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The idea of a Kosovan language in Yugoslavia's language politics

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Abstract: Not only are nations invented (imagined) into and out of existence, but languages and states are as well. Decisions on how to construct, change or obliterate a language are essentially arbitrary, and as such dictated by political considerations. The entailed language of politics (often accompanied by the closely related politics of script) is of more immediate significance in Central Europe than elsewhere in the world, because in this region language is the sole and fundamental basis for creating, legitimating and maintaining nations and their nation-states. Since 1918, the creation and destruction of ethnolinguistic nation-states in Central Europe has been followed (or even preceded) by the creation and destruction of languages so that a unique language could be fitted to each nation and its national polity. This article focuses on the politics of the Albanian language in Yugoslavia's Autonomous Province of Kosovo and in independent Kosovo with an eye to answering two questions at the level of language politics. First, what was the kind of Albanian standard employed in Kosovo before the 1968/1970/1974 acceptance of Albania's Tosk-based standard Albanian in Yugoslavia? Second, why is Kosovo the sole post-Yugoslav nation-state that has not (yet?) been endowed with its own unique (Kosovan) language?

Keywords: Albanian, ethnolinguistic nationalism, Gheg, Kosovan language (project), Tosk

1 Central Europe: languages and nation-building

Language engineering or active overhauling of the linguistic for political and other ideologically motivated ends in Yugoslavia dates back to the very inception of this polity. In 1918, when it was founded, the country was initially known for 11 years as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Ethnolinguistic nationalism had been in vogue across Central Europe since the 1850s and the hold of its spell on the region continues unabated (cf Broomans et al 2008; Kamusella 2009; Sundhaußen 1973). However, it must be borne in mind that in

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the Balkan/southern section of Central Europe, religion (employed as the basis for the administrative non-territorial *millet* system in the Ottoman Empire [Hupchick 1994]) was the preferred basis for building nations and their polities to language until the Balkan Wars and the Great War. Ethnolinguistic nationalism decisively replaced its ethnoreligious predecessor in this region only after 1918, though at times elements of ethnoreligious nationalism tend to resurface in the Balkan politics to this day (cf Fortna et al. 2013; Perica 2002).

In Central Europe the “true nation-state” is defined through its sole unique official and national language *not* shared with any other nation (group of people) or polity. In this line of thinking, the population speaking this language becomes a nation. After the Great War communities speaking other languages on the territory of the newly established national polities were redefined as “foreigners”, whom the West accorded a modicum of cultural rights under the novel label of “minorities”. But the Central European nation-states often saw the minorities treaties protection regime as an unwanted imposition, which they increasingly did not wish to observe (cf Roudometof 2001: 197). Since 1918, the political equation of Language = Nation = State has ruled the politics of Central Europe unchallenged as the sole acceptable ideology of statehood creation, legitimation and maintenance (cf Kamusella 2015).

The problem was that all of the interwar nation-states in the region turned out to be miniature doubles of the former *multiethnic* empires, which they aspired to replace with a new homogenous, and thus supposedly more just, order. All of the national polities were *polyglot* and had populations composed of various ethnicities (also defined through religion, for instance, Jews and Muslims). Politically and ideologically this reality on the ground was unacceptable. The normative compulsion was for ethnolinguistic homogeneity, each nation housed in its own nation-state with the nation’s language as the sole official language. Not surprisingly the tripartite name of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was at variance with this principle. If all the state’s inhabitants were to constitute a legitimate nation, they should be united in one language. For this ideological purpose, the Kingdom’s 1921 constitution announced that its official and national language was the now largely forgotten Serbocroatoslovenian (*srpskohrvatskoslovenački jezik*) (Nielsen 2014: 30; Oczakowa 2002: 109).

As a result of this unifying and homogenizing language policy (Greenberg 2004: 21–22), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was made into a South Slavic nation-states, as promised by the popular name of this national project, namely “Yugoslavia”, which had gained much currency since the mid-nineteenth century (cf Rogel 1977). In Slavic the name means “South Slavia”, that is, “homeland of the Southern Slavs”. The main ideological problem that faced this political

project of Yugoslavia as implemented in the shape of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was the pronounced unwillingness of Bulgaria to join this Kingdom, so in the end a third of South Slavs remained outside “South Slavia”. However, at times, the ideological dimension of South Slavic commonality pushed Belgrade and Sofia to closer cooperation, typically on an ethno-religiously-inflected platform aimed against Yugoslavia’s Albanians and Bulgaria’s Muslims (“Turks”) (cf Jovanović 2009: 58–59).

