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The Kosovo crisis

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From Tirana to Peking, socialism is in a state of crisis, a fact that is even acknowledged by its representatives, in language that is more or less explicit according to the country. But nowhere as in Yugoslavia is this statement so frequently and so strongly made. Not only dissidents, but also the rulers of the country themselves seem to agree, even though they can then differ on the analysis of the causes and fight about the solution to be given to the problem. There is no official speech, interviewed personality, leading article or academic conference that does not describe, frequently in pitiless words, the internal illness that gnaws at this socialist society and its federal and self-managing State.

In this debate the most severe and hardest criticism has been devoted to the actual functioning and to the very nature of the regime. Most recently the Yugoslav economists have publicly expressed "their great concern about the gravity and all-encompassing character of the crisis" that is severely shaking the economy. But no main sector of public life is spared, and the debate has already begun (and continues) on how to amend the Constitution in the avowed aim of neutralizing a dangerous trend toward transforming the federal system into what is becoming a loose confederation of states.

Among the causes of the serious malfunctioning that is universally being denounced, the economists have not hesitated to point out the priority of political over economic reasoning as imposed by the Socialist dogma followed in Yugoslavia, as in all the other countries ruled by Leninist-inspired forces. After the spectacular request of the Union of Serbian Writers to abolish the monopoly of the Communist Party over political power and in all State structures, one more taboo had been broken. But though this fact is proof of the

freedom of thought and criticism presently tolerated in Yugoslavia, it also shows how terribly severe this crisis has become, and how it is determining a radical transformation of basic ideas and people's mentality.

Kosovo as a symptom

In pushing the crisis into the limelight, and showing that it is no longer only economic and social, but also political and moral, the factor that has played a considerable clarifying role is the tragical Kosovo question, a question very poorly understood in the West, where it looks ridiculously old-fashioned.

A turning point was certainly marked by the spring 1981 demonstrations of the Albanian nationalists, who demanded the transformation of Kosovo - presently an autonomous region inside the Republic of Serbia, itself one of the six that form the Yugoslav Federation - into a full-fledged Republic. After that, Yugoslav communist rulers could no longer pretend to give credit to the thesis, upheld since the postwar rebirth of Yugoslavia, according to which the problem of nationalities had been solved once and for all by the socialist nature of the newly created Federation.

With the Kosovo disturbances in the spring of 1981 - less than a year after Tito's death - the curtain was gradually raised on the reality of this region, and that showed how serious nationality questions could still be in socialist Yugoslavia. This reality had been previously carefully concealed, and its revelation so strongly shook the official stand that it obliged the ruling elite to confess that in the last ten years its policy towards national minorities (and especially towards the Kosovo Albanians), had been wrong and harmful.

This does not mean that in the history of this multinational socialist country there had not previously been disturbances in this delicate field that had necessitated intervention of the central authorities. Already in the late '60s, the same Kosovo question had been transformed by the Albanian minority into a serious problem for the Communist Leadership; not much later, moreover, the entire ruling *élite* of Croatia had been dismissed under the very accusation of nationalism. But these disturbances did not, according to the Belgrade rulers, first of all among them Marshal Tito, threaten the principle and the basis of state organization. On the contrary, they were proof of the fact that these principles had not been fully applied. They thus did not have to be modified, but rather applied more extensively, in order to give each national component

greater influence, and therefore to truly implement the slogan “fraternity and unity”.

It was for this purpose that the 1974 Constitution was adopted. This very Constitution is now being discussed for amendment and is, according to many prominent Yugoslavs, at the origin of the present serious social crisis, having made possible the formation of the “beaurocratic kingdom” that was denounced by the famous writer Dobrica Cosić, at the annual meeting of the Union of Serbian Writers.

Albanian nationalism

A guidebook of the Balkans, would describe Kosovo as being one of the two “autonomous socialist regions” of the Republic of Serbia; that it has common borders with the Republics of Montenegro and Macedonia, which are part of the Yugoslav Federation, and with independent Albania; that its surface area is 10,887 km², and that, according to the 1981 census, its inhabitants add up to 1.6 million, of which 210,000 live in the capital city of Pristina. According to the same census, the national composition of its population shows 77.4% Albanians, 13.3% Serbians, 1.2% Montenegrans, plus various smaller minorities.

