

MIGRATION OF SERBS FROM KOSOVO AND METOHIJA DURING THE YUGOSLAV COMMUNIST REGIME 1958–1981: SCALE AND CAUSES

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ABSTRACT: *The goal of this research is to establish the scale of, and reasons for, the migration of Serbs from Serbia's Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija during the communist regime in SFR Yugoslavia. This study covers the period from 1958, when field reports began to systematically record Serb migration from Kosovo, to 1981, when the death of Josip Broz Tito the year before and the Albanian demonstrations in Pristina led to a fundamental shift in the approach of the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities to this phenomenon. The research is based primarily on documents from the Archives of Kosovo, the Archives of Yugoslavia, the Central State Archives of Albania, the State Archives of Serbia, as well as on the analysis of statistical data. The findings suggest that the reasons behind Serb migration from Kosovo were predominantly political and security-related, rather than purely economic. They further suggest that territorial autonomy granted to a national minority requires additional measures to protect the internal minority within the autonomous territory and that the lack of such measures in autonomous Kosovo during Tito's regime prompted the migration of Serbs from the province.*

KEYWORDS: communism, ethnic migrations, Kosovo, national minorities, territorial autonomy, Yugoslavia

Introduction

The issue of the nature and reasons for the migration of Serbs from Kosovo in the communist period was raised within the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) in the 1960s. The debate generally revolved around two basic questions: was there a large-scale migration of Serbs from Kosovo, and if so, was it predominantly motivated by economic reasons or ethnic and political reasons. While this topic was

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strongly suppressed from public discourse during Josip Broz Tito's rule, the situation reversed after his death. Media outlets that had remained silent on the issue of Serbian migration from Kosovo until the early 1980s, began to produce exaggerated reports on it.¹ The new Serbian communist leadership sought to impose this issue in an attempt to shift the balance of political power between Serbia and its autonomous provinces. The lack of archival sources, combined with the pronounced politicisation of the topic due to ongoing crises, long hindered a thorough and objective analysis of issues related to the migration of Serbs from Kosovo.

In the following years the issue found its way into western historiography. The author of a Kosovo history, Noel Malcolm, claimed that "the most careful modern study of this issue concluded that there was a net emigration of between 80,000 and 100,000 Serbs from Kosovo between 1961 and 1981". He also found that "economic causes were the dominant factor for many of the Serbs and Montenegrins who left Kosovo, just as they were for the 45,000 Albanians who left the province between 1971 and 1981".² Another historian, Miranda Vickers, offered a somewhat different perspective on the phenomenon: "The events of 1966–8 that so increased mass self-confidence among Albanians also brought about increased Serbian and Montenegrin emigration from the province. If before 1981 much of this flow appeared to be of members of the intelligentsia seeking higher living standards elsewhere in Yugoslavia, subsequently emigration had taken the form of flight – reportedly encouraged by letters, threats, burnings, beatings, murders and Serbian monasteries and monuments in Kosovo being vandalised."³ From the quoted section it is not sufficiently clear whether the mass migration of Serbs and Montenegrins occurred after 1968, as implied in the first sentence, or only after 1981, as suggested in the second sentence. The second sentence indicates that the first wave of migrants consisted of members of the intellectual class, who left Kosovo for economic reasons.

Author Tim Judah did not address the scope of migrations and remained indecisive about the reasons for the migration: "So some Serbs felt they were harassed to leave their farms and houses, while at the same time the large amount of money being offered for them meant that they could get far more for their money in Serbia proper. So we can see that it is hard to say which was predominant – the pull or the push factors. In general terms it is probably safe to say that both were present".⁴ In their monographs on the history of Kosovo, authors Jusuf Buxhovi and Ethem Ceku devoted significant attention to the 1937 plan proposed by Serbian academic Vasa Čubrilović, which called for the emigration of Albanians from Yugoslavia to Turkey,

¹ Petar Ristanović, *Kosovsko pitanje* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2019), 318–379; Marie-Janine Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia* (West Lafayette, Indiana, US: Purdue University Press, 2019), 259–261; Kosta Nikolić and Srđan Cvetković, *Srbi i Albanci na Kosovu i Metohiji u 20. veku* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2014), 91–214.

² Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (New York: University Press, 1998), 330. On the controversies surrounding Malcolm's book, see Božica Slavković Mirić, „Pogled u noviju istoriografiju o Kosovu i Metohiji i nastanku albanskog nacionalizma“, *Tokovi istorije*, br. 3, (2023), 229.

³ Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: a history of Kosovo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 212–213.

⁴ Tim Judah, *Kosovo: what everyone needs to know* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 59–60.

despite this plan never being implemented.⁵ Conversely, their books do not address the phenomenon of the mass emigration of Serbs from Kosovo during the communist period. On the other hand, demographer and Fellow of the American Statistical Association, Miloš Macura, argued that Serbian migration from Kosovo was driven by a “diffuse system of discrimination”, which operated unimpeded due to the political power dynamics in Yugoslavia and Kosovo itself.⁶ This study aims to fill the existing gaps in the historiography regarding the onset, progression, predominant causes, and scale of migration by combining an investigation of archival sources with the analysis of statistical data.

Through most of the 20th century, political processes had a significant impact on the demographic trends in Kosovo. This was particularly evident in the case of migration, which largely reflected the political will of the ruling regimes. In the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Serbs were resettled to Kosovo from other parts of the country as part of the government-instituted agrarian reform.⁷ This led to a gradual increase in their share of the population, but the process was abruptly ended by the Axis occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941. Kosovo was then annexed to the fascist puppet state of “Greater Albania”, resulting in the forced expulsion of Serbs.

After the communist takeover in 1945, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) divided the country into six republics. In the largest of the six, Serbia, two autonomous entities were created – the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the Autonomous Kosovo-Metohija Region (AKMR).⁸ With ethnic Albanians accounting for almost two-thirds of the AKMR population, and with thirteen of Serbia’s fourteen districts with an Albanian majority population being incorporated into the AKMR, the Yugoslav ethnic Albanians were among the first national minorities in post-war Europe provided with territorial autonomy.⁹

Critics of the territorial autonomy model argue that establishing it with the aim of protecting the rights of a given minority generates the problem of a new minority being created within the autonomous region. Professor David Smith of the University of Glasgow maintains that in that case, additional measures are indispensable for protecting the collective rights of the minority community within the autonomous territory.¹⁰ Clarifying

⁵ Jusuf Buxhovi, *Kosova. Volume 3: From Occupation to International Protectorate*, (Houston: Jalfat Publishing, 2017), 277, 285–289; Ethem Çeku, *Kosovo and Diplomacy Since World War II: Yugoslavia, Albania and the Path to Kosovan Independence* (London: IB Taurus, 2016), 81–82.

⁶ Miloš Macura, „Premoderne migracije u savremenom jugoslovenskom društvu“, u: *Migracije i Bosna i Hercegovina*, ur. Nusret Šehić (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju u Sarajevu, 1990), 467–468.

⁷ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Kosovo: kurze Geschichte einer zentralbalkanischen Landschaft* (Wien: Böhlau, 2008), 193–203.

⁸ Autonomous Kosovo-Metohija Region was renamed the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija in 1963 and the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo in 1969. In 1990, it was renamed again as the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

⁹ For the history of Kosovo’s autonomy within Serbia under communist rule, see: Igor Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije u Srbiji (1945–1969)* (Beograd: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2021); Miomir Gatalović, *Kosovo i Metohija u državnoj politici Jugoslavije 1958–1965* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2016), P. Ristanović, *Kosovsko pitanje*; E. Çeku, *Kosovo and Diplomacy Since World War II*; Jan Pelikan, *Novim putevima: Kosovo 1958–1969* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2022).

¹⁰ David Smith, „Minority territorial and non-territorial autonomy in Europe: theoretical perspectives and practical challenges“, in: *Autonomies in Europe: Solutions and Challenges*, ed. Zoltán Kántor (Budapest: Research Institute for Hungarian Communities Abroad, 2014), 18.

the situation of the Serb population in Kosovo's autonomy and pinpointing the cause of their migration may thus prove useful in testing Smith's line of argument.

