

Hana Bajrami (Speaker)
Lura Limani (Interviewer)
Donjetë Berisha (Camera)

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Lura Limani: Okay, start...

Hana Bajrami: Let's go...

Lura Limani: *Action* [In English].

Hana Bajrami: *Action.* I am Hana Bajrami. I am 30 years old, soon to be 31, almost. I was born in Pristina. I have a twin brother, I'm only ten minutes older, that makes a big difference. I've lived in Pristina for 31 years, I've been going around Pristina. For the moment I work at the President's Office. Earlier I've worked in differed jobs, from projects of the European Commission to [projects] with civil society. This is it, more or less.

Lura Limani: Do you remember the summer of 2007?

Hana Bajrami: The summer of?

Lura Limani: 2007.

Hana Bajrami: 2007, or 2006? 2007. The su... I remember it kind of because I was a student. So I was in the second year, studying political science and just like summer is when you're done with exams on time and you just look... And yes, I was part of the Summer University of Pristina. So yes, I remember. There were a lot of participants from... I know there was this guys from Brazil, so yes, I remember it.

Lura Limani: Do you remember the first time when you heard, when you heard that Kosovo will declare independence? Or where were you?

Hana Bajrami: Yes. It so happened that I found out the date of independence on my first day at work, on February 4, 2008, when I started working at the Deputy Prime Minister's Office at the time, professor Hajredin Kuçi. That day I found out the date when the independence will be declared. I told my brother that I knew the date, but I didn't tell him [the date], and to this day he still mentions it, he says, "Imagine, you didn't tell me, me. I wasn't going to tell anyone." But work's secret (laughs).

Lura Limani: How did you feel when you found out? Was it like, in a way that you expected it, you already knew it was going to happen? Was it a surprise? What kind of atmosphere was there at the time?

Hana Bajrami: It was like, more or less like all the people. We all knew, but none of us believed it. And, I don't know, today when I think about it, it seemed so surreal. It seemed like that to me, but more or less it seemed like that to everyone. Because you don't know what independence is. You don't know the feeling of declaring independence, you know, it's something that happens only once, and no one experienced it. It was, it was interesting, an interesting feeling. Even when I think about it today, I say, interesting.

Lura Limani: Do you remember what you did that day? Where were you and...

Hana Bajrami: Yes.

Lura Limani: What happened during the day?

Hana Bajrami: That day, on the 17th at 8 AM, I was at the office. It was cold, extremely cold. I has never been that cold in my life. And since, since I happened to be at the Prime Minister's Office, people were coming and going, famous personalities, up and down the deputy Prime Minister's Office. And I would see people from the windows, our office was on the third floor and the square started getting crowded with people, they started celebrating, even though it was really cold. And I know I had a small camera, if we had these phones then, you know, but I had a Nokia at the time, it was like those sneakers with lights, it didn't have a camera. And I knew I took some pictures, I took them home, and it still seemed surreal to me, what was happening at the time. I mean, I'm talking about 10-11 o'clock, when the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister with some of his staff went to [Hotel] Grand, there was the media center, in front of international media. So this is how February 17 started.

Lura Limani: What happened then?

Hana Bajrami: Then, so I started working, and when I found out that the independence was being declared I insisted on going to the Assembly Hall. Even though what was happening seemed surreal, I still insisted to surely go into the Assembly Hall. And the Deputy Prime Minister told me, at about 2PM, he told me, "Hana, go to the Assembly." And I know when I went out of the government building, it was so windy, it reminded me of when I was a kid, I always found it interesting when I was between the government, the post office back then, and the Assembly, it was always windy. It was the same feeling. And I went to the Assembly and they gave me a protocol badge. But I was, I mean 13, I worked for 13 days, less than two weeks. I didn't know many people and I was 20 years old, inexperienced, I only had a year of working experience in an American project that had nothing to do with institutions.

And I know that I went to the second floor, it was the Office of the President of the Assembly, at the time Jakup Krasniqi. And I sat there in an armchair like a little kid and I was just watching, people would come in and out and I was just looking what's happening and I couldn't, you know... I was waiting to go to the Assembly Hall.

Lura Limani: And then, you were in the Hall, right? What, what did you have to...

Hana Bajrami: Then I ended up in the Assembly Hall as a member of the protocol team and I helped the deputies of the Kosovo Assembly sign the Declaration of Independence. This happened because the Declaration of Independence is written on a papyrus and that document had to be signed only with a special pen, not with... And we knew that everybody would want to sign with their own pens and keep them as memorabilia. So this, this is one of the reasons why I ended up there as a member of the protocol team at the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Lura Limani: So you gave them the pens as gifts also, or how?

