

**THE PEACEFUL MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE  
AS A UNIQUE MODEL OF ORGANIZING A PEOPLE FOR FREEDOM  
AND AN INDEPENDENT STATE**

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**Abstract**

Repression against Kosovo citizens was applied in every aspect of life and public activities. In that time, Serbia's policy towards Kosovo resembled conditions of apartheid in South Africa. Preparations for the drafting of the Declaration of Independence of the new emerging state of the map of Europe had begun. Albanians in Kosovo got organized and under a classic repression of the Serbian regime. They organized a parallel system of institutions, providing education, health care and other services to the local population.

**Keywords:** freedom, Kosovo, independence, new state, Ibrahim Rugova, former Yugoslavia

The Democratic League of Kosovo emerged as the primary authority for Albanians, extending to almost every Albanian home in Kosovo. In response to state repression, Albanians strengthened and increased their commitment to independence. The orientation of Albanians for freedom and independence had no

alternative. Albanian leaders in the early 1990s undertook a series of coordinated actions to advance these goals.

The chairman of LDK, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, had extensive contact with foreign diplomats, journalists and other actors. His outreach sought to internationalize the Kosovo issue and call attention to the plight of Kosovo Albanians among international policy-makers. The LDK program and political platform were oriented towards Euro-Western democratic values and fostering partnership with countries in the West. Close relations were established with diplomats of influential countries, primarily the United States. US senators and congressmen visited Kosovo in MONTH/YEAR. They watched from the second floor window of the Grand Hotel in Prishtina as Yugoslavia's armed forces beat Kosovo Albanians. In response to this attack, Dr. Rugova and LDK leaders considered an outright declaration of independence.

Jusuf Buxhovi, the first secretary of the LDK, wrote: "The idea of declaring the Declaration of Independence in the parliamentary way was discussed for the first time on the occasion of the visit of the journalist Viktor Mayer in Prishtina days ago, when he had given his support to the squares for the Kosovo Parliament to enter "this game" ..... 'You should not wait,' said Mayer ..... After many measurements and reflections, Rugova finally means that we will enter this work. "The next step [involved] parliament" ..... The US Senate and the Albanian-American Committee, invited Rugova and his LDK delegation to testify before the Senate to be opened. Rugova placed great importance on the visit to Washington in order to consult with US officials and legislators in order to make sure that the LDK's platform was in line with the Americans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Buxhovi, Jusuf, "Kthesa historike – Vitet e Gjermanisë dhe epoka e LDK-s" "Faik Konica", Prishtinë, 2008, f. 245.

The visit of the Kosovo delegation to the US led by Dr. Rugova enhanced the LDK's credibility, at the same time it further strengthened the ties and strategic partnership with the US as the main political and military power of NATO. During this visit, Dr. Rugova was treated as a statesman. His interaction with US officials gave additional legitimacy to the LDK, as well as responsibility. The secretary of the LDK and member of the Kosovo delegation on that important visit, Jusuf Buxhovi, wrote: "DioGuardi would inform me that Rugova should be kept away from the delegation for 'security reasons' ... however, he will soon do so. I understand that the next morning, when I will be introduced to two of the senior officials who will be introduced to me as state security agents ..... in fluent German, he told me who he was, so he was a senior official of state security, responsible for the service for escorting and securing foreign statesmen. He informed me that on the part of his service, dr. Ibrahim Rugova had the treatment of a statesman .... and this was to be expected when he was' separated 'from the group and placed under full surveillance, initially under the' pretext 'of security' due to the warning of a threat ', that I will soon realize that the Americans had promoted him the leader of a movement that there and in those circumstances will be called democratic, in which case he was informed that from that moment he was in charge of a historic turn, and which with the trump card of the demands for equality and democracy, which were the basis of the LDK program, Kosovo and its issue, first to take it out of the tutelage of Serbia, and then, in accordance with the developments that Yugoslavia would go through and readiness acceptance of democratic reforms by it, to transfer it to the framework of its state subjectivity, equal to other units "<sup>2</sup>.

The visit to the US was historic. Rugova's message resonated on Capitol Hill and in influential circles. The issue of Kosovo gained new contacts, awareness and a high level of internationalization. Dr. Rugova had indirectly received support

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<sup>2</sup> Right there, p. 260, 261.

to appropriate the deputies of the Assembly of Kosovo to take one of the most important steps in the new history of Kosovo, the declaration of independence.

Preparations for the drafting of the Declaration of Independence had begun. Rugova established a Group of Experts, headed by Academician Gazmend Zajmi, while the coordination with the delegates of the Assembly of Kosovo was organized by Fehmi Agani, a seasoned LDK representative who met regularly with US, British and German officials to keep them informed about the Declaration.

