countries. On the domestic level, the establishment of the KLA Office in Prishtina by the symbol of our national resistance, Adem Demaçi, marked the greatest result, because it offered a concrete opportunity to those who were interested in contacting KLA representatives in Kosova. While on the international level, it enabled us to create the KLA Diplomatic Group

¹⁶⁶ Exclusive interview of Bardhyl Mahmuti for Epoka e Re – newspaper (December 14, 2023): *Was there a "conspiracy" against the LPK? A pati "komplot" kundër LPK-së?* (14) – Epoka e Re

¹⁶⁷ Exclusive interview of Bardhyl Mahmut for Epoka e Re - newspaper (December 23, 2023): *Political Declaration number 7 opened the doors of diplomacy*. Deklarata Politike numër 7 i hapë dyert e diplomacisë (16) – Epoka e Re

¹⁶⁸ The meeting on June 29th, 1998 at the International Forum of Crans-Montana, between the KLA spokesman abroad, Bardhyl Mahmuti, and the US special envoy for the Balkans, Richard Holbrooke: <http://www.zemrashqiptare.net/news/19040/ina-interviste-me-bardhyl-mahmutin.html>

with representatives in the decision-making centres of the EU [the European Union] and the USA.

“In order to be as efficient as possible for Switzerland, where the headquarters of the United Nations were located, Ramadan Avdiu, Jashar Salihu, Bilall Sherifi and Agush Buja were appointed. For Norway, which at that time led the OSCE, Nufri Lekaj was appointed. For Germany and Austria, Sabri Kiçmari, Rexhë Ibërdemaj and Mujë Rugova were appointed. For Denmark, Ibrahim Xhemajli; for Great Britain, Pleurat Sejdiu; and for the USA, Dino Hasanaj; while I also covered France and Belgium, due to my command of the French language. In the most critical moments when the Albanian people of Kosova were faced with the offensive of the Serbian armed forces that were implementing the genocide project, the publication of the political representatives of the KLA opened the doors for diplomatic meetings in the countries with the most weight in international relations.

“In addition, the great interest of foreign journalists made it possible to hold hundreds of conferences with journalists in Prishtina, Geneva, Paris, Brussels, Bonn, Vienna, London, Copenhagen, Oslo, etc. As a result of a diverse political, diplomatic and media work, we managed to change the perception that was created of the KLA in the framework of international political institutions. In this context, on September 23, 1998, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1199, which marked a qualitative change in the attitude towards the KLA”.¹⁶⁹

According to researcher Daniel Cservolgyi, “Following its reclassification, the KLA has become an indispensable player in the Kosovo peace process. The KLA’s involvement in the conflict-settlement talks, had already taken place during its reclassification process in June-July 1998, after which the KLA was never linked to terrorism again in wide-ranging political statements. Later, in September 1998, all members of the UNSC signed Resolution No. 1199, which overwrote or overrode in many areas the March UNSCR No. 1160. The UNSCR 1199 did not include the KLA by name; only the condemnation of terrorist acts remained in this newer version of this Kosovo-related, UNSC’s collective attitude representer high-profile document. The condemnation of the KLA for terrorism would be in this document if UNCSR members had

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

assessed the highlight of the link as appropriate/proper - they still saw the KLA - terrorism link as appropriate/proper in March but not in September. After the reclassification process, the KLA was mentioned mostly by its name in the international community's documents and statements, but there was no terrorism linked to the organization (...). The next major indicator of the KLA's wide acceptance and status as legitimate belligerent came during the Rambouillet Peace Talks (...). Beyond the "diplomatic partner" status, the KLA also became a military partner/ally of the NATO in the spring of 1999 (...).¹⁷⁰

Four of the political representatives of the KLA, mentioned above, were close friends and collaborators of Backer: Demaçi, Haliti, Kelmendi and Lekaj. In addition to concrete help for the UÇK in the field, Lekaj also served as a representative of the KLA in Scandinavia, with an office in Oslo. This is reflective of the influence of Norway in international relations, and especially the leadership of the OSCE in this period, headed by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk.

In the following, there are eight photos as an example of KLA representatives, namely the members of the KLA - Diplomatic Group, during their political-diplomatic activities in conferences, interviews and television debates about Kosova. The first photo depicts Bardhyl Mahmuti and British Foreign Minister Robin Cook at a press conference. In the second photo, Jashar Salihu engages in an interview for the Cable News Network (CNN) and *Time* magazine. The third photo depicts Sabri Kiçmari on ZDF television, while the fourth photo presents Nufri Lekaj at one of the televised debates in Norway in which former Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, currently secretary general of NATO, also participated. In the fifth photo, Dino Asanaj is interviewed by American journalists, and in the sixth, seventh and eighth photos are Ramadan Avdiu, Rexhë Ibërdemaj and Pleurat Sejdiu, respectively.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Daniel Cservolgyi (2002): *The role and ramifications of the Kosovo Liberation Army's reclassification in the peace process of Kosovo*, p. 45, 46, 47: AD1173258.pdf (dtic.mil)

¹⁷¹ In addition to the above-mentioned, the KLA representatives, namely the members of the KLA - Diplomatic Group headed by political scientist Bardhyl Mahmuti, were also Bilall Sherifi, Agush Buja, Muj Rugova, Xhevat Bislimi, Ibrahim Xhemajli, Visar Reka and Naim Sadiku. In this context, several notable figures from the Albanian political emigration also made significant contributions, including Ismail Kadare, Muhamedin Kullashi, Daut Dauti, Shinasi Rama, Shefki Mexhuani, Rrustem Ibraj, Bruno Ceka, Reshat Sahitaj, Sadik Tolaj, among others.



At the insistence of Xhavit Haliti and others, Adem Demaçi assumed responsibility and was appointed General Political Representative of the KLA, based in the KLA office in Prishtina. He was supported by KLA Secretary Albin Kurti, as well as Skender Kastrati, Shasivar Makolli, Blerim Reka, and Mahmut Bakalli.¹⁷² This appointment played an important role for the even greater mobilization of the KLA on a national level, and it had a similar effect on the international scene, as the KLA war began to be identified directly with the sacrifice of Demaçi, an internationally recognized personality known the “Mandela of the Albanians”.

In the following two photos, Demaçi, in his capacity as the general political representative of the KLA, visits the KLA soldiers in the field in 1998, together with Kurti:

¹⁷² Newspaper - Demokracia (April 1, 2022) : *These were the 60 assistants of Adem Demaçi in the KLA Office in Pristina* : <https://demokracia.com/emrat-keta-ishin-60-punetoret-e-adem-demacit-ne-zyren-e-uck-se-ne-prishtine/>



Previously, on June 24, 1998, a meeting took place in Junik, Kosova, between several soldiers of the Kosova Liberation Army (KLA), led by Hajdin Abazi, and the U.S. Special Envoy for the Balkans, Richard Holbrooke. The event attracted considerable international media attention. On the same day, among other outlets, the Associated Press reported on the meeting in an article titled “Holbrooke Meets With Kosovo Rebels,” describing the encounter as a significant and unusual diplomatic move. The report noted that Holbrooke’s direct engagement with KLA fighters in Junik was widely perceived as bringing the organization into the sphere of international diplomatic recognition.¹⁷³

Below is a photograph of Richard Holbrooke and Hajdin Abazi taken during that meeting:



¹⁷³ Associated Press, “Holbrooke Meets With Kosovo Rebels,” June 24, 1998, AP News Archive.

Norway's important and constructive role in the framework of the Helsinki Process and international relations in general was strengthened even more after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, as the starting point for the Helsinki Process, was renamed in 1995 as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In the same year, the member states of the OSCE signed the so-called Pact on Stability in Europe. Their aim was to create a peaceful resolution of all disputes related to the issues of borders and national minorities. In this context, for its peacekeeping operations, the OSCE could request military support from NATO or the EU.¹⁷⁴

Norway became a strong contributor to efforts to prevent the war in Kosova from escalating into a regional war, and towards achieving peace in Kosova during its chairmanship of the OSCE in 1998–1999. Among other factors, the OSCE was important in the mediation of the ceasefire between the KLA and the Serbian forces, especially regarding the monitoring of war crimes. One of the massacres – the Racak massacre in the village of Racak, Kosova, in which dozens of Albanian civilians were killed – received the attention of the world because it was directly reported by the OSCE monitors led by William Walker, the head of the Kosova Verification Mission. This was a peacekeeping mission mounted by the OSCE in an attempt to halt the ongoing violence in Kosova by verifying compliance on the part of Yugoslav forces with UN resolutions.¹⁷⁵ Walker described what he saw as “the saddest event in my life” when he visited the village with many media representatives a day after the massacre: “From what I have seen, it is obvious that we are faced with a massacre and a crime against humanity”.¹⁷⁶ The Racak massacre, which occurred on January 15, 1999, is considered a turning point in NATO's intervention in Kosova.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Norwegian Encyclopedia; OSCE (2024): <https://snl.no/OSSE>

¹⁷⁵ ReliefWeb (20th of October 1998); *OSCE deploys Kosovo Verification Mission*: <https://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/osce-deploys-kosovo-verification-mission>

¹⁷⁶ Anadolu Agency (15th of January 2024); *Kosovo remembers 45 victims of 1999 Racak Massacre*: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/kosovo-remembers-45-victims-of-1999-racak-massacre/3109519#>

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

In one of the parliamentary sessions, Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk, an experienced diplomat and peacemaker, who also chaired the OSCE, expressed the following: “When it comes to Kosovo, it is important that we also take part through our OSCE chairmanship. We see that the OSCE can play a role, and we will also take advantage of the opportunity to create peace and stability in Europe”.¹⁷⁸ Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, in one of the sessions on October 15, 1998, stated, “President Milošević clearly understands only one language, namely, power. Therefore, it became necessary for NATO to adopt an activation order – with a deadline – for a possible military action”.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, other influential politicians spoke during the parliamentary sessions to express their determination and commitment to stop the violence of the Milošević regime against the Albanians in Kosovo. For example, on October 27, 1998, Erik Solheim declared that NATO’s intervention is a necessary action: “In my opinion, the situation in Kosovo is now of such a nature that emergency law must come before international law”.¹⁸⁰ The politician Jens Stoltenberg specified that “peace in Europe depended on peace in the Balkans, and ... this had to be an important motivating factor for the international community to create lasting peace in the area”.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, politician Håkon Blankenborg underlined that stopping the violence against the Albanian population in Kosovo should have more priority than the aspect of not violating the principle of sovereignty; he added that “the problem is not this [violation of international law]. The problem is that there is abuse within a state that the international community cannot accept. The assault is not an internal matter”.¹⁸²

In general, the pro-NATO intervention debate in the Norwegian Parliament was based mainly on values in line with Fridtjof Nansen’s humanitarian tradition in Norwegian foreign policy, focusing on arguments and efforts to defend human rights and create lasting peace in the area. Nevertheless, other Norwegian politicians focused more on *realpolitik* arguments for NATO’s pro-intervention. For example, politician Jan

¹⁷⁸ Helseth 2007: 69

¹⁷⁹ Ibid: 59

¹⁸⁰ Ibid: 70 – 71

¹⁸¹ Ibid: 56

¹⁸² Bruun – Lie 2004: 85

Petersen argued that Norway should support and participate in the NATO intervention, because “firstly, a good relationship with our allies in NATO would then be preserved, and in the next step this would serve Norwegian security policy interests”.¹⁸³ In other words, the largest parties and the majority of representatives in the Norwegian Parliament, who had participated in the debates during the parliamentary sessions, had expressed support for NATO’s intervention and the Norwegian participation in this operation to stop the violence of the Milošević regime in Kosova. In fact, the decision was made almost unanimously; only two members of the Norwegian Parliament voted against Norway’s participation in this NATO operation.¹⁸⁴

The positive relations between Norway and the United States became even better during the period in which Kjell Magne Bondevik was prime minister. In fact, when U.S. President Bill Clinton paid an official visit to Norway in 1999, it was the first time a sitting U.S. president had visited the country. Bondevik intensified contact with the White House and had several conversations with top American leaders during his several trips to the United States. In the statement for press No. 108/99 published by the Prime Minister’s Office, under the title “Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik visiting the U.S. for talks with President Bill Clinton”, it is clear that the situation in the Balkans was the priority in these talks, as Bondevik said the following in this statement: “I am looking forward to the visit to Washington. It will help to strengthen the close and good relations that prevail between Norway and the USA, both bilaterally, through our alliance community in NATO, and through our cooperation in other multilateral organizations. Security policy issues, the follow-up to the NATO summit, the situation in the Balkans, the relationship with Russia and the Nordic areas will be among the central topics during the talks with President Clinton”.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Helseth 2007: 51

¹⁸⁴ Ibid: 62, 86

¹⁸⁵ Regjeringen.no, Press release; Nr. 108/99: *Prime minister Kjell Magne Bondevik visits USA for talks with President Bill Clinton*. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumentarkiv/Regjeringen-Bondevik-I/smk/Nyheter-og-pressemeldinger/1999/statsminister_kjell_magne_bondevik-3/id241813/



Knut Vollebæk and William Walker



Knut Vollebæk and Javier Solana



Knut Vollebæk and Kjell M Bondevik



Kjell M Bondevik and Bill Clinton

During the war in Kosova, the AAN initiated the placement of the NorHosp Military Field Hospital from Norway in the Albania–Kosova border area, in Kruma. This was in cooperation with the medical staff of the well-known Norwegian humanitarian organization, the Norwegian Aid Committee (NORWAC), and a sponsorship by the NMFA. Specifically, the AAN sector for health in Kosova¹⁸⁶ and the chairman of NORWAC, Professor Dr Erik Fosse, had applied for the funding from the NMFA.¹⁸⁷

Fosse headed the group of surgeons in this hospital, accompanied by the anaesthesiologist, Professor Dr Petter Andres Steen, and the operating room nurse, Kjersti Fiveland. The coordinator of the team of doctors was pathologist Kristin Refsdal,¹⁸⁸ who moved around with the help of a wheelchair. NORWAC had only one employee, and the others were idealists who mostly worked in the Norwegian health services.¹⁸⁹ These Norwegians and their colleagues of the medical staff within NorHosp remained silent without seeking glory and meritocracy, but as true humanists, they helped Kosova greatly. Kristin Refsdal's brother, journalist Pål Refsdal, had entered Kosova as a war journalist in cooperation with the AAN, and was injured while doing so.

The lives of many civilians and KLA soldiers were saved at this military field hospital. This hospital had a double importance for the KLA soldiers, since they feared serious injury or death as a direct result of the wrong medical treatment or the lack of treatment. Consequently, this Norwegian hospital provided KLA soldiers with both security and proper treatment.¹⁹⁰ The general coordinator of this hospital was the AAN, and representatives of the AAN were always present there. It is worth noting that Norway was the only Western country that helped Kosova in this way. Fosse was quoted for a story that appeared in the newspaper of the University of Oslo, *Uniforum*: 'Norway is the only country that has accepted the plea from the Kosovo Albanians representatives in-exile for

¹⁸⁶ The sector of the Albanian Association in Norway, for health in Kosova, was led by Kristin Refsdal, Ismailhaki Ahmedi and Remzi Idrizi - Ziki.

¹⁸⁷ Kjell Arne Bakke (10th of June 1999) *NORWAC: Our contribution when the war rages*: <https://www.dagensmedisin.no/norwac-vart-bidrag-nar-krigen-raser/230511>

¹⁸⁸ Ibid

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

help to build a field hospital'. Together with the Norwegian Albanian Association and the Health Association for Kosovo, NORWAC applied to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the funds on the project in Kruma. Fosse sees nothing problematic in an aid organization choosing a side in a conflict, as NORWAC has done in favour of the Kosovo Albanians and the KLA guerrillas; quite the opposite. 'If Norwegians experienced war in Norway and had to flee to Sweden, we would take it seriously if aid organizations from Pakistan, Turkey or Afghanistan set up refugee camps and aid receptions without asking us what we needed. They should rather make contact with political representatives and draw up a plan together', [Fosse said]. He is of the opinion that it is contrived and can also be downright dangerous to try to be impartial when working in war zones. 'We work with the Kosovo Albanian refugees and have already donated the hospital to them. The soldiers in the KLA primarily consist of refugees, and we gained a lot of trust in those with whom we have collaborated. In order to not be paralyzed by action, we had to choose a side. The Kosovo Albanians have been subjected to harassment for a long time, which has only peaked with the deportation and the war in recent months. They have experienced being segregated from the Serbs at school, and they have experienced being banned from universities. When Norway becomes biased in a conflict and goes to war, one must be able to choose a side and work with the local authorities', believes Fosse (...)" ¹⁹¹ The following is a facsimile of the full interview:

¹⁹¹ Marit Schulstok (17th of June 1999): *With a scalpel in the war zone*. <https://www.uniform.no/no/nyheter/1999/uniform10-99/08.html>

Med skalpell i krigssonen



Uniform nr. 10 1999



Etter halvannet døgn med hardt arbeid var det hemmelige norske sykehuset i Kruma operativt. (Foto: Petter Andreas Steen)



Tirsdag var Fosse og Steen i møte med Utenriksdepartementet for å søke om midler til å flytte sykehuset inn i Kosovo. Stedet har de allerede funnet, ikke langt fra provinshovedstaden Pristina. (Foto: Ståle Skogstad)

To universitetsansatte har nylig kommet hjem fra Albania og UCK-geriljaens hovedkvarter, på grensen til Kosovo. Der har de bygd opp et norsk feltsykehus på rekordtid.

Av Mart Schulstik

I noen hektiske uker har Petter Andreas Steen og Erik Fosse befunnet seg midt i krigssonen, i byen Kruma. Der har de bygd opp et feltsykehus og operert soldater og sivile kosovoalbaniere.

Arbeidet har gitt en følelse av å ha vært med på noe dypt meningsfullt, sier Steen. Han er anestesilege og professor i akuttmedisin og arbeider til daglig ved Ullevål sykehus.

Nå ønsker vi å reise ned igjen for å hjelpe til med å flytte sykehuset inn i Kosovo, supplerer professor Erik Fosse. Han leder hjelpeorganisasjonen NORWAC, som stod bak oppbyggingen av sykehuset i Kruma.

Moské fytt til randen

Den 24. mai reiste de to universitetsansatte nedover til Albania. Utstyr til et komplett feltsykehus var i forveien blitt sendt med trailer. Først tilbrakte de noen dager i Tirana, i samtale med den albanske helseministeren og helseministeren i den selvklærte kosovoalbanske eksil-regjeringen. Derfra dro de til Kukës og videre til byen Kruma, der sykehuset skulle bygges opp, i samarbeid med den kosovoalbanske hjelpeorganisasjonen Ne Ndhmë Kosoves (Hjelp til Kosovo).

Søndag, under en uke etter at de var reist fra Norge, kunne de gjennomføre sin første operasjon - en blindtarmoperasjon på en sivil pasient. Bykehuset ble bygd opp i kontordelen av byens moske. Selve kirkerommet var fytt opp til randen av kosovoalbanske flyktninger, slik at muligheten til slutt hadde et rom til rådighet sammen med sin familie.

Gjesterhiten var stor, også i private hjem, kommenterer Fosse.

I løpet av den første uken sykehuset var operativt, hadde 191 pasienter benyttet seg av sykehustilbudet, og cirka 20 større og en rekke mindre operasjoner var blitt utført. Da Steen og Fosse dro, ble de avskilt av et nytt team fra Norge.

Krigshemmelighet

Det norske feltsykehuset i Kruma har vært en krigshemmelighet, helt til nå. Steen og Fosse anser det ikke lenger som noen fare å rope beliggenheten.

Kruma ble beskutt av serbisk artilleri uka etter at sykehuset ble bygd. Det er ikke utenkelig at det var nettopp på grunn av feltsykehuset. Vi opplevde to nedslag mens vi var der, og dagen etter at vi dro, var beskytningen førsteoppslaget på CNN, forteller Fosse.

Kruma har 12 000 innbyggere og ble brukt som hovedkvarter til UCK-geriljaen. Før NATO rykket inn i Kosovo, var det mange og harde kamper mellom serbere og UCK-geriljaen i området.

Vi tenkte ikke noe særlig over risikoen for å bli truffet av det serbiske artilleriet. Vi arbeidet så mye og så intenst at vi ikke hadde tid. Avstanden var dessuten for stor, og det fjellendte terrenget for kupert til at de kunne treffe særlig nøyaktig, sier Steen.

De ble omhyggelig beskyttet av UCK-geriljaen, men først og fremst mot albanske bander - og mediene.

Afghansk bonde

Erik Fosse grunnla NORWAC (Norwegian Aid Committee) i 1983, som en forlengelse av Palestinakomiteens arbeid med å sende helsearbeidere til Libanon, etter at landet ble invadert av israelske styrker. NORWAC består hovedsakelig av frivillige, norske helsearbeidere. Utenriksdepartementet og NORAD finansierer prosjektene.

Fosse er utdannet hjerte kirurg og nylig blitt utnevnt til professor i minimalinvasiv og bildeveiledet behandling. Den høyteknologiske krevende forskningen står i kontrast til arbeidet med krigskirurgi. Likevel er Fosse stadig engasjert i hjelpeoperasjoner i kongeherjede land, tidligere i Libanon og i Afghanistan. Et bilde på veggen på kontoret hans viser ham med langt skjegg, kledd i tradisjonelle afghanske klær.

Jeg var nært til å kje meg ut for å få mulighet til å praktisere i området, forklarer kirurgen.

Må velge side

Norge er det eneste landet som har tatt imot bannen fra den kosovoalbanske eksil-regjeringen om hjelp til å bygge opp et feltsykehus. Sammen med norske Albansk samling og Helseforeningen for Kosovo søkte NORWAC ved Erik Fosse Utenriksdepartementet om midlene til prosjektet i Kruma.

Fosse ser ikke noe betenkelig i at en hjelpeorganisasjon velger side i en konflikt, slik NORWAC har gjort i favør av kosovoalbanerne og UCK-geriljaen - snarere tvært imot.

Om nordmenn opplevde krig i Norge og måtte flykte til Sverige, ville vi ta det ille opp om hjelpeorganisasjoner fra Pakistan, Tyrkia eller Afghanistan opprettet flyktningleire og hjelpeomtak uten å spørre oss om hva vi trengte. De burde heller tatt kontakt med våre politiske representanter og utarbeide en plan i fellesskap.

Han mener det er søkt og kan også være direkte farlig å forsøke å være upartisk når man arbeider i krigssoner.

Vi samarbeider med de kosovoalbanske flyktningene og har allerede forært dem sykehuset. Soldatene i UCK består først og fremst av flyktninger, og vi fikk en veldig tilitt til dem vi har samarbeidet med. For ikke å bli handlingslammet måtte vi velge side. Kosovoalbanerne har i lang tid vært utsatt for trakasseringer, noe som bare har toppet seg med deporteringen og krigen de siste månedene. De har opplevd å bli segregert fra serberne på skolen, og de har opplevd å bli utestengt fra universitetene. Når Norge blir partiske i en konflikt og går til krig, må man kunne velge side og arbeide med de lokale myndigheter, mener Fosse.

Gjerne ned igjen

Nå vil de søke Utenriksdepartementet om nye 4 millioner for å få flyttet sykehuset fra Kruma og inn i Kosovo. De har allerede funnet et sted, ikke langt fra Kosovos hovedstad, Pristina.

Vi drar gjerne nedover igjen så snart som mulig, for å hjelpe til med flyttearbeidet. Det er Fosse og Steen skjent enige om.

In the following photo, from right to left, Nufri Lekaj, Esat Kadrijaj, and Isa Thaqi are pictured supporting the KLA in the field. They assisted on behalf of the General Council of the Albanian Association in Norway, to help establish a field hospital from Norway to the Albania–Kosova border area:



The following is a facsimile for one of the examples regarding the appearance in the Norwegian print media by the representative of the KLA for Scandinavia. This is from the newspaper *Stavanger Aftenblad*, in which it was said, “(...) The news that the KLA has been broken by Serbian forces and that it suffers from a lack of equipment has not affected motivating people. KLA is not broken. On the contrary, it regained its positions and counterattacked in certain areas. Sayings that the KLA is weak have only strengthened the morale of the war’, says Nufri Lekaj, KLA representative for Scandinavia and spokesperson of the Albanian Association in Norway (...). The general mobilization from the KLA in Kosovo came a couple of weeks ago. It states that all men between the ages of 18 and 50 must register for service for the guerrilla movement, which is fighting for an independent Kosovo (...). Everyone who leaves from here thus travels voluntarily and based on their own assessments. Of

course, we have great respect for those who do this, but no one is exposed to social pressure (...). According to Norwegian law, it is also not permitted to enlist for military service in another country; we thus do not recruit anyone either. There is no campaign here. Those who travel are individuals who feel bound by what is happening in their home country', says Nufri Lekaj, KLA representative in Scandinavia".

