



**Serbia is enforcing the conviction of not being engaged for ethnic Albanians living in Preshevo. Council for Human Rights Chairman – Belgzim Kamberi in an interview with DespiteBordes.**

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Belgzim Kamberi is chairman of Council for Human Rights in Bujanovac. He works as a freelance journalist and as Albanian human rights activist. He is defending rights of Serbian Albanians in various individual and collective rights. Editors of DespiteBorders portal have contacted Mr. Kamberi and made interview with him on currents in Preshevo Valley, RrOSH organization and some Kosovo relating issues.

**First of all something general. What is the attitude of non-Albanians in Serbia to Albanians that are living in south Serbia (in Kosovo too)?**

The attitude of non-Albanians in Serbia towards Albanians remains in general influenced by prejudgment, stereotypes and various stigmatism. Albanians in Serbia are still considered as "foreign body" in the Serbian state either due to anti-Albanian opinion which is still present in different social milieu of the country or due to the fear from Albanians. There is a symbolic progress in issues related to respect of individual human rights but nearly no amelioration in the field of collective rights of communities. The general situation is still difficult for the non-Serbian communities in areas such politic, judicial, economic and social, in particular for Albanians who still remain discriminated. I refer here to the discrimination on the rights for employment, rights for higher education in mother tongue, right for official use of national symbols and the right for free movement. Much is to be done to go through this logic of domination-minded approach that the Serbian state belongs only to Serbs. The approach



towards non-Serbian, including Albanians, describes the difficulties of the modernization of the Serbian state.

**In December you have organized a protest against the non-recognition of diplomas from the Pristina University in Serbia. You are claiming that the Albanians living in Presevo valley (further “the Valley” too) are hostages in political relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Why is Belgrade doing so? It is only matter of the phrase "Republic of Kosovo" on diplomas or is something more important in game?**

It will soon be three years from the decision of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia for non-recognition of diplomas from Kosovo Universities. This decision denies all rights for education and employment of hundred students and thousands of secondary education pupils from Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. Despite the normative progress of standards for rights of minorities, national and international standards related to the right for education for national minorities are not respected for Albanian national community. As from 2005, Universities in Kosovo are functioning and issuing diploma in accordance with the Declaration of Bologna. All diplomas granted in these Universities are accepted in all countries applying the Bologna standards. While Serbia, having as well signed the Bologna declaration, does not recognize diplomas for a political reason as a reaction to the declaration of the independence of Kosovo. The government of Serbia does not respect the entirety of the Constitution of Serbia, education related legislation, the Law on abolition of discrimination, the Bologna Declaration, the Framework Convention on protection of national minorities and the UNESCO Convention against the discrimination in education. The government of Serbia should set as a priority the issue of recognition of diplomas, regardless the talks between Belgrade and Prishtina. Right for education should not be a political issue but is an elementary human right.

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The argument that recognition from Serbia of diplomas from Kosovo would mean recognition of the state of Kosovo does not stand. There are many alternatives for solving the issue of (non)recognition of diplomas from Kosovo in Serbia. The political situation of Belgrade towards Kosovo is reflected in direct discrimination on most education groups of Albanian community in Serbia. While the government of Serbia has identified the subject of fleeing of experts as an important subject to be treated, fleeing of non-Serb experts and intellectuals is not a priority and furthermore the migration of Albanians is tended through a forced additional migration. In this way, Serbia is enforcing the conviction of not being engaged for ethnic Albanians living in Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja and that secession is the best alternative.

