

Serbia's 1937 plan to expel Albanians

Serbia is planning a Nazi-style "final solution" in Kosova, and "our country is next on the ethnic genocide list of Serbia," Kosovan Prime Minister Bujar Bukoshi warned on Jan. 5. His warning is absolutely to the point. It has long been one of the tenets of the Greater Serbians that the areas inhabited by Albanians, like Kosova, must be "cleansed" and replaced with "pure" Serbians.

The secret document we excerpt below, "The Expulsion of the Arnauts," the Serbian name for Albanians, was written by Vaso Cubrilovic 56 years ago, and presented to Prime Minister Stoyadinovic on March 7, 1937.

In 1914, after the assassination in Sarajevo of the Archduke Ferdinand, Cubrilovic was arrested for having participated in the plot. He was a leader of the terrorist organization Young Bosnia, which included the most fanatic Greater Serbians living in Bosnia, the future Chetniks. After World War I, Cubrilovic became a political adviser to the new Karageorgievic dynasty in Yugoslavia. He was later a minister in the government of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Serbia, and a member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia. In 1970 he held the post of director of the Institute of Balkanology in Belgrade.

This memorandum was recently released in English by Harry Bajraktari, the publisher of the Albanian-American newspaper Illyria.

The expulsion of the Albanians

The problem of the Albanians in our national and state life did not arise yesterday. It played a major role in our life in the Middle Ages, but its importance became decisive by the end of the 17th century, at the time when the masses of the Serbian people were displaced northwards from their former ancestral territories of Raska and were supplanted by the Albanian highlanders. Gradually the latter came down from their mountains to the fertile plains of Metohija and Kosova. Penetrating to the north, they spread in the direction of southern and western Morava and, crossing the Sar Mountain descended toward Polog and, thence, in the direction of the Vardar. In this way, by the 19th century, the Albanian triangle was formed, a wedge based on a Debar-Rogozna axis that penetrated as far into our territories as Nis and separated our ancient territories of Raska, Macedonia, and the Vardar Valley.

This Albanian wedge inhabited by the anarchist Albanian

element hampered any strong cultural, educational and economic connection between our northern and southern territories in the 19th century. This was the main reason why Serbia was unstable, until 1878, when it managed to establish and maintain continuous links with Macedonia, through Vranje and the Black Mountain of Skopje, to exercise the cultural and political influence on the Vardar Valley. . . . Serbia began to cut pieces off this Albanian wedge as early as the first uprising, by expelling the northernmost Albanian inhabitants from Jagodina. . . .

From 1918 onwards it was the task of our present state to destroy the remainder of the Albanian triangle. It did not do this. There are several reasons for this, but we shall mention only the most important of them;

1) The fundamental mistake of the authorities in charge at that time is that, forgetting where they were, they wanted to solve all the major ethnic problems of the troubled and bleeding Balkans by western methods. Turkey brought to the Balkans the customs of the Sheriat, according to which, victory in war and the occupation of a country confers the right to the lives and property of the subject inhabitants. Even the Balkan Christians learned from the Turks that not only state power and domination but also home and property are won and lost by the award. The concept of the relations of private ownership of land in the Balkans was to be softened to some extent through laws, ordinances and other international agreements issued under pressure from Europe, but this concept has been to some degree the main lever of the Turkish state and the Balkan states to this day. We do not need to refer to the distant past. We shall mention only a few cases of recent times, the removal of Greeks from Asia Minor to Greece and of Turks from Romania to Turkey. While all the Balkan states since 1912 have solved or are on the way to solving the problems of national minorities through mass removals, we have stuck to slow and sluggish methods of gradual colonization. The results of this have been negative. That this is so is best shown by the statistics from the 18 districts which comprise the Albanian triangle. From these figures it emerges that in those regions the natural growth of the Albanian population is greater than the total increase in our population from natural growth plus new settlers (from 1921 to 1931 the Albanian population increased by 68,060, while the Serbs show an increase of 58,745, a difference of 9,315 in favor of the Albanians). Taking into account the intractable character of the Albanians, the pronounced increase in their numbers and the ever-increasing difficulties of colonization by the old methods, with the passage of time this disproportion will become even greater and eventually end in our own colonization from 1918 onwards. . . .