Hana Bajrami: No. There were two special pens for that kind of paper and everybody had to sign with that pen. So they couldn't use their own and there is, I remember this sequence, a recording, when President Sejdiu takes out his pen from his pocket...

Lura Limani: Yes...

Hana Bajrami: And I tell him, "Sorry President, but signing with this pen is not allowed, because of the paper." And he say, "Yes, yes, okay." You know, and he takes his pen back inside [his pocket] and signs with the pen I had. Two pens.

Lura Limani: Do you remember exactly when, exactly what were you doing at 3:50 PM?

Hana Bajrami: Yes, in the Assembly Hall, so at 3:37 the Declaration of Independence was read and there was like an invasion of journalists, so many, and I ended up at the Assembly Hall upstairs. And I remember a Spanish journalist asked me, we know Spanish from the telenovelas, he asked me, “Ah, are these the pens that the declaration will be signed with?” And I said, “Yes.” I know he filmed my hands, you know. And I was, okay, you know. So at 3:50 I was with the journalists, in the moment when the Declaration was read and when... After that moment the journalists started leaving and only the Public Television of Kosovo was there.

Lura Limani: What did you do after, did you go out to celebrate?

Hana Bajrami: No, I mean, that lasted for about an hour, an hour and a half until all the deputies signed the Declaration. And even today, when I look at the Declaration of Independence, I say that I managed it well, the signatures look good. Then, no, I went back to the office. Then I barely went home, I went through the *korzo*, there were so many people, you know. The people who lived at that time and got to experience that moment were very lucky. I would see children, parents and children, “Dad, dad look at the girl [from TV].” And I was like, “Ah, okay.”

I went home walking, I live in Ulpiana. And when I went home my mom said, “Everybody called.” And my brother said, “Wow! Where are you?” He said, “Watch the *breaking news* [English] on CNN.” And that is when I realized that it was all real (laughs) because I still didn’t believe it. Then I went back, I took my, I invited my brother and went to the concert that was held at *1 Tetori* [October 1]. It was like minus one hundred degrees Celsius, so cold. I was wearing an elegant dress since it was a solemn concert, you know. I still have a rose because there was a white rose in each agenda folder. I have that rose at home somewhere, withered, as a memory.

From there we went again to the government building because there was time for the concert and where the three leaders greeted, so the President of the Assembly, the Parliament and... the Assembly, the Prime Minister and the President, greeted the people. And I remember, at that time the Chief of Staff, mister Bekim Çollaku, and today Chief of the President’s Staff, was sitting behind me and he called someone on the phone and said, “Light them.” And I know that Pristina’s sky lighted up, when they lit the fireworks. And that stayed with me, you know, just like in the movies, “Wow,” because, you know, we had never seen that many fireworks until then.

Then the whole ceremony was over, so the official agenda that I had with my work was over, so I went back to the office and my brother called me, the brother I didn’t tell the date to, the one who will never forgive me. He told me, I said, “Where are you?” He said, “I’m at a café celebrating.” It was very noisy and I said, “Okay, can you come get me? I’ll come, too.” In that moment, as I was going out, my good or bad luck, a colleague of mine was going out with his car. And he, with U turn, could get out of the crowd, and he said, “Hana, do you want me to take you somewhere?” So I had, I had started working on February 4, it was the thirteenth day that I was working. And I said, “Okay.” You know, the offer was very attractive and my brother was by the fence of the government building and he said, “Hana, are you coming?” And I said, “Ah, no, no. I am not coming, I am going home,” you know, “because I’m tired.”

So then, they say how my brother that night, from the joy and from being drunk in honor of independence, saying, “Hana is a VIP, she got into a jeep, and she didn’t come with me,” complaining that I didn’t go. Today I still feel, I mean, I regret not going, but in that moment I was exhausted. But if it were today, I would’ve celebrated for 48 hour, but now it’s too late, we will celebrate the tenth anniversary now.

Lura Limani: Yes, now you can celebrate the tenth anniversary. Do you have any specific plans?

Hana Bajrami: Yes, we have an agenda in the office. We will celebrate. I don't know, it's a feeling, it's a special day for me, I believe it is so for all Kosovo people. Today I saw, when they were lowering the big flag from the government building, and there was a lot of talking, and ridiculing... A lot was said about that flag, you know, but I know that this will be the flag of the future generations. Even today I feel it as the flag, so it will be a special day. So every 17th, however we are, will be special for all of us.

Lura Limani: Thank you very much.

Hana Bajrami: Thank you.