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The Educational Position and Status of Albanians in Kosovo (1941-1960)

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Abstract

Kosovo and other Albanian regions in the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian Kingdoms, and later Yugoslavia, had a more difficult position and status than during the Ottoman Empire's many centuries of rule; they did not have an equal status and position to other people and nationalities who lived on Yugoslavia's territory. The political, economic, and social conditions were extremely difficult, and education was not discussed at all because the Yugoslav occupiers, particularly the Serbian occupiers, who played a dominant role, did not allow Albanians and other ethnic groups to be educated in their native language, but only in Serbo-Croatian. As a result, this paper will examine the educational and developmental status of Albanians during WWII and thereafter until 1950s, in order to assess the educational situation of Albanians during this time period, comparing the educational circumstances of both the occupiers and rulers in Kosovo, the fascists and the SFR of Yugoslavia, who targeted the Albanian people of Kosovo.

Keywords: Kosovo, education, school, literacy, Albania, Albanian

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Introduction

Between 1919 and 1941, Kosovo's educational condition was inextricably linked to the country's political situation. It was exacerbated by the legacy of many centuries of non-development in the past, as well as prejudice by the old Yugoslav government towards Albanians. Underdevelopment of the industrial sector, primitive agriculture (which employed 90% of the population), and insufficient development of other economic branches did not motivate other Yugoslav bourgeois regions to exert influence on improving the situation (Ukaj, 2006: 13). Classes and other cultural and educational institutions were only open to the wealthy and high society; the poor were excluded. Kosovo Albanians were only allowed to participate in these institutions symbolically, and those who did were not allowed to attend classes in their native language. Serbian politics did this on purpose in order to assimilate Albanians and leave them with no choice but to remain in the dark of ignorance, i.e., illiteracy. Albanian students in the former Yugoslavia attended four-grade elementary schools for five years, during which time they were required to acquire the Serbian language for one year, mathematics, and a religious course. Thirty to forty percent of first-graders passed a class like this. They were gradually dispersed and eliminated, resulting in the school's closure. There were only a few Albanian students in the class (Ukaj, 2006: 14-15).

The Yugoslav government replaced public schools with religious institutions known as "mejteps and madrassas" for Albanians and Turks who practiced Islam. These schools were housed in private homes near mosques. Students could only learn the Arabic letters and the Quran in these schools. Only Islamic education was available to Albanian students. The mejteps became the primary educators for the majority of Kosovo Albanians (Hoti, 2006: 16). The authorities frequently ordered madrassas and mejteps to be closed so that Albanian youngsters might attend Serbian schools. The Ministry of Religion made a report to the key elders of education, highlighting that there were 50 muftis and 600 imams in southern Serbia, none of whom could not or did not want to hear about the Serbian language. They were known as Albanian nationalists, and the establishment of mejteps and madrassas was considered a danger to Yugoslavia's state and national interests. The report said, "... build a madrassa in Skopje as soon as feasible; a madrassa that will be under state control, and Albanians will be taught in national and religious spirit in the interests of our state (Bajrami, 1983: 203)."

Madrassas have operated since the Ottoman period. The four mentioned subjects were lectured in these madrassas, and after completing them, the attendees received the religious titles "Mualim" or "Imam", and were able to continue their studies in the High Madrassa School in Skopje. The Madrassa of Skopje was established by the decree of King Alexander the Great on April 28, 1924. It operated until 1941, since it was ranked at the same level as high schools. Eight madrassas operated in Kosovo. Prizren and Prishtina had two madrassas each; one was in Vushtrri, one in Peja, one in Gjilan, one in Gjakova, one in Mitrovica, and one in Ferizaj (Kasumi, 1980: 164). The Catholic Church, in addition to education in madrassas and mejteps, played an important role in the spread of literacy. The church, though illegally, taught Catholic Albanian children in their native language (Ukaj, 2006:16-18).

