

DI LELLIO, Anna (ed.). *The Case for Kosova: Passage to Independence*. London and New York: Anthem Press, 2006. 209pp.

Many doubt whether Kosovo is ready for independence. Here highly qualified authorities answer all possible doubts. Anna Di Lellio has spent several years in the country herself, writing and talking about it. She has also met many from around the world who have studied the situation, some for several decades. The book is set out in the form of 28 frequently posed negative questions about Kosova, Kosovar Albanians or their actions. Each of these questions has been repeated by significant authorities, for example, Vuk Drašković, Serbia and Montenegro Foreign Minister; Hieromonk Sava of the Serbian Orthodox Church; Alex N. Dragnich retired Political Science Professor at Vanderbilt University and Slavko Todorovich, former broadcaster for the Voice of America; Retired Major General Lewis MacKenzie, Canadian former Commander of UN Peacekeeping Forces in NATO in former Yugoslavia. Their statements are then countered by 18 well-known Balkanologists, such as Noel Malcolm, Senior Fellow at All Saints Oxford University; Ivo Banac, Professor of History at Yale University; Julie Mertus, co-director of the MA Program of Ethics, Peace and Global Affairs at the American University; Janusz Bugajski, Senior Fellow, Centre for Strategic International Studies in Washington, D.C; and Alain Ducellier, Professor Emeritus of Medieval History, focusing on Byzantium and the Balkans, at the University of Toulouse.

In the preface to the book, Muhammedin Kullashi argues that non-violent and violent responses to repression should be viewed as complementary forms of protest. He points out that those who see Kosova's independence as a destabilizing force, should bear in mind that Serbia's domination over Kosova was one of the most

unstable and dangerous situations in Yugoslavia and the Balkans throughout the twentieth century.

As editor, Di Lellio has tried to present an unprejudiced view. She points out that the distortion often heard from some leftist groups concerning the NATO bombing, responds to a perception of it as representing US imperialism, and to sympathy for Serbia as the last bastion of socialism, and remnant of Yugoslavia.

Isa Blumi counters the claims that Albanians were always on the side of the Ottoman Empire against the Christian powers and that Kosova is the creation of the Yugoslav state and the often claimed 'cradle of the Serb nation'. Blumi's response demonstrates that the myths of provincial thinkers and their distortion of the past still dominate our understanding of Kosovar history, affecting policy makers, journalists and the larger public, despite the fact that there was a much more collaborative pattern of interactions which existed for many centuries up until the 19th century nationalists recorded antagonistic views as the norm. He gives a re-interpretation of the myth of Ottoman enslavement of young Christian men, proving that the one member per family who trained in the Ottoman army actually considered this a great honour. They were permitted to use their own languages and practise their own religions. Conversions under the Ottomans were by persuasion, not by force (the Ottoman state even resurrected the Serb Patriarchate in 1557). Later conversions to Orthodoxy, on the other hand, were forced in humiliating ways.

Noel Malcolm takes on the allegations that Albanians in Kosova are actually descendants of Albanianized Serbs, and that it was the Muslim conversion of most Kosovar Albanians which caused their estrangement from Slavs. Malcolm argues that these controversies have only arisen since the mid-19th century when a religious divide became evident; however, he points out that the Serb nationalist doctrine

emphasized the role of the Orthodox Church, while the Albanian nationalist doctrine emphasized the Albanian language. It was the Serb conquest of Kosova in 1912 which finally confirmed the subsequent and continuous inequalities of the peoples. Malcolm also addresses the continual dispute concerning the deportation of Albanians from Kosova between the two World Wars. He gives a range of likely statistics and the varying forms of pressure for Albanians to leave Kosova: forced conversion to Orthodoxy, suppression of Albanian language education, colonization, heavy reprisals for the Kaçak guerrilla actions and the confiscation of Albanian land. He also observes that the advent of World War II prevented the escalation of the stated policy set out by Vaso Čubrilović in the late 1930s.

The eminent Mediaeval historian, Alain Ducellier dispels the myth of an Albanian invasion of Kosova. He also points out that ‘historical arguments should never be the justification for a people’s claim over territory that they have long lost’, even though he also comments that exactly these arguments would deny the Serb current claims.

In his response to Robert Fisk’s assertion that NATO’s bombing ‘is vandalism with a mission’ to ‘blow up churches’, Andrew Herscher draws attention both to the destruction of mosques, noting that approximately 200 of the 600 mosques in Kosova were damaged during the 1998-9 War. He also notes that there has been protection and reconstruction of all kinds of religious buildings.

Michiel Kiel, who did so much, before the recent widespread destruction, to record *Ottoman Architecture in Albania (1385-1912)* (the title of his book published in 1990), responds to the allegation that Albanians have consistently and systematically, throughout the centuries, attacked Orthodox institutions. One example of the friendly relations between Orthodox and Muslims, quoted by Kiel, tells of the dramatic history

of Ioannina including the offering of this Christian town, by a deputation, to Sultan Murad II. He claims that the greatest destruction of Orthodox churches was carried out by Austrian and German armies invading in the War of 1683-99, and again to a lesser degree in 1738-39.