If these rough figures were considered, it would be clear that the claims of the Albanian nationalists in demanding the transformation of the autonomous region into a federated Republic inside Yugoslavia, are not without foundation. Kosovo has indeed a global population (independently from nationalities) much bigger than that of the Republic of Montenegro at the time of the same 1981 census (584,310 inhabitants) and a little less than the populations of Macedonia (1,909,136 inhabitants) and Slovenia (1,712,445 inhabitants). But in order to have a clearer view of the situation, one has to examine the legal connection between this region and the Republic of Serbia. Indeed, if Kosovo is looked at as a part of Serbia - which it is, both administratively and historically - the Albanian majority of this region, plus the other Albanians living in the rest of the Serbian Republic would only represent a minority of around 14% of the total population.

The main point that the Albanian nationalists try to stress, that of being the majority, would thus lose all its conviction. Everything, therefore, depends on the definition given to the Kosovo entity in the Serbian framework.

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This fact explains the tireless efforts of the most extremist wing of Albanian nationalists to prove in all possible ways that this region has always been Albanian and that the demographic situation of today is nothing but the expression of a permanent historical reality. Once this point is established, the Kosovo question takes the form of a normal de-colonization problem. The nationalist thesis thus becomes logical and simple to formulate: on the Kosovo land that has always belonged to them, in spite of all foreign occupation, and where they are and have long been the majority, the Albanians have only legitimate aspirations and are entitled to claim the right to self-determination, which is recognized to every nation. In short, the Albanian nationalists tend to impose on Western interpretations of their struggle the classical scheme of a people's wish for independence from the pitiless oppression of a foreign power. And it is thus perfectly normal that the Albanian militants presenting this interpretation of the facts have gathered sympathy and support among the "progressive" opinion and political forces, as well as with humanitarian organizations. De-colonization is today considered by everyone in the West - where the season of empires and colonies is over for good - not only as a good cause, but also as a positive and inevitable step in human history.

This sympathy is further strengthened by the examples that the Albanian nationalists can produce, proving that many of them have been tried and condemned - frequently to very heavy penalties - on the basis of the infamous article 133 of the Yugoslav penal code that makes dissent a crime and that represents the main tool of political repression not only in Kosovo, but in all of Yugoslavia. With numerous petitions, the Belgrade and Ljubljana intelligentsia have demanded in recent years the abolition of this article as the pre-condition of all real democratization of Yugoslav political life. And it is with reference to Albanian prisoners that a motion was adopted at the last assembly of the Union of Serbian Writers to demand an amnesty for all those tried on the basis of

article 133. All victims of this section of the penal code, which is in obvious contradiction to the universally accepted idea of human rights, deserve compassion and solidarity. The sympathy and support of the Western public opinion thus naturally go, amongst others, to Albanian nationalists who have suffered systematic repression since the 1981 disturbances.



One year earlier, during Tito's long struggle against death, the foreign press had frantically started to search all over Yugoslavia, looking for the signs of the troubles that could menace the country after the death of the Marshal. Some of them had even focussed on the Bulgarian border where, according to them, Soviet tanks could roll through into Yugoslavia. The fact that in Bulgaria there were no Soviet tanks was a trivial technical detail that could easily be ignored. Other journalists were combing the streets of Zagreb, sniffing the air in search of the slightest scent of Croatian nationalism. A last and largest group of journalists had travelled to the mosques of Bosnia and Herzegovina to

taste the picturesque and unusually strong presence of Islam in valleys both very green and very close to the West. But at that time nobody had noticed that the so passionately looked-for menace did not lay in the future, but that it had already taken shape in the present, and could be traced far back into the past. The menace was south of Serbia, in Kosovo, and expanded its tentacles into Macedonia and Montenegro. But then the authorities were silent on the reality of that region, and the press, which a few years later would play an important role in bringing the truth to light, was not allowed to deal with this subject, which had been declared one of the many taboos of Yugoslav life.

