

Research Article

KOSOVO: SPRING OF 1981 A HERALD OF CHANGE IN YUGOSLAVIA



History

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Abstract

This article argues that a number of factors, both internal and international were the cause of the 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo. There were three internal factors: Yugoslav, Serbian and Albanian. External factors include the international context at the time of the events and the influence coming from Albania. Among the internal factors, the Yugoslav factor in itself is quite complex. Josip Broz Tito, an incomparable balancer, had managed to put under control inter-ethnic relations and encourage any initiative for economic development of the country. But since the beginning, the economy faced a number of problems, the foreign debt had gone up, and the gap between the Republics and the Autonomous Provinces had deepened. Kosovo had remained the most underdeveloped region all the time. The Constitution of 1974 marked an important step towards national equality; however, this caused dissatisfaction among Serbs due to the increased level of rights of the two provinces controlled by Serbia. Albanians were also dissatisfied with the new degree of *federal element*, while their demand was a *federal unit*, i.e. for a republic. The Serbs had tried to regain their “rights” they had been deprived of, but Tito prevented them. Among Albanians, the Kosovo leadership considered the constitutional changes as part of an evolutionary process, a process which could lead to a republic for Kosovo. That is why, they did not support the demonstrations of 1981, and they even condemned them. In their view, the demonstrations had severely damaged the process and this provided the Serbs the opportunity to exercise their uncontrolled nationalism. This has already been proven. If there are still uncertainties as to who had incited the demonstrations and whether they were politically motivated since the beginning, the fact is that the conditions for social eruptions had been created and that the spring of 1981 became the herald of future changes in Yugoslavia.

The demonstrations that broke out in the spring of 1981 represent a turning point for the future of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo (hereinafter SAPK), but are also a warning for change in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (hereinafter SFRY).

The circumstances these demonstrations took place in were quite complex. Although Yugoslavia has long been considered the ‘paradise’ of national equality and successful economic development, the federal state has long been plagued by many problems. Some of Yugoslavia's problems were estimated to be due to changes in the construction of the new decentralized system of self-government; part of the other problems was thought to stem from inheritance and unresolved historical issues in the relations between the peoples that were involved in the socialist federal state of Tito¹. Nevertheless, only owing to the experience and dominating authority of J.B. Tito, as a skilled and courageous politician in establishing and maintaining balance, many of the above problems managed to be attenuated and waned down to a considerable extent.

However, Tito’s death, in May 1980, brought out the long-held question posed by various international circles as to what would happen in the future to the Yugoslav state after him.

¹ “Feuilleton - The CIA Secret File on Kosovo”, *Koha Ditore* (Prishtina), 21.01.2005.

Concerns about this issue had started to appear during the '70s, when detailed analyses and forecasts were made away from the eyes of public opinion.² The fate of Yugoslavia's future, based on assessments of various possible scenarios, was predicted to be very bleak. Tito's death was also considered 'Day X', the day when the destruction of Yugoslavia would begin.³

Such conclusion was reached based on the identification of known problems, but also of problems that existed potentially and in certain situations could appear as nationalist, separatist and disintegrating actions within the country.⁴ On the other hand, the fate of Yugoslavia was also linked to developments in international relations. The birth of 'Solidarnost' in Poland in 1980, as well as the USSR intervention in Afghanistan,⁵ had an impact also on Yugoslavia, the leading state of non-aligned countries. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's theory of the limited sovereignty of the countries of real socialism, which had in fact begun to be contested on the rebellious satellite, Poland, with the: 'Solidarnost'⁶ movement, hung over head like the sword of Damocles for all communist states. Fears that the Soviet Union might be involved in the developments in Yugoslavia, a goal that had remained an attempt for years, were also raised as a concern by various Western diplomats.⁷

The death of J.B. Tito was a moment that Serbian nationalist forces saw as a chance to strengthen their political power throughout the Yugoslav state. They regarded the Yugoslav Constitution of 1974 and the status of Kosovo in the federation, as the main injustice and obstacle to the realization of their interests. The unitarist ambitions of the Serbian political and intellectual circles began to manifest themselves. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the most economically developed republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, which had long embraced the idea of economic and political decentralization, opposed unitarism in any form.

Serbian nationalists sought a pretext to impose the changes they intended. It was as if they were waiting for a moment to avenge the 'injustices' that had been done to them. The political and social atmosphere was impregnated with years of accumulated resentment against Tito and his ethnic and political groups.

