

"Greater Albania: Kosovo and surrounds"

("Adventures in Slobostan," Part Two)

by Chandler Rosenberger

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
WITHOUT WRITER'S CONSENT

Mr. Peter Bird Martin
c/o ICWA
4 W. Wheelock Street
Hanover, N.H. 03755
U.S.A.

Dear Peter,

Will the Yugoslav war migrate again? First the Yugoslav federation fought to keep Croatia and Slovenia from leaving. Now the war is on keep Bosnia. But these three aren't the only regions to try to get out. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kosovo, now a region of Serbia itself, have also both voted in referenda to break from Belgrade. Macedonia has even succeeded. But will these two suffer the fate of the other three? Will the Yugoslav National Army fight for the federation's last scraps?

Perhaps, but not because Kosovo and Macedonia are like Croatia and Slovenia. If the war moves to these regions, it will be because they are *unlike* the republics to the west. A battle for Kosovo would be a war on and for Serbian soil. To the Serb mind, the residents of Kosovo who voted last year for independence have committed a much more serious sin than leaving their federation. They, mostly ethnic Albanians, have threatened to seize part of Serbia itself. Any of the large number of Albanians living in Macedonia who supported them in a conflict would be accessories to the crime.



And this Yugoslav war would involve an ethnic minority of a state outside the territory of the former federation. That, surprisingly, seems to make the war more, not less, likely. The Albanian minorities of both Kosovo and Macedonia are prone to dreams of joining their territories to a Greater Albania. The dreams are merely that, since Albania itself would divide over whether to accept the 'Kosovars,' much less fight for them. And Macedonia is already uneasily seeking to unite its Slav and Albanian populations. A crisis in Kosovo would split the new state between Macedonians who wanted to steer clear and Albanians who wanted to help. A war in Kosovo would offer the Yugoslav army the justification of fighting 'traitors' and the satisfaction of an easy win.

Whether the war moves to Kosovo depends on whether some politician in Belgrade decides that offering the Yugoslav army a win is worth 'crossing the line' the international community has drawn around the region. As the Yugoslav state dissolves into chaos, getting the army's support becomes more important.

KOSOVO

I might never have had the chance to have long chats with Yugoslav soldiers had they not arrested me on my way to Kosovo. I was travelling by train to Priština, the region's capital, to see how things were holding up since the fraudulent December elections gave Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević a minority government dependent on the vicious Serbian Radical Party. I especially wanted to see whether the Kosovo Albanians had profited from their decision to boycott the elections. The boycott gave the 10 % Serbian minority of the region free reign to install some of Serbia's most notorious "ethnic cleansers" in the majesty of high office.

My unexpected run-in with the "law" proved instructive. Nothing else could have shown me why the December boycott had been a logical step for "Kosovar" politicians, or why they had rejected the Yugoslav state in favor of a dream of re-uniting "Greater Albania."

A brief tour of the police state

The Albanians of Kosovo have Europe's highest birth-rate. Just try getting a seat on the 1930s steam train that runs from Niš to Priština. I spent the first two hours of the ride balanced over the coupling between two jammed passenger cars. Lucky me. I didn't have to hang from the rusting steel steps, a sheaf of dried flowers in one arm, as a few of the hardier Albanian babičkas did. I also didn't have to worry about a ticket collector, much less about any soldiers. I pulled my ski cap over my ears and tried to pretend to understand the jokes the gold-toothed Albanian men told.

The comradeship dissolved as the crowd thinned out and I was able to find a seat inside. There were fewer Albanians, more crew-cut young Serbs. I curled up in the corner with an English-language version of one of Belgrade's opposition newspapers and tried not to let the print or political cartoons show.

A few minutes later the first species of Serbian soldier appeared. He was tall and lean in his green camouflage and brushed off affectionate greetings from his fellow Serbs. He pulled his

red beret off his shaved head to reveal a tuft of hair on top (so that's how those caps stay on, I thought) and settled down for a snooze. I stuffed my magazine away and imitated him.

About an hour later another breed of the Serb military tapped me on the shoulder. He was as tall as the sleeping soldier but wore the navy blue jacket and friendlier expression of the local police.

"Your passport?" he asked. So began my four-hour conversation, held in Slovak-Serbo-Croat, with the Serbian military.

What was I doing in Kosovo? Just visiting friends. Was I journalist? No, no, just visiting, I said, knowing that my role as an "institute fellow" might sound suspicious and worried that I might not see anything if saddled with local guides.

"Who are you visiting?" he asked. I stumbled. I didn't actually have any contacts in Priština except for the "Democratic League of Kosovo," a group of Albanians who had tried to declare an independent republic in June. I pulled out a fax from them and hoped to soften the blow by saying I was visiting an American working there.

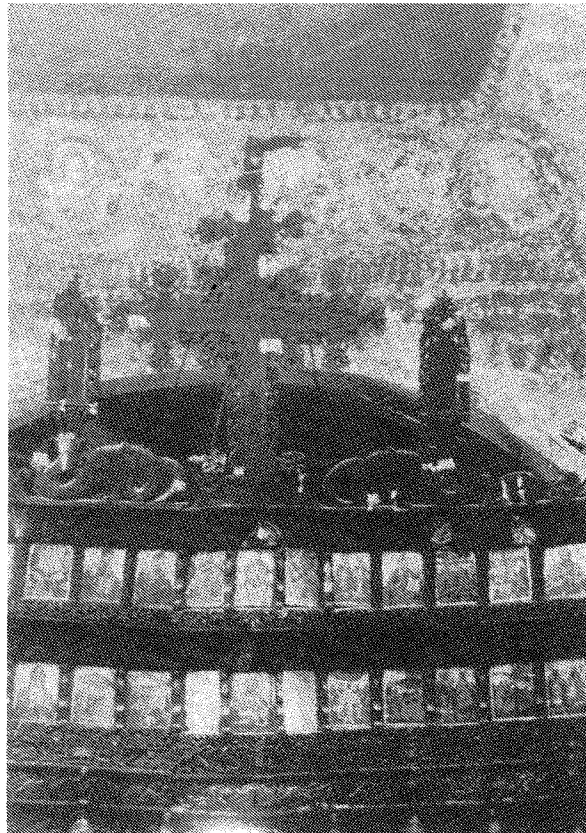
The soldier smiled kindly and shook his head. "Sit down and wait here," he said. He left and returned with a fellow policeman who, apparently, had made the first sweep of the car and had missed me. They had a good laugh, then went through everything I had on me.

"What is this?" A copy of Hölderlin's poems. "You read German?" Well, yes. Another kindly smile. "And these?" Six copies of the East European Reporter. "And this?" Oh, some phone numbers. "They are contacts in Albania?" Um, yes. He shook his head again. "We will get off the train with you," he explained, "and then we will go to the police station."

"Well, you have the guns," I said.

"No, no, it's not like that," he said.

To pass the time we chatted about the Serbian churches I hoped to see in Kosovo. Like many Serbs I have met, the soldiers knew a phenomenal amount about the architectural treasures of Kosovo, treasures the Serbs



Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo

feel they could no more give up than could England Westminster Abbey.