As members of the Kosovo Assembly were prevented from holding the session in the assembly hall, they gathered in front of the Kosovo Assembly building. Over two-thirds of the deputies, including two Turks and a Muslim, joined the ceremony to demonstrate Kosovo's multi-ethnic character. However, no Kosovo Serb participated. 114 members of the Kosovo Assembly participated in the formal act of secession.<sup>3</sup> One of the deputies read the Declaration of Independence, which was approved by acclamation. The Declaration was published in the official gazette of the Assembly of Kosovo and was sent to the Federal Assembly and the republican assemblies. Rugova was three right man at the right time. According to Ambassador Ahrens, "Writer Ibrahim Rugova became the leader of the LDK; His political roots were not in the Communist Party, but, among other things, in the intellectual circles associated with the University of Prishtina and the Writers' Union of Kosovo (of which he was the chairman). Rugova, whose father and grandfather were executed in 1945 by communist partisans because they were wealthy peasants, adamantly rejected the use of force. Many described his as Ghandian in his commitment to non-violence. While internationalizing the conflict, Rugova adamantly rejected any form of Serbian or Yugoslav rule over Kosovo.

Both intellectuals and people of Kosovo welcomed the Declaration of Independence despite the incumbent challenges and difficulties. In response, the

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<sup>3</sup> Ahrens, Geert, "Diplomacia mbi tehun e thikës", "Toena", Tiranë, 2010, p. 312, 313

Government of Serbia adopted even tougher measures and laws against Albanians. "Serbian austerity measures led to the dismissal of 115,000 Albanians, who accounted for 70 percent of the province's employment. The lives of Albanians underwent a double deterioration."<sup>4</sup>

Repression was applied in every aspect of life and public activities. Serbia's policy towards Kosovo resembled conditions of apartheid in South Africa. Rugova and the LDK rejected efforts concerning "minority rights". Though Albanians were a minority in Serbia, they represented more than 90% of Kosovo's population. The problem was not about minority-majority relations. The problem in Kosovo resulted from Serbia's racist and chauvinistic treatment of Albanians. Kosovo was an occupied territory, where the Serbian minority used a heavy hand to control Kosovo Albanians. Its draconian security measures, which included disappearances and torture, merely deepened the division between Serbs and Albanians, enhancing the resolve of Kosovo Albanians to separate from Serbia. Republic status for Kosovo in a highly decentralized Yugoslav federation had been an option. The Declaration of Independence closed that door and irrevocably put Kosovo and Serbia on a path of confrontation.

Kosovo Albanians got organized and under a classic repression of the Serbian regime. It organized a parallel system of institutions, providing education, health care and other services to the local population. Many scholars, historians and publicists call it a "parallel state". If the situation resembled apartheid, the LDK was partly responsible by rejecting all aspects of Serbian rule and driving a deep wedge between Kosovo's communities. The LDK's approach reflected the people's will. There was no going back to life under Serbia's iron fist.

Many have compared the "Peaceful Resistance of Kosovo Albanians," as many would call it, to the Gandhi Movement of civil disobedience and non-violence

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<sup>4</sup> Bytyçi, Enver, "E drejta e vetëvendosjes: Rasti i Kosovës", "Koha", Tiranë, 2007, f. 67.

in India. Though the Kosovo and South Africa experiences occurred at different times and in different political, historical, demographic, territorial contexts, they shared the similarity of an occupation that denied the majority privileges and opportunity. The British system of colonial rule differed markedly from the medieval approach of the Serbian regime, whose pathological hatred and medieval "myths" sought to wipe out Albanian identity. The need for accountability was affirmed when many Serbian personalities, including Milosevic, were indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The genesis and activities of the National Peace Movement for Freedom and Independence is unique in the history of oppressed peoples who struggled for national freedom and independence.

In elaborating this matter in terms of arguments and historiographical facts, I have relied on renowned authors, coming from countries with a long democratic tradition, eminent scholars, diplomats directly involved in resolving the Kosovo conflict, but also actors of the National Movement for Freedom and Independence. Regarding the continuous oppression of Albanians in Kosovo by the Serbian regime, Malcolm wrote: "To write a genuine analysis of the human rights violations that Kosovo Albanians suffer from 1990, it will also be needed in a number of chapters. Every aspect of living in Kosovo has been destroyed ..... arbitrary arrests and police violence have become routine."<sup>5</sup>