STAVANGER AFTENBLAD 15. april 1999 Passregler stanser UCK-rekrutter

Av Ingeborg Eliassen

«Flere titalls» kosovoalbanere i Norge har til nå reist til Balkan for å slåss med UCK-geriljaen i Kosovo. I Stavanger-området vil flere dra, men har ikke de nødvendige reisedokumentene.

Den generelle mobiliseringsordren fra UCK i Kosovo kom for et par uker siden. I den heter det at alle menn mellom 18 og 50 år skal melde seg til tjeneste for geriljabevegelsen, som slåss for et uavhengig Kosovo.

Bakgrunn
Nato angriper Jugoslavia -
Øyvind Ellingsens bilder fra
Makedonia

Unntakene er folk i eksil som bidrar økonomisk til frigjøringskampen. Dette gjelder de fleste kosovoalbanere i Norge, ifølge Nufri Lekaj, som representerer UCK i Skandinavia og er talsmann for den all-albanske organisasjonen Albansk samling i Norge.

– Alle som drar herfra, reiser dermed frivillig og på grunnlag av egne vurderinger. Vi har selvfølgelig stor respekt for dem som gjør dette, men ingen er utsatt for sosialt press. Tvertimot har vi frarådet folk å dra hvis de i stedet kan gi penger til frigjøringskampen. Det er annerledes i Italia og Tyskland, der mange er arbeidsløse. Folk som ikke kan bidra materielt, forventes å verve seg, sier Nufri Lekaj til Aftenbladet.

Norske borgere

Siden i fjor har likevel «flere titalls» kosovoalbanere fra Norge – de aller fleste med norsk statsborgerskap – reist til Balkan for å slutte seg til UCK, ifølge Lekaj. Flere av dem har vært såret og tildels hardt skadet av blant annet granatsplinter, men alle er i live, sier han.

Meldingene om at UCK-geriljaen så å si er knust av serbiske styrker og lider av en dramatisk mangel på utstyr, har ifølge UCK-talsmannen ikke virket inn på folks motivasjon.

– UCK er overhode ikke knust. Tvertimot har de gjenvunnet sine posisjoner og har gått til motangrep i enkelte enklaver. Påstandene om at UCK ligger dårlig an, har bare styrket kampmoralen, sier Lekaj.

Mangler papirer

Men det er ikke bare å reise. Man trenger pass eller andre gyldige reisedokumenter for å få passere gjennom landene mellom Norge og UCKs baseområder i Albania. Mange av kosovoalbanerne i Norge har ikke bodd lenge nok i landet til å ha fått norsk pass eller såkalt utlendingspass, og jugoslaviske reisedokumenter er det ikke særlig aktuelt for dem å forsøke å skaffe seg.

Dermed sitter mange og venter på å få ordnet slike papirer. I Stavanger-området er et titalls personer i denne situasjonen, ifølge Nufri Lekaj.

Norske myndigheter er ikke spesielt imøtekommende, mener UCK-representanten.

– Vi har bedt norske myndigheter utstede enveis reisedokumenter til folk. Men vi støter på paragrafer i utlendingsloven og manglende vilje i byråkratiet, sier Nufri Lekaj, som nå planlegger å ta saken opp med ledelsen i Justisdepartementet.

Ifølge norsk lov er det heller ikke tillatt å verve seg til militær tjeneste i et annet land. – Vi verver da heller ingen. Her er ingen kampanje. De som reiser, er enkeltpersoner som føler seg bundet av det som skjer i hjemlandet, sier Nufri Lekaj, UCK-representant i Skandinavia.

The political leadership of the KLA was heavily challenged by the agreement proposed at the Rambouillet Conference (1999), because it could not accept a solution for Kosova within Serbia. At the outset, this document guaranteed the *de facto* sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – *de facto* Serbia over Kosova – and planned for Kosova even lesser autonomy compared to what it had enjoyed under the 1974 Constitution. However, the KLA leadership, including its general political representative, Demaçi, was willing to compromise, but only for an open solution to a clear political perspective for Kosova. This was recorded by Shkëlzen Gashi, in his biography of Demaçi, where he wrote, “At the end of November 1998, Demaçi warned that any kind of attempt to keep Kosova as a Serbian or Yugoslav colony is completely unacceptable. But he acknowledges that the KLA can make a compromise: that Kosova becomes a republic, within the Yugoslav residuum – along with Serbia and Montenegro – but with a U.S. and EU guarantee that, after a three-year deadline expires, it should enjoy the right to self-determination”.¹⁹²

Following the insistence of the international community, the platform presented for the negotiation of the provisional status of Kosova was initially accepted by the LDK, led by Rugova, and then by some of the KLA representatives led by Hashim Thaçi, who was director of the political directory of the KLA, namely, director of the political part of the general staff of the KLA, not as a general political representative of the KLA. Meanwhile, the general political representative of the KLA, Demaçi, rejected the negotiating platform. However, this rejection attitude indirectly affected the strengthening of the negotiating position of Kosova’s Albanian delegation at the Conference of Rambouillet headed by Hashim Thaçi. Moreover, in her book, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir*, U.S. Secretary of state Madeleine Albright wrote *inter alia* that Demaçi “was among those pressuring Thaçi to take the hardest possible line”.¹⁹³

In this course, after it was promised that the Rambouillet Agreement would be based on the people’s will – although the expression “people’s

¹⁹² Gashi 2010: 150

¹⁹³ Albright 2003: 404

will” was not materialized),¹⁹⁴ – Kosova’s Albanian delegation, led by Hashim Thaçi, accepted the proposal for the Rambouillet Agreement and signed it on March 18, 1999, in Paris, France. All of this, along with the rejection of this agreement by Milošević, led to the NATO air bombing and final liberation of Kosova.

The following photograph shows the leadership of the Kosova delegation at Rambouillet signing the Rambouillet Agreement. Hashim Thaçi is second from the right, Ibrahim Rugova second from the left, Rexhep Qosja first from the right, and Veton Surroi first from the left, who also served as the spokesperson of the Kosova Albanian delegation at Rambouillet.



Balkanologist Svein Mønnesland posited that Milošević rejected the Rambouillet Agreement because he did not accept what was foreseen in the agreement regarding the stationing of peacekeeping troops led by NATO, and that this agreement foresaw a referendum for Kosova after three years.¹⁹⁵ These two main reasons for Milošević’s rejection of the Rambouillet Agreement were recently confirmed by Vuk Drasković, a writer and former Serbian politician, during an interview for Kosova TV (June 5, 2023). Drasković added another important reason: “Personally, I think that Milošević rejected the agreement also because of some personal reasons. Until the war in Kosovo and before the NATO bombings,

¹⁹⁴ Rambouillet Accords: Interim Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo 1999, p. 85: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/990123_RambouilletAccord.pdf

¹⁹⁵ Mønnesland 2006: 359

Milošević was known in the world as an aggressor, as a man who was behind all the crimes and aggressions in Bosnia and Croatia. Now, he suddenly wanted to be in the victim's position, and for the world to recognize him as someone who was the victim of the aggression of the greatest military force in the history of mankind. I don't know, maybe that was some kind of satisfaction for him".¹⁹⁶

It is crucial to emphasize that the Albanians' quest for the liberation of Kosova beginning in 1912, including the Peace Movement struggle during the 1990s, culminated with the legitimate war of the KLA. Since 1912, all Serbian regimes, especially the Milošević regime, had refused to find a solution to the Kosova issue. The KLA managed to impose the Kosova issue on the international agenda, and the sacrifice of heroes, martyrs and victims of war served as the catalyst for the liberation of Kosova. This included the support of the Albanian state and the crucial role of the NATO military air intervention, led by the United States, Great Britain, Norway, Germany and the rest of the NATO member states, to which the Albanians are eternally grateful.

Firstly, NATO's intervention was legitimate, because the conflict in Kosova represented a significant threat to stability and security in NATO's core area, not only the Balkans, but in the entire region. That is to say that the crisis in Kosova was a security threat also to the NATO member states; therefore, NATO contributed not only to warding off a major security threat but also to better consolidating and expanding itself in the Balkans. Secondly, in the case of Kosova, NATO's intervention was prompted by the pressure from the media, NGOs and the Albanian diaspora on states and organizations (NATO, UN, etc.) to do something. Thirdly, NATO's intervention also had the necessary international law anchoring in the provisions of the UN Charter on the maintenance of international peace and security and in the Security Council's relevant resolutions on Kosova. In other words, the UN Security Council addressed the crisis in Kosova in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter involving threats to international peace and security which may authorize the use of force. Thus, there was no need for an explicit resolution or authorization from the UN Security Council.

¹⁹⁶ Interview of Vuk Drašković on Kosova TV (5th of June, 2023) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6R-lxnfF-w&t=2727s>

Fourthly, and importantly, was the humanitarian aspect. This was the first time NATO had attacked a sovereign state with justification in the concept of humanitarian intervention. Both the security and the humanitarian aspects should be seen as a continuation of the Helsinki Process after the end of the Cold War. This is seen through the strong consolidation of European security and peace policies through NATO, with the principle of human rights prioritized above the principle of non-intervention in states in cases where state regimes violate basic human rights against their own citizens and create a serious humanitarian crisis. In relation to this humanitarian aspect, it is worth quoting one of the most important human rights activists in the framework of the Helsinki Process, Václav Havel, from his interview for the French newspaper *Le Monde* on April 29, 1999: “I believe that during the intervention of NATO in Kosovo there is an element nobody can question: the air attacks, the bombs, are not caused by a material interest. Their character is exclusively humanitarian: What is at stake here are the principles, human rights which have priority above state sovereignty. This makes it legitimate to attack the Yugoslav Federation, although without the United Nations mandate”.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, the liberation and freedom of Kosova should also be seen as a victory for the human rights principle of the Helsinki Declaration (1975) in the framework and continuation of the Helsinki Process.

In relation to the importance of NATO’s intervention, it is also worth mentioning a statement by the Serbian intellectual and humanist Srđa Popović, who had continuously criticized the Serbian regime for exercising violence against the Albanians in Kosova. Even in 1988, Popović sought to help the U.S. Helsinki Watch delegation during its trip to observe the human rights situation in Yugoslavia, including Kosova.¹⁹⁸ In an interview published in the Croatian newspaper *Feral Tribune*, on April 19, 1999, during the NATO air campaign, Popović stated, “I am a pacifist and against any kind of violence. Even so, I think that it was necessary to intervene. Indeed, it came very late. I have said publicly that

¹⁹⁷ Interview of Vaclav Havel for the French newspaper “Le Monde” (April 29th, 1999): *Moi aussi je me sens albanais*: https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1999/04/29/moi-aussi-je-me-sens-albanais_3554258_1819218.html, see also Libquotes: Václav Havel Quote; <https://libquotes.com/vaclav-havel/quote/lbz0b6j>

¹⁹⁸ A Helsinki Watch Report (1989): *As the Federation Disintegrates: Human Rights in Yugoslavia*, p. i

it was necessary after Vukovar, or at the latest, when the aggression began against Bosnia–Hercegovina. It became clear that there was no other way to stop Milošević. If this had happened, many victims would have been spared, and the intervention would have helped the Serb population, too. That is to say, they would not have perpetrated so many crimes, which have given the Serb nation such a bad name. The Serb people need a military defeat for psychological reasons, too, in order to understand the degree to which the whole policy was mistaken. It seemed as if the entire people had taken the wrong direction at a crossroads and was plunging deeper and deeper into disaster”.¹⁹⁹

The following is a facsimile of quoted part of Havel’s interview, titled “*Moi aussi je me sens albanais*” (“I also feel Albanian”). Havel considered that, in accordance with the principle derived from the human solidarity that transcends the borders of states and regions, what the regime of Milosević was doing to the Albanians felt the same as if it was being done to him. Therefore, he said, “I also feel Albanian!”.



Jürgen Habermas, widely regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century, wrote the following in 1999 regarding the NATO air intervention in Kosova in his article “Bestiality and Humanity: A War on the Border between Law and Morality” (Bestialität und Humanität: Ein Krieg an der Grenze zwischen Recht und Moral): “The pacifist opponents highlight the moral difference between

¹⁹⁹ Shkëlzen Gashi (2024) *The Other Serbia 3*, Publisher: Admovere: Excerpts from the interview of Srđa Popović realized by Darko Vukorepa, published in ‘Feral tribune’, on April 19th, 1999, Split: <https://admovere.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/03/Serbia-Tjetar-3.pdf>

acting and non-acting, and point to the suffering of the civil victims, who have to pay the price of military force, even if it is executed with surgical precision. Their appeal, however, is not directed against the good conscience of hard-bitten realists proclaiming *raison d'état*, but against the legal pacifism of the red-green government. In line with the old democracies, who are influenced much more than we are by a rational natural law tradition, foreign secretary Fischer and defence secretary Scharping are relying on the idea of a domestication by means of human rights of state of nature between states. This move puts onto the agenda the transformation of international law into a law for world citizens. Legal pacifism wants not just to restrict the latent state of war between sovereign states by means of international law, but also to replace it with a cosmopolitan order based on law. From Kant to Kelsen this tradition also existed in Germany. Today, however, it is for the first time being taken seriously by a German government. Direct membership in an association of world citizens would protect any state citizen against the arbitrary actions of their own governments.....Under the premise of human rights policy, this intervention is now to be seen as an armed peace-creating mission, which is authorised by the association of nations (admittedly without a UN mandate). According to this Western interpretation the Kosovo war could turn into a leap from the classical conception of international law for sovereign states towards the cosmopolitan law of a world civil society....Even before the allied air strikes started 300000 people were subject to murder, terror and expulsion. In the meantime the horrific pictures of refugee movements en route to Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania provide the evidence of an ethnic cleansing campaign that was minutely planned beforehand. The fact that refugees are also being kept as hostages does not make the situation any better. Even though Milosevic uses the NATO air campaign to force his wretched policy to its logical conclusion, the depressing images from refugee camps make the true causal connection clear. It was precisely the aim of the talks and negotiations to end this murderous ethno-nationalism.”²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Jürgen Habermas, “Bestiality and Humanity: A War on the Border between Legality and Morality,” English translation of “Bestialität und Humanität: Ein Krieg an der Grenze zwischen Recht und Moral,” originally published in *Die Zeit*, 29 April 1999. Available at: https://dhspriority.org/kenny/PhilTexts/Habermas/Kosovo.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com

In 1999, the provisional government in Kosova appointed Nufri Lekaj as the first diplomatic representative of Kosova in Norway. Prior to this, after indicating that Kosova's question was not included for resolution within the Dayton Conference, Lekaj strengthened his cooperation as one of the close collaborators of the Sector of Special Importance of the LPK, which turned into the Central Staff of the KLA on November 17th, 1994. During the war in Kosova, he was the KLA representative for Scandinavia.²⁰¹ Since 1987, Lekaj, acting as the spokesperson for the Albanian community in Norway, had publicly distanced himself from any sporadic illegal actions committed by members of the Albanian community in Norway, whenever such actions were reported in the Norwegian media. He insisted that the Albanian community in Norway should distance themselves from these illegal actions and that this should not tarnish the overall image of the community or Albanians in general. Furthermore, on several occasions, Lekaj emphasized the enduring gratitude of the Albanian community in Norway for the support provided by the Norwegian state to Albanian refugees before and during the Kosova War. He expressed appreciation for the continued support and assistance to Kosova from the Norwegian state and added that the amicable relations between Kosova and Norway would persist as a long-lasting bond.²⁰²

In addition to considerable diplomatic and media activity, the representation office of Kosova in Norway made an important contribution in 1999–2000 to help the newly liberated Kosova with liaison efforts and various projects. In June 1999, in the framework of the activity of the representation office of Kosova in Norway, it is worth noting that Lekaj and his associates organized the passage and accompanied the journalist and film director Maria Fuglevaag Warsinska-Varsi to Kosova, to make a documentary film and to gather facts related to the crimes of Milošević's neo-fascist regime during the war in Kosova. At the same time, they initiated the Kosova Commission for Missing people and evidence of War Crimes, with the new ad hoc Kosova government.

²⁰¹ An interview of Nufri Lekaj based on documents about his activity in Kosova from 1978 and in the framework of Albanian political emigration in the period 1987 – 2008 (2014): p. 91: <https://www.scribd.com/document/557546433/Politika-Nordike-dhe-Levizja-Popullore-e-Kosoves-LPK>

²⁰² Ibid: 107-108, 249

Warsinska-Varisi has earlier been recognized with many international awards for her work as a film director and journalist²⁰³. She played a decisive role from June 1999 to the end of 2003 in shedding light on the crimes committed by the Milošević regime in Kosova, having the responsibility to document the major war crimes committed for the Kosova Commission with Kosova lawyers and forensic experts. First, she documented two years with the Kosova commission on war crimes. Later she continued the important work with The Family Association of Missing people, when the commission was not allowed to work anymore by the UN. She played a key role in helping to create the family associations, through her contacts in Bosnia with the Srebrenica women and the ICMP, who then started to fund and facilitate the work of the association.

During the first year, she was coordinating expert cooperation in Kosova with the Bosnian commission of missing people and the Bosnian commission of war crimes. During the Balkan wars, an international team of expertise had been created, helping the local organizations. They provided expertise in the field and offered documentation programs to gather evidence. With the help of Nufri Lekaj and his team, she also coordinated the cooperation with the Albanian forensic team to join the work on the mass graves. With the Kosova forensic team, she uncovered multiple mass graves throughout the country and cooperated with the Haag tribune about the discoveries. Together with Warsinska-Varisi, the Kosova commission could open graves with less than 20 bodies. Later they had to reopen larger graves with the family associations to find and identify victims, like in Mitrovica and Vushtrri, where they uncovered half of the Izbica victims. She gave four years of this voluntary work.

Warsinska-Varisi's documentation consists of 700 hours of video materials of witnesses and victims' testimonies and recordings from autopsies from all the sites and crime scenes around Kosova. There are also more than 1000 images from the crime scenes, and the commission work in all municipalities of Kosova from this time. According to her, the materials will be available for the war crime cases, only when a Kosova government is ready to make war crime cases against Serbia and serb war

²⁰³ Nordic Women in Film: *Maria Fuglestad Warsinska-Varisi About basic info, Filmography, Awards (n.d.)*: <https://nordicwomeninfilm.com/person/maria-fuglestad-warsinska-varisi/>

criminals, as this is the only purpose for the materials and what she together with witnesses and victims have agreed upon.

The Kosova commission today does not have complete documentation without these materials. Currently they only have random work with amateur images and videos, as well as a collection of copies by Warsinska-Varisi's work that are out of context and not related to places and dates, and without her or the victims' consent for any use. The Commission has a responsibility to handle the evidence in a secure manner and with dignity and respect. She promised the victims that nobody could benefit personally or earn money from their horrible suffering. Because of this, Kosova has still not recognized her contribution to the country.

The solemn opening of the diplomatic representation of Kosova in Norway can be seen in the following link, <https://youtu.be/uRylUe eRxU>, where the secretary general of the NHC, Bjørn Engesland; the chairman of the Committee for Foreign Policy in the Norwegian Parliament, Haakon Blankenborg; the well-known Norwegian politician, Erik Solheim; and other personalities from the Norwegian political and cultural sphere were present.

Below is a photograph of the staff of Kosova's diplomatic mission, the letter sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosova to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway regarding the appointment of Kosova's diplomatic representative to Norway, and the press statement concerning the official inauguration of Kosova's diplomatic representation in Norway. Other photos from the solemn opening of the diplomatic mission of Kosova in Norway are also included:



The staff of the diplomatic representation of Kosova in Norway, from the left: Fatmir Zymberaj, Gëzim Haklaj, Nufri Lekaj, Shkëlzen Kukleci, Bajram Mjeku and Sylo Taraku.

KOSOVA GOVERNMENT
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 Dep. Minister Hydajet Hyseni

Prishtina 9.7.99

The Norwegian Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Dear Honorable **Minister of Foreign Affairs Knut Vollebaek**

We have the pleasure to inform you that we have now established our Foreign Ministry in Prishtina and we have appointed our diplomatic representative for Norway, and his delegates who will represent our government.

Diplomatic Repr. **Mr. Nufri Lekaj**
 Dep. Repr. **Mr. Gëzim Haklaj**
 Dep. Rep. **Mr. Shkëlzen Kukleci**

With this our representatives we are looking forward to have good diplomatic relations with your government and ministry.

Sincerely

Dep. Minister of Foreign Affairs for Kosova

Hydajet Hyseni

Kosova's Representative office in Norway

Youngstorget
2a, 0181 Oslo
E-mail

Press release

No. 01/1999
Oslo November 1, 1999

Kosova's Government represented in Norway

Late in October the Provisional Government in Kosova led by Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, opened its office of representation in Oslo. The first diplomatic delegate in Norway, Nufri Lekaj, was a former representative of the Kosova Liberation Army, KLA, in Norway.

The official opening was however postponed until Albania's national day on November 28, with members of Thaci's government present. - Our Government in Kosova felt a great need of a representational office in Norway, Nufri Lekaj says. As a member of both NATO and OSCE, Norway has engaged itself strongly in Kosova and plays an important part in the rebuilding of Kosova. The great interest for Balkan in general and Kosova in particular - as well as the large community of Kosova Albanians in Norway, have made an office which can represent the Kosovans' interest in Norway necessary, says the newly appointed diplomat who was a political prisoner in Yugoslavia before coming to Norway in 1987. Lekaj is a father of two and has previously been working for the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the the Norwegian Helsinki-committee.

The Provisional Government of Kosova is a coalition government formed by agreement between the widely politically composed Kosova Albanian delegation in Rambouillet earlier this year. Later other political parties have joined in, like Turkish and Muslim parties.

LDK (Kosova's democratic league) and the Serbs are not yet represented in the Government, but this does not mean that our office in Norway will not represent their interest, says Lekaj who is looking forward to get started on the new tasks, in the country which during war received the highest number of refugees in proportion to the number of inhabitants.

Information manager Sylo Taraku. phone: 97180176, fax: 32812360, e-mail:
sylo@online.no

Below are some photos from the solemn opening party of the diplomatic representation of Kosova in Norway. In the first photo, Nufri Lekaj, Fatmir Zymberaj and Maria Fuglevaag Warsinska-Varsi welcome the guests with a toast. In the second, third, fourth and fifth photos, respectively, Nufri Lekaj is with the chairman of the committee for foreign policy in the Norwegian Parliament, Haakon Blankenborg; with the well-known politician and Norwegian diplomat Erik Solheim; with the secretary general of the NHC, Bjørn Engesland; and with Dr Kristin Refsdal. In the sixth photo from the right are: Pål Refsdal, Erik Fosse, Trond Olsen Næss, Bjørn Engesland and Maria Fuglevaag Warsinska-Varsi. In the seventh and eighth photos are Berit Backer's close friends, Ann Christine Eek and Gjøtterud's wife, Michaela Spandow. In the ninth photo is one of Berit Backer's associates, Pål Haugland, former member and activist of the Group for Kosova within the NHC, and Gjylfidane Elshani Krasniqi, chairwoman of the Berit Backer Association for Albanian women in Norway. The other five photos picture some distinguished activists of the Albanian community in Norway and some other Norwegian guests.





In 2000, the UN mission in Kosova functionalized the Interim Administrative Council (IAC). It was composed of 10 members – four nominated by the UN, three representatives of Kosova Albanians, one representative of Kosova Serbs and two additional observer members. The IAC was replaced on March 3, 2002, by a cabinet established as part of the provisional institutions of self-government following elections held in November 2001.