When we arrived in Priština my new friends led me to a waiting police car which took us to the local station. I waited with the officers until the local commander came in. He was accompanied by several specimens of a third species of soldier, dressed head to toe in the blue camouflage of the Yugoslav Army. "Bye!" the locals said, laughing.

The police commander wasn't interested in small talk, especially after he found a fax describing his sweeps through the local Albanian community. But he was scrupulously polite. He opened my files carefully and laid each sheet of paper neatly down after looking it over. His colleagues from the army would then snap them up and pass them around, cackling.

"The Democratic League!" a soldier cried in surprise. "These people are fascists!"

"You have the phone number of the Albanian Minister of Defense?" the commander said coolly.

"Yes, I do," I said. The commander lay the sheet of Albanian contacts down neatly; a soldier, imported from Krajina, snapped it up, giggled and waved an admonishing finger at me.

"And who made these marks on your map?" he asked.

"One of your officers did," I said. "He was showing me where the Serbian churches are."

The commander asked what I was doing in Bratislava but didn't seem satisfied with my story about teaching some philosophy and occasionally writing a few articles. My "Propagandice Material" was all carefully recorded; they seemed as disturbed that I had books in German as that I had lists of contacts in Macedonia. All the paper was then packed up into the smaller of my two cases and we were off for our next stop.

"We will now go meet the General of the Yugoslav Army in Kosovo!" the soldier from Krajina said. I tried to express my gratitude at the honor.

We got into another car and drove the now-darkened streets. The fact that the accompanying officer had pulled out his handcuffs put a damper on the conversation. After a short wait I was introduced to the general.

The general looked much more like a philosophy professor than I do. He pulled a pack of filterless Drinas from under his worn orange sweater and we chatted while a large and humorless soldier went through my material again. The soldier played the role of the prosecution, pointing out political cartoons portraying the Serbian military as children of Hitler. The general looked them over distractedly and sighed as he signed a report listing the material I had with me. He asked me not to distribute any of it in Kosovo.

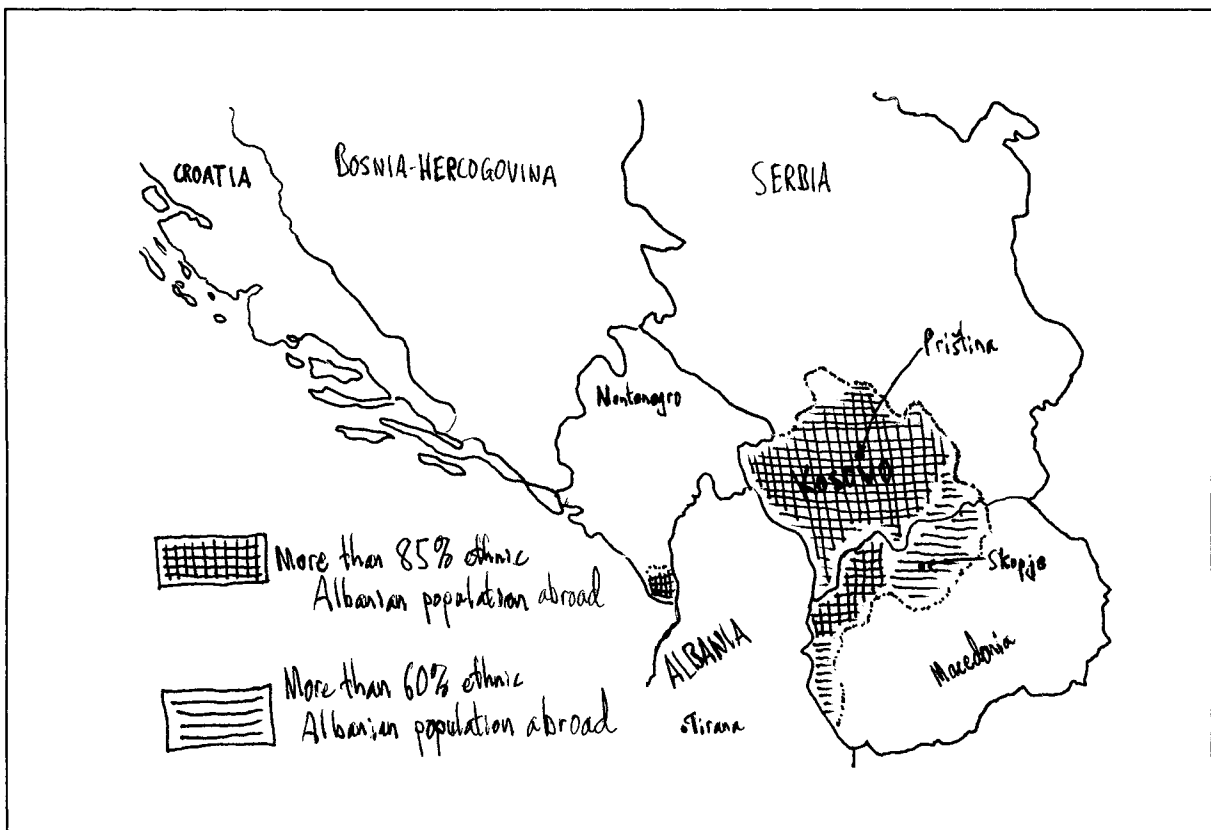
"Well," he finally said, "it looks like we've been more trouble to you than you've been to us. Will you stay in the hotel?"

"Yes," I said. "It's just around the corner, isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, out the door and to the right. Goodnight." The prosecution looked disappointed.

The Kosovars and "Greater Albania"

My first few hours were a useful introduction to the police state Serbia has built as its answer to what is perhaps Eastern Europe's most intractable "ethnic minority" problem. The ebbing of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century and the rise of the nations it had suppressed left Kosovo, largely populated by Albanians, awash on the shores of the insurgent Serbian nation. Until 1981, Kosovo enjoyed a surprising amount of autonomy within Serbia. While the demands of the modern bureaucratic state forced ethnic minorities in other parts of Central Europe to abandon their languages and cultures, Kosovo was granted autonomy and self-government under the Communist federal government of Marshal Josip Tito.



Population of ethnic albanians in Kosovo and surrounding areas (Democratic League)

But Serbian president Slobodan Milošević won the 1990 elections in Serbia in part because he had helped undermine such autonomous regions. His "anti-bureaucratic revolution" was in fact the culmination of a nationalist and statist program. If Serbia was to assert itself in the former Yugoslavia, Serbia must guarantee the sovereignty of its own bureaucracy. That bureaucracy must speak a common language — Serbo-Croat. Throughout the 1980s, the Serbian government closed schools teaching in Albanian and expelled Albanian professors

from Priština University. In 1989, the parliament of Kosovo was disbanded. The Albanian majority of Kosovo could only elect representatives to the Serbian and Yugoslav parliaments in Belgrade. In the former, they were naturally out-voted by Serbs, most of whom were of Milošević 's Socialist Party of Serbia.

The Kosovar response was to establish a "civil society" outside of the state. The Democratic League of Kosovo, the major Albanian political party, runs an underground school system, university and health-care system from a three-room building behind Priština 's football stadium. Its 25,000 teachers hold classes in living rooms and are paid poorly and irregularly from donations the Democratic League collects at home and abroad. Doctors make house calls and depend on donations of equipment from Tirana and abroad.