Colonization of the southern regions

. . . From the military-strategic standpoint, the Albanian bloc occupies one of the most important positions in our country, the starting point from which the Balkan rivers flow

to the Adriatic, the Black Sea, and the Aegean Sea. The holding of this strategic position, to a large degree, determines the fate of the Central Balkans, especially the fate of the main Balkan communication line from Morava to Vardar. It is no accident that many battles of decisive importance for the destiny of the Balkans (Nemanja against the Greeks, the Serbs against the Turks in 1389, Hunyadj against the Turks in 1446) have been fought here. In the 20th century, only that country which is inhabited by its own people can be sure of its security; therefore it is an imperative duty for all of us that we should not allow these positions of such strategic

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importance to be in the hands of a hostile and alien element. The more so since this element has the support of a national state of the same race. . . .

The Albanians cannot be repulsed by means of gradual colonization alone; they are the only people who, during the last millennium, managed not only to resist the nucleus of our state, Raska and Zeta, but also to harm us, by pushing our ethnic borders northwards and eastward. Whereas in the last millennium our ethnic borders were shifted to Subotica in the north and Kupa in the northwest, the Albanians drove us from the Skadar and its region, the former capital city of Bodin, from Metohija and Kosova. The only way and the only means to cope with them is the brute force of an organized state. We have had no success to speak in assimilation of the Albanians in our favor. On the contrary, because they base themselves on Albania, their national awareness is awakened and if we do not settle accounts with them at the proper time, within 20 or 30 years we shall have to cope with a terrible irredentism, the signs of which are already apparent and which will inevitably put all our southern territories in jeopardy.

The international problem of colonization

If we proceed from the assumption that the gradual displacement of the Albanians through our gradual colonization is ineffective then we are left only one course, that of their mass resettlement. In this case we must consider two states, Albania and Turkey.

With its sparse population, its many undrained swamps and uncultivated river valleys, Albania would be in a position to admit some hundred thousand Albanians from our country. With its large and uninhabited and uncultivated territories in Asia Minor and Jurdistan, modern Turkey has almost boundless possibilities for internal colonization. However, despite all the efforts of Kemal Ataturk, the Turks have not yet filled the vacuum created as a result of the removal of the Greeks from Asia Minor to Greece and some of the Kurds to Persia. Hence, the greatest possibilities are that the bulk of our displaced Albanians might be sent there.

First, we stress that we should not limit ourselves to diplomatic steps with the Ankara government only, but should employ all means to convince Tirana to accept some of our displaced people. I believe that this will come up against difficulties in Tirana because Italy will try to hinder this process. However, money plays a great role in Tirana. In the talks about this question, the Albanian government should be informed that we shall stop at nothing to achieve the final solution to this question. Eventually, secretly, the notables in Tirana may be persuaded by material gain to raise no opposition to this whole business.

As we have heard, Turkey has agreed to accept about 200,000 of our displaced people initially, on condition that they are Albanians, something which is most advantageous to us. We must comply with this desire of Turkey readily and sign a convention about the resettlement of the Albanian population as soon as possible. In connection with the resettlement of the Albanian population we must study the conventions which Turkey has signed recently on these questions with Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, paying attention to two things: that Turkey should accept the largest possible contingent, while from the financial aspect it should be given the maximum assistance, especially in the matter of organizing their transportation as quickly as possible. Undoubtedly, this problem will give rise to some international concern, which is inevitable in such cases. Over the last 100 years, whenever such actions have taken place in the Balkans, there has always been some power which has protested because such an action did not conform to its interests. In the present instance, Albania and Italy may make some protest. As to Albania, we have already pointed out that attempts should be made to conclude a convention with it over this problem, and if we do not achieve this, we should at least secure its silence over the question of the removal of the Albanians to Turkey. We repeat that skillful action and money properly used in Tirana may be decisive in this matter. World opinion, especially that financed by Italy, will be upset a little. Nevertheless, the

world today has grown used to things much worse than this and is so preoccupied with day-to-day problems that this aspect should not be a cause for concern. At a time when Germany can expel tens of thousands of Jews and Russia can shift millions of people from one part of the continent to another, the shifting of a few hundred thousand Albanians will not lead to the outbreak of a world war. However, those who decide should know what they want and persist in achieving this, regardless of the possible international obstacles. . . .