In any case, there were indications which could have suggested that fire was smouldering. Already by 1968 there had been Albanian demonstrations in Kosovo and Macedonia, and the rallying cry had, on that occasion, been the same as that which would blossom in the spring of 1981: "Kosovo for Republic". In May 1986, prophetic warnings had been voiced about the danger of growing Albanian nationalism by two members of the Central Committee of the Serbian Communist Party, Dobrica Cosić and Jovan Marjanovic, but this warning was not only disregarded but actually brought about the exclusion of these two personalities from the Central Committee. Until 1980, the end of Tito's reign, the official thesis of the predominant ideology was that the causes of the disturbances which had occurred in the late

'60s had been healed once and for all by the Constitution of 1974, which, according to official wisdom, guaranteed full and equal rights to all peoples and nationalities in Yugoslavia.

As far as Kosovo was concerned, the trend towards greater and greater autonomy had continued. From the status of "autonomous territory", attributed to it in 1945, it had been promoted, in the very 1960s, to the status of a "self-governing region", and with the last Constitution it had obtained the right to be considered "a basic element of the Federation", so that, even officially belonging to the Republic of Serbia, it enjoyed an autonomy over which the Serbians had no say. The rulers of Kosovo were masters in their own home and in practice only a very feeble nuance divided the status that they enjoyed from the status of a full-fledged Republic, which was the aspiration of the avowed nationalists and probably of the region's rulers themselves. No-one can say what the political destiny of this region could have been if the demonstrations of the spring of 1981 had not openly challenged the Central Government, obliging it to react and to oppose the objectives of Albanian nationalism, which was denounced as "counter-revolutionary". This time it was the integrity of national territory that was endangered, because, under the conditions of 1981, the possibility that a second independent Albanian State could appear in the Balkans could not be ruled out.

The persecution of the Serbs

Already by the early 1980s, when the arrogance of the groups that rule Yugoslavia was still unshaken, and the press was totally silent on the Kosovo question, the cold language of the census told the indisputable story of the decline of the Serbian and Montenegrin population in Kosovo. The Serbs were 23.62% of the inhabitants of the region in 1948; five years later they were 23.49%, and in 1961, they were 23.55%. But this percentage had declined to 18.35% in 1971, and ten years later, to 13.2%. The trend was more or less similar for the Montenegrins: 3.85% in 1948, 3.88% in 1951, 3.9% in 1961, 2.54% in 1971 and 1.71% in 1981. According to an estimate of the Statistical Institute of the Republic of Serbia, over 100,000 Serbs and Montenegrins had left Kosovo between 1961 and 1981.

But other data are also very meaningful: the percentage of Serbs leaving Kosovo out of the total Serbian population of Kosovo was, according to the 1981 census, nine times bigger than the percentage of Albanian immigrants out

of the Albanian population of the region; and for the Montenegrans this percentage was thirteen times higher than that of the Albanians. Contrary to what the authorities have long tried to make people believe, then, there was a strong asymmetry between the departure of Serbs and Montenegrans on one side, and the departure of Albanians on the other. Moreover, in the same twenty-year period (1961-1981), the same official data showed that, while the majority of Serbian emigrants had sold their properties before leaving, a strong minority, around 20%, had not been able to sell and had abandoned their houses, their land, their woods and their pastures. In short, the statistics showed a strong migration of the Serbian population of Kosovo, a flow that was growing with time and was bringing about a drastic decrease of the Serbian presence in many important municipalities of the region.