Furthermore, the ethnolinguistic character of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes by default translated into the suppression of the use of non-Slavic languages in administration and school, namely, Albanian, German, Hungarian and Turkish (Byron 1985: 68). In interwar Europe Austria and Germany, on the one hand, and Hungary on the other did successfully exert pressure on Belgrade to ensure a modicum of linguistic rights for their co-ethnics. On the other hand, Ankara, focused on the construction and modernization of Turkey, was not much interested in the strongly religious (ergo, “anti-modern”) Turkish/Muslim minorities in the Balkans, while Albania was a weak state that possessed no effective means to support Albanian-speakers outside its borders (Purellku 2012: 116–117). As a result, in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes only limited literacy in Albanian was on offer, exclusively in religious schools (*medresas*) and by interested individuals in the privacy of their own homes that sometimes doubled as “underground Albanian schools” (Franolić 1980: 55; Nećak 1995: 23–24). Speakers of the aforementioned, non-Slavic languages, especially when Muslims, often were expelled to Turkey or preferred to leave the Kingdom for Turkey, rather than face this Kingdom’s administration, that in many ways was anti-Muslim, anti-Albanian and anti-Turkish. In 1938 Belgrade and Ankara signed an agreement to formalize and facilitate this emigration, but it appears that the Kingdom’s (Yugoslav) authorities were most intent on expelling Albanians, since they could not be easily assimilated (Slavicized) (Bjelajc 2007: 222–226; Jovanović 2008; Purellku 2012).

2 Language policy during World War II and in its aftermath

The malleability of languages and their scripts in compliance with current political needs became apparent to most political decision-makers in the Balkans during World War II. After the 1941 multipronged attack on Yugoslavia staged by Germany, Italy, Hungary and Bulgaria, Serbocroatoslovenian was erased from the law books. In the Slovenian ethnic territory, split between Germany and

Italy, this language (de facto, Slovenian) disappeared from official use and was replaced by German and Italian. In the Independent State of Croatia (composed of today's Croatia and Bosnia) under joint Italo-German tutelage, the Latin alphabet-based "Croatian" was instituted as the polity's sole official and national language. Cyrillic was explicitly banned, while – in an implicit fashion – the same restriction was imposed on the Arabic script. On the other hand, the Cyrillic-based "Serbian" was limited to rump Serbia under German administration, while Bulgarian replaced Serbocroatoslovenian in the territories seized by Sofia (or in today's Macedonia), thus requiring the supersession of the Serbo-Croatian (Serbian-style) Cyrillic with the Bulgarian one. In this pattern of things, Hungarian supplanted this Yugoslav language of Serbocroatoslovenian in the territories annexed by Budapest (mainly in Vojvodina), while Albanian (alongside Italian) became official in today's Kosovo. In the latter case, the area was added to Albania that had been under Italy's direct control since April 1939. An unclear situation remained in Montenegro that was also ruled by Rome. Initially, the Italian administration planned to introduce a new Montenegrin language written in Latin letters (Vignoli 1996), but in reality the Cyrillic-based Serbocroatoslovenian, usually known as "Serbian", continued to be employed there alongside Italian (cf Pavlowitch 2008; Samardžija 2008).

After the Second World War, when Yugoslavia returned to the political map of Europe as a Soviet-style communist federation of national republics, this radical change in the state structure also entailed a similarly thorough overhauling in the compartment of official-cum-national languages. The new Yugoslav authorities dropped the idea of an etholinguistically homogenous nation-state for a unitary Yugoslav nation that would speak and write its own Yugoslav (that is, Serbocroatoslovenian) language. The Soviet model won the day, meaning that of a non-national (or ideologically communist) polity composed of national (ethnolinguistic) republics. The former northernmost variety of Serbocroatoslovenian, or Slovenian, became a language in its own right and the sole national language in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. In southern Serbia (renamed as Macedonia) regained from Bulgaria, the interwar southern dialect of Serbocroatoslovenian (Serbian) (Barker 1999: 6), very close to Bulgarian, was made into a brand new language, or the Cyrillic-based Macedonian (Reuter 1999: 30). This maneuver allowed for nullifying the wartime influence of Bulgarian nationalism (Wachtel 1998: 90), but beneficially built on the then already widened literacy in the region brought about by the Bulgarian occupation administration and the Bulgarian-medium school (Greenberg 2004; Koneski 1968).

In Vojvodina, which had been regained from Hungary, Hungarian was not altogether banned but rather downgraded to the level of a mere one of the region's five official languages, also including, Serbo-Croatian, Romanian, Rusyn and Slovak (Kamusella and Nomachi 2014). On the contrary, in Kosovo, which passed from Albania back to Yugoslavia, Albanian was retained in use alongside Serbo-Croatian. Until the 1948 rift with the Soviet Union, the Albanian communist leadership sought a union with Yugoslavia, as another national republic within this new communist federation (Fischer 2007: 250; Malcolm 1998: 320). Had the plan worked out, like Slovenian in Slovenia and Macedonian in Macedonia, Albanian would have probably become the official language of Yugoslavia's planned Republic of Albania that would have consisted of today's Albania and Kosovo.