The morning after my meeting with the Yugoslav Army I dug out the fax from Democratic League and called the number on the letterhead. After a few confused exchanges an English speaker came to the phone. I arranged to meet members of the League's presidency at 2 p.m.

"One last question," I said. "Excuse me, but is it safe to visit you?"

"Yes, of course," the voice on the other end said.

"I only ask," I said, "becuase I spent four hours last night with the local police. ."

The phone line suddenly went dead. I called back and asked again for the English speaker.

"You cannot say everything over the phone," he said.

The football stadium lies just behind and below the Hotel Grand. I walked down the concrete steps of the shopping mall that forms the hotel's base and quickly lost my bearings. To my right was the army headquarters where I'd spoken with the general the previous evening; in the light of day I could see a glass box of the sort I'd seen in East Berlin before 1989 and in Prague afterwards. Like the first, and unlike the second, it was occupied.

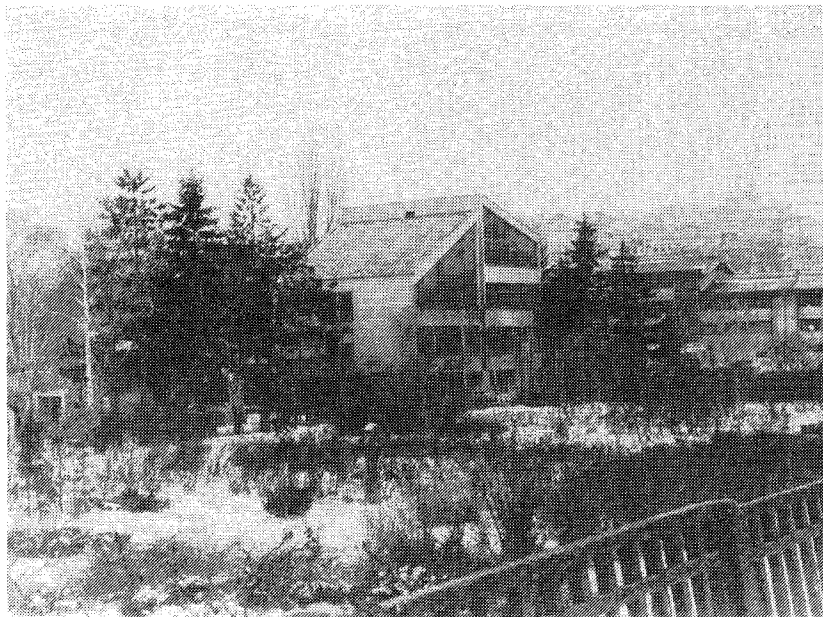
I walked passed a guarded army truck and wandered through another shopping mall across the street. At first I asked innocently for the football stadium, then, losing patience and dropping my guard, I asked openly for the Democratic League. Vague directions led me across barren mud flats around the studium's rim, where a tatty carousel blasted Michael Jackson for the benefit of its sole rider.

A small split-level house looked appropriately shabby. But when I asked the porter for the Democratic League, he led me to an even smaller pillbox in back. Delegations streamed out past the "P.E.N. Club of Kosovo" sign and huddled for quick debriefings before climbing into their muddy Yugos. I was ushered into one of the building's three rooms while members of the Democratic's League's presidency were pulled out of a conference room to speak to me.

The Democratic League's presidency meets in a virtual permanent session to keep the underground school system going. "Sometimes the burden (of organization) is unbearable,"

Dr. Rexhep Ismajli, one of the League's presidents, said. But the explosive birth-rate of the Albanian population has made education the League's highest priority, he said, since a large uneducated generation would become the "paupers of Europe."

And the Democratic League must maintain its unofficial government to justify its decision to withdraw from Yugoslav society. The League convinced the Kosovars to boycott the December 1992 elections, Ismajli said, because it could neither endorse the Yugoslav state nor any of the parties also opposed to Milo-



Democratic League headquarters (obscured by trees)

šević. "The entire political climate in Serbia relied on xenophobia," he said, "in which the whole non-Serb population was undervalued." The leader of the opposition, Vuk Drasković, had arisen through the late-1980s by advocating a program of hatred that paved the way for Milošević, Ismajli said. "His main political motto has always been 'Serbia is everywhere there is a Serbian grave.'" The Kosovars were suspicious of Drasković's supposed conversion to pacifism and reconciliation in 1991. The League was more open to Milan Panić, the Serb-American businessman who challenged Milošević for the the Serbian presidency, but doubted he could fulfil his promises even if elected. The Serbian establishment would have undermined him and branded him "president of the evil minorities," Ismajli said.

The boycott had the unfortunate if predictable consequence of giving the Serb minority of Kosovo free reign to choose the province's government. They elected the leader of the Serbian Radical Party, Vojislav Sešelj, and Zelko Raznjatovic, (better known as "Arkan") to the Serb parliament. Both run private armies out of Priština's Hotel Grand. (Don't try going down the stairs to the hotel's two bottom floors — they are sealed off with plywood.) What in Bosnia has been a loose alliance between irregulars and the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) has consolidated into one in Kosovo, Ismajli said.

Since the elections, a new state policy of "disarming the Albanians" has been enforced by both. Soldiers search houses for weapons and beat occupants who fail to turn over guns. Albanians who insist they have no weapons are often deported. Since January, over a thousand homes had been raided, according to Skendar Kastrati, also a member of the

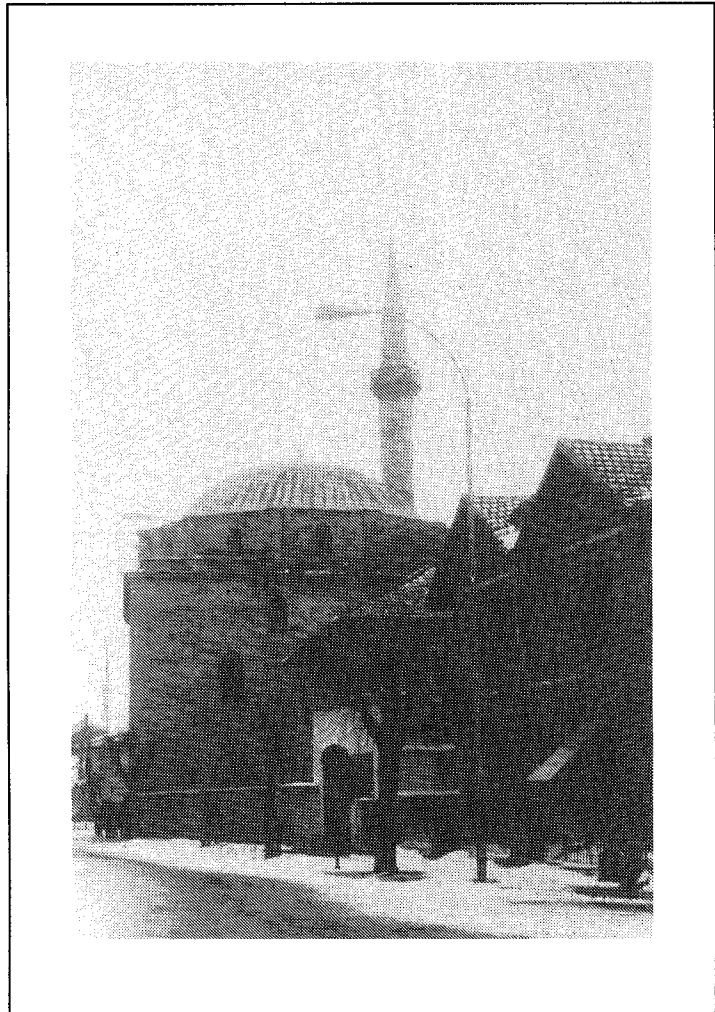
Democratic League's presidency.