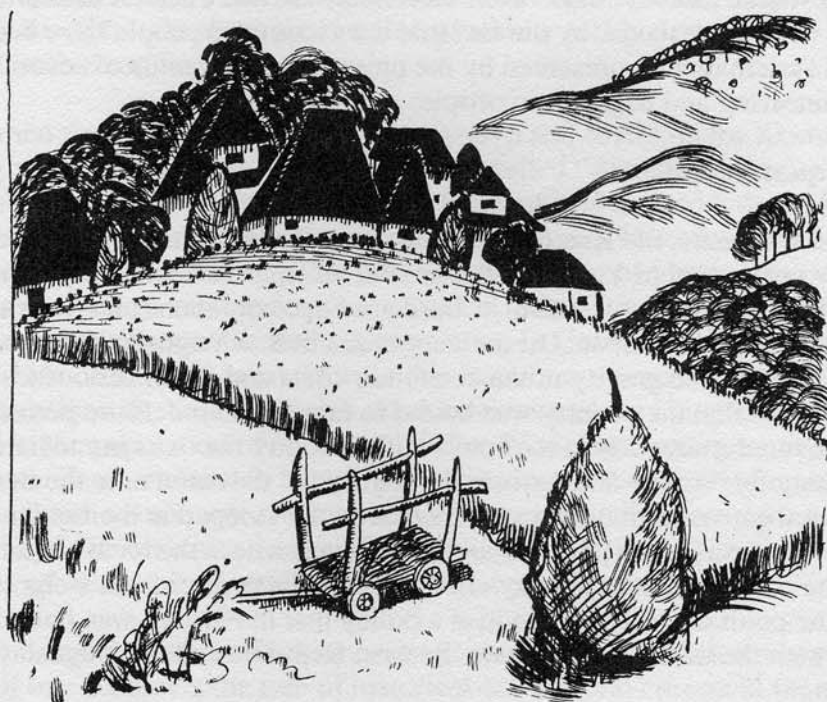
For a long time the official thesis to explain these departures has been the same as that which is today put forward by the Albanian nationalists: it was just a national migration phenomenon of a strictly economic and social nature. In that period of silence, when the voices of protest were rare and isolated, the Serbian Orthodox Church regularly sent messages to the authorities to draw their attention to the persecution of the Orthodox Serbs by the Moslem Albanians, as well as to the destruction and vandalism in Serbian churches, monasteries and cemeteries. But the church never succeeded in making itself heard by the authorities, nor did it obtain even the most basic measures of security. It was only after the spring of 1981 that the truth gradually appeared in its full tragical dimension.

From that day to the present, however, the brutalities of the Albanian nationalists have become more and more frequent, and the Serbs have departed in ever greater numbers, reducing to 10% the total percentage of Serbs and Montenegrans in the region. But in the recent period there has been no censorship by the Central Government. Having finally decided to fight against the "nationalists" and against the "counter-revolutionaries", the Yugoslav authorities had no more interest in concealing the reality that they had to face, all the more so since to re-establish their power in Kosovo they had set the aim - that is still aspired for - to stop the exodus of the Serbs, that is to abolish its causes. The real situation in Kosovo has thus appeared in the public eye as a situation that can be summarized by saying that the Serbian people have systematically been both physically and economically persecuted, in the effort to force them to leave, in order to make the region fully Albanian: "ethnically pure", to use the very words of the Albanian nationalists.

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It is obviously impossible here to draw a complete list of the crimes committed against the Serbs. However, to understand the present situation in Kosovo, a situation which is absolutely unique in Europe and inconceivable after two thousand years of Christianity, one has to know that the action of the Albanian nationalists against the Serbian population touches all sectors of life and utilizes an infinite variety of tools.

There is action against property: physical occupation of land, destruction of houses and barns, burning of woods, destruction of cultivation and of vineyards, massacres of herds. But there is also action against persons: threats, harassment, insults, physical aggression, mostly on women and children, rapes, and - when an Albanian is tried for being responsible for these crimes - there is an open exhortation to revenge and reprisals that end up in disputes, street fights and murders. The action against national and religious values takes the form of profanation of cemeteries, monuments and churches, as well as disturbance of ceremonies.



In every-day life the persecution takes the form of a climate of permanent insecurity, tension, isolation and boycott of the Serbian community, as well as of discrimination in shops and markets, and in public transportation, in hiring and in the work environment. The relationship with the administrative authorities is characterized by the lack of respect of the principle of equality of languages, by delay in the granting of permits, and in general, in all beaurocratic obligations, in inquiries and judicial cases, and in blatant non-application of judicial and police decisions which for the Serbs add up to a total lack of the possibility of appealing to the law against the pressures and threats, and in differences and quarrels.