3 Breaking up a state and its language

Unlike its interwar predecessor, communist Yugoslavia did not proclaim any official (state) language (Radovanović 1983: 57), though for all practical purposes Serbo-Croatian (frequently dubbed as “Yugoslav”) de facto functioned in this capacity (Hill 2011: 420; Liu 2015: 9). Before returning to the subject of Kosovo, I need to remark that the institution of the biscriptural (Cyrillic and Latin alphabet-based) Serbo-Croatian (Yugoslav) as the lingua franca of Yugoslavia and as the national and official language of the four socialist republics of Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia created an ideological dilemma. From the perspective of ethnolinguistic nationalism, Macedonia and Slovenia with their unique and unshared national languages of Macedonian and Slovenian, respectively, seemed to be more “normal” than the other four republics. In this ethnolinguistic pattern of thinking about nationhood and statehood, the four republics' nations of Bosniaks, Croats, Montenegrins and Serbs appeared to be somewhat “deficient”. The normative tension was partly resolved in the 1974 Yugoslav constitution. Among other things, on the model known from the case of the interwar language of Serbocroatoslovenian, this new constitution allowed for construing Serbo-Croatian (Yugoslav) as consisting of four separate (though closely related) national varieties (Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian) for each of the four “linguistically deficient” socialist republics of Bosnia, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia. Despite all these momentous changes, the biscriptural language retained its unitary name. However, the components of this language's moniker kept multiplying to meet various national needs, and eventually yielded the terminologically

complicated name of “Serbocroatian/Croatoserbian, Serbian or Croatian language” (*jezik, srpskohrvatski/hrvatskosrpski, hrvatski ili srpski*) (Brozović and Ivić 1988). As a result, the popular name “Yugoslav” for this language, on the one hand, was ideologically exorcised in line with ethnolinguistically driven national demands, while on the other, the new complicated compromise name reinforced the tendency to use the unofficial name “Yugoslav” for Serbo-Croatian, for brevity’s sake.

In this way the Serbs’ and Croats’ need for ethnolinguistic separateness was met, leaving the slash, the comma and the “or” in this new official multi-constituent name for the Bosniaks and Montenegrins to be satisfied with. In a way they did not mind, until the violent breakup of Yugoslavia after 1991. In order to survive, like Yugoslavia’s other nations, they had to make their republics into independent nation-states in their own right. And because these polities are located in Central Europe, where ethnolinguistic nationalism is the only legitimate one, both Bosniaks and Montenegrins had to distance themselves from the Serbo-Croatian linguistic commonality. Thus the former constructed their own national Bosnian/Bosniak language, and the latter followed suit with their biscriptural, Latin and Cyrillic, Montenegrin language (Greenberg 2004; Kalajdžija 2008; Nakazawa 2015). All republics of the former federal Yugoslavia became independent nation-states, each complete with its own language. Interestingly and quite ironically, the “disowned” Serbo-Croatian language continues to thrive on the web.

4 A Kosovan language?

The only exception to this policy of claiming an exclusive national language for the post-Yugoslav states is independent Kosovo. No Kosovan language was declared, while the international administration imposed Albanian and Serbian as its official and national languages. An easy and rather simplistic explanation of the situation would be that Kosovo was not a republic in federal Yugoslavia, but a “mere” autonomous province *within* the Socialist Republic of Serbia. Obviously this difference in administrative and political status of the region must have influenced the formation of the new state. But was it enough to prevent the rise of a Kosovan language?

The closest comparable case appears to be that of Macedonia. It was well known that the Slavic vernacular of this territory was more similar to Bulgarian than to the Serbo-Croatian variety of Serbocroatoslovenian. All four post-Serbo-Croatian languages are mutually intelligible, and so are Macedonian and

Bulgarian. But these two languages are *not* mutually intelligible with Serbo-Croatian or the four post-Serbo-Croatian languages. Furthermore, both Macedonian and Bulgarian share almost the same script of Cyrillic (cf Velichkova 1992). Between the two world wars, Sofia claimed Macedonia (then still known as “southern Serbia” in interwar Yugoslavia) as an “unredeemed part” of Bulgaria, and finally annexed it in 1941. In the reestablished postwar Yugoslavia the legacy of this Bulgarian occupation necessitated much ideological distancing from Bulgaria and Sofia’s claims on Macedonia and its population. As a result, the communist Yugoslav authorities extended official support to the previously minor movement that had sought to create a separate Macedonian language and a Macedonian nation based on it. The project became politically expedient and was realized from 1944 on with a codification that made Macedonian as different from Bulgarian as possible. The process, however, did not do away with mutual comprehensibility between Macedonian and Bulgarian (Reuter 1999: 30; Rychlík and Kouba 2003: 177–181; 184–187, 193, 206).

Until the 1948 rift with the Soviet Union, communist Yugoslavia did not need to follow a similar path of ethnolinguistic engineering in Kosovo because, as remarked above, it appeared that Albania and Kosovo would soon be made into another Yugoslav republic (Lalaj 2012: 219–220; Pavlowitch 2002: 164). But this was not to be. In Yugoslavia’s ideological quarrel with the Kremlin, Albania sided with the Soviet Union and as a result remained an independent nation-state. The Albanian communist elite, stemming mainly from the south of the country, encouraged the region’s Tosk dialect for written purposes in preference to the Gheg (northern) dialect spoken in Kosovo and across the northern half of Albania. It also helped that the population in the Tosk dialect area were relatively more literate than their Gheg counterparts in northern Albania and Kosovo. It is estimated that in the mid-1940s Tosk-speakers accounted for as many as three quarters of all Albanians with some formal education, meaning that they could read and write Albanian (Lloshi and Lefe 2015: 156). In addition, the Gheg-speaking north was staunchly anti-communist, while Catholic Gheg-speaking and -writing intellectuals and authors kept channels open for the flow of ideas and information from the “capitalist West”. Hence, the sidelining of Gheg and the gradual replacement of it with Tosk as the basis of a future standard Albanian let the Albanian communist leadership suppress the restive north and isolate the future generations of Gheg-speakers from prewar and wartime non- and anti-communist literature in Gheg (Elezi 2015).

