

## INTERVIEW WITH ADEM GRABOVCI

Pristina | Date: December 11 and 13, 2015

Duration: 209 minutes

Present:

1. Adem Grabovci (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Noar Sahiti (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication*

*{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.*

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension*

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

## Part One

*[The excerpt at the beginning of the interview is extracted from the video recording: the interviewer asks the speaker to tell the year and place of birth, and to speak about his family and childhood.]*

**Adem Grabovci:** My name is Adem Grabovci. I was born in a village of Staradran in the municipality of Istog, from my parents Ziza and Azem, raised in... at the age of five my father passed away as a consequence of tortures by the Serbian regime at the time. So I grew up with my mother, who took care of me and my brothers, who were older than I, but they also were of relatively young age, when they took over the care of the family. I was raised and educated in that village. I also finished primary school in my home village. Then I began secondary school at the gymnasium<sup>1</sup> in Istog, which I completed.

So I started a student life, a brand new life. But we were lucky that we did start studies in completely new circumstances, in a brand new spirit. Besides the very transition to studies in a completely brand new and special phase for every young person, whole brand new circumstances, there was another special feature such as being fortunate to be a student in the great spring of '81, when the protests began. You could feel it in Kosovo, we can also say it publicly, that voice of discontent by the citizens of the Republic of Kosovo, so by the Albanians, over the injustice carried out continuously, since after the war. We can freely call it the reoccupation of our land, of our people, that consequently, we all know it, used to be a form of repression, and its consequences were suffered by all Albanian citizens, families.

---

<sup>1</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

So part of these suffering was also my family since the end of the war, after '48, which is known as the time of the Cominformists,<sup>2</sup> many Albanians who have shown disobedience to the system of the new regime, of the reoccupation. My well-known paternal uncle was one of those revolutionaries, Bajram Meta, whose fate like many others was to be taken to the infamous *Kulla e Popit*.<sup>3</sup> Then my father and the other uncle joined him, but many others too.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In which year?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, in the year '49, around '48-49. And my uncle is executed, and the family didn't have the chance, my mother explains it best, the family, to view the corpse, his body. And the family was constantly anxious, it was waiting for the return of his corpse, and to finally rehabilitate the soul more or less, and to set the family spirit at peace. However, during the entire time we have lived with this wish, or with this dream of waiting. And this was then a... and simply an inspiration, our education that Yugoslavia could never be – if we can say so figuratively – a mother, but always considered as the occupier, the aggressor, the villain, the violator.

But we were lucky that the other uncle was ranked in the Albanian brigades, a participant in wars, for what he has also been decorated by the Albanian regime, with decorations for bravery and war values. But I can freely say that my mother and the family have overcome all those sufferings experienced by the family, but we have also understood the sufferings and the pain of all the many families that went through this pain, went through this pain. And we continuously grew up in this spirit. We were educated to truly love ourselves. Even my predecessors who were older in age tried to contribute in this aspect. But being the type of family as we are, since long declared, from the beginning, enemies of the system, as it was the fortune of many other families, normally we were very... very much confined, and excluded.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What happened to your father?

**Adem Grabovci:** After the tortures, my father, my mother and the rest of the family members would tell more, they best explain the tortures that were committed on Albanians during that time, also in the years '48-49, so after the new reoccupation, during the gun action, known among our people as Ranković's

---

<sup>2</sup> Cominform, or Communist Information Bureau, stands for Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties, the international forum of the Communist movement founded in 1947. After the expulsion of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia from Cominform in 1948, those suspected of sympathies for Moscow were prosecuted as Cominformists.

<sup>3</sup> Alb. *Kulla e Popit*, was a notorious prison in the Istog municipality, Kosovo, which was fully functional in the first part of the twentieth century; mainly Albanian nationals were sent for torture and imprisonment. The term *kulla*, on the other hand, is a traditional, fortified Albanian house, tower.

period,<sup>4</sup> the years '54-56, and so forth. And in '56, they were taken again as a family understandably, like many other families that were initially identified by the former regime as enemy family, they were arrested and tortured, they were inhumanely maltreated.

And we have a few cases that have remained in my memory, they tell of a case when they took my father and uncle [searching] for guns, they tortured them so much, that after being released they arrived [home] almost unconscious. And normally the healing during that time and circumstances was much more difficult. Medicine was much less developed, but when you take into account, you add up to this the fact that they did not dare, they were deprived of the right for medical care, they used those primitive forms, such as wrapping in a lamb or ram's skin, sheep as it is called, to heal the wounds.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Have they survived these tortures?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, they survived these tortures, but then there were consequences, it is normal, because like many others who faced those consequences they could not heal entirely. In the years '65-66 he gets ill and he is finished, passes away. Meanwhile, consequently the other uncle, his leg was, one leg broken, damaged, and during his entire life until death, he also had... and there was a mark so to say, that followed us and always remained fresh in our memory. Because as a child, normally [I had] curiosity, and it also interested me, and others, and we did ask him. And he did not hesitate, although in many cases they avoided, they didn't want to speak about it. But at some point, growing up, evolving, with age, while understanding things, we asked and then normally family members were forced to explain it to us. And they did well that they explained to us what happened, what the family went through. And those are... simply turned into, it is normal, also into... also into hate towards the regime, but fortunately also into inspiration and engagement.

Then the other uncle as well, I remember various cases when he told us about the wars he took part in, during the fightings. He explained very well about the fighting in Tivar, and many other places, which truly made us proud, humble. Even though it seemed to us that he is telling a movie. Because we did not experienced it. But unfortunately, we had the same fate and experienced that. And now I can see that for my children, or grandchildren, it sounds as if I am telling a movie. Nevertheless, this is the reality of our people, our country, what we have been through. And it is exactly these numerous efforts of our people, I can freely say even as a collective. And as much as they tried, we all know that there were huge efforts in

---

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of the Military Intelligence after the war. He was a hardliner who established a regime of terror in Kosovo, which he considered a security threat to Yugoslavia, from 1945 until 1966, when he was ousted from the Communist Party and exiled to his private estate in Dubrovnik until his death in 1983.



order because speaking against that system was prohibited. They made efforts, the propaganda was very advanced back then.

And at the time Tito was considered a saviour. And it happened that a large number of people, even [among] Albanians, presented Yugoslavia as a savior, simply presented it as our mother. While the fighting was going on, much effort was done by the former Yugoslav system of the time to turn us against the Albanian state, that our enemy is Albania and Yugoslavia is our friend and mother. So in this instance, as a student in the gymnasium in this particular case, that is, as a graduating I student before finishing the gymnasium, I do remember Tito's death. Together with friends we had that sort of a feeling, with few of them who had, whose families also suffered from the former regime, and who had the same education as children of being in the opposition, as much as I could understand during the time.

But I am also grateful to some professors who during the time I was a student in the gymnasium provided us with some texts, *Lahuta e Malcis*,<sup>5</sup> I'll never forget professor Sali Kabashi. And this was an inspiration back then, and some other books that were truly an inspiration. We then had some newspapers of the time from Albania, such as *Bashkimi*, such as *Zëri i Popullit*, etcetera, whereas for us just the newspaper only, not only as content but also as form, as matter, was an inspiration. But moreover, we read it with passion, with much eagerness. And later they permitted television and that had its effect too, for us truly it was an inspiration and made us understand our position faster, and later determine our means of action clearly. And by the time Tito died...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** He died in '81?

**Adem Grabovci:** In '79-80. When Tito died we were organized at the gymnasium to follow the funeral ceremony in a large hall. We organized an accident inside, in order to ruin it slightly. And we were threatened of expulsion, the director of the gymnasium at the time, and they took some measures against us. And it is true, there is always fortune in misfortune, as they say. And those were times when people did not get discouraged, on the contrary. It was an inspiration, and that's where the link between those friends and me is. And we kind of kept our contacts even during our studies, and we are in contact with each other even to this day, and we discuss with great passion various issues.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How was the year '81 for you, did you take part in the protest?

---

<sup>5</sup> Alb. *Lahuta e Malcis* (*The Highland Lute*) is an Albanian epic poem, written by the Albanian friar and poet Gjergj Fishta in 1937. It is written in the Gheg Albanian language, with 30 songs and over 17,000 verses. Gjergj Fishta (1871-1940) was an Albanian Franciscan brother, a poet, an educator, a politician, and a national hero. Notably he was the chairman of the commission of the Congress of Monastir, which sanctioned the Albanian alphabet. Also, in 1921 he became the Vice President of the Albanian parliament.

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, in '81 I was a student and normally that part of... that way, if we can say so, more or less the beginning of the illegal action, the events of '81 persisted and made the greatest shift possible, which was a kind of revolution for me. And for me that is the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav regime, which soon became a reality.

But we started then to understand many other events, and to get into contact with other groups as well. The bright figure of Adem Demaçi<sup>6</sup> was our ideal and inspiration, and his group, the groups of *baca*,<sup>7</sup> Metush Krasniqi,<sup>8</sup> Ramadan Shala, Nezir Gashi, many many others who are to be admired in fact, because they made the greatest shift, by bringing on '81. In '81 I took part in protests as a random participant, but in the city of Peja we successfully managed to be part of the organizing team of those protests, with many peers, and in the municipality of Istog.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What were the political goals? I mean, what did you get organized for?

**Adem Grabovci:** Look, first of all the past affected us. Simply our family's experiences, they are for me the source of my opinions, or my orientation. Then it is the contact with colleagues, the peers of the time, mainly during our studies. During our studies we started to... normally that is when mature age starts, so you are able to... the environment itself creates conditions, the possibilities to understand issues in a different way, to process them, to discuss them, but certainly to evaluate situations and choose the means. And normally, with many peers at the time we organized, and the main request that prevailed was the declaration of independence, the Republic of Kosovo. It was a dominant request that was conveyed for many years. Then the protests were being held in continuity.

In '81, we know, there was always an unseen repression towards the youth, either towards the protesters, through murders, through imprisonments, maltreatment, inhumane tortures. But absolutely, no matter how much effort the system of the time put into stopping this eruption, this discontent, on the contrary, the measures undertaken continuously increased the dissatisfaction, which spread even more quickly. It

---

<sup>6</sup> Adem Demaçi (b. 1936) is a Kosovo Albanian activist. Demaçi was first arrested for his opposition to the authoritarian government of Josip Broz Tito in 1958, serving three years in prison. He was again imprisoned 1964-1974 and 1975-1990. He was released from prison by new president of Serbia Slobodan Milošević. In 2010 he received the order Hero of Kosovo.

<sup>7</sup> *Bac, baca* - literally uncle, is an endearing and respectful term for an older person.

<sup>8</sup> Metush Krasniqi (1928-1986) was a Kosovo Albanian educator and activist. Krasniqi was known for running illegal nationalist organizations such as The Revolutionary Party for Uniting Albanian Territories with the Motherland and National-Liberation Movement of Kosovo and other Albanian Regions in Yugoslavia. Krasniqi was imprisoned several times by the Yugoslav regime between the years 1958- 1986. The last time he was taken to prison, the tortures he was submitted to led to his death.

is true that in '82 we were among the first organizers of the protests to mark the anniversary. We started with boycotting lectures in the faculty, which proved to be very successful. Then at the student dormitory we went as young, we blocked in an organized way the door of the students' canteen and from there we began assembling students, and the demonstrations started too.

Yes, in continuation, in '82, in '83, in '84, then we continued with various actions, writing slogans, distributing various propagandistic material, as it used to be *Bashkimi*, *Zëri i Kosovës*, *Rruga e Lirisë*, and many newspapers of the time, besides those coming from Albania, books...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What were the slogans?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, "Kosova Republic," similar, "We want to live free," and many other slogans. We then established the group in an organized way. My responsibility assigned by friends was to operate in the region of Peja, which included Istog, Deçan, Gjakova, and some other municipalities, usually with the young ones from the region. And it was a marvelous group, among them was Xhemajl Fetahi, our national hero now, who was a distinguished activist, age wise he was really very young but he was very mature in his thoughts and actions.

I remember, with Xhemajl and some other friends, when we discussed about various actions, they were quite enthusiastic, quite eager. And when we undertook an action at the national level for distribution of slogans, other writings, with Xhemajl it happened to have a written slogan around three hundred and some meters long, three hundred and eighty meters long. Then, there was a case of placing a banner on the electricity transmitter Peja-Deçan, in the street, which was already very courageous for that time. After we distributed it, the following day, out of curiosity to know how law enforcement were acting, we went out and observed the police. Conclusions were of various kinds, simply superhuman. They would say, "They could have this way..." because the danger was greater due to the venue which didn't allow [placement]... but we placed it. Xhemajl was very brave.

Then together with Vehbi, his cousin Dema, the brother of... and many other friends, we distributed materials that simply for the time, for someone today can be considered insignificant, but they were obviously weapons of choice for the time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What was the reaction of the system?

**Adem Grabovci:** The system was... normally for a long time they could not discover us. We operated in the region of Peja around '82, the end of '81, in '82-3, until the end of '83, the beginning of '84. That is when we were discovered as well. A number of us got arrested in Peja, after the murder of Rexhep Mala,

Nuhi Berisha and arrest of Sejdi Veseli and others. We got discovered in Peja also, but never - even though the contacts were there, mutual coordination - could they connect us in a direct line. Yes, being thankful simply for the endurance of my friends, because the purpose was to have as few people as possible arrested. And to continue... our purpose in continuing, even during the most inhumane tortures that we experienced, was the continuity of the action. And other people continuously persevered, continued the work even more vigorously, and more courageously. The arrests never dropped down in intensity, on the contrary, they only went up.