The Yugoslav Kingdom's policy of discriminating against Albanian education in Kosovo hampered their education not only within the country, but also beyond its borders. It blocked Kosovo Albanians from receiving an education in Albanian because, according to them, Albanians posed a significant threat to bourgeois Yugoslavia since a constellation of Kosovo Albanian intellectuals would pursue and defend their nation's rights. In Kosovo, secular gymnasiums were founded in addition to elementary and religious education. There was a gymnasium in Prishtina at this time that had been reopened after the First World War. It was attended by students from Ferizaj, Gjilan, Mitrovica, Prizren, and Novi Pazar, though Albanian students were in the minority. Only 20 Albanian students had completed their Matura by the end of 1940. (Ukaj, 2006:20-21). Apart from the Prishtina gymnasium, there were additional pro-gymnasiums in other Kosovo cities; there were trade and craft schools; and popular universities (Hoti, 2006; 16).

FeratDraga, the leader of Xhemjet's political party, met with the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (SCS): The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was founded in 1918 and remained known as such until 1929. (Only after this year was it called the Yugoslav Kingdom.) In 1920, Nikolla Pashiç requested the reopening of Albanian language schools throughout the country. Pashiç responded, "If we open your schools, we will also assign boarders" (Ukaj, 2006: 29).

Hasan Prishtina declared in his petitions to the League of Nations in 1927, 1929, and 1931:"... almost one million Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia do not have access to schools in their native language. They are even barred from using private funds to open such institutions "(Bajrami and Dhimi 1996: 93-94). The SCS Kingdom's stance on the education of Kosovo Albanians was unequivocal. It never permitted the establishment of schools in Albanian but did so in Serbian. Even the few religious schools that they had permitted to operate were violently shut down because they were attended by Albanians. This state of affairs in Kosovo's educational system persisted until 1941, when the Nazi Block seized the country.

World War II began in 1939 with Germany's attack on Poland. On the other hand, Albania was occupied by fascist Italy, which at the same time was the first victim of fascism in Europe. The same did not happen with Kosovo. On April 6, 1941, after Nazi-fascist troops had occupied a part of Europe, they undertook an aggression against Yugoslavia. With its division, the goals and interests of the Fascist Block would be fulfilled. The same happened with Albanian territories that were under the Yugoslav Kingdom (Historia e popullit Shqiptar, 2008: 129). During April's war, Kosovo Albanians faced many difficulties and barriers. They were a target of mass expulsion because Serbs and Montenegrins, especially settlers in Kosovo, considered the beginning of World War II as a good chance to fulfill their chauvinistic plans and reject every rapprochement with the Albanians. They regarded Albanians as a national element, Nazi-fascism collaborators, and a threat to Yugoslavia. Under these circumstances, Albanians left every interaction against any invaders and got ready to resist the extermination that was about to happen (Bislimi, 1997: 41-42). During this period of outbreak in Kosovo, the Serbs and the Yugoslav army spread violence, murdered innocent people in cities and villages, burned and destroyed their homes, etc. With its expansionary goals, the Yugoslav army even crossed the border and marched toward Kukës and Shkodra, but with its capitulation, its army capitulated as well (Bislimi, 1997: 43-44).

Italians not only formally joined Kosovo and other Albanian provinces with Albania but also paved the way for the creation of Albanian-language education and forged a spiritual bond between wide swaths of ethnic Albanian territory. The Ministry of Education made a significant contribution to the revival of the education system in the lands controlled by the Italians. The exceptional mission to Prizren, led by Ali Harshova, was organized and launched by this ministry to assess the situation and urgent requirements of schools and Albanian education. It formed education inspectorates and teaching departments, issued decrees and directives governing educational activities, provided Albanian textbooks, sent teachers, opened schools where the Albanian language was taught, and sponsored education, among other things (Koliqi, 2012: 423–424).