The decision to base communist Albania’s language on Tosk flew in the face of the governmental 1923 consensus to write in the transitory Gheg-Tosk dialect of the city of Elbasan located in central Albania on the Shkumbin River that doubles as the notional border between these two dialects (or rather dialect

areas). This consensus dated back to the 1916 Literary Commission of Shkodra founded by the Austro-Hungarian occupation authorities, and was confirmed four years later, in 1920, at the Congress of Lushnja that rebuilt the Albanian statehood in the wake of the Great War (Byron 1976: 58; Elsie 2010: 88–89; Ismajli 2010: 115). The Elbasan standard constituted a certain ideal to which Gheg- and Tosk-speakers aspired but which they were not legally compelled to follow. Thus, many wrote in their native (dialect of) Gheg or Tosk. But under the influence of the state institutions which encouraged some circulation of professionals, a converging of Gheg and Tosk began. This in turn encouraged the rise of literacy and did not unduly exclude this or that group of speakers on the basis of their home dialects. That approach led to the adoption of this flexible norm by Gheg-speakers in Kosovo when this territory found itself in the enlarged Italo-Albania between 1941 and 1944 (Lloshi and Lafe 2015: 154–155). At that time, the Italian administration established as many as 173 Albanian-language elementary schools in Kosovo (Malcolm 1998: 292).

The communists' decision to begin the standardization of Albanian afresh was a new start of Albanian language politics. The interwar and wartime legacy of Albanian statehood was of a non-communist character reflecting influences from Austria-Hungary, Italy and the Third Reich. To add insult to injury, before 1944 Gheg-speakers from the north dominated Albanian politics, with President Ahmet Muhtar Zogu, later turned King Zog I (also a Gheg-speaking northerner), at the helm between 1925 and 1939. The postwar communist government drew its legitimacy from the fact that in early 1944 they successfully liberated the Tosk-speaking south of the country, and then seized power across the Gheg-speaking north, following the withdrawing German troops. The victorious communists, after a brief civil war, liquidated the remnants of the prewar (Gheg-speaking) national elites. These military and ideological successes let the communist government declare that “the official language should be the language of those who fought and won the war” (Elezi 2015). The question of the dialectal base of standard Albanian, to a degree, was unfurled as another ideological banner. The prewar and wartime non-communist elite had already had their own Gheg-based Albanian, so now after the change at the political top it was the turn of the communist southerners to build a new “socialist Albanian language” on the basis of their own Tosk dialect (Elezi 2015).

5 Language politics and geopolitics

No official document specified the official language of interwar Albania and neither did the two (1946 and 1976) constitutions of communist Albania. But the Albanian

communist regime threw its weight behind the Tosk-based project of standard Albanian, especially following the ideological divorce with Yugoslavia in 1948. The postwar period of the Elbasan-style liberal mingling of the two dialects came to an end when the tradition of producing two parallel elementary school primers, one in Gheg and another in Tosk, was discontinued in Albania in 1950 (Lloshi and Lefe 2015: 156). It should be remarked that some differences between Tosk and Gheg are quite conspicuous, like the infinitive form of verbs that exists in the latter, but not in the former. In the loss of infinitive, Tosk is closer to such Balkan languages as Bulgarian, Greek or Macedonian, while Gheg that retains infinitive is closer to Serbo-Croatian or Aromanian (Vlach) that share this feature.

On the political plane, in 1955 the communist authorities decided that allowing for regional differences between Ghegs and Tosks was an unlawful expression of “bourgeois chauvinism and localism”, which was punishable by repression and imprisonment (Boçi 2012: 294–295). In 1956 the relative liberalism of the Elbasan norm was finally over in Albania, when a new Tosk-based manual of orthography was published for enforcing the Tosk-based correctness in the country through school and university entrance examinations, alongside the publishing production fully under communist control and censorship (Pipa 1989: 4). The communist regime’s effort to liquidate illiteracy, as part and parcel of the Soviet-style process of modernization, was now channeled exclusively through this new Tosk-based norm of Albanian. Thus, the Tosk-based standard was rapidly spread across Albania, including its Gheg-speaking north. This development resulted in diglossia among Gheg-speakers. They speak Gheg in everyday life, but have to write in the Tosk-based standard. Inescapably, with the rise of radio and television, the Tosk standard also impacts the north-ers’ Gheg speech.