**As far as I know you are advocating rights of Albanians in the Valley for higher education in mother tongue. However for surviving University needs at least 200 000 people (otherwise it would be personally underfunded). In the Valley, approximately 70,000 Albanians are living that is not sufficient. Or you have other opinion? What is situation concerning primary and secondary education in the Valley?**

The establishment of faculties in Albanian language in Bujanovac and Preshevo has been announced in several occasions as from 2001 as foreseen in the Plan of the Coordination Body for solving the crises in Southern Serbia. Only two faculties have been opened as branches of the Nis University for judicial and economic studies in the Medvedja municipality, where some dozen pupils of Albanian community are following the secondary school. Requesting the right for education in mother tongue can be translated into the establishment of faculties, as branches of other University or other higher education institution. The establishment of these faculties is a legitimate request; Preshevo and

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Bujanovac fulfil the required criteria's and standards. Further phases and circumstances would help to assess the needs for expansion of those faculties into University. For higher education, we face a situation where access to higher education is not possible, diplomas from Kosovo are not recognised, furthermore Serbia does not facilitate the procedure of validation of diplomas from the Universities of Albania and Macedonia where an important number of Albanian are studying. In primary and secondary schools in Albanian language, the State has failed in the issue of curricula and programmes. Hence the infrastructure in school has improved; the quality of education has deteriorated.

**In the Valley is the highest unemployment rate in Serbia. Why? Are there any relevant employers? Where are Albanians going to seek job opportunities? Why is there such poor economic and social situation?**

Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja were one of the most undeveloped regions also in former-Yugoslavia. The economic and social situation has degraded even more after the changes of the system and the beginning of wars in Yugoslavia. Today, these three municipalities have the higher unemployment rate in Serbia. Statistics show that national minorities dominate in the unemployment list. The situation is marked by two factors, the neo-liberal economic politics of the Serbian government resulting to bankrupting of social enterprises – former employers of citizens from the region and; the privatization process without capacities and possibilities for development due to the political and economical regional circumstances. In an undeclared “enclave”, this situation hinders the development of policies of free trade and equal opportunity. As unemployment is getting higher, it seems that the state has no vision on how to withdraw the region out of economic and social misery, but often is seen as not willing for changes of the actual situation. Therefore, an important number of citizens from the



Valley continue searching employment abroad as an alternative for an economic and social security.

**How do you judge the security situation in the region?**

There have been no important incidents in Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja for years. The general security situation is stable and calm, even more peaceful than in many other regions in Serbia. The problem is the insecurity in the future, the lack of security for tomorrow is today's main concern, this is often ignored for absence of conflict actions, but the absence of wars is not enough for building a stable peace. The state structures do not understand, or do not want to understand, when trying to keep peace by investing in the presence of army and police and not in the improvement of social and economic situation.

**What is the situation in the Valley concerning compulsory military service? Previously, young conscripts refused to serve in the Serbian army...**

Albanians from Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja did not serve for more than ten years the Yugoslav/Serbian army which during the process of dissolution of Yugoslavia was an instrument applying the politics of Slobodan Milošević. At present, the military service in Serbia is professional and not-mandatory. I do not think of Albanian showing interest for recruitment for the coming years, as there is no reciprocal trust between Serbian army and Albanians living in Serbia.



**What is status of Albanian language in the Valley? Can be used as official minority language in official communication? What is situation concerning of using of Albanian national symbols in the Valley?**

The status of use of written and spoken Albanian language in Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja has partly improved as from the adoption of the Law for use of official minority language which foresees that the official languages can be used in municipalities with more than 15% of citizens belonging to one national minority, like Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. But in these three municipalities, the problem persists in the application of the law from the institutions which are under the competencies of local governance not led by Albanians. These institutions do not, or only partly, apply the bi-lingual rights. As per the use of national symbols, these are yet prohibited by the law in force which prohibits symbols similar to symbols of other states being a way to justify the refusal for the sake of respect of law and international standards.