But we also had material that was titled and distributed to all illegal activists at the time, "The enemy holds us in his hands as long as we allow it." That implied, "It has us in his hands as much as we reveal ourselves," let's say that, "We always thought that the enemy knows nothing," when in reality it knew a lot of things (laughs). However, even when facing inhumane tortures, with the most brutal tools, I can still say, they could never interrupt our activity entirely. New groups were continuously formed and continued so. The good thing was that even in prisons, with political prisoners, contrary to the previous cases with Metush Krasniqi, Adem Demaçi and others, who were numerically small and dispersed one or two per prisons, for example Požarevac, Niš, the most notorious prisons, where they were few in numbers, or only one of them, and nobody to communicate with. And that was very difficult.

In the meantime, during the time when we were arrested after '81, there were no prisons that didn't have 20-30 or 60, or more political prisoners only, whereas the majority of them led an organized life even inside the prison. They led a resistance.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How many years were you in prison, and what was the court verdict? What was the reason, how did they justify keeping you in prison?

**Adem Grabovci:** But it was the laws of that time, as per article 136, paragraph 1 and 2, for unification, for agitation activity, it is known. Then article 114 for posing a threat to the constitution, etcetera, etcetera, against constitutional order, etcetera, which I might not remember at this moment. But it was this, simply we were convicted as an organized group. Even though they could never give that [conviction] with the statements of co-activists, because none... they had a stoical attitude indeed. They were unbreakable without exception. They used the most inhumane tortures, and most of the times... I actually recall a case, it was quite heavy, when they asked about the connections with the Pristina [group].

Or in... a more concrete case, the most inhumane tortures used to be when they asked to verify if we have direct contacts with Nezir Gashi, with Sadri Tafili, then with Shaban Mani, a respectful lawyer and activist who was tragically killed after the war, those who were very significant to us, much appreciated, much

respected. But we never admitted to have had contacts, thanks to the endurance of Rexhep Kelmendi, Zenel Kadria, Musa Hasani, and many others who knew of the contacts, but never revealed them.

At a certain moment it was very interesting, when they got arrested for something else, Nezir Gashi and Xhemajl Gashi. And they took them to the walk, when UDB<sup>9</sup> invites me upstairs, exactly during the time they were taking a walk. And when I saw them, I really did freeze for a moment, I did feel very bad. Because I instantly thought that they had arrested them and normally things would have been quite bad. And while leaving, Nezir Gashi was with his hands tied, and being an experienced man, he only glanced at me and said nothing, he only told me without moving his lips, “Stay strong, we don’t know each other!” And that sole signal was important for me. And all the friends then found out that Nezir is here, but he doesn’t know us.

### Part Two

**Adem Grabovci:** After meeting with Nezir, I went to UDB, I mean, I appeared in front of the secret service of Yugoslavia at the time. Unfortunately, they were mainly Albanians, Albanian speakers, who in fact behaved in the worst possible way, perhaps even worse than the Serbs who were... who assisted during the interrogation to normally show loyalty towards the boss. And they took me to Asllan Sllamniku’s office, who was the head at the time, where also Mehmet Loci, Qazim Mazreku, Xheladin Beqiri, and many others were, and few Serbs obviously. And they put me close to the window as if by coincidence, and they tell me, “Do you know him?” And they watch my body language, how I react. However, I made attempts, despite being young, I knew their intentions more or less because... and I didn’t react, I didn’t give a sign that was... suspicious. And I saw that they believed it. And after that moment, I can freely say that they asked me very little about Nezir Gashi. But it was a moment that had an impact. And there was the tendency to connect us, to reveal the organisational chain afterwards, and normally the punishment, the sanctions would have been very severe. But also, everyone’s individual stand was, without exception, simply not to give away names, not to admit our activity. And thanks to this, the punishments were also light then, six years and under. But it influenced also the trial process and the defendants’ stand, I mean, the co-activists’.

Another moment, which meant a lot to me, which will stay forever with me, is the evening... the day when we met Nezir, usually in the evening they took us after six o’clock, when it started to get dark, we knew that tortures are awaiting us. Because during the day they only attempted to hide their mask, not to cause

---

<sup>9</sup> UDB, *Uprava državne bezbednosti* (State Security Administration).

noise because there were movements of people even in their offices. And the prison guard summoned us to hand me over upstairs, they called him, “*Bac Hivzi*,” and he sighed once and took me upstairs. Because he was aware that it happened a few times to me, when *bac Hivzi* together with the others, Isa, Jaha, Jakup and many other guards who really felt sorry, I can freely say, from the heart, for our situation, for the tortures, when they saw us. There were cases when they carried me on a blanket from the UDB offices to the prison cell. Then they made attempts to splash me with cold water, with a towel and bring me to a normal state (smiles).

And on one occasion, a prison guard, my mother’s maternal uncle, who in fact lived in my mother’s neighborhood, came and took care of me. As he approached, after I fainted, he asked me, and when he started to speak to me, he reacted in the language which was normal for us at the time, simply accusations and... and slowly, a few days later, he tells me who he is. Back then he played a very positive role, and many other guards helped us, hence we used the communication with friends and we communicated with each other with friends on what was told and what wasn’t. And then, that contributed a lot to us being unbreakable.

But *bac Hivzi* came on one occasion, when he took me closer to the UDB office back then, he sighs, he put his arm around me, hugged me and said, “Stay strong like you have done till today.” And it was simply the persistence to ask for contacts, that easiness with friends in Pristina, but also about Shaban Mani, Sadri Tafili and many others, some even older than we were. And it was that dilemma, simply, whether to speak or not. And in that moment, when he said those words to me, it was empowering for me, an extraordinary force that honestly, even if they skinned me alive, as people say, they would not be able to force me to admit what...

And really, in that occasion, they sent me fainting to the prison of Peja, the hospital, where I stayed a few days. And after coming to my senses and after I recovered, I went back to the cell again. But even in prison, in the hospital I was exceptionally and increasingly cautious..And after having returned a few days later to prison, my condition’s escalation had them sending me to the hospital again. And they organized a special location, what used to be an office. They adapted it specifically for my hospitalization and they also sent policemen to the hospital. And when I entered there, normally they would tie me on both sides of the bed {stretches his arms} because the prison director ordered them, he introduced me as a very dangerous person and told the policemen: “You need to be extra cautious. Do not tie him to the legs of the bed,” that were there, “but to the side of the bed. If you tie him here [legs of the bed], he will break them, he will put the legs of the bed on his back and run away (laughs).”

And I had a few conversations with the policemen, we started to chat of course. Agush Berisha was the policeman, then it was Xekë Gojqi, and some other policemen who truly had a very pure Albanian soul and we talked to them about many things. Initially, normally, they were scared too. And after a while they untied one arm and left me only with one. But when he left the room, I managed to untie the handcuffs with a thin wood. And I sat with legs crossed on a bed and when he entered, he saw me, untied. I said, "No, I only wanted to show you that these are useless. If I want to escape, I will escape, but neither Switzerland nor Germany needs me, nor anyone. Kosovo needs me. I was born here and I will die here." And those words left an impression on them, it was obvious and that's where the mutual trust began.

At a certain point, it is true that this guy Agush told me, "I have a machine gun, if you say that you are ready to escape, I will join you as long as we can escape together." I said, "No, Kosovo needs us, and we will remain in Kosovo." Then we connected even with the nurses who took care of the Albanian personnel, but there was also a Serbian doctor, whose name I forgot, a chauvinist in fact, without any human compassion. And normally, with the police's recommendation, to hide their own traces [he] reports them as poisoned and does not read the real consequences.

This was the part, you know, that was created with medical nurses at the hospital. They had different feelings completely, I had their support, I had lost, I was bleeding during those interrogations and I had lost a lot of weight. And it was Sabiha, if I remember her name well, an older nurse, and she would take off from work and go to buy chicken liver. She used to feed me with those, because they have an effect and compensate for blood, they have a positive effect. Then, it was also the communication, it was Cyma, Zenija who really had an extremely good attitude and support, and they felt some sort of compassion.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** In the hospital of Pristina?

**Adem Grabovci:** In the hospital of Peja. And a few days later, Cyma had an argument with those Serbs and she started to wear red and black now, she manifested that... and it started to become a problem even at the hospital (laughs). And UDB saw it as necessary to avoid me because it became dangerous for this to spread. They were medical nurses, who had no choice, they were obliged to take care of me. And after a few days they interrupted accommodation and treatment at the hospital and brought me back to prison, the cell, prison. Then treatment continued there as much as conditions allowed. But the good thing about this was that interrogations didn't continue in the same measure as before. So, you were only questioned and then six months later there was a court trial.

But another special event that remains, that will never be erased from my mind, all those tortures experienced by all co-activists, that they spoke of, they still remained unbreakable, it's when the



concern... everything was secondary, tortures, everything. But there was always a wish and a concern in case any of our friends from the group may repent, which was one of the offers by the security authorities back then, of the state security... UDB. In a way to break us morally, so we would declare before the court panel that we regretted our actions, which would reflect negatively on the youth. This was our friends' concern.

Furthermore, this was more distinctive, everyone without exception, as Xhemajl Fetahu told me, tells me through the guard, "Make a request to visit the doctor, the dentist, the teeth doctor simultaneously." And they take us, and that is where we were able to meet {joins the pointing fingers of the hands}. And when we met, we discussed about many things, he asked questions and everything was alright. He says, "But we shouldn't repent." I said, "We haven't repented, Xhemajl." And he grabbed me, hugged me and said, "Eh, I only have this worry." I said, "Never. We will continue further."

Therefore, this was a spirit, a resistance, and simply a faith that we had in our rights, in ourselves. And that brought us here, then. The trial, the court trial which was held six months later in '84, sometime around June, not to speak of accurate dates now because I reckon it started on June 26, if I'm not mistaken. And this went on for a whole week, but none of the accused, my friends, declared that they did it, but that they didn't and each of us always attempted to take over the responsibility and to take the blame one for the other. And that really was ... it was majestic. That was manifested then in front of the families, the worry was lifted, we then talked to family members. They were concerned that UDB spread propaganda that, "They are on bad terms," that, "they were speaking against each other," while it was the opposite in fact. And that was then proven even during the main investigation, during the trial. And Xhemajl was the most outspoken, when he stood stubbornly taking over the blame, convinced that if he got sentenced the rest shall be released. But that wasn't... it had not value (laughs), because everything was foretold, our sentences were decided much more in advance.

And yes, this gesture of solidarity had its positive aspect, but as such it was terrifying for the [police] service, and after the sentence [they tried to break us apart], which was prohibited by the law. But we all know how much were the laws respected at the time, in that system, in those circumstances. And they would question us, threaten us. They made attempts during the time we were out, when we hugged each other, a lot of policemen would surveill us and it became crowded there... (laughs). However, they couldn't ever stop us from hugging, from talking to each other. And when we got sentenced, you know, none of us knew who and how long had been sentenced, we only turned back, all of us, and embraced each other. Because we were convinced that if we act this way it would be a punch, it would be a punch in the face for the very service, for the police forces of that time. But at the same time, it would strengthen



our families and other young people, and it would be an inspiration for the youth to continue in this path, and that really happened.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How many years did you stayed in prison, how long were you sentenced for?

**Adem Grabovci:** We... Xhemajl was sentenced to... six years, we were sentenced to five years. I was sentenced to five years, Zenel Kadria, Rexhep Kelmendi, now heroes, the same, and so forth, three, four, one, and so on. And all the friends with whom we worked from the very beginning, we have remained friends even to this day. We have remained friends even while serving our sentence. In the prison of Peja we got organized, this is how we expressed discontent in various forms, with barricades, with hunger-strikes, and so forth.

And in one occasion, I was in a room, I was the only political prisoner, whereas the rest were other prisoners. And they took me to that room, after seven months of staying in, you know, solitary cell, to a room where the inmates were a few young ones [sentenced] for various crimes, but really we had a common language, a communication and for a moment we were under siege. And in the room where I was staying, we were... three or four others for various crimes and they supported me, they joined me and then I was interrogated, the prison director in the presence of the others, that used to be the routine.

He says, "Listen, Adem Grabovci for his disobedience and his behaviour," this and that, "I give you my word that I will take you to a place where you will be missing both family and Kosovo," etcetera, etcetera. I had nothing to say to him, I said, "Listen mister director, I have five years, take me wherever you want." I am using a quote from that time, saying, "Mister director, wherever you may take me I will serve five years," pardon my language, "even with my back resting on razor blades, I will never surrender, and I will never ask for mercy." And he really kept his word, sometimes around September I think, after that strike, they dispersed all of us, mostly to prisons in Serbia.

They picked us from Peja in the morning, four or five inmates from groups of other prisoners who were not in my group, I was the only one from my group, three in fact: Nuhi Hadri, I think, then Skender Krasniqi and I don't remember if there was anyone from Peja, I forgot. But our standpoints were such, even though we didn't know each other, our standpoints were the same. And in the morning they mobilized the police, on a large scale, as if God knows what was happening. It was a form of psychological pressure. Yes, we started to sing. And we went out of the room singing and we weren't bothered by where they were taking us. Would they take us to Pristina, to a prison in Pristina, or Srem or... it wasn't important. Yes, we started to sing and when they placed me there, they put me in handcuffs. Each had its own, two with two,

one pair each, but I had two pairs on. When they looked at me, they started to laugh. But one pair for Skenda, one pair for Nuhi.

And as we left for the prison of Pristina, the police convoy stopped and pulled out of prison three young people whom I was seeing for the first time. Afrim Zhitia happened to be in a car with me. And when he entered, Afrim was very young back then... and we started to communicate then and the link with... I was tied with handcuffs and he would meet me afterwards, some other handcuffs, I think they removed them, Skenda and Nuhi, and they tied me with Afrim. And, initially Afrim kept quiet, but then we started again, they were chatting a bit and we started to ask questions and relax and we started to sing, all of us, the songs of the time, of course. And when we approached the road, in other words we headed towards Podujeva, when we arrived at Afrim's village, he looked around once, and said, "This is my village."