The year 1956 heralded the beginning of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, widening the gap between Moscow and Albania. Step by step, Albania was leaving its alliance with the increasingly post-stalinist Soviet Union for a new ideological friendship with communist China. In the eyes of the Albanian leadership, Beijing remained faithful to Stalin’s ideals, and in addition had means and expertise to facilitate Tirana’s ambitious program of modernization through industrialization. On the other hand, communist China, thanks to this unconventional alliance with faraway and tiny Albania could more freely engage in commerce across the world, because some of its ships began sailing and trading under the Albanian flag until the United Nations recognized the People’s Republic of China in 1971. Meanwhile, Tirana’s rift with the Kremlin became apparent in 1960, and was decisively marked the following year by the evacuation of the Soviet (Warsaw Pact) military base from the Albanian city port of Vlora (Czekalski et al. 2009: 257–258; Heine 1989: 69).

However, Albania's alliance with China was shaken in 1968 by the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. In protest, Albania officially left the Warsaw Pact. However, Beijing did not respond to Tirana's pleas for security guarantees, advising that Albania should rebuild its ties with Yugoslavia and Romania (Hoxha 1979: 536). Tirana had no choice but to follow this advice. Soon Albania's commerce with the outer world was increasingly channeled through Yugoslavia, thus opening a narrow path for cultural cooperation with the Albanians in Kosovo and elsewhere in Yugoslavia. The Albanian-Yugoslav *détente*, though at that time hardly noticed in the wider world, unfolded against the wider backdrop of the global *détente* between the West led by the United States and the East spearheaded by the Soviet Union (Czekalski et al. 2009: 261–262; Staar 1982: 23).

During the opening phase of this rapprochement in April 1968, Albanian linguists from Albania and Kosovo met in the Kosovan capital of Prishtina to discuss the construction of a Tosk-based standard Albanian language (Lloshi and Lefe 2015: 157). It was a serendipitous timing for Belgrade. The sustained suppression of Albanian-language culture and identity in Yugoslavia after the 1948 rift with Albania¹ did not end when the status of socialist autonomous province was conferred on Kosovo in 1963. The continuing widespread social displeasure in the context of a relative liberalization of the regime resulted in student protests that erupted across Kosovo in November 1968. The protesters demanded a full-fledged Kosovan/Albanian republic. Belgrade had prepared for facing such a situation since 1966 when some anti-Albanian restrictions had begun to be lifted (Malcolm 1998: 320–321, 324–325). Belgrade's agreement to introduce Tirana's Tosk-based standard of the Albanian language in Kosovo proved the Yugoslav authorities' good will vis-à-vis Yugoslavia's Albanians. Moreover, Yugoslavia's Albanians were allowed to use Albanian national symbols (Nećak 1995: 25–26). Two years later, in 1970, formerly Kosovo's local branch of the University in Belgrade was elevated to the status of a full-fledge University of Prishtina in its own right (Judah 2008: 53–54). In the same year a long-lasting cooperation agreement was signed between this new university and the University of Tirana (Lita 2012: 316). Offering courses mainly in the medium of Albanian, Prishtina University was designed as the leading national institution of tertiary education for Kosovo's (and all Yugoslavia's) Albanians. These positive developments contributed to the calming of the tense situation in Kosovo and to the development of the full Albanian-medium educational

¹ Apparently, the suppression was also caused by the Kremlin's insistence in 1949 that Tirana mobilize Kosovo's Albanians against Belgrade. Hence, the Yugoslav authorities might see these Albanians as potentially disloyal to Yugoslavia (Boçi 2012: 295).

system, from elementary school to university, for Albanians in Kosovo, western Macedonia and southernmost Serbia (Caca 1999: 152).

The participants of the 1968 linguistic consultations in Prishtina declared that the Albanians, both in Albania and Yugoslavia, are “a single nation with one national literary language” (Byron 1979; Lloshi and Lefe 2015: 161–162). It was an unambiguous and succinct statement of what Albanian ethnolinguistic nationalism is about, in full agreement with the Central European norm of defining and constructing nations and their nation-states through language. The politically underwritten consensus, vetted and approved both by Tirana and Belgrade, led to the 1972 congress on standard Albanian. This time the event was held in Tirana with the participation of the delegation of Kosovan Albanian led by Rexhep Qosja, Director of the Institute of Albanian Studies in Prishtina (Kostallari 1973). The congress took place in November 1972 under the auspices of the Albanian Academy of Sciences, which only a month earlier (in October) had been formally established in order to lend an appropriate “scientific and political gravity” to this momentous event. The delegates officially proclaimed the establishment of a “unified literary Albanian” language, which was also adopted across the border in Yugoslavia, that is, in Kosovo, western Macedonia and southernmost Serbia (Pipa 1989: 5).

Two years later, in 1974, Belgrade made good on this formal adoption by making standard Albanian an official language of Kosovo (alongside Serbo-Croatian), in the wake of the promulgation of the new and genuinely federal Yugoslav constitution of 1974 (Malcolm 1998: 328). Albanian began to be employed at the state level in Yugoslavia’s various federal institutions, including the parliament. This language decisively entered the public space wherever Albanians happened to live, including, administration, schools, cultural institutions, newspapers, television and radio (Zymberi 1991: 132, 134). For better or worse, these processes also led to a growing ethnolinguistic separation between Yugoslavia’s Albanian-speakers and Slavophones (Byron 1985: 68).

