

Qosja, Rexhep: Çështja shqiptare, historia dhe politika. Prishtina: Instituti Albanologjik 1994. 363 pp. [The Albanian question. History and politics.]

Kosovo scholar, writer and critic, Rexhep Qosja (b. 1936) studied in Prishtina and Belgrade and is now a member of the Kosovo Academy of Sciences and Art, as well as a leading figure in Kosovo public life. He is the author of many works on Albanian literature and on the present political situation, among which are: *Dialogje me shkrimtarët*, Prishtina 1968 [Dialogues with writers]; *Panteoni i rralluar*, Prishtina 1973 [A rarified Pantheon]; *Morfologjia e një fushate*, Prishtina 1980 [The morphology of a campaign]; a three-volume *Historia e letërsisë shqipe, Romantizmi*, Prishtina 1984, 1984, 1986 [History of Albanian literature, Romanticism]; *Populli i ndaluar*, Prishtina 1990 [The banned people]; *Strategjia e bashkimit shqiptar*, Prishtina 1992 [The strategy of Albanian unification]; and the novel *Vdekja më vjen prej syve të tillë*, Prishtina 1974 [Death comes with such eyes], which has been published in French as *La mort me vient de ces yeux-là*, Paris 1994.

Rexhep Qosja's most recent work, *Çështja shqiptare, historia dhe politika*, is the first comprehensive treatise on the 'Albanian question' written from an Albanian point of view. One must stress the word *an* because, as the author himself is well aware, there are various views on what the Albanian question is and should be, and certainly on how to solve it.

Broadly speaking, the Albanian question is the problematic situation of the two to three million Albanians left outside the borders of the Albanian state when the latter was created in 1912, i.e. essentially the Albanians of former Yugoslavia. In the narrower context, the book focuses on a solution to the explosive and seemingly intractable problem of Kosovo.

Since the reunification of Germany, Rexhep Qosja regards Albania as the only remaining 'divided nation' in Europe - half of the Albanians living in Albania, and the other half living under foreign rule not only in Kosovo, but also in Macedonia, Montenegro and southern Serbia.

Qosja's approach to the question is initially historical. The first eight chapters of the monograph cover various aspects of the Albanian question from the nineteenth century to the beginnings of the present crisis: 1) *The Albanian question and the national awakening*; 2) *The Albanian question at the Congress of Berlin*; 3) *The Albanian question and the propaganda of the peoples of the Balkans*; 4) *The Albanian question at the Conference of the Ambassadors in London*; 5) *The Albanian question and the politics of ethnic cleansing*; 6) *The Albanian question in Serbian projects and programmes*; 7) *The Albanian question in communist Yugoslavia*; and 8) *The Albanian question and the dissolution of Yugoslavia*. Qosja stresses the fact that, from the late nineteenth century onwards, an acceptable solution to the Albanian question was unattainable for the primarily Moslem Albanians simply because, as opposed to their Christian neighbours, they had no patron among the Great Powers to lend political weight to their modest demands. Another element which threads through the book is the historical continuity of ethnic cleansing in what was Yugoslavia and of the often fanatic Serbian resolve to hold onto Kosovo, whatever the cost may be. What is true of Bosnia and Herzegovina is equally true of Kosovo - it is only by understanding Balkan history that one can hope to comprehend the present.

In chapter nine, *The Albanian question and the new world order*, Professor Qosja approaches the present dilemma, in which he reviews many of the plans and ideas proposed for Kosovo and the Albanians at large, not only by the international community, but also by the other Balkan states, and in particular by Serbia which is so directly, profoundly and fatally linked to the Albanians in Kosovo. Qosja analyses not only current government policies in Serbia, but also the attitudes and policies of opposition parties and groupings in Belgrade which, despite all their quarrels and differences, would seem to be surprisingly united in their uncompromising stance towards self-determination for Kosovo.

In chapter ten as a conclusion, Qosja offers his own views, no doubt reflecting those of many of his compatriots, in: *The Albanian question and its proper solution*. The basis of his argument is that "it is essentially wrong to treat the Albanian question as the question of an ethnic minority." (p. 287)... "The Albanians were not an ethnic minority in former Yugoslavia because they were about eight times as numerous as the Montenegrins, who had their own republic within the Yugoslav federation. They were also about two and a half times as numerous as the Macedonians, who had their own republic, too. They were more numerous than the Slovenes, who had their own republic, and more numerous than the Moslems, who also had their own republic within the framework of the former Yugoslav federation. Thus, they were not a minority in communist Yugoslavia for the simple reason that they were a majority in comparison with a good number of the 'state-forming' peoples of the federation. The Albanians are not an ethnic minority in rump Yugoslavia, the present state of Yugoslavia as it is called by the Serbs and Montenegrins alone, because they are still more numerous than the Montenegrins who have their own republic within this Yugoslavia. Nor are the Albanians a minority within Serbia, because you cannot call one-third of the population of a multinational state such as Serbia an ethnic minority." (p 288)... "If there are just as many Albanians in former Yugoslavia as in Albania itself, people living on their own ethnic and historical territory which forms a geographical continuity with the Republic of Albania, it is then logical that these Albanians in former Yugoslavia, i.e. in contemporary Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, cannot be considered an 'ethnic minority' but rather as part of a *divided nation*. Consequently, the Albanian question must not be seen or dealt with in terms of a minority problem, but rather as the question of a *divided nation*." (p. 289).

"At a time when the aspirations of the Serbs, Croats and Moslems of Bosnia and Herzegovina are close to being fulfilled by the division of that country into historical ethnic states, no one has the right to demand of the Albanians that they fulfil their aspirations any differently. Is it proper for the Serbs, Croats and Moslems of Bosnia and Herzegovina to enjoy the right to self-determination, and for the Albanians in Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) and Macedonia to be denied this right? It is unjust to apply certain political criteria to the Serbs and Croats and to apply other criteria to the Albanians. How is it that the 1,000,000 to 1,200,000 Bosnian Serbs should enjoy the right to self-determination when the 2,000,000 Albanians in Kosovo are deprived of this right? How are the 600,000 to 700,000 Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina to enjoy the right to self-determination when the 700,000 to 800,000 Albanians in Macedonia are being denied this right? How is it that the 1,300,000 Montenegrins enjoy the right to self-determination, but not the 3,000,000 Albanians in former Yugoslavia? The principle of equal treatment must apply. One cannot play around with political principles without severe political and historical consequences for the region" (p. 307-308).

Rexhep Qosja insists, as one might expect, that there will be no peace in the southern Balkans until the Albanian right to self-determination is realized in former Yugoslavia, and in Kosovo in particular.

Qosja's logical, moral and historical arguments in favour of Albanian self-determination in former Yugoslavia are clearly laid forth and should convince most objective-minded observers outside the Balkans. What is missing, or perhaps simply beyond the scope of Qosja's monograph is a more extensive treatment of the geopolitical and military realities of the situation in Kosovo, of the power politics involved in the present stalemate in the southern Balkans. Theory is fine, but reality is quite different.

Despite this limitation, *Çështja shqiptare, historia dhe politika* provides the most thorough representation to date of the situation and aspirations of the Albanians in former Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, one must say in this case, the book was written and published in

Albanian, i.e. for readers who need no convincing to start with. English and French translations are nonetheless said to be underway, which will give this worthy monograph greater impact and enable it to be read and analysed by scholars and experts from various Balkan and non-Balkan nations.

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