And, now, the youth of that time, with plenty... but with a smile, with pride, without... I told Afrim, "Oh, I will return soon Afrim, and we will continue where we left off." And we continued singing. The car stopped so we went completely silent, and it seemed like the police surrendered and they continued, and we continued with singing. And then we made a stop, few made a stop in, I think in Srem, in Niš. We then continued to the prison of Požarevac, with Afrim Zhitia, with Ramadan Avdina, with Ilaz Zhitina, Nuhi Hadri. The rest then continued to other prisons, like in Smederevo, or wherever else they might have taken them.

Then, an utterly new environment was created. After being in a solitary for a long time, we entered the prison of Požarevac, which is a huge prison and a totally different environment. When they got out of the car and offered us space, we breathed freely and felt some sort of different emotion. Even though we didn't know where we were, they accommodated all of us in rooms, in separate alleys and then we started the life of a prisoner, a new life. Soon, we established contacts with other former prisoners during the time we were staying in what they called a quarantine. And it was pavillion number five, pavillion number four next to it, and we communicated with Nezir Myrta and some other prisoners, and they found out. Nezir was detained in '81 with Hydajet Hyseni and previous groups and Afrim's teacher, Ilaz Ramadan, so like, a professor with his students. And after we found out that there are political prisoners, we immediately began, a few names that we already knew of. It was then that we felt some sort of relief and that we were simply like a family.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you maintain communication, did you have any special language with other prisoners?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes... they would take us out in the yard, because the treatment was semi-open. The communication was forbidden but we certainly used... it was, there was no obstacle, walls, or something. When there were no policemen, we used the opportunity to communicate with each other. They kept us for a while in the quarantine, then they dispersed us to other pavilions. I think Afrim was in pavillion number six. Ilaz, Ramadan, Nuhi and I in pavilion number four. So there were many other prisoners who created an entirely new life. And yes, even the organization was different indeed.

What we, each political prisoner maintained and did... by simply not taking note of time, we went through it easily. It was also the internal communication, the life we led, the efforts to organize it, to defend our standpoints, to show ourselves unbreakable in front of... and we discussed it often, we were in the hands of the enemy and we shouldn't given in. And that truly happened. We had other commitments, such as reading. There was a prison library in Pozarevac which we used to the fullest.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did you read?

**Adem Grabovci:** Well, there was a diverse literature. Surprisingly, there were books that were prohibited outside, yet we found them in prison, in the library of Požarevac. Because there were prisoners from earlier on and normally, to create an impression, which was the policy of the system, for... to appear tolerant in front of the world, how...

### Part Three

**Adem Grabovci:** During the time we were in semi-open detention, we also had a job, I mean, we worked in the factory of... production of heaters, white ones, Preporod, which was well known. And on the first day I got introduced to Fadil Vata. And he came, news broke that a man arrived who should be contacted by all means. And Fadil, because he was very... with initiative, with a... he came first to the premises that were organized in sectors. So we got introduced to him and we then chatted with Fadil, with Bardhyl Mahmuti, with many others to whom we were close, it was simply a familiar environment. But we had a refusing stand towards the prison director, towards the superiors, but when it came to the guards we never allowed to... we simply saw them as workers, as people who were forced to work, to perform their job, and as victims of the system, yet rejecting all the superiors.

During that period I had a moment when they asked for a right to visit,, you needed to have a list of family members, while other members were not eligible. By the time I went to prison I was already engaged.

And I went to consult all my friends, those who were responsible for our pavilion and all memos had to go through them, about a request to enable a visit from my fiancée. He said, "You have to... it can be done, but you have to submit an application." I said, "Pardon, I am not here in a church or a mosque, and I don't pray to anyone. In the end... if you want to allow me fine, if not..." {stretches the hand}. And the trend at that moment was to refuse, because their purpose was to slowly start to break us down and surrender. But our stand was to stop at the first step and not continue further. But there were consequences later.

Immediately, after some time, such circumstances were created whereas attention towards us increased. We were considered as extreme even in a prison. And at a certain point, when Afrim was being visited by his family, I think it was the anniversary of Tito's death at the time which was accompanied with sirens and every citizen had to stop wherever they happened to be and pay homage. And Afrim did not stand up there and was confronted by the guard and they immediately took him to a solitary confinement. Then Fetah Shemsiu also and someone else from... I cannot remember the name right now. But I was taking a walk with Taip Zeka in that particular moment, and when the siren rang, *bacha* Taip, Kadri Zeka's brother, *bacha* Taip says to me, "Adem *bacha*, what are we doing, are we going to honor Tito?" (laughs). I said, "Well, we will do as you wish, *bacha* Taip," and we continued to make jokes with each other, all the prisoners stopped. Only *bacha* Taip and I remained, we were moving, without any distress, any concern. There was a guard named Gërshtak, he started to shout, but we did our own thing, it didn't bother us.

All the prisoners were looking at us, surprised that we didn't stop. But we did that consciously, as a sign of protest and refusal, normally. Nevertheless, the prison authorities, we were anticipating that they would immediately undertake measures, but first of all the measures were applied against Afrim, Fetah, and others, whom they took to solitary confinement, a cell, in prison, if we can say so. Because through semi-open treatment, we also had the freedom of movement, so we could stay outdoors. There was also a recreational centre, a sport centre, to do some sport like all the other prisoners, but also work. So like, here was also an exploitation of the prisoners for the benefits of the state of course. And after sending Afrim to the cell and also Fadil, I think, Fadil Vata, it was Fetah Shemsiu. Back then, few of us as a sign of solidarity and protest, did refuse to work and automatically were subjected to other measures, punishment with solitary confinement in those alleys, in the basement. The optimal punishment was around 30 days, while for the time being they sent us, we were few prisoners who refused... and it was the most dangerous [punishment] that prison authorities executed, as they attempted to set us apart and [break] the solidarity we had. But we didn't allow even for a moment to fall apart from each other and allow the prison representative bodies to get in between us.

And then, we were sentenced with 90 days, it means three times 30 days in a prison cell. Together with a few friends we stayed in the alleys in the basement, where the hygiene was terrible. There was also lack of air. We had a stool to call it so... where we were allowed to lay down and sleep in the evening, they gave us very dirty blankets, *batanije* [blankets]. And in the morning, at five or six o'clock, we had to get up. They locked us up, therefore we had to stay there during the whole day, only a metal stool there. However, we endured that too, and we endured it I think with our patience of... simply, we endured it through songs. But anyway, we made efforts to do some exercises during the time in prison, physical strengthening, I never stopped exercising at any time.

Afterwards, punishment in isolation followed. It was... it can be freely called prison into prison. Pavillion number seven was only for those who were inobedient, simply for those who broke the house order in prison. But there was one more method, where they divided us, one Albanian prisoner, was put among three, four or five in the alleys of Serbian prisoners, and that was the part, the hardest punishment because you had criminals of various nationalities there, but mainly Serbs who were asked by the prison authorities to cause provocations, to simply make the prisoner's life harder.

Our behavior and communication with other prisoners was never set aside and we managed to create very good relations even with the Serbian prisoners, regardless of their nature, because it did not interest us who is what. We used to have our opinions and we were not interested in having conflicts, and we didn't allow, we didn't have, apart from one single case when one of our friends entered into a conflict, when Bajrush Xhemajli was attacked by a well known criminal who was sentenced with some twenty years, I reckon, for murder. Even in pavilion, number seven, we weren't allowed to have, nothing made of metal on us, because it was a prison, like any interrogation prison... and no metal items were allowed. Whereas, the Serbs were allowed and the prison authorities themselves provided them [with such items] in order to provoke and attack us. On this particular occasion, even a razor was allowed in an attempt to hurt Bajrush, then Bardhyl Mahmuti reacted and ran to his aid and they did hit that criminal, so that created a heavy situation.

We were locked up, whereas the doors - no matter how hard we tried to break those doors because it was horrible, we knew that our friends were having a fight with someone, and we were convinced that something very bad was happening. We were concerned about his fate that, perhaps, any of our friends could lose their life, but fortunately it ended well. Then measures followed, where Bardhyl and some friends got sent to other prisons. And we remained in the prison of Požarevac, refusing to do the walk. And we stayed for three years in alleys, in isolated rooms without going for a walk at all, because at certain time the slots, we were entitled to only 30 minutes a day to be out in fresh air, however, we were

obliged to keep the hats, the prisoner's uniform buttoned up, with hands behind the back just like a soldier, and to walk around for thirty minutes.

Then, we made another request, to allow us a free walk, so we could stay thirty minutes longer, to have the right to walk without jackets, without a hat and simply to move freely. And this was refused by the directorate and then in a sign of protest, we boycotted it entirely and we stayed in for three years without going out to the fresh air even for a minute, apart from the visits by family members every month, they were a great help to us, bringing us food. It was specified that they were allowed an amount of four kilograms [of food], but they also specified, what [items] could be brought.

We managed to schedule the family visits not having everyone come at once, but someone [to come visit] in the beginning, someone in the middle and someone at the end. So three or four of us in a room could have enough food during the whole time. And simultaneously, our families supplied us with literature, all kinds of books. And the scheduled timing was our salvation. We had a schedule, we also had some sort of a discipline. We did physical exercises in the morning, even though prison authorities did not allow that. However, we would use the space like that. And though there was, especially during the summer, lack of air because there were metal nets indoors, then there were two pairs of glass windows and another net on the outer side. And usually in summer, although it wasn't allowed, it was punishable, we were aware that they will undertake measures, we continuously broke part of the glass. We would pull out the inner part and often during the day, when we were short of air, we went close to it and breathed enough air. Nevertheless, we endured it together with all the friends.

Then we had the schedule, after breakfast they would come pick us up and we would finish the work while reading the whole time. And we were planning on how much we would read during that particular day, and in the evening after the lights went out, we would comment during that [time], discuss regarding what we read during that day. And after this ended, we had folklore (laughs). It was usually held in room number eight, together with Nezir Myrta and Sami Kurteshi. Nezir played the *çiftelia*<sup>10</sup> very well and we had our *çifteli* over there, but not an ordinary *çifteli* but an improvised one... a prisoner always finds a way (smiles). And the part of the milk carton, that... we drank the milk and took the package and used it as the head of the *çifteli*, whereas the tail of the *çifteli* was made of cardboard, cardboard paper. We would wrap it well and make the tail of the *çifteli* out of it, whereas the strings were made with rubber-bands from socks, we pulled those out and made strings for the *çifteli* out of it. Meanwhile, the bridge pins with the

---

<sup>10</sup> The *çifteli* (*çiftelia*), is a two-string instrument with a long neck, played in Northern Albania and Kosovo, used to play folk songs and epics.

part of cellophane, from cigarettes, the rolling paper of cigarettes was made into a saddle and Nezir played sounds as if it was a real *çifteli*.

And then we would start playing the *çifteli* and sing for a while, for thirty minutes or until they allowed us. At that moment, as soon as they heard us playing, once the lights were out, they immediately punished us because it was strictly forbidden. Usually these punishments applied to us more, however we did our thing being aware of them and it did not bother us whether we would be punished or not. It was the same for us, whether we stayed in the room, whether we stayed in the cell, hence we made peace. But even prison authorities and guards had given up too. They were forced to give up because we disregarded their authority.

We continued in isolation together with Nezir. And then the case when we clashed with prison authorities, during the event of Paraqin, the murder of Aziz Kelmendi and arrests of few prisoners. Then another prisoner got killed, which was another act, I think it was Ibrahim Kastrati, if I didn't forget his name, he was killed in the prison of Požarevac and then it was announced as suicide, which was untrue. So, as a sign of protest we wrote a note with heavy accusations against the prison director, against the system, which were real to us. And then as a sign of revenge, the prison director came over, he said, he made a provocation, said, "You wrote this note, do you stand behind this ?" We said, "Yes, we certainly do." Yes, we continued to add up the list of our accusations with some more against the directorate, the system, their unjust behavior, thus punishment followed.

After detention in prison, after returning from the cell, after a while, the director organized, there were around 40 guards that we could count, the chaperon, the prison commander and others. And the prison director addresses us at the alley where we were staying with Sami and Nezir, saying, "Are you going for a walk?" We said, "Yes, yes we will go out for a walk, free." "Go ahead!" We knew then that something is being prepared for us. And Sami was very big in size, but I was also a bit bigger than Nezir, so our concern was that they will hit Nezir. So we put Nezir in the middle and went out to the promenade. When we got there, we didn't put the hat on, we didn't button up the jacket and our hands started to move freely {moves arms}.

The director issued the command three times, as foreseen, "Hands behind the back, hands behind the back!" We didn't obey. The guards were ordered to attack us and we instinctively turned against the wall, with our backs against the wall, and we set it up with Sami and we put Nezir in the middle. To our fortune, but theirs also, they didn't approach to attack us physically. Then he gave orders that we should go inside, they took us to solitary confinement, in fact, after a discussion with the director. And when we entered,



we then started with accusations against him, he against us, and they took us to a cell. And in the cell they did not tie us not with handcuffs like before, but with chains and a padlock, which means it was a psychological war. They divided us in three cells and you couldn't sit in that metal seat, so they made us lay down. And there was "the gorilla" as we called him, a huge guard, they were looking for this part here {points at the wrist} to put the chains on, so we couldn't move, exactly to prevent the blood circulation. And we... very twisted since the start of the day.. However, we started to sing, I will never forget, "An echo falls in Dardania," together with Sami Kurteshi we started to bang the wall with our heads and we gave a signal.