6 The plot thickens

A clear and straightforward story, but from the available literature I was unable to establish why Yugoslavia agreed to such a transborder linguistic union, and what kind of Albanian was used for education and publications in Kosovo between 1948 and 1972. The only thing which I found was a vague and unspecific observation on Gheg that was seemingly employed for written purposes in Yugoslavia’s Kosovo prior to 1968 (Byron 1985). But this mention

did not explain either the history or the extent of the use of this “Kosovan language” (Pipa 1989: 4). What is more, the standard English-language history of Kosovo claims, quite confusingly, that no such Gheg-based standard was ever employed in Kosovo (Malcolm 1998: 329).

However, in late November 2015 I had a unique chance to visit the Institute of Linguistics and Literature (*Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe i Letërsisë*) in the Center of Albanological Studies (*Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike*) in Tirana, and then the Institute of Albanology (*Institut i Albanologjik*) in Prishtina. The former institute based in the Albanian capital traces its origins to the Institute of Albanian Studies founded under Italian rule in 1940 and, predictably, was tasked with the development of a standard Albanian language during the communist period (Instituti 2015). Its Kosovan counterpart in Prishtina had a bumpier ride in Yugoslavia through the twentieth century. The history of the Institute of Albanology was marred by political rifts. This institute was established in 1953, but the Yugoslav authorities closed it down within two years, when it became clear that Tirana would not resign from sticking to the Stalinist dogma. The Prishtina-based Institute of Albanology was revived only twelve years later, in 1967, when a rapprochement between Yugoslavia and Albania became possible (Institute 2015).

I interpret the repeated changes in the fate of Kosovo’s Institute of Albanology as follows. The founding of the institute was an answer to the death of Stalin and the growing possibility of an ideological split between the Kremlin and Albania. But the split was slow in coming, so meanwhile Belgrade had a change of heart. Likewise, the renewed opening of the Institute of Albanology seems to be an indicator of the increasing cooperation between Tirana and Belgrade that was unfolding against the backdrop of Albania’s rapid distancing from the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Yugoslavia, as a burgeoning leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, could become an attractive ideological alternative to Tirana, which was disgruntled and confused with all the ideological and systemic changes in the communist world. The Albanian leadership, however, decided to stick to the dogma of Stalinism, which in their eyes made Yugoslavia look like a “capitalist stooge”. Hence, China, as mentioned above, was instrumental in coaxing Albania to rebuild its relations with Belgrade. Tirana’s ally in the Far East was simply located too far away to offer the support and security Tirana desired. This left Yugoslavia as the least ideologically odious partner out of all Albania’s neighbor states.

Before visiting both institutes, on 21 November 2015 I met Mehmet Elezi. After a career in the communist party and holding the post of postcommunist Albania’s Ambassador to Switzerland, nowadays Elezi is an independent linguist, who promotes an improved inclusion of the Gheg linguistic heritage in standard

Albanian. According to him, the Tosk-based standard unjustifiably excludes the heritage and values of Gheg-speakers, thereby impoverishing the Albanian language (cf Breu 1997: 248–257; Vehbiu 1997). He proposes that Gheg-speakers encounter no problems in comprehending and appreciating Albania’s important poets who wrote in Tosk. But Elezi adds that it is the other way round in the case of these Albanian poets of note who wrote in Gheg, because Tosk-speakers are presumably unable to understand the Gheg poets’ writings (Elezi 2015).

Elezi let me know that prior to the acceptance of standard Albanian in Yugoslavia’s Kosovo, Belgrade indeed had a plan of developing a separate Yugoslav variant of the Albanian language, that is, a Kosovan language.² In Serbo-Croatian the Albanian language of Albania is known as the *Albanski jezik/Албански језик*, while the proposed Albanian language for Yugoslavia’s Kosovo was to be dubbed as *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћиптарски језик*. Obviously, the name of the latter is a mere phonetic rendering of the Albanian self-ethnonym *Shqipt* ‘Albanian’ in Serbo-Croatian transliteration with the added Slavic adjectival suffix *-ski/ски*.

Such a project of linguistic engineering would make sense, especially in view of Belgrade’s unwavering support for the Macedonian language for the sake of distancing Macedonia and its Slavophone population from Bulgaria. Furthermore, the project of *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћиптарски језик* would easily follow into the footsteps of the Greek policy of regarding Orthodox Albanophones in Greece as different from Albanians outside Greece. In Greece the former are seen as “non-Greek-speaking Greeks” and are dubbed as “Arvanites” (*Αρβανίτες*), while their language is termed “Arvanatiki” (*Αρβανίτικη*) (Tsitsipis 1998). On the other hand, the sobriquet *Alvanoï* (*Αλβανοί*) is employed in Greek for referring to the Albanians of Albania, and by the same token their language is referred to in Greek as *Alvaniki* (*Αλβανική*). Arvanatiki (also spelled, Arvanatika) by the strength of being part of the Tosk dialect area is actually closer to standard Albanian than to any formerly planned Gheg-based *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћиптарски језик*. But apparently the *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћиптарски језик* (like standard Albanian) was to be written in Latin letters, while Arvanatiki is invariably written with the Greek alphabet. This scriptural tradition graphically distances Arvanatiki from Albanian and