² Yugoslavia: *An Intelligence Appraisal* (In Response to NSSM 129), 27 July 1971, see: http://www.dni.gov/68C316DC-38CE-4608-B7AC-ECBC13779302/FinalDownload/DownloadId-F1BC22180243B622FA138735FAB8DFB0/68C316DC-38CE-4608-B7AC-ECBC13779302/nic/DF_GIF_declass_support/yugoslavia/Pub24_An_Intel_Appraisal_27-Jul-1971.pdf (visited on 22.10.2012) ; "Feuilleton - The CIA Secret File on Kosovo", *Koha Ditore*, Prishtina, 15.01.2005, 21.01.2005; 27.01.2005. Fill in page number.

³ *Fadil Hoxha in the first person* (with notes and forewords by Veton Surroi), Prishtina: KOHA, 2010, p. 387.

⁴ *Yugoslavia: An Intelligence Appraisal* (In Response to NSSM 129), 27 July 1971 "Feuilleton - The CIA Secret File on Kosovo", *Koha Ditore*, Prishtina, 15.01.2005, 21.01.2005; 27.01.2005. fill in page number.

⁵ Gabriel Partos, *The World That Came from the Cold*, Tirana: Çabej MÇM, 1995, p.123-124. At the end of December 1979, Soviet Union dispatched thousands of troops to Afghanistan and immediately took military and political control over Kabul and a great part of the country.

⁶ Ukshin Hoti, *Political Philosophy of Albanian Issue*, Prishtina: UNIKOM, 1997, p. 106.

⁷ *Albanian Government Diplomatic Documents on 1981 Demonstrations, researched and prepared for print by Sabit Sylja*, Prishtina: Association of Kosovo Political Prisoners, 2012, f. 39. Document Nr. 9 "Some opinions of western diplomats on Kosovo events, 5 May 1981".

And if we go back in time, we will find the beginnings of this discontent, especially after the sentencing of Aleksandar Rankovic*, a personality in whom most Serb nationalists had outlined the accomplishment of their goals. This is best illustrated by the statement of the member of the Central Committee of the YCL, Dobrica Ćosić (hereinafter Dobrica Qosiq), one of the most determined exponents of extreme Serbian nationalism, who at the time wrote to Tito: “Do not harass Rankovic as this will be understood as a strike to the entire Serbia.”⁸ The subsequent constitutional changes within the project “Constitutional Amendments and Supplements” during 1967, 1968, 1971 and the approval of the new federal Constitution in 1974 further aggravated the Serbian nationalists, often enrobed in party and ruling garment. After failing to prevent these changes, which sanctioned the decentralization of the federal and republican state system, and consequently the advancement of the autonomy of the autonomous provinces, these forces started seeking other forms for the revision of this constitution.

During 1976, 1977, a working group led by senior Serbian officials, such as Dragoslav Marković (hereinafter Dragosllav Markoviq) and Petar Stambolić (hereinafter Petar Stambolliq), drafted the so-called ‘Blue Book’ entitled “Socialist Republic of Serbia and Its Autonomous Provinces - Constitutional Position and Practices”.⁹ This ‘working document’ as it was called at the time, semi-officially, not publicly, called for a review of the part that had to do with the position of the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina, because Serbia was allegedly damaged. It stated that the provinces should remain under the jurisdiction of Serbia and that many powers [rights] should be returned to Serbia. Serbian leaders initially tried to impose these proposals on provincial leaders. But they also tried, in a camouflaged form, to serve such proposals for approval even to the highest Yugoslav state leaders. These circles went so far as to achieve their goals, in a trickery manner, they introduced another, milder version, of this book, even to Edward Kardel himself. This resulted in him being misled when he concluded that “It is fine, there were no major problems.”¹⁰ This group then tried to urge E. Kardel to put pressure on the provinces to accept the proposals coming out of this document. Only after numerous meetings, discussions and clarifications made by Kosovar leaders at various party and state levels and forums, Tito demanded that the Presidency of the Communist League of Serbia reject the ‘Blue Book’.¹¹

But Serbian nationalists did not cease their activity. They endeavored to achieve their goals in different ways. Manipulating the interpretation of history and playing with people’s feelings

⁸ *Forging Anti-Yugoslav Conspiracy*, Book 1, (Edited and prepared by: Sonja Biserko), Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2006, p. 85.