Now, I wasn't sure whether it was Sami, or Nezir. But, that was Sami, next door to me, whereas Nezir was opposite, and we start singing and whistling. And we were synchronizing through the window, you could hear the whistling of each other and we continued like this. Not long after, a doctor came to the prison. That was for psychological effects, purely. And he enters together with the guards, and says, "What are you doing?" He saw me laying down, tied. I said, "I am singing." He continued, "What?" He addressed me "Kako [What]?" I replied in Serbian, saying, "*Pjevam!* [I am singing!]" (smiles). He just got terrified, he was, it was something unexpected to him and in the state we were in, you know, because he had come to break us mentally. And he had it coming, he got what he deserved.

But the same thing happened with Sami, without making a deal between each other, the same thing with Nezir. And they kept us like that for a while, we went on strike, we refused the food, everything. Then after some time they took us out. One day... I think on the third day they took us to the director's office. And on this occasion, three days after we went on a strike, they called us at the division as the order required. And I went straight to the director, I entered. He was a real chauvinist who took part in events that were, a notorious massacre in the '60s, around the '70s, it happened in the prison of Požarevac and he was a judge who sentenced, the Albanians in that case, to death. And he tells me, I don't even greet him, we behaved in such a way because we had taken a stand not to consider him, so we manifested our revolt, our discontent in every aspect and form available to us.

And he addressed me, he said, "Fine Mr. Grabovci, when will the two of us ever greet each other?" I said, "We will greet each other." It didn't occur to me to say through the barrel of a gun, "we will greet each other with a gun." And the guards reacted because it was their superior in question. He said, "Leave it, don't touch him, because he is right, he is correct. I am his enemy, and the other way around." He said, "Yes, you are punished to thirty days in a cell." I said, "What more can you do? This will pass too." And then he became angry, "Get out!" The guards grabbed me and there was this young guard, because we could



identify all guards based on their behavior, we called him *kokërrsharrë*,<sup>11</sup> a thief. And he was pretty arrogant, but in regard to us he was very careful with the political prisoners, because we didn't offer him a chance. And on this occasion I was impressed, while leaving, going down the stairs to the basement of the cell, he waves at me with a hand like this {stretches the hand}. I thought he wants to provoke me, to hit me and I turned back, I reacted very quickly, when he told me "*Neka, neka!*" [OK, OK] Don't, don't, he said, "Hang on, I just want to ask you something." I said, "Go ahead?" A good fortune smiled at me, to make myself heard, a sort of propaganda even in those conditions (laughs). He tells me, "Can I? there is something unclear. Why do you behave nicely with us guards and we have no problem with you Albanian political prisoners? Whereas with the director, the commander, the educators..." I said, "But listen, you are imprisoned here just like me. You are obliged to come here because you support the family. Hence, we treat you the same, just like us you are obliged to, you support the family with this salary. Meanwhile, he is the one who exploits you." We continued this dialogue for some time. And after that moment, since literature was not allowed in the cell, some interesting relations were created with this *kokërrsharri*. From an extreme of being very dismissive, very indifferent towards us, it didn't... there was an intimacy and he started bringing me books to the cell, something which wasn't allowed. I then started to joke around with other friends. And they were teasing me, "What did you do to *kokërrsharri*?"

But also another case, [this] element was very important, as you said about the communication signs. One of the communication signs for "Kosovo Republic" in the isolation room used to be knocking. We would create sounds, so like, Kosovo Republic.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Are you able to reproduce it?

**Adem Grabovci:** {Knocks on the table to demonstrate the sounds} (laughs) Republic Constitution, by will, or by war. This was our identification signal in order to identify each other. Not by names, but that there is someone from the political prisoners. While leaving... I forgot a very important element, while leaving the director's office, Afrim was entering, Afrim Zhitia. They were now upstairs, Afrim, then Sabit Veseli, Halil Selimi, Ymer Hasani, Behadini, and few other friends, and they were now upstairs, in isolation rooms. We were, only us downstairs, because they already faced a resistance from our part and continued with further provocations. And now while leaving, he only gestured, Fatmir asked me... Afrim in fact, if we were going on with the strike? He asked me {imitates the facial expression} if we are eating. I only did this {nods down}. And the guard was there, he didn't know what was happening (laughs). However, we understood

---

<sup>11</sup> Alb. *kokërrsharrë*, a tiny saw.

each other and friends upstairs immediately joined the strike and we had already heard that they brought them to the cells downstairs.

And it was that kind of life that really, even there in prison, despite being in a state of isolation, regardless of efforts to isolate us, to obstruct the communication, we absolutely found other forms of action, but also cooperated with others. Whereas, up to the moment when we were released from prison, it was a rule, attempts were made as usual to break the prisoners, so we would ask for forgiveness. That wasn't only a practice, it was a stand not to give in. Even so, it is strange, it may be for someone considering the circumstances, but for us it was very normal. No forgiveness, because there is no reason. Because if during any moment it would have been just, we would ask for forgiveness, we would admit being guilty. We simply considered ourselves war hostages, regardless of that, so we didn't request [anything]. And we would feel insulted if they released us before time and all of us served the sentence to the last bit. In fact, Serbia owes me something like three days, they kept me longer than my sentence.

And it is interesting, usually at the last phase in prison, they try to behave kindly, to appear more liberal in order to leave a good impression, but with us they couldn't. A month before getting out of prison in '89, I was punished with another thirty days, I was back in a cell. Then I happened to stay for thirty days in a joint room and thirty days later, I was out. And at the moment I got out of prison, the employee of the secret security service, the usual talks they invite you to, so he calls me and he tells me, he starts to have a chat and to leave an impression of a civilized person, very goodhearted, bighearted and etc. and, "What will you do, in life?" I will never forget how I responded... he said, "What will you do now? That last conversation mister Grabovci." I said, "Nothing more, nothing less. The word of..." I said it in Latin "Words of the people, words of truth. I will never run away from my people. I will always stay among my people" (laughs). He became angry, he couldn't contain himself, so he unleashed himself this way by saying few swear-words that were common. And that's how we parted.

### Part Four

**Adem Grabovci:** It was chaos in '89, events, turmoil. They sent me back to prison right after twenty days (laughs).

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you give us some details please? On what pretext did they send you back to prison?

**Adem Grabovci:** I went back soon after, because when I arrived the protest of '89 was happening, the workers' strikes etcetera, etcetera. I stayed only the night I arrived [released from prison]. It was a completely different environment after five years, everything had changed. My nephews, they had grown up, all those changes in five years, I didn't recognize them anymore. And then also, the environment had changed. We hung out for a while and we went with friends to the workers of the car parts [factory] of Ramiz Sadiku in Peja. While we were on a strike, we held a speech in Peja, from prison, a speech for the workers (laughs). That was the story.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How come that you went back to prison?

**Adem Grabovci:** Then from Peja we went to meet with them. A few friends came to visit me, others couldn't make it and so I went to the protests. Bardhyl Mahmuti, Ramadan Avdiu, Fadil Vata, Afrim Zhitia and some others who happened to be there. And I left, I got in touch with them, while demonstrations were going on in Pristina. As soon as... I saw everyone, there were plenty, I said, "May I, I am withdrawing, perhaps heading towards Peja?" They hesitated for a second, because they knew I just got out and I was being watched, it was normal. They said, "Normally, it is very important, but with one condition that you don't go on the frontline, [as to] not get exposed." I was indeed determined not to appear in the front. But also convinced that we could... and without even appearing, but the opposite happened. Inevitably, I was forced in front of the Shopping Mall of... some, there were some... it exists even now in Peja this concrete [building], and so I climbed onto that concrete. A few words in a hurry and immediately among the crowd, the police reacted soon. That is when I got into a fight with the police, we made attempts to pull out the gun of a policeman, some guy Maksim Jašović. And I pointed the gun to him, and I inserted the bullet because I couldn't, I tripped over it.

But they caught me from behind, a guy named Blerim Gashi, I think, and another, a Gorani, both security staff, and they dragged me out. The police of course, and I was arrested. But to my luck, they put me in with some other arrested ones, few young boys in that jeep. I had a white jacket on, and one of the young boys, whom I don't know even to this day, I took it off, I told him, "Can we swap jackets?" and I took it, his was black, I gave him mine and we went over there. I had now changed my appearance. And nobody could ever make me admit that it was me (laughs). Even the guy himself whom I had a fight with, when they brought him as a witness in the evening, pretty late, he takes a look and they are saying to him, "Is it him?" He was in doubt and he let me know that now everything depended on me, and it didn't have a chance. So, that was gone, and then I was sentenced to one year.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** What did they arrest you for a one-year sentence?

**Adem Grabovci:** Participation and organization, participation and others... as it was for demonstrations, reactionary, you know it was the term they used. Then at the court ruling, they supplemented the act with the part committed by a few other young men and...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Were you in Peja back then?

**Adem Grabovci:** In Peja, this was over there, the serving of the sentence was in Peja. But it was that period when we were already shaking, structures were being dissolved. And also the distrust for representatives we had, both local Albanians and from the Republic. And during the investigation procedure, it was mainly those of the republic, [not] of the federation, staff from the service. The first session was with a few locals, it was Istref Sadiku, Hamdi Bujupi, Dem Muja, Mehmet Loci, Qazim Mazreku, Xheladin Beqiri, Mustafë Loka, at first they were very arrogant, very extreme, but a few Serbs too. However, when they arrested me they asked me, they said, firstly they asked me about participation. "Firstly," I said, "you should know that I was just released from prison," I said, "I knew that I should come to report to you." There was a rule, few days later, I had to turn up at the nearest station once released from prison.

But we already took a stand while in prison that we would not acknowledge those instructions, those laws. And I didn't intend to report to the order authorities. Nevertheless, I used that opportunity and said, "Whom to?" "To you?" Exactly to the one who interrogated me. I said, "You can question me." But it was chaotic there, you couldn't tell who is asking what from whom. And it was left like that, but then in the evening when they started with questions, those from the federation came over, from the Republic of Serbia and started with questions and with pressure as usual. I said, "It is not true that it was me" and they brought that policeman, I noticed when they opened the door for him and asked him, he was hesitating. Now everything depended on my stand, and I refused, saying it is not true, and in some way, that was closed. But the very position they took, such as taking my file and started to browse [through] it during the serving of my sentence. Afterwards it was the standpoint of the group in the prison of Požarevac and the standpoint of each one, the relations they maintained so they reacted based on those.

And they quoted the words I said to him, by then I had forgotten the name of the security service member of staff who was in prison and that I said that I would stay among my people. He said, "You have stated..." this and that. "Well no doubt I will be among people and I don't regret it, I will do so, I will act upon [this]." Then they started with their precautions as per usual timing, usage of excessive physical force and at a certain moment, I noticed that on the fifth day of investigation, which took place in the evening, I put my hands under the table because I saw that there is no stopping. I thought, I better come up with a

decision, and end everything. And I inserted my hands under the table and fell on the table on top of them. It became a mess there, then the others came over, they grabbed me obviously, and then tied me up.

And tied like that, they could only unleash their anger. The next day I saw myself in the hospital. And what is very important, something of permanent memory with me, there was this guard who knew me, it was Sadik from Strelle, older in age, very well behaved, very... and you could see the pain in him. But there was also another guard, Jaha, someone who covered me with his jacket, he took it off and covered me with it, because I was unconscious. And when I was conscious again I began to laugh and to... and he was very emotional because he was very concerned for my health. And I told him, I said, "What is it?" He said, "What do you mean what is it? Do you see what they done to you?" I said, "Listen, one more, one less, it doesn't matter, we will win." I said, "Do you have children?" This question came to me instinctively. He said, "Yes, as of tonight..." for coincidence he became [a father] with a daughter. He said, "My daughter was born tonight." It fell a night before... I said, "Listen well, even if you and I die, your daughter, will certainly gain freedom."

And it was very interesting after the war... in reality after the war, because it was over, I am making a digression here. I saw that girl after the war, I was with some friends from the branch of the Democratic Party in Peja, Ilami Gashi, Rexhë Abazi, many others and the guard moves aside, he greets me. Then this girl approaches, she was all grown up by now, she was a student. And she stopped, the girl greets me and he says to the daughter, he addressed the said girl, calling her by name I apologise but I forgot it, I can't recall it right now and said, "Father, this is the uncle that had told me that even if I die, you will experience freedom. Listen, you are a grown up now, you are a student, and you are free."

These were quite emotional moments and they are simply unforgettable. But the period now, when the investigations started, I am going back to it.. it was, I noticed the mistrust whereas the secret service already had no more... neither the republican one of Serbia, or the one of the Federation towards these, our executioners who behaved in the most brutal way possible in regard to us. Even though they tried to show themselves off to us, they were still bypassed. And the Federation had taken over all the competencies, the Republic of Serbia. So, it was the beginning of a massive shift that was happening and with all those experiences of ours, which normally nobody wants to experience such things, that just by recalling it, for me... I don't want to talk about this issue ever, but the true stories recall a very tough period, very rough, not only for individuals, but for people in general, everything we experienced. But on the other hand, it has a positive aspect, because even back then, we felt a satisfaction, when we noticed the cracks. And we gained strength, we gathered courage to truly see the end and finish of our country's

slavery. And we did see... I can freely call them the first signs of freedom, a result of much suffering, of much pain, of many sacrifices by our people, in the name of freedom.

It then started, after going to the hospital, we didn't have, we didn't receive a lot [inc.] because you didn't have what to receive, considering it was around twenty-one days that I had stayed out of prison. And it was clear to us that there was no space or opportunity for any activity of that scale. Contrary to the first part in '84, when I can say with pleasure that, although we were a group that operated in a way which was very organized internally, as independent, but also in cooperation with other groups, and I say it with pleasure that thanks to the sacrifice, the willpower, courage of the group of friends, Xhemal Fetahi, Blerim Muriqi and many others, Vehbi, Dema, Miftar and many others. It was an extraordinary activity, very condensed and I can say that, openly that [judging] from concrete actions of that time, the distribution of materials, writings of slogans, pan-cards, etcetera, it was the most fruitful, the most successful group. Whereas the other part was only an act. So, they could accuse me for participation in... and the truth is that everything went in a coordinated manner with friends from Pristina, who were in the prison of Požarevac. And I can honestly say that the merit for returning to life of illegality, illegal activity, and empowerment of the movement, is attributed mostly to Afrim Zhitia and his release from prison, Fadil Vata, then Bardhyl Mahmuti and other friends whom we were together with at the prison of Požarevac. Since the very first day, also, they were already involved and committed to the activity.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did they get out of prison together with you?