After World War II, Kosovo emerged as the Yugoslav region with the indisputably highest fertility rate – which was not the case during the interwar period – and this rate was sustained at over six children per woman for an extended period. Moreover, in this province, fertility and natality declined at the slowest rate in Yugoslavia, which significantly increased Kosovo's share of the population of both Serbia and Yugoslavia.¹¹ The shrinking size of the Serb population in autonomous Kosovo during the communist regime cannot be attributed only to standard demographic factors such as birth or fertility rates, which were not significantly lower among the Kosovo Serb population as compared to the Albanians.¹²

An attempt to periodise Serb migration from Kosovo under the communist regime identifies several phases. The first, between 1945 and 1948, saw an estimated 40,000 interwar Serbian settlers stripped of their estates in Kosovo by the new communist authorities and relocated predominantly to Serbia's northern province, Vojvodina.¹³ The following decade, 1948–1957, was defined by a delicate ethnic balance between the Serbs and the Albanians in the region, maintaining a demographic equilibrium, with no major ethnic outmigration.¹⁴ This is also shown by the census data for 1948, 1953, and 1961, recording stable shares of the Albanians and the Serbs in the total population of the region.¹⁵ The census of 1971, however, showed a considerably different picture, mirroring the political and demographic changes that had taken place in the previous decade.

Table no. 1: *Albanian, and Serb and Montenegrin populations as percentages of the total population of Kosovo and Metohija according to the censuses of 1948, 1953, 1961, 1971 and 1981*

	1948	1953	1961	1971	1981
Serbs and Montenegrins	27,5	27,4	27,5	20,9	14,9
Albanians	68,5	64,9	67,2	73,7	77,4

¹¹ Marina Blagojević, „Iseljavanje Srba sa Kosova: trauma i /ili katarza“, u: *Srpska strana rata: Trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju* (Beograd: Republika, 1996), 235; I. Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije*, 502.

¹² In 1953, the fertility rate in Kosovo and Metohija was 5.92 children per woman among Serbian women, and 6.32 among Albanian women. Both communities during this period remained predominantly agrarian, traditional, and deeply rooted in faith and heritage. [Marina Blagojević, „Iseljavanje Srba sa Kosova: trauma i /ili katarza“, 235].

¹³ I. Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije u Srbiji (1945–1969)*, 215–260.

¹⁴ Some migration of both groups from the region did occur during the era of 'ethnic balance', but it was of considerably lower intensity and began to increase noticeably only in the later phase of this period. [Uroš Miketić, „Iseljavanje Srba i Crnogoraca sa Kosova i Metohije 1966–1981. godine: uzroci, tok i posledice“, Doctoral dissertation, University of Pristina, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of History, 2024, pp. 399–400].

¹⁵ Ruža Petrović and Marina Blagojević, *Seobe Srba i Crnogoraca sa Kosova i Metohije: Rezultati ankete sprovedene 1985–1986. godine* (Beograd: SANU, 1989), 84; Branislav Krstić, *Kosovo – uzroci sukoba, pomirenje prava* (Beograd: Liber-press, 2002), 13.

Raising of the 'minority question' and strengthening autonomy through federal party initiatives (1957–1966)

The special relationship of Josip Broz Tito towards ethnic Albanians in the AKMR was taken to a new level in the late 1950s. The LCY leadership set out to make the strengthening of the political and economic position of the Albanian population in Serbia a federal-level priority.

Despite the fact that the equality of national minorities was regulated in the initial legal acts of communist Yugoslavia, the party leadership decided in 1957, without any apparent reason, to reopen this issue. On 24 January 1957 the Executive Committee of the Central Committee (EC CC) of the LCY set up a Commission on National Minorities. The newly established body was tasked with enhancing the cultural, educational, and economic standing of national minorities, as well as ensuring their representation within the state apparatus, companies, party structures, and public offices.¹⁶ The first important precedent in the communist regime's attitude towards national minorities concerned the definition of who belonged to this category. Although the Yugoslav republics were recognised as "states" in the early constitutional regulations, the members of Yugoslav nations living outside their home republics (e.g., Croats in Serbia or Serbs in Croatia) were not considered "national minorities". Only non-Yugoslav peoples who lived in Yugoslavia were classified into this category.

The existence of the AKMR, whose governing bodies were dominated by Albanians, placed this community in a distinctly different position from other national minorities in the country. Yet the federal commission on national minorities regarded Kosovo Albanians as an "endangered" community and called for the strengthening of their political status. In other words, the commission treated the actual ethnic majority in the AKMR as a minority. The federal commission also proposed enhancing Kosovo's autonomy within Serbia.¹⁷

The LCY's new policy was initially confined to symbolic gestures: in June 1958, the Executive Council of the AKMR prescribe that all legal acts should be written in Albanian too; Serbs employed in the provincial administration were sent to courses to master the Albanian language.¹⁸ Several campaigns were also launched to encourage ethnic Albanians to join the Communist Party.¹⁹

Problems arose when the issue of "equal ethnic representation" in public enterprises was initiated. At an expanded meeting of the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia (EC LCS) in January 1959, influential Kosovo functionaries Fadil Hoxha and Xhavit Nimani raised concerns about the "national make-

¹⁶ Archives of Yugoslavia, (AJ), fond 507, CK SKJ, XVIII-K. 1/1, Stenographic record and minutes of the meeting of the Commission on National Minorities, 28 Feb. 1957, 4–10; I. Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije u Srbiji (1945–1969)*, 427–428.

¹⁷ AJ, 507, CK SKJ, XVIII-K. 11/2, Data on the economic situation of national minorities, 4; M. Galatović, *Kosovo i Metohija u državnoj politici Jugoslavije 1958–1965*, 125–127

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ AJ, 507, CK SKJ, III/82, Materials from the expanded meeting of the EC CC LCY, 2 Mar. 1959, Report on national minorities in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY) [FNRJ], 8–9.

up of the employed workforce” and the “inadequate” representation of Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija. According to Nimani, the trouble was that ‘it would not be correct that Serbs and Montenegrins should quit their jobs’ to make way for Albanians. Hoxha also mentioned the dismissals of Serbs as an option: “The current composition of the administration is such that out of 3,015 employees, 1,300 are Albanian, so not even with all of our efforts shall we be able to solve the problem quickly. So you have to dismiss Serbs from work, and not just a few but many, and that would have its consequences.”²⁰

Albeit they did not openly propose it, both Hoxha and Nimani spoke of the idea of putting Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija out of work as a possible solution to their problem, thereby indirectly legitimising it before the highest body of the Communist Party in Serbia. Their approach ignored the fact that the ethnic structure of the employees in the local administration and companies simply could not be identical to the national structure of the population as established by the 1953 census because of the socioeconomic factors such as education and expertise levels and demography.²¹

A similar disproportion in the ethnic structure of the workforce in the economy existed in the northern parts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Although Serbs held political power in the Danube Banovina and were the largest ethnic group there, their share in the industry and banking sector was significantly smaller than that of the Germans and the Hungarians, who particularly dominated the managerial and ownership structures of these enterprises.²² In a predominantly democratic state, which at least fundamentally respected the rule of law, the socioeconomic situation, which reflected the previous decades or centuries, could not be abruptly changed. In contrast, the ruling party in Communist Yugoslavia’s one-party system began intervening politically to address the issue of ethnic representation in enterprises.

The expanded meeting of the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia on 2 March 1959 was entirely devoted to national minorities.²³ Fadil Hoxha and Xhavit Nimani once again brought up the ethnic make-up of the employed workforce in Kosovo and Metohija, using it as a proof of ‘discrimination’ against Albanians.²⁴ The meeting conclusions emphasised the need for providing a boost to economically lagging areas of Yugoslavia, especially the one inhabited by the “numerically strongest, Albanian national minority”, the only minority in Yugoslavia specified by name in the document. The conclusions were dispatched as a separate document to all municipal party organisa-

²⁰ State Archives of Serbia Srbije (DAS), Đ-2 fonds, Izvršni komitet Centralnog komiteta Saveza komunista Srbije (IK CK SKS) [Executive Committee of the CC LCS (EC CC LSS)], box 2, Stenographic record of the expanded meeting of the EC CC LCS, 27 Jan. 1959, 9.