*Aleksandar Ranković (hereinafter Aleksander Rankoviq), a Serbian senior communist, one of Tito’s closest associate, who held various positions such as Organizational Secretary of the Central Committee of Yugoslav Communist League, Minister of Interior Affairs, Head of the State Security Management (UDB) as well as the Vice-President of the SRFY.

⁹ *Fadil Hoxha in First Person...*, p.364; *Forging Anti-Yugoslav Conspiracy*, Book 1..., p. 102; Mehmet Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization and 1981 Demonstrations*, Tirana: TOENA PUBLISHING, 2008, pp. 48-49; Bajram Kosumi, *Concept on New Political Thinking*, Prishtina: BREZI 81, 2001, p.23.

¹⁰ *Fadil Hoxha In the First Person...*, p. 365.

¹¹ M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization...*, pp. 48-49.

was one of those forms. Dobrica Qosiq, after being admitted as a permanent member of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1977, began to animate the view of Serbian history as a tragedy. He blamed the tragedy on the Yugoslav state, which he said was ‘unsuitable for Serbs.’ Qosiq then came up with the saying “...Serbs win at war but they lose at peace...”,¹² a provocative saying for a hurt pride, which in time would become the postulate of Serbian chauvinist circles and the basis and guideline for the path to be followed by Serbian policymakers in the future.

The 1974 constitution had extended the rights of the provinces and certainly created many other facilities. Thanks to these changes, in 1978, the Albanian Fadil Hoxha, had even managed to be elected the Deputy Chairman of the Collective Presidency of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). It was the first time that an Albanian had achieved such a state post, in the Yugoslav hierarchy, being a deputy of Tito himself¹³. This had a great impact on the masses of the people at that time, and served to maximize the image of the Yugoslav leader, Tito, as a master of creating balances between nations and nationalities and avoiding the dominant ambitions of larger nations. But the symbolism of the appearance was just the image; basically there were plenty of hot and untouched areas that could bring unforeseen tensions.

Although most of the Albanian / Kosovar communist leaders were accommodated in the Communist League of Yugoslavia (CLY) and the Yugoslav system, and some of them were even convinced of the right path they were following, the Kosovar population had reason to feel unwell. One can rightly ascertain that in the Yugoslav edifice, Albanians were the most dissatisfied. This was primarily due to lack of full realization of their political, economic, educational and cultural rights. But, most importantly, the Albanians failed to gain the status of the republic they were aiming for.

If one looks at the social circumstances, Kosovo was the federal unit with the most underdeveloped economy. Despite the fact that this region possessed numerous natural resources, the orientations of economic development, directed by the central level, were inappropriate. In Kosovo, thanks to investments from the federal fund, the primary industry was developed that was based on the exploitation of assets as a raw material, but not the processing industry.¹⁴ In the period of the Mid-Term Development Plan 1976-1980, Kosovo lagged far behind the development of other Yugoslav territories.¹⁵ Economic problems were deepening the progress gap between Kosovo and other regions, an element that affected the discontent of Albanian citizens. Unemployment in Kosovo was highest, and per capita income was the lowest in the country.¹⁶

¹² Forging Anti-Yugoslav Conspiracy, Book 1, ..., p.22.

¹³ Miranda Vickers, *Between Serbians and Albanians – A Short History of Kosovo*, Tirana: Toena Publishing, 2004, p.225.

¹⁴ Noel Malcom, *Kosovo: A Short History*, Prishtina: KOHA, 1998, p. 351.

¹⁵ Jens Reuter, *Albanians in Yugoslavia*, Tirana: Botimpex, 2003, p. 63.

¹⁶ *History of Albanian People, Volume IV* (fill in the publication year of Volume IV), Tirana: Toena Publishing, 2009, f. 390.

According to official Yugoslav sources, the difference between per capita income in Kosovo and Slovenia, as the strongest economic unit, was 6 to 1 to the detriment of Kosovo.¹⁷ This gap was further aggravated by the economic stagnation that was emerging in the second half of the 1970s in the SFRY. In particular, the oil crisis in 1976, when the considerable lack of this important product for the economy was felt, was significantly reflected.¹⁸ The country's trade and payment balance deteriorated; external debt increased rapidly. Between 1977 and 1980 it increased from \$ 8.5 billion to nearly \$ 20 billion.¹⁹ The SFRY was unable to cover all financial obligations to repay its debts. On the other hand, the conditions set by the World Bank for financial loans were quite harsh. They were most severely reflected in underdeveloped areas, which in turn led to job cuts and weakening political stability.²⁰