The policy of "disarming" is merely a ruse, according to Liam McDowell, Albania editor of The East European Reporter. Whatever small arms the Albanians in might have would be no match for the combined forces of the private armies and the JNA depots. Since the JNA was organized in part as a local militia of "partisans," it has a vast reserve scattered among village depots. Even if these were once meant to repel an invader, they are also especially well-placed to put down an internal insurrection. "Disarmament," McDowell said, is an excuse to terrorize and deport.

Hoping to spare themselves, Kosovar Albanians are now importing arms, Kastrati said, just to have something to give to the police when they come. "The dimensions of this terror are so large," he said, "that we wonder whether Serbia needs an open war to achieve its aims."

The terror is the latest Serb response to the Albanian minority's rejection of the Serb state. Long before the elections and their repercussions the Democratic League had given up on Yugoslavia. It is unabashedly separatist. In May 1992 the League organized unofficial elections to the parliament the Serbian government had abolished but which had operated "in exile." The parliament declared an independent "Republic of Kosova" headed by President Ibrahim Rugova. The Kosovar writer Redzep Casja, league member, author and "Father of the Nation," has called for a "Greater Albania" which would include Kosovo and the Albanian parts of Macedonia.

Any discussion of redrawing Central European borders inevitably begins somewhere in the 10th century. While such conversations may not have much bearing on the borders of the day, they are invaluable sketches of the mythical maps that motivate.



Mosque in Pristina

My talk with Dr. Ismajli started with the division of the Roman Empire. The Illyrians, predecessors of the Albanians, were Christianized from Rome in the first and second centuries A.D. The Illyrians were, however, unwilling to accept the division of the Roman empire and its church, Ismajli said, since the line between the Roman and Orthodox churches

ran through their community. Instead, they promulgated their own confession. It was quickly suppressed by both the Serbian and Greek orthodox churches.

Their religion having been weakened, the Illyrians converted easily to the Islam of Ottoman occupation, Ismajli said. By the end of the 19th century, over 70 percent of Illyrians had converted while the minority remained Orthodox or Roman Christian. Albanian loyalty, however, lay with Illyrian blood rather than foreign creeds. "Bektashi," a tolerant form of Shi'ite Islam, suited Albanians with Christian cousins more than other creeds might have. "The Albanians had to be tolerant," Ismajli said, "because they had to live in a community of more than one religion." When the Berlin conference of 1912 offered Albanians their own state, an Eastern Orthodox priest was elected its first president. The motto of the time, Ismajli said, was "The religion of the Albanians is Albanianhood."

Since World War II, the culture uniting the Illyrian descendents had only prospered outside Albania proper, Ismajli said. Evner Hoxha, the Communist dictator who ruled Albania, suppressed religion and banned its practice entirely in 1961. Bektashi sects flourished in Kosovo and Macedonia under the Yugoslav government of Tito in part because Tito restrained the religion's traditional enemy, Serbian orthodoxy. But since the death of Tito and the collapse of Communism in Albania, the tables had turned. Albania allowed the freedom to practice a religion that had died out, while the Kosovars were struggling to keep from suffocating under renewed Serbian chauvinism. A Kosovo independent of Serbia and perhaps reunified with Albania could rescue a culture from the Priština necessary to revive Tirana, Ismajli said.

The appeal of "Greater Albania" but some doubts

After my talk with the Democratic League I spotted the last few species of the Serb military — its paramilitary — flocking into the Grand Hotel's lobby. A few fat old Serbs in shiny suits were making calls from the lobby telephone; a young man in black leather and a crewman's cap stood guard and warned me off each time I tried to assert my position in the line to call out.

As I waited the lobby filled with his colleagues. They arrived in buses carrying small sports bags like some kind of athletic team. Waiters were called out of the restaurant to bring chairs to a meeting room downstairs. Men in identical blue down jackets stood guard at the hotel's exits and patrolled the bathrooms and gift shops.

The evening with the Yugoslav army had been reassuringly military and correct in comparison to my chat with the dull-eyed guard in the hotel lobby as colleagues assembled for what looked like a strategy session between the two private armies. I decided I'd seen enough of the forms of Serbian police for one visit and felt cowardly compared to the Albanians I had met that afternoon. After all, they'd lived with these people for 12 years and no doubt knew better than I did that the uniformed soldiers were losing out to the gangs assembling around me.

I decided I had gotten off lightly by falling into the hands of men still restrained by their uniforms. The young recruits gathering in the hotel lobby didn't look like the sort to discuss brands of cigarettes or Serbian churches while they filled out forms. I found myself almost hoping that my Albanian friends had the good luck to confront the official military before the

more savage lords of the Kosovo jungle took matters into their own hands. And I could certainly see why the Kosovars might want to opt out of Yugoslavia altogether and join their Albanian cousins.

But had the "Albanian religion of Albanianhood" survived the Cold War? The political lines that cut through "historic" nations leave scars, the Albanian writer Boshkim Shehu later reminded me. Germany's futile search for a unifying spirit of "Germanness," he argued, ought to dispel the Kosovar illusions of Albanian unity. Kosovo has never been part of the Albanian state; worse, Albania's Communist dictatorship, fearing the influence of Tito's more moderate policies, had sealed the border with Yugoslavia in 1948.

The end of the cold war has only aggravated the differences. "The Kosovars are suspicious of the West," Shehu said, "because the 'Western world' had come to them through the Yugoslav state. They have always relied on a more conservative tradition as a defense against that state." The medieval Albanian common law system, known as the *Kanun*, or "the Code," is admired in Kosovo's southern region while, in Albania, Hoxha's destruction of traditional life Tirana more open to the West.

made

I didn't want to risk my notes on Kosovo to another police search. The entire Grand Hotel seemed to know that I planned to take a 7 p.m. train to Skopje, in the newly-independent Macedonia. So when my taxi driver heard I was to catch the train and offered to take me over a mountain pass himself, I accepted. He reassured me as we drove out over the snow-covered plain south of Priština. "There." He pointed to an intersection. "That's where the police sit in the summer. But it's too cold for them tonight!" he laughed.

The driver, Bali Zogaj, said he had been a law professor at Priština University before the Albanians had been purged from the faculties. His wife, he said, had been head of Kosovo's Post and Telegraph office. His daughter now studied in one of the Democratic League's living room schools. To them, Tito had been a hero, he said. Now his Yugoslavia was no more than a mask for a paranoid police state.