²¹ Apart from these factors, Serbs in Kosovo were significantly more inclined to join the Communist Party than Albanians, which was undoubtedly an important factor in securing employment in the public sector within the communist system [Dejan Guzina. “Kosovo or Kosova – Could It Be Both? The Case of Interlocking Serbian and Albanian Nationalisms”, in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo*, Florian Bieber & Židas Daskalovski (eds). (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 35].

²² Duško Dimitrijević, „Zahtevi pripadnika nekadašnje nemačke manjine za restituciju imovine u Srbiji“, *Međunarodni problemi*, br. 1, (2011), 128.

²³ AJ, 507, CK SKJ, III/82, Materials from the expanded meeting of the EC CC LCY, 2 Mar. 1959; I. Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije u Srbiji (1945–1969)*, 433–436; M. Gatalović, *Kosovo i Metohija u državnoj politici Jugoslavije 1958–1965*, 138–141.

²⁴ M. Gatalović, *Kosovo i Metohija u državnoj politici Jugoslavije 1958–1965*, 90.

tions, along with the directive to “introduce concrete measures” compliant with the Conclusions in every municipality with a national minority population.²⁵

Against the backdrop of rigid single-party system in Tito’s Yugoslavia, this move by the party leadership had a serious impact on interethnic relations in Kosovo. According to Rajko Vidačić, former head of the regional State Security Service, the publication of the Conclusions left local Serb officials confused and concerned, while it was welcomed with enthusiasm by the local Albanian population.²⁶ Some municipal committees in Kosovo promptly issued directives to companies and organisations to strictly implement the ethnic quota policy on employment.²⁷

Divergent assessments of the Kosovo situation by the Communist Party and the State Security

The actions of the party leadership between 1957 and 1959 soon led to the escalation of ethnic intolerance in the region. In 1958, State Security organs recorded a considerable deterioration in the security situation in the region, along with increased pressure on the remaining Serb interwar settlers to leave.²⁸ Upon his arrest in November 1958, Adem Demaçi admitted to the investigating officers that he advocated the use of violence as a method in the struggle for the unification of Kosovo and Albania.²⁹

In the subsequent years, State Security reported to the party leadership that Serbs were leaving Kosovo due to threats to their safety. One report noted: “Various nationalist elements, not formally associated with illegal organisations, frequently commit impermissible acts – ostracising and physically attacking persons of Serb and Montenegrin nationality, intimidating them to compel their departure from this territory.”³⁰

In the early 1960s, the Eparchy of Raška-Prizren informed the Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church about threats to the safety of its priests, monastics, and faithful, posed by certain individuals and authorities. In his report of 27 April 1961, Pavle, the bishop of Raška-Prizren, stated: “Our persistent trouble is an unstoppable migration of our population from all parts of the Eparchy. Some claim the reason is their fear of oppression by Albanians and Turks in the case of political complications in these regions”.³¹ The increased incidence of stoning of Orthodox monasteries and churches, desecration of cemeteries, and even physical attacks on nuns and other ecclesiastics, documented between 1959 and 1962, compelled Bishop Pavle to submit multiple complaints to the Executive Council of the People’s Board of the AKMR.³²

²⁵ Radošin Rajović, *Autonomija Kosova: Istorijско-pravna studija* (Beograd: Ekonomika, 1985), 467–470; M. Gatalović, *Kosovo i Metohija u državnoj politici Jugoslavije 1958–1965*, 138–140.

²⁶ Rajko Vidačić, *O korenima separatizma i terorizma na Kosovu* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 2000), 195.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ DAS, BIA fonds, III-121, Activity of the internal reactionary forces from the ranks of the Albanian national minority.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3, 4.

³⁰ DAS, Đ-2, box 22, Report on the work of the commission on identifying deviations and abuses and on the measures taken for the reorganisation of the state security service in the AP KM, Pristina, 1 Nov. 1966.

³¹ Atanasije Jevtić, *Stradanja Srba na Kosovu i Metohiji od 1941. do 1990.* (Priština: Jedinstvo, 1990), 39.

³² *Albanian genocide of the Serbs in the twentieth century. Documents of the Archives of the Diocese of Ras-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija*, ed. Mirjana Litričin (Belgrade: Žagor, 2011), 294–317; A. Jev-

In the first half of the 1960s, the State Security's reports and the party's narrative as regards the situation in Kosovo began to diverge. The State Security pointed to a drastic worsening of interethnic relations in the province and a mass outflow of Serbs and Montenegrins, citing instances of pressure, harassment, and physical attacks on Serbs with the aim of forcing them to leave the region. The Communist Party, by contrast, adhered to the approach set out in its 1958 platform and the Conclusions of its 1959 Executive Committee, envisioning greater federal support for the overall position of Albanians in Kosovo, without even mentioning the problems faced by the Serb population.³³

Differences emerged between the local State Security office and the Communist Party over the frequent removal of Serb employees by Albanian-controlled municipal authorities, with the party justifying these actions under its policy of 'even representation of national minorities'. A 1963 report from the State Security Department reveals how the local party organisation interpreted and implemented the policy of "improving" the ethnic composition of the workforce:

"In some municipalities, such as Peć, the municipal party committees sit in a series of meetings and discuss whether the highest positions in the organs of authority and companies are properly distributed between the cadres of Albanian nationality, on the one hand, and those of Serb and Montenegrin nationalities, on the other – in percentages in accordance with the number of inhabitants. Under this policy, the able and qualified cadres are frequently removed from their positions and replaced by persons lacking any qualifications."³⁴ After the 1966 Brioni Plenum, this report was interpreted as a sign of the State Security's "nationalist activity".

In 1966, the chief of the Đakovica police department, Jovo Bajat, described the pressures faced by the Serb population in the province: "In recent years, there have been cases of Serbs' and Montenegrins' farmland being usurped entirely or partially, of damage to their farms, and of rapes and other threats, all aimed at forcing them to leave Kosovo and settle elsewhere."³⁵

The situation was difficult in the educational sector as well. The federal interior ministry (State Secretariat for Internal Affairs) was informed in 1962 that the Serbian teaching staff of some schools in Kosovo were put under such pressure that some had quit their jobs and the others were about to.³⁶ The State Security drew special attention to the case from Vučitrn District, where the member of the its People's Board responsible for education exerted such pressure on the Serb teachers that in a few schools all of them resigned from their jobs.³⁷

tić, *Stradanja Srba na Kosovu i Metohiji od 1941. do 1990*, 38; Patrijarh Pavle, *Kosovska iskušenja* (Beograd: Knjiga komerc, 2018), 27–54.

³³ DAS, Đ-2, box 22, Report on the work of the commission on identifying deviations and abuses and on the measures taken for the reorganisation of the state security service in the AP KM, Pristina, 1 Nov. 1966.

³⁴ DAS, Đ-2, box 22, Report on the work of the commission on identifying deviations and abuses and on the measures taken for the reorganisation of the state security service in the AP KM, Pristina, 1 Nov. 1966.

³⁵ DAS, Đ-2, box 22, Statement of Jovo Bajat, employee of the Secretariat for Internal Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Serbia (SIA SRS) [SUP SR Srbije] at the behest of the SIA SRS, 9 Sept. 1966.

³⁶ DAS, BIA, III-136, Report on hostile activity and anti-socialist tendencies among teaching professionals, secondary-school and university students in Kosovo, 12–13.