The mode of removal

As we have already stressed, the mass removal of the Albanians from their triangle is the only effective course for us. To bring about the relocation of a whole population, the first prerequisite is the creation of a suitable state of mind. It can be created in many ways.

As is known, the Muslim masses, in general, are very loosely influenced, especially by religion, superstitious and fanatical. Therefore, first of all we must win over their clergy and men of influence, through money or threats, to support the relocation of the Albanians. Agitators to advocate this removal must be found, as quickly as possible, especially from Turkey, if it will provide them for us. They must describe the beauties in the new territories in Turkey, the easy and pleasant life there, kindle religious fanaticism and awaken pride in the Turkish state among the masses. Our press can be of colossal help by describing the gentle removal of Turks from Dobruje and how well they have settled down in the new regions. These descriptions would create the necessary predisposition to move among the mass of Albanians here.

Another means would be coercion by the state apparatus. The law must be enforced to the letter so as to make staying intolerable for the Albanians: fines, and imprisonments, the ruthless application of all police dispositions such as the prohibition of smuggling, cutting forests, damaging agriculture, leaving dogs unchained, compulsory labor, and any other measure that an experienced police force can contrive. From the economic aspect: The refusal to recognize the old land deeds, the work with the land register should immediately include the ruthless collection of taxes and the payment of all private and public debts, the requisitioning of all state and communal pastures, the cancellation of concessions, the withdrawal of permits to exercise a profession, dismissal from state, private, and communal offices, etc., will hasten the process of their removal. Health measures: The brutal application of all the dispositions even in the homes, the pulling down of encircling walls and high hedges around the houses, the rigorous application of veterinary measures that will result in impeding the sale of livestock on the market also can be applied in an effective and practical way. When it comes to religion the Albanians are very touchy, therefore they must be harassed on this score, too. This can be achieved through ill-treatment of their clergy, the destruction of their cemeteries, the prohibition of polygamy, and especially the

inflexible application of the law compelling girls to attend elementary schools, wherever they are.

Private initiative, too, can assist greatly in this direction. We should distribute weapons to our colonists, as need be. The old forms of Chetnik action should be organized and secretly assisted. In particular, an invasion of Montenegrins should be launched from the mountain pastures, in order to create a large-scale conflict with the Albanians in Metohija. This conflict should be prepared by means of our trusted people. It should be encouraged and this can be done more easily since, in fact, the Albanians have revolted, while the whole affair should be presented as a conflict between clans and, if need be, ascribed to economic reasons. Finally, local riots can be incited. These will be bloodily suppressed with the clans and the Chetniks, rather than the army.

There remains one more means, which Serbia employed with great practical effect after 1878, that is, by secretly burning down Albanian villages and city quarters.

Organization of the removal

. . . It is apparent what regions must be cleared. They are: Upper Debar, Lower Polog, Upper Polog, Sar Mountain, Drenica, Pejd, Istok, Vucitern, Stavica, Lab, Gracanica, Nerodimje, Dalovica, Podgor, Gora, Podrimje, Gilan and Kacanik. Among these regions which together comprise the Albanian wedge, the most important for us at present are: Pejd, Dakovica, Podrimja, Gora, Podgor, Sar, Istok, and Drenica north of the Sar Mountain, as well as Upper Debar and the two Pologos in the south and the Sar Mountain. These are border regions which must be cleared of Albanians at any cost. The internal regions such as Kacanik, Gilan, Nerodimje, Gracanica, Lab, Vucitrin, etc., must be weakened if possible, especially that of Kacanik and Lab, while the others should be gradually and systematically colonized over a period of decades. . . .

Resettlement should begin in the villages and then in towns. Being more compact, the villages are more dangerous. Then the mistake of removing only the poor should be avoided: the middle and rich strata make up the backbone of every nation, therefore, they too must be persecuted and driven out. Lacking the support which their economically independent compatriots have, the poor submit more quickly. This question has great importance, and I emphasize this because one of the main causes for the lack of success of our colonization in the south is that the poor were expelled while the rich remained, thus we were no further forward, because we gained very little land for the settlement of our colonists. During the creation of the state of mind for the resettlement, everything possible must be done to send off whole villages, or a least whole families. A situation in which part of the family is shifted while others remain behind must be prevented at all costs. Our state is not going to spend millions to make life easier for the Albanians but to get rid of as many of them possible. . . .