**Adem Grabovci:** No, earlier, a year before me, about year and a half before me. But in general, all of us got out within two years, we were all out. And everyone, this exit then followed all of us as it was the beginning of changes in Europe, and in South Eastern Europe. The fall of the Berlin wall as the biggest turn, and the greatest success of crumble and failure of a monist system. What's more, our actions were interrelated of course. So, no matter the circumstances, when you don't have the mechanism to turn those situations to your benefit, they come and go. But fortunately, Afrim, Fadil, Bardhyl, Fahri, Fazli and many other friends were and did set these situations into motion which afterwards found the support of students, of large masses of people and we are all aware of the shifts and changes that happened.

But at this point the investigation procedure came to a closure, they held us for five more months, or six months in custody until the court process commenced. And at the court they merged the act with that was committed by a few young men and women from Peja, whom I didn't even know. They knew me by name, and moreover, they were worried for themselves since now, they associated them with Adem,

whereas we didn't have any contacts with Adem. What is their intent? And rightly so, because they saw it as a penalty measure.

But that was their agenda, their goal. So it was very important, because we couldn't even make a statement, something that happened often, whenever they had the opportunity, they would violently force them to admit to many acts which they didn't commit, because violence is forceful and those were the methods that the Service used back then, so, UDB frankly said. Yes, we did appear at the court proceedings, also, at the court proceeding there was a very interesting scene. I hugged those young men despite not knowing them. But it was clear that we had... our viewpoints bringing us together.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Was that the group of Myrvete Dreshaj?

**Adem Grabovci:** No, this is another group, that was independent, mainly students. Sami Elshani, Ismet Elshani, Bekim Kelmendi, I think two of the girls were from Elshan. And the Elshanis are in a way also next of kin. Their uncle, Adem Elshani, who was cooperating with my uncle, as I told you in the beginning of the 50s, who was liquidated by UDB. But he was also in contact with my father. Besides those relations, family [relations] as cousins from the same tribe, they also were in terms of cooperation. The same was then transmitted to their successors. And so they had this, this, this mutual trust. But when we went to the court proceeding, during the review, they began with those accusations, the usual ones, as expected. And normally the experience did its thing, I was much more relaxed now, and simply more neglectful. I have to say this too, that there was a determination not to consider them, as institutions of the enemy. And to consider ourselves as a sort of, which in reality we were, hostages. And they brought that policeman, at the main court proceeding. And I was a full figure, healthier when I got out of prison. But during the period of investigations, I had excessive bleeding and I had lost weight, I became really thin. Bekim and Sami Elshani, Bekim Kelmendi and Sami Elshani were younger, but quite well-built. And then the policeman started, when the judge asked questions, I blushed. He said, "Can you tell us what he looks like?" He described the event, it happened like this, it happened like that, he explained it in exact terms. I had really pulled out the gun, but unfortunately these two caught me and I couldn't carry out the last act.

Perhaps fortunate and unfortunate, because certainly the measures might have been more severe then. However, he describes it as corpulent,<sup>12</sup> very dangerous etcetera, etcetera. He said, "Can you tell us which one it is?" Now, I was the first one in the queue, however, I was looking in the direction towards Bekim. And the way he described it, it may have been Bekim or Sami in fact. And he says, "This one..." he said,

---

<sup>12</sup> The speaker describes physical attributes.



“Please, can you repeat once again, exactly which one?” And he addressed Sami. Yes, as disciplined, as a servant, as devoted as he was, Ukë Muçaj from the former system. He pointed at him, said, “Please, once again which one it is?” And he pointed with a finger in his direction. Back there, the crowd who were family members reacted during the proceedings. And, I heard the voice of my oldest brother, a martyr now, who was my supporter in continuation, who reacted. Then the judge took a decision at the spot and expelled everyone from participating in the proceedings [court].

The procedure continued afterwards, I began with some accusations, words, that were normal in relation to, us as defendants, them. And it ended then, we got punished. I was sentenced to one year, those young boys [were sentenced] less, some of them were released entirely. But the best thing was that we were all released, on probation, so me too. And then luck followed me again, it was autumn of the same year. And there was a case during the investigations, but before I was imprisoned. I was engaged back then, we had just announced our engagement with my fiancée, in fact she had, after my arrest. We were both students, we had already met and when we went on a date we were planning to get married. And we were in Gjakova, there was a week left, or something like that, when we were supposed to get married. On our way back from Gjakova, in a bus, a song “Moj Erlinë” I think....”Moj Erlinë, merr xherxhefin eja të rrijmë” and that was in instinctive manner. But when we went to prison, during the tax procedure [inc.] to kill that noise, what went on in UDB offices, they played exactly that music and it reminded me and it stayed forever in my memory. This song accompanied me and it was one of my favourite songs.

But even after being released from prison, again, you know, it was the summer of '89, the same fate accompanied me, there were riots again. And then, I took an initiative in those circumstances, we met with all the groups, since by then, Havë [Shala] had been released, and Myrvete Dreshaj, then the group “Independence,” whose member was Ibrahim Dreshaj and many others, Nezir Nikçi [was] with another group. So, when these two groups got arrested, we both knew of each other, from the time I was a student, so when I was arrested they were still junior students, but they were fractions that had contacts with Xhemal Fetahi, with Fahri Bërdyna, with Blerim Muriçi, and others. And our link was with other groups. Because our purpose was to extend our activity in a more horizontal level, and to include as many, but not to... the organization of small groups, so they can be dispersed, and not for everyone to get caught. And to our fortune, none, they didn't get caught all at once. They then continued their activity after I was convicted for the first time. But after a while they were arrested, but when arrested, they tried to involve us in investigations too. It was in Požarevac, they questioned me few times, but no, there was no procedure initiated against us. But luckily by the time we got out of prison, all of them got released. And the first step we took, finding it necessary, was the reorganisation of all groups. And that's when we got reorganised. We then begun a very intense activity.



**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Is this an illegal organization?

**Adem Grabovci:** I am always speaking of illegality. The leader was the Kosovo People's Movement. Either direct or indirect contacts. And we brought, as a group, when we had our second gathering, because now Ramadan Avdiu was released and many other friends. And we started with activities in the region of Dukagjin, our focus was there. When the protest started, it was bloody, because at this point those were the last kicks of the Yugoslav Federation. The discontent started to take toll and to be openly manifested even in Slovenia. In Croatia too. And normally, events in Kosovo. And automatically, it was becoming necessary for us to become more active.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** And what was one of the requests in these protests?

**Adem Grabovci:** As always, the request was [to become] the Republic of Kosovo, so that we could be equal to other republics. We still hadn't moved to the last phase, secession or similar. But as part of those, now those murders that, the murder of... Daci, Fatmir I think, Fatmir Uka, Gani Daci and some others that happened, those, we would usually pull out of protests in the evening, in most cases, I can say, my house which was in the suburban part of the city of Peja was a base, or we used to go to Nezir Nikçi's uncle, often to his uncle's house. We then used the house of Xhafer's cousin, who was continuously supportive of me. And we used to make plans for the next day, but we often moved to, to the municipality of Istog to organize protests and we split into groups. We operated a lot in the municipalities of Deçan, Peja, Istog and we then started with the organization of protests. And it was, so, it was November, the end of November, December, that time around, before New Year's Eve. One evening we went to my house and debated for a long time, demonstrations were already going on for quite some days, it was normal for the crowd to get tired.

## Part Five

**Adem Grabovci:** Even in prison, we often discussed about the fratricide [blood feuds] that was happening. There was this preoccupation with everything bad, every negative phenomena distressed the prisoners, because we wanted to see our country, our people as good as possible. But when we went to my house that evening with Hava Shala, Ibrahim Dresha, Myrvete Dreshaj, Lulëzim Etemi, it was my niece Lulja and brother Dini who hosted us. Like every night, he had organized heating and the rest, the food. And after we had finished, and while having dinner, we debated on how we would act. And we saw it as

necessary to find a way to reach out the masses, but at the same time not to allow UDB to pursue us. And it was an initiative, the most right thing to do was to begin with the reconciliation of blood feuds.

In regard to this, during a conversation Hava tells us about this case, says, “I saw a young man today,” because there was this call, “Who doesn’t join in is a traitor,” and she noticed a young man whose name I don’t know unfortunately, who was crying. She tells him, “C’mon here!” He says, “I would approach you, I would march with you, and I am with you. But I am in a blood feud, I am in conflict with my neighbor. And if I join I am afraid the enemy will shoot me. They will kill me, and it will then compromise the Movement, so the protest,” because, “Albanians are killing each other.” And that was very emotional for all of us.

And then we decided, besides assigning ourselves a task, a purpose from a human perspective, we decided to use something which undoubtedly was a heavy wound for our people. It wasn’t our main goal, I must be fair, I must very correct, very sincere. Since the very first night we discussed that it would not be our main goal. A goal yes, a good humane deed, yes. But there was a moment when we did see many good things out of it, many benefits: one, we would combat a negative phenomena that was planted and fed by the occupier, by the regime of the time, with the goal of separating, dividing our people. And secondly, it was another opportunity for us to reach out to the masses, to appeal to the masses for simply getting prepared for an armed struggle.

And in the beginning our motto was, there were around 37 victims killed across Kosovo, if I am not mistaken, three in the protests. And it went with the slogan, “We will ask [you] to stretch the hand of reconciliation, reconciliation of blood feuds in the name of Kosovo, and to raise the dead.” Because we estimated that with potential reconciliation, reconciliation of blood feuds, we would resurrect each dead protester. And initially, our objective was to reconcile 37 blood feuds. And then we slowly elaborated it, without any great ceremony, but in a simple manner. That evening at my place, besides other guests, there were also Flamur Gashi, Serbeze Vokshi, Bajram Kurti, who joined us in the debate. And we elaborated this issue long and wide. And we then started with positive, negative aspects, and we began [to think] on how we would act from now on. And we gave roles to everyone, who had what role.

Our first conversation was also about the division of tasks within the group. Identification, one group had to identify people of influence, authorities. More of moral authorities to be honest. Connoisseurs of *oda*<sup>13</sup> talk, and what were their proceedings. And then, we came to a conclusion, we identified few in the region

---

<sup>13</sup> Men’s chamber in traditional Albanian society.

of Peja, and as necessary we foresaw the link between top intellectuals, University professors, people of science, and the masses. In that regard, there was a great division up till then, I can freely say.

For our first meeting we have also foreseen Rexhep Qosja, who was an authority somehow, and our food [for thought] I can freely say, and some others. Even during the suffering of spiritual punishment, he had then won us with his viewpoints, which he kept during all periods of time, and some others. Besides that, our suggestion at the time was to establish contacts with the Council for Defense of Human Rights [Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms] that functioned at the time, led by Zekeria Cana. And both of them suggested us to invite and talk about this issue the folklore expert and scholar, our honored professor Anton Çetta.

We went to Professor Anton Çetta, we talked, we elaborated our goal. To one and another, we explained our final goal, that our goal was not only to combat this phenomena, our final goal was: we had to prepare for an armed war. And to use this fight, in case the institutions of the Serbian regime at the time took action against us, as a humane act and greater denigration of Serbia.

But initially, fortunately, they understood the goal and allowed us free space for action, for a certain period. But after the talks we had with professor Anton, he accepted our request, justified it very well and offered us his support. He encouraged us to start with the identification of cases. We talked and at the time, he suggested Professor Ibrahim Rugova to us. And he offered his support. There were some other professors with whom we discussed, but initially it was these ones. Mujë Rugova, Professor Mujë Rugova, and some others who were persecuted in the past, imprisoned, and exposed to UDB, we always consulted them, and they became part of us. And they have exquisite merits for the initial phase of the beginning of blood feuds reconciliation.

So we went back again. We held a meeting in Peja, where we created working groups for the identification of cases: who they were, who is in enmity with whom. And we agreed with Professor Anton. He supported our idea to identify people ourselves, and to go without the perpetrator, but we only went to the damaged party, so only to the family that had to stretch the hand of reconciliation, to forgive blood. We were also very careful with symbolic acts and the [initial] start-off, the venue, how to find the most appropriate one, so we could have a proper start. And we went to the village of Lumbardh, which was also chosen for its figurative meaning lumi-bardh [white river], which has its own meaning. But incidentally the Ukaj family happened to be from the village of Lumbardh. And that is where we began with the first case of blood feud reconciliation.

That was a very heavy case. Then, the first case where the reconciliation hand was stretched was at the municipality of Peja, in the village of Raushiq, in a very big family, with a lot of influence, where a multiple murder happened, the Buçolli family. A case where *hoxha*<sup>14</sup> and elders had gone, and whoever could, plenty of them, [to mediate] and still had proven to be unsuccessful. Our visit... because that family is well known, and an influential family in the region of Dukagjini and [in terms] of patriotism surely. We made attempts to identify even this element, their [political] orientation, how trustful they were and to what extent we could express ourselves freely in this family.

And the first time we went there, we asked for the hand of reconciliation. They welcomed us in a very... in the best possible way. We then started the debate. During the week we were assigned with the identification, and we presented ourselves as a youth group, that we called pre-preparation for stretching the reconciliation hand. Then came Professor Anton with others: Zekeria Cana, Mujë Rugova, Muhamet Pirraku, Ramiz Kelmendi, Mark Krasniqi. The deceased lawyer Bajram Kelmendi joined us afterwards, and many many others who contributed. But when we started with the first phase, [which was] not open to public yet, we didn't have any harassment from the state institutions, from the police, but when we started to appear at the scene, at the surface, that is when they saw the danger that is threatening them. So they made attempts to halt and arrest us.