³⁷ Arhiv Kosova (AK) [Archives of Kosovo], Dosja Procesi Prizrenit 1956, Gjykata penale e Qarkut në Prizren, Testimony of Nijazi Maloku about 21 persons from the party and state apparatus; AS, BIA,

On 9 July 1962, Serbia's interior minister, Vojin Lukić, presented a report to the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia on the sharp deterioration of the security situation in Kosovo and the mass migration of non-Albanian populations.³⁸ According to the report, during 1961 and 1962, 356 families left the Peć police jurisdiction, and 117 families departed from Gnjilane. In Đakovica, of 4,500 interwar settler families, only 300 remained, of whom "80% were making preparations to leave".³⁹ The report included examples of terror, plundering, rape, farm arson, threats, and physical attacks against Serbs over the two-year period. The courts, under the political control of the provincial authorities, were generally lenient in cases of nationalist-motivated crimes. In some instances, prosecutors delayed proceedings until the statute of limitations had expired. The report concluded that the migration of Serbs from certain areas of Kosovo and Metohija had reached such proportions that it "has become a serious political problem".⁴⁰

Lukić's report to the Serbian party leadership specifically criticised the "mistakes made in carrying out the letter of the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia on national minorities", implicitly suggesting that it was after the 1959 letter from the Yugoslav party leadership to lower-level party organs that interethnic relations in the province had taken a drastic turn for the worse.⁴¹ The Serbian party leadership, however, lacked the political strength to raise the issue before the federal party leadership or to challenge the tenets of its policy on Kosovo. At the same meeting at which Lukić's report was presented, the Executive Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia concluded that 'the new party programme of 1958 and the decisions of the expanded meeting of the Yugoslav Executive Committee of 1959 should continue to be carried out'. This means that party regarded strict adherence to its dogma as the solution to interethnic problems in Kosovo, even though that same dogma had initially contributed to their escalation.

The first half of the 1960s was characterised by a clear divergence between the way the Communist Party organs portrayed the situation in Kosovo and the reports provided by state intelligence services, which operated under the Party's control. While lower-level state security bodies increasingly documented the deteriorating security situation and emigration from the province, party officials continued to avoid addressing these issues in public statements and internal meetings.

Large-scale migration after the Brioni Plenum of 1966

Tito's removal of Aleksandar Ranković from political life and the purge of State Security officials in 1966 had far-reaching implications in Kosovo. The discourse accompanying the removal of Serbs from key positions in the state security sector and their replacement with Albanians was marked by phrases about "greater-Serbian oppres-

III-136, Report on hostile activity and anti-socialist tendencies among teaching professionals, secondary-school and university students in Kosovo, 13.

³⁸ Slavenko Terzić, *Stara Srbija (XIX–XX vek): Drama jedne civilizacije* (Beograd: Istorijski institut, 2012), 544.

³⁹ DAS, CK SKS, Izvršni komitet (IK) [Executive Committee (EC)], 1962, Stenographic record of the meeting of the EC CC LCS of 9 July 1962; Terzić, *Stara Srbija*, 542.

⁴⁰ DAS, CK SKS, Izvršni komitet (IK) [Executive Committee (EC)], 1962, Stenographic record of the meeting of the EC CC LCS of 9 July 1962; Terzić, *Stara Srbija*, 543–544, 548.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

sion of Albanians” in the previous period and demands for achieving “even national representation of Albanians” in state-owned companies.⁴² Fadil Hoxha pursued this policy with full support from Tito and the Croatian and Slovenian members of the Yugoslav party leadership.⁴³ German historian Marie-Janine Calic described the atmosphere in Kosovo in the late 1960s and early 1970s as follows: “There was euphoria and triumphalism, which were increasingly directed against the local Serbs. Thus, the consistent Albanisation led to a deep alienation and polarisation between the peoples”.⁴⁴

In October 1966, the Provincial Committee of the LCS for Kosovo and Metohija endorsed a report on “deviations within the Secretariat for Internal Affairs and the State Security Service”, thereby paving the way for a new security policy in the province. The committee dismissed all previous reports submitted by the Security Service as “proof of greater-Serbian and anti-Albanian activities of the Security Service”.⁴⁵ Not only was the outflow of Serbs from the province denied but any attempt to raise the issue was also condemned as “propaganda by Serbian nationalists”.⁴⁶

While the increasing migration of Serbs from Kosovo was officially denied in Yugoslavia, Albania’s foreign ministry, led by Nesti Nase, began to receive such information soon after the Brioni Plenum. The Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gathered information on political developments in Kosovo and Yugoslavia from various sources, primarily informants on the ground in Kosovo. This intelligence was then passed on to the party leadership in Albania and Enver Hoxha. Minister Nase cited some of these sources in his reports, referring to them as “from our source close to Fadil Hoxha” or “from our source within the Kosovo UDBA” (the secret police), but most frequently as “from our sources abroad”.⁴⁷ The reports were classified as “strictly confidential” and were neither made public nor disclosed at party meetings, indicating that their primary function was to provide the Albanian leadership with a realistic understanding of political and social developments in Kosovo and Yugoslavia.

The report to the Albanian foreign ministry of 3 August 1966, when the post-Brioni campaign was only gaining momentum, states: “Rumour has it that Serbs in Kosovo are selling their land and starting to leave.” Eight days later, the Albanian ministry received another report: “Most Serbs are moving from rural areas to the interior of the country, although local authorities are trying to prevent them from leaving.”

⁴² DAS, Savez komunista Kosova (SKK) [League of Communists of Kosovo (LCK), box 1, 1966, Materials from the 7th plenary session of the LCS Provincial Committee for Kosovo and Metohija, 12 Oct. 1966; Miomir Gatalović, *Burna vremena: Kosovo i Metohija u državnoj politici Jugoslavije (1966–1969)* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2018), 41–73; Ljubodrag Dimić, *Istorija srpske državnosti: Srbija u Jugoslaviji* (Beograd: SANU, 2001), 404–457.

⁴³ Igor Vukadinović, „Strogo poverljivi izveštaji ministra spoljnih poslova Albanije o situaciji u Jugoslaviji i na Kosovu i Metohiji“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 1 (2023), 165–166; Atanasije Jevtić, „Hronika stradanja Srba na Kosovu i Metohiji (1941–1989)“, *Bogoslovlje*, XXXIII, 1–2 (1989), 67–73.

⁴⁴ Mari-Žanin Čalić, *Istorija Jugoslavije u 20. veku* (Beograd: Klio, 2010), 305.

⁴⁵ DAS, Đ-2, box 22, Assessments of deviations within SIA [SUP] and SS [DB], their causes, ideological roots and consequences, and proposal of measures for overcoming them; I. Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije u Srbiji (1945–1969)*, 511–685;

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror (AQSH), Ish-Komitete të Partisë, fondi 14/Arkivi i Partisë – Struktura, (14/APSTR), viti (v.) 1968, Sektori i Jashtëm, dosja (d.) 318.2, Informacion nga burimet tona jashtë informohemi, Për Kosovën, 4. 6. 1968, njësia arkivore (n.a.) 15.

The report from August 21 states that “many Serbs are leaving Kosovo, as they no longer feel safe there”.⁴⁸

The confidential report of the Albanian foreign minister Nesti Nase to Enver Hoxha of 14 September 1966 notes the politically motivated migration of Serbs from the province as a result of the campaign launched by the Communist Party in the province: “The departure of Slavs from Kosovo to other republics has increased enormously. They are selling all their property to Albanians. The explanation is that now ‘Albanians have taken power’ in Kosovo, so they no longer feel safe there”.⁴⁹

That Yugoslav leadership was aware of the process may be seen in an anonymous letter to Tito from Vučitrn, kept in his personal archive. It states that “a great migration of Serbs from Kosovo is underway”, and that it was set off by attacks on their farms. The author finds that the situation in Kosovo “is worse than it was at the time of the occupation” and that authorities are “concealing the truth about it”.⁵⁰

A few months later, the strictly confidential report of the Albanian Foreign Ministry, dated 28 February 1967, highlighted the systematic dismissal of Serb and Montenegrin employees from provincial companies: “In Kosovo, Serb and Montenegrin employees are continually being fired and replaced with Albanians, who are close to occupying all positions in the party and organs of authority. Fadil Hoxha, whose return to Kosovo is awaited with great enthusiasm, is working in that direction”.⁵¹

The claim about uneven representation of Albanians in local companies was used as the main proof of their “inequality”. At the meeting with Tito on 23 February 1967, Veli Deva, president of the provincial committee, said that the national structure of the employed workforce in the province “is almost inversely proportional to the national structure of the population”. He argued that even if, over the next four years, employment were allocated exclusively to Albanians, with no members of other nationalities employed, a “well-balanced national structure” would still not be achieved in Kosovo. Tito expressed his support for the Albanian leaders’ intention to “correct” the national composition of the province’s workforce.⁵²

At a meeting with Tito on 20 March 1967, Petar Stambolić, Yugoslav prime minister, and Dragi Stamenković, Serbian prime minister, drew his attention to the dismissal of Serbs under the pretext of “correcting the national composition” in Kosovo, as well as to the resulting problem of Serb and Montenegrin cadres leaving the province.⁵³ In April 1967, bishop Pavle of Raška-Prizren described the new employment policy as follows: “Since there have been more Serbs employed than their

⁴⁸ AQSH, 14/APSTR, v. 1966, Sektor i Jashtëm, d. 202.1, Mbi gjendjen politike ne Jugosllavbi, n.a. 38, 40.