With vicegerent's decree no. 340, issued on November 20, 1941, the method of education and educational institutions were set. A few primary and infant schools were opened and operated from the school year 1941/42. It was also planned to open day and night courses in the Serbo-Croatian language for the illiterate and those who attended Yugoslav schools (Ukaj, 2006: 32). From 1941 to 1944, education in Kosovo operated under the laws and regulations of the Ministry of Education of Albania and was led by Ernes Koliqi. It defined the duties of the Minister of the Department of Education, educational inspectorates, didactic departments, school boards, and school commissioners. It drafted curricula, textbooks, and other documents pertaining to the field of education. 173 primary schools and a few gymnasiums, one in Prishtina and one in Prizren, operated in the entire territory of Kosovo. The Commercial-Agrarian Institute in Peja, the normal trade school in Gjakova, and some other gymnasiums with 264 teachers and 13665 students, of whom 4,000 were from the German-occupied area, were also opened. Albanians in general, and those in Kosovo in particular, benefited from some of the rights that had been denied to them by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; they did not have the right to use national symbols, and the Albanian language was prohibited in administrations (Ukaj, 2006: 33-35). But, through schools, the fascist occupiers utilized their openings in order to spread the Italian culture and language.

During the invaders' presence in Kosovo during WWII, the educational development circumstances varied depending on the occupiers' districts. The Italian, German, and Bulgarian occupants oversaw and controlled the educational system. During Bulgarian rule, schools were only permitted to operate in the official Bulgarian language, not in Albanian (Ukaj, 2006: 42). The Bulgarian policy was a re-enactment of the country's policy during World War I, when all employees were Bulgarians. The Bulgarian language replaced Serbo-Croatian as the official language in different activities and educational institutions. Simultaneously, the Bulgarian administration threatened the local population with death if they spread anti-Bulgarian propaganda (Malcom, 2001: 303). There were two Albanian schools in the German-occupied Mitrovica district, the elementary school "Skanderbeg" in Mitrovica and the secondary school "NaimFrashri" in Novi Pazar (Koliqi, 2012: 425). The Albanians in Kosovo and other parts of Montenegro and Macedonia took advantage of the circumstances that arose at this time to further the growth of school education. SullatneKojçini-Ukaj, a researcher on this topic, says: "Schools that operated during World War II laid the first foundations of national and institutional education in Kosovo." (Ukaj, 2006, p. 44).

From 1941–1944, teachers and other activists from Albania and Kosovo who fought for the educational system in Albanian territories outside of Albania's borders were true revivalists and missionaries of knowledge, language, and national culture. BedriGjinaj, Vasil Andoni, Haki Taha, RexhepKrasniqi (Koliqi, 2012: 426-428), and a number of other teachers were among them. Despite the challenges caused by Italian and German occupation, war, financial shortages, and students' indifference to learning, the Second World War, which lasted from 1941 to 1944, was a critical moment for Albanian education in freed countries. For the first time, a considerable number of Albanian schools in the national spirit were present.

In comparison to other parts of the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo's educational development, as well as the country's general development, was accompanied by unique circumstances following WWII. The lack of interest in the educational and cultural systems had been passed down through the generations as a result of Serb discrimination. Albanian education in Kosovo was hampered by a lack of qualified teachers, deteriorating school infrastructure, and a variety of other economic and political factors (Ukaj, 2006:47). Kosovo's education system was based on the Yugoslav educational system, which attempted to educate the youth in the spirit of "Yugoslav Socialist Patriotism" (Koliqi, 2012: 486). According to Prof. HajrullahKoliçi, the progress of education in Kosovo from 1944 to 1991 may be classified into three stages. **The first stage** covers the years 1944–1966, when education in Kosovo and other Albanian-populated areas of Yugoslavia underwent a dramatic transformation.

The second stage covers the political and socioeconomic developments in Yugoslavia following the Brion's Plenum (the 4th Meeting of the Central Committee of Yugoslavia, held on July 1, 1966), from 1966 to 1980, which had a favorable impact on educational development. **The third stage** began in 1981 with spring demonstrations and ended in 1991 with the collapse of Kosovo's educational system. This was the time of Serbian brutality against Albanian schools, as well as the denial of their right to an education. Albanian schools have been accused of "indoctrination in nationalism and separatism" (Koliqi, 2012: 500).