The road's shoulders soon lifted us away from the plain and twisted our trail into the tree-lined foothills. My thoughts slipped from of the city behind us, with its Kosovar intellectuals and the betrayal Belgrade had meted out to them. We crossed a stone bridge over the railway tracks that ran through the valley below; a moment later Zogaj joked that if the road had been a bit icier I might have caught my train after all. But as we rose higher the valley disappeared. The bare branches that had cross-hatched the far mountain face now fell over the steep but even slopes as one shadow floating in the evening's snow. The "Accursed Mountains" themselves were invisible behind their darkened outline. My fears about my notes, my passport, my visa dissolved. The tentacles of Serbian control, it seemed, could only stretch down telephone lines and railway timetables. But we were rising into the realm of the Albanian common law code which had hovered over these ridges as regimes, even world wars, had come and gone.

In Broken April, the Albanian novelist Ismail Kadare describes a trip up towards these mountains from the other side, from Tirana. A writer who has spent his career in the capital praising the mysterious grip of the *Kanun* over the rural northerners takes his first trip into its

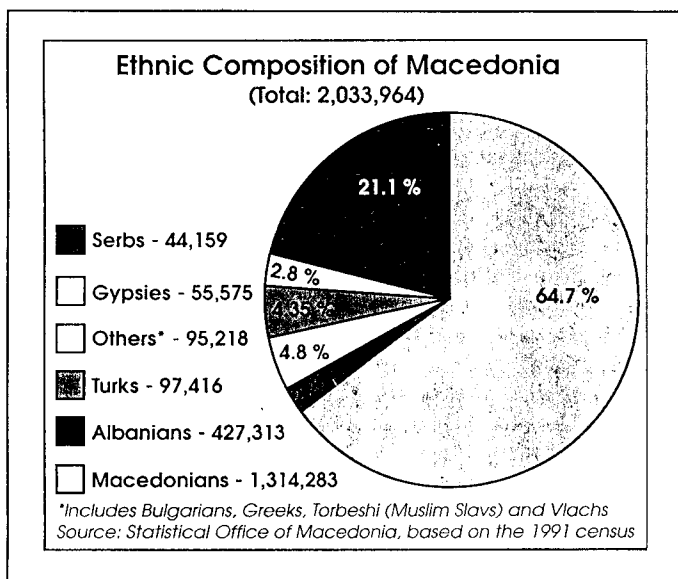
jurisdiction on his honeymoon. "We are entering the shadow-land," he tells his bourgeois-born wife, "the place where the laws of death prevail over the laws of life."

The writer's naive faith in the nobility of "the Code," with its tradition of revenge, is ruthlessly exposed. But the novel captures the mystery of the "Accursed Mountains" and the comfort, however cold, of predictable common law. By the time Zogaj and I saw the bright lights of the new Macedonian border my fear had mostly faded. If Kadare's novel portrayed the law's calculation as cruel, could it be crueler than unpredictable violence? In Kosovo, the "laws of death" has moved from mountains to the plains and can be found in the cool professional terror of the Yugoslav Army's rule over Priština. Worse still, the hounds of the private armies lurk in the lobby of the Hotel Grand waiting for their leashes to break. Even if traditional "Albanianhood" no longer exists I could understand its appeal to the Kosovars. I had felt safer edging along the immobile shadows of an unyielding law than wandering among the lawless.

MACEDONIA

Since Macedonia received the United Nations' blessing on April 9, the white U. N. tanks that sit on the mountain pass between it and Yugoslavia are now defending an international border. But the new border runs right through the old Yugoslavia's ethnic Albanian minority. It divides those in the region of Kosovo, who still live under the Belgrade government, from their cousins in the new nation. If Kosovo becomes the next Bosnia, Macedonia itself will split, perhaps fatally, over the question of how to respond.

(East European Reporter)



Before Yugoslavia's break-up, Albanians in Kosovo, a southern province of Serbia, and those in Macedonia, then a republic of Yugoslavia, were both abused equally. But now, across the new border the Albanian minority isn't oppressed by the government — it is part of the government. Macedonia's Albanians have the third-largest party in Skopje's parliament and rule in coalition with the former communists.

Despite recognition, Macedonia deserves pity. It is the object of territorial ambition for at least two of its four neighbors. Its sanctions against Yugoslavia and a blockade against it from Greece

have savaged its economy. It is governed by a coalition of parties that at first glance would seem marginally interested in its independence — former members of Yugoslavia's communist party and representatives of the Albanian minority. The only party committed to Macedonian independence is in opposition and desperately suspicious of the Albanian minority.

I put it to Stoyan Androv, the president of the Macedonian parliament, that the country would be possibly the most difficult of Europe's new states to establish.

"I think it will be the easiest," Androv said *con brio*. "There isn't a single party that isn't interested in independence. And we Macedonians have a history of tolerance, of living together. This is a good basis for building a civil state."

But a history of living together under Belgrade and cooperating in an independent state are two different things. How would a crisis in Kosovo affect a state unrecognized abroad and weak and divided at home?

Unrecognized and unemployed

Macedonia was the southernmost and poorest of the six republics that made up Yugoslavia. Elections in December 1990 gave a nationalist party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO) the largest bloc of parliamentary seats — 37 out of 120. The nationalists were followed by the reformed communists, now the Party for Democratic Transformation, who won 31 seats. A coalition of parties representing Macedonia's Albanian minority (about 21 percent of the population) took 23 seats. Kiro Gligorov, a former communist, was elected president. The country has been governed by a coalition of the former communists and the Albanians since a VMRO-Social Democratic coalition collapsed in June 1992.

Macedonians voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence in a 1991 referendum. But the state has had trouble asserting itself in the neighborhood. Bulgaria recognized it quickly but refused to admit that "Macedonians" were an ethnic group. Albania won't recognize the new state until its Albanian minority is the status of a "constituent nation." Yugoslavia and Greece have both refused recognition outright. Yugoslavia objects to the further disintegration of the former state. The Greeks complain that the nationalist party has chosen the name of a terrorist organization that at the turn of the century made territorial claims on what is now the Greek province of Macedonia. Boris Johnson of Britain's Daily Telegraph has accused Greece of providing the Serbs with oil to keep pressure on the new state. More importantly, Greek objections had held up recognition by the European Community and the United States.

The antagonism of Greece and Yugoslavia has squeezed the new state's economy. A Greek blockade has killed off cross-border trade once worth \$1.3 billion. That blockade plus Macedonia's decision to observe sanctions against the former Yugoslavia has reduced exports by 61 percent. Until this month Greek intransigence had isolated Macedonia. Although the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank had done preparatory work no agreements could be signed. Foreign investors were reluctant to sign deals with businesses that operate in a country not yet bound by the guarantees of international commercial law.

The squeeze has frustrated Macedonians all the more because the EC had decided in December 1991 that, of the former Yugoslav republics, Slovenia and Macedonia met its criteria for recognition, such as respect for the rights of minorities, while Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina did not. "Comparing their own frustrating battle for independence with the Slovenian and Croatian one, Macedonians have learned three important things," Djordi Spasov, an intellectual from Macedonia's capital city of Skopje, wrote in The East European Reporter. "First, it is very important what part of Europe you start your battle in, second, who your friends and neighbors are and third, how many times the Pope mentions you in his

prayers."