Consequently, the diplomatic representation of Kosova in Norway froze its diplomatic function in 2000 because the IAC did not have a department for foreign affairs, and this meant that there could be no diplomatic representation of Kosova in the world. However, since Kosova was not yet recognized as an independent state, Nufri Lekaj decided at the beginning of 2001 to at least allow some type of self-reorganization within the Kosova representation in Norway, registering it as the Kosova Interest Office under the name Kosova Office in Norway. This was a voluntary activity for the recognition of Kosova's independence from the Scandinavian countries. Although the Kosova Office in Norway was not formally the representative office of Kosova, it was greeted by Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik through his letter sent to this office on October 29, 2001.

In the framework of the activity of the Kosova Office in Norway and in the continuation of the commitment to argue for the importance of Kosova's independence, Lekaj also wrote an article on the eve of the declaration of Kosova's independence for the prestigious Norwegian magazine *Ny-Tid*, which was published on February 15, 2008, in which he wrote: "... Now that Kosova is building its own state, it is important to underline the mutual understanding contract between Kosovars, that the liberation war was directed against a regime and not to a people. All Kosovars have equal rights, but also responsibility for their country and together they will build their common future (...)". On February 18, 2008, in the capacity of the chairman of the Kosova Office in Norway, Lekaj participated in a televised debate, arguing pro-independence and the importance of international recognition of Kosova's independence as the best solution possible that ensures stability, democracy and economic development in the Balkans. This televised debate can be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqKR20-qiWQ>).

The first facsimile in the following is the greeting letter from the Norwegian prime minister sent to the Kosova Office in Norway, on October 29, 2001.

The Kosova Office in Norway also maintained some communication with the American Embassy in Oslo. As an example of this, the following is the second facsimile expressing gratitude from the American Embassy for the condolences from the Kosova Office in Norway, after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The third facsimile is the article of the chairman of the Kosova Office in Norway published on February 15, 2008, in the Norwegian magazine *Ny-Tid* on the eve of the declaration of Kosova's independence.



Nufri Lekaj

Fra: Naess, Petter <pnaess@usa.no>
Til: 'Nufri Lekaj' <n-leka@online.no>
Sendt: 17. september 2001 08:42
Emne: RE: Condolence to people of Amerika

On behalf of the American people we here at the American Embassy wish to express our gratitude for all the declarations of sympathy, greetings and flowers we have received since the tragedy hit the U.S.

We are all part of the global community and must support each other through difficult times. We are grateful for the support, which makes the grief easier to carry.

Sincerely,

Jay L. Bruns III
Chargé d'Affaires

—Original Message—

From: Nufri Lekaj [mailto:n-leka@online.no]
Sent: Thursday, September 14, 2000 7:20 PM
To: oslo@usa.no
Cc: teuta@online.no
Subject: Condolence to people of Amerika

Kosova Office in Norway
P.B. 121 Grorud
0905 Oslo
tel&fax 22252451
mob: tel 90038036
e-mail n-leka@online.no <mailto:n-leka@online.no>
www.kosova.no <http://www.kosova.no>
Oslo, 14.09.01

Honoured Presedent of United States of Amerika

On behalf of Kosova Office i Norway and Kosovar Community in Norway, accept our deep condolence to You and people of USA. We are shereeng your peopels compassionate.

ORIENTERING

Etter 95 års okkupasjon er Kosova nå klar for en ny start.

Endelig uavhengighet

NUFRI LEKAJ
LEDER, KOSOVA OFFICE IN
NORWAY

1912, våre fedre fra 1945, og til oss selv som opplevde 1968, 1981, 1990, 1997 og juni 1999.

Vi er fulle av glede over å få se vår drøm gå i oppfyllelse, selv om prisen og smerten for å nå fram til målet har vært høy. Kosova (albansk skrive-måte for Kosovo, red. anm.) er et lite land, og hver eneste familie der er berørt av 95 års okkupasjon og kamp for selvstendighet. Kosovarene glæde i 1912, etter frigjøringskampen mot tyrkerne, ble kortvarig da det nordlige Albania (Kosova) og andre albanske områder ble okkupert av Stor-Serbia.

Våre bestrebelser for å oppnå frihet ville ikke ført fram om ikke den vestlige verden hadde vært overbevist om at okkupasjonen av Kosova fra 1912 var urett, og at vi som folk, på lik linje med andre folk, har selvbestemmelsesrett og rett til frihet. Det albanske folket opplevde aldri dette i perioden Kosova var under Jugoslavia, og det skulle bli verst under Milosevic.

Slobodan Milosevics regime undertrykte det albanske folket med vold og represalier. Som reaksjon forsøkte kosovarene å løse konflikten med en ikkevoldelig protest ledet av Dr. Ibrahim Rugova. Den demokratiske verden ble vitne til en situasjon som i økende grad viste konturer av et folkeopprør. Den albanske befolkningen forstod at ikkevoldtaktikken mot Milosevic-regimet ikke nyttet. Dette førte til at noe som startet som en liten bevapnet motstandsbevegelse under den albanske frigjøringshæren UCK (etablert i hemmelighet på midten av 90-tallet), fikk økt støtte fra folket da dens inspirator Adem Jashari ofret livet sammen med fjernt familiemedlemmer. Til sammen ble 52 mennesker massakrert av jugoslaviske /serbiske styrker under angrepet på landsbyen Prekaz den 5. mars 1998 i Drenica-dalen.

Denne massakren, og andre som ble begått mellom 1998 og våren 1999, resulterte i at flere tusen mennesker mistet

[uavhengighet] I disse dager er de fleste kosovalbanere i gledeus, og teller ned timene til våre forfedres drøm endelig skal gå i oppfyllelse. Våre tanker går tilbake til den lange og vanskelige veien fram dit vi er i dag. Til våre forfedre fra 1912, våre fedre fra 1945, og til oss selv som opplevde 1968, 1981, 1990, 1997 og juni 1999.

Vi håper at Kosovas uavhengighet vil avslutte Balkans kruttønemareritt.

livet. Dette økte oppmerksomheten rundt det som foregikk, man ønsket ikke en repetisjon av Srebrenica-massakren. Men massakrene fortsatte, og den etniske fordrivingen av albanere begynte. Det internasjonale samfunn slo da fast at situasjonen ikke kunne tolereres.

Kosovas befolkning ble til slutt reddet av Nato, etter at den Albanske frigjøringshæren, UCK, hadde ført en ensom «David mot Goliatt»-kamp. Nato kom det albanske folket til unnsetning ved bombing, hovedsaklig av militære mål. I denne perioden, fra mars til juli, «hevnet» Milosevic-regimet seg ved å intensivere massakrene og tilintetgjørelsen av albanske bosetninger i Kosova.

Mer enn 10.000 mennesker ble drept, og over 2.000 tatt til fange som levende skjold ved militære installasjoner. Det skulle også ta mer enn to år etter at krigen var over før de fleste av fangene som hadde overlevd ble løslatt. Ennå i dag er mer enn 3.000 mennesker savnet i Kosova. Nato-bombingen kom siden til å markere et viktig historisk vendepunkt i Natos historie: Verdens diktatorer kan ikke lenger regne med å utstraffet utsette «sin» befolkning for folkemord.

Når Kosova bygger sin nasjonalstat er det viktig å understreke en felles forståelse kosovarene imellom, om at frihetskampen var rettet mot et regime, ikke mot et folk. Alle kosovarer har like rettigheter og ansvar for sitt land, og sammen skal de bygge en felles framtid. Vi håper at Kosovas uavhengighet vil avslutte Balkans kruttønemareritt. Kosovas befolkning ser med glede og forventning fram til å endelig ta del i det europeiske fellesskapet som et fritt land. ■

KOSOVA: Barn i landsbyen Brod sør i Kosova. FOTO: MATT ROBINSON, REUTERS/SCAMPX



NY TID 15. FEBRUAR 2008 35

It is worth mentioning that, unlike other Western countries, the recognition of Kosova's independence had been challenging for Norway and especially for the party in power, the Labour Party. Not only did Norway expect that the negotiations between Kosova and Serbia led by Martti Ahtisaari would result in a resolution approved by the UN but also that it would take into account the traditional and amicable relations between Norway and Serbia. However, Norway, as a country with influence and integrity in international relations, particularly committed to peace, democracy and respect for human rights in the world, continued to have a constructive approach and supported Kosova even after the declaration of Kosova's independence on February 17, 2008. This also likely had to do with the history of the Norwegian people, since just as the Albanians had been under Ottoman rule for several centuries and then under Serbian rule for several decades, Norwegians had similarly been under Danish rule for several centuries and under Swedish rule for several decades. Nevertheless, they fortunately had not been persecuted to the same extent by their rulers as the Albanians had.

In this context, it is relevant to highlight an opinion piece by Norwegian Professor of Political Science Janne Haaland Matlary, who served as Norway's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs during the war in Kosova. She is also internationally recognized for her work with the Vatican, having served in significant advisory roles under Pope John Paul II and continuing her engagement in various capacities. In an article written on February 22, 2008, with particular reference to the declaration of Kosova's independence, she contends, among other things: "A parallel: Kosovo became a state in an illegal manner, just like Norway in 1905. We did not ask Sweden for permission, and they did not ask Serbia. It is a sobering thought that this new statehood is desired by no one other than the Kosovar-Albanians themselves, but was induced by the intransigence of Serbian nationalism. Had Serbian nationalism not been so strong, there would not have been a new state either...." ²⁰⁴

In the following are two statements by Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre regarding the declaration of Kosova's independence. The first is dated on February 17, 2008, the same day the Parliament of

²⁰⁴Aftenposten (2008) *Stat til besvar*.

<https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/O3qd1/stat-til-besvaer>

Kosova declared Kosova's independence, and the second statement is from three days later, on February 20, 2008. Following these official statements, an excerpt is also included from the above-quoted article by Janne Haaland Matlary.

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HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

Published under: Stoltenberg's 2nd Government
Publisher: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Government to consider Kosovo's declaration of independence

Press release | No: 022/08 | Date: 17/02/2008
[Les på norsk](#)

"We note that the authorities in Kosovo have issued a declaration of independence today. Kosovo has entered the final, decisive phase of the future status process. The declaration will now be studied carefully by the Norwegian authorities," says Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

"We note that the authorities in Kosovo have issued a declaration of independence today. Kosovo has entered the final, decisive phase of the future status process. The declaration will now be studied carefully by the Norwegian authorities," says Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

"Throughout the status negotiations, Norway has stressed the importance of finding a solution both parties could agree to and that thus also could lead to a new UN Security Council resolution. It is deeply regrettable that this has not been possible," says Mr Støre.

During the next days, the Government will consider the future nature of Norway's relations with Kosovo. In this process we will maintain close contact with other European countries. At the same time, the Government attaches great importance to maintaining Norway's close friendship with Serbia and the Serb authorities.

"In the period we are now entering, all parties must do their utmost to maintain calm and order in and around Kosovo. In connection with the status negotiations, both the Government in Belgrade and the authorities in Pristina undertook to do everything in their power to avoid unrest. Now all parties must live up to this obligation," says Foreign Minister Støre.



HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

Published under: Stoltenberg's 2nd Government
Publisher: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Norway to recognise Kosovo as an independent state

Press release | No: 024/08 | Date: 20/02/2008
[Les på norsk](#)

"I can announce today that Norway is going to recognise Kosovo as an independent state. There are several reasons why we have arrived at this conclusion," says Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

"I can announce today that Norway is going to recognise Kosovo as an independent state. There are several reasons why we have arrived at this conclusion," says Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre.

"Unfortunately, there is no reason to believe that further negotiations would lead to a mutually agreed solution to the status issue. At the same time, the status quo is no longer viable. There is a need to clarify Kosovo's future status so that it can continue its economic and political development. In the current situation, it is important that the members of the international community as far as possible take a common position. This in itself would contribute to clarity and stability. A large number of European countries, including other Nordic countries, intend to recognise Kosovo. Given the situation, we feel it is appropriate to signal that Norway will do so as well," says Mr Støre.

"I would like to stress that the Kosovo situation is a special case. The conflict in 1999 and the fact that Kosovo has been under international administration since then constitute special circumstances," says the Foreign Minister.

Norway attaches great importance to the obligations undertaken by Kosovo's leaders with a view to implementing the provisions of the Ahtisaari plan. Kosovo must now develop into a multi-ethnic, democratic state with respect for human rights and law and order. Respect for the religious and cultural heritage of the various ethnic groups is essential in this respect. The fulfilment of these obligations will be an important factor in the development of our relations with Kosovo.

"The Norwegian Government would like to reiterate how important it is that all parties refrain from violence. Any unrest or increase in tension in and around Kosovo could have negative and dangerous consequences for the region," says Mr Støre. "Recognition of Kosovo will also make it possible to engage the entire region in a process of gradual integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. This process will be an important contribution to stability and must be open to the entire region."

"I would like to underscore once again Norway's close relations with Serbia and its leaders. We attach great importance to maintaining the mutual trust and cooperation we have built up over the years," says Foreign Minister Støre.

Recognition of Kosovo will be effected in accordance with the procedures prescribed for such decisions, and will take the form of a Royal Decree. The date for the formal decision has not yet been fixed.

Debatt | Debatt

Stat til besvær

Universitetet i Oslo

Forf>professor i Statsvitenskap

<forf>janne Haaland Matlary <

EN PARALLELL. Kosovo ble stat på ulovlig vis, akkurat som Norge i 1905. Vi spurte ikke Sverige om lov, de spurte ikke Serbia.

Publisert: 22.02.2008 00:01 | Oppdatert: 18.02.2009 14:28

Nyhetsbrev: Se. Lese. Høre. Gjøre.

Ukentlig | Gratis

Debattredaktør Erik Tornes sender deg de mest interessante anmeldelsene og debattene.

+ Meld deg på

DET ER ET tankekors at denne nye statsdannelsen ikke er ønsket av noen uten kosovarene selv, men tvunget frem av serbernes steile nasjonalisme. Hadde ikke serbisk nasjonalisme vært så sterk, hadde det heller ikke blitt en ny stat.

Realpolitikken bestemmer.

Uansett er det realpolitikken lover, ikke folkerettens, som bestemmer om en ny stat overlever. NATO intervenerte militært i 1999 av etiske grunner, men hadde neppe gjort det uten folkemordet i Srebrenica i friskt minne. Det var en intervensjon som var uten FN-mandat, men med "etisk" mandat. FN og NATO, nå etter hvert EU, har stått i Kosovo i snart ti år med soldater, politi og sivile virkemidler. Forsøkene på å finne en status for provinsen har vært mange. Så lenge Kosovo bare anerkjennes av "halve verden", gjenstår mye. Men realpolitikken hjelper likevel, fordi tiden arbeider for nye stater. Når USA som verdens mektigste land har sagt ja, og de nestmektigste – Storbritannia, Frankrike og Tyskland - også, vil flere land følge etter. Hva Serbia mener, spiller liten rolle. Hva Russland mener, avhenger av dets interesser. De protesterer sterkt nå, men protesten avtar med tiden, særlig når gradvis aksept kan byttes med realpolitikk.

Considering the importance of the fastest formal or official recognition of Kosova's independence by the Norwegian state, after the declaration of Kosova's independence on the February 17, 2008, the Kosova Office in Norway organized a visit of the Kosova delegation to Norway in March 2008, headed by Sabri Hamiti and Xhavit Haliti, speaker and deputy speaker of the Parliament of Kosova, respectively. Accordingly, on March 28, 2008, at 10AM, the first secretary of the Norwegian foreign minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, informed the delegation of Kosova in the meeting – consisting of Sabri Hamiti, Xhavit Haliti, Nufri Lekaj and Daut Haxhaj – that the Norwegian kingdom, from that day, officially recognized the Republic of Kosova. (Until this date, Norway had not formalized the recognition of the independence of Kosova, announced by the Assembly of Kosova on February 17, 2008). On the evening of the same day, there was a solemn celebration for the formal and official recognition of Kosova's independence by the Norwegian state, which can be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r26sNg7uB1Q>).

In the following are some photos taken during the celebration on March 28, 2008, for the formal and official recognition of the independence of Kosova by the Norwegian state. In the first and second photos are the chairman of the Kosova Office in Norway, Nufri Lekaj, and the deputy speaker of the Parliament of Kosova, Xhavit Haliti. As part of the thanks for the official recognition of the independence of Kosova from the Norwegian state, they evoked their memories of Backer, as they were close friends and associates of hers. The speaker of the Parliament of Kosova, Sabri Hamiti, also expressed his deep thanks to the Norwegian state for the official recognition of the independence of Kosova (third photo).

In the fourth and fifth photos are two of the Norwegian friends who had supported the activity of the Kosova Group within the NHC (photographer Ann Christine Eek and Professor Svein Mønnesland), wishing those present the independence of Kosova. In photos 6 and 7 are two of the Norwegian friends who had supported the activity of the Albanian Association in Norway, in aid of the KLA (Director Maria Fugleavaag Warsinska-Varisi and Professor Dr Erik Fosse), wishing the attendees the independence of Kosova. Furthermore, nine additional photos reflect the festive atmosphere of the formal and official recognition of Kosova's independence by the Norwegian state.





Following the recognition of Kosova's independence by Norway and other Scandinavian countries, Nufri Lekaj declared the closure of the Kosova Office in Norway, because it had fulfilled its mission as a pro-recognition entity for the Republic of Kosova by Norway and other Scandinavian countries. Nevertheless, to ensure that he was not evading any responsibility for Kosova, he informed the relevant political institutions there that he was willing to provide any diplomatic services, if needed, and that he was committed to doing so free of charge. In this context, he provided assistance in the form of advice and support to individuals within Kosova's political institutions. He also served as an advisor to the Minister of Defence of Kosova during the period 2021–2023, a role he performed without financial compensation.

It is important to make it clear that Lekaj's activities since 1978 have not been directed against the Serbian people. Instead, his efforts have been focused solely on opposing the consistently oppressive, hostile, and hate-sowing regimes in Belgrade concerning the Albanians in Kosova. His motto is: "Respecting human rights without discrimination, transcending political borders in the Balkans and worldwide".

THE CONTINUITY OF THE NORWEGIAN'S COMMITMENT FOR PEACE BUILDING IN KOSOVA, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MARTTI AHTISAARI PLAN

Norway continued to help Kosova even after the liberation and the declaration of independence. As a former emissary of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide had an important role in resolving the worsening situation in Kosova after the March riots in 2004, which weakened the efforts for coexistence in Kosova between the Albanian majority and the Serbian minority. In other words, considering the sociopolitical context in Kosova at that time, Eide, with his pragmatism and proposals, reached the best possible solution. On the one hand, he suggested a plan of decentralization at the municipal level that especially conveyed the sense of security to the Serbs in Kosova (since the Serbs insisted that they still felt unsafe in Kosova), but at the same time Eide emphasized that this plan of decentralization should not threaten the central institutions in Kosova or weaken the authority of Prishtina. On the other hand, Eide suggested that the process of determining the final status of Kosova should begin, since the Albanians in Kosova felt uncertain about their socio-political future based on past experiences with the Serbian state and the continuation of the status quo.²⁰⁵ In fact, Eide's proposals were an important starting point for the Ahtisaari Plan.

This was not particularly surprising: Eide, in addition to being an experienced diplomat (including having chaired the OSCE Permanent Council during the 1999 war in Kosova), had the opportunity to become informed as early as the 1980s — in part due to his wife, Gro Holm, an investigative journalist and political scientist who first visited Kosova in 1988 to closely observe the socio-political situation. As a result, she became well aware of the political developments in Kosova from the 1980s onward. Holm was also a close friend of Backer.

²⁰⁵ Kai Eide: *Report on the situation in Kosova* (2005): 17-18: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2005/635>



Kai Eide and Kofi Annan during one of their meetings

Based on Eide's assessments and proposals, Annan appointed former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari as his special envoy for negotiations over Kosova's final status. Ahtisaari's appointment was approved by the UN Security Council on November 10, 2005.

Negotiations for the settlement of Kosova's status began in February 2006 in Vienna. They were led by the UN Secretary-General's special representative, Martti Ahtisaari, and his deputy, Albert Rohan, assisted by representatives of the UN Office of Special Representative, stationed in Vienna.²⁰⁶ Of the 15 direct meetings between the parties during the negotiations in Vienna in 2006, 13 were related to minorities – eight meetings on decentralization, three on the protection of cultural and religious heritage, two on minority rights – and one on economic issues.²⁰⁷ On April 3, 2007, Ahtisaari presented his proposal for the international recognition of Kosova's independence to the Security Council. His proposal also included the provision of maximum rights for minorities in Kosova, especially for the Serbian minority, both at the local and national levels.

On October 10, 2008, Martti Ahtisaari was announced as that year's recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for his important efforts as a peace mediator in some of the world's most serious conflicts, including

²⁰⁶ Weller, 2009: 323

²⁰⁷ Unosek: "*The Status Process*" (2007): <https://www.unosek.org/the-status-process/>

Kosova.²⁰⁸ He received the prize on December 10, 2008, at the Oslo City Hall in Norway.²⁰⁹ On the same day, Ahtisaari greeted many citizens from the balcony of the Grand Hotel in Oslo – among them, many Albanians from Kosova – who had come to congratulate him. As the Norwegian News Agency (Norsk Telegrambyrå – NTB) announced that day: “As Ahtisaari stood on the balcony, some of those present took the opportunity to pay tribute to him for his efforts for Kosovo, by shouting ‘Kosovo, Kosovo’. The Finnish peacemaker was appointed UN Special Envoy for the negotiations on Kosovo’s status in 2005. During his visit to Oslo, Ahtisaari stressed that he is now pleased with the developments in Kosovo. ‘Kosovo is independent and will remain independent. Kosovo is recognized by over 50 states, of the countries that count, and more will come. Kosovo is doing better than Finland did after its declaration of independence [in December 1917, editor’s note], and the process is irreversible’, said the Peace Prize winner about Europe’s youngest state”.²¹⁰

In the meantime, a delegation composed of some Albanians from Kosova living in Norway was accepted at the meeting by the Norwegian Nobel Committee.²¹¹ The delegation presented a symbolic gift to the Norwegian Nobel Committee to convey to Ahtisaari as a sign of respect for his contribution to the strength of peace in Kosova. Additionally, the delegation commended the Norwegian Nobel Committee for awarding the prize to Ahtisaari for his important contribution as a peace mediator in some of the world’s most serious conflicts, including Kosova.

The following presents the excerpt quoted above from the Norwegian media:

²⁰⁸ The Nobel Peace Prize 2008 (October 10th, 2008) *Press release*: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2008/press-release/>

²⁰⁹ The Nobel Peace Prize Award Ceremony 2008 (December 10th, 2008): <https://www.nobelprize.org/ceremony/the-nobel-peace-prize-award-ceremony-2008/>

²¹⁰ Norwegian News Agency / Norsk Telegrambyrå – NTB (December 10th, 2008): *honored with torchlight procession and celebrity banquet*: <https://www.abcnyheter.no/nyheter/2008/12/10/79301/ahtisaari-hedret-med-fakkeltog-og-kjendisbankett>

²¹¹ The delegation was initiated and composed by Selim Hasanaj, Imri Trena, Shemsi Bunjaku, Ismet Berisha, Nufri Lekaj and Enver Seferi

Nyheter

Ahtisaari hedret med fakkeltog og kjendisbankett

NTB

10. des. 2008 22:55 – Oppdatert 10. des. 2008 22:55



Ahtisaari hedret med fakkeltog og kjendisbankett

<p>Rundt 300 fredstilhengere trosset kulden og hedret fredsprisvinner Martti Ahtisaari med fakkeltog og jubel i Oslo onsdag kveld. Deretter var det duket for en bedre middag for inviterte gjester.</p>

Fakkeltoget endte utenfor Grand Hotel, hvor Ahtisaari troppet opp på balkongen og vinket til folkemengden.

«Kosovo, Kosovo»

Da Ahtisaari sto på balkongen, benyttet enkelte av de oppmøtte anledningen til å hylle ham for innsatsen han har gjort for Kosovo, og ropte «Kosovo, Kosovo».

Fredsmekleren fra Finland ble i 2005 utnevnt til FNs spesialutsending til forhandlingene om Kosovos status.

Under sitt besøk i Oslo understreket Ahtisaari at han nå gleder seg over utviklingen i Kosovo.

– Kosovo er uavhengig og vil forbli uavhengig. Kosovo er anerkjent av over 50 stater, av de landene som teller, og flere vil komme til. Kosovo gjør det bedre enn Finland gjorde etter sin uavhengighetserklæring (i desember 1917, red.anm.), og prosessen er irreversibel, sa fredsprisvinneren om Europas yngste stat.