The seriousness of this situation was also understood by the top Yugoslav leaders. Eduard Kardel himself, in 1977, had warned his party colleagues that, if no measures were taken to reduce these economic differences and to reduce interethnic tensions, violence would break out in Kosovo.²¹ Two years later, J. B. Tito, during his last visit to Kosovo, tried to alleviate the situation by promising to help narrow the gap in development,²² but it was already too late. His concern about the aggravated situation was also raised by the Kosovar communist leader, Mahmut Bakalli, when by the end of 1980 he stated that: "The province was not being helped by the Federal Fund as planned"²³, but encountered a deaf ear.

From political aspect, with the 1974 Constitution, Kosovo had managed to advance to the level of a constituent element in the Yugoslav Federation, and this, in the eyes of the Albanian / Kosovar communist leaders, was seen as the result of an evolutionary process, which could lead to the creation of the federal unit, i.e., to the Republic of Kosovo. But, as it turned out, the status of Kosovo as a federal element was the maximum that Albanians could achieve within the Yugoslav communist system at the time. This phenomenon was constantly made clear to Kosovars by Tito, the Central Committee of the YCL and other federal and republican structures of Yugoslavia. Let us mention Tito's meeting with the Kosovar delegation, in 1968,²⁴ the 12th Plenum of the Central Committee of the YCL held in February 1969, where the idea of rejecting the evolution of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo into a federated republic was reconfirmed.²⁵

¹⁷ J. Reuter, *Albanians...*, p. 85.

¹⁸ John V. A. Fine, *The Exceptional Case of Josip Broz Tito*, Tirana: AHS, 2010, f.100-101.

¹⁹ Branko Komatina, *Yugoslav-Albanian Relations 1979-1983 Ambassador's Notes and Memoirs*, Belgrade: Newspaper Printing Institution – Official Gazette SRY, 1995, p. 97.

²⁰ John V. A. Fine, *Exceptional Case...*, p. 100-101.

²¹ M. Vickers, *Between Serbs and Albanians ...*, p. 226.

²² J. Reuter, *Albanians...*, p. 64.

²³ Naim Krasniqi, *The 1981 Demonstrations in Kosovo According to German Printed Press*, Prishtina: SAS 2011, p.13.

²⁴ Ana Lalaj, *Kosovo A Long Journey to Self-Determination (1948-1981)*, Tirana: Mësonjëtorja, 2000, p. 334.

²⁵ J. Reuter, *Albanians...*, f. 59.

Tito also expressed such an attitude to the Kosovar communist leader, Mahmut Bakalli, during a meeting they had in 1974, when the new Yugoslav constitution was being discussed.²⁶ The above facts prove that despite the aspirations of Kosovars to evolve their status into federal / republican units, decisions were made by the highest Yugoslav party and state structures headed by J. B. Tito. This particular fact is also confirmed by Fadil Hoxha, one of the highest Albanian communist officials in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, when he states that: "... Kosovo has never made decisions for itself. "For the main functions, the factors always consulted with Tito while he was alive".²⁷

However, this evolutionary path that failed to reach the republic was especially disagreed by the various illegal Albanian groups, organizations and movements, which had different views from the institutional leaders of Kosovo. Political activity contrary to or not harmonized with official policy, in Kosovo, as in the entire SFRY, has been possible only through illegally organized forms. Illegal movement in Kosovo has had a long tradition since the end of the WWII.²⁸ Their ideal was freedom and the realization of full political and national rights that were envisaged in various forms.

In the mid-60s and during the '70s of the XX century, this ideal was perceived in the form of "unification of Kosovo with Albania". Representatives of this idea were organizations such as the "Revolutionary Movement of Unification of Albanians" led by Adem Demaçi, "Revolutionary Group of Kosovo" (in 1976 renamed "Marxist-Leninist Group of Kosovo") led by Kadri Osmani, "The People's Red Front" led by Ibrahim Kelmendi, "National Liberation Movement of Kosovo and Albanian Territories in Yugoslavia" (Metush Krasniqi, Jusuf Gërvalla), "Communist-Marxist Leninist Party of Albanians in Yugoslavia" (Abdullah Prapashtica), etc.