During this time, exactly while making efforts to identify friends affiliated to the Ukaj family, and the family in Raushiq too, they came after us. We were with Hava, with Ibrahim, Lulëzim, Myrvete, in other words, the nucleus of this Reconciliation Council, so the initiators, I think at the cemetery in Kakariq, as they call it, in the municipality of Peja, in a road with two exits but with walls on both sides, where they attempted to arrest us. The police surrounded us from both sides, but we luckily jumped off the wall onto the cemetery and we avoided for that to happen.

And from there we then continued further. The stretch of the first hand of reconciliation was done at the Buçolli family, it was an emotional moment indeed, also on behalf of the family. Because we did understand that it triggered emotions, and the recollection of all those undesired scenes for the family. But it was a special emotion for us as well. And that is when we saw the result of our action and humanity, and many other aspects of success. The second element that helped us in our path, was our rule from the first day, whereas the family that forgave the blood would then be our co-traveller. They will come with us to accompany us directly as an example for other families. And this has proven as great success indeed. The representatives of the Buçolli family, when they came along with us to other families, and revealed their emotions, their experiences, and what state of pressure they were in before the blood forgiveness.

---

<sup>14</sup> Local Muslim clergy, mullah, *muezzin*.

Simply, both the family of the killed one and the family of the killer were under pressure, they led an insecure life, one out of fear of revenge and the other for having it easy to stretch the hand and to raise the finger against its own brother.

However, we conducted an analysis, because every night when we were finished with the work in the field, we analyzed almost every case one by one. And in all the cases, the majority of them, the regime came out as a triggerer. In the said case, it was a property dispute, which by a fair decision of the relevant institutions of the time, would have been solved as a problem, and wouldn't have resulted in murder. But those decisions, one trial granted one of the party, the next round granted the other party, and as a result, it triggered the conflict which ended with a murder. And the final goal, the division of families with influence, meant to diminish the influence of those families, and jeopardize their authority in front of the masses, so it simply loses its authority. And we then conveyed this to the other families too, we continued with the reconciliation of blood feuds.

In a record time, within days, we achieved, the first time our balance showed 16 reconciled cases, I mean, it exceeded our projections, and this was only in the region of Dukagjini, it was all over the news, which helped us a lot at the time.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which newspapers were [operating] at the time?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes it was *Rilindja*,<sup>15</sup> it was RTP.<sup>16</sup> But foreign media started to become involved too. Through the Council for Human Rights Defense, then many delegations came over that joined us, who were impressed by this. And clerics joined us. *Hoxha* and priests provided a vast contribution, an unsparing assistance. So even churches and mosques were available to us, they opened the doors for us, and served as our homes. Both the *hoxha* and the priest, we took them with us to reconciliations of blood feuds. And that was the message to the world, that this is a common evil. It was a message of cohabitation, direct, of religious cohabitation, that we respect each other, both Catholics and Muslims. And when it comes to mutual interest, we are one. And this was an example and success projected on our behalf, to be sent as a message to the democratic world. We also had representatives of that time, the Belgian senators Willy Coppins, and many others who joined the action.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Did you have a bigger ceremony, that is known for that time?

---

<sup>15</sup> *Rilindja*- the first newspaper in Albanian in former Yugoslavia and published in Kosovo since 1943.

<sup>16</sup> RTP (Radio Television of Prishtina)-national TV broadcast during the time Kosovo was a province of the Yugoslav Federation.

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, initially the first phase was carried out in *oda*, an individual forgiveness. With the passing of time, we achieved to have a reconciliation within a week, without professor Anton's presence. And during the week we achieved to prepare seven-ten, or twelve cases of reconciliations and so to go ensured. Because we didn't want to pester professor Anton, however in cases that were difficult, professor Anton never hesitated to accompany us. Even in late hours, professor Anton was present together with other professors who supported us. And we became one: intellectuals of all categories, and students became one with the people. And then we have seen it as necessary and in our interest to move to group reconciliations, where there was a ceremony with participation of hundreds, thousands citizens, where dozen of blood feuds, disputes, wounds etcetera were reconciled.

And something that was special in the first days, in ten days, or in the first 15 days, where we achieved during this time to score over 30, an old man who was doing work at the council of the elders, in Lugu i Baranit, in the *oda*, asks us, says, "May I, may I have a question?" Because he asked us about results, and we told him. He said, "I will tell you, what it is that makes your action successful?" And we started from the humane aspect, this and that, the situation. He said, "No, I am telling you, there was a case where we went to a family to stay for 41 days, as the custom was. On the 42<sup>nd</sup> day it was a custom to forgive the blood. We ate, we drank with that family, without going out at all, without interrupting the conversations. When we went on the 42<sup>nd</sup> day, it was the final phase to forgive, to stretch the hand of reconciliation, to forgive the blood. I had to swear that we have no interest," but, as he stated, "we have come *fi sabilillah*,<sup>17</sup> for God's sake, only out of human compassion, but in that moment we wanted it, and I pledged once, twice, and by the third time I remember that the murderer gave us two liras, or three liras, he put it in our pockets. My hand froze and my mouth went shut. I couldn't pledge and there was no forgiveness of blood." He said, "I am telling you as a father, do continue because you will be successful as long as you stay with empty pockets. Only with empty pockets you shall continue ahead. Whereas us, we had our pockets full, hence we couldn't succeed, because we did it out of personal interest, for benefits. You are doing it for the national interests, for the state interests, the liberation of the country."

And so we continued like that. We had cases of various kinds. We had cases when two blood feuds, three or more, were forgiven. A very sensitive case is the one of the Demaj family, in the municipality of Klina, of professor Marian Dema, who stretched the hand of reconciliation and forgave the blood of his murdered brothers. Then we had cases when... and one case, which I reckon remained in my personal memory, again in the village of Lugu i Baranit, at the Shalaj family. As soon as we knocked and arrived there, the doors were open to us. In one way or another, they were waiting for us to turn up one day.

---

<sup>17</sup>Arab. *fi sabilillah* means for the sake of Allah.

And the victim's mother, who lost her son at a very young age, 17-18 years old, turned up, and she addressed us with these words, "Come close, mother's pigeons, because mother has waited for you a long time." And they took us to an *oda*, where we started the conversation. In the middle of conversation she stood up and brought us, "Before I stretch the hand of reconciliation, I am handing you over the shirt, so the vest, that my son was wearing at the moment he was killed, with the eagle." It was with holes. It was a very heavy moment. The next thing, she invited all the other children, her sons, and said, "I would also give my living sons for Kosovo." And finally, she stretched the hand of reconciliation to us. And this was a very touching moment for us indeed, and it will be unforgettable. And really, the sons of that mother were fortunately our co-warriors during the war. And those boys have merits for the first spring of the organization of the Kosovo Liberation Army.

Afterwards we had cases when we were given gun bullets saved by the family for the culprit. And they handed over the bullets, the chargers that they had saved, "Firstly, we are giving you this." Then they stretched the hand of reconciliation. And this atmosphere reflected afterwards on the whole of Kosovo. Mass mobilization was more... it spread in the whole Albanian land, in all those enslaved [places], so even in Montenegro, in Macedonia, Presheva, Bujanovc and Medvegja, where we had our Reconciliation Councils, where we started the organization and our action as well.

I even remember that after some time, the police were after us and during the conversation, our nucleus now was mainly... already now... we caught their eye and we were being followed. Hava was wanted, and Myrvete, and I, Ibrahim, Lulëzim, and few other friends. But overall they were organized in the whole Kosovo region. The nucleuses were initially organized by former political prisoners. And they handled work with much commitment and discipline. And almost in every village, in every neighborhood, we had an organized nucleus and we operated as one coordination body at a national level.

Then, when in Kosovo we were in jeopardy, a conversation we had while we conducted the usual analysis, with Anton Çetta and many activists of the time, the issue of our jeopardy was raised together with the probability of being arrested. And without hesitation we said, "Even if we get arrested, it will be useful in a way." Professor Anton said, "But will it be useful? You will be subjected to tortures, all of them." We said, "But we have already experienced that, Professor Anton, those tortures." And Zekeria interjected, "Anton, I have obtained documentation," he had obtained my file, wherever he may have found it, and he tells of the damages I had suffered, such as bleeding from ear, nose, everywhere, he says this, that, "in this state..." "Professor," I said, "it is worth it, because our action will be way more successful, because it will positively affect the revolt. It will incite the revolt of Kosovo citizens, of Albanians. And they will see that indeed, it will be proven that UDB is interested that we are in enmity with each other." And both of them froze, said, "So this can happen too? It means that you are ready to make this sacrifice too?" Although, to



be honest, we didn't do it intentionally, but we were simply convinced that if one of us gets arrested, that would positively influence the mass mobilization of our Movement. And we were ready for any kind of sacrifice.

But we then moved to, we took the decision that the Peja group gets represented by Rexhep Kelmendi, Xhemajl Fetahi, and many others, and we then moved to other regions, we took actions, some of us in the region of Rahovec, Prizren, Suhareka, some of us in the region of Drenica, and we mobilized the masses.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How did you identify people?

**Adem Grabovci:** Through the Reconciliation Councils that were established, everyone in their own neighborhood. Almost everywhere you had political prisoners that got introduced to each other and trusted one another. Then, the Student Movement was also part of us. And they provided us with unsparing support. And afterwards, everyone was assigned a task and went on engaging each other and hence everyone was engaged.

And we continued like this our activity until the greatest forgiveness was achieved, we had gatherings in almost every region. One of the greatest gathering, one of the greatest was in Bubavec. The *hoxha* who was our greatest supporter, Kokrruk,<sup>18</sup> then many other religious clerics, in Novosella of Gjakova, certainly, in a church in the municipality of Klina, in Zllakuqan. Also he has great merits for the massive gathering that was held. But also other regions, in Pristina, in all regions.

The final [gathering] was achieved at the gathering in Verrat e Llukës, which is a historic place, not chosen by accident, but simply as a place where prior to the war, Haxhi Zeka<sup>19</sup> and so forth, at the time of *Besëlidhja*, the *besa-besë*<sup>20</sup> was taken there, and all blood feuds [that happened] before the war were forgiven. And we wanted to send a message. The symbol spoke for itself. And it is estimated that over eight hundred people gathered at Verrat e Llukës.

---

<sup>18</sup> Myderriz Idriz Kokrruki, was a *hoxhë* in many Kosovo villages and in the arab world. He was known for his nationalist views. He was an active member of the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Movement and in the Kosovo Liberation Army. Later on he migrated to United States, he died in 2008, in Chicago, where he was serving as imam.

<sup>19</sup> Haxhi Zeka (1832-1902) was an Albanian nationalist leader and member of the League of Peja, an alliance which in 1899 tried to negotiate autonomy for Albanians within the Ottoman Empire. In this process, a truce was declared among people involved in feuds in order to unite against the Ottomans.

<sup>20</sup> In Albanian customary law, *besa* is the word of honor, faith, trust, protection, truce, etc. It is a key instrument for regulating individual and collective behavior at times of conflict, and is connected to the sacredness of hospitality, or the unconditioned extension of protection to guests.



**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Can you give us details from the ceremony, tell us how it was?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, we had initially gone to Verrat, we had the Reconciliation Council in the municipality of Deçan, organized, led by a well known activist, former political prisoner, a person of high merits, Jashar Salihi. And together with Jashar and the rest of activists in the municipality of Deçan, we identified the place. And we had a look at the valley there, with rubbish and plenty of gravel. And we started an action to clean up and prepare the terrain. Also, we assigned roles. A great contribution was given by photographer Sali Cacaj, in Peja, who followed us everywhere, from the very first days. And he had also influence with his photographs published in the media, which had a positive influence in the mass mobilization of this Movement. He was very active even at Verrat e Llukës, together with Jashar and others, so that the gathering turned out as majestic as as possible.

We were afraid, normally, of people's gathering. It is normal, sincerely, because we didn't anticipate that it would be so massive. We were certain that there would be high attendance, because a large number was being prepared, dozens of blood feuds, disputes, to be reconciled. But we hadn't foreseen such a large crowd. What is also very important to mention, during the preparation of the terrain, time after time, as the nucleus, as the Initiation Council used to call us, we were invited to every occasion. Many cases were conditioned to our participation during reconciliation, "We request that they come..." sometimes by names too, but usually, "We request that the Initiation Council comes." And we didn't hesitate, we eagerly went.

### Part Six

**Adem Grabovci:** We continuously took part, we mobilized, people voluntarily responded with excavators and other equipment, but also with physical [labor], for the leveling and adjusting of the terrain. Once, when we went, it was everyone from the original nucleus, and almost all of us were former prisoners. And by fate, by coincidence, we had been convicted by the presidents of the same prosecution body or we had the same prosecutor, Ukë Muqa, who was from the same village. And there he comes, I am not certain whether it was Salih or someone else, he tells us, "Ukë Muqa is asking to meet you, if you allow it." And we responded, we said, "Personally we didn't have anything with Ukë Muqa." And then, we made it clear and we make it clear even today: our commitment is for the good of the country's liberation. Therefore if he was able to understand his mistakes and wants to rank on our side, on the side of the people, he can freely come and give his contribution. And so he came, naturally feeling guilty, which was normal. And we accepted and talked to him, but we continued our work.