1389 has been imprinted on everyone's minds, at least since the 1999 Kosova War. But much less recognized is the fact that the importance that the Serbs attach to the Battle of that year, has only featured since the 1860s in the lead up to their claim to territory all the way to the Adriatic. Ivo Banac refutes the rights of the annexation of Kosova by Serbia, in 1912. Despite negotiations over this right at the time, it was never ratified. Banac also addresses the allegation that Tito's Yugoslav policies favoured the Albanians of Kosova, observing that the Albanians got the maximum of what that regime offered 'limited equality with other regime elites', but not the status of a republic.

Bernd Fischer discusses the role of Kosovar Albanians during World War II, and their support for the Axis. He argues that despite some collaboration, Albanians were never pro-Nazi, and points out the fact that Albanians actively and extensively rescued any Jews amongst them. Their collaboration should rather be seen as their hope 'to seize the opportunity of the collapse of Yugoslavia to reverse the (existing) colonization and Slavicization'.

In answering the question as to whether the Kosovar Albanians breached their voluntary commitment to join Yugoslavia in 1945, extracts are supplied from Owen Pearson's remarkable record of Albanian History, recently published in three volumes (by I.B. Tauris). These extracts record eleven instances between 1928 and 1945, where Yugoslav government bodies of the time stated an intention to return Kosova to Albania.

Howard Clark, himself actively involved with the Kosovar non-violent movement of the 1990s, responds to such accusations as ‘Serbian-language Paper Accuses Rugova of Inciting Terrorism’ (1993), and that Albanian terrorism caused changes in Yugoslav state policies during the 1990s. He cites the Union of Independent Trade Unions in Kosova’s collection of thousand of testimonies, and the lodging of some 70,000 complaints of unfair dismissal with the Kosova labour court before that court was itself abolished, and the use of weapons raids as a major instrument of provocation. Clark also comments that the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK: of which Rugova was leader), visited villagers after such attacks in order to document and ‘name the violence’, but urged them not to respond with violence. Clark observes that as a response to a call for a Kosova Republic, between March 1981-88 half the Albanian adult population of Kosova were arrested, interrogated and interned; thereafter Kosova Albanians all lost their civic rights, living under increasingly severe oppression through the 1990s.

Maybe the most intense argument covered in the book, is the status of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) from claims that it was supported by Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda and that it was formed and financed by criminal enterprises in cities around the world, to its own claim to be the freedom fighters for an independent Kosova. NATO certainly found the KLA a useful information organization, and Albanians themselves, even if not wishing to support violence found the KLA the *only* organisation attempting to prevent further atrocities from the Belgrade-based regime. Stacey Sullivan, a young American journalist, became deeply involved in Albanian issues from the early 1990s. Her chapter here (a shortened version of her book: *Be Not Afraid, for you have Sons in America*, St. Martins, New York, 2004) counters the claims that the KLA was a criminal, terrorist and Islamist organisation.

The denial of Kosova's right to self-determination is continually made, for example by the President of the Republic of Serbia, Boris Tadić, at the UN Security Council meeting in New York on 14th February 2006. Two lawyers who have been working long term towards the outcome of the 'final status for Kosovo', Jennifer Ober and Paul Williams, set out detailed arguments concerning the serious abuse by Serbia in their systematic campaigns of violence in the 1990s, and how this calls into place international human rights action. This right was reaffirmed in the UN 1970 Declaration of Friendly Relations which ensures that governments comply 'with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples ... without distinction as to race, creed or color'. The authors observe that as a country which has continuously violated its peoples' rights, 'that country must forgo any sovereignty it exercises over those people' (120).

Furthermore the authors find that the Serbian regime of the late 1980s, and 1990s, revoked the autonomy of Kosova by forcing through illegitimate constitutional amendments. The same lawyers also address the legality of NATO's actions, giving several compelling arguments: that it was consistent with several Security council resolutions as well as with the UN Charter, that it was necessary to ensure the Albanians' collective self-defence, and also to prevent the crime of genocide.

Another increasingly frequent distortion in the international media is that it was NATO's bombing, along with KLA activity which caused the Albanian refugee crisis of 1999 and that the number of Albanians killed at the time has been grossly exaggerated. While it is true that there were early claims of hundreds of thousands being killed, such miscalculation was quickly rectified, and has remained fairly constantly at around 10,000 dead or unaccounted for (presumed dead). To answer the accusation, di Lellio has provided some of the findings of the independent report

presented to the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, along with analysis of how the researchers for this report came to their conclusions.

