

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH BEQIR MALIQI

Stari Trg | Date: October 26, 2020

Duration: 100 minutes

Present:

1. Beqir Maliqi (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Korab Krasniqi (Interviewer)
4. Renea Begolli (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

Anita Susuri: Mister Beqir, if you can introduce yourself and tell us something about your family?

Beqir Maliqi: My name is Beqir Maliqi, born on 12. 10. 1956. I come from a family of miners, my father worked here in Trepça in Stari Trg. My father, may he rest in peace, had six sons and two daughters. Like every child, I started school in Tuneli i Parë. I am the third child in my family. I finished primary school in Tuneli i Parë near the mine. I am from a village in Shala e Bajgorës where the mine is around a kilometer and a half away by air, that's why we finished primary school in Tuneli i Parë. Then I continued my studies at the gymnasium in Mitrovica, where I finished the Silvira Tomasini Gymnasium, now called Frang Bardhi.

After finishing gymnasium, I tried to enroll in the Economics Faculty, but luckily I didn't get in, and I came to Mitrovica and enrolled in the Faculty of Mining and Metallurgy. Actually, Professor Minir Dushi helped me enroll, because I told him my father was a miner and he wanted me to continue studying the Mining Branch. When I went home, I told my father I enrolled. To tell you the truth, he said, "Where did you enroll?" I said, "Mining." He said, "Ah son, you can't enroll anywhere else because..." I tell you exactly what he said, "I made you out of ore," he meant from the mine and he was happy I got enrolled.

Luckily I finished university on time, I didn't fail any classes. Initially without graduating I worked at the Technical High School in Mitrovica. Then, when I graduated in 1980 from the Faculty of Mining, I started working here {shows with his hand}, near the Stari Trg Mine.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you something before we continue. You said your father worked at Trepça. What kind of memories do you have when he came back from work? What condition was he in, or what did he tell you about his job then?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, I learned many things about the mine here from my father. My father worked almost the hardest job, we here call it, filling the skips, so the ore that is produced in the mine, the filling happens in low level, so where my father worked, then it comes out of the mine and it

continues to flotation. So, he explained everything about the mine. His job was hard. He was injured at work many times, when he came home, he came injured two or three times. So, he was some kind of inspiration for me to continue with mining.

To tell you the truth, he had a close family. Apart from the work he did here in the village, he also did farming and so on. He suffered a lot. He started working in 1947, so after the Second World War, and he worked until... the end of '80, he worked in the mine for around 32 years.

Anita Susuri: Was it hard for your mother and your family?

Beqir Maliqi: Yes, very hard to tell you the truth. Now I'm telling you how it was. When I started work here and I went home to tell my mother, I went into the mine and I am tired, she would say, "Why did you choose the same hard work as your father?" I said, "To learn the job, I have to visit them while they're working." She said, "You haven't done anything!" She said, "I thought you finished university and you will stay in an office and so on." So, it's interesting that somehow she guessed it to tell you the truth, because this is a hard job with huge risks.

Anita Susuri: What kind of memories do you have in that period, so when you went to school? You said a kilometer, what was it like to walk to school for that long?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, the road was rough. The village Kutllovc is a hilly region. So, it was hard to travel. There weren't many students, often alone, a long road. It was a huge uphill, we would get sweaty during summer and winter while going home, even though it wasn't far from Tuneli i Parë, half an hour, but it was very uphill. So, it was hard, there were dogs, they were dangerous, mountain, do you understand? So, especially during high school, we traveled when it was dark, we traveled alone for example, we didn't have peers there because there were a few houses in the village, so it was hard and a sacrifice in itself, so to say.

Anita Susuri: What other details can you tell us, for example, about your father and his work, and what kind of opinion did you have about the job when you saw your father in that condition?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, it was pretty hard because we had a father who took care of his children. We're six brothers and we're all educated, to tell you the truth, he contributed. Out of six brothers, only my oldest brother, who also worked for 45 years here in the mine, he retired two years ago, since '71. He graduated from the Mining High School and started working here in the mine. The others, the other five, we all went to university. I graduated from the Faculty of Mining, my brother studied architecture, the other brother electronics, the two younger ones studied geology, my youngest brother even earned a doctorate from the Faculty of Geology and is a teacher, a professor at the Faculty of Mitrovica.

