

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نښاند تن من مباد      بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم      از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

<http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2015/06/15/the-idea-greater-albania-then-and-now-ii.html>

## The idea of a ‘Greater Albania’, then and now (II)

Pyotr ISKENDEROV

6/15/2015



The bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia orchestrated by global centres of power opened up new possibilities to the ideologists and practitioners of a ‘Greater Albania’. A key role in realising the plan now passed to military and political structures, first and foremost the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its ‘affiliates’ in neighbouring Balkan regions.

The issue of establishing Albanian armed units in Kosovo numbering 40,000 people was first raised in Germany in 1992 with the active participation of the Albanian authorities. Among others, the Albanian defence minister at that time, Safet Zhulali, and his Kosovo colleague Heizer Heizerai took part in the talks held between 1992 and 1993 (1). Then the issue was ‘frozen’ for two years due to the defeat of underground Albanian paramilitary organisations in Kosovo. In 1996, however, evidence came to light that the Albanian government had started

financing underground armed groups «centred in one of the European countries» through its embassy in Belgrade (2). The first armed KLA operations were noted at the end of 1997. Then in 1998, the International Crisis Group recorded the presence of KLA paramilitary training camps in the north and northeast of Albania operating under the control of the special services of NATO member countries.

The KLA initially set itself two key goals: to gain independence for Kosovo (including through the use of terrorist methods) and to transform the area into a military and political centre for the 'gathering' of Albanian lands in accordance with the provisions of the 1878-1881 League of Prizren (the League of Prizren was a national organisation of Albania established on 10 June 1878 as part of the Albanian National Awakening. It was founded in the city of Prizren to oppose the implementation of decisions of the Berlin Congress, according to which certain border areas of the then Ottoman Empire were transferred to Montenegro and Greece). To this end, a branched structure of military and political organisations of Albanians who closely coordinated their armed actions and attracted funds from the Albanian diaspora around the world as well as from international institutions, including those with a Euro-Atlantic focus, was established around the cusp of the 1990s-2000s.

In this regard, the biography of Ali Ahmeti, the current head of the Democratic Union for Integration (of Macedonian Albanians) is typical. He became active in the Albanian separatist movement immediately after graduating from the University of Pristina in 1983. In 1986, Ahmeti was elected as a member of the Main Council of the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo, in which he was responsible for cooperating with European countries. In 1988, he became one of the movement's few leaders and became the head of its military sector in 1993. In 1996, Ali Ahmeti was one of the main founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and when violent fighting broke out in the region between Albanian units and the Yugoslav army and Serbian police, he was already a member of the high command of the KLA.

It was in 1998 that Western circles finally decided in favour of ethnic Albanian extremists as their main military and political allies in the Balkan region. Thus, the statement made several months before by the then US envoy to the Balkans, Robert Gelbard, that the KLA was a «terrorist organisation» was actually disavowed. As Jerry Seper, a leading US expert in international terrorism and drug trafficking, pointed out in May 1999, Albanian separatists «were terrorists in 1998 and now, because of politics, they're freedom fighters», despite the fact that the KLA «financed much of its war effort with profits from the sale of heroin» (3).

After the NATO bombing campaign of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the deployment of international contingents to Kosovo, Ali Ahmeti was transferred to the Macedonian theatre of fighting for a 'Greater Albania', where he became one of the leaders of the anti-government uprising of Albanians in Macedonia, supported by relevant Kosovo institutions. In 2001, Ali Ahmeti was elected Commander-in-Chief of the National Liberation Army of Macedonian Albanians. In June 2001, Ali Ahmeti was temporarily included on a US blacklist of people associated with terrorist activities and was denied entry into Switzerland and a number of other European countries. This did not prevent him from signing the Ohrid Peace Agreement, which was developed and championed by NATO and the European Union, in the name of Macedonian Albanians, however. (The Ohrid Agreement is a document signed by the Macedonian government and

Albanian political representatives on 13 August 2001 under pressure from the international community).

At present, the leaders of the Macedonian Albanians, referring to the spirit and letter of this document and accusing the authorities in Skopje of non-compliance, are already calling for the country's authorities to agree to turn the state into a Macedonian-Albanian confederation called the «Republic of Macedonia-Illirida», failing which they are threatening to achieve it through force.

An armed uprising of Albanians similar to the one in Macedonia broke out in 2000-2001 in the south Serbian municipalities of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac and were suppressed by Yugoslav army and police forces. However, a scenario involving the gradual Albanianisation of the region is currently being successfully implemented there and is allowing Albanians to establish control over local government institutions. According to Serbian experts in national and regional security, «the actions of Albanian extremists in Kosovo, Macedonia, South Serbia and Montenegro are being coordinated from a single centre». In particular, the former head of the Coordination Centre for Kosovo and Metohija under the Serbian government, Nenad Popovic, says that «the actions of Albanian extremists and terrorists in different areas of the Balkans are well organised and coordinated» (4).