The July 2 Declaration of Independence moved shifted responsibility for daily life in Kosovo to Kosovo Albanians. Using the legal forms, the deputies of the Assembly of Kosovo coordinated with the LDK and other Albanian political forces and intellectuals to advance Kosovo's self-rule in accordance with democratic principles and reflecting the popular will through their legitimate democratically-elected representatives. In September 1990, another important legal

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<sup>5</sup> Malcolm, Noel, "Kosova një histori e shkurtër" Botoi "Koha", Prishtinë. 2011, p.435, 436.

and constitutional step was taken that consolidated the declaration of independence. In Kaçanik on September 7, 1990, deputies of the Assembly of Kosovo approved the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Former Chairman of the Working Group on Kosovo at the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), German diplomat Ahrens describes the event: “On September 7, 1990, the Albanian members of the dissolved parliament held a secret meeting in the town of Kaçanik , where they approved the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Article 1 reads: "The Republic of Kosovo is a democratic state of the Albanian nation and other nationalities, minorities and citizens of Serbs, Muslims, Montenegrins, Croats, Turks, Roma and others living in Kosovo." Article 2 declared the Republic of Kosovo sovereign and independent. The Constitution, which entered into force immediately, including the Albanian parallel system, provided for all institutions a modern democracy and contained a separate section on human rights (Articles 42 to 79). As a result, in December 1990, a majority of Albanians boycotted the first pluralist elections in Serbia, won by Milosevic.<sup>6</sup>” Articles of Kosovo’s new constitution, also called the “Constitution of Kaçanik” affirmed democratic principles, especially in relation to minorities in Kosovo (i.e. Serbs, Roma, etc.). The people of Kosovo and their leadership aspired to create a democratic state, where all citizens are free and equal. Croatian diplomat Dario Malnar writes about this event: “After the proclamation of the Constitutional Declaration, the Kosovo Albanians, the legislators of the dissolved assembly of Kosovo gathered again, this time in Kaçanik, on September 7, 1990. In that case, they approved the Constitution of Republic of Kosovo, the Law on Political Union of Citizens, the Law on Elections, as well as other acts within the scope of the

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<sup>6</sup> Ahrens, Geert, “Diplomacia mbi tehun e thikës”, “Toena”, Tiranë, 2010, p. 313.

Assembly of Kosovo and on relations with the Assembly of Yugoslavia. Kosovo was defined as a political entity independent of Serbia.”<sup>7</sup>

The political leadership of Kosovo Albanians coordinated with concerned governments, especially the US, to organize referendum on independence. Slovenia had already taken the step of secession from the former federation. The war in Croatia had started, after the declaration of independence by the Croatian parliament (Sabor). The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was about to explode into civil war. The federation was an illusion. Full and final dissolution of the federation was irrevocable. In these circumstances, the leadership of Kosovo Albanians took the final step, which was the referendum, allowing the population to declare its future. The independence referendum was held in September 1991. Dr. Marc Weller commented: "The official declaration of independence took place a year later, on September 22, 1991, to be confirmed by referendum. About 87 percent of voters participated (ethnic Serbs boycotted the vote) with about 100 percent in favor of independence.”<sup>8</sup>

The independence referendum of September 1991 sent a clear message to the Belgrade regime that the will of the majority people and their aspiration for freedom was stronger than any kind of regime. At the same time, it demonstrated to representatives of the international community the popular will for independence from which there was no turning back. In the coming months, the political leadership of Kosovo formed the government of the Republic of Kosovo, led by Dr. Bujar Bukoshi, who due to the circumstances of the occupation would migrate to Germany. The government was formed by a wide range of political parties,

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<sup>7</sup> Malnar Dario, "SHBA-ja dhe Kosova", Botimet "Koha", Prishtinë, 2013, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> Weller, Marc, "Shtetësia e kontestuar: Administrimi ndërkombëtar i Kosovës për pavarësi" Botimet "Koha", 2011, p. 89.

which reflected the government of unity and stability as well as the national consensus, which was necessary to withstand Serbia's coercion and pressures.

The Government of the Republic of Kosovo started with the functioning of several departments. To pay for its operating costs, the government established the "three percent fund". Diaspora Albanians paid three percent of their monthly income. Employees in Kosovo also contributed though 120,000 workers had left their jobs in public institutions. The contributions of private businesses were indispensable to sustaining the education system and other vital services. Classes were conducted in private homes from lower primary education to university education. The system was unprecedented in Europe. Over nearly a decade, about 400,000 students were joined by thousands of teachers in private homes, under the reproachful watch of the Serbian police. There were beatings, harassment, imprisonment of teachers, Albanian education officials, but the great will of teachers, the people, pupils and students was stronger than the regime.