² Elezi proposes using the form “Kosovar” instead of “Kosovan” in the collocation “Kosovan language”, because the former is an Albanian-language adjective derived from the name of the region/state, namely Kosovo (in Serbian/Slavic or English) and Kosova (in Albanian) (Elezi 2015). However, I prefer the more ethnically neutral adjective “Kosovan” that conflates both Albanian and Serbian/Slavic forms of the name of this region/state. Just for the matter of record the Serbian/Slavic adjectival form of Kosovo is *Kosovski*.

emphasizes the former's commonality with the nationally defined overarching Greekness and the Greek language (Kyriazis 2015).

The non-recognition of Albanian as a language of local administration or education in interwar Yugoslavia reinforced the use of Cyrillic across the southern section of this state, nowadays coterminous with Kosovo and Macedonia. The dominance of Cyrillic for writing Serbocroatoslovenian (Yugoslav) in this region was also spurred up by the modernizing-cum-nationalizing revolution in Turkey. The anti-religious character of this revolution and the adoption of the “Latin letters of infidels” for writing Turkish alienated numerous Muslims across the Balkans, especially in the Christian nation-states of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Greece. In opposition to the ideological and scriptural changes in Turkey after 1928, they stuck to writing Albanian, Turkish or Slavic (“Bosnian”) with Arabic letters between the two world wars.

When talking to the staff of the Institute of Linguistics and Literature in Tirana on 23 November 2015, I mentioned Elezi's remark on the never realized project of *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћунмарску језук*. My interlocutors were unconvinced, and only proposed that the word *Šćiptar* (or *Šiptar*) is a Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) offensive term for an Albanian (Ćirilov 2009). They had a point as one of the demands of Kosovo's Albanian demonstrators in 1968 was that Belgrade discontinue the use of the Serbo-Croatian term *Šiptari* for referring to “Albanians”. They wanted to be known as *Albanci* in this language (Elias-Bursać 2015: 150; Lita 2012: 306; Ramet 2006: 295).

7 A forgotten Kosovan language

Next, I pursued the issue of *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћунмарску језук* at Prishtina in the Institute of Albanology, which I visited on 26 November 2015. Memli Krasniqi admitted that indeed there was such a project of a Kosovan language. However, he immediately added the caveat that Yugoslavia's Albanians perceived this attempt at linguistic engineering with deep distrust, so the project was eventually rejected for good, following the aforementioned rapprochement between Belgrade and Tirana at the turn of the 1970s.

After this promising opening I pressed on with my question on the Albanian language as used for writing and producing books in Kosovo before the adoption of standard Albanian in 1968/1972/1974. The institute's director, Hysen Matoshi, was reluctant to discuss this subject. It appears to be a highly sensitive question, due to the continuing ideological and political tension that may disrupt the still fragile stability and peace in independent Kosovo.

This tension is a product of the ideological conflict between the non-ethnolinguistic character of the new polity and its population's ardent belief in language as the sole defining basis of the nation. The rife belief in ethnolinguistic nationalism as *the* norm of statehood creation and legitimation is shared by both, Albanian and Serbian, citizens of Kosovo, which immediately puts them at loggerheads. In line with the political norm of Central Europe's ethnolinguistic nationalism, they claim that it is impossible to build a genuine nation-state with two official and national languages. In this quarrel, the two ethnolinguistic communities also question the very statehood form of Kosovo, which they see as a Western imposition. It does not bode well for the future, when the ethnolinguistically differentiated groups of the country's citizens agree only on these elements of political culture that work against the very existence of Kosovo.

Eventually, after a consultation with Krasniqi, Matoshi admitted that until 1968 a Gheg-based Albanian language was employed as a medium of education (alongside Serbo-Croatian) and for the production of publications in Yugoslavia's Kosovo. So a Kosovan-Šćiptar/Шћиптар language, as opposed to Tirana's Tosk-based Albanian, was a possibility prior to the linguistic union of 1968/1972. What is more, around 120 book titles were produced in Kosovan Albanian, including numerous school textbooks. Kosovo's Albanian newspaper *Zani i Rinisë* [The voice of the youth], founded in 1946, was published in the Kosovan (Gheg) Albanian language, too. It meant that in 1968, the spelling of the periodical's title had to be altered to *Zëri i Rinisë* in line with the orthographic rules of the Tosk-based standard Albanian, when the latter began to be adopted as official in Yugoslavia.