At the same time we met a few days in a row, we talked and we shared our responsibilities, each one role. For us, the most adequate person for leading the gathering was Jashar Salihi. And Jashar Salihi, together with Hava, were the leaders. The rest of us, we dealt with our organizational work, it was a huge crowd, there were a lot of policemen, mobilized, they made maximal attempts to hinder the attendance, which was natural. But it was impossible to prevent that, because people were flowing from all corners and found alternate paths. And they arrived there. And there, the majestic happened, when the hand of reconciliation was stretched, when people emerged directly from the crowd even voluntarily, those we weren't able to visit, to ask for the hand of reconciliation, and they came voluntarily to stretch the hand of reconciliation. And they indeed gave power to that gathering, hence empowering our Movement for Reconciliation.

After that gathering, there were waves of arrests. Myrvete Dreshaj and I were forced, we were assigned with the task to go to the Macedonian part. There was a gathering, apart from rallies already being held in Tetova, Kërçova, and various locations, in the municipality of Gostivar, we were invited by Reconciliation Councils. And we wanted to slightly avoid the territory of Kosovo because we were a target by then. And we went to Çegran in Gostivar, whereas a majestic gathering was held, and a large number of reconciliations took place. And at the last moment, they attempted to arrest us. However, we spotted them thanks to our friends who operated within the Reconciliation Councils. And at the last moment, they pulled us out and disguised us. And so we escaped this arrest. Also the Reconciliation Councils operated in many western states, all the way to America, where they gave a great contribution.

While organizing the reconciliation rallies, after a while, we were threatened with arrests, to stop us. But what is very important to stress [here] is that there was no discontinuation of our activity, and while some started to withdraw, professor Anton and professor Zekeria never left us. At the gathering in Verrat e Llukës, with professor Zekeria, considering we were attacked by an armored vehicle, the police, a large number, and they attempted to break the crowd with the tank, I remember when we came out together with a few boys, it was Xhemajl Fetahu, and we bumped into a tank. But professor Zekeria Cana joined us and never left. And the whole front part of the tank, the armored vehicle, stopped on our bodies. And we were determined not to withdraw without them driving over our bodies. And professor Zekeria reacted in the harshest possible manner and very rightfully so. We then appealed to the masses to calm down, hence we have avoided a catastrophe that could have turned into and end up in multiple deaths.

Professor Anton and professor Zekeria have the greatest merits for the mass mobilization of the Movement for Blood Feuds Reconciliation. They were people who simply, if I can say so, were blended with us until the end. They were ready to share every sacrifice with us. In the majority of cases, professor Anton addressed us with words too, because we had another rule: we didn't allow any of us to undertake

the responsibility that, “We have done it!” And at a certain point when professor Anton listened to us during the announcements in front of the media, that it is the youth and we weren’t identified by name, he asks us, says, “Why,” he said, “don’t...” we said, “Professor, this is a student movement, a youth movement. And we don’t want to incite anybody’s feelings, and make anybody feel less worthy than the other. All of us are worthy. Our purpose is only success. Therefore if we get identified now and brag about [the fact] that we are the ones who started this initiative, then it will cause discontent, and it will be very difficult to have all that support and climate we already have.”

And professor Anton spoke to us about the role of the individual. We said, “We have you.” He said, “I am aged. This place needs new faces, new personalities.” We said, “They will emerge in time professor.” Professor Anton not only once, but he is one of the few that always, together with Zekeria, Anton, there are few other too, but mostly professor Anton, in every meeting, in every speech of his, emphasized and explicitly stated that, “I feel very happy for being among the youth, that the initiative is initiated by the young students of Peja, by the political prisoners,” he correctly pointed out, “and we are all supporters.” And this then had an effect, calmed down our souls, but also gave us strength, not only to us, but to the entire student body and citizens of Kosovo.

With these expressions, with this sincerity by professor Anton, we achieved to turn our Movement into a genuine nationwide people’s movement. But we had numerous evidence even from the gathering in Rugova, in Peja, where we held a massive gathering, a massive reconciliation of blood feuds, where our roads were blocked by the police from all sides, and professor Zekeria Cana collected us with his vehicle, he drove himself and we left together. And he didn’t pay attention to the police, nor any danger, and we went together to the venue of the event, where the gathering was being held.

But we have various memories of professor Anton. As per usual, he knew folklore quite well. He had extraordinary anecdotes. But we were slightly reserved, we in the Peja group. He was very open to the Reconciliation Council of Gjakova. And on one occasion, friends from Gjakova told... we organized an evening to hang out, after the gathering held in Smolica I think, somewhere in the vicinity of Gjakova, which was again, quite a massive gathering. And Shefqet Vokshi, Miradije Muriqi, Sylejman Loka, many others there, Ilir Bytyçi, and many other activists said, “Come over tonight and you will see how well we get along with professor Anton. Because you only know one aspect of professor Anton.” So that evening when we got there, and professor Anton didn’t notice us, he felt very free and started with jokes, and at some point, you know, we weren’t used to hear professor Anton talk like that, when we came out and we

were laughing, he said, “*Obobo*,<sup>21</sup> so you are here?” And indeed over there it was a much intimate atmosphere with professor Anton.

In the majority of cases [while] on the road towards more remote villages together with the professor, when there was a case, we were accompanied by professor Anton and visited the same family a few times. There are families which we visited up to 72 times to ask for the hand of reconciliation, until they were persuaded and stretched the hand of reconciliation. But professor Anton did not feel tired, ever. Many times while on the road, in order to save time, we, usually it was the custom that we request the food from the family that asked for reconciliation. And then we took the food in the car and we continued further. And eventually even professor Anton completely agreed with our rules, he accepted them. And he used to say, “I am accepting [them] with great pleasure because I feel young just like you.” Therefore, besides being a professor, and a very good educator, he was a friend, a man who knew how to accommodate all age groups.

Besides his authority, professor Anton had an influence on Zekerija Cana and many others, on the representatives and the international media who were there in large numbers to follow our activities. Because by now this had become a very interesting Movement, a massive one. And it was of interest to everyone to find out what was really happening. But now we had the greatest scholar in the country, professor Anton. We also had a historian with us, professor Zekerija Cana. We had Muhamet Pirraku, Mujë Rugova, Agim Vinca, many other professors who truly helped us with important information that was made public to the world. And thus, I know that the Reconciliation Movement reflected upon many segments of the population.

Also what is quite important is that with the passing of time, we then started, when the Reconciliation Movement started to have a mass mobilization already, because initially it was very necessary to have the most credible people, such as Xhemajl, Skender Çeku, many others, we then started to think about the new organization. Because during the time of the Movement for Reconciliation of Blood Feuds, we faced obstacles during the day, but in the evening hours we moved freely. Even though for some time a curfew was announced, we still moved, and [we] didn’t come across the police anywhere. And we used to say that the night is ours, while the police had the day. And we preferred to move from one place to another even at nighttime. But there comes a need to upgrade to a higher level of organization even in the discussions with the Movement, as at the end of the day the Albanian People’s Movement stood behind us and all of us were part of the People’s Movement.

---

<sup>21</sup> Alb. expression of amazement/impression or surprise similar to wow in English.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which were the years of reconciliation afterwards?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, the year of reconciliation, we declared it so, it was our decision, “The year ‘90 will be the year of reconciliation.” And by the end of the ‘90s, we foresaw other actions. We had to carry on with mass mobilization and additional actions to maintain and unify it, to connect our people, to create new bridges of friendship, cooperation, introduction. We found another form of solidarity, because we know that in the ‘90s the institutions were all shut down. And we applied a method, a new action as it was called, “One family helps another family.” The purpose was to create bridges of cooperation, bridges of acquaintance, new friendships, that would serve us, and did serve us much later. Let’s say a family from Peja was obliged to help a family from Shala of Bajgora, somewhere in the vicinity of Mitrovica. Or another family from Mitrovica helps a family in Peja. And like this, all the municipalities of Peja and the settlements were connected to one another. And bridges of cooperation were created, and we achieved to successfully awaken and mobilize the masses, that unity.

Then, the second action, which was very well thought out: the identification of a few persons who were ready for further actions, for the last action. Because it was obvious that there is no other alternative without an armed battle. And we considered the organization of watchmen in the villages. We thought back then to have a recruiting mechanism, conditionally said, that will then become units, or armed groups. And one of the guys directly assigned with this task, was the national martyr Xhemajl Fetahi, [who] had the support of Skender Çeku.

There were Isa Balaj and few other guys from the municipality of Peja. And they were assigned the task of recruiting and establishing groups for a joint coordination. We held few meetings in... usually we had a village which was very safe, Radac of Peja. We usually used the *mejtep*,<sup>22</sup> as the place is called that is used by everyone, so the *hoxha* provided us with that opportunity. But also the *oda* belonging to the Bajraktari family, the Gjuraj, and some other families, the Elezaj, who hosted us and we held a few meetings there, where we also had some special talks with more specific groups, where we talked about the manner of organizing the watchmen, whose initial task was to identify movements within the villages.

But with the passing of time, normally this was the greatest danger then, as viewed by Serbia. It had to be operated under great secrecy. And after a while, the majority of these young men posed a threat, like Xhemajl Fetahi, and then the persecution against us started from that point on. Xhemajl was forced to go

---

<sup>22</sup> *Mejtep*, *Maktab* (Arabic transliterations include **makteb**, **mekteb**, **mektepe**, **meqteb**, **maqtab**), also called a *Kuttab* or school, is an elementary schools. Though it was primarily used for teaching children how to read, write, grammar and Islamic studies such as Qira'at (Quranic recitation), other practical and theoretical subjects were also often taught.

into exile. Then Hava had to escape too. It was the end of the '90s, the beginning of '91, where a vast number of us were forced to escape. I was also forced to exile in the west. The purpose was that even over there... we held a few meetings initially, with professor Anton, Zekeria, Murat Bejta, Mujë Rugova, in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France. But some of us were unable to return to Kosovo, hence we were forced to seek asylum there. I sought asylum in Switzerland, and others.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** How long did you stay in Switzerland?

**Adem Grabovci:** I stayed in Switzerland for seven years, or eight, if you count them as calendar years. But my stay in Switzerland was sporadic, because there were continuous movements en route Switzerland-Kosovo. But different from earlier, when I visited there, I came with different documents, foreign documents. Simply, I visited secretly. I was accomplishing duties that were assigned to me by the organization, by the People's Movement in Switzerland. And I returned back to the west, where we had the influenced to give a contribution internally, whenever needed, for the organizing of ranks in the Movement, and also preparing for what was ahead of us.

Because there were also special sectors that operated as part of the Movement. The movement made continuous attempts and anticipated that one day should inevitably... the last means will be an armed struggle. Therefore, this was thought through constantly in this direction. The ammunition was continuously brought to Kosovo. One of the people who performed this task with great commitment was Skender Çeku.

The Movement for Blood Feud Reconciliation started in extraordinary circumstances, with the protests. In order to keep the mobilization spirit alive, we found a tool, we thought it, as fair, as humane as possible, also patriotic. If we view it from the human standpoint, there is nothing more humane, more patriotic, than saving people's lives. So, reconciling blood feuds, stopping the fratricide. Patriotic, there is nothing more patriotic, from the patriotic point of view, than saving people's lives and mobilizing them, preparing them for the challenges ahead, for the armed struggle. This was our motto: to stretch the hand of reconciliation, the final goal not being to combat this phenomena, but our final goal being the preparation for an armed struggle.

Secondly, the primary motto, we took a decision that the year 1990, respectively the end of '89, November-December when we started, and the end of 1990, be the year of blood feuds reconciliation. This Council would not operate once this mandate is over. It started, fortunately in my *oda* in Peja, in the suburbs. Participants, or initiators were Ibrahim Dreshaj, Have Shala, Lulëzim Etemaj, Myrvete Dreshaj. Guests at my place were also Flamur Gashi, Serbeze Vokshi. It was Bajram Kurti who provided us with

extraordinary help, his vehicles, cars, and his brother's, were at our disposal. Even his brother, a policeman, helped us much in every aspect. Then Lulja, my niece, was a participant, a very devoted activist, who mainly worked with Lulëzim, Myrvete, Ibrahim, and others.

But it was my brother as well, deceased now, who gave us an enormous support also morally. Because he was experienced in the tradition of the *oda*, he knew it relatively well. And for a moment he addressed us, says, "Walk bravely, because with your goal, you will be successful." And at a certain point he said, "You also need funds, money. For the time being I don't have much, but I have the family fund." At the time it was one thousand and five hundred Deutch Marks that he made available to us. And those were almost the only ones, besides the aid also by the compatriots from Sweden, such as Nasim Haradinaj who sent an amount to us. And other expenses were mainly on voluntary basis. And this year was the year of reconciliation. The end of 1990 was the end of this action. The decision came because, "We will not allow the stretching of the hand of reconciliation in places where there will be a homicide. Because if we continue as a mechanism, we will then turn into destroyers of fraternity. So, we ended it. Since people will think that there is now a mechanism, a Reconciliation Council, and we can kill each other, and they will reconcile us. No!"

But we found other forms, as I said, such as "One family helps another family." Then it was Reshat Nurboja, who had an idea that we all supported, and Jahja Lluka. And solidarity with the displaced persons that emerged later, at a national level there were volunteers who donated land for those who wanted to return, either from Turkey or other states. And that was a solidarity that had a positive impact. During this period, we also had the most advanced organization at the military level, which was called, "Village watchmen," but unfortunately this idea was then hijacked from others after the nucleus the competent people in it, were jeopardised, and hence it was distorted.

Also, during the action for reconciliation of blood feuds we had a very important action, the mobilization to declare Kosovo's Independence, so on July 2, in coordination with President Rugova<sup>23</sup> at the time, and in coordination with deputies of the Kosovo Parliament back then, we were coordinating with Muhamet Bici, I remember when we went to talk with Et'hem Çeku, with Adem Mikullovc, with few deputies and then we talked to Ibrahim Rugova. We requested a number of signatures, which was sort of a referendum. And we used our organization mechanisms spread everywhere in the territory, not only at the municipal level, not only in rural areas, but also in the neighborhoods. And in record time we collected over eight hundred thousand signatures to be delivered to the deputies in the Parliament. That was a referendum,

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006) - a writer and journalist, founder and leader of the Democratic League of Kosovo, and President of Kosovo during the war and after until his death.



an opportunity created for the deputies, to speak on behalf of the people's will, because everyone was in favor of the declaration of independence. And this really happened.