The period after the war until 1948 is considered the first stage of efforts for educational development, mainly on the voluntary basis of Albanians, by understanding the role and importance of their education in their native language. Intellectuals did not spare their intellectual and material efforts to spread knowledge in their mother tongue (Ukaj, 2006:48). The events of 1948, which followed the submission of the Information Bureau and interrupted excellent relations between Yugoslavia and Albania, represented a key turning point in Kosovo's educational sector in negative terms. After revealing their true faces and anti-secret intents, the Yugoslav authorities banned Albanian symbols from the national curriculum, effectively denying the Albanian people's origins (Kojçini-Ukaj, 1997: 22). One of the steps taken in Kosovo after World War II was the organization and fighting of illiteracy eradication, which was seen as an urgent and necessary need in the new socialist society. Its resolution was conditional on the rate of social and economic development in Kosovo, where after the war, 85 percent of the population was illiterate. This was passed down from the Yugoslav Kingdom's time between the two World Wars (Ukaj, 2006: 61).

The former Yugoslav-Serb regime took actions against education development and teachers by compiling lists of "convenient" and "inconvenient" teachers. They arrested, imprisoned, dismissed, and deported teachers who had come from Albania during World War II to open Albanian schools (Kojćini-Ukaj, 1997: 22). To prevent the opening of Albanian schools, the Yugoslav government opened schools in Turkish. For this, Belgrade urged the Kosovo Provincial People's Council to approve the official recognition of Turkish nationality and establish Turkish language schools in the territory of KAKM. This was done due to the policy it pursued towards the declaration of Albanians as Turks, and as a consequence, their children were forced to attend schools in Turkish. Due to these circumstances in Kosovo, a significant segment of education took place, thus establishing "infant" schools. The majority of attendees were orphans whose parents were killed in war, and the children whose parents worked in state institutions. In 1944/45, some educational centers were opened in Mitrovica, Ferizaj, Gjilan, Peja, and Prizren (Ukaj, 2006: 88). In 1949, a decision was taken to open educational institutions for children called "kindergartens" in five centers: Prishtina, Peja, Mitrovica, Zvečan, and Gjilan, which means that during this period there were no kindergartens or other preschool institutions in Kosovo. The main reason was that Kosovo did not have the same dynamic social and economic development as other Yugoslav provinces. While in Yugoslavia, 6.8 of 100 children were in pre-school institutions, in Kosovo, only three attended these institutions, namely Serbs. The development of these institutions could not be fulfilled due to low economic factors, disinterest in solving this problem, and the very small number of employees in the social sector, particularly women. This influenced the development of education in Kosovo during this period. Shortly after the war, despite the need for "infant and kindergarten" schools, there still existed a great need for primary education in four grades where children aged 7–11 could learn the language. On December 6, 1945, a general law for compulsory seven-grade education was issued. According to it, primary education had four grades only, and pre-gymnasium had three grades only. The Constitution of 1946 defined the right to education as a constitutional right, thus emphasizing that primary education was mandatory and free of charge. Schools and other educational and cultural institutions were open to all social classes with the sole purpose of arousing general culture and distancing school from religion. Yet again, there were many difficulties, such as the lack of educational staff, the lack of school buildings as a consequence of war, the lack of textbooks and teaching aids, and many other elements for normal educational work (Ukaj, 2006: 93-94).

The first results of the opening of primary schools were marked in the first school year, 1944/45. Due to better teaching conditions, they first opened in regions where mekteps operated during the Ottoman Empire and in primary schools in the former Yugoslavia. There were 278 elementary four-grade schools this school year, 135 in Albanian and 143 in Serbo-Croatian, with a total of 27,000 students, 15,427 Serbs and 11,573 Albanians. There were 460 teachers, including 202 Albanians and 258 Serb-Croats. Albania's new government made a significant contribution with teachers, textbooks, and technical means in the years following WWII. Around 80 teachers arrived in Kosovo under the 15th December 1945 Convention between Albania and Yugoslavia. Until 1948, when they were compelled to return to Albania, the majority of them worked in Kosovo (Koliqi, 2012: 486-

488). Year after year, the number of schools and students increased, particularly in Albania, where 479 schools operated in Kosovo with 64,812 students and 765 teachers in 1949/50, compared to 311 schools in Serbo-Croatian with 32,360 students and 513 professors. In total, more than 206,000 people learned to read and write between 1945 and 1950, with 115,000 of them being Albanians (Topçiu, 1967: 487).