So, it was hard for my father to invest his whole life in children, but in a way, we repaid him. He was content in the end, but he was a very strict father, he didn't let us move a lot, to waste time, just school-home, school-home, school-home. Because even at home, we dealt with livestock, we had cows, sheep, and we worked the land, even though it wasn't very arable, but we had trees, we had a good life. It was a prosperous life with great suffering and hardships, but we had everything because my father had a good salary here, and at home we fed cows and sheep and we had many trees in that place, and there was wood, there was water, and we had and we had all the good things. But, we worked constantly, to tell you the truth, we started working as children. In a way to hold the pillars of the house, we all tried.

Anita Susuri: You said you continued high school. Was it hard then also and what was it like during high school?

Beqir Maliqi: Those of us who went to high school from the village, to tell you the truth, we felt more secluded, but there was discipline, discipline, there was learning, there was a schedule, there was... so, we didn't miss classes, we learned, people who didn't study failed, so there was a level of education, a level of education.

Anita Susuri: Did you travel, did you live there?

Beqir Maliqi: No, I traveled by bus and I would buy a ticket. My father would say, "I'll buy you a ticket because if they found you and said, 'The son of this person and so on.' I can't give you money for other things, but the ticket and transport are insured." So in the beginning, I would buy the ticket until the end of the month, then the next month and so on, all of our brothers, because we all got an education at the same time, to tell you the truth.

Anita Susuri: What was the school system then? You learned in Albanian, there was Albanian...

Beqir Maliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: For that, so for mining, but was the class in Serbian, and what was the report like?

Beqir Maliqi: Well, to tell you the truth, the Mining University, to not say we only had seven or eight exams in Serbian-Croatian, there weren't, there weren't professors. So, some classes were taught by Serbs. But, we were good, we learned, we had to learn a lot to achieve something to tell you the truth, we were devoted, we were a hundred percent focused on learning. But, luckily, when we got to the fourth year, professors from Albania came, in '77, '78, seven or eight exams, seven or eight professors or even more. There was an agreement between the University of Prishtina and the University of Tirana, so the professors from Tirana in Mitrovica taught us and we took the exams.

To tell you the truth, we enjoyed seeing them and we spoke the language better. So, we were enthusiastic about learning. To tell you the truth, when they taught, I imagined myself in the ground piercing. There was the professor who... but we were good. I finished it in '80. It was still calm {shows with his hands} in the political sense and so on.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you about those years, in '74 when the Constitution happened, so when a more stable life began if I can say that.

Beqir Maliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: What were those years like for you, for society?

Beqir Maliqi: Those years were very important for Albanians, because Albanian people burst, in a way, started to breathe more freely in the political aspect. So, since '74, not to say '70, so this generation kept Kosova and the University of Prishtina, but also the Faculty of Mining and Metallurgy of Mitrovica but also others in other cities, for example.

The generations that came out of those years were strong generations, because they finished school with will, they learned. So, to achieve something more and I said the years after the war not to say those generations kept the produce here but also in Kosova. Strong generations came out, because they were focused on learning, there was a kind of overall will of the people of Kosovo then to learn and to achieve something.

Anita Susuri: How do you remember those years? What did you think?

Beqir Maliqi: Also for me, so we were focused on learning, on learning. We didn't spend time to be honest, we didn't have a youth where we went out and walked around not to say away from the cities where we got our education. We didn't move. But, our interest and focus was only on learning, because we thought that only with work and learning and ability we can achieve something.

Anita Susuri: You said you finished university in '80, when did you start working here?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, I started working in the High School of Mitrovica before graduating. I graduated in November '80, I started working in the mine of Stari Trg in December.

Anita Susuri: Did you notice the politics, the changes, so was it noticeable that the situation wasn't very stable?

Beqir Maliqi: Yes, I started in '80. So, immediately in '81, to tell you the truth, with the students' demonstrations, the situation completely changed. The situation changed, it got worse politically

wise, the ideo-political differences began, there was repression with every step toward Albanians, the situation just got worse. There was no stability, simple as that. From 1981 and on, there was no stability because the situation got worse. Politics directed then, politics, the Communist Party. They differentiated any of the Albanians they wanted, "The Committee put a dot," they would fire them, not give them the jobs they deserved. So, it wasn't a good period.