Two key sources make up the financial basis for realising the 'Greater Albania' idea. First are the 'voluntary-compulsory' contributions from the Albanian diaspora. According to the International Crisis Group, «the large Kosovo Albanian diaspora communities living in the United States, Germany and Switzerland have played – and will continue to play – a key role in the current and future economic, social and political development of Kosovo, as well as dictating military events on the ground. They could easily open up new fronts if they wish to keep up the pressure on the numerous unresolved Albanian-related issues» (5).

The second important source of income for realising the 'Greater Albania' idea is money from drug trafficking and other cross-border criminal activities controlled by Albanians. The money made by Albanian groups through controlling the drug flows from the Near and Middle East and Southwest Asia (primarily from Afghanistan) to Europe is estimated to be at least \$30-50 million a year.

As well as the military and political developments and the multi-billion dollar financial support, the 'Greater Albania' idea also relies on relevant historical and ethnographic theories. The latter aim to prove the autochthony of Albanians in the Balkans as direct descendants of the ancient Illyrians (as opposed to the 'newly-arrived' Slavs) and substantiate the autonomy of the 'Greater Albanian' state by means of historiography so that it will be «proven with respect to antiquity and to all subsequent periods» (6). Using the vivid words of Serbian academic Spasoje Djakovic, the Albanian irredentist «has incorporated a historical past, an ancestry and an 'authentic' culture into continuous ideological and political propaganda with deafening force and enormous persistence» (7).

Even the Albanian experts themselves have to recognise the fact that right up to the start of the 20th century, the Albanian ethnos was lacking a number of key characteristics traditionally

inherent in a single nationality. Among other things, the first government of 'independent' Albania established in Vlorë in 1912 had to prepare its declaration of independence in Turkish and write its directives using the Turkish alphabet, since there was not a single member of Ismail Qemali's cabinet who knew the Albanian Latin alphabet that had been developed just a few years before.

In fact, there is historical and philological evidence that suggests the ancestors of Albanians lived much further east of present-day Albania and Kosovo. In particular, the similarity of the early Albanian and Thracian languages suggests that the ancestral home of Albanians, who engaged in distant-pasture cattle breeding, should be regarded as the Carpathians, from where they crossed the Danube together with the Slavs and moved through Macedonia to the west of the Balkan Peninsula. This theory is a good explanation of the lexical similarity of the Albanian and Romanian languages, as well as the fact that the first mention of Albanians in written sources is not until the 11th century as inhabitants of 'Arbanon' in present-day central Albania.

The violent expulsion of other nations and their Islamisation actively carried out during the Ottoman yoke between the 14th and 19th centuries is also another important factor in the formation and wide-spread distribution of the Albanian ethnos across the Balkans. According to Serbian sources, between the 18th and 19th centuries alone, a total of nearly half a million Serbs were resettled in the Kingdom of Serbia from Kosovo and Metohija. The peak of the migrations took place in the periods following the Serbian uprisings of 1804-1813 and the Serbo-Turkish wars of 1876-1878.

The remaining Serbs were subjected to forced Islamisation, as a result of which a significant amount of Kosovo Albanians are of Serbian origin, according to Serbian academic Jovan Cvijić. The same has been said by Russian academics and diplomats, including the consul in Vlorë and delegate to the International Commission of Control in Albania, Aleksandr Petrjaev. He stressed that the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia «should, in the vast majority of cases, be regarded as Turkicised and Albanianised Slavs» (8).

An attempt to create a Balkan state within its widest possible ethnic borders was undertaken at the European level at the end of the 1870s. This refers to the Preliminary Treaty of San Stefano, signed in 1878 by Russia and the Ottoman Empire that determined the territorial and state structure of Bulgaria. The idea was not realised at that time because of the anti-Russian position of the other great powers and concerns within the Russian government itself regarding the emergence of a «regional heavyweight» and the subsequent chain reaction among the other Balkan nations. The 'Greater Albania' model of the 21st century, however, looks much more dangerous and, more importantly, much more realistic than the hypothetical 'Greater Albania' of the late 19th century. The fact that the Albanian nationalists have a single military and political centre and command and staff structures that have established close ties with the higher echelons of the US, NATO and the European Union, as well as considerable financial resources, means that the prospect of an Albanian state with a population of around 10 million appearing on the map of the Balkans can be regarded as completely realistic.

#### References:

[1] Lopusina M. OVK protiv Jugoslavije, kako smo izgubili Kosovo i Metohiju. Čačak 1999,

p343.

[2] Smirnova N. Konflikt v Kosovo kak chast' 'albanskogo voprosa' // Kosovo: mezhdunarodnye aspekty krizisa ('The conflict in Kosovo as part of the 'Albanian question' // Kosovo: international aspects of the crisis'). Moscow 1999, pp108-109.

[3] The Washington Times, 03.05.1999

[4] Vremya novostei, 13.11.2007.

[5] Pan-Albanianism: How big a threat to Balkan stability? Tirana/Brussels, p31.

[6] Jakupi A. Two Albanian States and National Unification. Prishtina 2004, p47.

[7] Djakovich S. Sukobi na Kosovu. Belgrade 1986, p13.

[8] Albanskii faktor v razvitii krizisa na territorii byvshei IUGoslavii ('The Albanian factor in the development of the crisis in former Yugoslavia'). Dokumenty. Volume One (1878-1997). Moscow 2006, p.57.