Vjosa Dobruna, whose diverse background gives her expertise in human rights, women's issues, pediatrics and the media, addresses the issue of Albanian responsibility for reverse ethnic cleansing after the War. She condemns the terrorising of Serbs and destruction of Serb property both on the immediate return of Albanians after the War, and again in March 2004, when events escalated into widespread violence again. However, Dobruna clarifies the difference between planned government policy (as in the case of systematic military campaigns carried out under the Milošević regime) and sporadic, minimally planned, outbreaks by individuals, or even by small groups. She also points out that the vast majority of Albanians returning to Kosova had absolutely no part in, nor support for, the revenge attacks, and that Serbs were not forced to leave Kosova as Albanians had been, rather they chose to leave, fearing reprisals, when their army was forced to leave. She also points out that in the 2000 election, LDK, the party which supported non-violence, won 58% of the vote. While Vjosa does feel that more might have been done to actively prevent those few Albanians who were set on violent revenge, she also notes that the Serbs who remained in Kosova after the War, still voted for Milošević, despite the atrocities which had been carried out under his leadership.

Albin Kurti is a former student activist who served a year of the 15-year-jail sentence, imposed on him by the Serbs in 1999 for his activism. He addresses the alleged issue that an independent Kosova would become a mono-ethnic state unless Serb communities and their territories became autonomous. He points out that Serbia is using this argument in preserving a hold on Serbian communities in Kosova., with the intended outcome that the borders of these enclaves can later be expanded. It was

over such an issue, that the former Serbian mayor of Strpce, Sladjan Ilic was attacked in Belgrade, never to return to Kosova. Kurti sees the desire of the Serbian regime to send returnees to Kosova, as their expansionist plan.

Julie Mertus affirms that a human rights culture, respectful of minorities in Kosova is not merely a remotely hope for possibility. She regrets the fact that NATO did not clarify its 'humanitarian intervention' in legal terms, but she feels nevertheless that there are strong indications that Albanians and Serbs will, in time, set aside chauvinist nationalism and myths and be able to build community trust in the context of human rights.

Since 9/11, fears have increased that Kosova (with a population of 90% Muslims), as an independent state would become an Islamist state. Dom Ljush Gjergji speaks for many in disputing this fear and makes three specific points. Firstly he describes the importance of the movement of peace and forgiveness, led by the Catholic professor Anton Çetta, which resolved hundreds of blood feuds during the 1990s. He draws attention to the strength of the parallel school system in the Ablanian fight against illiteracy during the Serbian repression, and the solidarity movement spearheaded by the Mother Theresa Humanitarian Society and other non-governmental associations, all of which supported the strongly influential non-violent strategy of Ibrahim Rugova. He claims that the country with such a background, while respecting Muslim traditions, is certainly not going to allow alien Islamist influence to repress Kosova's population.

Whether Kosova could survive as an independent economic state is certified by the international lawyer, Henry Perritt. He declares that Kosova has a bright economic future, once foreign investors recognize its potential with the assistance of international community pursuing business-friendly policies and regional economic

integration. He points out that transport infrastructure in the country is good and it is very well situated in the centre of Europe. Furthermore, Perritt emphasizes the remarkable ability of Kosova's people to manage no matter what obstacles are thrown in their way (viz. the remarkable alternative health and education systems which functioned despite Serbian attempts to prevent them, through the 1990s). He acknowledges that the failure in the supply of electricity currently hampers development, but points out that everyone's uncertainty, being placed in limbo until the final status is resolved produces a difficult climate in which to make major economic progress.

Besnik Pula, currently a Fulbright sociology scholar in the US, analyses the term 'conditional independence' (first proposed in 2000 at a time when Milošević's fall from power seemed to indicate an easy continuing road to full independence). He shows that in fact this is not only undemocratic, but actually anti-democratic, by its use of undue interference from outside the democratically chosen government. Pula also addresses the questions of Albanian clannish society and their continued use of traditional law (the *Kanun*). He explains how this traditional law functioned to 'reflect each community's collective experience' on 'fundamental questions of the organization of collective life' (181), noting also that the *Kanun* 'as a meaningful social system has ceased to exist'. While this may be true of Kosova, many would dispute his findings on this matter as far as they relate to Albania itself.

Paulin Kola discusses the question of the possible threat of a 'Greater Albania'. This is a subject which Kola has studied over decades, first as an inhabitant of Albania who never heard the suggestion until he left the country. One of his strongest arguments concerns the lack of a national religious authority. He notes that Albania's Communist leaders never claimed Kosova, and that up until 1998, 'not a

single individual, non-governmental organisation or government department in Albania had ... produce(d) a single draft or memorandum' on this matter (192).

On the wider issue of whether independence for Kosova would destabilize both the Balkans and other areas in the world, the long standing authority on and Director of the New European Democracies Project, Janusz Bugajski is able to see the wider perspective. He observes that there are three possible scenarios: the current situation, a return to incorporation into Serbia, and eventual statehood'. Bugajski sees the last as the least destabilizing, stating also that Kosova's independence 'does not establish any legal or political precedent for separatism in the broader international scene' (200).

In the final chapter of the book Di Lellio and Blumi dispute the assertion that decentralization is the key to security and stability in Kosova. They see decentralization, and especially the need in taking that approach to find representatives from different ethnic groups, as creating new possibilities for conflict. The arguments given by such deeply involved writers, presented in this book are all clear and concise making the whole an important contribution for anyone seeking the answers to so many potential handicaps to Kosova's independence.

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