It is the cumulative efforts of all these tools that make life without hope, and impossible to live. The constant Albanian pressure on the Serbian population becomes a terrible exodus that still continues today. This exodus has long been concealed; but even today, when it is fully visible and openly discussed in the Yugoslav papers, it has not brought about any feeling of sympathy from the humanitarian organizations and not a single word in favour of the Serbian Orthodox priests of Kosovo who, together with monks and nuns, are being martyred. These facts are made even more unusual, and difficult to bear for the Serbs all over Yugoslavia, by the fact that the victimized people have been long and systematically presented by the press and propaganda of several sides as a domineering and hegemonic people.

The unequal Republic

In the last few years, the Kosovo crisis has brutally found its way into the Yugoslav press. And in Yugoslav public life, this question with its paradoxes, its aberrations, its tragical nature, its burden of ancient taboos and State secrets, has had a devastating impact. At the very moment that Yugoslavia started to become aware of the gravity of the economic crisis and of the seriousness of the difficulties that the country was bound to face for an indefinite period, it also discovered a situation in the south of the country that was immediately jeopardizing its serenity and territorial integrity. At the same time the Serbian authorities discovered that their powers practically stopped at the border of the two autonomous regions (Kosovo and Voivodina) where the local authorities had all the means necessary to govern and to escape control from Belgrade, even to the point of being able to lead a policy that in Kosovo was flatly in contrast with the interests of both the Serbian Republic and the Yugoslav Federation.

Confronted with this reality, the Serbian authorities had to admit the fact that their Republic has an inferior status in comparison to the other federated Republics that have no autonomous region on their territory, and can therefore fully exert their sovereignty. The economic crisis has already shown the damage done by the non-existence of a Yugoslav unified market, which was demolished by the complexities of the 1974 Constitution. Now the Kosovo crisis is tragically showing the fragmentation of the Serbian Republic. The unity of Serbia had disappeared thanks to the Constitution itself, which had shown in full light the inequality of the status held by this Republic inside the Federation. In short, the Kosovo crisis has greatly contributed to posing the Serbian question, a question that has to be faced here and now.

The problem of the two autonomous regions of the Serbian Republic, Kosovo and Voivodina, has also focussed the attention of the "Committee for the Defence of Freedom of Thought and Expression", formed by several well-known intellectuals, among whom several members of the Serbian Academy of Science. They have pointed out the fact that the same ethical and cultural conditions on the basis of which the creation of these two autonomous regions has been justified also existed outside of the Serbian Republic, but nowhere else had they brought about the creation of similar self-governing administrative entities.

Thus when the autonomous territory of Kosovo and Metohija (or Kosmet, the name given after the war to what was before called "Ancient Serbia", and is today named Kosovo) was created, the Albanians represented only 8.15% of the population of Serbia. At the same moment in time, Macedonia had 17.12% of Albanians and 8.32% of Turks, but nobody thought of forming an autonomous self-governing territory for these minorities. Similarly, and more important, after the war the Serbian population in Croatia was estimated at around 15% of the total inhabitants of this Republic, a percentage similar, if not higher, than the total share that the Albanians and the Hungarians together formed in the population of Serbia (14.79%). While the two latter minority groups were each entitled to have an autonomous territory inside Serbia - promoted with subsequent constitutional changes to self-governing regions - the Serbs of Croatia did not enjoy such privilege, even though the large majority of them formed a rather compact geographical settlement.

The same irrationality, as has been pointed out by the Committee, can be found, if one considers the role of historical and cultural criteria in the creation

of the Yugoslav federal system. These criteria must have been taken into consideration in the formation of Voivodina, and deemed more important than the ethnical criteria, because this region, already at the end of the war, had a majority of Serbs. But this same cultural criteria has not been respected in the case of Istria and Dalmatia, which, according to their cultural peculiarity, would certainly have been entitled to the same status of autonomy inside the Republic of Croatia.

In raising this point, this Committee of intellectuals went far beyond the debate on the damage done by the Constitution of 1974, and touched on a more delicate issue: that of the very formation of the socialist state and of its federal structure, and therefore on the issue of the nationalities policy followed by the Yugoslav Communist Party, of which the Kosovo was just one aspect. This issue goes beyond the Kosovo tragedy, but because of it, has come again to the forefront of the urgent issues of present-day Yugoslavia.

Ideology-induced blindness

Several sizeable national minorities that were foreign to the southern Slavonic peoples that formed Yugoslavia, Italian, Albanian, German, Hungarian, and others, lived inside the borders that World War II gave to Yugoslavia. Towards them, the revolutionary authorities who took over when the country was freed by the occupying armies did not behave according to one and the same principle. On the contrary their attitude was very differentiated, not so much according to the legacy of the war and the atrocities that had accompanied it, but according to their political projects for the future.

As is well known, Yugoslavia, after having been crushed by the Axis forces in 1941, was dismembered not only by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, but also by the Hungarian and Bulgarian regimes of the time, as well as by the creation of the "Independent Croatian State" under Ante Pavelić, and with the sponsorship of Rome and Berlin, to whom it was allied.

Moreover, under the Italian occupation (Italy already held Albania), the Albanians of Kosovo and Metohija actively participated not only in this dismantling of Yugoslavia, but also in the dismantling of Serbia itself, with a systematic effort to eliminate the Serbian population through massacres, pillages, destruction of monuments, and expulsion, with the aim of making the region "ethnically pure", and eventually creating a Grand Albania.

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This genocidal aim was similar to what was also pursued, on a grander scale, by Pavelić's Ustaschas, who, in the territories under their control, had condemned the Serbian population to disappear in three ways: physical extermination, expulsion, and forced conversion to Catholicism. Similarly, the Hungarians and the Bulgarians slaughtered and expelled the Serbs from the areas inside what had once been Yugoslavia, and on which they had claims and/or aspirations.

By the end of the war, all these foreign minorities logically feared having to pay the price for their participation in the action of the occupying powers. And even more than them, the Croats had reason to fear revenge. But in the eyes of the new rulers of Yugoslavia, what was important was not so much to settle the



quarrels and hatreds of the past, but to build a socialist order, to open a new chapter in human history that would solve all the contradictions and abolish class struggle, thus eliminating the source of all evil, beginning with national conflicts. Hence, since Bulgaria was now a country embarked on the socialist path, the Bulgarian troops which had participated in the occupation of the country were not bothered when they met the armed forces of the new Yugoslav revolutionary power. And since Hungary and Albania were also part

of the Socialist camp, the Hungarian and Albanian minorities of Yugoslavia were not sent back to their homelands; in actual fact they were entitled to have their own self-governing administrative entities.

On the other hand, expulsion was the destiny of the Italians and the Germans, whose home countries were not marching in what the communist leaders considered the direction of history; and the expulsion policy did not pay any attention to political and ideological factors, because German and Italian communist militants were expelled as well. In the perception of the regime that was being created, the Albanians were one of the peoples that had been oppressed by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, dominated by the Serbian bourgeois. The Albanians were thus entitled to their own place in the socialist sun, as is clearly shown by the fact that returning to Kosovo was forbidden to the Serbs who, during the war, had been expelled from this region, or had abandoned it to escape Albanian persecution.

The implementation of this policy in which ideological factors superseded national ones was, of course, not without problems. In Kosovo itself, Tito's government had to fight, at the end of the war, against an armed insurrection organized by the nationalists; and repression was brutal but quite difficult. Moreover, the break with Stalin totally disrupted relations between Belgrade and Tirana, and put an end to all the Yugoslav Communists' plans to create a Balkan Federation, (whose exact formula is still today kept secret) which was supposed to solve all the national questions, like that of Kosovo.

In spite of all these obstacles, Tito kept following his initial project, and in the new domestic order that took its present form in the '60s, an Albanian communist *nomenklatura* became the ruling caste of Kosovo, according to the classical process of the formation of national bureaucracies in Leninist-type regimes. Smartly mixing ideology and nationalism, and also thanks to their strong connections to the central federal Party machinery, and even in the Serbian ruling *élite*, this Albanian *nomenklatura* succeeded in becoming a feudal caste endowed with full powers, including that of favouring the development of Albanian nationalism, which could only strengthen its hold on power. These are the social dynamics which, with the ensuing transformation of everyday life in Kosovo, have brought about the massive Serbian exodus.

The actors and rules of this complex game only began to be understood in the '80s, when the federal power *élite* became aware of the self-destructive

consequences of the policy that they had followed up to then. Some light began to be shed on past management of the Kosovo situation with the purges and the rehabilitations that have taken place in the Kosovo Party machinery in the last few years, as well as the memories and reports of old revolutionaries that presently flood the Yugoslav publishing market. That is how it has been acknowledged that during the war the Albanian presence in the partisan movement was negligible; that is how the contacts which the Albanian Communists have long held with nationalist elements who have actually never given up the old project of uniting Kosovo to Albania have been discovered. Subsequently some light has also been shed on central power manipulation to conceal this reality, which is as disagreeable for the central ruling *élite* and its national ideology as it is for the Kosovo *nomenklatura*.

Looking back over the postwar period, it appears very clear that Albanian nationalism has never died, and that it has actually always been much stronger than the communist ideology which was supposed to bring about its disappearance. In the end, contrary to what the ruling Yugoslav *élite* had believed, nationalism has used communism, and not the other way around. And this nationalism has always and fundamentally been anti-Serbian, and still is today. In concealing this evidence because of their ideology-induced blindness, and in order not to contradict the main principle of its national policy, the struggle against "Grand Serbian hegemonism", a principle created by the Komintern before the war, the Yugoslav Communist Party has thus debased the only principle that it could oppose to Albanian chauvinism in order to prove the legitimacy of Kosovo being part of Yugoslavia; and this principle is the indisputable fact that historically Kosovo and Metohja belong to Serbia.

Historical legitimacy

It was, indeed, on this land that the Serbian nation was born and entered into history, on this land that its medieval State grew, and its civilization flourished, and its Christian faith brought about the building of churches and monasteries that still today bear testimony to that past. These monuments are one of the main artistic and spiritual treasures of the Byzantine and Orthodox world, and have long represented the values that enabled the Serbian people to keep its identity in spite of Ottoman domination, and to finally recover independence and freedom in the nineteenth century. In its golden age, as well as during the dark age of Turkish occupation, the Serbs have continuously and intensively inhabited this region; it was only in the early nineteenth century that the grand

exodus began, as a result of the suppression engineered by the occupying power which utilized the Islamized Albanians for its purposes. The latter were indeed able to make use of the privileges that ensued from their conversion to the religion of the occupier, and, starting in the sixteenth century, came in regular waves to settle in these fertile regions. This is the way in which the demographic map of the territory was deeply modified during the last century. And it is quite impressive that the methods utilized in these last few years to force the Serbian population to flee from the country and leave it open to Albanian colonization are quite similar to those that were common in these past centuries of terror and atrocity; and similar to the methods that were applied during the two World Wars of this century when Yugoslavia was under Austrian and Italian occupation.

Unwilling to base their claim on the only possible historical legitimacy which could be used to explain Kosovo's being inside the Yugoslav borders, the Belgrade authorities have been amateurish and inefficient in defending the national interest, and incapable of making their point against the reasoning according to which the Kosovo problem is just one more chapter of the decolonization process.

The fact that the Kosovo crisis has helped push the Serbian question again into the forefront of Yugoslav political life does not, however, mean that there does not also exist an Albanian question of growing seriousness and complexity. To both these problems, the ruling *élite* presently in power in the Belgrade Federal government seems incapable of finding an answer. The change of the official views on Kosovo that the communist power has recently attempted has neither stabilized the situation, nor put an end to the Serbian exodus. Because of their demographic development, amongst the most dynamic in the world, the Albanian presence has continued to grow, not only in Kosovo and Metohija, but also in Serbia, in Montenegro and Macedonia, whose capital city, Skopje, is supposed to have, according to an estimate, around one third of its population formed by Albanians. All signs suggest that the Kosovo crisis which has come into the limelight in the '80s will breed more crisis, to the great misfortune of all the people concerned.