**On the Albanian political scene of the Valley are six political parties. Is political scene not so fragmented? Can this political scene effectively defend the interests of the Albanian minority? Apart from representation of these political subjects in local government bodies; have they created Assembly that is trying to compete with Serb authorities? If yes, what is attitude of Serbian rule to this body?**

More than the number of Albanian political parties, the problem is probably the lack of capacities to protect and progress in the interest of local Albanians. The situation of Albanian parties re-states that the number does not mean necessarily the quality as the quantity does not mean the force. Without political programme and vision, politics are mainly oriented towards the realisation of policies for individual interests. Showing lack of capacities for more



professionalism and actualisation, the political parties confirm inability to find a place in post-Milošević Serbia. Instead, the political parties are taking advantage of the situation to hide their incapacity and abuses. They were not able to create a joint political body and failed in the creation of a national Council which would have been the needed professional and political tool to advance the issue of Albanians in Serbia. While the Constitution of Serbia as well as the legislation related to national minorities does not facilitate the progress of rights for non-Serb communities in Serbia, the immaturity of Albanian political spectrum is also contributing to the non-advancing of the rights of Albanians. In essence Albanian politics serves the interest of their members and not the interest of those they are representing. Therefore, the political spectrum in Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja has an important part of responsibility for failure of the political process started after the conflict between the Serbian security forces and the revolutionary Albanians of the Army for liberation of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja. A process that has failed in realisation of its main purposes. Some structures of the government of Serbia have contributed to its failure by preferring an Albanian unorganised political and weak corpus than a serious Albanian political partner for solving the main problems.

**Representatives of the Liberal Democratic Party (of Serbia) offered to Albanian minority members the opportunity to enter into party structures. Why according to you such an initiative was occurred? And what is Albanians attitude to this?**

The representatives of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Cedomir Jovanovic are the only representatives of the Serbian parliamentary parties to date having shown interest for Albanian membership. Furthermore, this party succeeded to obtain hundred of votes of the Albanians of Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja in the last Serbian presidential elections without any pre-electoral campaign in the Albanian areas. But meanwhile there has not been

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any dialog, or serious interest for cooperation between Jovanovics' LDP and the Albanian parties of the Valley. The invitation of LDP for Albanian membership should be seen as a political braveness, even more when such an act could cost politically knowing the possible reactions of the Serbian electorate. Albanians of the Valley did not respond to this invitation with serious political offer. Without any concrete political offer and then without any concretization of the electoral support, LDP faded the possible interest of Albanians for its politics, serving this way, unconsciously, the local Albanian political structures which try continuously to isolate and barricade its politics at the local level in order to keep the power.

**What are the relations between Albanians and Serbs in local government bodies? Are there any conflicts?**

The relationships between Albanians and Serbs in the local government structures remain institutional. As there are no important political conflicts, there is neither any serious political cooperation. Even in the structures of joint-governance, they act more politically as two parallel ethnic blocs than as a unique multiethnic structure. As in whole Serbia, in Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja too, the ethnic criteria remain essential in politic.

**Many times you have said that Serbs are denying communities collective rights to Albanian minority. What exactly did you mean?**

Serbia doesn't show any political will to move forward with the rights of national minorities as communities. Serbia tries to confine them in individual rights by essentially denying their collective rights. But, the problem first stands in the constitutional framework of Serbia, followed by the actual territorial and political organization of the state which do not guarantee the appropriate rights to ethnic, social, minority communities etc; neither economic



development for the marginalized areas. Therefore, Serbia should necessarily change its Constitution by adapting it to the community interests and to the marginalized areas and not only to the interest of parties and to the dominant social and political parties. Serbia should begin to think more seriously about the pattern of regionalization and decentralization that should be applied.

**You are defending the idea that the Valley should be the subject of territorial exchange between Serbia and Kosovo. What should be offered to Serbia for the Valley? For example North Kosovo and Serb enclaves located on south Ibar river bank?**

Personally I do not plead the idea of territory exchange between Kosovo and Serbia, but this question remains anyhow open, especially in the actual conditions in the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia in particular and between Albanians and Serbians in general.