We elaborated our idea in front of our dear president Ibrahim Rugova, and this happened in his house. Because initially we met with Ibrahim Rugova almost every two or three days a week, during the reconciliation of blood feuds. And the Reconciliation Councils influenced the establishment and the mass mobilization of the Kosovo Democratic League (LDK),<sup>24</sup> because all these Councils that we had for the reconciliation of blood feuds in municipalities, in villages, in neighborhoods, turned into an organized structure of the Kosovo Democratic League (LDK). And everyone without exception gave his contribution and strengthened it. Because the Democratic League at the time, we were a common front. And we used it in a marvelous way, I believe. And this was the reason why we met regularly with president Rugova.

Then there were few activists who were given concrete tasks. They had been elected mayors in the valley of Dukagjini, but also at the state level, like Shaban Mani who was a distinguished activist in the reconciliation of blood feuds, and a man active in the Illegality too. It was Ramë Berisha who operated in Istog, a distinguished activist, very brave, also at the time of the Illegality, because I had direct contact with him, but he didn't spare himself in the reconciliation of blood feuds either. There was Nezir Gashi, Mustafë Ademi the doctor, Riza Krasniqi, and many, many, many others who truly had an impact. And our meetings with the president of the Democratic League at the time, Ibrahim Rugova, initially we met in the headquarter of the Democratic League. But with the passing of time, we were suggested to meet in special places, whereas in few cases we met at his place too, in his apartment that used to be in Lakrishte.

The most important meeting for me was when we went with an idea for the declaration of independence. We elaborated it, it was Hava Shala, Et'hem Çeku, Ibrahim, if I am not mistaken Myrvete was there too, five of us, and we elaborated it as an idea, we thought it through. We thought that deputies of that time, being elected by the people conditionally, referring to the signatures, in a sort of referendum, declare the independence. We were aware that the masses, the police, the regime wouldn't normally be passive. The police would have intervened, but we were ready. Hence, the People's Movement being the illegal organization of the time, would come to help, and the people, and mostly students, to protect the deputies. And we had foreseen that the army will come to help the police afterwards. And at some point

---

<sup>24</sup> LDK (*Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës*) - Democratic League of Kosovo. First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals. The LDK quickly became a party-state, gathering all Albanians, and remained the only party until 1999.

mister Rugova asked us, he said, “What will happen then?” “But there will be killings of course, there will be arrests. Who knows what fate will bring, but this is the price of freedom.” And for a moment he froze and started to think.

However, we know the flow of things. With this I want to say that the Movement for Reconciliation of Blood Feuds wasn’t simply a Movement for reconciliation, but it was a Movement, a general mobilization, that had a generic and multi-folded effect. Once the reconciliation action was over, we were forced to go into exile. After going into exile, I concluded and clearly determined, “I will not stay in the western world.” Because, even while in prison, I was offered to escape by the police itself, to become a fugitive, but I saw staying in Kosovo as necessary and immediate. But after leaving, I always had the dream to return to Kosovo, just like everyone else.

It wasn’t my intention to get organized, to lead an organized life abroad, but at a certain point, considering those circumstances, the Movement abroad in general, particularly in Switzerland, it was very scattered. It was the beginning of the birth of pluralism, the establishment of the Democratic League and other parties, whereas the voice of the Movement was under attack as an extreme, ideological force, and other, which was bizarre if we refer to accusations of nationalism, irredentism, etcetera, anti-communism, that is where the Movement took off, what used to be [labeled] as nationalist, irredentist, etc., anti-communist, was now called Marxist-Leninist, and so forth.

However, it was the only an organization, powerful, oriented towards a goal, that anticipated the combination and use of all means to reach the goal. In the Movement’s program, besides the political factor which was never disputed, a great importance was given to a special military unit. And it was continuously stated and envisaged that without the combination of these segments we cannot achieve freedom, as time really told.

After staying in Switzerland for some time, one of my prison mates, Bardhyl Mahmuti, came to visit, paid me a visit on behalf of the Movement, the diaspora branch, and requested that I become active in the Movement again. The reasons were sufficient, he also mentioned talks with Afrim Zhitia, Fadil Vata, and so forth. And I agreed to get involved. In the upcoming days, in a meeting in ‘91, I was elected chair of the People’s Movement branch in Switzerland and member of the chairmanship of the Movement in the diaspora. And so I started my activity and I reckon that, thanks to the understanding of the chairmanship of the time, with Ali Ahmeti as a vice-chair, Agush Buja as a secretary, Bardhyl Mahmuti, and many others. Then it was Jashar Salihi, with whom we successfully managed to resume activities of the People’s Movement, starting from Switzerland, something that reflected across the diaspora.

Another crucial fact was that both Jashar and I were also names that contributed to the Reconciliation Movement. Identified as originators and leaders of the Reconciliation Movement, we had authority and support from a wider audience and they had faith in us. And we started with the mass mobilization of the Movement. As time passes by, I was assigned with the task of establishing a fund for the care of prisoners' families, which was simply a camouflage for the war fund. But later, I was assigned with the task, by the Movement again, the section of, there were two important sections: the political section, for the maintenance of the communication inside the country, with Kosovo, and the special section, as we used to call it at the time, or the military one. And the scope of the section I was in, the operators, it apparently obliged me, it required that I often come illegally to Kosovo.

Even during that time I had meetings with president Rugova and many other personalities, whom I met during the reconciliation of blood feuds. And the tasks that were assigned to me without hesitation by the organization, I accepted them without hesitation, despite dangers, because entering illegally in those circumstances while the Serbian regime was still [ruling] Kosovo, was, is a full responsibility and understandably dangerous. But I carried them with me and I past them successfully. Many times, before the war started, initially, I mean, I exiled to Switzerland sometimes by the end of 1990, beginning of '91. Initially I escaped on my own, later I was joined by my spouse. And I returned to Kosovo for the first time illegally for an assignment, with documents that were brought to me by Skender Çeku. He used to run a bus line in Switzerland, Zurich-Pristina, in cooperation with my uncle's son, Xhafer. And they transported both literature from abroad which was dispatched from Zurich, Switzerland, as well as ammunition. And they were arrested a few times, both Xhafer, Gëzim Avdimetaj, and went through inhumane tortures. Still, they overcame those.

And my first time of illegal travelling was with Skender Çeku, and we passed through without any problem. We arrived, I finished those tasks that I was assigned to do. So I collected the contacts of people who were part of the reconciliation and some others more special ones who were ready to contribute to the People's Movement of Kosovo. We normally discussed the next steps, and I returned. The second time I came through Albania, it was the end of '91 I think again, whereas from Albania... in Albania I met with Sami Kurteshi, the former Ombudsperson, a prison mate, and he had prepared his brother's passport for me. With his passport we entered Macedonia. But what was interesting is that, when we arrived at the border of Dibra, because Sami was familiar with that region, there was Kastriot Rexha, a guy from Dibra, a former prisoner, and he was waiting for us.

When we arrived, the border was being expanded, and there were workers around. Sami said, "We are going to the customs, with a passport directly to the police." I said, "Fine Sami, you go, but I am heading that way, I am becoming an engineer," as there were workers around. So now I started to play the role of a

worker, as if I am monitoring the works, and slowly following the reaction of the police and I noticed that they are not noticing me. But when Sami went among them, fearing what is going to happen to me, he was stopped at the police station and they held him for a long time, verifying him, discussing. But it was my opportunity now, and I went and passed on foot through the border carefree. And once we passed through, I started to tease Sami, but he also teased me of course, “With whom am I? You are theirs, right?” (laughs) “Yes,” I said, “it is our state.”

And together with Sami we continued to the family of Kastriot Haxhi-Rexha. From there we went to Kumanova, we passed to Presheva, Bujanovc, I think. We took the bus to Pristina. And we got into a bus, during that journey, the same journey, I was sitting next to a policeman. Sami sat on the other side, pretending to read the paper. I borrowed one [newspaper] from the policeman too, and started a conversation with him, a Serb. And we continued the road. But the police came in while on the road, the only one who didn't get searched was me, because I was with the policeman.

Whereas when I entered [Kosovo] for the third time, I was with Ramadan Avdiu, he took me with him. I came from Switzerland with a friend from Switzerland, Shadan Avdiu, on his car, via Tetova. In Tetova Ramadan was waiting for us, he had fixed the documents, we passed the border with foreign documents. And at the checkpoint there was no way out, the police stopped us and of course I handed them the passport, and we gave in to fate. But there was a problem with Ramadan as they pulled him out of the car, they searched him, all those check-ups they used to do, still even this time around I escaped without any problem, and we arrived in Kosovo. Then I continued to Peja and other centres as required.

And later on we continued with our life, and activities in Switzerland. We came back from this visit that was called, an inspection of the situation on the ground, together with Ramadan and others, we concluded that it is necessary to have a joint meeting between the Movement in the country and the Movement out of the country. And as our meeting point we set Kërçova, the village of Kollare, where a meeting was held, with representatives of the Movement out of the country, in the *oda*, in the house of a friend from Kërçova, I forgot his name. That is where met, the representatives came, or the delegates, if we can call them so, of the Movement in Kosovo and in other countries, the regions under the rule of Yugoslavia at the time, and we from the countries abroad. And that is where we elected a joint body, and a long and comprehensive debate was held. And it was sort of the first meeting where we took a decision for elections and the organization of the Movement all across, Kosovo, and in the diaspora.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which year?

**Adem Grabovci:** The years '92-'93, if I remember well, if I'm not mistaken. We can verify those dates.

However, that is where the decision to make a shift to a military organization was taken. I can freely say that that is where the idea for the organization of the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) originated, which also gives it a structural character. And after this, we held a meeting in Switzerland where the first actions of the armed struggle started to take place. And it is where the first [press] release was issued, where a decision was taken that all armed groups get organized single-handedly, and that it should be the Kosovo Liberation Army.

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Why do you say armed groups?

**Adem Grabovci:** Yes, there were units that operated as part of the Movement, but in the end the military sectors was seen as necessary, which operated as part of the Movement, which was in the country. We, as the political section, our role was to organize, to maintain contacts and connection with the political structures. While the special section, the military section, was led by Azem Sylja, Xhavit Haliti, Ali Ahmeti. In the political section were Emrush Xhemajli, Gafurr Elshani, the three of us. And our duty was, we were to contact young men who asked to get organized, militaries, they belonged to the military section, they were skilled in that area, we directed them to this section. Whereas the political ones, they were directed to us. You know, some cooperation, we were a single body that operated as part of the Kosovo People's Movement.

Later on we established, we saw it as necessary to establish a fund, what I mean is that an army without finances, without ammunition, cannot... and we saw it necessary to establish this fund in Vinterthur, Switzerland. We assigned Jashar Salihi, Agush Buja, and myself, three of us, to establish this fund. And we then started with its mass mobilization in the whole diaspora. And this is how it all started, the fundraising, the ensuring of ammunition, and all necessary things for the units that were operating in the country.

Up to a certain moment, once the Liberation Army started to operate, up till those moments, I moved illegally in a sporadic way. In '97-98 I returned to Kosovo for longer. But after the battle in Prekaz,<sup>25</sup> I returned definitively to join the Kosovo Liberation Army. I was a member of the General Headquarters. I was also elected, as a chief or chief executive of G1, the first directorate, it was one of the major

---

<sup>25</sup> In March 1998, in Prekaz, Serbian troops surrounded the compound of the Jashari family, whose men were among the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and killed all of them, including the women and the children. This event energized the Albanian resistance and marked the beginning of the war.

directorates that took care of organization, structuring of the Kosovo Liberation Army, until the Rambouillet agreement.<sup>26</sup>

At the Rambouillet agreement, a decision was taken, an agreement was signed. It preceded, it is a known fact, the NATO intervention, and the ending, or the liberation of our country. One of the decisions was to establish the Government of Kosovo, known as the Provisional Government. I was elected Minister of Finances in the Government of Kosovo, and then we proceeded for some months, it functioned as a government. Followed by the dissolution of the Provisional Government...

**Erëmirë Krasniqi:** Which years?

**Adem Grabovci:** The arrival of UNMIK [United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo] in 2000, '99-2000, roughly in that period, yes in '99, after '99, the arrival of UNMIK and the establishment of the joint structures, local and international. Back then I was appointed by the Democratic Party of Kosovo as a co-manager of the Department of Trade and Industry, or sort of Minister of Trade and Industry. But back then it was referred to as departments, the [manner] of organization at the time of UNMIK.

After the expiration of their mandate we formed the Democratic Party, so in '99. I am one of, I was lucky to be, and as you noticed, let's say I have contributed to the establishment of Kosovo Liberation Army, the constitution and organization of its fund, then I was one of... I also contributed to the formation of the Democratic Party of Kosovo, where I was initially elected as a secretary of finances, which had an organized structure, well-organized, with all the sections it should have. Thanks to the associates who accompanied me during the whole time to my fortune, I think I achieved to be successful to a certain extent. And now as a deputy, the chair of the [parliamentary] group for two terms in a row, I believe we will have a successful ending.

---

<sup>26</sup> The Rambouillet Agreement was a proposed peace agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and a delegation representing the Albanian majority population of Kosovo. It was drafted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and named for Chateau Rambouillet, where it was initially proposed. The significance of the agreement lies in the fact that Yugoslavia refused to accept it, which NATO used as justification to start the Kosovo War.