Even after Milošević's extradition to The Hague in 2001, some of the former political structures of his regime survived, and the Secret Service (Bezbednosno Informativna Agencija - BIA) remained particularly intact. Therefore, one of the main goals of Zoran Đinđić's government was to reform it. However, Đinđić was killed on March 12, 2003, by the structures of the Secret Services, which had previously carried out the assassinations of Ivan Stambolić, Slavko Ćuruvija and others. In fact, after the end of the war in Kosova, the approach of the new Belgrade regime led by Vojislav Koštunica concerning the Albanians did not differ from the approach of the Milošević regime. However, Koštunica – as the former president of Yugoslavia from October 2000 to February 2003, when Yugoslavia became the Serbia–Montenegro Union, and as the prime minister of Serbia in 2004–2008 – always maintained that Serbia was democratic during his tenure and not during Milošević's regime.

In this context, at a meeting held in Belgrade on March 1, 2008 (based on the transcript of a speech delivered during a book launch event, organized by Peščanik in Pančevo, Serbia), the aforementioned Serbian intellectual and humanist Srđa Popović said, "When Milošević brought the police state to Kosovo – because that is what it was, a police state that could kill any Albanian, without any consequences – in order to survive, the Albanians were forced to construct a parallel society. The Serbian opposition never opposed him, even with a single word, and I thought of this when I heard Koštunica speak at the United Nations, when he tried to make clear that Serbia today is a democratic Serbia, and not the Serbia of Milošević. I thought that if I were an Albanian, I would conclude that I had not seen any change in the attitude of Milošević and the Serb opposition toward the Albanians.

"Koštunica was the supposed opposition to Milošević because he was ostensibly a communist, and at least he was a communist. Yet in national and wartime politics, he was even often more radical than Milošević. And now, when Albanians hear what Koštunica is saying, they cannot accept what he and the current Serbian opposition are doing politically in relation to them. It is no different to the time of Milošević! In my opinion, the Albanian population fought a liberation war. They got out of a colonial situation, they defended themselves against a racist policy and they

suffered terrible casualties. After the war, their revenge cannot be compared to ours, although I do not justify it”.²¹²

Vuk Drašković, the aforementioned Serbian writer and former politician, is also known for his courage in terms of his public repentance regarding some past actions. During the aforementioned interview for the Kosova–Albanian television, Drašković allows each person the right to admit a mistake, the right to repent and the right to change. He even refers to some historical personalities who have admitted their mistakes, repented and changed, and who, in fact, have contributed significantly to the development of civilization. The Apostle Paul is the very foundation of Christianity for Christians, even though he previously murdered Christians. Abraham Lincoln hanged African - Americans as a young ranger but entered in history as someone who abolished slavery in the United States. Kemal Ataturk was an Ottoman pasha, but his historic contribution is establishing republican rule, giving women the right to vote. Furthermore, Drašković considers it highly important that the Serbian people learn the truth about the crimes and manipulation of the Milošević regime. He stated, “(...) I had made a big mistake when, during a presentation, I said that Yugoslavia had to be reformed based on the map and project compiled by the Serbian Cultural Club. According to this project of 1936, Serbian territories were considered Serbia together with Kosovo, Vojvodina, Macedonia, Montenegro, all of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and even some parts of Croatia.

“In 1936 this project was probably real, but I realized that in 1990 it was disastrous. Because, in the meantime, a new reality had come to life, with borders of republics and provinces, and because we no longer had to risk inciting conflicts and mutual hatreds, we should have accepted the offers that came to us, as Yugoslavia, from the EU and from the US. The EU offered us a short and fast path for Yugoslavia’s membership in the EU, along with the recognition of all its internal borders, but with the obligation to break away from the Security Services and the communist regime. Meanwhile, from the US came the offer brought by the Secretary of State, James Baker, for Yugoslavia to join the NATO Alliance very

²¹² Gashi 2024: 60, se also: Indeksonline (2020): *Serbian intellectual: Kosovo fought a liberation war (...):* Intelektuali serb: Kosova bëri luftë çlirimtare, ndërsa Serbia ka kryer gjenocid të pastër – Indeksonline.net

soon, of course, with the obligation to democratize the state. Even a gift was bought, in the form of five billion dollars at that time, with the aim of building democratic institutions, firstly in Serbia. I experienced these projects as projects of hope.

“So, at that moment in the Serbian Cultural Club, I opposed the stories about the creation of Greater Serbia and the destruction of Yugoslavia. I opposed evil, and then I founded the Serbian Renewal Movement, with the aim of destroying the evil regime of Slobodan Milošević but also the regime of the Serbian cultural nationalist elite, be it literary or Christian. I paid a heavy price because of this. They tried to kill me several times and it’s a wonder how I survived. To cut a long story short, in 1999 they killed four of my closest people, including my wife’s brother, who were with me in the car. Although slightly injured, I survived. In 2000, I was shot twice in the head, but since the wounds were superficial, I still survived. There were several other attempts. Several dozen members of my party were killed by the Milošević regime (...).

“We must – I am talking about the Serbs – inform the people in the most honest way about the crimes committed against the Albanians in Kosovo, from the Milošević regime, his army and police, mobsters and looters. We have to wash away the shame from our name and from our national honour. It is terrible how thousands of Albanian civilians were killed in Kosovo and then they were taken out of their graves, put in refrigerator trucks, and thrown into lakes and rivers in Serbia, and buried in police training grounds in Belgrade, and that we still stay silent about all of this. There is no apology, nor punishment for that great crime. Punishment will come, because it must come.

“The people in Serbia are not informed about these things. In the media with national frequency, in the parliaments or in our governments since 2000, there is only talked about one crime, without exception: the crime of bombing Serbia by NATO. So, it turns out that we are divine and angelic people, who, without any possible fault, fell prey to the bombs of the NATO alliance in 1999. I, both as a writer, as a politician and as a foreign minister, have done everything to tell the people some facts. Someone has heard, but the vast majority of people do not believe. Propaganda is terrible. Lobotomy is terrible. I say that the people should know not only what happened in Kosovo in 1999 but also what happened

before 1999, from Knin (Croatia) onwards. People must know about the more than three-year siege of Sarajevo, for the thousands of civilians killed by Serbian shells fired from the hills above Sarajevo, among whom 1,600 were children. These are official data.

“The Serbian people should know about the death squads that used to leave from here to kill and loot. The Serbian people did not do this. This was the biggest shame; it was even a crime against us and against our history. I have been receiving constant death threats from people who have heard some of my television appearances. We must tell the people in Serbia that in 1998, the United Nations Security Council had approved three resolutions, through which they warned Slobodan Milošević about the situation of the Kosovo Albanians. They threatened him that he was jeopardizing the application of Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, which states that the use of force against criminal regimes is also allowed. Milošević violated all three of these resolutions”.²¹³

However, according to Drašković, a satisfactory compromise solution was and remains that the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosova should be implemented based on Marti Ahtissari’s plan (2007). During the same interview, he said, “(...) I was a participant in the Vienna negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo for the final status of Kosovo. The special envoy of the secretary general of the United Nations was Marti Ahtisaari. There was also an international Contact Group, of which Russia was also a member. Shortly before the Vienna negotiations, both the United Nations Security Council and the International Contact Group accepted the four basic principles that Marti Ahtisaari should adhere to during the negotiations. First, there is no return to the situation before 1999. In other words, there is no return of the Serbian state in Kosovo, because Serbia – through the Kumanova agreement, i.e. capitulation, and Resolution 1244 – has been expelled from Kosovo. Second, there is no division of Kosovo. Thirdly, there is no unification of Kosovo with Albania, and fourth, maximum rights for the Serbian minority in Kosovo.

“Ahtisaari has adhered to all four of these principles. Russia supported these four principles, and I, as well as everyone else, expected – despite the fact that the parties failed to reach an agreement – that the Ahtisaari

²¹³ Interview of Vuk Drašković on Kosovo TV (5th of June, 2023) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6R-lxnff-w&t=2727s>

Plan as an imposed solution, which was also foreseen by Resolution 1244, would be accepted. However, shortly before the end of the Vienna Conference, a message came from Moscow: "We certainly want to accept the Ahtisaari Plan, but on the condition that the same status that Kosovo will gain belongs to Abkhazia, Ossetia and Pridnestrovie". At that time, there was still no talk of Dombas, nor of Ukraine. Russia had attempted to trade on behalf of Serbia. The West rejected such a thing, and then Russia threatened that it would use its veto and that the Ahtisaari Plan would not be accepted in the United Nations Security Council.

"Of course, this attitude of Russia suited the regime in Serbia, which inserted a preamble in the Serbian Constitution during the Vienna negotiations. In fact, the preamble is not even part of the Constitution, although some say it is, and there it is written that Kosovo is the Autonomous Province of the Republic of Serbia, and that it is an integral part of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia. This is an impossible legal norm, which does not oblige anyone, because it is out of reality (...). I think the agreement will be reached in the end. That a mandatory and comprehensive agreement will be reached, and that Serbia will have to accept that Kosovo is an independent state, this is the reality (...). Somehow it seems to me that traditional morality has not yet died among Albanians. Not even among some Serbs. However, it is more preserved among Albanians than, let's say, among Serbs, Croats, etc.

"In his great book, Marko Miljanov describes, among other things, examples of 'humanity and bravery' of Albanians, which shows that humanity is when you protect others from yourself, while bravery is when you protect yourself from others. Today, the Albanians in Kosovo can show their traditional humanity, protecting the Serbs from themselves. In the sense that no one amongst them attacked the Serbs, regardless of what happened in the time of Milošević, because the crimes against Albanians were not committed by the Serbian people but by the Milošević regime. Consequently, by protecting the Serbs, Albanians protect the traditional honour of the Albanians (...).

"Personally, I think that the position of any minority is a mirror that shows the face of the majority. Later, but before the war in Kosovo, while Yugoslavia existed, Albanians were a minority in Yugoslavia, and they were a minority in Serbia. The position of the Albanians as a minority was

the mirror in which both Yugoslavia was seen and the mirror in which Serbia was seen. Now the Albanians represent the absolute majority in Kosovo, and the position of the Serbian minority in Kosovo is a test for the Albanian majority (...). Albanians have accepted the wonderful principles of the Ahtisaari Plan and have incorporated these principles into the Constitution and laws”.²¹⁴

In other words, the Ahtisaari Plan for Kosova provides an external protection for minorities in relation to the Albanian majority on both the central and local levels, stipulating that the Assembly of Kosova (based on proportional representation) has 120 seats with 20 seats reserved for minorities – 10 seats for the Serb minority and 10 seats for other minorities – with decision-making by a majority of both parties in the Assembly, with majority and minority representatives alike. This means that some legislative changes require not only a majority in the Assembly but also a majority of minority representatives in the Assembly. Significant legislative changes require the consent of almost everyone. For example, any future amendment to the Constitution requires the approval of two-thirds of the representatives of the Assembly of Kosova, while at the same time it requires the approval of two-thirds of the representatives of minorities. Moreover, Kosova’s government continues to have a Serbian minister and a minister from other minorities.²¹⁵ Furthermore, at least 15% of judges on the Supreme Court of Kosova and the Court of Appeals are from minority groups. Both Albanian and Serbian are the official languages in Kosova, while Turkish, Bosnian, and Roma are the official languages at the municipal level.²¹⁶

At the local level, the Ahtisaari Plan envisioned self-governance – the right to internal organization and the right to property – for the Serbian Orthodox Church as well local self-government, through ethnic decentralization, for the Serb minority. The Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosova – including monasteries, churches, and other facilities used for religious purposes – would enjoy full recognition as an integral part of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade and would benefit from the rights,

²¹⁴ Ibid

²¹⁵ Marti Ahtisaari: Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement: 2007, p. 11-14, 17 https://reliefweb.int/attachments/b2391e96-ba2c-323c-8c4b03c68610e2db/1DC6B184D02567D1852572AA00716AF7-Full_Report.pdf

²¹⁶ Ibid: 2, 34-35

privileges, and immunity within the internal organization, including its hierarchy and activities. Movable and immovable property, including other assets of the Serbian Orthodox Church, would be inviolable and would not be subject to expropriation. The Kosova authorities may have access to the property of the Serbian Orthodox Church only through its consent and in case of court orders in connection with illegal activities or immediate endangerment to life and health. Moreover, a select number of monasteries, churches, and other religious sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church – including historical and cultural sites of special importance to the Kosova Serb community – would enjoy the protection of special areas. In essence, this meant the prohibition of any new development, within these areas, including construction or industrial development such as exploration and exploitation of mineral resources and construction of dams, power plants or power grids, kilns and factories, and transit routes in rural areas.²¹⁷

Decentralization – in other words, local self-government in Kosova, as per the Ahtisaari Plan – is based on the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, especially the principle of subsidiary. This aims to protect and promote internationally accepted human rights standards, taking into account the needs of minorities and their members in Kosova. Decentralization also included the establishment of new municipalities, in which Kosova Serbs comprise at least 75% of the population in a concentrated settlement, with a total population of at least 5,000 inhabitants. All Serb-majority municipalities have courts, the right to inter-municipal cooperation and the right to cooperate with institutions in Serbia. Serbian language schools in Kosova have the right to implement curricula or textbooks drafted by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, as long as these curricula and textbooks do not conflict with the Constitution of Kosova.²¹⁸

Certain municipalities in Kosova have their own competencies enhanced. For example, the municipalities of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North have competence for higher education, including registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of education instructors and administrators. The municipalities of

²¹⁷ Ibid: 38-40

²¹⁸ Ibid: 25, 27-30, 34

Mitrovicë/Mitrovica North, Graçanicë/Gracanica and Shtërpçë/Štrpce have competence for the provision of secondary healthcare, including registration and licensing of healthcare institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of healthcare personnel and administrators. All municipalities in which the Kosova Serb community is in the majority have the authority to exercise responsibility for cultural affairs, including protection and promotion of Serbian and other religious and cultural heritage within the municipal territory as well as support for local religious communities, including enhanced participatory rights in the appointment of police station commanders.²¹⁹

NORWAY'S ROLE IN PEACE-BUILDING IN KOSOVA AFTER THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE AFFIRMED THE LEGALITY OF KOSOVA'S DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

On October 8, 2008, at the 63rd session of the UN General Assembly, Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Vuk Jeremić submitted a draft resolution for approval, requesting the assembly to seek an opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding Kosova's declaration of independence. In July 2010, the ICJ found that Kosova's independence was indeed legal, violating none of the following: general international law, Security Council Resolution 1244, Kosova's constitutional framework or any applicable international rule of law. After this verdict from the ICJ, 27 EU countries, plus Serbia, sponsored a resolution that was adopted by the UN on September 9, 2010. The resolution (GA/10980) welcomed the ICJ findings as well as the EU's readiness to facilitate dialogue between the parties, emphasizing that it would serve as a factor of peace, security and stability in the region and that it would promote cooperation, improve the lives of citizens and help both Serbia and Kosova make progress on their path to entrance into the EU.

The Norwegian Foreign Ministry welcomed the news that the ICJ affirmed the legality of Kosova's declaration of independence. Regarding

²¹⁹ Ibid: 23-24

this, the NRK wrote on July 22, 2010, “Norway welcomes the statement from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on Kosovo’s independence. Serbia and Russia believe that the statement does not change anything. We reiterate our full support for the principles of the UN Charter and for the International Court of Justice, which is the UN’s supreme judicial body. ‘I welcome the statement from the Hague Tribunal’, says Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre in the press release. ‘We now encourage the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Kosovo to cooperate fully in putting old disputes behind them in order to secure a better future in the region’, says Støre. The Foreign Ministry states that Norway voted in favor of the request from the UN General Assembly for an advisory statement. Norway also took part in the proceedings before the Court. Norway does not consider that there is any general right to secession in accordance with international law. There was a very special sequence of events in Kosovo linked to the conflicts in the Balkans. It created a unique situation, says Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre”.

The following is a facsimile of the NRK press release, dated July 22, 2010:

NRK TV

NRK RADIO

NRK

NRK

Nyheter

Sport

Kultur

Humor

Distrikt

Mer

Logg på

Søk

Unik

Unik forklarer

Unik på NRK TV

Unik i NRK Radio

Korrespondentbrevet

Nobelts Fredspris

Norge positiv til Kosovo-uttalelse

Norge hilser uttalelsen fra Den internasjonale domstolen (ICJ) om Kosovos uavhengighet velkommen. Serbia og Russland mener uttalelsen ikke endrer på noe.





Arne Nilsen

Publisert 22. juli 2010 kl. 19:06

Oppdatert 22. juli 2010 kl. 19:16

Artikkelen er flere år gammel.

– Vi gjentar vår fulle støtte til FN-paktens prinsipper og til den internasjonale domstolen, som er FNs overordnede dømmende organ, sier utenriksminister Jonas Gahr Støre i en pressemelding.

FOTO: BONDEVIK, ANDREAS / SCANPIX

«Domstolen har fullt ut bekreftet at Kosovos uavhengighetserklæring av 17. februar 2008 ikke brøt med folkeretten. Dette er i tråd med Norges syn», skriver Utenriksdepartementet (UD) i en pressemelding.

LES OGSÅ: Domstol godtar Kosovos uavhengighet

Norge anerkjente Republikken Kosovo 28. mars 2008.

LES OGSÅ: Norge anerkjenner Kosovo

– Vi gjentar vår fulle støtte til FN-paktens prinsipper og til den internasjonale domstolen, som er FNs overordnede dømmende organ. Jeg hilser uttalelsen fra Haag-domstolen velkommen, sier utenriksminister Jonas Gahr Støre i pressemeldingen.

Oppfordrer til samarbeid

– Vi oppfordrer nå Republikken Serbia og Republikken Kosovo til å samarbeide fullt ut om å legge gamle stridigheter bak seg for å sikre en bedre fremtid i regionen, sier Støre.

UD opplyser at Norge stemte for anmodningen fra FNs hovedforsamling om en rådgivende uttalelse. Norge deltok også i rettsforhandlingene for domstolen.

– Norge anser ikke at det foreligger noen generell rett til løsrivelse i henhold til folkeretten. Det var et helt spesielt hendelsesforløp i Kosovo knyttet til konflikten på Balkan. Det skapte en unik situasjon, sier utenriksminister Jonas Gahr Støre.



Kampene i Kosovo er over



Difor er det kraftige samanstøter i Kosovo

Mer om: Kosovo →



Dialogue between Kosova and Serbia under the EU regime was led by negotiator Catherine Ashton, high representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and was assisted by the Norwegian foreign ministry. During an interview in the Norwegian media on April 24, 2013, in connection with the help from Norway regarding normalization of relations between Kosova and Serbia, Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide was quoted in the following: “(...) For three years Norway worked behind the scenes while the EU led the negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo. It is a work he calls a support process (...) [and] it (...) ‘untangled in some tangles’, says Eide about several secret meetings in Oslo. He describes a long and good relationship between Serbia and Norway that also lasted through the wars in the Balkans. This was an important reason as to why Norway could function as an unofficial arena alongside the official negotiation arena in Brussels (...). ‘The relationship is something we have invested a lot in, but it is also a capital for us’, says Eide about how it has given Norwegian credibility when difficult things were to be discussed (...)”.

The following is a facsimile of the Norwegian News Agency (NTB) interview with Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide:

Serbia håper på Kosovo-effekt

EU meklet, og Norge jobbet på sidelinjen. Nå håper Serbia de samme Kosovo-aktørene kan hjelpe dem opp i den økonomiske eliteserien.

NTB

Publisert: 24 apr. 2013 12:11 Oppdatert: 24 apr. 2013 12:17

14 år på venterommet er lenge, sier utenriksminister Espen Barth Eide (Ap) om årene Serbia og Kosovo har balet med forholdet.

For Kosovo har det betydning at landet flere steder ikke er blitt anerkjent. For serberne har det betydning at de ble et slags internasjonal B-lag.

- Og det har hatt økonomiske konsekvenser, sier Eide i Beograd.

Han er den første internasjonale lederen som besøker Serbia etter det han kaller en historisk avtale med Kosovo. De to landene er etter maysommelige forhandlinger enige om å normalisere forholdet.

- Denne avtalen gir en ny mulighet til å bli sett som et land med en konstruktiv rolle, sa statsminister Ivica Dacic etter å ha møtt Eide på flyplassen sent tirsdag kveld.

Vendepunkt

Serbia har ikke vært ansett som et pålitelig investeringsland, innrømmet Dacic på et presse møte. Landet kan nå være ved et vendepunkt, håper han.

Utenriksminister

Serbias regjering har godkjent Kosovo-avtale

Regjeringen i Serbia har godkjent avtalen som regjeringens forhandlingsdelegasjon fredag inngikk med Kosovo.

- Han håper at det som nå skjer, kan gi en politisk stabilitet som igjen kan omsettes i økonomisk samarbeid med land som Norge, sier Eide til NTB.

Norge er Serbias tredje største utenlandske investor, fremholder Dacic, men passer også på å minne om at den bilaterale handelen kunne vært større. EU-kommisjonen har allerede anbefalt å starte

medlemskapsforhandlinger med serberne.

Norsk rolle

- Nå ønsker vi å samarbeide om gjennomføringen, sier Eide etter å ha gjort det klart at Norge i tre år jobbet i kulissene mens EU ledet forhandlingene mellom Serbia og Kosovo.

Det er et arbeid han kaller en støtteprosess der det ble «nøstet opp i noen floker», sier Eide om flere hemmelige møter i Oslo.

Han beskriver et langt og godt forhold mellom Serbia og Norge som også varte gjennom krigen på Balkan. Dette var en viktig grunn til at Norge kunne fungere som en uoffisiell arena

<http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/Serbia-haper-pa-Kosovo-effekt-7183358.html#Um8tjxbqgj>

Side 2 av 8

Serbia håper på Kosovo-effekt - Aftenposten

29.10.13 03:23

på siden av den offisielle forhandlingsarenaen i Brussel.

Kapital

- Forholdet er noe vi har investert mye i, men det er også en kapital for oss, sier Eide om hvordan det har gitt norsk troverdighet når vanskelige ting skulle diskuteres.

Utenriksministeren bestemte seg for å dra til Balkan med en gang avtalen ble kjent. Onsdag møter han den serbiske visestatsminister Aleksandar Vucic.

Han reiser deretter videre til Pristina for møter med Kosovos statsminister Hashim Thaci og utenriksminister Enver Hoxhaj.

Vanskelig

Det var ingen enkel prosess for Serbia å inngå avtalen med Kosovo, som erklærte seg selvstendig i 2008.

Det knytter seg fortsatt mange sterke følelser til det som en gang var en serbisk provins. Det bor fortsatt rundt 100.000 etniske serbere i Kosovo, og Eide understreker at det nå blir opp til Kosovo å bevise at de kan leve opp til ansvaret og respektere minoritetsrettighetene.

Dacic sier uansett at planen kommer til å få god støtte når den skal opp til avstemningen i nasjonalforsamlingen.

- Dette er strategisk klokt lederskap. Det måtte skje en gang, det har ligget i kortene at Serbia til slutt måtte erkjenne at Kosovo ikke er en del av Serbia for å komme videre, sier Eide og gratulerer den serbiske regjeringen.



Barth Eide and Catherine Ashton during one of their meetings

From 2014 to 2024, Jens Stoltenberg played a significant role in leading NATO during a highly challenging period in international relations, especially the Russian war in Ukraine. Regarding this, on the marking of the NATO alliance's 75th anniversary, delivered in front of the secretary general of NATO, President Joe Biden said the following: "One person in particular has done an extraordinary job leading NATO for the last decade. So much of the progress we made in the alliance is thanks to Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. He's a man of integrity and intellectual rigor, calm temperament in a moment of crisis, a consummate diplomat who works with leaders across the political spectrum and always finds a way to keep us moving forward. When the Russian war in Ukraine began, you didn't hesitate. Today, NATO is stronger, smarter, more energized than when you began. A billion people across Europe and North America – indeed, the whole world – will reap the rewards of your labour for years to come in a form of security, opportunity and greater freedom. For these reasons, I am pleased to award you the highest civilian honour the United States can bestow, the Presidential Medal of Freedom".²²⁰

In the following photo are Jens Stoltenberg and Joe Biden on the occasion of Jens Stoltenberg's awarding of the Presidential Medal of Freedom:

²²⁰ Norway's biggest media house – NRK (10th of July 2024): *Stoltenberg received the Presidential Medal of Freedom*. Jens Stoltenberg fikk presidentens frihetsmedalje – NRK Uria – Utenriksnyheter og -dokumentarer



Germany and Sweden also paid tribute to Jens Stoltenberg for his 10-year contribution as NATO secretary general. He received the Grand Cross Order of Merit of Germany, one of the highest honours awarded to foreign leaders and statesmen. German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier praised Stoltenberg for his contributions to Germany's security and his efforts to support Sweden and Finland's NATO membership.²²¹ At the award ceremony held at the Bellevue Palace, Steinmeier said, "You have shaped the alliance through your integrity, your clear political analysis and your personal commitment. You have ensured that NATO is stronger and more united than ever at a time when Russia is threatening us again (...). Your services to the security of Germany and NATO, especially through the northern expansion, are really historic. I would like to thank you on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany for this great and impressive personal commitment".²²² King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden awarded the Royal Order of the North Star to former NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and eight other foreign citizens for their efforts to help Sweden join NATO.²²³ The king's

²²¹ Anadolu Agency (October 22nd, 2024): *Ex-NATO chief Stoltenberg awarded Germany's Order of Merit*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/ex-nato-chief-stoltenberg-awarded-germanys-order-of-merit/3370601#>

²²² Ibid

²²³ By Niclas Rolander (October 22nd, 2024): *Sweden Honors Stoltenberg and Blinken for NATO Accession Roles*: <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/business/politics/2024/10/22/sweden-honors-stoltenberg-and-blinken-for-nato-accession-roles/>

decision was made on the recommendation of Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson's government, who said in a statement, "These awards are an expression of our great gratitude for the efforts of these people in connection with Sweden's NATO membership".²²⁴

The following are facsimiles of newspaper excerpts regarding the presentation of these awards by Germany and Sweden:


TÜRKİYE WORLD ECONOMY POLITICS ENERGY SPORTS INFOGRAPHICS OPINION VIDEO PHOTO

WORLD, EUROPE

Ex-NATO chief Stoltenberg awarded Germany's Order of Merit

President Steinmeier thanks Jens Stoltenberg for his contributions to Germany's security, his efforts for Sweden and Finland's NATO membership

Anadolu staff | 22.10.2024 - Update : 22.10.2024



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (R), presents Order of Merit (Grand Cross) to Jens Stoltenberg (L) with the Order of Merit (Grand Cross) of the Federal Republic of Germany to Jens Stoltenberg in Berlin, Germany on October 22, 2024.







BERLIN

NATO's former Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was awarded Germany's Order of Merit on Tuesday for his contributions to European security and transatlantic ties.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressed gratitude for Stoltenberg's work as secretary general of NATO over the past decade, and said during his time NATO became stronger.

"You have shaped the alliance through your integrity, your clear political analysis and your personal commitment. You have ensured that NATO is stronger and more united than ever at a time when Russia is threatening us again," he said at the award ceremony held at the Bellevue Palace.

Steinmeier said Sweden and Finland's NATO memberships could not have been possible without Stoltenberg's efforts and commitment.

"Your services to the security of Germany and NATO, especially through the northern expansion, are really historic. I would like to thank you on behalf of the Federal Republic of Germany for this great and impressive personal commitment," he said.

Stoltenberg received the "Grand Cross" Order of Merit of Germany, one of the highest honors awarded to foreign leaders and statesmen.

In his speech, Stoltenberg thanked Steinmeier and said it was a "great privilege and honor" for him to receive this award.

"I think it is a recognition not only of what I have done, but recognition to the whole of NATO, for what NATO allies have done over the last 10 years, to ensure that we're able to cope with a more challenging security environment," he said.

Stoltenberg said Germany has played an important role within the alliance with its increased contributions to Europe's security. He also thanked Steinmeier for his friendship and cooperation over the past years.

"We have worked together in different capacities, and I always listen to your advice, your guidance on difficult issues. So, therefore, it is a great honor for me to be here today, to receive the award from you, an old friend and political colleague," he said.

World

Türkiye denies claims of oil shipments to Israel

Bolivia gets BRICS partner country status

Russia denies phone conversation between Putin, Trump

Australia appoints 1st anti-slavery commissioner

COP29 president says UN program shows current policies would lead to global warming of 3C

²²⁴ Ibid

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Politics

Sweden Honors Stoltenberg and Blinken for NATO Accession Roles

By Niclas Rolanden
October 27, 2024 at 10:45AM EDT



Jens Stoltenberg, secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), left, and Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, during a joint news conference at the US State Department in Washington, D.C., on Monday, Jan. 26, 2024. Sweden says the US spent its power the Middle East conflict by spreading lies and respond strongly to any effort that escalates the conflict or incites violence against US personnel. (Photographer: Nassim Bang/Bloomberg (Bang/Bloomberg))

(Bloomberg) – The King of Sweden will award the Royal Order of the North Star to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, former NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg and eight other foreign citizens for helping Sweden join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Sweden became defense alliance's 32nd member in March this year, after more than a year of tough negotiations as Turkey opposed its accession and Hungary dragged its feet on ratifying the application.

The Nordic country sought to join the bloc jointly with neighboring Finland after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Finland's former President Sauli Niinisto, who spearheaded the push, has previously received the Order of the Seraphim, Sweden's foremost honor.

"These awards are an expression of our great gratitude for the efforts of these people in connection with Sweden's NATO membership," Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said in a statement. The King's decision was made on the recommendation of Kristersson's government.

The list of people who will receive the order also includes former Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan, Finland's former Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto and the US Permanent Representative to NATO, Julianne Smith.

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During Jens Stoltenberg's term as NATO secretary general, Kosova's status in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly was advanced. Specifically, on March 24, 2024, during a meeting in Estonia of the Permanent Steering Committee of this Assembly, Kosova's status was raised from observer member to the associate member level. This is the highest level of presence in the Assembly until Kosova's full membership in NATO. This decision was formalized with a vote in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in the

spring session of the Assembly, which was held on May 27, 2024, in Sofia, Bulgaria.

This cooperation between Kosova and NATO is of special importance for security in the region and to avoid the potential aggression of the Serbian regime towards Kosova. Aleksandar Vučić, who was the minister of information in the Milošević era (1998–1999) and who had been leading Serbia since 2013 as both prime minister and as president, attempted to take terrorist actions to destabilize Kosova. On September 24, 2023, Serb terrorists in armoured vehicles stormed a village in north Kosova, battling police and barricading themselves in an Orthodox monastery near the village of Banjska in the Serb-majority region, where monks and pilgrims hid inside a temple as a shootout raged.²²⁵ The terrorists' aim was to stage a massacre in the Banjska Monastery, victimizing Serbian pilgrims and monks and then accusing the Kosova police of being terrorists, thus inciting a rebellion of Serbs in north Kosova and justifying military intervention for the annexation of northern Kosova. However, the professional action of the Kosova police in coordination with the international military forces in Kosova managed to neutralize this terrorist action and turn away from this provocation for conflict. This issue became a significant topic of discussion in the international media, including Norwegian media outlets. In the following is a photo from NRK's interview of Nufri Lekaj on September 25, 2023, regarding the tense situation in the north of Kosova:²²⁶



²²⁵ Armed Men Storm Kosovo Village, Serbian Orthodox Monastery; Policeman Killed | N18V | News18: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=mDZcXOEMBAM>

²²⁶ Dagsnytt 18 (September 25th, 2023): <https://radio.nrk.no/serie/dagsnytt-atten/sesong/202309/NMAG03019123>

These forms of diversionary actions have a long tradition in Belgrade regimes to sow hatred towards Albanians. Among them is the so-called Panda Bar case during the escalation of the war in Kosova (December 14, 1998), when six young Serbs were attacked and killed and 15 others were injured in the Panda Bar in the city of Peja, Kosova. The KLA was accused of this terrorist action. Six young Albanian men were arrested and tortured in custody at the time, but they were later acquitted at trial. However, the torture they suffered resulted in them being disabled for life. The Panda Bar attack was used by the Serbian regime of Milošević to motivate further murders and massacres of Albanian civilians. In other words, the problem with Alexander Vučić was not only his past service as the minister of information in Milošević's government from 1998 to 1999 but also his unwillingness to learn from the mistakes of the past and to promote peace between Serbia and Kosova. Still, even after the war in Ukraine began, Vučić has chosen to secretly maintain his friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin and to strengthen support for Russia in Serbia.

During the aforementioned interview for Kosova TV, the well-known Serbian writer and former politician Vuk Drašković said, "The Serbian secret service, with its death squads, not only killed Albanians loyal to the Serbian regime but also killed those Serbian teenagers in the Panda Bar to blame the KLA".²²⁷ He continued, "The war in Ukraine is a crime, not only against Ukraine, but it is also a crime against Russia, to Russian culture, and to Russian history. For the first time since the existence of Russia, the word 'Russia' in the world is being pronounced as if it were a plague. It is terrible what that KGB regime did to the Russian people. I consider that this Russian aggression will end with an uprising within Russia against that regime and that, in the not-so-distant future, a Russian Willy Brandt will kneel in the square of Kiev and beg the Ukrainians to forgive them for the crime that the Stalinist KGB regime committed against Ukraine, but also against Russia. This will also give Serbia more freedom because we are completely enslaved by the same Russomania".²²⁸

²²⁷ Interview of Vuk Drašković on Kosova TV (June 5th, 2023) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6R-lxnfF-w&t=2727s>

²²⁸ Ibid

After Belgrade's demand for an assessment by the ICJ of Kosova's declaration of independence and following the court's verdict that the independence was indeed legal, the UN General Assembly, on September 9, 2010, adopted a resolution (GA/10980) that welcomed the ICJ findings as well as the EU's readiness to facilitate the dialogue process between Kosova and Serbia. There was hope that the dialogue, developed over the course of 10 years, could bring about a final agreement between Kosova and Serbia, with mutual recognition ensuring and strengthening peace in the region. Nevertheless, this did not happen, mainly due to the constant refusal of Alexander Vučić, who also "won" the election in December 2023; however, the vote was marred by irregularities and fraud allegations and triggered a protest.

According to CNN on December 25, 2023, "Thousands gathered in Belgrade in an anti-government protest last Sunday, to demand the annulment of Serbia's general election last week, that was deemed 'unjust' by international observers. Protesters attempted to gain access to the City Assembly in Belgrade, using flagpoles and rocks to break the windows of the building, but were repelled by the police using riot shields and tear gas, CNN's Serbian affiliate N1 reported. At least 35 people were arrested Sunday, according to N1, in what was the sixth straight day of protests since the parliamentary and local elections (...). The ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) won 47% of the votes after President Aleksandar Vučić called a snap election, cementing his decade-long grip on power in the Balkan nation that is seeking membership of the European Union while retaining close ties to Russia (...). The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) said the election day had been marked by numerous procedural deficiencies. The German Foreign Office said the findings were unacceptable for a country with EU candidate status (...). Separately, Vučić met with Russian Ambassador Aleksandar Bocan-Harchenko in Belgrade. According to Russian state media TASS, the Russian ambassador afterwards said that Vučić has irrefutable data that there is incitement and support from the West".²²⁹

²²⁹ By Christian Edwards, Josh Pennington and Anna Chernova, CNN (December 25th, 2023): *Demonstrators try to storm Belgrade city hall in protest against 'stolen' Serbian elections*: <https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2023/12/25/europe/serbia-protest-election-stolen-vucic-intl/index.html>

Moreover, the *Frontliner* magazine reported on January 12, 2024, “In a disturbing echo of Serbia’s troubled past, the arrest and alleged brutal treatment of opposition politician Nikola Sandulović casts a grim shadow over the presidency of Aleksandar Vučić, a leader whose roots trace back to the propaganda machinery of the Milošević era. This incident, as reported by the *Financial Times*, not only raises serious concerns about human rights violations but also serves as a stark reminder of Vučić’s controversial legacy as a former propaganda minister, a role in which he justified heinous war crimes and crimes against humanity. Sandulović, known for his bold stance in seeking reconciliation for past atrocities, found himself in the crosshairs of the Serbian government after a poignant act of contrition for war crimes in Kosovo. His arrest by secret police and the subsequent harrowing reports of his treatment while in custody, spotlight the repressive tactics reminiscent of a darker time in Serbian history. Despite the government’s denial of any mistreatment, the severity of Sandulović’s condition upon his release and the outcry from his legal team are hard to dismiss (...)”.²³⁰

Consequently, Kosova’s membership in NATO would extinguish once and for all the Serbian state’s desire to make Kosova a non-functional state and destabilize the region. At the same time, this would help Serbia, so that the progressive and pro-Western political opposition forces could come to power in Serbia, and the Serbian people would finally be freed from the clutches of the criminal structure of the neo-fascist Milošević regime. This would also prevent Serbia from using Serbs in Kosova as a tool to prevent their integration in Kosova, since all the preconditions for the integration of Serbs in Kosova are present.

In fact, after the ICJ’s verdict that Kosova’s independence was indeed legal, Vučić identified the Serbia–Kosova negotiations as a last chance to obtain further concessions from Kosova. This was beyond the Ahtisaari Plan, intending to annex parts of Kosova’s territory or forming some type of a Republica Srpska in Kosova, as it did in Bosnia, and making Kosova a non-functional state. During the negotiations after 2010, Vučić insisted on the establishment of an association of municipalities with a Serbian

²³⁰ The Frontliner magazine (January 12th, 2024): *The Dark Shadow of Vučić’s Regime: The Arrest and Alleged Abuse of Nikola Sandulović* : <https://www.thefrontliner.uk/p/the-dark-shadow-of-vucics-regime>

majority in Kosova, although, at the local government level, it is the extended municipal powers that provide the Serbian minority in Kosova services and appropriate security. However, as a compromise within the dialogue for the normalization of relations and mutual recognition between Kosova and Serbia, the political representatives of Kosova Albanians have agreed to establish a type of association of municipalities with a Serbian majority in Kosova, similar to the association of municipalities with a Serbian majority in Croatia. In other words, this is an association that does not constitute a territorial unit but is a democratically elected political, advisory and coordinating mechanism that has self-managing powers in matters relating to Serbs' civil and national rights as well as identity issues, their culture, participation and integration in society as a whole.

Nevertheless, Vučić increasingly insisted, especially after the Russian aggression in Ukraine, that a type of association of Serb-majority municipalities similar to the Republica Srpska in Bosnia should be imposed on Kosova. His goal was that the neo-Milošević political forces in Serbia continue to hold power in Serbia and have the opportunity to destabilize and divide Kosova along ethnic lines in the future. Nevertheless, it remains to be hoped that a final agreement will be reached in the near future between Serbia and Kosova, based on the ICJ verdict that Kosova's independence is in line with international law and the Ahtisaari Plan, which secures high-level rights for minorities in Kosova.

Regarding Kosova's integration with NATO, it is worth mentioning that Armend Mehaj, a Norwegian - Albanian who grew up in Norway, was the minister of defence in Kosova from 2021 to August 2023 and made a special contribution to raising the standards of Kosova's armed forces on the way to Kosova's integration with NATO. Mehaj has a background in the the Norwegian Armed Forces as well as an education in psychology and public-sector governance and leadership. He is an experienced security and defence policy analyst with a specialization in global conflict management, threat assessment and long-term security challenges. Mehaj also has experience in the healthcare sector, security policy and EU and NATO processes. He has previously worked in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Chad. In politics, he has extensive experience in diplomacy,

negotiations and communication, skills that are essential for managing and resolving conflicts in a peaceful manner.²³¹

In 2012, Mehaj was decorated by the Albanian state, specifically by the Albanian Army. In 2023, in his capacity of minister of defence in Kosova, he was decorated by the German Army as one of the rare non-German personalities with the military order Cross of Honour in Gold. Mehaj's father, Kadri Mehaj, who was an activist, was a friend of Backer and Gjøtterud.

Below, the first photo is from the Albanian state honour ceremony in 2012, and the second photo is from the German state honour ceremony in 2023.



Unfortunately, although the Belgrade government had requested the ICJ's assessment of Kosova's declaration of independence, it did not ruminate on the decision that the independence was legal. On the contrary, Serbia reiterated its position and declared that it would never recognize Kosova's independence, persevering in its claims to a historical right to the land. Serbia's claim of historical rights over Kosova is unfounded and completely ignores the period before the Serbian occupation and rule of Kosova, as if the territory had been empty and uninhabited before the Serb invasion. In other words, Serbian historiography legitimizes Serbian historical references to Kosova, claiming Kosova as the so-called cradle of Serbia, extending from the medieval Serbian kingdom at the end of the 12th century to 1389. Even if

²³¹ Center for security and resilience (UTSYN): *Armend Mehaj*: <https://www.prosjektutsyn.no/en/fagprofil/armend-mehaj/>

we were to accept, as a criterion, Serbia's historical rights over Kosova, there are other implications. Bulgaria, for example, can claim to have far greater rights, having ruled its territory earlier, before 850 until the early 11th century. In addition, Turkey can claim even more historical rights over Kosova than Serbia, because Kosova was under Ottoman rule from 1389 to 1912, a much longer period.²³² Regarding this approach of Serbian historiography concerning Kosova, English historian Noel Malcolm writes the following: "Medieval Kosovo is often referred to in general terms as the 'cradle of the Serbs', as if it had been a Serb heartland from the outset; but the reality was rather different. Just over 800 years separate the arrival of the Serbs in the Balkans in the seventh century from the final Ottoman conquest in the 1450s: out of those eight centuries, Kosovo was Serb-ruled for only the last two - and - a half - less than one - third of the entire period. Bulgarian khans or tsars held Kosovo from the 850s until the early eleventh century, and Byzantine Emperors until the final decades of the twelfth".²³³

Many foreign scholars consider that the Albanian population inhabited the territory of Kosova before it was conquered in the Slavic intrusion, regardless of the demographic variables of the Albanian population in Kosova. For example, Norwegian Balkanologist Svein Mønnesland considers that the influx of Slavs in Kosova transpired to the detriment of Albanians and other populations. Indeed, he writes, "In the depths of the Balkans, the Slavs assimilated some populations, but some, such as the Albanians and the Vlachs, moved up into the mountains and managed to survive".²³⁴ After the invasion of the Balkans, the Serbs organized into two states during the year 1000. One centre was Raška, near present-day Novi Pazar in Serbia. The other centre was Dioclea (Dukla) or Zeta, in present-day Montenegro,²³⁵ a land originally populated by Illyrians.²³⁶ Malcolm considers that Kosova, during this period, was not within the state centre of Raška, which the Serbs controlled, because "the Serbian expansion into

²³² Lekaj 2021: 92-93, 266

²³³ Malcolm 2001: 42

²³⁴ Mønnesland 2006: 31

²³⁵ Ibid: 89

²³⁶ Norwegian Biographical Encyclopedia: "*History of Montenegro*" (2024): <https://snl.no/Montenegroshistorie>

Kosovo began in earnest only in the late 12th century”.²³⁷ Furthermore, Malcolm considers the Battle of Marica in 1371 to be more important historically than the Battle of Kosova, having paved the way for the general conquest of the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire. He posits that this particular defeat must have had a significant impact on the Serbs, as they lost the most important occupied territories in Macedonia.²³⁸

Serbian and Albanian historians disagree about the composition of the army led by Lazarus at the battle of Kosova in 1389. Serbian historiography assigns little to no importance to, and only briefly mentions, Albanians’ involvement in the ranks of Lazars’ military forces against the forces of the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, Albanian historiography focuses on the Albanians’ participation in this battle. Moreover, early Ottoman chronicles written in the 15th century prove that Albanians and people of other non-Serb ethnicities participated in Lazars’ army.²³⁹

Regarding the long historical continuity of Albanians, American scholar Edwin Jacques starts his study with the prehistoric Pelasgians. As proof of their existence, Jacques relies on early historians, geographers, poets, and playwrights, including Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Dionysus of Halicarnassus, Plutarch, Strabo, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Cyrus. Jacques reveals that Pelasgian, being an ancient term and one that is not suitable for historical tracing, has led many young scholars to replace the term Pelasgian with the term pre-Hellenic.²⁴⁰ Among others, Jacques considers that: “. (....)..Like Homer, Virgil presented both protagonists of the Trojan tragedy as Pelasgians rather than Greeks. He declared that the Dardanian King Priam of Troy was, like other Trojan kings, Pelasgian (ibid., 1:1.624). Aeneas also was Dardanian (ibid., 1:1.494, 617) and therefore Pelasgian, as were most of the Trojans....(....)...Although these great epic poems of Homer and Virgil may not be acceptable as history, they do preserve a remarkable record of the Pelasgian civilization of that early period. The reader quickly discovers that these Albanian forebears of 1000 b.c. were by no means slouching anthropoids or uncouth troglodytes....(....). One dramatic

²³⁷ Malcolm 2001: 26

²³⁸ Ibid: 59

²³⁹ Ibid: 63

²⁴⁰ Jacques 1995: 53-64

episode at Troy paralleled precisely the “besa” obligation still inviolable in the northern mountains of Albania. Diomedes of Argos, advancing for single combat, recognized his opponent as the son of a former houseguest. He refused to fight him, but “planted his spear in the earth” and declared them “guest-friends”, whereupon they leaped forward to clasp hands and pledge their faith by exchanging pieces of armor as gifts (6:72). It becomes obvious that chivalry did not originate at King Arthur's Round Table.”²⁴¹

Jacques emphasizes that the Roman occupation caused the loss of the precious freedom of the descendants of the old Pelasgian population, living in Macedonia, Epirus, and Illyria, and a part of this proto-Albanian population shrank to their castles in the mountains²⁴². The long Proto-Albanian (Illyrian) resistance led by Kings Agron, Teuta, and Gent, against the Roman Empire had gained notice, even after the subjugation of Illyria by Rome.²⁴³ Thus, it was no surprise that the Praetorian Guard recruited many Illyrian soldiers, and that Illyrians produced some of the most important figures within the hierarchy of the Roman-Byzantine Empire.²⁴⁴

Malcolm considers that Albanian and Greek are the only languages that have survived from an ancient Balkan language, and the proper names – toponyms, names of people and tribes that are preserved in Latin or Greek inscriptions as well as in the works of ancient historians – constitute valuable evidence for the connection of Albanian with Illyrian.²⁴⁵ The well-known Greek historian Dhimitri Bethanis considers Albanians and Greeks to have old kinship ties. Bethanis takes his point of departure from the sources of the ancient Greek historians such as Thucydides, which proves that the Illyrians fought alongside the Greeks in the Peloponnesian War. Bethany sees it as a testament to the kinship between the Illyrians and the Greeks because he argues that the Greeks did not allow the barbarians to intervene in a civil war, whichever side they took, unless they considered them “their people”.²⁴⁶

²⁴¹ Ibid: 62, 65, 70-71

²⁴² Ibid: 142

²⁴³ Ibid: 138-142

²⁴⁴ Ibid: 150-153

²⁴⁵ Malcolm 2001: 31-32

²⁴⁶ Të Zgjedhura: “The history of Albania (Illyria) since 2500 BC, according to the Greek historian, Dhimitri Bethanis” (2018): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qWXSrBlKw&feature=youtu.be>

Gradually, under the rule of the Roman Empire, the Proto-Albanians (Illyrians) became Christianized and, after the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, they fell under the rule of the Byzantine Empire.²⁴⁷ The religious rivalry between Constantinople and Rome had influenced the Proto - Albanians (Illyrians), as they found themselves to be geographically between these two major political centres and under the pressure of both; therefore, they remained religiously fragile. Additionally, the Greek and Roman languages were dominant, so Illyrians could not compete linguistically with either by using Illyrian as a written language.²⁴⁸

Malcolm argues that the retraction of proto – Albanians (Illyrians) in mountain areas may have contributed to their cultural continuity. In respect to this, he writes: “This is why the purest element of Albanian vocabulary refers to mountains, high-altitude plants and shepherding: the point is not that the proto - Albanians had never lived any other sort of life, but that the only ones who survived as Albanian-speakers did so precisely because that was the sort of isolated and independent life they led, probably for several centuries. The Illyrians who lived on the coastal plains were Romanized, like the ones on the Dalmatian coast and indeed in most areas of Yugoslavia. By the time the Slavs began arriving in the sixth century, there were only scattered pockets of speakers of the old ‘barbarian’ languages left anywhere in the Balkans, and all of them were in mountainous regions”.²⁴⁹

After the conquest by the Ottoman Empire, the conversion of a considerable number of Albanians to Islam took place gradually, similar to the Albanians’ Christianization under the Roman and the Byzantine empires. This has mainly been the result of the fact that Albanians, due to successive invasions since antiquity and historical circumstances in general (which have also contributed to the assimilation of a large part of them), have not managed to have their own church in their own language (as other Balkan peoples have). In this sense, the Islamization of the Albanians contributed to slowing down the further assimilation process of the Albanians. Several scholars and foreign researchers have addressed

²⁴⁷ Jacques 1995: 168-177

²⁴⁸ Lekaj 2021: 53-54

²⁴⁹ Malcolm 2001: 35

this topic. For example, Mønnesland considers that: “It is debatable what the reason was for the Islamization of Albanians. It has been partly explained that the tax system had changed, making it difficult for non-Muslims to cope with tax pressure. But it is likely that the Turks also used violence, in contrast to what was common, probably because the Albanians were insurgents. The main reason was that Catholic Albanians posed a threat to the Ottoman Empire as potential allies with Venice. For this reason, the strongest persecution was against Catholic Albanians, especially after they rebelled and supported Venice during the wars at the end of the 16th century. Some of them moved to Kosovo, where even today there are groups of Albanian Catholics (Mother Teresa, actually Agnes Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, comes from an Albanian Catholic family)”.²⁵⁰

As they had done in the Roman Empire and later in the Byzantine Empire, the Albanians produced some of the most important figures in the Ottoman Empire. One of them was Mehmet Ali Pasha, the governor of the Elayet of Egypt, the founder of modern Egypt, and the occupier of many other high positions, up to prime minister (grand vizier). German-American historian Bernard J. Fischer infers that much when he writes the following: “Fully one-fifth of all Grand Viziers, some thirty of them, were Albanians.”²⁵¹ In much the same manner, Albanians also contributed to the independence of Greece. According to British historian Eric Hobsbawm: “...if we were to suppose that the Greek mountaineers who rose against the Turks in Byron’s day were nationalists, which is admittedly improbable, we cannot fail to note that some of their most formidable fighters were not Hellenes but Albanians (the Suliotes).”²⁵² Regarding the long historical continuity of the Albanians, the Swiss historian Oliver Schmitt, in an interview, states among other things: “There are many elements that indicate the existence of continuity. In fact, archaeology, linguistics, and more recently, paleogenetics clearly show that the core of the Albanian people — that is, the Albanian or proto-Albanian population — has been present in the central Balkans from

²⁵⁰ Mønnesland 2006: 143–144

²⁵¹ Bernard J. Fischer: “*Albanian Nationalism And Albanian Independence*” (2014) p. 28, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307842058_Albanian_Nationalism_and_Albanian_Independence/fulltext/57d1903a08ae6399a38b7ff4/307842058_Albanian_Nationalism_and_Albanian_Independence.pdf?origin=publication_detail

²⁵² Hobsbawm 2012: 65

antiquity to the present day. (...) My main message is that today, even international scholarship acknowledges the continuity and autochthony of the Albanians as a well-established historical fact, especially when compared with other peoples — particularly the Slavs. This is also one of the reasons why Albanian history is so fascinating. (...) Language has played a key role in shaping Albanian identity. The proto-Albanians and their descendants have preserved their language under various imperial rules — Roman, Byzantine, and especially Ottoman - while also playing a significant role within those empires. For this reason, I think that, in a European context, the Albanians can only be compared to the Basques of Spain. (...).”²⁵³

Consequently, historical circumstances have influenced Albanians as an ethnic group to be continuously exposed to religious fragmentation, assimilation, and absorption, and thereby to contribute more to others than to themselves in the process. These experiences have shaped Albanians’ socio-political preconditions for nation-building in such a way that, later, during the nationalism era and nation-building process, they appear weaker than other Balkan people. Nevertheless, many Albanians managed to preserve linguistic continuity and historical memory, which was used as a basis for their nation-building. For this same reason, the ideologists of Albanian nationalism bestowed special importance on language as the most unifying factor for Albanians.²⁵⁴ About this, Hobsbawm argues the following: “Albanians, living under rival cultural influences since classical antiquity, and divided among three or (if we include the locally centred Islamic cult of the Bektashi) even four rival religions: Islam, Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. It was natural for the pioneers of Albanian nationalism to seek an Albanian cultural identity in language, since religion, and indeed almost everything else in Albania, seemed divisive rather than unifying”²⁵⁵

Therefore, it is within this historical–political and social context that Pashko Vase Shkodrani’s postulate should be weighed. He wrote that “the religion of the Albanians is Albanianism” in his poem titled *Oh Albania*,

²⁵³ Interview of Oliver Schmitt on KTV (April 20th, 2025): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXksLGu0TnE>

²⁵⁴ Lekaj 2021: 59-60

²⁵⁵ Hobsbawm 2012: 53

Poor Albania (1880). In its essence, this postulate, which had a great impact, was a call for Albanians' national unity and interfaith harmony and did not oppose religions as a value in themselves. The author of the poem criticizes certain priests and hodjas, who, through religious divisions, pushed to further assimilate Albanians into other nations, and he does not at all appeal to atheism as some interpret it, because he refers to God with respect, as seen at the end of his poem. In other words, the author reminds his people that the identity of Albanians was not a product of religion, as in the case of other peoples in the Balkans. He describes the nation as a mother defiled by foreigners and appeals to the Albanians to act against this dishonour: "Once you were a great lady. The men of the world called you mother....But today, Albania, tell me, how are you faring now? Like an oak tree, felled to the ground!... Some say 'I am Turk,' others 'I am Latin,' Some 'I am Greek,' others 'I am Slav'. But you are brothers, all of you, my hapless people! The priests and the hodjas have deceived you, To divide you and keep you poor....Come, let us lament poor Albania. Who is without honour and reputation. She has become a widow, a woman with no husband. She is like a mother who has never had a son! Who has the heart to let her die. Once such a heroine, and today so weak? This beloved mother, are we to abandon her. To be trampled underfoot by the foreigners? No, no! No one wishes such shame. All dread such misfortune! Before Albania is thus forlorn. Let all our heroes perish with rifle in hand. Awaken, Albania, wake from your slumber. Let us all, as brothers, swear a common oath. And not look to church or mosque. The religion of the Albanian is Albanianism! From Bar down to Preveza. Everywhere let the sun spend its warmth and rays. This is our land, left to us by our forefathers. Let no one touch us for we are all to die! Let us die like men as our forefathers once did. And not bring shame upon ourselves before God!".²⁵⁶

Unlike neighbouring countries in which nation-building was raised mainly on religious grounds, such as Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, Albanian nation-building, being inspired by Western countries' ideas of nation-building and due to historical circumstances, was raised mainly on moderate secularism, based on history, language, and interfaith harmony

²⁵⁶ Letërsi Shqip: "Pashko Vasa - O Moj Shqypni" (1880): <https://www.teksteshqip.com/amp/pashko-vasa/poezi-101206.php>

and respect. Therefore, compared to neighbouring nations that are somewhat closed, the Albanian nation is a more open nation, in terms of national content with a high level of voluntarism, because a particular religion is not an exclusive criterion for being a member of the Albanian nation. In this regard, many Albanian religious leaders - Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox - made significant contributions during the Albanian nation-building.²⁵⁷

In this context, it is important to highlight that Albania's protection of Jews during World War II can be attributed in large part to longstanding cultural traditions among Albanians, as noted by Jacques. Central among these is Besa, a traditional code of honor, along with a deeply rooted ethos of interfaith harmony. These values contributed to Albania becoming one of the few European countries where Jews found refuge during the Holocaust. This phenomenon was also acknowledged by Herman Bernstein, who served as the United States Ambassador to Albania at the time. In his observations, Bernstein wrote: "There is no trace of any discrimination against Jews in Albania, because Albania happens to be one of the rare lands in Europe today where religious prejudice and hate do not exist, even though Albanians themselves are divided into three faiths."²⁵⁸

Below is a passage with a citation from Ambassador Bernstein, taken from the official website of Yad Vashem – The World Holocaust Remembrance Center:



²⁵⁷ Lekaj 2021: 89

²⁵⁸ Yad Vashem: "Besa: a code of honor - Muslim Albanians who rescued jews during the Holocaust" (n.d.): <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/besa/index.asp>

It is worth noting that during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, some of the world's most prominent human rights activists, politicians, diplomats, and military officials began to draw parallels between Slobodan Milošević's hatred toward Albanians and anti-Semitism. These included figures such as Kristoffer Gjøtterud, as well as several individuals of Jewish descent—among them Aleksander Gleichgewicht, one of the dissidents of the Polish Solidarity who later served as information secretary of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee; U.S. congressmen Tom Lantos, Eliot Engel, Benjamin Gilman, and Nita Lowey; and a number of senior U.S. diplomats and military officials, including Madeleine Albright, Richard Holbrooke, Wesley Clark, James Rubin, and William Cohen. As a result, their empathy and commitment to supporting the Albanian people grew even stronger, becoming intertwined with a sense of historical gratitude rooted in the fact that, during the Second World War, Albanians were among the very few nations in Europe who protected Jews, offering them refuge and safety.²⁵⁹



Tom
Lantos



Eliot
Engel



Benjamin
Gilman



Nita
Lowey



Aleksander
Gleichgewicht



Madeleine
Albright



Richard
Holbrooke



Wesley
Clark



James
Rubin



William
Cohen

²⁵⁹ Lekaj 2021: 156

It is also worth noting that the heritage of the Orthodox Churches in Kosova is not only Serbian but also Albanian, as an autochthonous population in Kosova. In an interview for Serbian TV on September 6, 2023, Serbian politician Nenad Čanak said, “The biggest deception is in the so-called identity of the Serbian people, which is being used for political purposes through forgeries. There is no Serbian monastery in Kosovo. They are orthodox monasteries. Then there is another thing that the Serbs adopted....”²⁶⁰ During the aforementioned interview for Kosova TV, the well-known Serbian writer and former politician Vuk Drašković said, “...as early as the 15th century, Lekë Dukagjini in his Canon ordered that churches and monasteries be protected in the same way as Albanians protect their houses. In the Canon of Lekë Dukagjini it is written: Churches and monasteries have neither fire nor sword, therefore they must be protected. I have taken up this subject and I have studied it as a writer. Within a few centuries, around a thousand Albanians were killed while they were protecting churches and monasteries from thieves across Kosovo. Well, these thieves were Turks, Albanians, Serbs, and who knows what else. This is because it was said that there was gold, silver, etc. in the churches. So, they were protecting those churches. The Serbian population in Kosovo called these protectors voivodes of monasteries. In 1983, while I was standing in the Patriarchate of Peja (Kosovo) in a popular assembly, I was watching the arrival of an Albanian voivode of the monastery, whom the nuns received with great honors. He even had his own room inside the Patriarchate of Peja. King Alexander, after the creation of the first Yugoslavia, awarded the highest state honors to 20 descendants of the Albanian voivodes of the monasteries. The people in Serbia do not know this. Truth heals....”²⁶¹.

There also exists a long religious tradition and ethnohistory in the area. For example, on August 14, 2023, archaeologists made a remarkable discovery in Kosova: A mixed team of international and local experts led by Professor Christophe J. Goddard has unearthed a monumental inscription of historical importance, dedicated to the Byzantine Emperor

²⁶⁰ Interview of Nenad Čanak, on Serbian “TV Happy” (September 06th, 2023): <https://youtube.com/CgWDaN77dPM?si=KEbY9Aum43zkqFFg>

²⁶¹ Interview of Vuk Drašković on Kosovo TV (Jun 05, 2023) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6R-lxnfF-w&t=2727s>

Justinian, at the archaeological site of Ulpiana during excavations. This inscription dedication by Emperor Justinian (527–565 AD) and his wife Theodora of an “Urbem Dardania”, which means “city in Dardania”, is one of the very few Latin dedications of the imperial couple in the late Roman world. Despite being a relatively young country, Kosova’s territory has a rich history. In Roman times, Ulpiana served as the country’s political, monetary, and cultural hub. This Roman-pre-Byzantine settlement, which is located about eleven kilometers southeast of Pristina, is also considered a Roman-Illyrian city. Archaeological excavations have taken place there since 1954. Traces of pre-Roman life were discovered during archaeological excavations from 2009 to 2011. Ulpiana was an important place for the Dardan Kingdom and was inhabited by the Dardan and Illyrians during the Classical period. The unearthing of this mosaic, as well as the discovery of an imposing episcopal basilica in 2022, are the concrete results of an EU-funded project titled “The European Archaeological Mission in Kosova: from Ulpiana to Justiniana Secunda”, which is expected to conclude in December 2024. According to archaeologists, this provides evidence of the Dardanian origin of the great Byzantine emperor. Emperor Justinian (527–565) was born in Tauresium, believed to be near present-day Skopje.²⁶²



²⁶² Arkeonews: “Archaeologists made a remarkable discovery in Kosovo: Evidence that the great Byzantine Emperor was of Dardanian origin” (2023); <https://arkeonews.net/archaeologists-made-a-remarkable-discovery-in-kosovo-evidence-that-the-great-byzantine-emperor-was-of-dardanian-origin/>

This archaeological discovery that includes the name Dardania was also mentioned by historian Noel Malcolm during an interview for Kosova TV's "Pressing T7". He said, "... I think it is very important for every society to know about its origin as far back as possible, and of course in the case of the Albanians, they are, apart from the Greeks, the only people of the Balkans who have a clear origin in the pre-Roman civilization and pre-Roman societies, in this case Dardanians, who were a branch of the Illyrians. So, this is an extremely important matter and I'm sure that the archaeologist and ancient historians will be looking for the implications of this very carefully....".²⁶³

At the same time, it should be borne in mind that the Albanian nation is multi-religious, and a significant number of Albanians have Orthodox religious affiliations. An interesting fact about the religious affiliation of the national hero of the Albanians, Gjergj Kastrioti (commonly known as Skanderbeg), is that he lived as an Orthodox Christian child, developed into a young man and military commander as a Muslim, and fought and died as a Catholic Christian king. Skanderbeg met the three religions to which the Albanian people belong.

Skanderbeg was not only a skilled military leader, but he was also regarded as a capable statesman. He converted to Catholicism in order to gain support from the Papacy, aiming to strengthen the medieval Albanian kingdom. During this period, the majority of Balkan populations had been reduced to vassalage under the authority of the Ottoman Sultan. There have been tendencies to portray Skanderbeg solely as a religious figure, but this is not accurate. Had he been concerned only with religion, he would likely have returned to the Orthodox faith and perhaps become a monk or priest, like his brother Reposh Kastrioti, an Orthodox monk/priest. This does not mean that nations, in the modern sense, existed in Skanderbeg's time, or that he thought like a typical nationalist. However, it does show that he was deeply concerned with the establishment of an Albanian kingdom and had a clear awareness of the historical legacy of the proto-Albanians.²⁶⁴ As an example of this, It is worth mentioning a testimony, as a primary source, from Skanderbeg

²⁶³ Interview of Noel Malcolm, on Kosova T7 (November 2nd, 2023): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=41-0WUAdf5A>

²⁶⁴ Lekaj 2021: 96-97

himself: the correspondence that he wrote to the Prince of Taranto, Giovanni Antonio Orsini: "... if our chronicles do not lie to us, we are called Epirotes and you should know that, in other times, our ancestors went to the place you hold today and had great battles with the Romans and we know that most of the time they parted with honor rather than shame..."²⁶⁵ Skanderbeg's mention of the ethnic past, implicitly referring to the Pyrrhus of Epirus, does not prove the existence of the Albanian nation in the Skanderbeg period, because nations are modern phenomena. Nor does it testify to Albanian nationalism in the Skanderbeg period, in the sense of the nationalist doctrine of the rigid distinction between "us" and "them", because nationalism is a modern phenomenon of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. However, it testifies to the subjective memory and the awareness of the ancient historical continuity of the Albanian ethnicity that, later, at the start of the 18th century, became the basis for the nation-building of the Albanians.²⁶⁶

Scanderbeg statues, describing him as "the Defender of Western Civilization", stand in half a dozen European capitals. On October 27, 2005, the U.S. Congress issued a resolution "honoring the 600th anniversary of the birth of Scanderbeg, statesman, diplomat, and military genius, for his role in saving Western Europe from Ottoman occupation". In this resolution, which was based on the assessment of the noted British historian Edward Gibbon, Scanderbeg was included alongside the names of Alexander the Great and Pyrrhus:²⁶⁷

Below is a facsimile of the resolution adopted by the U.S. Congress:

²⁶⁵ Frashëri 2005: 110

²⁶⁶ Lekaj 2021: 55-56

²⁶⁷ Congress.gov: "H.Res.522 - Honoring the 600th anniversary of the birth of Gjergj Castrioti (Scanderbeg), statesman, diplomat, and military genius, for his role in saving Western Europe from Ottoman occupation" (2005-2006): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-resolution/522/text>

latter (1468), scholar Roel Schuyt writes, “Albanian migration to Italy and Romania to some extent can be compared to *velikaseoba* – Great Migration – in 1690”.²⁶⁸

Serbian historiography claims that in 1690, during the so-called great migration from Kosova (Velika Seoba), an estimated 500,000 Serbs were displaced. The background to this event was the attack and expulsion of local Ottoman forces from the Kosova area by an army of the Habsburg Empire in the autumn of 1689. In early 1690, Ottoman forces pushed the Austrian army to withdraw from Kosova and, a few months later, also from their headquarters in Niš and Belgrade. Along with the Austrian forces, a number of Serb refugees fled from Kosova to Hungary, led by the Patriarch of Peja, Arsenije III Crnojević. Based on the correspondence between Patriarch Arsenije and Emperor Leopold, Malcolm finds that the number of displaced people was greatly exaggerated in Serbian historiography because the Patriarch, petitioning for help from the Emperor, mentions only 30,000 exiles in Hungary, including men, women, and children. Moreover, based on another letter sent to Leopold’s heir, the Patriarch refers to approximately 40,000 people.²⁶⁹ Furthermore, these refugees were not only from Kosova. Regarding these events, Malcolm writes the following: “The largest element must surely have come from the Nis region, the Morava valley and the area of Belgrade. (A comparison between the Ottoman tax registers before and after the period 1688 - 90 for the sanjak of Belgrade shows that the non-Muslim population there fell by seven- eighths.) Other parts of central Serbia must also have contributed their refugees, as the geographical spread of the Serb dignitaries who met in June 1690 - and much other evidence besides - suggests. It is hard to believe, therefore, that more than one-quarter of the total refugee population came from Kosovo itself. No doubt many more had fled; many of those trying to travel long distances may have died on route, but some were probably just taking refuge in the hills, as they had done at previous times of crisis, to return home sooner or later. And of those who did get as far as Hungary, a minority (perhaps only a small one) were either Slav-speaking Catholics, or Albanian-speaking Catholics, or

²⁶⁸ Roel Schuyt: “Greeks, Albanians, Romanians and Vlachs: Antagonism and Symbiosis in the nineteenth century”, p.2 (n.d.): http://cf.hum.uva.nl/natlearn/Balkan/athens_schuyt.html

²⁶⁹ Malcolm 2001: 144, 166-167

Albanian-speaking Muslims, or even Muslim Slavs. Toma Raspasani, writing in 1693 about the Catholics of Kosovo, observed that many had gone to the district of Budapest, 'where most of them died, some of hunger, others of disease'. Austrian military records mention 'Arnauts in Imperial service' in December 1690 and March 1691; and a document of February 1693 states that on the island of Szent Endre there are 'a large number of Rascians, among whom are there apparently also Turks [i.e. Muslims]'. These pro-Austrian Muslims and Arnauts deserve, one may feel, a little more recognition from the history books than they have hitherto been allowed to receive".²⁷⁰

On August 30, 2024, a statue of Skanderbeg was inaugurated in Sicily, Italy, specifically in Hora e Arbëreshëvet (the Village of the Arbëresh), known today as Piana degli Albanesi. This village was founded in 1488, marking the 20th anniversary of Skanderbeg's death. The statue, sculpted by Gëzim Muriqi, was the result of an initiative led by the Albanian Association 'Hora e Skënderbeut' in Switzerland, together with its supporters. It stands as a gesture of gratitude and respect for the significant contributions of the Arbëresh of Italy, including their solidarity in opening their homes and generous hearts to Albanian refugees during the Kosova War of 1998–1999.

Below are several photographs from the event. The first and second images, taken in the main square of Piana degli Albanesi, feature the newly erected statue of Skanderbeg, surrounded by numerous joyful local residents and guests from Albania, Kosova, and members of the Albanian diaspora from nearly every corner of the world - some of whom were even dancing. In the third photograph, from right to left: Nufri Lekaj, Rosario Petta (Mayor of the Municipality of Hora e Arbëreshëvet), and Fatmir Lekaj. In the fourth photograph, from right to left: Nufri Lekaj, Lulëzim Jashari (son of Adem Jashari), and Fatmir Lekaj. In the fifth photograph, from right to left: Fatmir Lekaj, Gëzim Muriqi (sculptor of the statue), and Nufri Lekaj. In images six, seven and eight, Nufri and Fatmir are pictured together with several of the event's initiators, supporters, collaborators, and friends.

²⁷⁰ Ibid: 167-168



It is worth noting that the history of Albanians and Serbs in Kosova is not entirely black and white. In the past, they often lived peacefully alongside one another, and there are instances in which they fought together against common enemies - for example, during the Battle of Kosova in 1389 against the Ottoman Empire, and again during the Second World War against Nazi fascist forces.²⁷¹ The roots of the conflict between Serbian regimes and Albanians can be traced back to the *Načertanije* project.²⁷²

The Serbian state national project *Načertanije* was drafted in 1844 by Serbia's Minister of Interior Ilija Garašanin and aimed to form a Greater Serbia that would include parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosova, Macedonia, northern Albania, and parts of Croatia and Bulgaria.²⁷³ Similar to Mussolini's fascist project for the rebuilding of the Roman Empire and Hitler's Nazi project, as the most prominent examples of the misuse of nationalist ideology, the project of Garašanin was based on the rebuilding of the Medieval Serbian Empire of Stefan Dušani. This project of Garašanin, was also an important forerunner of later Yugoslav concepts. In this regard, the Swiss researcher Viktor Meier states, "Without doubt, Serbian policy over all the decades until the collapse of the first Yugoslavia in 1941 followed, more or less, the lines sketched by Garašanin".²⁷⁴ Similarly, the American sociologist Rogers Brubaker argues, "Just as Russians viewed the Soviet Union as a whole (and not just the Russians republic) as 'their' state, so Serbs viewed the Yugoslav state as a whole (and not just Serbia) as their own, regarding internal boundaries as insignificant or 'merely administrative'."²⁷⁵

In other words, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian nationalist expansionist project *Načertanije* (1844) as well as the project of the Serbian Cultural Club in Belgrade (1936) have been the main causes of the failure to achieve lasting peace and political, democratic, and economic development in former Yugoslavia. Those projects, especially the political approach taken by their followers – Nikola Pašić, Vasa Čubrillović, Aleksandar Ranković, Slobodan Milošević, and others – who

²⁷¹ Lekaj 2021: 284

²⁷² Ibid: 97-99

²⁷³ Roe 2005: 79

²⁷⁴ Meier 1999: 45

²⁷⁵ Brubaker 1999: 73

misused, politicized, and criminalized even the Serbian Orthodox Church, shaped the Serbian fascist policy towards others, especially Albanians. Without these instigators, national issues in the former Yugoslavia were more likely to be resolved with less conflict, similar to the case of the Scandinavian people.²⁷⁶

In fact, during the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the entry into the era of nationalism (nation-building) fuelled the beginning of the nation-building process in the Balkans, where nationalist ideology was misused to the extreme, especially after the Russo–Turkish Agreement of 1878 (Treaty of San Stefano). In this regard, the process of creating nation-states in the Balkans and elsewhere resulted in painful consequences that included crimes, ethnic cleansing, and persecution against Albanians, Armenians, and Kurds. Similar consequences, caused by the misuse of nationalist ideology, were repeated during the Second World War against Jews, Roma, and others, and during the break-up of federal Yugoslavia in the 1990s against Bosnians, and Albanians.²⁷⁷

Unlike Načertanije, the national project of the Albanian League of Prizren (1878) aimed to liberate and unify the Albanian-majority vilayets into one state and not to expand, assimilate, or ethnic cleanse others. It would have been similar to *Načertanije* if the project had sought to expand or enlarge Albanian territories in line with territories formerly inhabited by Illyrians. The national project of the Albanian League of Prizren (1878) was also a key factor behind the intensification of Albanian uprisings for independence against the Ottoman Empire from 1878 onward.²⁷⁸

It is therefore important to emphasize that, from the beginning of the nationalist era – the late 17th and early 18th centuries – there was no conflict between the Albanian and Turkish people. Instead, this period was characterized by continuous efforts of the Albanian National Movement to achieve national rights and liberation from Ottoman Empire rule, which resulted in the declaration of independence of Albania in 1912. In much the same way, there was no conflict between the Albanian and Serbian people after the occupation of Kosova by the Serbian state in 1912, but there were continuous efforts by the Albanian National Movement for

²⁷⁶ Lekaj 2021: 226

²⁷⁷ Ibid: 186

²⁷⁸ Ibid: 98-99

the liberation of Albanians in Kosova from the oppressive regimes of Belgrade. This continuous striving of the Albanians beginning in 1912 culminated with the legitimate KLA war and, finally, with the liberation of Kosova (1999).²⁷⁹

Therefore, a distinction must be made that in the period from 1912 to 1999, on the one hand, the policy of the Serbian state – in a state-organized manner, through state programmes for the expulsion and extermination of Albanians, including the colonization of Kosova, had consistently killed, massacred, deported, imprisoned, persecuted, and discriminated against Albanians. On the other hand, the Albanian National Movement for the Liberation of Kosova, beginning in 1912 and culminating in the formation of the KLA, was a continuous liberation attempt, with a clear programme against the Serbian state policy and not against the Serbian civilian population. At the same time, everyone should be clear about the fact that in the period between 1912- and 1999, the crimes and oppression against Albanians, organized and systematically implemented by the Serbian state, cannot be compared and equated with any individual revenge by Albanians (isolated examples), mainly because their land had been taken away and their family members had been killed or raped. And it should not be forgotten (without delving into history back to 1912) that in 1998 - 1999 alone, an estimated 10,000 Albanian civilians were killed, hundreds of Albanians were massacred, thousands of women were raped, approximately 1 million Albanians were deported, and about 100,000 houses were burned and destroyed.²⁸⁰

Finally, it is worth noting that just as Serbia's claim to historical rights over Kosova is unfounded, so too are its arguments regarding legal rights. In reality, the facts demonstrate that Kosova was never legally part of Serbia. Regarding this, Malcolm stated the following in an interview: "...legally, Kosovo was not incorporated into the Serbian kingdom in 1912; it remained occupied territory until some time after 1918. Then, finally, it was incorporated, not into a Serbian state, but into a Yugoslav one. And with one big interruption (the second world war) it remained part of some sort of Yugoslav state until June 2006. Until the destruction of the old federal Yugoslavia by Milošević, Kosovo had a dual status. It

²⁷⁹ Ibid: 189

²⁸⁰ Ibid: 277-279

was called a part of Serbia; but it was also called a unit of the federation. In all practical ways, the latter sense prevailed: Kosovo had its own parliament and government, and was directly represented at the federal level, alongside Serbia. It was, in fact, one of the eight units of the federal system. Almost all the other units have now become independent states. Historically, the independence of Kosovo just completes that process. Therefore, Kosovo has become an ex-Yugoslav state, as any historian could tell you”.²⁸¹

Kosova, ultimately, grounded in the Martti Ahtisaari Plan (2007) and the ruling of the International Court of Justice (2010), constitutes an independent state and a polity that belongs to all its citizens, irrespective of ethnic and religious differences. In this respect, the Ahtisaari Plan should not remain an isolated example that applies only to Kosova but as a point of reference for the region and beyond, ensuring a fairer organization and reorganization of political communities between majorities and minorities.

²⁸¹ The Guardian: “Is Kosovo Serbia? We ask a historian” (2008): <https://amp.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/26/Kosova.serbia>

KOSOVA POSTHUMOUSLY AWARDS THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL TO BERIT BACKER FOR HER CONTRIBUTION TO THE FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVA

Demaçi's last official visit abroad was to Norway. On December 5, 2014, he met the director of the department for the Western Balkans, Haakon Blankenborg, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accompanied by the organizer of this meeting, Nufri Lekaj, and by Hajdin Abazi. During his stay in Norway, Demaçi visited Backer's grave, as was his custom. During his visits to Norway, Demaçi also regularly stopped by to see Berit's mother, Ina Backer, until her death in 1996.

Below is the first photo from the meeting at the NMFA. In the second photo are Adem Demaçi and Ina Backer during one of Demaçi's previous visits to Norway. In the third and fourth photos, Adem Demaçi visits the grave of Backer during one of his previous visits to Norway. The fifth photo depicts Adem Demaçi during his last visit to Norway in December 2014, together with his associate for many years, Nufri Lekaj, when they visited the common grave of Berit Backer and Ina Backer.





The last time Nufri Lekaj and his brother Fatmir Lekaj met Demaçi in the fall of 2017, a few months before his death, they discussed the importance of a formal recognition by the state of Kosova for Backer. Previously, Fatmir Lekaj had written in both Kosovar and Albanian media about the important role Backer played in the liberation and independence of Kosova. He also dedicated his master's degree in political science at the University of Oslo to Berit Backer about 15 years ago.²⁸² Both brothers had conversations with some of the politicians of Kosova, especially with current Prime Minister Albin Kurti, to discuss Backer's significant contribution to Kosova as well as that of many other Norwegians.

The first photo below shows Nufri (standing), Fatmir (on the right), and veteran activist Xhemajl Duraku (on the left) with Adem Demaçi in 2017—the last time they met him. The second photo shows Fatmir with Prime Minister Albin Kurti in 2002, when they discussed the contribution of many Norwegians to Kosova over the past four decades.



On May 14, 2018, the state of Kosova posthumously awarded the presidential medal to Backer for her contribution to the freedom and independence of Kosova. This was the result of Fatmir Lekaj, Nufri Lekaj

²⁸²L ekaj, 2011: *Etniske tilhørighet og politiske fellesskap – Det internasjonale samfunnets betydning for organiseringen av et politisk fellesskap i Kosovo 2001 – 2008*. Institutt for Statsvitenskap. Universitetet i Oslo: <https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/13082?show=full>

and Fatmir Zymberaj's initiative and Demaçi's suggestion to President Hashim Thaçi.

Thaçi is one of the main protagonists in the liberation of Kosova. However, Fatmir Lekaj has criticized him publicly in his writings. The reason is that the proclamation of Kosova's independence in 2008 should not have been done by Thaçi but by Demaçi, who was the incomparable protagonist of Kosova's liberation and independence. Moreover, Demaçi not only was the symbol of the Kosova Albanians' freedom and equality struggle and the former general political representative of the KLA but also was an internationally recognized human rights activist.²⁸³ In 1991, he was awarded the Sakharov Prize and in 1993, the Club of University Rectors in Madrid awarded him the Special Prize for Peace against Racism and Xenophobia. In February 1994, five members of the Norwegian Parliament nominated Demaçi for the Nobel Prize for Literature, while in September he was nominated for the Nobel Prize for Peace. On December 14, 1995, Oslo University presented him with the Leo Eitingер Prize for Human Rights.²⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the declaration of Kosova's independence on February 17, 2008, was, in fact, a reconfirmation of the first declaration of the Republic of Kosova through the demonstrations of 1981, which resulted in a popular referendum for the Republic of Kosova and a reconfirmation of the declaration of the independence of Kosova on July 2, 1990. These three historical acts contributed towards the full independence of Kosova.

On behalf of the Backer family, the presidential medal was accepted by the Ambassador of Norway in Kosova, Per Strand Sjaastad, and some of Backer's closest friends and collaborators: Ann Christine Eek, Nufri Lekaj and Shkëlzen Kukleci. The same day, some of Backer's friends and associates gathered on the occasion of her posthumous honour.

In the following, the first four photos are during the posthumous decoration of Backer; in the fifth photo, some of her friends and associates are depicted at the event. Sitting from right to left are: Adem Demaçi, Ali Aliu and Zekë Sinanaj, and standing from the right are: Xelali (Demaçi's companion), Nufri Lekaj, Ann Christine Eek, Fatmir Zymberaj, Gazmend Pula, Shkëlzen Maliqi and Shkëlzen Kukleci.

²⁸³ Lekaj 2022: 69

²⁸⁴ Gashi 2010: 105-106, 112-113



The following is a photo from the funeral of Adem Demaçi (on July 28, 2018), showing Nufri Lekaj with his family (Genc, Pirro, Era and Eltona), along with Demaçi's son, Shqiptar Demaçi, and Demaçi's companion, Xhelal (far right).



As mentioned previously, after the liberation of Kosova in 1999, the government of Kosova opened its first diplomatic office in Norway, which was headed by Nufri Lekaj. He served as the first diplomatic representative of Kosova to Norway in 1999–2000. Then, from 2001 to 2008, Lekaj led the Kosova office in Norway until the official recognition of Kosova's independence by the Norwegian state, on March 28, 2008. The same year, in October 2008, Norway opened its Embassy in Kosova, and the first diplomatic representative/chargé d'affaires was Sverre Johan Kvale, who served in this role in 2008–2009. Kvale also was Norway's first ambassador to Kosova, in 2009–2011. Continuing, Jan Braathu was ambassador in 2011–2016, Per Strand Sjaastad in 2016–2019, Jens Erik Grøndahl in 2019–2023, and currently, Andreas Gaarder is the ambassador for the Norwegian Embassy in Ankara, also covering Albania and Kosova.

After 11 years, the Kosova Embassy then opened in Norway. In 2019, Nufri and Fatmir Lekaj informed the then ambassador of Kosova in Norway, Uliks Emra, and later in 2022, the current ambassador of Kosova, Nita Luci, about the enormous contributions provided by Backer and other Norwegians to Kosova.

Two photos follow. In the first are two of Backer's closest friends and collaborators, Ann Christine Eek and Nufri Lekaj, who presented Backer's medal to Ambassador Uliks Emra and placed it in the embassy. In the second photo, on the occasion of the celebration of the 15th anniversary of Kosova's independence in 2023, Kosova's ambassador to Norway, Nita Luci, expressed a special thanks to Norway in her substantive speech, in the presence of many Norwegian guests, for the contribution of Backer and all other Norwegians who helped Kosova over the years.





On March 19, 2015, Fatmir Lekaj worked with Bujar Shala, Vlora Haxhimehmedi and Liridona Gashi, with the support of Professor Gentian Zymberi, Nufri Lekaj, Anila Nuni, Rezarta Gorani, Kosovare Olluri, Rudin Gjata, Mensur Sakiri, Eurona Svirca and Gazmend Berisha, to establish the Norwegian–Albanian Interdisciplinary Network (NATN; Norsk-albansk tverrfaglig nettverk). The establishment of NATN was welcomed by Kosova’s Ambassador to Sweden (non-resident for Norway, Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Iceland), Ilir Dugolli, and by the Macedonian Ambassador to Norway, Enver Abdullahi. Both ambassadors subsequently paid official visits to NATN, signaling their support for the initiative.

The purpose of the NATN is to contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of the Norwegian–Albanian friendship and to facilitate the integration of the Albanian community into Norwegian society as a whole. This integration includes opposition to any tendency of the Albanian community to misuse or politicize religion. At the same time, the NATN respects religion as one of the fundamental universal human rights and, therefore, respects any religious activity as long as it does not conflict with other universal human rights. In addition to the various activities organized by the NATN, such as seminars – and with the initiative of Bujar Shala and the support of the board members of the NATN, including the support of all Albanian organizations in Norway – the NATN also designated a special day each year in Oslo to celebrate the Albanian–Norwegian friendship. Below are two photos from one of the seminars organized by NATN and four photos from one of the celebrations in Oslo of the Albanian–Norwegian friendship day:



In mid-2025, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, marked the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act (August 1975–August 2025). Below is one photograph from the event. From left to right in the photo are: Aage Borchgrevink, Senior Adviser to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee; Berit Lindeman, Secretary General of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee; Jan Braathu; and Nufri Lekaj.

Braathu joined the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1985²⁸⁵ and has since served in a wide range of diplomatic positions, both within the Ministry and at diplomatic missions abroad.²⁸⁶ He served as an Adviser on Balkan Affairs (1996-2000), and was also working with the Norwegian Foreign Ministry's OSCE Chairpersonship-in-Office Section from 1998 to 2000 on Western Balkan issues.²⁸⁷ In other words, during the war in Kosova (1998–1999), when Norway held the Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), he played a significant role in the Norwegian OSCE Chairmanship Section at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the leadership of then Foreign Minister, Knut Vollebæk. From 2011 to 2016, he served as Norway's Ambassador to Kosova and Albania. Following his ambassadorship, Braathu was appointed Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosova, a position he held from October 2016 to December 2020. He is currently the sixth OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, having been appointed in December 2024.



²⁸⁵ United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), “Ambassador Jan Braathu,” <https://unmik.unmissions.org/ambassador-jan-braathu>.

²⁸⁶ Store norske leksikon, “Jan Braathu,” https://snl.no/Jan_Braathu.

²⁸⁷ OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, <https://rfom.osce.org/node/582373>.

CONCLUSIONS

Alongside the developments in Kosova leading up to and following the fall of the Berlin Wall, Backer and Gjøtterud, along with their friends and international contacts, played crucial roles in the internationalization and accurate understanding of the Kosova issue in the framework of the Helsinki Process. That is because, in addition to being exceptional human rights activists, they were also professionals of integrity, using the most objective information available to assess the state of human rights in Kosova and providing advice grounded in a thorough analysis of the political landscape in the country. This held significant importance, since during this time Kosova lacked external support, making the insights of foreign experts such as Backer and Gjøtterud crucial for providing objective information and advisory perspectives within the frameworks of both the Helsinki Civil Process (International Helsinki Federation) and the Helsinki Interstate Process (delegations of Western countries under the CSCE).

This initiative for Kosova, coordinated by Backer and Gjøtterud, received substantial and ongoing support from the leadership of the NHC, including Stein Ivar Ærester, Bjørn Cato Funnemark, Ole Drolsum, former Solidarity activist Aleksander Gleichgewicht, Guri Rusten, Bjørn Engesland and other NHC personnel such as Tomasz Wacko (also a former solidarity activist), Aage Borchgrevink, Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal, Maria Dahle and Enver Djuliman. Notably, the NHC, along with Backer and her team, played a crucial role in organizing the Kosova delegation's inaugural official visit to the West, led by Rugova on February 14-18, 1990, in Oslo, and facilitated the programme of the Kosova Assembly delegation's first journey to Western countries in July 1990. Backer also was pivotal in fostering the civil society in Kosova, a crucial foundation for the establishment of the democratic development of society, by providing tangible support and collaborating with organizations such as the Kosova Helsinki Committee and the Council for Freedoms and Human Rights in Kosova. In this context, the NHC, with assistance from Backer and her team, helped establish the Albanian Helsinki Committee, marking the first overseas initiative dedicated to promoting human rights and democratization in Albania.

Moreover, Backer and Gjøtterud, serving as the primary coordinators of the KGNHC, provided invaluable counsel to key political leaders of the Albanians of Kosova, such as Rugova and Demaçi, in the early 1990s. Their guidance significantly shaped the efforts for freedom of the Albanians of Kosova to garner ongoing support from Western nations, ultimately contributing to Kosova's liberation in 1999. It is worth noting that, following the fall of the Berlin Wall – which, not by chance, coincided with a heightened risk of war in Yugoslavia due to Milošević's aggressive policies – the Albanians of Kosova were uniquely positioned to engage in peaceful resistance, unlike other ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, such as those in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The peaceful movement of the people of Kosova was successfully led by Rugova, with support from Demaçi and the entire spectrum of political and civil society in Kosova. Through this approach, the Albanians of Kosova garnered sympathy from Western countries, which was exemplified by the recognition of Demaçi, a symbol of Albanian resistance for freedom and equality, and Rugova, a missionary of peace, with the Sakharov Prize.

In this context, the Albanians of Kosova combined their efforts with the international community for years to peacefully resolve the situation, but they faced strong opposition from Milošević, who intensified systemic oppression through arbitrary raids and police violence against Albanian families. Consequently, the emergence of the KLA in Kosova, led by the iconic military figure Adem Jashari and its prominent political leader Demaçi, was accurately interpreted by Western countries as an armed movement defined by principles of self-defence and liberation. As with the Peaceful Movement of Kosova, led by Rugova, the KLA worked closely with Western countries to seek a resolution for Kosova, yet faced continued opposition from Milošević. As a result, the West intervened to stop Milošević, because the West could not tolerate another genocide like the one in Bosnia, especially given the unique geopolitical circumstances and the potential for an armed conflict in Kosova (unlike Bosnia) to expand beyond the borders of Yugoslavia. During the 78-day NATO airstrike campaign that commenced on March 24, 1999, to stop the Milošević regime's genocide in Kosova, Milošević retaliated against the vulnerable civilian population of Kosova Albanians, perpetrating crimes

on a genocidal scale. Milošević ultimately stopped only after NATO issued a threat of deploying ground troops for an attack.

In summary, the patience and ongoing collaboration of Kosova's political leaders with Western countries were crucial in preventing the war from escalating beyond Yugoslavia and in fostering peace in Kosova, despite the significant challenges, oppression and atrocities faced by Kosova Albanians under the Milošević regime. This political vision can serve as an example for resolving various global conflicts, including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, despite the significant variations in context between these different situations. Backer and Gjøtterud, whose initial guidance through the NHC significantly contributed to the political vision of patience and ongoing cooperation between Kosova Albanians and Western countries, played a crucial role in guiding and encouraging Kosova's political leaders, such as Rugova and Demaçi, to recognize the importance of continuous collaboration between the leadership of Kosova and Western countries to achieve peace in Kosova. In fact, the contribution of the NHC towards achieving peace in Kosova – and the general contribution of the NHC in many countries in the past, including the current contribution of the NHC, headed by General Secretary Berit Lindeman – should be greatly appreciated. There would be no surprise if the NHC were to be recognized with the Nobel Peace Prize for its 50 years of general contribution to the cause of peace, or with another prestigious human rights award conferred by EU institutions, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary (1977–2027).

Even amidst the Kosova war, human rights activist figures such as director and journalist Maria Warsinska-Varsi, a member of the NHC council, played a crucial role in shedding light on the crimes committed by the Milošević regime in Kosova. Warsinska-Varsi's documentary film and photocatalogue were classified as evidence in the trial against Milošević by the Hague Tribunal. Previously, Warsinska-Varsi and the NHC as a whole had also contributed to uncovering war crimes in Bosnia.

In addition to the NHC, other Norwegian organizations have supported Kosova Albanians in various ways and during different time periods, responding to the oppression and crimes inflicted by the Milošević regime. For example, the Norwegian organization Norwac, led by doctors Erik Fosse and Kristin Refsdal along with their collaborators, successfully

established a field hospital near the combat zone (the Kosova–Albania border) saving the lives of numerous wounded Albanian civilians and KLA soldiers. Furthermore, Kristin Refsdal’s brother, journalist Pål Refsdal, entered Kosova during the war to join the KLA; despite being injured upon arrival, he remained in the region for some time, where he gathered crucial information on the development of the war in Kosova.

It is worth noting that these instances of solidarity are not isolated: Norwegians have consistently supported Albanians since the late 1980s, in response to the suppression of Kosova Albanians by the Milošević regime. Among those engaged from the late 1980s onward were activist Olav Breilid, lawyer Pål O. Haugland, and professors Svein Mønnesland, Trond Nordby, and Tore Lindholm. Others became active later, in the early and late 1990s, including Elise Kipperberg, Josef Martinsen, and Professor Kenneth Andresen, among others. Furthermore, Norwegian civil society organizations, notably the Norwegian Organization for Asylum Seekers led by French–Norwegian Anette Thomassen, continuously provided assistance to Albanian refugees fleeing repression during the 1980s and 1990s. Additionally, Norwegian churches played a crucial role during certain periods by offering ecclesiastical asylum to Albanian refugees until the relevant state structures made permanent decisions on the asylum requests for some of the Albanians involved.

Moreover, the Norwegian state has persistently sought to establish peace in Kosova, regardless of whether left-leaning or right-leaning governments have been in power. During the Kosova War from 1998 to 1999, the Norwegian government, under Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, made a significant contribution to peace efforts in Kosova, particularly through the leadership of Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk, who headed the OSCE, thereby ensuring a continuity of the Helsinki Process. Additionally, the Norwegian government, led by relevant ministers – such as Minister of Social Affairs Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa – showcased a strong commitment to assisting Albanian refugees who had been displaced by the Kosova war. Norway’s contribution to maintaining peace in Kosova persisted beyond the country’s liberation, exemplified by Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, who, serving as a United Nations emissary and successfully mitigated the political unrest following the March 2004 riots, paving the way for a safer future for all citizens of Kosova.

In July 2010, the ICJ deemed Kosova's declaration of independence legal, prompting the UN General Assembly on September 9, 2010, to adopt a resolution that not only embraced the ICJ's ruling but also underscored the EU's readiness to facilitate dialogue between Serbia and Kosova. The resolution emphasized that it is crucial that this dialogue be viewed as essential for promoting peace, security and stability in the region while helping both countries progress in their path towards EU membership. In this context, successive Norwegian Prime Ministers Jens Stoltenberg, Erna Solberg and Jonas Gahr Støre played pivotal roles in advancing the goals of this UN resolution aimed at strengthening peace in Kosova and the region. In this regard, in 2013, Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide informed the media that Norway serves as an unofficial arena complementing the official EU efforts in fostering the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosova and enhancing peace in the region. During Jens Stoltenberg's term as NATO secretary general from 2014 to 2024, Kosova's status was elevated from observer member to associate member, the highest level achievable prior to full NATO membership.

Norway, like the United States, has consistently been committed to achieving peace in Kosova since the late 1980s. This commitment intensified in the late 1990s, driven not only by leaders such as U.S. President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, but also by Norway, led by Kjell Magne Bondevik and Knut Vollebæk, as well as other Western states. At the time, Great Britain, under the leadership of Tony Blair and Robin Cook; Germany, led by Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer; and France, governed by Jacques Chirac and Lionel Jospin, faced significant pressure from activists, intellectuals and foreign politicians both within Western countries and beyond, who sought to persuade these countries to intervene and halt the violence and crimes perpetrated by the Milošević regime during the war in 1998–1999.

Among these activists, intellectuals and politicians were Adelheid Feilcke-Tiemann, Alfonse D'Amato, Alexandra Boulat, Anna Di Lellio, Anne-Marie Lizin, Anto Kovačević, Antoine Garapon, Benito Mares, Bernard Kushner, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Bob Dole, Branka Magash, Bülent Ecevit, Christane Amanpour, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, David Loyn, Emma Bonino, Ervin Hladnik-Miharčić, Ines Sabalić, James Pettifer,

Janez Janša, Jaša Zlobec, Jean Ziegler, Joe Biden, John Mc Cain, Joseph DioGuardi, Justin Elliot, Marc Weller, Matjaž Hanžek, Melanie McDonagh, Noel Malcolm, Olivier Dupuis, Peter Božić, Quintin Hoare, Reginald Hibbert, Richard Holbrooke, Ruth Dreifuss, Stjepan Mesić, Süleyman Demirel, Tim Judah, Tom Lantos, Ueli Leunberger, Viktor Meier, Vlado Gotovac, Vlado Šeks and Yves Laplace.

Overall, all NATO member states, including Denmark in the broader context of Scandinavia, made significant contributions to achieving peace in Kosova. Furthermore, many Danes, including activists, intellectuals and politicians, consistently demonstrated solidarity with the people of Kosova in their struggle against the oppression of the Milošević regime, among them Jørgen Petersen, Marianne Petersen, Lotte R. Madsen, Minna Skafte Jensen, Erik Sisby, Tue Magnussen, Søren Søndegård, Niels Henrik Hooge, Thomas Sjørup and Mogens Jensen. Additionally, support in Sweden came from Ullmar Qvick, Anders Wessman, Örjan Sturesjö, Göran Wassenius, Rolf Ekeus and others. Although Sweden was not a NATO member until 2024, it actively supported efforts to achieve and strengthen peace in Kosova, especially the government headed by Prime Minister Göran Persson, who served from 1996 to 2006, and Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, who held office from 1998 to 2003.

At the end of this conclusion, I first want to reiterate – as I mentioned in the introduction of this book – that fully capturing the detailed contributions of all foreigners to the achievement of peace in Kosova cannot be done in a single book. My goal with this book is to highlight the significant contributions of specific foreigners to the achievement of peace in Kosova, drawing from verifiable documents and sources, while also expressing gratitude to all foreigners for the roles they played in achieving peace in Kosova. Secondly, while Kosova is not an isolated case – because history indicates that no nation has fully liberated itself or formed a state independently, without relying on external support – the Albanians of Kosova are and will remain forever grateful for the help they received from foreigners in achieving and maintaining peace, as gratitude is a cornerstone of Albanian tradition. Furthermore, in the words of the esteemed German philosopher Immanuel Kant, gratitude emerges as a “sacred duty”.

Thirdly, the NATO alliance against the Milošević regime was specifically directed at the tyrannical government, much like the coalitions formed against Hitler and other oppressive regimes, and it should not be misconstrued as an alliance against the Serbian people. Fourthly, the efforts of the Albanians of Kosova for freedom and equality were targeted against the Milošević regime, and against the previous oppressive regimes of the Serbian state towards the Albanians, and not against the Serbian people. In the words of Demaçi, the winner of the Sakharov Prize and a symbol of freedom and equality for the Albanians of Kosova, “There are no bad peoples, only bad regimes”.

Lastly, I want to thank my brother Fatmir Lekaj for his collaboration and contribution to the realization of this book. I also want to thank him for his ongoing support and cooperation throughout all my activities for Kosova. His continuous support started as early as in his adolescence – after my imprisonment in the early 1980s – when he showed solidarity with my stance against the repressive Serbian regime. Because of this, he experienced difficulties from the regime at that time, as a young boy. Therefore, I want to thank him especially for the fact that despite his negative experience as a young boy – including that of our family members – with the Serbian regime, he has consistently maintained his stance against interethnic and interreligious hatred, as well as the importance of respecting human rights for all people.

As a gesture of deep respect, just as I began this book by presenting photos of Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud, I conclude it with two photos below from my recent visit to their graves.



APPENDIX: PROPOSAL FOR HONORING THE NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE (NHC)

The following proposal for the conferral of an honor will be submitted to the relevant institutions of the state of Kosova and the state of Albania, as well as to the European Union and the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

Subject: The Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Justification:

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee was the first organization in the West to include the issue of Kosovo on its agenda — a development that marked a significant historical moment, as for the first time, efforts to internationalize the Kosovo issue became an official part of the agenda of an influential Western organization.

Being an almost semi-governmental organization, with an advisory role to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and considerable influence within the International Helsinki Federation (IHF), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee gave the Kosovo issue a new international dimension, turning it into a genuine topic within the Helsinki Process. This process, based on the Helsinki Final Act (1975), developed on two interrelated levels: through the international civil activity of the Helsinki process, led by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), and through the intergovernmental activity of the Helsinki process, carried out by state delegations within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The latter was conceived as an arena for dialogue between East and West during the Cold War period and introduced an essential innovation: the inclusion of human rights as a distinct principle in interstate relations. This meant not only facing criticism for possible violations of these rights but also that the human rights situation in CSCE member states became a subject of discussion at various political levels. As a result, the issue of human rights became a dominant theme of discourse among the CSCE member states throughout the Helsinki Process. The Western countries criticized the Eastern ones for violations of political and civil rights, while the latter rejected

the criticism by referring to one of the fundamental principles of the Helsinki Final Act — the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. At the same time, they accused the West of violating economic and social rights.

The legacy of the Helsinki Process remained highly influential even after the institutionalization of the CSCE, which in 1995 took the form of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This development contributed to reducing the absolute importance of the principle of non-interference and to affirming human rights as an international standard. This, however, does not mean that the Westphalian principle — now also included among the fundamental principles of the Helsinki Final Act — was abolished or disappeared. It remained in force as a guiding principle of interstate relations, but its significance diminished insofar as it concerned respect for human rights. In this sense, violations of fundamental rights could no longer be considered merely internal matters, but legitimized international reaction, especially in cases where state regimes infringed upon basic citizens' rights and caused humanitarian crises. At the same time, this process contributed to the consolidation of European policies of security and peace through NATO. In this context, for the implementation of peacekeeping operations, the OSCE could request military support from NATO or the EU — as was the case with Kosovo. Fortunately, during that period, Norway — a country with extensive expertise and a strong humanitarian commitment within the framework of the Helsinki Process — held the role of the OSCE's chairing state during the war in Kosovo.

Seven main reasons for the proposal to honor the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC):

1. The NHC encouraged and supported the organization of the first fact-finding mission to Kosovo concerning the human rights situation there. The delegation consisted of individuals with direct influence within the network of the Helsinki Civil Process, who also enjoyed friendly relations and cooperation with important figures within this network. This was of particular importance, since, unlike the Council of Europe and the United Nations, the less bureaucratic organizational structure of the CSCE created greater space for influence and “bottom-up” lobbying. In this way, the Helsinki Civil Process — through the International Helsinki Federation, composed of the National Helsinki Committees — exerted a significant influence on the Intergovernmental Helsinki Process, especially in relation to the delegations of Western states within the CSCE framework. Specifically, this delegation traveled to Kosovo before the fall of the Berlin Wall and aimed to observe and analyze the human rights situation. Among others, it

consisted of: Karl von Schwarzenberg, Chairman of the International Helsinki Federation — a friend and collaborator of Václav Havel; Kenneth Anderson, representative of American Helsinki Watch — a friend and collaborator of Jeri Laber, Vice President of the International Helsinki Federation and Executive Director of American Helsinki Watch; and Kristoffer Gjøtterud, representative of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee — a friend and collaborator of Andrei Sakharov. In fact, this delegation traveled to Kosovo under the guidance of Berit Backer, who at that time acted as a coordinator between the Group for Kosovo — which operated within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (GKNHC) — and the International Helsinki Federation (IHF).

Backer also made a special contribution to the collection and interpretation of information on the human rights situation during the stay of this delegation in Kosovo. As a result, in January 1990, the first report on the situation in Kosovo was published by this joint delegation, authored by Kenneth Anderson, titled “...Crisis in Kosovo.” This report presented concrete recommendations to decision-makers in the European Community, the Council of Europe, and U.S. foreign policy regarding developments in Kosovo. The information and recommendations contained in this report — prepared by a delegation of such stature — were of particular importance, as they provided an independent and credible overview of the situation on the ground. Moreover, as an important part of the International Helsinki Federation, the American Helsinki Committee, namely American Helsinki Watch (later known as Human Rights Watch), played a significant advisory role in U.S. foreign policy, particularly for the American delegation within the framework of the CSCE. During the period 1986–1989, this delegation was led by Warren Zimmermann, who later served as the U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia until 1994.

In fact, in this report, at the insistence of Berit Backer, two important advisory recommendations were adopted and included as an integral part of it. Specifically, on page 43 of the report, U.S. foreign policy decision-makers were officially advised to open an American consulate in Kosovo. This request had been raised earlier, but now it gained a formal and institutional basis, as it was included in an important and authoritative report. At the same time, on page 44 of the report, the European Community and the Council of Europe were urged that any future process of integrating Yugoslavia into the European market and economic system, should be conditioned on the full restoration of respect for human rights in Kosovo. It is also emphasized that the European Community and the Council of Europe have an obligation to require Yugoslavia to fulfill the international human rights standards that it had long pledged to uphold. Moreover, the report

stresses that the European Community and the Council of Europe should begin by demanding accountability regarding why the delegation of the European Parliament, sent to Kosovo in May 1989 to investigate developments, was forced to leave, since, according to the delegation's own statement, it had been impossible to fulfill its mandate.

2. The NHC organized the first visit of a Kosovo delegation, led by Ibrahim Rugova, to the West from February 14th to 18th, 1990 — in Oslo and departing from Oslo — thereby helping to establish the first political and diplomatic connections between Kosovo's representatives and Western circles. This visit took place in the spirit of the objectives of the Helsinki Civil Process, one of which was to encourage and promote opposition forces operating under repressive regimes. During the visit to Norway, the Kosovo delegation led by Ibrahim Rugova met with several important Norwegian state and cultural figures. Moreover, earlier on September 12th, 1989, Berit Backer had been present as an encourager and observer during the initial discussions at the Association of Writers of Kosovo, which later resulted in the founding of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). This occurred specifically when Berit Backer led the joint delegation's visit to Kosovo, consisting of representatives of the International Helsinki Federation, the American Helsinki Watch, and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

3. The NHC organized the visit and program of the Delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo to Western countries immediately after the Declaration on July 2nd, 1990, thus contributing to the dignified representation of Kosovo's institutions during that highly sensitive period.

4. The NHC encouraged and supported the formation of the core of civil society in Kosovo, particularly through its concrete cooperation with Gazmend Pula in the establishment and support of the activities of the Kosovo Helsinki Committee, as well as through its cooperation with Adem Demaçi and others, in supporting the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms in Prishtina. Within this framework, the initiative to establish the Center for the Rehabilitation of Former Albanian Political Prisoners in Kosovo, which was implemented in 1999 by Feride Rushiti, was also included.

5. The NHC encouraged and supported the formation of the core of civil society in Albania, particularly through the establishment of the country's first non-

governmental organization — the Center for Human Rights and for the Rehabilitation of Victims of the Political Persecution by the Totalitarian Regime — which represented the first external nucleus for the promotion of human rights and democratization in Albania. It also assisted in the establishment of the Albanian Helsinki Committee, through concrete cooperation with Arben Puto, Kujtim Çashku, and others. This engagement also included Berit Backer's additional efforts to enable Albania's representation at the Expert Meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), even though at that time, Albania was not a CSCE member and was the only European state that had not signed the Helsinki Final Act (Helsinki Declaration, 1975).

6. The Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) established the Group for Kosovo within its framework in 1988 (GKKNH). From 1990, this group obtained official status as an integral part of the Committee and simultaneously as an activity within the International Helsinki Federation (IHF).

Upon Backer's initiative, the KGNHC, continued its activity as the Balkan Group within the NHC (BGNHC). They did this to ensure that the information and activity of this group would not be completely prejudged as subjective to Kosovo, but would be as accessible, convincing and acceptable as possible for the chancellors' offices in Western countries. The information and recommendations that this group sent—both as part of the “Helsinki Civil Process” (under the umbrella of the IHF) and directly to Western state delegations participating in the Intergovernmental Helsinki Process (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – CSCE)—carried undeniable weight. They were valued for the credibility of their sources and for their influence in shaping an objective picture of the situation in Kosovo, helping to dismantle the false image spread by Serbian-Yugoslav propaganda. The importance of this contribution was further enhanced by the fact that this activity was carried out on behalf of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, which functioned as almost semi-governmental and advisory organization to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs—a state with an active role and high moral credibility in international relations. A special merit for this contribution and for the abovementioned points belongs to Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud.

7. The NHC had a significant advisory influence. In particular, the coordinator and co-coordinator of the Kosovo Group within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee - Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud, gave valuable advice to the two most influential political figures in Kosovo in the early 1990s - Ibrahim

Rugova and Adem Demaçi, regarding the approach and vision of the Albanian resistance in Kosovo. They recommended that efforts should focus on democratic and non-violent methods, avoiding any hasty actions and not falling for provocations that could give the Milošević regime a pretext to present the Albanian resistance as violent. Such a perception, according to them, would help the Belgrade regime convince foreign observers and international opinion that the Albanians were not willing to resolve the Kosovo issue through democratic means. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that during the first visit of the Kosovo delegation, led by Ibrahim Rugova – as mentioned in point 2 – an open gathering for journalists was held at the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in Oslo on February 17th, 1990 (at which the author of this text was also present). During this gathering, Ibrahim Rugova held a speech where he publicly expressed the highest regard for Backer and Gjøtterud, as well as for their valuable advice. Meanwhile, Adem Demaçi, in his capacity as chairman of the Council for the Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms in Prishtina (the CDHRF), had consistently appreciated the advice of Backer and Gjøtterud, the latter of whom was simultaneously the vice-chair of the Board of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee and an honorary member of the CDHRF.

It was of particular importance that Demaçi – who was considered the spiritual leader of the LPK and was regarded by many of his associates as self-willed – especially appreciated the advice of Backer. Not only did Demaçi say this in his remarks on the day of Backer's funeral, when he emphasized "her valuable advice", he often repeated it privately (in which it happened that the author of this text was also present) that for the freedom of Kosova that we enjoy today, Backer's advice had been invaluable. It is significant that Backer had convinced Demaçi that if Kosovo Albanians could not be freed through peaceful efforts or passive resistance, this would legitimize other forms of active resistance, and the international support for Kosovo would not be lost. In other words, although Demaçi was not optimistic that Kosovo would be liberated only through peaceful methods, he had been persuaded that these methods would have a legitimizing effect for other eventual methods for the liberation of Kosovo, with the support of the international community. Therefore, he remained loyal to this political approach until the Dayton Conference. As an example of this, in a 1992 interview (an interview also published in the biographical book on Demaçi by Shkëlzen Gashi, on page 98), Demaçi stated the following: *"Peaceful resistance is a modern method, but I am afraid that Serbia is trying to pull us out of tact to 'prove' to the world that Albanians do not like solving problems by democratic means without violence. Nevertheless, thanks to the help of the Democratic*

League of Kosovo (LDK), the people are keeping their calm, wisdom, peace and patience. As things are going further, time will require other forms of resistance, which I don't know what will be, but the people will look for them in one moment and will find those forms. If the international community will support us energetically for the realization of our goals, then the sacrifices will be smaller...".

At the same time, through their extensive network of contacts within the framework of the Helsinki Process, Berit Backer and Kristoffer Gjøtterud insisted that some of Kosovo's most well-known dissident figures – distinguished for their activism before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall – among them Adem Demaçi, Ibrahim Rugova and Ukshin Hoti, should be nominated for the "Sakharov Prize." This insistence aimed to increase international recognition of the peaceful and legitimate efforts of the people of Kosovo for freedom, democracy, and self-governance.

Final Considerations

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee was established much earlier (in 1977) than many of the other Helsinki committees in Western countries. This can only be explained by Norway's strong willingness to engage in the service of global peace and the protection of human rights, in accordance with the humanitarian tradition of the well-known Norwegian humanist, diplomat, and scientist Fridtjof Nansen. At the same time, this is also connected to the political context of the Nordic states after the Second World War, which were under constant threat from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, among them, Norway proved to be the most proactive state in the field of international relations, especially in relation to NATO, the United States of America, and other international structures such as the CSCE (which later became institutionalized as the OSCE), etc.

Specifically, the establishment of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee was connected to the expansion of the international civil society dimension for human rights that accompanied the Helsinki Process. On one hand, this dimension included the efforts of activists in totalitarian and authoritarian countries who demanded respect for the human rights principle enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act — as in the cases of the Moscow Helsinki Group, the Solidarity movement in Poland, or Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, the support these activists found in the West — through the first Helsinki committees, such as the U.S. Helsinki Watch, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, and other sister

committees — in line with Andrei Sakharov's appeal for international cooperation, led to the establishment of the International Helsinki Federation, which further strengthened the international dimension of the civil activity for human rights within the Helsinki Process.

In the early 1980s, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee expanded its activities to include support for the Polish "Solidarity" movement. As part of this involvement, one of the well-known Polish dissidents, Aleksander Gleichgewicht - a former political internee in Poland, became engaged as an information secretary in the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, after his escape to Norway. This engagement reflected the organization's openness to direct cooperation with representatives of movements opposing repressive regimes in Eastern Europe. In the same spirit, the Committee began to take an increasing interest in the dissident movements of Kosovo, which operated against Belgrade's oppressive regime. This interest led to the establishment of the Group for Kosovo within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (GKKNH) — a development of particular significance, as for the first time the efforts to internationalize the Kosovo issue became an official part of the agenda of an influential Western organization. In this context, the Group for Kosovo, with the full support of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, in addition to its general activities for Kosovo within the Helsinki Process, undertook several initiatives with far-reaching impact. It encouraged, supported and guided the journey of the first fact-finding mission concerning the human rights situation in Kosovo; organized the first visit of a Kosovo delegation, led by Ibrahim Rugova, to the West — specifically to Oslo, from where the visit began on February 14th, 1990; organized the visit and program of the Kosovo Assembly Delegation to several Western countries immediately after the proclamation of the Declaration of July 2nd 1990; encouraged and supported the establishment of the core of civil society in Kosovo and in Albania; and contributed, in the early 1990s, with valuable advice to Kosovo's key political figures — Ibrahim Rugova, Adem Demaçi, and others — regarding the approach and vision of the Albanian resistance in Kosovo.

This activity was not only the result of the commitment of the GKKNH leadership, but also of the broad institutional support within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee itself. At the forefront of this work stood the coordinators of the GKKNH: Berit Backer, a renowned anthropologist, idealist, and great friend of the Albanian people, and Kristoffer Gjøtterud, a professor of physics at the University of Oslo and simultaneously vice-chair of the Board of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. The responsible person of the GKKNH was Nufri Lekaj, a former prisoner and politically persecuted individual under the Serbo-Yugoslav

regime. Before his arrest, he had pursued studies in electrical engineering in Kosovo, while after his release — having avoided a second arrest and managing to escape — he continued studies in sociology and journalism in Norway. Lekaj was proposed as the responsible person of the GKKNH because, since 1987, he had gained public recognition in the Norwegian media as a proven example of a torture victim of the Serbo-Yugoslav regime, as well as an active and organized member of the movement of Kosovo Albanians against Belgrade's oppressive regime. Moreover, the activities of the GKKNH were strongly supported by the Board, the Secretariat, and, in general, the staff of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. Among the most important supporters were Stein-Ivar Aarsæther, journalist and chair of the Board for more than ten years, as well as several secretary-generals who served during various periods: Bjørn Cato Funnemark (journalist), Guri Rusten, philologist — who later served as Norway's ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina and as a senior adviser in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs — Bjørn Engesland (law graduate), and the deputy secretary-general for more than two decades, Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal (with an academic background in philosophy). Valuable support was also provided by three members of the Polish "Solidarity" movement who operated within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: Aleksander Gleichgewicht (with a degree in physics and a former political internee in Poland before fleeing to Norway), Tomasz Wacko (who had studied history and had been a political prisoner in Poland before escaping to Norway), and Jarosław Pawlak (journalist). Also included in this support were other staff members of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: Ole Drolsum — one of the committee's veterans (journalist), Ole-Petter Sunde (law graduate), Aage Borchgrevink (literature graduate and well-known writer), Maria Dahle (journalist and later director of the Human Rights House Foundation), as well as others who contributed in various ways.

At the same time, it is worth emphasizing that during this period, in addition to the Board and Secretariat of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee being led by individuals with significant national and international influence in the field of human rights, the Council of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee was also composed of several political figures with substantial national and international impact, among them: the chair of the Council, Reiulf Steen (who, during his political career, served as leader of the Norwegian Social Democratic Party – the Labour Party – from 1975 to 1981, a member of Parliament from 1977 to 1992, twice a government minister, etc.), and the vice-chair of the Council, Jan Petersen (who, during his political career, served as leader of the Norwegian Conservative Party – Høyre, as a member of Parliament, Minister of Foreign Affairs, etc.).

During this period, Jens Stoltenberg was also a member of the Council of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee. He later became known, among other things, as Secretary General of NATO, during whose term Kosovo's status in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly was advanced from observer member to associate member.

It is also important to highlight that even during the war in Kosovo, prominent figures within the Council of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, such as the film director and journalist Maria Warsinska-Varsi, who played a decisive role from June 1999 to the end of 2003 in shedding light on the crimes committed by the Milošević regime in Kosovo, documenting the major war crimes committed for the Kosovo War crimes commission with lawyers and forensic experts. First she documented two years with the Kosovo commission on war crimes and later she continued with the family association of missing people, when the commission was not allowed to work more. She played a key role in helping the family associations to be created, through her contacts in Bosnia with the Srebrenica women and the ICMP, who started to fund and facilitate the work of the association. Warsinska-Varsi was, with the help of Nufri Lekaj and his team, a key figure to establish the war crimes commission, coordinating expert cooperation the first year with the Bosnian commission of missing people and the Bosnian commission of war crimes. During the Balkan wars there had been created an international team of expertise helping the local organizations. They provided expertise in the field, and offered IT-programs to organize the evidence. She also coordinated the cooperation with the Albanian forensic team to join the work on the mass graves. With the forensic team she uncovered multiple mass graves throughout the country and cooperated with the Haag tribunal about the discoveries. The Kosovo commission with Warsinska-Varsi could open graves with less than 20 bodies. Later they had to reopen larger graves with the family associations to find and identify victims like in Mitrovice and Vushtrri, where they uncovered half of the Izbice victims. Her contribution was significant, earlier, Warsinska-Varsi and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee itself had also contributed to exposing war crimes in Bosnia. Warsinska-Varsi was a contact for the NHC, giving updates on the situation in the field on the war crimes committed. For the NHC, she gathered info on Albanian political prisoners in Serbia, the releases of prisoners, information on rape cases, and their vulnerable situation and the total lack of interest or recognition from the UN on the matter. Also, in 2001, she was asked by NHC to investigate if Albanian refugees from Macedonia had crossed the border to Kosovo. On this mission she was targeted and arrested by the Spanish Nato soldiers and brought to Bond steel. Once the Americans

realized she worked for NHC, she was released. She later reported to NHC about the dire situation for the Albanian prisoners kept there in cages. Her critical independent point of view from the inside, with the Albanians was unique. Many of her images were published and made public by NHC. Images have also been used as evidence in the Hague Tribunal on war crimes committed on the Albanian people. This extensive engagement should also be seen in the context of Warsinska-Varisi's long-standing institutional role within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee: she served as a member of the NHC Council from 1997 to 2020.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the Group for Kosovo, which operated within the Norwegian Helsinki Committee during the period 1988–1995, also had a number of external collaborators and supporters, both Norwegian and Albanian. Among them were: Tore Lindholm (professor of philosophy at the University of Oslo), Svein Mønnesland (professor of Slavic languages at the University of Oslo), Pål Haugland (lawyer), Kjell Høibraaten (politician and businessman), Trond Nordby (historian and professor of political science at the University of Oslo), Ann Christine Eek (photographer and close friend of Berit Backer), as well as others. Included in this group of collaborators were also Shkëlzen Kukleci (a sociologist who had developed a friendship with Berit Backer in the 1970s, during the period when she conducted a social-anthropological study in the village of Isniq in Kosovo), as well as several other activists from the Albanian diaspora in Norway: Ali Aliu, Hajrie Aliu, Isa Thaçi, Blerim Rexhepi, Jashar Etemaj, Qani Dehari, Afet Ismajli, Jonuz Emini, Rrahim Përçuku, Antigona Qena, Xhemadin Neziri, Gëzim Haklaj, and Fatmir Lekaj. Likewise, during this period, several Albanian students studying at the University of Oslo in the early 1990s were also involved; Berit Backer had helped them to continue their studies abroad: Anila Hyka (IT), Anila Nauni (sociology), Fisnik Bardudha (IT), and Najada Mandi (sociology). After the liberation of Kosovo in 1999, Sylo Taraku and, later, Liridona Gashi were involved in the work of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee for a period.

Consequently, the contribution of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee to achieving peace in Kosova – as well as its overall contribution over the years in many countries, including its current activities under the leadership of Berit Lindeman (Secretary General and internationally renowned human rights activist) – deserve the highest recognition, not only from the Republic of Kosova and the Republic of Albania, but also from the European Union and the Norwegian Nobel Committee.

KOSOVA AWARDS THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDAL OF MERIT TO THE NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE (NHC)

On September 1, 2026, on behalf of the Republic of Kosova, acting President Albulena Haxhiu awarded the Presidential Medal of Merit to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in recognition of its contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, the affirmation of the Kosova issue in the international arena, and its continued commitment to strengthening peace. The medal was accepted on behalf of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee by Secretary General Berit Lindeman and Deputy Secretary General Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal.

The following photographs were taken during the award ceremony at the Presidency of the Republic of Kosova:



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