⁴⁹ AQSH, 14/APSTR, v. 1966, Sektor i Jashtëm, d. 202.1, Informacion mbi gjendjen aktuale ne Jugosllavi, 14. 9. 1966, n.a. 12.

⁵⁰ AJ, fond 837, Kabinet predsednika Republike (KPR) [Office of the President of the Republic], II-4-b/25, Copy of the letter from Vučitrn on Serb migration from Kosovo and the memorandum in connection with J. B. Tito’s remark about the letter, 30 Sept. – 18 Oct. 1966.

⁵¹ AQSH, 14/APSTR, v. 1967, Sektor i Jashtëm, d. 267/2, Informacion nga burimet tona inforohemi, 28. 2. 1967. n.a. 3.

⁵² AJ, 837-II-2/316, Reception of the delegation of Kosovo and Metohija, 23 Feb. 196, Note about the reception, 4–19 Mar. 1967.

⁵³ DAS, Đ-2, CK SKS, box. 7, Notes, information, Note about conversation with President of the Republic, Josip Broz Tito, regarding his upcoming visit to Kosovo and Metohija, 20 Mar. 1967, 9–14.

share in the population, because Albanians did not have qualified cadres, who are only now beginning to arrive [fresh from education], from now on no Serb will be able to get a job until the employment quota for Albanians is met. Serbs will have no other alternative than to seek employment in other parts [of the country] or abroad”.⁵⁴

In 1968, the Serbian party leadership was informed that 215 experts and skilled workers had left the Trepča mining and metallurgical complex in the preceding period.⁵⁵ Most of them were Serbs and Montenegrins, and among them were individuals indispensable to the production process. An inquiry found that they left their jobs due to ethnic harassment, physical assaults, threats at gunpoint, workplace sabotage, and even letters warning them to “either learn the Albanian language or move out”.⁵⁶

In early 1968, Albanian foreign minister Nase informed the party leadership that the Kosovo authorities were adopting measures aimed at securing a dominant Albanian presence in the provincial administration and enterprises, while encouraging the departure of Serb cadres. He reported:

“The recent decision, effective 1 January 1968, granting the Albanian language equal status with Serbian, was intended to facilitate the appointment of Albanians to leading positions and to hasten the exit of Serb cadres from Kosovo. Over the preceding months, sixty Serb families from Peć – mostly farmers and intellectuals – had already moved to Serbia, while in Pristina Serb farmers were daily selling their houses and land before leaving”.⁵⁷

At the 14th session of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia on 29 May 1968, two members raised the issue of intensified Serb and Montenegrin migration from Kosovo due to endangered safety and loss of employment. The rest of the meeting was devoted to condemning their statements, and the CC LCS adopted special conclusions, officially distancing itself from their claims.⁵⁸ The Albanian party leadership, by contrast, had long acknowledged the migration of Serbs – a subject dismissed in Serbia as mere “back-room [conspiracy] theories” of Serb nationalists. In a strictly confidential report of 4 June 1968, the Albanian foreign ministry once again noted this phenomenon: “Serbs are very frightened by the revival of patriotic sentiment in Kosovo; they do not seem to feel safe. Despite many provocations they stage, according to our information, their migration to the interior of Serbia – following the sale of land and other property – continues in various forms”.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ M. Gatalović, *Burna vremena*, 280–281.

⁵⁵ For details on the employment policy at the Trepča mine during the socialist period, see: Pieter Troch, „Social dynamics and nationhood in employment politics in the Trepča mining complex in Socialist Kosovo (1960s)“, *Labor History* vol. 60, no. 3, (2019), 217–234.

⁵⁶ Jan Pelikan, *Novim putevima*, 472; M. Gatalović, *Burna vremena*, 282.

⁵⁷ AQSH, 14/APSTR, v. 1968, Sektori i Jashtëm, d. 318.1, Informacion nga burimet tona jashtë informimi, 3. 1. 1968, n.a. 1–2.

⁵⁸ DAS, Đ-2, box 4, Central Committee of the League of Communists of Serbia – materials from the 1968 plenary sessions, 14th plenary session of the CC LCS of 29 May 1968; Dobrica Ćosić, *Lična istorija jednog doba. Knj. 1. Vreme iskušenja 1951–1968* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2009), 299–300.

⁵⁹ AQSH, 14/APSTR, v. 1968, Sektori i Jashtëm, d. 318.2, Informacion nga burimet tona jashtë për Jugosllavinë, 4. 6. 1968, n.a. 17.

The accuracy of the Albanian government's reports is borne out by statistical evidence: between 1961 and 1971, Kosovo recorded a negative net migration of Serbs amounting to 41,967 persons – nearly 18 percent of the province's Serb population in 1971. According to sources of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as many as 35,000 Serbs left Kosovo and Metohija during the mere four-year period from 1966 to 1970.⁶⁰

While covering up the interethnic problems in Kosovo, the provincial leadership emphasised “positive social trends after the Brioni Plenum” at their meetings with the Yugoslav party leadership. At a meeting with Tito, Veli Deva, president of the LCS provincial committee, stated: “Many cadres are leaving Kosovo for other parts of the country where they have better working conditions. If some of them are nationalist-minded, they present their departure as if it were ‘because of persecution by Albanians’”.⁶¹ On the same occasion, Tito gave credit to Kosovo leaders for “opposing nationalism, chauvinism, and reactionary forces”.⁶²

Just one month later, mass Albanian demonstrations erupted in Priština and other cities across the province, revealing a reality of interethnic relations that sharply contrasted with the image portrayed by the party authorities. Many emigrants later identified the 1968 demonstrations as a catalyst for the further deterioration of relations. Nevertheless, Tito lent his support to the Kosovo leadership in their efforts to gloss over the protests and maintain the existing policy course. The same approach was adopted by the new leader of the Serbian Communist Party, Marko Nikezić, who remained loyal to Tito's Kosovo policy throughout his tenure.⁶³

In early 1969, the Serbian leadership was informed that the situation in Kosovo was growing “ever tenser” and that Serbs “increasingly tend and intend to flee and move out of Kosovo”.⁶⁴ The departure of Serbs from Kosovo companies jeopardised the functioning of the local economy. As admitted by the Presidency of the Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Kosovo in 1969, the policy of “proportionate national representation” resulted in “a certain number of expert cadres [resigning] from work and mov[ing] out of the province”.⁶⁵

Failed attempts to raise the migration issue within the League of Communists

While the Albanian foreign ministry kept abreast of the trend of Serb migration from Kosovo and Metohija between 1966 and 1968, the response of the Yugoslav communist leadership to the phenomenon was quite different. Two weeks after the Albanian state leadership was informed of the dismissal of Serbs from the companies

⁶⁰ *Memorandum o Kosovu i Metohiji Svetog arhijerejskog sabora Srpske Pravoslavne Crkve* (Beograd: Sveti arhijerejski sinod SPC, 2003), 42.

⁶¹ AJ, 837-II-2/364, Reception of the delegation of the Provincial Committee LC Serbia for Kosovo and Metohija, Belgrade, 24 Oct. 1968, 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Note about President Tito's conversation with members of the delegation of the Provincial Committee LC for Kosovo and Metohija, 20.

⁶³ I. Vukadinović, *Autonomija Kosova i Metohije u Srbiji*, 663–680.

⁶⁴ Zoran Vuković, *Od deformacija SDB do Maspoka i liberalizma* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1989), 272.