The health system was also organized through the network of Humanitarian Associations named after "Mother Teresa". The Serbian regime believed that the dismissal of Albanians from work and with the closure of schools and health institutions, Albanians would be "tired" and would not be able to resist. It was wrong. The more repressive the regime, the more determined Albanians were to resist. Those years of humanism and solidarity of our people are simply incomparable. "Family helps the family," in cooperation with the association "Mother Teresa", supplied about 50,000 families with basic necessities of life. The institutions of the Republic of Kosovo now worked and acted in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. All institutional mechanisms were established for managing society, including the field of security. Meanwhile, other political parties were formed alongside the LDK and in order for the institutions of the state of Kosovo to have democratic legitimacy, with full consensus. The entities

representing the political spectrum of Kosovo organized the first national elections in Kosovo, according to "The Constitution of Kaçanik". The most important decisions after the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo was the commitment to have a referendum on independence, the adoption of an electoral law and the organization of elections in accordance with this constitution of Kosovo.

The first pluralist election in the Republic of Kosovo was held on May 24, 1992. The massive turnout of Albanian, Turkish, Roma and Muslim citizens demonstrated Kosovo's democratic and civic culture. These elections are convincingly won by the Democratic League of Kosovo and Dr. Ibrahim Rugova was selected as the first President of the Republic of Kosovo. Croatian diplomat Dario Malnar writes: "Apart from Kosovo Albanians, Turks and Muslims also participated in the elections ..... Ibrahim Rugova won the presidential elections with an overwhelming majority of votes. ... With these elections, the process of forming parallel institutions of Kosovo Albanians ended, who continued the peaceful process without violence, and this affirmed the democratic characteristics of the struggle for independence."<sup>9</sup> This national and state-building consciousness of Kosovo Albanians demonstrated democratic principles and the commitment of an ancient people to national freedom and independence. This political course of Kosovo Albanians was led by the President of the Republic of Kosovo, Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, who had already become an icon and synonymous with freedom and independence. Rugova became the face of Kosovo to the international community.

The Serbian regime had not counted on such a political strategy and national consciousness of Kosovo Albanians. Scholar Enver Bytyçi, regarding the specifics of the Albanian-Serbian conflict (Kosovo - Serbia), wrote: "The notion of conflict and crisis in Kosovo was enriched with an innovation in the inevitable big clash

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<sup>9</sup> Malnar Dario, "SHBA-ja dhe Kosova", Botimet "Koha", Prishtinë, 2013, p. 125.

between Albanians and Serbs - Albanians formulated the strategy of peaceful resistance, which was accompanied by the rejection of Serbian institutions as well as the building of self-governing institutions. This wise act of the Albanians, led by the historical leader Ibrahim Rugova, gave the clear signal that the conflict was irreversible and unresolved until the independence of the state of Kosovo.”<sup>10</sup> In this period of political and institutional organization by Kosovo Albanians, the Albanian leadership placed priority on garnering international support and systematically sought to internationalize the Kosovo problem. Internationalization was a cornerstone of efforts to separate from Serbia and gain legitimacy with foreign governments.

The Serbian regime continued with daily repression, violence and reprisals of all forms against Albanians. In so doing, Serbia demonstrated that it was powerless to impede the will of Kosovo Albanians to establish the institutional organization of Kosovo. After every official meeting of President Rugova or other elected officials of the Republic of Kosovo, whether inside or outside the country, Serbian propaganda reacted harshly. It sought to discredit Rugova by activating its entire political, diplomatic, media, financial and arsenal of friends. Serbia’s efforts failed to deny, neutralize or paralyze the political and diplomatic actions of internationalization and advancement of the Kosovo issue in the centres of world decision-making.

Accusing Albanians of being Islamic fundamentalists was a criticism of Kosovo still used today by Serbian propaganda and diplomacy. Kosovo debunked this accusation through its actions and diplomatic outreach. Historically, Albanians participated in three religious denominations (Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox religion) . Kosovo was known for its religious tolerance and fraternal respect. Noel

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<sup>10</sup> Bytyçi, Enver, “Diplomacia imponuese e NATO-s në Kosovë”, “Instituti i Studimeve të Europës Juglindore”, Tiranë, 2012, p. 124.

Malcolm emphasizes the religious tolerance of Albanians: "The truth is, Kosovars are so indifferent to religious politics that none of them think it is strange to have a 'Christian Democratic Party' in which the vast majority of the members are Muslim."<sup>11</sup>. Facts on-the-ground demonstrate that Albanians are a tolerant and peace-loving people, oriented towards the values and traditions of Euro-Western civilization.

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<sup>11</sup> Malcolm, Noel, "Kosova një histori e shkurtër" Botoi "Koha", Prishtinë. 2011, p. 438.