Despite their increased numbers, Albanian schools faced plenty of obstacles, including infrastructure and the environment, instructional aids, teaching staff, and plenty of other issues relating to school operations. It's worth noting that these institutions were known for their lack of students and poor academic performance. During this time, the State Security Administration, also known as the KSKSA, was in charge of overseeing educational activities in Kosovo (UDBA). They also kept a careful eye on the teaching staff and students' activities (Ukaj, 2006: 102–103). On the other hand, UDBA organs gave people a variety of benefits, including scholarships, weaponry, jobs, party positions, and so on. Students who were funded by UDB, guaranteed educational rights, and threatened with expulsion were given special attention. UDB also targeted the Albanian intelligentsia. UDB prepared a detailed report for the Albanian Institute, claiming that the organization had been subjected to hostile groups opposed to Yugoslavia. Many other organizations in Kosovo were targeted by the Yugoslav UDB, including the only Albanian newspaper, "Rilindja," the magazine "Jeta e Re," the Provincial Writers Association, and the Department of the Republic Institute for publishing textbooks in Prishtina, among others. These institutions were regarded as unfriendly work environments (Historia e popullitShqiptar, 2008: 347).

Apart from primary education, pre-gymnasium schools were created for the first time in 1946/47 within Kosovo's territory. There were fifteen pre-gymnasiums in Kosovo, eight of which were in Albanian and seven in Serbo-Croatian. These schools had 384 Albanian students and 386 Serbian and Montenegrin students (Ukaj, 2006: 127). The conditions and circumstances under which these pre-gymnasium schools functioned were terrible. They didn't meet the demands and expectations of a traditional school. These three-grade-only pro-gymnasiums were in use until 1952, when seven-grade schools were transformed into eight-grade schools, and pre-gymnasiums remained in primary schools. The center of Kosovo's most significant educational and intellectual institutions was Prishtina Normal School (Pristina Normal School). Well-known Albanian lecturers who spoke there were ZekeriaRexha, BeqirKastrati, ShefqetVeliu, JasharRexhepagiq, Abdulla Zajmi, DritaDobroshi, Rexhep Hoxha, PajazitNushi, SaliNushi, and others. It was renamed "MiladinPopoviç" in 1958, and in 1974, it became the Pedagogical Academy. The curricula included professional courses in pedagogy, psychology, methodology, and other areas, in addition to general education subjects, including natural and social sciences and languages. Other normal schools existed in addition to the one in Prishtina: one in Prizren, one in Gjakova, one in Ferizaj, one in Gjilan, one in Mitrovica, and one in Peja (Koliqi, 2012: 488-490). Skopje's Normal School also played an important role. In 1947/48, Skopje Normal School opened next to "Nikola Karev" school. RexhepBajrami was the principal. It was relocated to Skopje in 1952 and became a major center for teacher training for Albanian elementary schools, not only in Macedonia but also outside its borders, particularly among the Albanians of Preshevo,

Bujanovac, and Medvexha in southeast Kosovo. It was known as "Liria" until 1972, when it was renamed "Zef Lush Marku." In the 1950s, Kosovo was subjected to the most heinous campaign in human history: mass displacement from their homelands. Everything was coordinated with one goal in mind: the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo. This expulsion was planned in 1953 with the help of Yugoslav-Turkish nobles. There was surplus collection, weapon collecting (in 1955 and 1956), and a slew of other sorts of intimidation and brutality. All of the Serbian-Yugoslav conquerors' tactics failed to halt Kosovo's progress in numerous areas.

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