⁶⁵ AJ, fond 142, Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije–SSRNJ [Socialist Alliance of the Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY)], f. 318, PC SAWP of Kosovo 1969, Session of the Presidency of PC SAWP Kosovo, 5 Dec. 1969, 24.

in Kosovo, on March 11, 1967, the Provincial Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo and Metohija organised a consultation with the party's municipal committees, at which it was concluded that the migration of Serbs from Kosovo was of an "economic nature" and that only "chauvinistic elements" portray them differently.⁶⁶

Renowned Serbian author Dobrica Ćosić and historian Jovan Marjanović, both active members of the League of Communists of Serbia, raised the issue of Serb migration from Kosovo at the 14th session of the Central Committee of the LCS on 30 May 1968. Ćosić stated that the "belief has become widespread about a sense of endangerment among Serbs and Montenegrins, about pressures to leave, the systematic removal of Serbs and Montenegrins from senior positions, and the departure of skilled cadres from Kosovo and Metohija". He called for these claims to be thoroughly investigated.⁶⁷

Marjanović reproached Kosovo functionaries for dealing with peripheral issues while ignoring the fact that a "part of the Serb and Montenegrin population, the intelligentsia in particular, is moving out of Kosovo and Metohija because of the highly charged national atmosphere".⁶⁸ All other Serbian communists harshly condemned their speeches. The deputy speaker of the provincial parliament, Katarina Patrnogić, accused Ćosić and Marjanović of "lying", claiming that there was no such thing as intensified migration of Serbs from Kosovo. She produced "statistical data" according to which there was an annual outflow from Kosovo and Metohija for more prosperous parts of Yugoslavia of 9,000 Albanians and only 1,000 Serbs.⁶⁹

On the same occasion, the Albanian official Mahmut Bakali stated that the Priština party organisation had been engaged in investigating the reasons for Serb and Montenegrin cadres leaving the province and that its conclusion was that "there is no question of any pressure, but rather their departure has personal motives of material and cultural nature".⁷⁰ In attempting to refute Ćosić's and Marjanović's claims, Kosovo officials contradicted themselves: Patrnogić denied any intensified Serb migration, while Bakali acknowledged that the Pristina municipal committee had recognised and analysed the phenomenon.

Veli Deva admitted on the meeting there was an Albanian nationalist approach to the issue: "Characteristic of this current of Albanian nationalism is a measuring stick policy: take a measuring stick, enter every workplace, assess its national composition, and then remove 'national surpluses' to replace them with Albanian workers." He considered the approach misguided, asserting that it had been "rejected" by Albanian communists.⁷¹

The CC LCS, at its 14th session, adopted a separate document that officially condemned Ćosić's and Marjanović's addresses. Thereafter, any mention of Serbs and Montenegrins leaving Kosovo was dismissed as "Serb nationalist propaganda".

⁶⁶ Miomir Gatalović, „Prilozi za proučavanje iseljavanja Srba i Crnogoraca sa Kosova i Metohije pod vlašću Josipa Broza Tita“, *Istorija 20. veka*, br. 1, (2024), 213.

⁶⁷ DAS, Đ-2, CK SKS, f. 4, Materials from the 1968 plenary sessions, 14th session of the CC LCS, 29 May 1968, 97.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 79, 196.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 242.

Yet the scale of the phenomenon was such that it became evident across the economic, cultural, and social spheres in the province. In the 1968/69 school year, the number of elementary-school students (grades 1–8) receiving instruction in Serbian began to decline for the first time since the Second World War, and the number of secondary-school students attending Serbian-language instruction also fell.⁷² In addition to farmers, highly educated members of the Serbian community – physicians and professors – began leaving Kosovo, exacerbating the shortage of skilled professionals.⁷³

The chairman of the League of Communists of Serbia, Marko Nikezić, adhered to the official party line by denying the migration of Serbs from Kosovo. Dismissing it as “unsubstantiated”, he framed Serbian, rather than Albanian, nationalism as the primary threat.⁷⁴ In his memoirs, former federal interior minister, Vojin Lukić, notes that Serb officials at the republic and federal levels either ignored numerous complaints from Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija or “coldly delegated them to the provincial authorities in Pristina”. Historians Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević pointed to the “passive role” of the leadership of Montenegro, which also glossed over the problem of pressures put on the Montenegrin population of the province.⁷⁵

Under those circumstances, there were individual attempts to draw attention to the problem by addressing letters directly to Tito. One such effort was made by Pavle Jočević, wartime secretary of the CPY committee for Kosovo and Metohija and later a speaker of the AKMR parliament. In January 1969, he sent a letter to Tito asserting that “Albanian nationalists are instituting a regime of terror in Kosovo, resulting in anxiety among Serbs and Montenegrins and their intensified migration from the province”. He attributed responsibility for this state of affairs to Fadil Hoxha and Xhavit Nimani, accusing them of being chiefly responsible for the “escalation of the situation”.⁷⁶ Yet the frequent accusations of nationalist activity directed at Fadil Hoxha appear to have worked in his favour. The more complaints were lodged against Fadil Hoxha, the more Tito seemed to reward him with higher positions on the party ladder. At the 9th congress of the LCY in March 1969, Fadil Hoxha was elected a member of the Presidency of the CC LCY, the highest body of the Communist Party in Yugoslavia.

In 1969, Serbian Orthodox Patriarch German sent a letter to Tito concerning the situation in Kosovo. The letter indicated that the Serbian Orthodox Church and its faithful in the province were facing violence and terror. The patriarch noted that

⁷² AJ, 319, f. 31, Analysis of the social plan of SAP Kosovo 1965–1970. Part two: The achieved development of education and culture in the SAP Kosovo and basic development projections until 1975, 7; *Privredni i društveni razvoj SAP Kosova 1947–1972*. (Priština: Pokrajinski zavod za statistiku SAP Kosova, 1974), 125.

⁷³ Boško Bojović, *Kosovo i Zapadni Balkan: Pitanje regionalne stabilnosti i evropske bezbednosti* (Beograd: Odbrana, 2014), 20–21; Mirko Čupić, *Oteta zemlja. Kosovo i Metohija: Zločini, progoni, otpori* (Beograd: Nolit, 2006), 82–84.

⁷⁴ Before he assumed the highest post in the League of Communists of Serbia, Marko Nikezić served as Yugoslav foreign minister. His stance on the migration of Serbs from Kosovo was diametrically opposite to that of Albania’s foreign minister, who regularly informed the party leadership of his country about the phenomenon. [J. Pelikan, *Novim putevima*, 477; I. Vukadinović, „Strogo poverljivi izveštaji ministra spoljnih poslova Albanije“, 165–170].

⁷⁵ Branko Petranović and Momčilo Zečević, *Agonija dve Jugoslavije* (Šabac: Zaslona, 1991), 323–324.

⁷⁶ M. Gatalović, *Burna vremena*, 187–188.

previous complaints submitted by the Synod to the relevant republic and federal authorities had received inadequate responses. He stated that violence “ha[d] been assuming ever more appalling forms”, including physical assaults causing serious injuries to monks and nuns, desecration of gravestones, and the destruction of crops and forests.⁷⁷

Tito politely replied to the patriarch, expressing his regret at such acts and claiming that he would “do everything to have incidents and illegal acts prevented”.⁷⁸ However, the LCY Presidency meeting on 22 April 1970, focused on Kosovo, deliberately disregarded all the issues raised in the patriarch’s letter, including the migration of Serbs.⁷⁹ Instead of addressing the patriarch’s complaints, the party leadership adopted a document filled with rhetoric on the need to further strengthen the political position of Albanians in Kosovo.⁸⁰ While the migration of Serbs was ignored, the “correction of the national make-up of employees” in favor of Albanians remained a priority.⁸¹

In a context where the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo effectively functioned as a “separate para-republic” within Yugoslavia, with its key power structures – the Provincial Committee of the League of Communists, the executive branch, the judiciary, the prosecutorial system, and the police – controlled by Albanian communists, the Yugoslav party leadership nonetheless continued to treat Kosovo Albanians as an “endangered minority”, the only community in the province deemed to require special support. This policy, in turn, was a key factor driving the mass migration of Serbs, who, though *de facto* a minority in Kosovo, lacked any recognised status or additional protections.