The temptation to help across the border

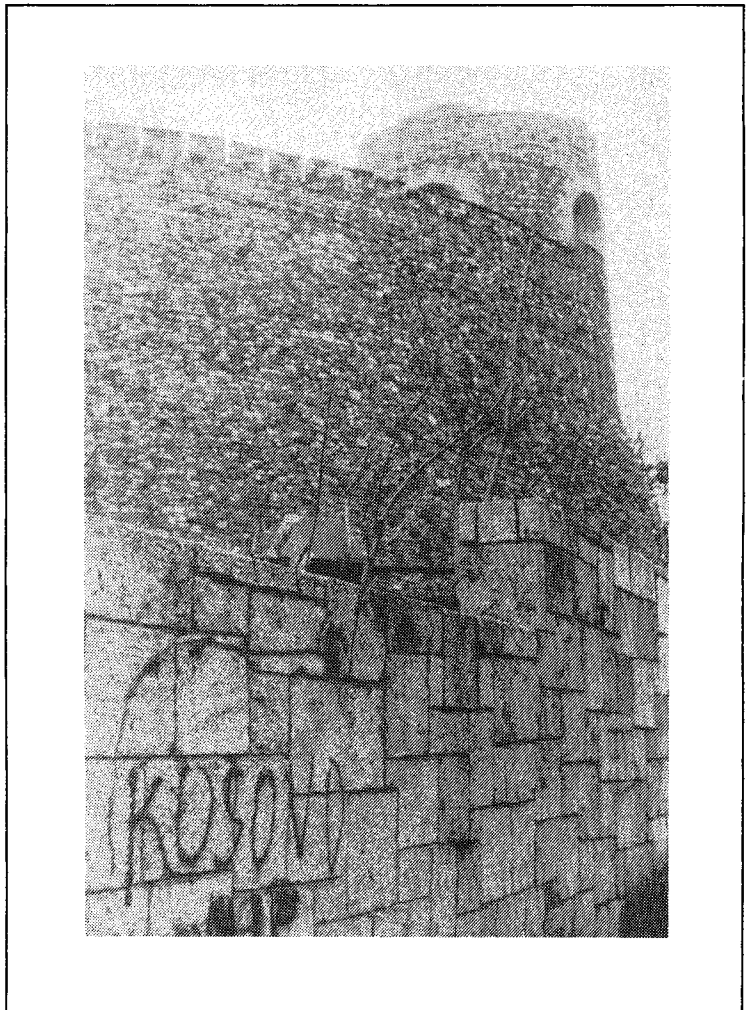
With virtually the world arrayed against it, Macedonia would appear all the more vulnerable to irredentists among the Albanian minority. Like their cousins in Kosovo, the Macedonian Albanians are gathered in a compact community along the border with Albania. (Please see map.) They represent anywhere from 21 to 40 percent of the population, depending on whether you trust surveys from the communist period or the minority's own estimates.

There have been signs of irredentism. While out of government, the Albanian minority party hardly behaved as a "loyal opposition." Albanian parliamentarian Mersim Pollozhami, for example, once called for the creation of an autonomous "Republic of Ilirida." But since joining the government, its representatives have modified their demands. Today the talk is of language rights rather than autonomy.

Popular opinion among Albanians seems much more volatile. In January 1992 the Albanians voted in a referendum for "autonomy." (They received the congratulations of the Albanian parliament.) They have twice taken to the streets in large numbers, once to press for the "constituent nation" status and once to protest the death of an Albanian at the hands of Macedonian police. The killing and the violent suppression of the demonstration brought back memories of state pressure that, as in Kosovo, the Yugoslav government had begun to apply in the early 1980s.

The real challenge to the new state will come, however, if there's a gap between the Macedonian government's official policy of "non-interference" in Kosovo and private gun-running. Of 26 seizures of illegal arms in 1991, 22 were destined for Kosovo, according to the Macedonian Ministry of the Interior.

Interior Minister Ljubomir Frčkovski, a former communist, is sanguine about the loyalty of Albanians already in state positions. "They have two approaches," Frčkovski said, "one for public opinion, one for normal politics." When the minority's politicians speak of autonomy



Graffiti on castle wall in Skopje

they are playing to the galleries, he said.

To dispel fears of a Macedonian government repeating Belgrade's terror Frčkovski has required that minorities fill 15 percent of the posts in the police and secret service. Only Albanians who "threaten the territorial integrity of the state" will be prosecuted. Frčkovski hopes that both Macedonians and Albanians will remember the 1980s as the "tyranny of an occupying power." So far the carrot of freedom in a new Macedonia plus fear of sliding back under the Serbian stick has calmed Albanian opinion, Frčkovski said. "They are in our institutions," he said, "and they are co-operating."

And the Albanian minority knows, Frčkovski said, that if there were a crisis in Kosovo, the Macedonian Interior Ministry would be capable of suppressing any gun-running. "They will keep a cool head and not confront the authorities because they know would be in no position to do so," he said. "They know we are capable of enforcing the border."

Well, maybe. Albanian parliamentarian Ešref Aliu, known in the capital as a moderate, agreed that it was in his constituency's interest to build a strong Macedonian state. In fact, he disagreed with the concept of minority rights. "Macedonia doesn't need to divide its citizens into national groups and minorities," he said. "The constitution should be written for all the Macedonians."

That might sound selfless, but what Aliu and the "moderates" mean by "equal rights" is that government officials in all parts of the country, not just the Albanian areas, should be required to speak both Macedonian and Albanian. Still, Aliu thought autonomy had become a dead issue; the state was doing enough to placate Albanian fears of mistreatment. "All Macedonians should build a future together," he said. "No other way exists."

Aliu agreed with the current Macedonian policy of staying out of the Kosovo dispute and was heartened that the Macedonian president had frequently met the Kosovars' "government-in-exile." But the image of harsher repression on the border's other side brought out not only anger at government plans but even skepticism towards the Macedonian state.

"My two brothers live in Priština," he said, his voice rising for the first time. "If a war started in Kosovo, how could I stand here calmly? If there's going to be war in Kosovo, how can I ignore my brothers? We (the Albanian minority in Macedonia) belong to that country, the co-operation is very close. But there is the political problem that no one consulted us when Macedonia opted for independence."

No fraternal love

Did Macedonians "opt for independence," as Aliu would have it, or was it that "the Macedonian people rejected at the last the semi-colonial status in the as till yesterday known Yugoslav 'brotherly community,' from decades of political and economical inferior mentality and forcefully implanted complex of minority?"

The latter is taken from the party literature of VMRO, the nationalist party that holds the largest bloc in parliament but is in opposition. The same document argues that Macedonia should pursue a foreign policy of "STATE and NATIONAL interests, and not others — the so-called

“higher interests, for example.”

I met Dosta Dimovska, vice-chairman of VMRO, Branislav Sinadinovski, in charge of foreign policy, in the party's headquarters. After half-listening to a tirade of complaints about the current government, ranging from phone tapping to the “leftist putsch” that drove VMRO into opposition, I asked about how VMRO deputies would respond to a crisis in Kosovo. Did STATE and NATIONAL interests include intervention in Kosovo or leniency towards the Albanian minority if it took part?