When I enquired Matoshi and Krasniqi about any articles on Kosovo's pre-1968 Gheg Albanian or on the project of *Šćiptarski jezik/Шћунмарску језик*, both my interlocutors replied that no such texts had been written. As an explanation, again, they pointed to the liquidation of the Albanian autonomy in Kosovo in 1989 (Drapac 2010: 267), followed by the replacement of Albanian with the Cyrillic-based Serbo-Croatian (Serbian) in official use (Greenberg 2004: 164; Nećak-Lük 1995: 120), the 1991 removal of Albanian as a medium of education from the University of Prishtina (International Crisis Group 1998: 4–5), and the Serbian ban on the use of the Latin script fully replaced with Cyrillic in Kosovo (Judah 2008: 73). Then, in 1999, Belgrade carried out the massive expulsion of *all* the province's Albanians (alongside many Roma and most Muslims of any ethnic background) (Loquai 2000). This as yet unhealed trauma translates into the still uneasy relations between ethnic Albanians and Serbs in today's independent Kosovo, where the two groups prefer *not* to become Kosovans.

A graphic expression of this ethnic tension between Kosovo's Albanians and Serbs can be gleaned from bilingual road signs and other official signage. The Constitution of Kosovo designates both, Albanian and Serbian, as the state's official languages. But on the road signs and official signage the two different, Albanian and Serbian, versions of a given place-name or the official name of an institution are rendered *exclusively* in Latin letters. This amounts to a breach of the Constitution, because when the former Serbo-Croatian is written with the use of the Latin alphabet, it now becomes either the Bosnian or Croatian language, rather than Serbian, which should be written only in Cyrillic. The de facto ban on the use of Cyrillic in today's Kosovo (outside the overwhelmingly Serbian areas) is a direct legacy of the 1999 ban on this script put in place by returning Albanians in the wake of the international intervention in Kosovo (Judah 2008: 25, 154–155). The ethnolinguistic and scriptural polarization of Kosovo's Albanian and Serbian speech communities is further deepened by the separation of Albanian and Serbian schools which dates from the 1989 liquidation of the autonomy in Yugoslavia's Kosovo and continues to this day, not only in Kosovo, but also in western Macedonia and southernmost Serbia (Fridman 2013: 145; International Crisis Group 2003: 21; Rugova 2015).

Despite Matoshi and Krasniqi's cautious stance toward any research on Kosovo's pre-1968 Gheg-based standard of Albanian and on the unrealized project of Kosovan-Šćiptar/Шћиптар language, I proposed that talking openly about and analyzing in detail such ideologically laden issues might actually defuse their divisive or otherwise damaging potential. Krasniqi tentatively conceded, but remarked that only a foreign and studiously impartial scholar, with no ethnic or family connections to Albanians or Serbs, would be best placed to embark on such a sensitive research project.

8 A research agenda for the future

In the conclusion to the most interesting meeting that at long last began to provide some answers to my questions on the (as it now appears, rather recent lack of the) Kosovan language, Matoshi kindly gifted me a copy of the freshly published volume that gathers the (1966–1968) articles and interviews from the *Zani i rinisë*. At that time Kosovo's leading Albanian intellectuals and writers intensively discussed the pros and cons of abandoning the region's Gheg Albanian for the Tosk-based standard Albanian (Berisha 2015). That is as close as it comes nowadays to an open discussion on these highly ideologized issues of language choice and language standardization.

Obviously, the book does not present any deepened analysis of the presented discussion. Neither are the dynamics of this discussion outlined, nor its importance for the political decisions and developments, which led to the Albanian-Yugoslav détente and the 1974 adoption of standard (Tosk) Albanian as a co-official language in Yugoslavia's Kosovo.

It is a project for the future. Kosovo's pre-1968 Gheg-based Albanian and book production in this truly Kosovan language need to be incisively described and analyzed in a proper monograph. The story of that period's as many as three Albanian languages (Albania's Albanian, Yugoslavia's 'Kosovan' and Greece's Arvanatiki) usefully emphasizes the multiplicity of histories, identities, literacies, cultures and traditions which is typical of the Balkans (and of all Central Europe, too) and does not have to divide. But in order to exorcise its currently divisive potential, this recent past must be clearly analyzed and understood, so that people consciously take note of the fact that ethnolinguistic nationalism is not a product of nature, but exclusively of human decisions. That a similar multiplicity of languages, scripts and religions did not prevent peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence of the population in the Ottoman Empire for centuries. It was possible because the empire's inhabitants and elites made conscious effort to imagine various mechanisms and procedures for such coexistence to work in a stable manner, like their counterparts also did in Switzerland where four languages and two religions are official (while the country's inhabitants consider themselves to be Swiss, not Germans, French, Italians or Romansh), or like in the United States, which does not have any official language or religion at the federal level.

Furthermore, for the sake of an improved comprehension of the past, at least a meticulously researched and fully referenced journal article should be devoted to the history of the abandoned project of the *Šćiptarski jezik/IIIhунmapcky jezyk*. Only in this way, the demons of the recent past can be put to rest so that they would not haunt the future generations any longer. Another bonus would be a better understanding of the politics and the social history of Kosovo's Albanians in Yugoslavia and independent Kosovo, in the context of the Cold War and Albania's rocky relations with its northern neighbor, nowadays replaced with Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia as Tirana's new set of neighbor states in the north.

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