Towards the end of the '70s, this ideal was reformed into the demand for the "Republic of Kosovo within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia" which became the essence of the expression of the 1981 demonstrations.²⁹ This transformation of the illegal movement demand for the Republic of Kosovo within the framework of the Yugoslav Federation can be understood as a realistic-political maturity.³⁰ Such a request seemed more acceptable even in relation to international determination that did not allow violent changes of state borders.

²⁶ "Mahmut Bakalli Interview", *Koha ditore*, Prishtina, 17 April 2007.

²⁷ *Fadil Hoxha In the First Person...*, f.347.

²⁸ Bajram Kosumi, *Concept on the New Political Thinking*, Prishtina: BREZI'81, 2001, p. 27.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 29.

³⁰ M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization ...*, p. 171

It is worth mentioning that at that time (in 1975) in Helsinki (Finland), the CSCE (Conference on Security and European Cooperation) was established, one of the main principles of which was respecting the sovereignty and borders of the agreement signatory countries.³¹

This redefinition of the demand for the Republic of Kosovo within the borders of the SFRY seems to have been influenced by Albania as well. In the general opinion created at that time in Kosovo, the prevailing opinion was that the latter had been the motive for the non-inclusion of official Tirana in the CSCE**. In the prevalence of this atmosphere in Kosovo, it seems paradoxical that advice came from Albania to the activists of the illegal Kosovars that they be limited only to the demands for national equality within Yugoslavia.³²

Perhaps such stance of the Albanian state was influenced by the relaxation of relations with Yugoslavia, which had resumed in the early 1970s and continued throughout the decade. This attitude was an expression of the detente that existed between the two Cold War blocs, but could also be related to the potential danger posed to both countries by the USSR. During that time, the readiness for mutual support and protection in case such a threat would appear was also expressed.³³ This can be observed in the promise made to the Chairman of the Executive Council of the Provincial Assembly of Kosovo, Ilija Vasic, by the member of the Political Bureau of the ALP and the Albanian Deputy Prime Minister, Adil Çarçani, for Albania's readiness to help Yugoslavia, if necessary, even with the military, against the eventual dangers to its independence, which implied the USSR³⁴. Enver Hoxha was in the same line in his speech, held in October 1974, where, among other things, he strongly condemned all those voices that spread the dilemma about the “fate of Yugoslavia after Tito”.³⁵

³¹ Albania was the only European country that remained outside of Helsinki process, by not signing the CSCE Final Act in 1975.

** The Kosovar opinion was dominated by the idea that Albania had not signed the CSCE Final Act of 1975, not accepting the borders of Yugoslavia for reasons of Kosovo, namely that Enver Hoxha intended to include Kosovo within the borders of the Republic of Albania. Given the insufficient military and political power of the PRA of that time, we think that such a thesis does not stand. Another reason, the fear of respect for human rights that would shake the orthodox totalitarian power in Albania, was the main reason why Hoxha did not sign the Helsinki Charter on August 1, 1975.

³² Bedri Islami, *Movement (bloody birth) – conversation with Ibrahim Kelmendi*, Tetovo: Tringa design, 2012, p. 149. Ibrahim Kelmendi, an activist of the Kosovo illegal movement operating in the West, mainly in Germany, recounts the meetings he had had and the advice he received from persons that were engaged in the Albanian Embassy in Vienna, as of 1977; M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization ...*, p.155.

³³ M. Hajrizi, *The History of a political organization ...*, f. 58-59.

³⁴ *Albanian-Yugoslav Relations 1968-1981* (documents), selection, foreword and editing: Qerim Lita, Skopje, 2012 p. 121. Document No. 19 ДАМБНР, оп.5ш, а.е.1137, л. 298 NOTIFICATION from Bulgarian Ambassador in Belgrade, sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the PR of Bulgaria, with regards to the conversation with the Advisor of the Czechoslovakian Embassy in Belgrade, Mr. Shimacek with the member of the Political Bureau of the CC of CLY, Mr. Fadil Hoxha (Top secret – copying is forbidden! Belgrade, 27 September 1973).

³⁵ Ibid. p.130, Document no. 22 ДАРМ.1.159.332.29/1-12 Top Secret Report of the Secretariat for Relations with the World, sent to Executive Council of SR of Macedonia, which describes the Yugoslav-Albanian relations and participation of the SR of Macedonia with PR of Albania. (Highly confidential material No 147/1, Skopje 26.05.1975).