**Current mayor of Bujanovac on behalf of all Albanians living in southern Serbia announced idea that, the Valley villages should build up autonomous unit called Presevo Valley within that the Albanians would implement their rights that belong them as minority. Does this solution have support among the grassroots in other valley communities? On the other hand, in what aspects is your solution (territorial exchange) better?**

Regionalization, decentralization and inter-state regional relation remain the most hopeful processes for getting out from this situation without perspectives.

**For realization of territorial exchange ought to be done the followings: cancellation of the Ahtisaari plan and complete abrogation Article 1.3 of the Kosovo Constitution.**

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**These measures were scheduled by VETËVENDOSJE! political movement in its political program. Unfortunately, it grabbed 12 per cent only. Do you think that these measures will be politically feasible?**

The fundamental problem remains the sovereignty of the Republic of Kosovo. As an independent state, Kosovo should enjoy its full sovereignty as the other states of the region. This is in Balkans' interest. This can be possible if a political will exists.

**Council for human rights is a member of the Rrjeti Organizatave Shqiptar. What is role of the Council in this organization? Could you briefly describe mission of RrOSh?**

The council of Human Rights is a member of the Albanian Organizations Network (RrOsh) as from RrOSH' establishment. While we contribute to the network activities, we are of course mainly focused on the questions regarding the Valley. The principal mission of RrOsh is to enforce the cooperation between non-governmental Albanian organizations in the region.

**As far as I know RrOSh is protesting against the ethnic census principle in Albania, because under this condition would the number of Greek community increase artificially. Why are you afraid of this phenomenon?**

The proposed method of census leaves space to doubt that this census could be used by specific groups of interest to change the composition of the population in the Republic of Albania.



**In November RrOSh asked Albanian authorities to simplify the procedure of obtaining citizenship for persons of Albanian origin living outside Albania. Is it the same principle as is used by Romania and Hungary? What was reaction of authorities?**

As for the majority of other nations of the Balkans, the Albanians living outside their motherland should enjoy the right to citizenship of their motherland country. This is an ongoing process and I think that it will end with positive result.

**In April census in Macedonia will take place. Albanian NGOs (coming under RrOSh) have warned that they will carry out census simultaneously. Is there any threat of tainting of census by state power? If yes, why?**

The process of census does not seem to be jeopardized, even if main political structures in Macedonia could really jeopardize it.

**RrOSh is supporting closer cooperation between Albanian economic agents. Why?**

The new economic realities in the region had often negative influence on the economy of the Balkans, including the Albanian one. Enterprises and local products were often damaged by different monopolies, regional bureaucracies and inharmonious fiscal politics; therefore it is necessary to choose politics which would protect local enterprises and local products.

**What is your attitude to federalization of Macedonia to Macedonian and Albanian entity?**



The actual political and economical situation in Macedonia demonstrate the best the need of rethinking of the model of the functioning of state.

**Many times Albin Kurti has said that the continuing existence of UNMIK mission, undermines Kosovo's sovereignty and due to this reason sovereignty is only form without substance. Are you sharing this opinion with Mr. Kurti? If yes, why?**

The presence of UNMIK in Kosovo as well as other legal and political structures and documents in Kosovo, shows that Kosovo does not enjoy its substantial sovereignty. Without this sovereignty it is almost impossible to realize positive changes in Kosovo, which suffers from many internal and external problems. It seems clear that the lack of sovereignty fits some local and regional actors, which after those years become richer in illegal ways and profit politically by taking opportunity of the actual situation in Kosovo.

Sovereignty for Kosovo means the beginning of reinforcement of the state capacities deteriorated in the benefit of the individual and clan interests. It also means the beginning of the weakening of the external and internal actors which have interests in the lack or in the depravation of the state capacities of Kosovo. Full sovereignty of Kosovo is a need and a necessity for the development of Kosovo and of the region.

**How do you judge your relationships with Mr. Kurti?**

My relationships with Mr. Kurti are professional, as are my relationships with the other members of Rrjetit të Organizatave Shqiptare (RroSh).