In the early 1970s, some Kosovo Serb functionaries once again attempted to raise the issue, only to encounter strong resistance. During Tito’s visit to Kosovo in 1971, Pavle Jovičević addressed the party’s political task force, describing the situation as “worse than ever” since the end of the war. He substantiated his claim with detailed data on the migration of Serb and Montenegrin families, citing specific villages, the exact number of families who had left, and highlighting villages that no longer had any Serb or Montenegrin residents.⁸² Tito responded much as he had to Jovičević’s letter two years earlier – by simply ignoring it.⁸³ Katarina Patrnogić, on the other hand, accused Jovičević of “not telling the truth”. She claimed that all migrations in Kosovo were natural and that “there is no question” of political pressures. After the meeting, the provincial information secretary, Mile Lazić, instructed the attending journalists not to report on “Pavle Jovičević’s speech”.⁸⁴ The press was therefore barred from publishing the statements of officials regarding migration.

⁷⁷ D. Bataković, *Kosovo i Metohija: Istorija i ideologija*, 359–360.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁷⁹ AJ, CK SKJ, Presidency, 507-III/144, Stenographic record of the 8th session of the Presidency of LCY held in Belgrade on 22 Apr. 1970, 80–110.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8th session of the CC LCY Presidency, 3 June 1970, authorised stenographic record, Conclusions of the Presidency concerning current questions of the development of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Stenographic record of the 8th session of the LCY Presidency, 22 Apr. 1970, Conclusions of the Presidency concerning current questions of the development of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo.

⁸² Mile Kordić, *Oj Kosovo* (Beograd: Stručna knjiga, 1988), 49–50.

⁸³ J. Pelikan, *Novim putevima*, 476–477.

⁸⁴ M. Kordić, *Oj Kosovo*, 51.

At a meeting of the Pristina municipal party committee in July 1971, deputy secretary Petar Kostić stated that “three years ago the Municipal Committee made an inaccurate assessment by concluding one-sidedly that experts were leaving only for the sake of higher pay”, adding that “in some villages, Serbs are pressured in various ways into moving out”.⁸⁵ Another committee member, Blagoje Nikolić, noted that the 1966–70 period was characterised by “a stagnation in Serb employment, a stagnation in the number of regular university students of Serbian nationality, and a general stagnation of Serbian culture in Kosovo”. These observations were voiced only by the Serb members, while the Albanian communists maintained that “isolated unfortunate incidents surrounding the population census, workforce fluctuation, and migration of the Serb population cannot be taken as a realistic picture of the overall political situation”.⁸⁶ Kurtesh Salihu, a professor at the Faculty of Law in Pristina, rejected the views of Nikolić and Kostić. According to him, migrations “are a normal process, known in every country in the world” and there could be no question of Serbs being a minoritised population when “not even full equality of Albanians has been achieved yet”.⁸⁷

During 1971 and 1972, the Provincial Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo split along national lines over the interpretation of migrations. While Serb communists acknowledged both the problem and its causes, Albanian communists insisted that the migrations were purely economic and denied any political factors. The dispute culminated in the expulsion from the party of Jovo Šotra and Miloš Sekulić, prominent Serbian communist officials in Kosovo who had sought to initiate an intra-party debate on Serb migration and the community’s precarious security.⁸⁸ Thereafter, emigration definitively became a taboo subject, and throughout the 1970s the state authorities no longer permitted it to be raised.⁸⁹

The death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, followed by the mass demonstrations of Albanians in Pristina in 1981, triggered a radical shift in the policy of the Yugoslav and Serbian communist regime toward Kosovo. While Tito had downplayed the significance of the 1968 demonstrations and subsequently enacted constitutional amendments that greatly expanded Kosovo’s autonomy, the 1981 protests were met with a sharply contrasting response.⁹⁰ The Yugoslav regime labelled the demonstrations a “counterrevolution” and launched mass dismissals of all officials deemed responsible for Kosovo’s political situation in preceding years.⁹¹ The position of Serbs and Montenegrins, previously marginalised, quickly became a central political issue in the country. This shift in the party’s discourse led to the adoption of numerous measures and policies aimed at halting emigration.⁹²

⁸⁵ A.J, KPR, 837-II-4-b/56, Information on population migration from Kosovo, the danger of minoritisation and the last population census, 21–23 June 1971.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Miloš Mišević, *Ko je tražio republiku: Kosovo 1945–1985* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1987), 272.

⁸⁸ Momčilo Trajković, *Kosovo. Jovo Šotra – jedna politička sudbina* (Gračanica: Dom kulture, 2022); M. Čupić, *Oteta zemlja. Kosovo i Metohija*, 79–80.

⁸⁹ P. Ristanović, *Kosovsko pitanje*, 330–331.

⁹⁰ *Isto*, 216–243.

⁹¹ Momčilo Pavlović, Miomir Gatalović at. al, *Kosovo i Metohija. Vek važnih događaja* (Banjaluka: Akademija nauka i umetnosti Republike Srpske, 2014), 226–227; E. Čeku, *Kosovo and Diplomacy*, 136–150.

⁹² P. Ristanović, *Kosovsko pitanje*, 330–334; 350–352.

However, the newly implemented measures soon provoked dissatisfaction among Kosovo Albanians, sparking open conflicts between their communist representatives and the Serbian party authorities over constitutional reforms and the rollback of certain concessions granted to the autonomous provinces in 1968. Simultaneously, the politicisation of the issue failed to halt Serb emigration. By the latter half of the 1980s, the situation across Yugoslavia was rapidly deteriorating toward destabilisation.⁹³

Official statistics

As debates over whether the migration of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosovo was economically motivated or driven by political pressures persisted throughout socialist Yugoslavia, the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts launched a project in 1985 aimed at determining its nature and causes. It included a survey conducted among the people who had left Kosovo, a total of 500 households with 3,418 members. The project director, Marina Blagojević, concluded that the migration of Serbs from Kosovo represented the first predominantly ethnic migration in socialist Yugoslavia. Fewer than 25% of respondents cited economic reasons for leaving, while the vast majority indicated that political and ethnic factors were the primary drivers.⁹⁴

The survey showed that the characteristics of the resettled households greatly departed from the classical models of economic migration. While still in Kosovo, their material and social conditions were relatively secure. They were deeply embedded in local society, with 41.5% of respondents over the age of fifteen speaking Albanian. The majority of respondents indicated that the primary reason for leaving was political pressure, exerted under the auspices of the party and state policies implemented in the province.⁹⁵

That the nationalist campaign was instigated by the LCS committee for Kosovo and Metohija was suggested by the following replies of the respondents: “After 1966, all Serbs were systematically removed from senior positions”; “In the course of 1967–68, the national structure of senior positions was changing”; “Courts tended to penalise Serbs as stiffly as possible”. The media of public information in the province embellished things and the situation in Kosovo “appeared to be better than anywhere else in Yugoslavia”.⁹⁶

The campaign initiated by the authorities was soon embraced by the local Albanian population, which had its repercussions for the position of Serbs, turning them into a discriminated group in Kosovo: “Being a Serb was perilous and risky, there was always a danger of being beaten in the street for no reason at all”; “We didn’t dare take a walk like human beings. They stirred up quarrels everywhere. We used to return home before dark”; “None of us felt physically safe”.⁹⁷

⁹³ Branko Horvat, *Kosovsko pitanje* (Zagreb: Globus, 1989), 139–143; Dejan Jović, *Jugoslavija: država koja je odumrla: uspon, kriza i pad Kardeljeve Jugoslavije (1974-1990)* (Zagreb: Prometej, 2003); Marie-Janine Calic, *A History of Yugoslavia*, 259–262.

⁹⁴ M. Blagojević, „Iseljavanje Srba sa Kosova: trauma i/ili katarza”, 245.

⁹⁵ Darko Hudelist, *Kosovo – bitka bez iluzija* (Zagreb: Centar za informacije i publicitet. 1989), 105–108; R. Petrović and M. Blagojević, *Seobe Srba i Crnogoraca sa Kosova i Metohije*, 246.