No. Both supported the government's policy and the threat of prosecution for Albanians who ran guns. “If a conflict occurs, it is possible that the Albanian minority will intervene. That cannot be allowed. It would be difficult to control.” Sinadinovski spoke up. “The problem of Kosovo is an internal problem of Serbia.”

But if Macedonian Albanians faced imprisonment for supporting their brothers, mightn't they seek autonomy, even union with Albania? “I think that is their final aim and their strategy,” Dimovska said, “but they, like any other citizens, are obliged to respect the law. They know the sanctions.” Dimovska doubted, however, whether the current government would be capable of meting out punishment for such acts; after all, it hadn't prosecuted the politicians declaring “independent Ilirida” for treason.

Despite President Andov's optimism I left Macedonia thinking that a history of “living together” peacefully was not enough to establish a new state, especially one under such international and internal pressures. I found myself agreeing rather with the Skopje writer Kim Mehmeti. “We have lived together for more than four decades,” he wrote in a local paper at the time of Albanian protests, “but only side by side, without feeling any need to know each other better and to become closer to one another. It is a common condition in the Balkans, this madhouse where the occupants perennially forget that the survival of their own apartment depends first of all on the structure of the whole building.”

ALBANIA

If the Balkans can be compared to an apartment building, then the elevator is permanently out of order. There are no trains from Skopje to Tirana, only irregular buses. I was fortunate to get a lift from the Associated Press correspondent who knew the twisting 180-mile road well. And I was quietly glad that a flat tire landed us in the border town of Sturga. While the reporter negotiated the purchase of a spare, I watched the locals cycle and walk along the banks of the Lake Ochid, reportedly the cleanest lake in Europe.

Our slow course down the mountains into Albania was impeded by five random police checks, part of the government's law-and-order campaign. The police would wave us down with a red reflector, then amble up to the car, share a cigarette and a few jokes. Some would try to demand a “road tax” for the region, a trick my driver knew not to fall for. They would then shrug and wave us on.

But if there are police in downtown Tirana they don't distinguish themselves from the crowds of young men loitering in the darkened streets and parks. While we drank coffee with a friend putting me up for the night, the reporter sat on the edge of a seat in front of the window and

stared out the open gate at his car, even though there wasn't much left of his car to steal. Like every Volkswagen in the city it had long since lost its "VW" and rear-view mirror.

In the light of day, one can see how harmless the street-corner crowds are. Petty thievery is more likely a way to pass the time than to make a profit in a country where no one (except the housebound women) appears to work. Albania's road to reform has been a bumpy one and has hardened the character of the reformers along the way.

Reform slowing, revanchism growing

Demonstrations at the end of 1990 forced Albania's Communist regime to hold elections in March 1991. Although the Communists, renamed Socialists, won, a month of strikes forced the regime to share power with the opposition, the Democratic Party, led by the cardiologist Sali Berisha. Economic reform, especially the distribution of private plots of land, began under the guidance of Finance Minister Gramoz Pashko.

But the reform program splintered the opposition. Many members were the scions of families that had owned large tracts before the Communist regime and sought to have them back. Economic purists such as Pashko argued that a complicated restitution program would slow reform and provoke a backlash among current tenants. The divide also tended to be cultural, historical and geographic. The "economic purists" thought of themselves as the intellectual elite and were all too often, like Pashko, from Tirana's Communist families. The landowners portrayed themselves to be "true" Albanians, Muslims from the northern mountains; a few had dubious connections to the *Bali Kombitar*, a pre-war fascist movement. They rallied around Berisha (whose family name is also the name of an entire swath of northern Albania.)

Here a brief but important caveat is necessary. Balkan political groups, like most collectives anywhere, distinguish themselves from their opponents more according to perception than fact. How the northern nationalists portray themselves is more important than whether they actually are from the mountains or are Muslim, according to Shehu, the Albanian writer in Budapest. For example, Abdi Baleta condemns Pashko's faction as former Com-



The benefactors of Albanian economic reform on Tirana's main boulevard.

munists who are using reform to rob ordinary people and who won't speak up against the Serb treatment of the Kosovars. But Baleta himself was the head of the Communist regime's mission at the United Nations, Shehu said.

Even Berisha himself is not immune. Yes, he is from the north, but who brought him down from the mountains to study cardiology? Hoxha, the Communist dictator himself, who responded personally to a letter from Berisha's father. Berisha's transformation has been genuine, Shehu thought; if anything, Berisha's guilt over his collaboration with the previous regime makes him too accommodating of hard nationalists.

In December 1992, relations between the Democratic Party's two factions grew strained; against the wishes of Pashko's camp, the "northerners" took the Democratic Party out of the coalition government and called for new elections. Berisha led the Democratic Party from village to village and won 92 of the parliament's 140 seats. But the party's successful strategy transformed it from a broad anti-Communist front driven by economic modelling into a political machine of patronage especially dependent on its image of having rural northern and Muslim roots.

Back in power, but with promises to keep, the Democratic Party began to tinker with the purists' economic models. The right to sell the plots distributed was delayed pending a decision about restoring property rights. The government reclaimed its right to appoint the managers of state factories. Upset by the revisions, Pashko led six deputies out of the Democratic Party to establish the Democratic Alliance.

Pashko's bookshelves are lined with Hayek and von Mises and decorated with pictures of him meeting Milton Friedman and the right-wing Czech Premier Václav Klaus. But since his departure from power, Pashko has given up on joining the latter in implementing the ideas of the former. "A Friedman-Klaus philosophy cannot be achieved in this country," he sighed. "They cannot accept the state withdrawing from the economy."

Pashko claims that the Democratic Party's attempt to modify reforms to suit political interests have left Albania bogged down in the painful halfway stage. In an forthcoming academic article, Pashko writes that, after allowing the gross domestic product to fall 25 percent and exports to fall 45 percent, the revisionists haven't finished the job. The government hasn't cracked down on debts industries owe one another. As those debts grow they undermine the government's anti-inflationary policy, since the debts expand the amount of "money" in circulation. And many of the debts are used to avoid firing workers painful restructuring is avoided.

The government's decision to take back the right to appoint managers of state factories and set wages unfortunately suits the Albanian taste for "paternalism," he writes, which exaggerates the typical post-communist scenario. "Quick reforms in principle are well accepted in the very beginning. . . Then in the second stage, "gradualism revives. An old paternalistic ideology, extremely developed in Albania as an Ottoman as well as communist heritage, asked the state to defend equality of distribution and incomes. This ideology is linked to a kind of populism which expects the government to do what the crowd in the street asks for."

"That's why we have Berisha," Pashko said, referring to Albanian Prime Minister, "even though he is making many mistakes. Thank God we have Albanians working like dogs in Greece and Italy and sending their wages home," he added. "That's why we are still alive."