Such tones of closeness were also expressed by the Yugoslav leader at one of the meetings of the State Presidency held in Karadjordjevo (Vojvodina) in the late '70s. In this meeting, J. B. Tito presented his views on the progress of relations with Albania, as the latter with its independence and willingness to defend this independence was a protective ally from any aggressor.³⁶

If one analyses the illegal Albanian / Kosovar groups operating at that time, inside and outside the SFRY, one can note that most of them, especially the most active ones for Kosovo ***, were founded on leftist, communist, revolutionary ideas. Their ideological affiliation was understandable for the fact that Albania, where they found the main inspiration at that time, was oriented by this political and ideological line. Ideological and national inspiration and indoctrination penetrated from the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (PSRA) through various forms of information, such as the mass media, press or various literatures. However, according to the data, it can be said that some of these organizations sometimes took advice from the communist Albanian state of the time.³⁷ In general, however, official Albania was cautious, did not dwell on details or concrete suggestions, and often had doubts about them. Meanwhile, there was no lack of cases when some of these organizations tried to inform official Tirana in advance of each of their activities.³⁸

Despite the fact that the primary goal these groups was the national freedom of the Albanian people within Yugoslavia until the unification with Albania, in their strategy of action one can observe an ideological nuance. This would affect the ideological spirit based on the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary doctrine to be always present in various activities, such as the drafting of their pamphlets and newspapers (organs). This was also evident in the slogans that would be displayed during the 1981 demonstrations.

The above organizations operated in deep illegality and their activity was mainly based on small groups of three or as they were otherwise called the cells. Although it is claimed that they had had a great impact on the population, it must be said that "... the masses of the people were informed with their activity only when their members were imprisoned or tried"³⁹

³⁶ M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization ...*, pp.58-59.

*** There were also some organizations or individuals such as Mentor Çoku or Leka Zogu, with right-wing nationalist orientations operating in emigration, who committed themselves to bring together the various Albanian organizations around a common platform for expanding activities to the SFRY and the Republic of Albania. However, they failed to strengthen their influence in the territory of Yugoslavia thanks to the animosity they had with the Albanian government.

³⁷ Bedri Islami, *Movement (bloody birth) – conversation...*, p.149; M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization...*, p. 171.

³⁸ M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization...*, p.155.

³⁹ Such ascertainment came from the Marxist-Leninist organization of Kosovo itself, see the facsimile of the article "Guidelines on Conspiracy" written by Hydajet Hyseni one of the representatives of this organization in M. Hajrizi, *The History of a political organization ...*, p.122 and, the additional part photo and facsimile p. 533.

However, these groups had managed to convey to the Albanian people of Kosovo the idea that there are other ways to realize their national rights and freedoms. The activists of these organizations, not so much for the amount of illegal activity, but for the time they spent in prison and the extremely severe measures they had been subjected to, became points of reference for devotion, unity and expression of discontent against the Yugoslav government. Their deep convictions for freedom, as well as their determination and willingness to sacrifice to the point of self-sacrifice, have spread the idea that one day Yugoslavia would be destroyed and that Albanians would gain their rights.

One cannot yet state precisely as to who initiated the 1981 demonstrations. But one thing is more than clear; the atmosphere for the explosion was ripe. Albanians were dissatisfied with their position, the economic crisis in Yugoslavia was an opportune reality to ignite a revolt, and on the other hand Serbian nationalists were looking for only one spark to act.

From the consultations with the archived documents as well as with the protagonists of the time, it turns out to me that the very moment of the explosion of the demonstrations, in a way, took everyone by surprise. Few would have thought that the March 11 revolt that took place in the student canteen of the University of Prishtina, for better conditions, would later turn into a powerful demonstration involving workers, students, villagers and the different strata of the population. Such a dilemma can be further strengthened by the fact that a similar protest, demanding better student conditions, was held in the end of 1980.⁴⁰ There is even information that the March 11 demonstrations were initially supported by Serbian students as well, as an expression of solidarity with demands for better conditions.⁴¹

The reaction of the party and provincial authorities was at first restrained. They tried to explain these demonstrations as an expression of social discontent and would keep them under control, moreover, even the illegal groups somehow agree with the idea that these demonstrations did not have a specific organizer, but were rather a result of the dissatisfaction that prevailed among the Albanians.⁴² However, their continuation on March 26 and then on April 1 and 2, when they became massive brought new developments in their content.