⁹⁶ R. Petrović and M. Blagojević, *Seobe Srba i Crnogoraca sa Kosova i Metohije*, 133; Milorad Đoković, *Kosmetski dosije* (Beograd: AIZ Dosije, 1990), 10.

⁹⁷ R. Petrović and M. Blagojević, *Seobe Srba i Crnogoraca sa Kosova i Metohije*, 133.

The net migration of Serbs from Kosovo and Metohija during the communist period can be partially assessed by comparing the natural population growth of this community, as recorded by the provincial bureau of statistics, with the size of national groups reported in the 1961, 1971, and 1981 censuses.

Table no. 2: *Net migration of Serbs from/to Kosovo from 1961 to 1971*

Number of Serbs in Kosovo 1961	227,016
Number of Serbs in Kosovo 1971	228,264
Increase in the ten-year period	1,248
Natural increase of Serbs in Kosovo 1961–1970	+ 43,215
Net migration	- 41,967
Negative net migration as a percentage of the total Serb population in 1971	18.4%

The Serb community in Kosovo and Metohija had already experienced a negative net migration from 1953 to 1961, but it amounted to only 0.98% of the total Serb population in 1961. In contrast, between 1961 and 1971, negative net migration reached 41,967 persons – 18.4% of the Serb population in 1971 – indicating a mass migration, with nearly one-fifth of Serbs leaving the province during the decade.⁹⁸

In the same period, the Albanian population of Kosovo and Metohija experienced a positive net migration. Between 1961 and 1971, the community's growth exceeded natural increase by 29,398 persons, indicating that more Albanians – mostly from Macedonia and Montenegro – moved into the province than left it.⁹⁹

Table no. 3: *Net migration of Albanians from/to Kosovo from 1961 to 1971*

Number of Albanians in Kosovo in 1961	646,605
Number of Albanians in Kosovo in 1971	916,168
Increase in the ten-year period	269,605
Natural increase of Albanians in Kosovo in 1961–1970	+ 240,165
Net migration	+ 29,398
Positive net migration as a percentage of the total Albanian population in 1971	3.2%

A comparison of natural population growth and census data for the two national groups in Kosovo and Metohija between 1961 and 1981 yields the results presented in Table 4:

⁹⁸ *Demografske promene Kosova u periodu 1948–2006*, 7, 13; *Nacionalni sastav stanovništva SFR Jugoslavije. Knj. 1. Podaci po naseljima i opštinama*, 11.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Table no. 4: *Demographic indicators of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo from 1961 to 1981*

	Albanians	Serbs
Number at the 1961 census	646,605	227,016
Number at the 1981 census	1,226,736	209,498
Increase/decrease in the twenty-year period	+ 580,131	- 17,518
Natural increase 1961–1981	+ 578,931	+ 75,006
Net migration 1961–1981	+ 1,200	- 92,524
Positive/negative net migration as a percentage of the total population in 1981	+0.1%	-44.16%

Between 1961 and 1981, the Serb population of Kosovo experienced a negative net migration of 92,524 individuals. Since some Serbs moved into Kosovo during the same period for employment or university studies, the actual number of those leaving may have been slightly higher. Those who departed accounted for at least 44.1% of the Serbs remaining in the province.

In contrast, the Albanian population recorded a positive net migration of 1,200 persons over the same twenty-year period, representing just 0.1% of the Albanian population in Kosovo in 1981. This does not imply that there was no economically motivated Albanian migration during this period, but rather that the number of Albanians leaving the province was slightly lower than those moving in. Even when accounting for this and assuming that some 45,000 Albanians departed between 1971 and 1981, the total still represents only 3.75% of the Albanian population in Kosovo in 1981.

The stark contrast in the migration rates between Serbs and Albanians from Kosovo during 1961–1981 strongly suggests that the emigration of Serbs under Tito's Yugoslavia was driven primarily by political and security concerns.

Conclusion

The politically instigated migration of Serbs from Kosovo began in the late 1950s, following the Yugoslav communist leadership decision to provide targeted political and economic support to the Albanian national minority and the Autonomous Kosovo-Metohija Region. This new approach of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia pushed through the idea that the ethnic composition of the employees in local enterprises should mirror the ethnic structure of the region's population. By the early 1960s, the state security and police services were reporting mounting pressures on the Serb population. Serbia's interior minister, Vojin Lukić, informed the Serbian party's leadership that the migration of Serbs from Kosovo "has become a serious political problem", yet the Serbian communists lacked both the will and the resolve to challenge the nationality policy in Kosovo that the Yugoslav leadership had set in motion several years earlier.

The dramatic surge in migration followed the Brioni Plenum, when the decline of Serbian communists within the Yugoslav party enabled Kosovo's leadership to pursue far-reaching changes. Under the guise of "implementing Brioni's decisions", ethnically motivated purges reshaped the security apparatus and public enterprises. Although by the late 1960s the migration of Serbs from Kosovo had become a palpable problem, even

recognised by the Albanian leadership, Yugoslav authorities refused to acknowledge it. Numerous letters alerting Josip Broz Tito to the migration and the endangered status of Serb and Montenegrin communities in Kosovo were sent by concerned officials and party members. The authors understood that a single public statement by Tito, or even a remark at a party meeting, could have compelled authorities at all levels to address the issue. However, their hopes went unfulfilled. Tito's deliberate silence, combined with his efforts to suppress discussion of the matter in party plenums, proved decisive in allowing the situation to escalate. The migration of Serbs from Kosovo persisted, yet the League of Communists of Yugoslavia refrained from publicly acknowledging it until after Tito's death in 1980 and the ethnic Albanian mass demonstrations in Pristina in 1981.¹⁰⁰ As a result, the number of Serbs who emigrated from Kosovo between 1961 and 1981 amounted to nearly half of those who remained in the province.

The position of the Serb population in autonomous Kosovo during Tito's rule undoubtedly substantiates the proposition that the granting of territorial autonomy to a national minority creates a new national minority within its boundaries, leaving it unprotected unless additional measures for its protection are put in place. In the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, Serbs were a *de facto* minority community, yet the simplistic and reductive approach of the communist regime towards national questions ignored this fact. The status of internal minority and the lack of measures that would regulate the problems of Serbs in the province in which they accounted for a fourth of the population led to their large-scale migration to other parts of Serbia and Yugoslavia.

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¹⁰⁰ Aleksa Dragnić and Slavko Todorović, *The Saga of Kosovo: Focus on Serbian-Albanian relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 117; Stevan Pavlowitch, “St Guy's and the Bastille”, in: *The Kosovo collection* (Sydney: Svetosavlje, 1989), 158.

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MIGRATION OF SERBS FROM KOSOVO AND METOHIJA DURING THE YUGOSLAV COMMUNIST REGIME, 1958–1981: SCALE AND CAUSES

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Summary

The politically driven migration of Serbs from Kosovo began in the late 1950s, when the Yugoslav communist leadership introduced selective political and economic support for the Albanian national minority and the Autonomous Kosovo-Metohija Region. A policy that local enterprises should reflect the ethnic composition of the population soon produced pressures on the Serb community, reported by security and police services as early as the early 1960s. Despite warnings that this was becoming a serious political problem, Serbian communists lacked the determination to oppose the nationality policy promoted by the federal leadership.

The Brioni Plenum marked a turning point, enabling Kosovo's leadership to undertake purges and structural changes under the banner of "implementing Brioni's decisions." By the late 1960s, Serb migration had become a visible problem, but the Yugoslav authorities – above all Tito – remained silent. Letters to Tito from concerned officials were motivated by the belief that even a single statement from him could compel the authorities to act; yet his deliberate refusal to address the issue proved decisive the unhindered continuation of the migration process.

Between 1961 and 1981, the outflow of Serbs from Kosovo reached nearly half of those who remained. The case illustrates that granting territorial autonomy to one national group can create a new, vulnerable minority within it. In Kosovo, Serbs became such a minority, unprotected by state measures, which fuelled their large-scale migration.

KEYWORDS: communism, ethnic migrations, Kosovo, national minorities, territorial autonomy, Yugoslavia

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