The Democratic Party's new paternalism has shown some signs of becoming authoritarian. More than half of the staff of the party's daily newspaper, *Rilindja Demokratike*, have resigned in protest to its unquestioningly pro-government line. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Public Order, Bashkim Kopliku, has taken over border patrols from the army. The government has threatened to arrest the editor of the Socialist Party's daily "Zeri i Popullit" ("Voice of the People") for insulting the army. And Berisha until recently took a such a strident line on problems in Kosovo that then-U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger threatened to withdraw American aid. But the moves are not meant to prepare for a war with Yugoslavia, Pashko said, since the government recognizes it is in no position to fight one. "It's much more for internal purposes," he said. "They show you the enemy on the other side of the border but they keep an eye on you."

Understandable concern

Kopliku refused to speak to me, arguing that, despite his recent acquisition of the brief to defend the border, he was the wrong person with whom to discuss Kosovo. But the Democratic Party's chairman for foreign affairs, Dlyber Vrioni, assured me that the government had no intention of fighting for the Kosovars. "We know we are not prepared for a war." In giving Kopliku control of the border the government was merely reverting to the previous arrangement after an experiment with army patrols had failed. The conscripts were too unreliable to do such a job, Vrioni said.

In fact, Vrioni said, most Albanians don't care about what is happening in Kosovo. "We are in difficult times after communism," he said. "Most people are more concerned about their own basic needs."

But "those who understand" are concerned about both the Kosovars and the Macedonian-Albanians, Vrioni said. Albania must continue to argue in world organizations for the human rights of both. The Albanian parliament had congratulated their Macedonian brethren on their declaration of sovereignty because it realized that a new Macedonian state would not necessarily behave any better than the old Yugoslav province had. The situation in Bosnia was a warning to all Muslims, Vrioni said; the Macedonian-Albanians "are terribly upset because the same thing could happen there. And we cannot ignore that. They are our blood."

Vrioni had no kind words for Pashko and his "betrayal" but he struck me as a salt-of-the-earth patriot rather than an authoritarian. He assured me that Albania's recent flirtation with the Islamic world over Kosovo was merely a maneuver to attract the West's attention to the problem.

No unity at home

But do such Democratic Party leaders underestimate the degree to which the Kosovo question might split Albanian society? Ben Blushi, a journalist specializing on Albanian-Kosovar relations, thought so. The privatization of small businesses had given Kosovar émigrés, on the whole wealthier than ordinary Albanians, the chance to snap up shops.

Albanians, he said, especially the Christians in the south, resented the fact that Kosovars had "not lifted a finger" to help bring down the communists in Albania; southern Albanians were now unwilling to risk their new freedoms in a fight with Yugoslavia. The Democratic League of Kosovo apparently agrees; it recently closed its Tirana office. Even before it left Tirana the Kosovars apparently had their doubts. Ali Alui, the League's representative in Albania, said that "it is an illusion to think that the Albanian people are ready to liberate the other half of their country."

Nor, everyone I spoke to agreed, could Albania, in dire economic straits, afford any move that would threaten relations with the West. "Everytime Berisha says something provocative about Kosovo or Islam," Blushi noted, "a few thousand Albanians get kicked out of Greece. Then Berisha angers not only them but their families."

Still, Vrioni thought that in the case of an emergency in Kosovo private Albanians would be tempted to aid the Kosovars. And, unlike Frčkovski in Macedonia, he seemed unlikely to want to stop them. "If the Serbs are going to violate human rights (in Kosovo)," he said, "people can act individually."

Publicly, Berisha's office denies that Albania will intervene. Privately, sources close to the president wonder if he would be able to resist pressure from the "communist-nationalist" wing of his own party, should the Serbs crack down in Kosovo. Like Macedonia, Albania is weak economically. Should the new authoritarians need to distract the population from the effects of their muddled economic program, Kosovo may well provide it. But not all Albanians would rally to rescue the wealthier cousins many resent.

"GREATER ALBANIA": AN EASY TARGET

Imagine you are a young soldier in the Yugoslav National Army stationed in Kosovo. Maybe you're the baby-faced recruit who laughed at my faxes from the "fascist" Albanians. As you patrol the streets of Priština in your blue-and-black urban camouflage, you think about how the state you were taught to defend has been peeled down to its Serbian core.

First you review events on the Western front. Your hometown of Obrovac, in Krajina, is largely Serb but is claimed by the Croats as part of their new independent state. It's under "U.N. protection." Lot of good that did in February when the Croats stormed in: all the U.N. did was keep you from getting at your guns. Still, Milošević called for peace. The town is still in a diplomatic twilight zone.

Maybe then you think about how things are going in Bosnia. Here you know your army's been a bit more active, but always on the sly, just passing weapons on to the Bosnian Serbs. Maybe you know some of these paramilitaries, maybe you think they're cowards, lobbing shells at Sarajevo from the safety of the hills, raping helpless women. Never fighting the straight fight, the one your army was meant to fight, the fight to defend Yugoslavia from the fascists. Maybe your army's doing something there, but it's degrading to work with those street cleaners-turned-soldiers.

You hear a sudden clatter up the street but it's just a garbageman emptying a bin. You relax and think about where you are. Priština, Kosovo. Serbia. Home turf. This is where you saw

Milošević give those amazing speeches, back before he became Serb president, when he was talking about how Serbia suffered a defeat in 1389, a humiliation Serbia would never, never know again. At least Milošević hadn't backed down to any referenda for independence here. No referendum was going to take away the cathedral in Peč, give it to the Albanians. No Nazis were going to break into the anti-fascist core, into Serbia itself.

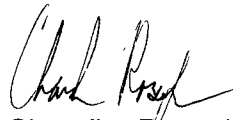
Maybe you go back to headquarters and sit and smoke under the fluorescent lights. It's humiliating, all this waiting, while Arkan's guys are in and out of the Hotel Grand, doing your job. When are you going to get the chance? You hear things from Belgrade about Sešelj and the Radicals pushing Milošević harder, but you wonder — what are they waiting for? What am I waiting for?

Who would stop us if we just cleared these traitors out? you think. Kosovo's home ground. Sure, the West says they'll respond, but they're not even defending Bosnia, and they think that's an independent state. Who else? The Macedonians? Maybe the Albanians would run a few guns (they've already been doing that), but the national army? What national army? Who else? The Albanians? Jesus Christus, if we can't wipe out the Albanians — that wouldn't be a fight, that would be fun. Whoever up there in Belgrade, you think, whoever finally gives us the chance to fight a straight fight, to win one — that's the guy I'm with.

That may or may not be the way the Yugoslav soldiers think. If it is, Kosovo must be a tempting target for any radical Belgrade politician. If, behind closed doors, the Yugoslav state is in flux, then the politician who leads the charge in Kosovo gives the beleaguered army the historic mission it hungers for. They'll be grateful.

And if that Serb radical thinks its an easy win, he's right. If the West refused to interfere (a big if), the weakened and divided states of Macedonia and Albania wouldn't be able to do much to help Kosovo. The "Greater Albania" that Kosovars dream might come to their rescue would provide more chaos than comfort. And after so much humiliation elsewhere, some Serbs might enjoy the fight all the more for that.

Yours,



Chandler Rosenberg
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CHANDLER ROSENBERGER is a John O Crane Memorial Fellow of the Institute writing about the nations of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire