

Albert Rakipi

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO
IS UNIFICATION
THE COMMON FUTURE?



Tirana, 2020



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To Xhorxh, Junik, Arabel and Charlie

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Introduction

What should be done to end the drama in which the Albanian question is trapped?¹ This question, posed by the Republic of Albania's Academy of Sciences in its Platform of 1998 on the resolution of the national issue, was 'answered' twenty years later by the Prime Minister of Albania - and answered twice.

The first occasion was on 18 February 2018, during the jubilee festivities for the tenth anniversary of Kosovo's independence. Speaking in a plenary session of the Kosovo Parliament, Albania's Prime Minister proposed the election of a common President for Albania and Kosovo.² This entirely unexpected proposal only reinforced the stillness of the parliamentary chamber, decorated with the national red and black flag which is officially that of the Republic of Albania. The surprise of the Republic of Kosovo's 120 deputies, and almost all of Tirana's political 'celebrities', likewise present in the solemn session, their attempts to stifle

their surprise, and the occasional ironic smile from political representatives from both sides of the border, demonstrated that the proposal was merely an idea of Albania's Prime Minister, without consultation in Tirana or in Pristina.

The second was on 26 November 2018, during a joint meeting of the governments of Albania and Kosovo in Peja. Albanian Prime Minister Rama suggested to the Kosovo's Prime Minister that their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs should begin work for *the preparation of a strategic document for the unification of Albania with Kosovo in 2025*. Taken by surprise, Kosovo Prime Minister Haradinaj - host of the joint gathering - accepted in front of the media that they had indeed discussed 'the preparation of an analytic, strategic document covering how they would progress towards 2025' and what the Albanian perspective in the Balkans would be,³ but without referring to unification of the two states.

During the last twenty years these have been the only two proposals coming from Albanian state institutions, following the Platform of the Academy of Science made public in 1998. In that platform, labelled a *treaty* of Albanian nationalism for the 'realization of a Greater Albania', to the question of what should be done to resolve the drama of the Albanian national issue, the Academy of Sciences replied: 'The only solution is urgent intervention by the International Community to oblige Belgrade to recognize the Republic of Kosovo as an independent state and... one open to both Serbia and Albania.'⁴ At that time, twenty years ago, the Academy proposed an independent Kosovo as the maximal objective in the resolution of the national issue, including that reference to openness in both directions.

But what has occurred to influence Albania's attitude to the

objective of the Academy of Sciences? Why, twenty years after the liberation of Kosovo from Serbia and ten years after the declaration and recognition of an independent Kosovo, was Albania seeking unification? What has really transpired in relations between the two states? Is unification the common future of the two states, and are the two of them ready for such a thing?

At the strategic level, Albania and Kosovo perceive their common future as members of the European Union, and this is mentioned ever more frequently. During the past six or seven years, meanwhile, the idea of the unification of the two states - or of *national unification* - has been ever more present in political discourse in Albania and in a series of initiatives undertaken chiefly by the Albanian government.

Beginning in 2014, Albania and Kosovo organized inter-governmental meetings, an initiative first proposed by authorities in Tirana.⁵ None of the many agreements signed in those meetings, including the agreement for strategic partnership, refers explicitly to the unification of the states. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of the scenography of such meetings, colorfully decorated with national symbols, where political leaders speak in ambiguous terms of the nation, the common future and unification⁶, coupled with reports on plans for open borders and a common customs union⁷, is such that it lends strength to the idea that the future of the two states lies in their unification.

In parallel with the bilateral relations between Albania and Kosovo, there appears to be another context nourishing the narrative of union or *national unification*: Albania's relations with the European Union, and in particular the sense of *stasis*,

if not indeed backwards steps in the process of the country's European integration. The thesis that besides *union with Europe*, there is an alternative possibility of 'union of Albanians among themselves', seems to appear with ever greater frequency in the political narrative in Albania.⁸ When two years ago, in November 2018, the Albanian Prime Minister asked the Kosovo Prime Minister that their Foreign Ministries should begin to prepare a strategy for union by 2025,⁹ the principle argument for union had to do with the European Union's unwillingness to move the integration process forwards with Albania and Kosovo. Such approaches accordingly have the air of both revenge and pressure, if not indeed blackmail, in response to that lack of will.

However it may be, the notion is growing in the country that *national unification* might be an alternative to Albania's European integration. Should 'Europe close her doors to Albania' then the option of pan-national union would remain, meaning principally unification with Kosovo.

Besides this context, the idea of unification continues to be sustained by two related arguments. The historical argument suggests that the Albanian nation and lands were divided unjustly, and that national unification would redress an historical injustice and finally resolve the Albanian National Question.

The second argument has to do with the *viability* of the Albanian state. The reason why Albania historically has been and remains a weak state, barely viable or functional, is 'the division of the nation and the fragmentation of its territories'. The unification of all Albanians and all Albanian lands would facilitate a functional, strong and competitive state, would guarantee economic progress

and would increase the country's political and diplomatic might, and the weight of the Albanian nation.

Meanwhile, the theory of a union on the basis of religion continues to circulate in the international media. According to this thesis, the EU's refusal to accept Albania - a country with a Muslim majority - will increasingly encourage it to cohere in an Islamic axis with other countries of the same faith, first of all Kosovo.¹⁰

Regardless of the cause, the fact remains that the issue of an Albania-Kosovo unification is becoming ever more prominent.

Historically, the notion of Kosovo's union with Albania, represented as *the resolution of the national question*, has been exclusively the preserve of nationalist/populist circles, predominantly concentrated in the Albanian diaspora and which yielded no influence in shaping governmental policy. Yet over the last five to six years, the idea of unification has become part of the political narratives of significant political parties and has attracted significant media coverage. During this period, public support *for unification* has grown to a surprising - even spectacular - degree. Were there to have been a referendum in Albania in 2018 on the question of union, 74.8% would have voted yes to it.¹¹ Were this referendum to have been held in Kosovo, proponents of unification would still have won but with a smaller total, 63.9%.¹²

Whither Albania and Kosovo?

This study offers a critical review of the issue of unification

between Albania and Kosovo, attempting to answer the following questions: Are Albania and Kosovo heading towards unification? Is union of the two states truly desirable? Why should they unite? Is union feasible? Is union an alternative to European integration? Are European integration and national union mutually-exclusive? What would be the possible implications of unification in Albania's domestic environment, and for the state which would be its product? Finally, what would be the potential implications for the international relations of the new state?

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Bota Sot. 2018. "Edi Rama: Kosova dhe Shqipëria do ta kenë një president të përbashkët të Unitetit Kombëtar". Accessed on: 18/02/2018 <https://www.botasot.info/lajme/837341/edi-rama-kosova-dhe-shqiperia-do-ta-kene-nje-president-te-perbashket-te-unitetit-kombetar/>
- 3 Time.al. 2018. "Serbia me tre fytyra, Shqipëria e Kosova me një fytyrë, kuq e zi" Accessed: 20/05/2020 <http://time.ikub.al/18-11-26-Fjalimi-kuq-e-zi-i-kryeministrit-te-Shqiperise-ne-mbledhjen-e-dy-Querverive703980/Serbia-me-tre-fytyra-Shqiperia-e-Kosova-me-nje-fytyre-kuq-e-zi-.aspx>
- 4 Academy, Platform p. 41.
- 5 The first joint meeting of the two governments, considered an historic development, was arranged in Prizren, emphasizing the link between this first joint meeting and the symbolism of the movement for national unity, represented by the League of Prizren formed there in 1878.
- 6 Zeri. 2019. "Edi Rama paralajmëron bashkimin e Kosovës me Shqipërinë!" Accessed on 20/05/2020 <https://zeri.info/aktuale/235135/edi-rama-paralajmeron-bashkimin-e-kosoves-me-shqiperine/>
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- 11 Demi, Agron and Blendi Ceka. 2019. "Kosova-Albania Interaction, Knowledge, values, beliefs, cooperation and unification." Kosova Foundation for Open Society / Fondacioni Shoqëria e Hapur për Shqipërinë , Tirana 2019, p. 12.
- 12 Ibidem.

Chapter I

ALBANIA AND KOSOVO: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The recognition of the Albanian state by the Great Powers in 1913 did not conclusively or satisfactorily resolve the *Albanian National Question*. Leaving almost half of the territories occupied by Albanians outside the borders of the new state defined the national issue, which has endured to the present day, more than one hundred years later, namely the eventual reunification of all former Albanian lands.

The original objectives of the Albanian national movement were partially realized by gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire and the recognition of an Albanian state. The new objectives of the movement and the newly-created state focused on the restoration of an ethnic Albania, and

consequently unification of all territories occupied by ethnic Albanians.

Over more than a century, Albania and Kosovo have functioned as two divided societies, economies and markets. The creation by the Nazis, for a brief period during the Second World War, of a *natural Albania* approximately congruent with ethnic boundaries, fell well short of a functioning unitary state with hierarchic central and local governance and an integrated economy. After the Second World War Kosovo was included within Yugoslavia, while Albania was confined in an increasingly extreme isolation. During the difficult years of the 1990s, when the communist regime fell and Yugoslavia began to collapse in bloody conflict, it was barely possible to establish communication and co-operation, let alone economic links and trade, between Albania and Kosovo; their shared border resembled that of the Cold War. Formally the boundary with Serbia and Montenegro, it was shattered violently after the onset of the war in Kosovo when at least half a million Kosovars crossed seeking refuge in Albania.

Kosovo and the Albanian National Question

In the context of *national unification* - in practice the union in one state of all territories occupied by Albanians - Kosovo had a central role in Ottoman Albania in every possible respect: historical, geographic, cultural and economic.¹³ Kosovo was the cradle of Albanian nationalism.¹⁴ The Albanian national movement for independence began in Kosovo with the League of Prizren.

After the recognition of the Albanian state in 1913, there were two arguments that shaped and redefined the national question. Firstly, Albanians considered the decision by the European Great Powers to recognize an Albanian state whilst excluding half of Albanian territories to be an injustice. Recognition of the Albanian state was at the same time a sundering of the Albanian lands. Accordingly, unification with Kosovo and the other territories with the new state represented the resolution of a historical injustice. Even today, the desire to remedy such injustice remains the driving force behind calls for unification.

A second and equally important argument relates to the viability and sustainability of the state recognized in 1913. The principal idea behind this argument is that a truncated Albania could never become a functional state.¹⁵ The recognition of Albanian statehood was certainly a development of historical importance, but at the same time fatal for its functioning and future. On the threshold of the First World War, when the European Great Powers' experiment with an Albanian royal principality under Prince Wied came to an end, his private secretary foretold precisely the impossibility of a state working when half of its natural territories, markets and citizens were left outside its borders:

‘The borders of the new kingdom did not satisfy the Albanians, who saw themselves cut in half and without the greater part of their bigger cities. The purely Albanian cities, with established markets, covering their areas such as Gjakova, Prizren, Dibra and Struga were handed over to Serbia and Montenegro. The inhabitants of northern and eastern Albania were cut off from their markets and their civiliza-

*tion ... This division lay the foundations for future problems... this interruption laid the foundation of future turmoil*¹⁶

Arguments about Albania's incapacity to be a functional state, because her territory, governance and its civilization were divided arbitrarily in 1913, have remained fundamental to the narrative of *national unification*.

Even today, more than one hundred years later, these are the central elements of the discourse around and motivation towards unification, among people and parties in Albania, Kosovo and the diaspora. In addition, these arguments represent a core element for political organizations and parties, the most of significant of which is Vetëvendosje in Kosovo.¹⁷

For the '*National Qquestion*' in Albania, Kosovo and especially the diaspora in the west, the overarching narrative has historically had at its centre the argument of 'historical injustice and the fragmentation of the Albanian territories', and the dream of rectifying this injustice. Nevertheless, leaders of Albanian nationalist groups have combined both arguments in their political formulations: the 'correction of historical injustice' and also the necessity of uniting Kosovo and the other territories with Albania as a *sine qua non* of a viable, strong and functional state.

In the first decade after the recognition of Albanian statehood, proponents of the national cause argued that in light of the territorial exclusion of lands inhabited by ethnic Albanians from its borders, this newly formed entity could never be a

sustainable and functioning state.¹⁸ However, the theme of the ‘historical injustice’ and *the necessity of resolving this injustice* have been an ever more present and important element of the narrative around unification. This concept was accepted even in communist Albania during the Cold War, when national issues were generally suppressed.

Although at the theoretical level the full resolution of the Albanian National Question comprises the unification in one state of all lands inhabited by Albanians,¹⁹ at a more practical level *national unification* is understood to mean the unification of Kosovo with Albania. Besides the fact that it has historically been the heart of the national cause, Kosovo has also had a compact territory and population, and it has remained a unitary economic and cultural unit. Until the establishment of the Albanian state in 1913 Kosovo was part of a greater economic and cultural entity, Ottoman Albania. In September 1912 - when, after the Albanian risings, the Turkish government agreed to recognize an autonomous Albanian state, something which in fact remained only a concept - the Vilayet of Kosovo was a more central component than those of Shkodra, Janina and Manastir.²⁰

The identification of the national question with Kosovo has been apparent through all the evolutions of the Albanian state, regardless of the diverse regimes that have governed. In the political debate that accompanied the establishment of the Albanian state and the ‘fragmentation of Albanian lands’ and for at least its first decade, Kosovo was central.

1913-1990 - In search of a Mother-Country

In 1913, when the European powers came to recognize an Albanian state while at the same time dividing Albanian lands, the state that was created was the *mother-country* for Kosovo and the other Albanian populations, which formed compact communities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and the after the Second World War the Yugoslav Federation. The dynamic of relations between Albania and Kosovo from the international recognition of the first as a state to the declaration of the second as an independent state in 2008 was defined relative to international contexts, the role and influence of the Great Powers, the role and ambitions of Balkan neighbours, and one other crucial fact: a historically weak Albania, critically dependent on foreign support.

In such circumstances Albania was incapable of playing the role of mother country towards Albanians who remained as minorities outside her borders. The independence of Albania was not a singular act, but a relatively long process; the first decade after the declaration of independence was vital to the very existence of the new state. At the peace conference at the end of the First World War, Albanian Officials managed to stave off calls for the redrawing of its borders, which were agreed upon in 1913.²¹ In an unfriendly international environment it was utterly impossible for Albania to seek unification with Kosovo and other territories. The Albanian question was finally decided in 1921, at the Conference of Ambassadors, which reaffirmed the validity of the 1913 agreement, according to which Kosovo remained outside state borders.

Even with the coming to power of Zog, first as President in 1925 and subsequently as King in 1928, Albania remained an extremely weak state. With these domestic circumstances, and with wholly unfavorable international circumstances, it was difficult for Albania to devote itself to the national question. From its very beginning, the chronic weakness of the state made it very difficult, if not impossible, to seek union with Kosovo and other Albanian lands. During the reign of King Zog, state interests took precedence over national interests, and this could be clearly seen in the fact that Kosovo was no longer on the government's agenda. King Zog even adopted a restrictive policy towards the political activities of Kosovar leaders and representatives resident in Tirana, although the reasons for this may also be found in the political struggle for power within Albania. Some of Zog's political rivals were prominent advocates for Kosovo.²²

In the internal political struggle between the parties following the Congress of Lushnje, the prominent leaders of the Committee of Kosovo²³ were avowed opponents of Zog. In December 1921, when Ahmet Zogu took control of the government and established martial law, his first step was to deprive the leaders of the Kosovo Committee of their parliamentary mandates,²⁴ with the justification that the Committee was damaging the normalization of relations with Yugoslavia.²⁵

Indeed, under Ahmet Zogu Albania's relations with Kosovo were substantially defined by its foreign policy towards Yugoslavia. And this policy was significantly influenced by the fact that it was with Yugoslav assistance that Zogu overthrew the government of Fan Noli in December 1924.

In the Second World War, the future of Kosovo was a fundamental issue dividing two resistance groups, the National Liberation Movement, dominated by communists, and the Nationalist movement steered by the Balli Kombetar ('National Front').²⁶ From the first days of their arrival in Albania the Germans made clear that they wanted the country to have its ethnic boundaries, and in the development of the German Albania Kosovo had strategic significance. The Germans declared that true unification of Kosovo with Albania was only possible thanks to them. They suggested to the Albanian public that the allies had been and continued silent on the subject of Kosovo and its future, letting it be understood the allies wanted to hand Kosovo back to Yugoslavia.²⁷ Unification with Kosovo was indeed an important policy objective of German forces in Albania. Although the pursuit of such policy was justified on ethnic grounds, for the Germans the assimilation of Albanian territories into a "Greater Albania" was also highly desirable from an administrative perspective.

Meanwhile, as part of their close engagement during the war, the Communist Parties of Albania and Yugoslavia seemed to have agreed that the only correction of borders which might transpire related to Kosovo. With the end of the Second World War, Kosovo was included within the Yugoslav Federation²⁸, in spite of Tito's promise to grant ethnic minorities a right to self-determination and the efforts of the partisan movement in Kosovo, which continuously supported unification with Albania.

Albania and Kosovo, the first as an independent state and the second as part of the Yugoslav Federation, existed for nearly five decades entirely isolated from one-another. This was with

the exception of a very brief period, at the start of the 1970s, of revived relations and contacts. Albania and Yugoslavia had another moment of rapprochement following the rift of 1948 when they both feared the threat of the Soviet Union. On top of a ceasefire in the propaganda war against Belgrade, Tirana went as far as declaring that it would come to the aid of Yugoslavia in case of an attack by the Soviet Union.²⁹ In any case, this second honeymoon served distinctively to invigorate relations between Albania and Kosovo in academia, education, culture and media. The sponsors of this co-operation were the two respective universities, as well as cultural centres, television broadcasters, publishing houses and Writers' Associations.³⁰

This very brief period of warming relations was interrupted by the return to the full isolation which otherwise characterized Albanian-Yugoslav relations after the Second World War, which in consequence created a wider gulf between Albanians living in Albania and those living in Kosovo, as their respective governments adopted different models of societal development and state-building. Whilst communist Albania was the most extreme example of dictatorship in the east, Kosovo generally operated under a regime that was more liberal and open to the world, in contrast to the utter isolation across the border. Although societies in both Albania and Kosovo remained traditional, functioning chiefly on the basis of the clan, they developed different political cultures. For all the discriminatory and oppressive policies pursued by Belgrade, the Albanians of Kosovo enjoyed freedom of movement³¹, education, religious practice and private property, which remained a dream in Albania until 1990. These very different realities fostered differences in the relationship between individuals and their laws and states. The Cold War somehow further deepened the distinction between these

two Albanian societies.³²

Communication was absent throughout this period, and the gaps widened. The government of Albania ignored the question of Kosovo. From the coming to power of the communists in Albania to the end of the Cold War, the Kosovo issue was more or less moth-balled. Domestically but also externally, Albania's communist regime fostered an impression of nationalism, but in practice national interests were peripheral and secondary, if not entirely forgotten. The priority was communist internationalism and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Although the communist regime and its propaganda spoke of the fatherland, the nation, history, wars, historical injustices, and enemies domestic and foreign - thereby sustaining the myth of the indivisible nation - Kosovo and the national question were part neither of the self-explanatory nationalist narrative nor of the regime's international policies and initiatives. It is clear that the survival of the regime and the preservation of authority were unquestionably the priorities, and the regime was ready to sacrifice everything else to hold on to power.

Meanwhile, throughout the Cold War communist Albania was too feeble a force to be able to care for Kosovo or other former lands in Yugoslavia. In circumstances when it was merely a client-state of Yugoslavia,³³ there was no chance that Albania could play the role of *mother country* towards Kosovo, much less that it could seek unification. Even the break in relations with Yugoslavia and Albania's rapprochement with the Soviet Union, one of the world's two superpowers, brought no change in foreign policy in general nor relations with Kosovo in partic-

ular. Yugoslavia's rapprochement with the Soviet Union further exacerbated the situation, and an independent foreign policy became quite impossible. As would be clear in the regime's engagement and subsequent rift with China, the limit of communist Albania's real sovereignty was the policy of total economic and political self isolation.

Until the fall of the communist regime, for Albanians in Albania, Kosovo was a myth discussed less and less: the other half of the nation lived beyond the borders, but the borders were impassable.

The Question of Unification after the Cold War

With the end of the Cold War, the fall of communism in Albania and the beginning of the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation, there was a resurgence of the debate about the national question. The idea of unification of all Albanian lands in one state was based once again on the notion of rectifying an historical injustice, but also on the thesis of the sustainability and functionality of the 'mother' state. With the start of Yugoslavia's collapse, joining Kosovo to Albania was an option that, in theory at least, could not be excluded. For some peripheral nationalist circles in Albania, and for the most active and prominent nationalist circles of the diaspora, Kosovo's unification with the *mother country* would represent a resolution to the national question.³⁴

In the programmes of parties and patriotic associations - including the Democratic Party, the first opposition party in 1990

- the 'national question' and Kosovo in particular occupied a prominent position. In 1998 the Albanian Academy of Sciences published its platform for the resolution of the national question, the basis of which was the 'unification of all lands in one unified Albanian state'.³⁵ In the constitutional package of 1992 and the preamble to the constitution of 1998, and indeed after the 2008 amendments, Albania recognized the legitimacy and the *centuries-old aspiration of the Albanian people for national identity and unity*.³⁶ However, in spite of the constitution, the party programmes, the Academy Platform and the media discourse, successive post-communist governments formulated no concrete policy whatever and undertook no concrete measures.

After the fall of the communist regime, a number of factors defined Albania's orientation and policy towards Kosovo and the national question. Firstly, Albania emerged from communism as a very weak, close to failed state with a bankrupt economy; and for all the militarization of Albania's economy and society there was no question of any significant military capacity. It was utterly impossible for Albania to go to war for Kosovo in 1990, when it lacked the military and economic capacity for its own defence and security. Secondly, and not only in 1990 when it appeared a failed state but later - even now, decades later, when the country is a NATO member - Albania is in no condition to exercise independence in foreign policy, much less sovereignty. This is especially the case with regard to Kosovo or other former lands of Ottoman Albania, which from 1913 have been and remain within the borders of other internationally-recognized states.

Until 2008, Kosovo remained part of the *national question*, at least in theory. Through nearly three decades after the fall of

communism, Albania showed no political ambition to, in one way or another, assimilate Kosovo as part of its territory. Despite the political agendas of some Albanian politicians, the commitments and obligations acknowledged in the Albanian Constitution, in practice the Albanian government failed to undertake any concrete steps to support any of the options formulated by the Kosovo leadership or other Albanian parties in Montenegro and Macedonia. With a weak state and an almost existential level of dependence from foreign support, Albania merely endorsed western policies in the Balkans, especially towards Kosovo.

During two key phases for the future of Kosovo - in 1991, when it became clear that Yugoslavia was on course for disintegration and in 1997-98, when the Kosovo war exploded, Albania was in the middle of the gravest crises of its modern existence. In 1991, when it found itself in an extremity of weakness, the Albanian government envisioned that Kosovo would remain part of Yugoslavia and that the latter would promote the establishment of democratic processes³⁷. In practice, it supported none of the models proposed by Kosovo's political leaders. With the eruption of civil war in 1997-1998, when de facto it had almost ceased to exist as a state, losing control of its territory, the Albanian government's involvement in this matter was limited to calls for respecting the rights of Albanian minorities within Yugoslavia, implicitly treating Kosovo as a domestic issue for Yugoslavia. In a meeting with Milošević at the Crete Summit in November 1997,³⁸ the Albanian Prime Minister sought equal treatment of Albanians in Yugoslavia, as regards human rights and freedoms.³⁹

Tirana's subsequent position evolved, continuing to adapt

itself to the situation on the ground and certainly to the position of the international community, leading eventually to support for Kosovo's independence. Both Albania and Kosovo - the latter in its constitution - rejected the possibility of changes to the borders of the new state, and thereby the possibility of unification.

Nevertheless, even after the declaration of independence in 2008 and the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state,⁴⁰ unification with Albania continued to be an option. But it was no longer as the integration of a territory and its people, left outside the borders of the *mother country* in 1913, rather as the joining of two independent states.

ENDNOTES

- 13 Kosova was one of the four vilayets of the Albanian lands in Ottoman times. See Malcolm, Noel, *Kosova a Short History*, Chapter 6, *Early Ottoman Kosova: 1450s-1580s*, Pan Books 1998.
- 14 Skëndi, Stavro. 1967. *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878–1912* (Princeton).
- 15 Biberaj, Elez. 2000. *The Albanian National Question* (New York: New York Council of Foreign Relations Press)
- 16 Heaton-Armstrong, D. Prince Wied: The six months Kingdom. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies, AIIS 2012, p. 7
- 17 Article One of the Statutes of Kosova's Vetëvendosje declares that the Movement 'aims for sovereign Kosova, thus a Kosova with control of its natural resources and which enjoys the right to have an independent military force of its own, and the right to unification with Albania. Accessed on 24/02/2019: <https://www.vetevendosje.org/statuti/>. Whereas in Albania the Red and Black Alliance declared that its mission aimed 'to defend the Constitution of the Republic, and to defend human dignity, while transforming into a symbol of resistance on the national question', without referring explicitly to union with Kosova.
- 18 Heaton Armstrong, D. 2012. *Prince Wied, the sixth month kingdom*. Tirana: AIIS Publications.
- 19 For Albanian nationalists, a pure national union would encompass unification in one state not only of the lands given to the former Yugoslavia but also of territories such as Chameria, etcetera.
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- 23 For the committee for the "National Defence of Kosova" see https://sq.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komiteti_Mbrojtja_Kombëtare_e_Kosovës
- 24 The committee for the national defence of Kosova was founded in Shkodra in November 1918, by a distinguished group of Kosovan political leaders led by Hasan Prishtina. The committee strove to include Kosova within the borders of the Albanian state. See Malcolm, Noel. 1998 *Kosova a Short History*, Chapter 14.
- 25 Pollo, Stefanaq and Arben Puto. 1981. *The History of Albania, from its origin to the present day*. London Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kenan Paul, p. 186-187.
- 26 Pano, Nicholas. 1968. *The Peoples's Republic of Albania*. New York: John Hopkins Press.

- 27 Fischer, Bernd J. 1999. *Albania at War, 1939-1945*. London: Hurst & Company
- 28 See Malcolm, Noel. 1998 *Kosova a Short History*, Chapter 16. *Kosova under Tito: 1945-1980*. For relations between Albania and Kosova during the period see Elez Biberaj 2000, *The Albanian National Question* (New York: New York Council of Foreign Relations Press)
- 29 Biberaj, Elez. 2014. *Çështja Kombëtare Shqiptare*. Tirana: Institute of International Studies p. 30.
- 30 Agreements to co-operate were signed between the State University of Tirana and the University of Prishtina. The period saw mutual academic exchanges, principally of professors of the two institutions; common projects were undertaken in the fields of science and culture, including publications. See Sabit Syla, *Shteti Shqiptar dhe çështja e Kosovës 1939-1981*, Chapter 4, Prishtina Institute of History, Prishtina 2012.
- 31 It appears ironic that today citizens of Kosova must secure a visa to visit EU countries, the USA and other western states regardless of which of them have not recognized independence, while 30 years ago they were free to travel to almost any country of the world (except Albania!).
- 32 Interview with Arben Hajrullahu: I believe that an ethnic Albanian from Graçanica and an ethnic Serb from Graçanica - when it comes to social life, how they see they way they live, the path their life will take - have more in common thanks to their common experiences than that Serb from Graçanica would have with a Serb from Belgrade, or the Albanian from Graçanica with an Albanian from Gjirokastra.
- 33 Krisafi, Ledion. 2017 *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia: Mitet, faktet dhe dyshimet (1945-1948)* Tirana: Naimi.
- 34 For these nationalist circles, the full and fair resolution of the Albanian national question is union of all Albanian lands in one state.
- 35 Academy of Sciences of Albania, *Platform for the Resolution of the Albanian National Issue*. Tirana, 1998
- 36 Constitution of the Republic of Albania. Accessed 12/10/2019 <http://president.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/kushtetuta-perditesuar-1.pdf>
- 37 Interview with a former senior official of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.
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Chapter II

UNIFICATION OF ALBANIA AND KOSOVO: PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES

Since Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, the governments of Albania and Kosovo have sought to develop relations appropriate between two independent states. During this time, the idea of unification has been "under discussion and development" in two different if not necessarily mutually-exclusive spheres. One is the sphere of imagination, sentiment, perceptions, symbols and theories by which history in general and the Albanian national cause in particular is interpreted. This is the mythical sphere, within which the only just option is unification. It is apparent that this sphere, the world of myth, is in no way democratic. The second sphere comprises of the political, trade, scientific and societal relations between the two states. This is the true sphere of relations between Albania and Kosovo. To a certain extent, the mythical sphere

also forms part of the real sphere of Albania-Kosovo relations.

Unlike the mythic sphere, which is totalitarian in character, the sphere of reality is democratic, multi-textured, open to discussion and continuously changing. The mythic and real spheres exist and function in parallel, and they also interact with and influence one another. Occasionally the interaction between them is so considerable that the line between them becomes obscured. This seems to be because the personalities - the protagonists, the players - are the same: statesmen, politicians across the spectrum, populists, nationalists and patriots (meaning also charlatans) of all kinds.

A critical review of developments within each sphere and in their inter-dependence is essential to understanding and explaining them, and to answering the question: Is the unification of Albania and Kosovo desirable, necessary and useful? Is union possible and permissible in constitutional and international law, and the international conventions that Albania has signed or is expected to in the future? Finally, though no less important, in the case of an eventual unification, what would be the political, socio-economic, religious and security implications first for Albania and the state that would result, and second for the Balkan region?

Popular Support for Unification: Welcome to the World of Myth

More than one hundred years after the founding and recognition of Albania as an independent state, thirty years after

the start of the disintegration of Yugoslavia and twelve years after the declaration and recognition of Kosovo's independence, the idea of unification of Albania and Kosovo occupies an important place not only in popular/nationalist discourse inside and outside Albania but also more widely in society. For many, unification would signify the resolution of the national question, namely that Kosovo should be unified with its mother country. In spite of the profound contextual changes that have occurred since creation of the modern Albanian state in 1912, which culminate with Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, in the discourse around unification Kosovo is still treated as a territory, and not as an independent state.

In the eyes of Albanian society, the idea of the unification with Kosovo enjoys popular support. In the event of a referendum, a substantial majority - some 75%⁴¹ - of citizens of the Republic of Albania would vote for it. This amounts to a popular mandate for *national unification*, and, if we continued the excursion through the world of perceptions, we would discover other data confirming that support for unification is widespread and indeed increasing. Thus in 2012, support for unification was at 62%.

In 2010, just 9% of Albanian citizens saw unification as something positive.⁴² Thus, within just less than a decade, the number of those in favour had increased seven-fold - reaching 58%. In the last four or five years the majority of Albanian citizens - 84% - have thought that relations between Albania and Kosovo are good or very good. Likewise, a substantial majority - some 87% - believe that in the future relations will deepen and the countries will grow still closer.⁴³

But those last two statistics, revealing the perceptions of

citizens about the state of relations between Albania and Kosovo and current co-operation, and their great optimism about the future of this collaboration, suggest that statistics alone - which come from the mythic sphere - are not enough to understand and explain the nature of Albania-Kosovo relations, the levels of collaboration and the prospects for the future. It is necessary to engage with the sphere of reality.

Poor Relations and Growing Tensions

During the last decade, the development of Kosovo-Albania relations has been marked by an impressive level of progress. The two states appear committed to increase inter-state cooperation. There are not - and naturally there is no need for - disagreements over territory, minorities or similar issues that are typical for neighboring states and which can lead towards conflict. Progress in trade relations has not been lacking either. In the first five years of independence, the general volume of trade between Albania and Kosovo reached 160 million Euros⁴⁴, and last year (2019) exchanges reached 306 million Euros⁴⁵.

However, there exist a variety of factors which hinder the prospects of increased economic cooperation and the further development of relations between the two states. On the onset, it is important to note that the two countries are not trying to rekindle pre-existing economic or political relations with one another, as these simply did not exist, in light of both Albania's political and economic isolation during communist rule as well as Kosovo's lack of statehood before 2008. It is rather the case that the governments of Albania and Kosovo are trying to

forge a new path towards political and economic cooperation. Another crucial factor that serves as a hindrance to the further development of trade relations between the two countries is the influence of what Tim Judah refers to as the Yugosphere, a term which serves to describe the current relevance of previously existing trade relations and structures between former Yugoslav republics. For all other states in the Balkans, economic cooperation after the collapse of Yugoslavia was a case of “back to the future”. In trying to ensure future economic growth, the newly formed states simply relied on already existing trade structures. The fact that Albania was not part of the Yugoslav federation and that moreover its government was extremely hostile to the latter, coupled with the almost non-existent political and trade relations between Kosovo and Albania before 2008, puts Albania at a comparative disadvantage in its efforts to build trade relations with Kosovo. Secondly, the economic structures of Albania and Kosovo have been dominated by agriculture, and focused historically on sustaining the population. The level of industrialization in Albania and Kosovo, not dissimilar to that in other Balkan states, despite some advances remains low - and so accordingly does the level of integration with the European and global economies. Third, Albania’s market and economy are chiefly oriented towards EU Member States, particularly Italy and Greece.

For all the progress, and a tendency to improvement, relations between Albania and Kosovo remain generally weak.⁴⁶ Right from 2008, political engagement and inter-state cooperation between them was more about protocol and ceremony than anything substantial,⁴⁷ with much folklore and formality but little content.⁴⁸

The extent and depth of state relations between Albania and Kosovo may be considered normal for two neighboring states.⁴⁹ There is an absence of planning and strategic thinking,⁵⁰ and of any common vision of harmonized strategy.⁵¹ Inexplicably, cooperation and exchanges between academic and research institutions in Albania and Kosovo are sporadic.

It is true that there is improved communication between the two societies, thanks to the opening up of both and improved road infrastructure. ‘The National Highway’, which has linked them for more than a decade, has invigorated communication and collaboration. With technological developments, the internet and social networks, cooperation between Albania and Kosovo has a growing inter-dependence. Traditional media and their market have nonetheless developed independently. Today all Albanian newspapers are available in Kosovo, and vice-versa. Cultural programming on television is less balanced, with Albania’s more present in Kosovo. Although it is undoubtedly the case that societal relations between the two populations have developed and are continuing to do so, such growth has not been the product of a concerted effort by the governments in Tirana and Prishtina.⁵²

There are a considerable number of agreements signed between the two states, but most seem to be protocols and memoranda of cooperation, by which the parties merely agree in principle to work together. A significant number of them have not been implemented, and the two governments have recently committed to an inter-governmental commission to discuss precisely this. Most of these agreements lack instruments, deadlines and statements of responsibility for each party, which

would render them practicable and useful.

Over the last four or five years, the two governments have organized pompous joint meetings, choreographed with much colour and national symbology of the kind likely to excite nationalists and populists on both sides of the border⁵³, but in practice there are significant barriers slowing economic cooperation and trade exchanges. Reciprocal capital investments are currently still insignificant, while cooperation in fields such as energy, banking services, and telecommunications is still rudimentary, despite the large advantages in these sectors.⁵⁴ On top of the lack of improvement in relations, they are not free of strains and indeed recriminations.⁵⁵

The grand facades, rich in colour and symbolism, can in no way disguise the growing tension between Albania and Kosovo. The sources of the strains and disagreements are various. The first is economic, and has to do chiefly with trade exchanges. Every now and then on the border, one which divides a nation, a little war breaks out over the trade in flour, or potatoes, or milk. Under the gleaming surface, it appears that the two states are 'reluctant' to avoid obstacles to trade relations, let alone to implement new more favourable arrangements. In both states, the economy is controlled by a network of oligarchs, linked to those in power, and they control and guide cooperation.⁵⁶ In June 2019, the Government of Kosovo threatened to impose a 100% tax on imports from Albania, as it had done with Serbia, if Tirana did not take steps to remove existing trade barriers.⁵⁷

Although economic cooperation could have been more impressive, it would be naive to conclude that more intensive

economic exchanges alone would have a significant influence on economic growth. Regardless of the different levels of development, the Albanian and Kosovar economies are small and not modernized, have a low level of industrial production, underdeveloped service industry and suffer from fragile and even distorted trade institutions.⁵⁸

Tensions arising from economic factors have a low profile and rarely capture the attention and engagement of Kosovo's government or public institutions. The growing tensions and more serious disagreements between Albania and Kosovo are in fact political in character, and have to do with Albania's relations with Serbia, which display a tendency to a persistent and growing Albanian paternalism towards Kosovo.⁵⁹

Thus there were political tensions in 2016, attendant on Albania's initiative with Serbia to lead reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs in the Balkans; then during 2018 and particularly the second half of 2019 the tensions and disagreements recurred. In 2018 and late 2019 the cause was Albania and Serbia's 'strategic agenda': forging peace in the Balkans, the issue of reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs, 'the European future of the whole region' and especially 'the future of Kosovo'.⁶⁰

In 2018 the Albanian Prime Minister seemed actively to be supporting an agreement between Serbia and Kosovo⁶¹, an agreement predicated on territorial exchange or 'the correction of borders', according to Aleksandar Vucic. Such an accord, the terms of which were never made public, found no support among Kosovo's political leadership, not only exacerbating the isolation of its one advocate there, President Thaçi, but also

provoking tensions with Tirana. The government and political parties in Prishtina appeared not to approve of the Albanian Prime Minister's activism in an issue relating exclusively to Kosovo and its institutions.

The European powers adopted a different stance, with the exception of Germany which would not accept a Serbia-Kosovo agreement reached through territorial exchange/correction of borders. Meanwhile it appeared that Washington was ready to support the resolution of the frozen conflict even if this involved border corrections, provided it was accepted by both states.⁶² According to National Security Advisor John Bolton, the USA was open to an exchange of territories between Kosovo and Serbia as part of an agreement to normalize relations between the two former enemies.⁶³

Western supporters of a reconciliation agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, even through border changes,⁶⁴ seemed over-optimistic about the role that Albania and in particular its Prime Minister could play in 'convincing Kosovo' to accept the agreement. But though Prishtina consistently refused to accept Tirana's paternalism and activism, in this existential issue and in a distinctive manner relative to its relations with Serbia or similar matters, the Albanian Prime Minister engaged himself in support of a Serbia-Kosovo agreement almost to the point of becoming himself a protagonist, striving consistently to present himself as a leader with influence over all Albanians in the region. Two of his proposals appeared to reinforce this concept of his trans-national leadership role: the first came in February 2018, when he proposed to the Parliament of Kosovo that Albania and Kosovo should have a joint president as a symbol of national

unity; the second was his nomination of a young man from Kosovo to the post of Albanian Minister of Foreign Affairs.⁶⁵

Political tensions rose again in the second half of 2019, as a result of the joint initiative by Belgrade and Tirana for a Balkan Schengen.⁶⁶ Kosovo's rejection of this was categorical and unanimous among its government, president and political parties, including the Vetëvendosje Movement which had emerged from the 6 October elections as the largest parliamentary party and was expected to lead a coalition government with the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK).⁶⁷

The political dissatisfactions and tensions had to do with the fact that Serbia, and paradoxically Albania, continued to consider Kosovo on their bilateral agenda. Kosovo did not wish Albania to speak in its name and did not recognize any mandate for Tirana to negotiate with Serbia on behalf of Kosovo. Kosovo likewise had no wish for Albania to act as intermediary in its relations with Serbia.⁶⁸ Prishtina was guarded about Albania's efforts to lead the process of reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs in the Balkans, along the lines of the Franco-German model.⁶⁹ According to the Kosovo Government, the road to reconciliation of Serbs and Albanians in the region passed through Prishtina and not Tirana.⁷⁰

This confrontation between the two states raises serious question marks about the validity of the perceived nature and extent of Albania-Kosovo relations, and indeed about the mythic world of perceptions, where the present is excellent and the future even more splendid. It would be speculation to conclude by analogy that the same applied to popular attitudes.

Nevertheless, the encounter with the real world context of relations at least strongly suggested the need for a critical re-appraisal of the great public support for unification.

When it comes to perceptions, the mythic and real worlds of Albania-Kosovo relations do not coincide with each other, yet they still have one element in common. The smaller this common element, the larger the gap and the difference between the two worlds, imaginary and real. Correspondingly, the greater the common element, the more closely the mythic and real worlds resemble each other. Meanwhile, a careful consideration of the common element helps to confirm fundamental issues such as the idea of unification and the real extent of support for it. Thus, although 75% of Republic of Albanian citizens would vote for unification in a hypothetical referendum, only 63% find the idea desirable.⁷¹ *Popular support* for union becomes even smaller if another data point from the world of perceptions is considered: Albanian citizens are more skeptical about others' votes for union, judging that the vote among family members, friends and acquaintances would be lower (59% in Albania and 47% in Kosovo).⁷²

The clash of Albanian and Kosovan citizens' perceptions about unification also suggests a move away from the mythic sphere. Historically, the idea of national unification has been much stronger and more widespread in Kosovo than in Albania, for the simple fact that Albania is seen as the *mother country*; even though it has never played that role, Kosovo's leaders have sought unification. Likewise, the perception that the idea of union is accepted more widely and affectionately in Kosovo has been dominant. (in Albania?)

In 2010, support for national unification was spectacular in Kosovo, with 81% saying they would vote for it in a hypothetical referendum. In Albania it has always been thought that the idea is much more lively in Kosovo than Albania.⁷³ It is surprising then to see how this balance of support has altered, and indeed been overturned: in Albania 75% would vote for unification, and in Kosovo 64%.⁷⁴ The issue is yet more open when it comes to the two societies' perceptions of each other. In Albania the idea of union is thought to be more welcome in Kosovo;⁷⁵ in Kosovo, indeed, the perception is that the desire is one-sided and only coming from them, and much less from the Albanians across the border.⁷⁶

Moving away from perceptions towards where the spheres overlap, it is apparent that significant popular support for unification is lower. It is distinctive and important that only 47% of young Albanians support the idea of national unification, and another 47% support the establishment of relations normal to two independent states.⁷⁷ Furthermore, bearing in mind that only 29% of Albanian citizens are prepared to pay a tax to enable national unification, it is clear that these are real world attitudes, significantly different to the mythic where 75% desire unification.

Following this journey from the sphere of perceptions through the overlap, we arrive at last in the sphere of the real: only 23% of Albanian citizens⁷⁸ believe that the union of Kosovo and Albania in one state is possible. At the end of the day, why shouldn't they appear 'politically correct' by voting in favour of union, when they know that the chances of it coming to pass are minimal?

Unification as Dogma and Reality

Ten years ago, only 39% of Albanian citizens would have voted for unification in a hypothetical referendum.⁷⁹ For a relatively long period, the issue of Kosovo and the national question were seen and claimed as a monopoly of parties on the right or centre-right - and clearly not of the left, in particular among the Socialist Party inheritors of the Communist Party. This pattern had its roots in the Second World War, where one of the issues most strongly dividing the nationalist forces from the Communists was disagreement over the future of Kosovo, with the former seeking immediate unification and the latter under Enver Hoxha insisting on postponing the question until after the war.⁸⁰

The situation has changed. Today 75% would vote for union in a hypothetical referendum in Albania, and parties traditionally of the right or those created in the early 1990s have all but lost their monopoly over the national question and Kosovo. Now all political parties speak of the national question, of unification, and their perpetual political tensions and battles seek to expose who is *betraying* the national cause.

In Kosovo, under the strict, discriminatory and somewhat oppressive regime of Tito's Yugoslavia, Albanians and their leaders on the right and especially the left utterly idealized '*the mother land*' and upheld the idea of unification. But twelve years after independence, Kosovo's society and leaders seem to be emerging from that *romantic phase*, seeing the idea of union with ever more scepticism and relations with the former mother-country with ever more realism. The opposite is happening in

Albania, where the national question is being transformed from a myth into a sacred and unquestionable dogma.⁸¹

In the discourse around unification in Albania, its proponents have increasingly neglected what was before a crucial argument for union with Kosovo, namely that in absence of unification it would be impossible for Albania to be a functioning state. The only argument that continues to be maintained fanatically and indisputably within the unification narrative is that of the *historical injustice* which must be rectified. Proponents of unification speak of its necessity in absolute terms, refusing to examine new arguments as to its current desirability, yet failing to propose policies and instruments that might lead to its eventual realization. The absence of arguments as to the lack of functionality of the Albanian state without Kosovo may be interpreted as a conscious decision taken in an effort to keep the debate in the past, given that an analysis of the strength of such an argument would necessarily entail an examination of the (dis) functionality of the Albanian state in 2019. In 1913, it could very well have been argued that territorial losses left Albania a weak state. In contrast, it would be rather difficult to argue today that the pandemic corruption, lack of economic growth and the violation of democratic norms which have left Albania as one of the poorest and weakest states in Europe could be attributed to the territorial losses that occurred more than a century ago.

On the other hand, although the Kosovar society and its leaders have a more realistic attitude to the question of unification, the argument that it is necessary for the health, viability and functionality of the state is nonetheless alive, together with that of the need to rectify the *historical injustice*. For the last ten years

this has been an essential policy in the political programme of the Vetëvendosje movement led by Albin Kurti. According to him, Kosovo and Albania are not functioning states because they are separated, and only unification could lead to a sustainable and functional entity.⁸²

It appears that in Kosovo the question of unification is following the same arc as in Albania: from myth to dogma. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if a party as important in Kosovo as Vetëvendosje, which in opposition declared unification with Albania a *sine qua non* for a functioning, democratic and developed state, will pursue an approach similar to that of political parties in the Republic of Albania.

At the beginning of the 1990s, there was a feverish contest in Albania to support and resolve the national question - among political parties, independent organizations, scientific academies, civil society, and the press. The national question and its resolution opened the programmes of parties and other political groups. In the first speech by the leader of the Democratic Party - the first opposition party in Albania - in December 1990, Kosovo and national unification took a central position. The leader of the opposition told all Albanians that ‘the Democratic Party of Albania cannot accept the division of the Albanian nation as permanent’.⁸³ But over three decades, the discourse about the national issue and in particular national unification has passed through three different phases. The fall of communism in 1990 marked the return of the issue with a fundamentally nationalist tone. A more realistic approach distinguished the second phase, which was concurrent with the more difficult period of post-communist transition; in

discussion of Kosovo and the national issue more generally, the idea of unification took a lower profile.

The democratic forces who came to power in 1990 continued to advocate the principle of self-determination for the Albanians of Kosovo, and at the same time strove to reassure the West that Albania had no territorial pretensions and opposed any change of borders. Tirana tried to convince the leaders in Prishtina to give up their hopes for the creation of an independent state or for unification.⁸⁴ Even, in 1997 at the Thessaloniki Summit, just one year before war exploded in Kosovo, the Albanian Prime Minister was asking Milošević to implement the agreement on education that he had signed with Ibrahim Rugova.⁸⁵ The sub-text was clear: Kosovo was a domestic issue of Serbia's, and disagreements between Belgrade and Prishtina were to do with technical matters such as education. Once it became clear that Serbia and Kosovo could have no future together, Tirana strongly supported the option of independence.

During the past decade, representing the third phase, the narrative around unification has been transformed into dogma. For a considerable time there has been an uncritical approach to the idea: there has been no further consideration of whether Kosovo should unite with Albania, whether political leaders or populations wish union, whether union is possible or what its consequences might be. Would the new state be stronger, more functional and more democratic than the two current states, weak and occasionally close to failure?

It appears that the majority of Albanians in Albania and Kosovo accept unification without raising any doubt or question.

But citizens on both sides of the border have no clear idea about what kind of union they want or how it might be achieved. The idea of unification is in itself abstract⁸⁶, increasingly becoming dogma and, in Kosovo, more clear and more controversial - if not indeed absurd. For example, if 64% of citizens in Kosovo would vote for union, does it imply that this majority is against the sovereignty and independence of Kosovo? Are they against the existence of an independent Kosovo, since to unite with Albania and to maintain the sovereignty of Kosovo is not even theoretically possible? Theoretically, the only way for Kosovo to join with Albania and preserve its sovereignty would be to annex the Republic of Albania⁸⁷, and it is hard to believe that this would be acceptable to Albania's citizens or political leaders - or to NATO, which Albania joined in 2009.

In Albania, the dogma of union is becoming ever more popular, considering that at present 75% of Albanian citizens would vote in favour in a referendum.

Despite this, it would be rather naive to interpret this support for the dogma as true support for unification. A careful examination of the programs of political parties - those parties, at least, that have had representatives in Parliament - shows that the national issue is discussed in very general, contradictory and equivocal language, expressing interest and intent for integration and the realization of national aspirations, but in none of the programmes is the idea of unification with Kosovo in one unitary state mentioned.⁸⁸

The issue of union has not been part of the electoral campaigns of Albanian political parties for some time. It is hard to believe that an idea that technically enjoys great legitimacy

and popularity does not become part of election manoeuvres. If the issue is so important to citizens, why has none of the Albanian parties supported it? None of the leading parties, nor any influential party, does so. The only political party that did was the *Red and Black Alliance*, which declared national unification as a fundamental objective, but in the 2013 election won less than one percent of the vote.⁸⁹

This appears to be a considerable paradox: on the one hand, the idea of unification appears to enjoy popular support (75%), while on the other it does not feature in party programmes, debates, or electoral campaigns, and no influential party has made it an objective. Last but not least, union of Kosovo with Albania is not among the ten most troubling issues for Albanian citizens.⁹⁰ Yet still, a substantial majority would vote for it. The only opponents of unification, if they can be considered as such, are a group of politicians for whom it is important but will happen within the European Union⁹¹ - although the the European Union is a 'club' whose members, despite having handed over some of their sovereignty in Brussels, remain nonetheless independent. The unification of Albania with Kosovo as one state within the European Union is no more possible than a union of Germany with Austria.

The fact that the relations between Albania and Kosovo have degenerated to such an extent that they have turned into a false dogma about unification presents three risks:

Firstly, it obscures the poor relations and the accumulation of increasing tensions, which might even in the end lead to conflict, instead of the two states engaging seriously to improve mutual

cooperation in all sectors to the benefit of citizens in both. Secondly, the dogma nourishes the thesis that Albania seeks the repositioning of Balkan borders in a way that would expand itself and create an ethnic Albania. At the regional level this damages the effort to establish stability and cooperation among the states of the region. Besides the potential penalization of Albania and the loss of energy and time in refuting the allegation, this approach is a sure way to prevent Albania playing a lead role in the region - should it wish to, bearing in mind the Albanian element across the Balkans. Lastly, the dogma of unification does not help, and even hinders, the rebuilding of the two states and the modernization of their societies. Liberation from dogma is only the first step in avoiding this risk.

ENDNOTES

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- 46 Kalemaj, Ilir. 2020. "Albania and Kosova Present and Future" in Tirana Observatory, Vol. 2, No.1 Winter 2020, p. 79- 85; see also A. Rakipi, 'Albania and Kosova - The Centrality Of Economics', Tirana Times, 2015.
- 47 Interview with Genc Rulin, September 2019.
- 48 Interview with Arben Hajrullahu, September 2019. The interview with Professor Hajrullahu was conducted by a research team from KIPRED. The author and the Institute of International Studies express their gratitude to their KIPRED colleagues.
- 49 Interview with Anton Berisha, September 2019. The interview was conducted by a research team from KIPRED.
- 50 Interview with Jakup Krasniqi, September 2019. The interview was conducted by a research team from KIPRED.
- 51 Interview with Albin Kurti, September 2019. The interview was conducted by a research team from KIPRED.
- 52 Interview with Enver Robelli. September 2019. The interview was conducted by a research team from KIPRED.
- 53 Tirana Times "Albania-Kosova Relations: the show goes on". Tirana Times, 2020. Accessed on 20/05/2020: <http://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=142612>
- 54 Interview with Genc Rulin, September 2019.
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Chapter III

AN EVENTUAL UNIFICATION: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

From the moment when the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania made public its *Platform for the Resolution of the Albanian National Question*⁹², none of the Albanian governments which have succeeded each other over two decades has taken any concrete step which might indicate that Albania really wishes unification and is working to that end. The concept of national unification as a mere linking of territories is useful in giving shape to nationalist and populist narratives, but certainly insufficient as a serious model of unification. At both theoretical and practical levels, unification - the most significant step in resolving the national question - is the fusing of two states.⁹³ This means economic and cultural

unification and integration, and the integration of two societies, something that would require analysis beforehand and a well-considered strategy.

However popular the idea of unification might be in Albania, there is no effort to prepare for it. No party in Albania or Kosovo has declared itself openly against unification, and they even speak enthusiastically if generally about this objective, but setting aside their rhetoric the political elite in the two countries would feel threatened by an eventual union, which might deprive them of power.⁹⁴

In the discourse of political leaders in Albania, the dominant notion is of unification of territories, ‘of lands unjustly divided’ which should be joined. In Skopje in 2012, during the celebrations for the centenary of independence, Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha made an appeal for national unification,⁹⁵ but this appeal - seen with much disquiet in the west and around the region as Albanian attempt to foster a Greater Albania⁹⁶ - was in fact accompanied with no concrete initiative by the then-government.

Over the last five or six years, Prime Minister Edi Rama has adopted more or less the same populist attitude to unification, an attitude which once again has at its core the idea of territorial conjunction, without articulating any concrete idea for this union. With contradictory language Tirana has repeated the idea of unification as an alternative to integration with the EU. If the EU is not willing to move forwards with the integration of Albania and to accept its membership, then Albanians would join together in the Balkans⁹⁷ - an approach which sounds more like blackmail against Brussels (European Union) and

EU Member States than a new step towards unification. But would the citizens of Albania and Kosovo give up the European integration of their states in exchange for union between them, or for a wider union requiring territory from three other Balkan states? In fact, neither in Albania nor in Kosovo do citizens see national unification as an alternative to the European future, meaning EU membership. Between the two options they have clearly indicated their preference - 84.7% in Albania and 66.4% in Kosovo - for European integration over national unification.

The only superficially concrete version of union is the Albanian Prime Minister's proposal, two years ago, for a common president.⁹⁸ The idea that unification might start with the nomination or election of a common president shows if nothing else that Albania has no vision or strategy for national unification - and even no serious intention. The proposal did not even help to stimulate debate about another aspect of union where the majority appears to be in agreement. Is unification between Albania and Kosovo possible, even if it is accepted to be desirable? Are there obstacles, and what are they? Are there any concerns about an eventual unification, and what would its potential implications be? An assessment of these issues would make it possible to move beyond the myth and dogma which cloud the issue, and through which the discourse about union has evolved and functions.

Concerns, Restriction and Consent Among the Great Power

Formally, from the perspective of international law and the relevant international conventions, there is no obstacle to Albania

joining with another state - especially if it happens peacefully and consensually. In Albania's foundational document, its constitution, there is no block to another state - for the sake of this discussion Kosovo - being united with Albania, or to Albania uniting with Kosovo. At first glance, there is even the impression that their unification is an obligation which flows from the constitution. During discussions for a potential resolution to the national question and in particular when speaking of Kosovo and its future, Albanian politicians often refer to a vague "constitutional obligation" to unite Albanian people.

However, a closer reading of the relevant paragraphs reveals that although there exist no barriers to unification, the constitution does not contain a legal obligation to unify with any other nation. In the general language of its preamble there is simply a declaration that 'We, the people of Albania, are proud of the centuries-old aspiration of the Albanian people to national identity and unification'⁹⁹.

Kosovo's situation is different.¹⁰⁰ According to its constitution, the Republic of Kosovo has no territorial pretensions towards any other state and will not seek union with any other state or part of state.¹⁰¹ In consequence, any notion of Kosovo's unification with any other country, including Albania, is not possible without amending the constitution. However, in theory at least it is not impossible for Kosovo to make such an amendment, and thus for there to be no obstacle to union with another state.¹⁰²

At any event, just as in Albania where there is currently no constitutional or international legal obstacle to union with another state, so in Kosovo where the constitution forbids union with another state or part-state (an obstacle that could be

overcome), the question of unification is very much more than a merely legal one.

At the practical level, besides the internal and external legal aspects (the constitution and international law, respectively), there are political, geopolitical, historical, geographical, economic, cultural and religious aspects which could make union impossible, even with popular will and no legal obstacle.

Firstly, union of Albania with Kosovo, howsoever it might be proposed, would not be possible without the consent of the Great Powers or the international community. When it comes to foreign affairs, political parties in Albania and Kosovo look to the international community and especially to those they see as strategic partners, chiefly the USA and the European Union. In almost all party political programmes in Albania and Kosovo, references to the national question are timid and equivocal. In each, political leaders are careful to address themselves to the *international community* and *strategic partners* for the promotion or resolution of national issues.

To this extent, the thesis for the resolution of the national question in party political programmes is the same as the thesis as presented in the ‘nationalist’¹⁰³ platform of the Academy of Sciences, which saw the only road to an outcome as collaboration with the international community ‘in accordance with universally declared principles regarding human rights and the right of self-determination.’¹⁰⁴

Albania and Kosovo are both small states, and for all small states independence, sovereignty and the capacity to operate in

the international environment are generally limited. Moreover, Albania and Kosovo are both weak states, critically dependent on the international community.¹⁰⁵ Kosovo's independence was in consultation with major players such as the USA, Great Britain, Germany and others, in a particular period of international equilibrium. Any radical shift from independence towards unification with Albania would require the same support and engagement by the western powers as in 1999, when NATO decided to intervene militarily, or 2008, when independence was declared, as well as a realistic evaluation of the stance of other important international players who have been against independence.¹⁰⁶

The union of Kosovo with Albania, in whatever form, would lead to a change in the political map of the Balkans. Previous changes, including the most recent, have been accompanied by bloody conflict within states and between states, and by the intervention of third parties - the USA, NATO, and European powers. However mutually-consensual an eventual unification of Albania and Kosovo might be, the risk of violence and conflict in the region could not definitely be ruled out.¹⁰⁷ In one way or another, this change in the political map would require some kind of consent from their neighbours. It is difficult to imagine that some countries, and foremost Serbia, would be willing to give such consent.¹⁰⁸

The creation of a new state through the unification of Albania - an almost ethnically homogeneous state - with Kosovo, likewise with a substantial ethnic Albanian majority, might nourish the idea of creating ethnically pure states. In the Balkans this appears to be a 'mission impossible', not forgetting that it is a philosophy

which the EU and USA have opposed or at least do not support.

Regardless of the ‘nationalist’ games and the occasional populist ‘exercises’, Tirana has been careful in its Balkan policy and the west has acknowledged Albania’s much-vaunted constructiveness, a role in practice generally supposed to comprise no ambition for border change towards a larger Albanian state, and unstinting support for western, EU and US foreign policy. There is likewise an established view among the Albanian public that unification of Kosovo with Albania could only happen if it were accepted and supported by the international community¹⁰⁹, seen as having the decisive role.¹¹⁰

All advocates of national unification, nationalist and populist, even those whose advocacy is in truth naive, refer to the national interest¹¹¹ - without a critical analysis whether unification would truly serve the national interest, the definition of which remains deliberately or otherwise very vague and unclear.

If the consolidation of Kosovo’s statehood internally and internationally is in the interests not only of Republic of Kosovo but of all Albanians - that is to say, it is in the national interest - by the same token it is clear that unification with Albania would seriously damage Kosovo’s statehood and independence.¹¹²

On top of these obstacles there is hesitation and even apprehension in the two societies, which historically have functioned separately. One of the arguments against unification, in both countries, is a kind of fear that Albania and Kosovo would function better as two independent states rather than united in one.¹¹³

In the discourse about unification on either side of the border, less and less is heard of the thesis that unification is essential for a successful, functional, democratic state able to guarantee for its citizens high economic standards, basic services, security, justice, education, healthcare, infrastructure and so on.¹¹⁴ It is unclear and surely uncertain how union should automatically deliver an increase in the quality of democracy, living standards, education or other basic provisions.¹¹⁵

It is not difficult to imagine that the unification of two small and weak states with poor economies such as Albania and Kosovo would result in a state that was larger but certainly weaker, if not actually failing. Unification might be feasible only if one of the states were strong and stable, having managed to secure economic and social prosperity to such a large extent that it would permit it to bear the great economic cost of unification.

There is also a fear, rather less overt, that differences in culture and tradition between two societies that have developed apart for some hundred and twenty years might not assist union, but on the contrary become a serious obstacle leading to a freezing of the current relations.

In Kosovo, there is a concern that unification would ‘leave Kosovo in the shade’: the capital city would be Tirana, the President would be chosen by Albania; other state institutions would likewise be led by Albanians of Albania. The new state would be run by Albanian Albanians because ‘Albania has greater economic, political and academic resources’ and in the end Kosovans would remain in Albania’s shadow.¹¹⁶

Implications in the International Sphere

An eventual unification of Kosovo with Albania supposing an ideal case in which there was full support from both states and their respective societies, would create a state whose functionality and even existence would face existential challenges both internally and internationally - environments that are not independent of each other. An assessment of the possible implications of potential unification should incorporate two levels: firstly, the possible implications for Albania and Kosovo,¹¹⁷ as well as for the product of their union, in the international arena - international law, international institutions and organizations, the United Nations, NATO and the European Union; and secondly, but no less important, the possible domestic implications for the new state.

Before assessing the potential implications at these two levels it is important to establish the theoretical possibilities of union and the nature of the entity that it would create. Given the declaration and recognition of Kosovo as an independent state, its unification with Albania would happen as the unification of two independent states. The concept of re-union - of two entities which were formerly part of one, as were the two Germanies - does not apply, for the simple reason that Albania and Kosovo have never been part of a common state.¹¹⁸

Union could be the unification of two states and thereby the establishment of a new one, or the absorption of one state by the other - most likely of Kosovo by Albania. Although the absorption of Albania by Kosovo cannot in theory be ruled out, it would be less advocated and less justified given the incomplete

legitimacy which follows from Kosovo's incomplete recognition by UN member states, including some permanent members of the Security Council and five EU members.

An alternative model would be union in a confederation, in which the two constituent states would maintain their sovereignty in domestic and international affairs, with weak central government. The most recent example was the Union of Serbia and Montenegro, formed in 2003 and dissolved in 2006.

Regardless of the specific modalities of an eventual unification, a final agreement between Kosovo as to Kosovo's status would be a precondition to its eventual realization. Otherwise, any hypothetical scenario would import a conflictual relationship and create a state over part of whose territory Serbia would continue to assert a claim. Thus, even in the case that Albania absorbed Kosovo it would have to compete with Serbia because of the latter's claim to Kosovo.

Any initiative by Albania and Kosovo towards union, in the context of the frozen conflict between Serbia and Kosovo, would carry the possibility of a conflict between Albania and Serbia, whereas any agreement between Albania and Serbia to resolve this conflict would mean a loss of independence for Kosovo and the fragmentation of its territory, and its division between its two neighbours.

In case of an eventual union between Albania and Kosovo, preceded by a recognition agreement of the latter with Serbia, which had at its heart reciprocal recognition as independent states, what would be the implications in the international arena for Albania, Kosovo and the product of their union?

The first fundamental question relates to international recognition, regardless of the form of union. Whether a new state is formed from the two or whether Kosovo joins Albania, the basic question is if formal international recognition for the new state should be necessary and, if so, what form it should take. What would this mean for the recognition process? An analysis of the possible developments and implications if international recognition were necessary is naturally hypothetical, but nonetheless required. After recognition by neighbouring states and the great powers, the process of international recognition would be very difficult, prolonged and in no circumstances guaranteed. This would affect the internal functioning of the state and might call into question its existence. In both cases - the creation of a new state and the absorption by one state of the other - there is a series of questions which cast a significant shadow over the prospects for union, and raise a number of critical concerns.

Would the international agreements that each state had signed with others remain valid? Would the new state inherit memberships of international organizations and institutions? Would the new state automatically be a member of NATO, given that one of its precursor states already is? Would NATO be willing to recognize the new state's membership?

The example of reunited Germany's continued membership of NATO demonstrates the need not only for the approval of member states - which arises from the Treaty of the Alliance and its procedures for new members - but also a consent reaching beyond the alliance, involving in particular the great powers. Following the reunification of Germany, the USA was very engaged and supported the continuation of NATO

membership for the reunified state, while the Soviet Union was weakened and on the brink of disintegration.¹¹⁹ In this way, and in different circumstances and noting that both Albania and Kosovo are small states, it is clear that their union and certainly their membership in the Alliance would require the consent of third parties and above all of the big players, whether or not these are NATO members.

Meanwhile, however hypothetical the discussion, it would in any case appear difficult for Alliance members to accept NATO membership for a state emerging from a union of Albania and Kosovo when a number of them have yet to recognize Kosovo. Likewise, it would be doubtful whether North Macedonia and Montenegro - two Balkan members of the Alliance and neighbours of Albania - would accept the continuation of NATO membership for the new state, for two reasons. A larger state encompassing the population and territory of the former Ottoman Albania might serve as a model and inspiration for the Albanian minorities in their countries to consider uniting with the 'motherland'. Secondly, an expanded Albania in the Alliance would force an adjustment of the power balance and overshadow these two states, irrespective of their own membership.

An Albania that is united with Kosovo and a NATO member would have a stronger military, human, economic capacity, and this would immediately shift the balance of power in relation to Serbia. balance relative to Serbia.¹²⁰ The border of Kosovo with Serbia would become the border of NATO with Serbia, which continues to have not particularly friendly relations with the Alliance while maintaining a preferential relationship with Russia. In this way, an inheritance of NATO membership by

the new state would contribute substantially to geopolitical rivalries, which are already pronounced enough in the Balkans.

All of the above arguments lead to the conclusion that a union of Albania with Kosovo would seriously jeopardize Albania's membership of the Alliance. Any analogy with the case of Germany seems irrelevant for a number of reasons, but fundamentally the point is that in the case of Germany the question was not whether West Germany's NATO membership might be an obstacle to union - as is the case with a potential Albania-Kosovo state - but whether reunited Germany should inherit West Germany's membership from before reunification.¹²¹

The same dilemmas apply when it comes to the Albania's status as a candidate country for the EU. Would it be possible for the new state to inherit candidate status, given that Albania as one of the precursor states enjoys such status? Would the EU be willing to continue negotiations for Albanian membership¹²² if Albania were negotiating union with Kosovo? Similarly, would the new state remain a member of INTERPOL when one of its precursor states, Kosovo, has not been? Thus, would Albania lose its membership of NATO, the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international organizations?

Security Dilemma at the Local Level

In any kind of unification, the fundamental issue remains that of functionality. The success of an Albania-Kosovo union in its three possible forms, which could in no way be a mechanical

process, would be determined by the degree of the new state's functionality. From two states currently weak and low in functionality, what would be the chances of securing through union a strong and functional state?¹²³

Albania and Kosovo have never functioned as a single, unitary state. The Ottomans operated in the region through a system of Vilayets (independent federal entities), without a shared hierarchical state structure. For a very brief period during the Second World War, Albania and Kosovo were unified, but this union was far from being the functioning hierarchical structure seen in modern states. After the Second World War, the two countries and societies existed separately and in extreme isolation from one another, not only during the Cold War but for almost the first two decades after the fall of communism.

The state-building process has been a relatively new phenomenon in both Albania and Kosovo. Furthermore, during such process the two countries have adopted different economic and political models. After the end of World War Two, Albania was a command economy, whereas Kosovo – as part of Yugoslavia – adopted quasi-capitalist economic policies and was subjected to a political system that functioned on the basis of the rule of law. Whilst it is true that Albanian and Kosovar societies share a few similarities in their political cultures, where political organization is largely based on clans and blood relations, it is submitted that these similarities not only fail to ease the process of integration, but would on the contrary serve to undermine such a process. Meanwhile it is certain that the dissimilarities are a further guarantee that a joint state would remain weak, if not failing, despite its greater population and territory.

When it comes to the question of the functionality of the Albanian state, we appear to be confronted with a paradox. More than 100 years ago, when the Albanian state was established and began to be recognized, the argument for Kosovo and the other areas of Ottoman Albania becoming part of this state was bound up precisely with the issue of its stability and functionality. Without Kosovo and other territories inhabited by Albanians, the Albanian state could not be sustainable. More than twenty years later, there is concern that out of a union an even weaker and less functional state might arise.

The case of the reunification of the two Germanies is of little help in analyzing the potential implications of the case of Albania and Kosovo, for at least two reasons. Firstly, the case of the two Germanies was a reunification of a divided state, which is not true of Albania and Kosovo. Secondly, German reunification was led by West Germany, a state based around a political culture and organizational ideology governed by the rule of law and the competitive capitalist economy, something which is not nearly true in Albania or Kosovo. And despite West Germany's great strengths, aspects of integration and functionality might still be questioned. In this particular case, neither Albania nor Kosovo have managed to establish a strong and viable state, with sufficient economic strength and political vision needed to shoulder the economic and social burdens of unification.¹²⁴

Even if one were to cast away doubts as to the viability and functionality of the new unified state, it would be extremely difficult to imagine that a potential union would be free of internal discord. This was precisely the case during the second world war, when for a brief period and under German occupation

Kosovo and Albania were unified in one state. During this time, it became clear that the integration of different religious communities was no easy task, as evidenced by frequent clashes between the Islamic communities in Kosovo and Albania as well as between religious communities and state institutions. Similarly, the efforts of Xhaver Deva, then acting in his capacity as Minister of Internal Affairs, to establish order in Albania with the help of functionaries brought in from Kosovo were met with grave reservations in Tirana.

In light of the fact that Albania and Kosovo have never been an integrated state, and given the prolonged absence of communication between the two, both at a societal and governmental level, would the union of Albania and Kosovo result in a state that is free of political conflict and massive corruption, which are two defining characteristics of both states today?

The legitimacy, functionality and capacity of the state in Albania and Kosovo are today substantially eroded by, among other factors, deep political disagreements between parties and between leaderships - thanks to the *zero sum game* logic applied in the competition for power - as well as difficulties in reaching consensus and in collaborating to advance the process of state-building. Right from the fall of communism in Albania, and from Kosovo's independence, the two countries have been caught in a cycle of crisis, in Albania crises as deep as that of 1997, the resolution of which required international intervention. Even for basic processes such as the holding of elections, the acceptance of results and the installation of new administrations, international mediation has been and is still sought.¹²⁵ There is no reason to assume that, *after unification*,

the deep political conflicts in Tirana and Prishtina would be overcome. Indeed, it is not impossible that the political divisions within each element should be exacerbated by a new conflict between Tirana and Prishtina.

The issue is not merely potential political conflicts that might assume new dimensions in the event of union. Religious, cultural and economic clashes cannot be excluded either.

From a theoretical perspective, the union of Albania and Kosovo in one unitary state would create the conditions for what Barry Posen has defined as an *emerging anarchy*¹²⁶, arising not from the fall of an *imperial order* as was the case with the collapse of the Soviet Union or the Yugoslav Federation, but from the breakdown of state order in the two countries as part of the transition. Just as ethnic groups of different nations who once had a peaceful existence under *imperial order* are confronted with security dilemmas when that order breaks down, so communities created by different political, religious, economic, cultural, urban or geographic identities might likewise face a security dilemma and might even end up using conflict or violence to maintain or improve their situation in the new state. An eventual union has the potential negatively to affect three equilibria that took a century to establish, half of it under brutal oppression: the north-south balance in favour of the former, the current religious balance (between Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Bektashi) in favour of Muslims, and the balance between urban and rural districts.¹²⁷ The upsetting of these geographic, faith and urban/rural balances would provoke security dilemmas for the communities in question, and in consequence potential conflict.

ENDNOTES

- 92 See: Platform For the Solution of the National Albanian Question, Academy of Science of Albania, Tirana 1998, Publishing House Shkenca, Tirana, October 1998.
- 93 Theoretically there is more than one option: the two states could be dissolved and one created; the two could maintain their sovereignty while joining in a confederation or federal arrangement. In any option, union would be much more than merely the joining of territories.
- 94 Interview with Ilir Kalemaj, August 2019.
- 95 ‘This centenary invites us, it inspires us, to continue to make real the dream of those who sacrificed themselves over this last century for freedom and national dignity. That dream must be read by you a thousand times, as it is the dream of Albanian national unity. Here in Skopje I want to appeal to all Albanians. They must strive every minute, every hour, every day, every week, every month, every year for their union. I call on our neighbours: understand that through Albanian unity you will become more free and more just, and that the Albanians are ready for a friendly, long-term, enduring collaboration. Liberated Albanians will be a leading force for the development of themselves and the region.’ See the speech by Sali Berisha in Gazeta Panorama: <http://www.panorama.com.al/shkup-mijera-ne-feste-per-100-vjetorin/>
- 96 Reuters, ‘Greece, Macedonia take offence at Albanian rhetoric’ EurActiv, 30.11.2012 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/greece-macedonia-take-offence-at-albanian-rhetoric/>
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- 98 Ibidem.
- 99 Constitution of the Republic of Albania, <http://president.al/ep-content/uploads/2018/10/kushtetuta-perditesuar-1.pdf>
- 100 Peci, Lulzim. 2020. Deconstruction of the idea of Unification. Prishtina: KIPRED, 2020.
- 101 Constitution of the Republic of Kosova, Basic Provisions, Clause 3. http://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Kushtetuta.e.Republikes.se_.Kosoves-2.pdf
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- 103 The 1998 Platform of the Academy of Sciences was seen as a test of Albanian efforts at a Greater Albania - both by those who had read it, and by those who simply didn’t wish to read it.
- 104 Platform for the Resolution of National Albanian Question, p. 41
- 105 Kosova is even more limited when it comes to sovereignty in foreign affairs, partly because five EU members and two UN Security Council Permanent Members have yet to recognize.

- 106 Interview with Aldo Bumçi, October 2019.
- 107 According to IDRA polling, other states would not accept national unification, and there would be conflict with neighbouring states and other powers.
- 108 For interviewees in Albania, potential opposition from Serbia is seen as one of the chief obstacles to a possible union.
- 109 Focus group, quoted in Kosovë-Shqipëri: Ndërveprimi, njohuritë, vlerat, besimet, bashkëpunimi dhe bashkimi (Prishtinë: KFOS, January 2019)
- 110 Interview with Gene Ruli, September 2019.
- 111 Rakipi, Albert. 2018. “Bashkimi i Kosovës dhe Shqipërisë mund të prodhojë një shtet të dobët” Panorama
- 112 Interview with Aldo Bumçi, October 2019.
- 113 IDRA study.
- 114 The leaders of Kosovo’s Vetëvendosje Movement, including Albin Kurti - for whom the issue was central to their political narrative - have begun to talk of the need to establish functioning statehood within each state.
- 115 Interview with Tonin Gjuraj, September 2019.
- 116 Focus group, quoted in Kosovë-Shqipëri: Ndërveprimi, njohuritë, vlerat, besimet, bashkëpunimi dhe bashkimi (Prishtina: KFOS, January 2019)
- 117 Peci, Lulzim. 2020. “Kosova and Albania – Deconstruction of the Idea of Unification” in Tirana Observatory: <https://tiranaobservatory.com/2020/04/06/Kosova-and-albania-deconstruction-of-the-idea-of-unification/>
- 118 Peci, ibidem.
- 119 Adomeit, Hannes. 2006. Gorbachev’s Consent Unified Germany’s membership in NATO. Paris: Working Paper, Paris Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2006.
- 120 In fact, a larger state, in terms of territory, population, military strength and economy, is one of the fundamental arguments of Albanian nationalists/populists especially when looking at the balance of power with Serbia in the western Balkans.
- 121 Adomeit, Hannes. 2006. Gorbachev’s Consent Unified Germany’s membership in NATO. Paris: Working Paper, Paris Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2006.
- 122 On 25 March 2020 the European Council took the decision to open membership negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. According to this decision, Albania would be able to begin negotiating as soon as a package of fifteen conditions is fulfilled. See Ruettershof, Tobias. The Opening of Accession Negotiations: A new Hope for Albania Tirana Observatory Vol. 2, Nr.2, AIIS Tirana 2020
- 123 A ‘strong state’ refers here not to the military perspective but to the capacity to guarantee for citizens basic public provisions: security, justice, equal opportunities, education, healthcare etc.
- 124 Interview with Gene Rulin, September 2019

- 125 More or less in parallel Albania's opposition and government asked the Venice Commission to resolve their domestic political conflicts. There were two more extreme cases: the Socialist majority in Parliament referred to the Venice Commission the legitimacy of the procedure to remove the President of the Republic, while only a few months later the Prime Minister of Kosova appealed to the Venice Commission to oppose the decree of the President of the Republic giving a mandate to a new Prime Minister.
- 126 Posen, Barry R. 1993. 'The security dilemma and ethnic conflict' on *Survival*, no. 35:127-147 (1993) DOI: 10.1080/00396339308442672
- 127 Interview with Remzi Lani, September 2019.

Chapter IV

CONCLUSIONS

Albania and Kosovo are today developing relations appropriate to two independent states. During the course of their historical journey from the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of independent states, Albania and Kosovo have functioned as two divided societies, economies and markets with an almost total absence of cooperation and interdependence.

From a strategic perspective, Albania and Kosovo perceive their common future as members of the European Union. Nonetheless, over the last five or six years the notion of unification has seemed ever more acceptable. Regardless of the motives,

clarity or real support attached to the idea, the hypothesis has rekindled debates about the Albanian national question and its full resolution through *national unification*.

Kosovo is central to the notion of national unification, for political, historical, geographical, cultural and economic reasons. Kosovo was the cradle of Albanian nationalism. The Albanian National Movement for independence began in Kosovo with the League of Prizren. The identification of the national question principally with Kosovo is apparent throughout the historical trajectory of the Albanian state, irrespective of the diverse regimes that have governed it during the last one hundred and twenty years and more.

The necessity for *national unification*, the chief component of which is the unification of Kosovo with Albania, has been and is still supported by two arguments: firstly, the historical argument, by which *national unification* is the resolution of an historical injustice, given that Albanians view as unfair the decision by the Powers of Europe to recognize a state that left out half of their territories and populations ; secondly, *national unification* is a fundamental condition (a *sine qua non*) for a functional, viable and sustainable state.

A new argument for the necessity of national unification has recently been heard. According to this, in the case that Europe ‘shuts its doors on Albania and Kosovo’ then the solution would remain a pan-national union, meaning first of all the joining of Kosovo with Albania.

At a theoretical level, the union is justified as the reconnection

of a part of the nation with its mother country, where Kosovo is the *part* and Albania is the *mother country*. Along a trajectory that began with the foundation and recognition of an Albanian state (Albania) and continued to the declaration and recognition of Kosovo as an independent state in 2008, Albania has never fulfilled the role of mother country.

At the peace conference after the First World War, Albania avoided successive attempts at division of the territory designated back in 1913. In such circumstances, it was quite impossible for Albania to undertake any step towards seeking the absorption of Kosovo or other territories.

During the rule of King Zog, for the first time a new factor of influence became apparent in relations between Albania and Kosovo: Albania's relations with Yugoslavia and, after the latter's disintegration, with Serbia. This factor would subsequently be transformed into an almost permanent feature of Albanian foreign policy, as was demonstrated during the Albania-Yugoslavia *honeymoon* after the Second World War, during the Cold War and at the start of the collapse of Yugoslavia in the nineties.

During the Cold War, communist Albania was too weak to give serious attention to Kosovo or other former lands of Ottoman Albania. In a situation where it was merely a client state of Yugoslavia, there was no chance that Albania could seek the 'return' of Kosovo. Even the breach in relations with Yugoslavia and Albania's rapprochement with the Soviet Union, one of the world's two superpowers, brought no change in Albania's foreign policy in general and its relations with Kosovo in particular.

Albania emerged from communism a very weak - if not indeed failed - state with a bankrupt economy, and with no military capability to speak of despite the militarization of the economy and society. It was quite impossible for Albania to go to war for Kosovo in 1990, when it lacked the human, military or economic capacity even for its own defence.

For almost three decades, from the fall of communism, the Albanian government has not shown any political ambition to assimilate Kosovo as part of its territory. Even not as a NATO member and EU candidate country, Albania is in no condition to exercise independence in foreign affairs and much less sovereignty, especially when it comes to relations with Kosovo or other former of Ottoman Albania, which since 1913 have been and remain parts of the territories of other internationally-recognized states such as North Macedonia, Montenegro and, since 2008, the Republic of Kosovo.

During two key moments for the future of Kosovo, in 1991 when it was apparent that Yugoslavia was heading towards collapse and in 1997-1998 when war broke out in Kosovo, Albania was undergoing the gravest crises of its modern history. In 1991, when it was at the limits of survival, Albania saw Kosovo's future within the *creation of democratic spaces in Yugoslavia*, without supporting any of the options outlined by Kosovo's political leaders. Then in 1997-1998, when *de facto* it had almost ceased to exist as a state, even losing control of its own territory and borders, Albania advocated respect for the rights of Albanian minorities in Yugoslavia, thereby accepting the position that Kosovo was merely a domestic issue for Serbia.

Three decades after the fall of communism in Albania and a decade after Kosovo's independence, the ideas of union between Albania and Kosovo and of national unification have been revived. They are apparent in the populist/nationalist narrative discourse of political elites in both countries, and also seem popular in public attitudes in both. Today 74% of Albanian citizens would vote for unification of Kosovo and Albania in the event of a referendum.

It would be naive, however, to draw conclusions based on the figure of 74% of Albanians supporting unification. If the notion of unification were really so popular and so important, how could its absence from the political programmes and electoral campaigns of Albanian political parties be explained? Relations with Kosovo do not feature among the ten issues Albanian citizens believe are important and have on their minds, and so much less does the issue of unification.

Albanians today on both sides of the border lack any clear notion of what kind of union they would like and how it might be achieved. Should Kosovo be joined to Albania, Albania annexing Kosovo with the latter's consent and becoming an enlarged Albania with the addition of Kosovo's territory and population? Would the 64% of Kosovo citizens who currently support unification accept the loss of their independence and sovereignty? Should the two countries come together as one and create a confederation, or a unitary state? The final option, albeit even less feasible, would be for Albania to join Kosovo, the latter thereby annexing the territory and population of the former and becoming an enlarged Kosovo. Would the 75% of Albanians who currently support union accept this?

More than a century ago, unification was justified on the grounds of righting an historical wrong done to the Albanian nation by the Great Powers when they divided its lands, but also of the functionality and viability and sustainability of the state - the idea that Albania could not be a functional and sustainable, viable state without Kosovo and the other territories. But in today's circumstances it is unconvincing to argue that Albania is a weak, if not indeed failing, state because national unification has not been completed, that the Albanians lands are divided and Kosovo is not united with Albania.

Some political leaders in Albania make propaganda of the idea of national as an alternative to integration with the European Union. But a considerable majority - 84.7% of Republic of Albania citizens and indeed 66.4% in the Republic of Kosovo - would choose the European integration of their state over national unification.

It is very possible that, rather than being an alternative to Albania's European integration, the thesis of unification with Kosovo - that is to say, the nationalist card - is used by the Albanian Government to apply pressure on Brussels, blackmail even, to stimulate the very slow process of EU integration.

Since 2008, although they have been improving, relations between the two countries have remained generally feeble. More important is the fact that Albania-Kosovo relations are not free from tension, accompanied intermittently by harsh rhetoric. Increasing tensions and serious disagreements spring from Tirana's paternalist attitude towards Kosovo - and, related to this, from Albania's relations with Serbia, and the inclusion

of Kosovo and her affairs in those relations.

While mentioning *unification* ever more frequently, Albania adopts a paternalist stance towards Kosovo, so that sometimes it even appears as though Albania considers Kosovo an autonomous region of her own. This attitude, *forgetting* that Kosovo is an independent state, impairs the normal business of political cooperation, economic coordination, trading exchanges, cultural, scientific and academic collaboration, and so on. The establishment of a strategic agenda between Albania and Kosovo demands first of all that Albania give up the paternalist approach and the use of Kosovo as a proxy for short-term political interests.

The political dissatisfactions and tensions relate substantially to the fact that not only Serbia but paradoxically also Albania continue to consider Kosovo as being a domestic issue on their bilateral agenda. Kosovo does not wish for Albania to speak in its name and does not acknowledge any mandate for Tirana to negotiate with Serbia on Kosovo's behalf. Accordingly, in its relations with Serbia, Kosovo does not wish for the Albanian Government to act as an intermediary. Albania to have a role as intermediary. The government of the Republic of Kosovo appears to view the Albanian Government's attempts to lead the process or reconciliation between Albanians and Serbs in the Balkans according to the Franco-German model with great skepticism. For the Kosovo Government, *the road to reconciliation between Kosovo and Serbia goes through Pristina, not Tirana, and it is only in this scenario, which is similar to the one in the Franco-German model, that peace could be achieved.*

For a section of Tirana's and Prishtina's political elites, and more precisely for the benefit of their short-term political interests, it is not unification per-se but rather the *idea of unification* that is rather helpful, an idea which has been transformed into a dogma which no one may question or doubt.

Although there are no legal obstacles to the union, neither in the Albanian constitution nor international law, such a unification would not be possible without the consent of the international community and the great powers. Albania and Kosovo are weak as well as small states, critically dependent upon the international community. As with many small and especially weak states operating in the international environment, their independence, sovereignty and capacity are limited. From this perspective too, union would not be possible without international community approval.

Unification of Albania and Kosovo in whatever form would change the political map of the Balkans. Previous changes to this map, including the most recent, have been accompanied by bloody conflict within states and between them, and by the intervention of third parties - USA . NATO, European powers.

In any of the theoretical scenarios, unification would create an ethnically almost pure state and might encourage the creation of ethnically pure states elsewhere in the region - apparently a 'mission impossible' in the Balkans - and conflict and violence would be guaranteed.

In all possible scenarios, whether Kosovo is joined onto Albania (or vice-versa) or whether they unite in a confederation,

the new entity would in any case require international recognition. Without the approval of at least a section of the international community – and especially of the great powers -- for unification, the process of international recognition would be very difficult, long and in no way certain. This would complicate the internal functionality of the new state and perhaps even call into question its very existence.

It would be very doubtful, if not utterly impossible, for the new state to inherit the agreements and memberships that its two progenitors currently enjoy in international organizations and institutions. It is entirely clear that a new country or a confederation could not inherit Albania's NATO membership, or its candidate country status with the EU. It is likewise hard to believe that, should Kosovo be absorbed into Albania, the latter would maintain its NATO or EU status. In the event that Albania was ready to give up its independence and sovereignty in a union with Kosovo, i.e. in favour of an enlarged Kosovo, matters would be still more complicated, given that Kosovo currently lacks full international recognition, is not recognized by some members of the UN Security Council, is not a UN member, is not recognized by five EU members, and is not a member of a series of other international organizations and institutions. In an eventual union, of whatever form, Albania would be calling into doubt its membership of the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international institutions and organizations.

In as much as one of the two founding and historical arguments for the necessity of uniting Albania and Kosovo is the issue of state functionality, it is possible that the union of these two, one of whose fundamental characteristics is non-

functionality, might produce an even weaker state, with an even lower level of functionality, and even lead to a failed state.

Is it not impossible for the unification of Albania with Kosovo, in any of its possible forms, to lead to a state free and immune from political, socio-economic, urban-rural, religious, cultural and developmental tension? From the theoretical perspective, union into one state could create the conditions for what Barry Posen defines as *emerging anarchy*, arising not from the collapse of an *imperial order*, as was the case with the collapse of the Soviet Union or of the Yugoslav Federation, but from the collapse of state order in the two countries as part of the transition towards a new country emerging from unification. As ethnic groups representing diverse nationalities and having lived in peace under an *imperial order* confront security dilemmas when that order falls away, so in this case groups defined by different ideologies, different religious policies or doctrines, or different economic, cultural, demographic or geographic factors might likewise be faced with a security dilemma and find themselves fighting for their status within the new conditions of a unified Albanian-Kosovan state.

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