The powerful revolt of the Albanians, which resulted in response to the repression and constant denial of their rights, was articulated through demands and slogans that were launched during the demonstrations. The prevailing opinion is that the slogans and demands were prepared by illegal groups that infiltrated the ranks of the demonstrators. On the other hand, the harshness displayed by the Yugoslav law enforcement agencies, the rush to categorize the “counter-

⁴⁰ M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization ...*, f. 177.

⁴¹ Momčilo Pavlović, “Kosovo Under Autonomy, 1974-1990”, *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies A Scholars` Initiative* (Edited by Charles Ingrao and Thomas A. Emmert), Perdu University Press West Lafayette, Indiana, 2009, f. 61.

⁴² M. Hajrizi, *The History of a Political Organization ...*, p.183, 190.

revolutionary”⁴³ demonstrations, suggests that part of the Yugoslav leadership eagerly waited to teach a good lesson to the Albanians and their demands for a republic.

Albanian illegal groups, and not only, consider that the demonstrations of March-April 1981 managed to bring to the surface the real situation of the Albanian people and to openly express their aspirations for freedom. While Kosovar communist leaders like Mahmut Bakalli and Azem Vllasi expressed their great dilemmas about the effect of these demonstrations. According to them, they became an excuse to open the way for the aggressive actions of Serbian nationalists and influenced the degradation of the evolutionary path, which according to them would bring the republic.⁴⁴ Perhaps, by understanding precisely the goals of the Serbian leaders of the time, Mahmut Bakalli had expressed his reluctance to the 1981 demonstrations and noted the lack of a proper operating platform for the illegal movement.

It is true that demonstrations were an excuse to introduce and activate an entire administrative, police and military machinery against Kosovo. The decision to declare a state of emergency on April 2, 1981, by the President of the Yugoslav Presidency, Cvijetin Mijatović (hereinafter Cvijetin Mijatović)⁴⁵, was the most drastic act that paved the way for dismissals, convictions, ill-treatment and various differentiations against the population, intellectuals and Kosovo Albanian politicians. The plan to calm the situation, codenamed ‘Rubin-81’, provided for very drastic measures, and all this had to be done away from the eyes of foreign journalists. Clear instructions for this were given at the meetings of the two presidencies, which took place on 1 and 2 April 1981.⁴⁶

Serbian nationalists accomplished the goal of yugoslavizing the Kosovo problem. They manipulated and exploited federal and republican institutional mechanisms to pound down Kosovo and prevent its evolution. However, the demonstrations managed to make the issue of Kosovo and the rights of Albanians in Yugoslavia the object of the European and world press.⁴⁷ Gradually, in addition to public opinion, the interest of official international opinion was stimulated. The national issue of Kosovo became part of the agendas of the international community only when it became involved in the platforms and activities of Albanians to protect human rights and build a democratic society. The United States was one of the first countries to side with Kosovo Albanians⁴⁸ on its long road to freedom and democracy.

⁴³ It is believed that such label was firstly used by the President of the Presidency of CC of YCL, Lazar Mojsov.

⁴⁴ “Interview with Azem Vllasi”, *Koha Ditore*, Prishtina, 1 September 2012. Fill in page no.

⁴⁵ AS 1589, CK ZKJ-P KP, št 05 3/29 6 April 1981 s 24-27; The decision for the state of emergency was in fact limited only to the territory of Prishtina Municipality, but with the possibility that in case the security situation requires, the same action could be undertaken in the entire territory of the SAPK.

⁴⁶ AS 1589, CK ZKJ-P KP, št 05 3/29 6 April 1981 s 20-23.

⁴⁷ See Naim Krasniqi, *Kosovo 1981 Demonstrations according to German printed press*, Prishtina: SAS, 2011, p....; Eqrem Zenelaj, *Austrian press on Kosovo Albanians Demonstrations in 1968, 1981 and 1989*, Prishtina: FAIK KONICA, 2011, p....; *World press on Kosovo events, Tirana, “*November”, 1981, p...*

⁴⁸ Interview of Shaun Byrnes, Head of American Monitoring and Diplomatic Mission in Kosovo, in the years 1998-1999”, *Koha Ditore*, Prishtina, 28 October 2012.

The brutality that the 1981 demonstrations in Kosovo were handled with, as well as the subsequent Serbian and Yugoslav violence, pushed very far the limits of Albanians patience. This violence was a prelude to what would happen in this province but also throughout the Yugoslav federation in the decades to come.

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