[The interview cuts here]

Anita Susuri: So in '81 the student demonstrations happened, and what was it like in Trepça then? How was it received by the workers here? By you?

Beqir Maliqi: The workers here, to tell you the truth, welcomed the demonstration, because even when rallies were held, they said, I remember a worker said, "They're our children, our children protesting." In a way they had the support of the miners and the students took part and most of them were imprisoned at that time when they caught them in demonstrations and imprisoned them for two-three months.

To tell you the truth, as a young engineer at that time, I had some colleagues who were here before me. I remember I had a good friend, Nazmi Peci who immediately in '83... he was already working here, he had skills for the mine and organizing the workers and giving the production and everything, in a way, Serbs started differentiating him and labeling him. They even imprisoned him, he was imprisoned and sentenced to five years for nothing, just because he worked, because he was capable, he wanted to work here. It bothered Serbs, it bothered them and they imprisoned him for five years then.

So, within the technical-supervisory staff here arose a suspicion that with hard work, good work, and work for Albanians, you would be imprisoned like Nazmi Peci. In a way I had consequences. I was called by the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, they called me then, for example, they interrogated me, "You were friends with Nazmi Peci?" "Yes, I was because we had the same education and we worked together." "You have to separate from him and you have to..." what do I know. There was pressure like this.

Anita Susuri: Informative conversations.

Beqir Maliqi: They called me in for informative conversation a couple of times. Two or three times they called me to the body of internal affairs in Mitrovica regarding Nazmi Peci.

Anita Susuri: Were you scared? What did you think about that because they were notoriously known?

Beqir Maliqi: They are notorious to be honest, because in that direction, you could see according to the conversation. They wanted to say, "Work, but don't bother Serbs." Because we had an attitude

towards Serbs and Albanians, in a way, regarding work here. But somehow they wanted to say to not bother Serbs. Actually I remember, when I was in the Secretariat of Internal Affairs, an Albanian interrogated me and he had different information about me and Stari Trg that people told him, or what do I know, and he told me, he was from Skenderaj, but old, much older than me. He said, "You could be my child," he said, "But you can't work like that. We can make noise and play music in this office until we bother the office next door {shows with his hands}. The moment we bother the office next door, we have to stop."

In a way, he wanted to say you can work, but not when you bother Serbs. "You have to change," he said, "you know best what you have to change inside your head." He said to me, it was very interesting to me for someone to give me advice in those security organs, for example, regarding those conversations and about work in Stari Trg.

Anita Susuri: Was there a reason for them to act like that?

Beqir Maliqi: There wasn't any reason. There wasn't a reason, but they had their aims, they had their people who they wanted to advance. If you had an equal attitude for everyone, it would bother them, every step we made would bother them and they pretended we pressured Serbs and so on. They would say to me, "You're going in the same steps as Nazmi Peci!" (smiles)

Anita Susuri: What was your job like those years? What did you do?

Beqir Maliqi: Well, I have worked here from the beginning since I started working here as an intern for six months, but in the production unit. Then, after completing the internship after six months, I was appointed technical manager of the sixth level. After a year or two, I was appointed head, a low turnover head who covers the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth, and eleventh levels. So, then I was the manager of production, the manager of the whole production I mean.

Actually, when the strike happened, I was like head, head of the production there, and I was part of the huge strike in '89, because day after day, the situation got worse since '81. So, miners as the most suffering people, the hardest job that they risk their life for their family and for themselves, but at the same time for society and all the injustices that were happening in Kosova at that time, the miners felt it in their skin because they're more sensitive.

Dissatisfaction, torture. You know the march took place in Prishtina in '88 where I also participated. So, we walked from Stari Trg to Prishtina to protect the so-called leadership of Kosovo, to protect the Constitution of Kosovo.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to talk about these in more detail, about the march and the strike. But first I want to ask you, as a child but also when your father worked and on, when was the first time you went to visit the mine?

Beqir Maliqi: The mine?

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Beqir Maliqi: The first time I went to the mine as a third-year student, to tell you the truth, as a third-year student we had a formal practice here, practice, and I also went to the mine. Actually my father tried to explain to us, explaining to my younger brother at home, my brother was ready to go to the mine. Sometime in '75 or '76 that date was written on the ninth level in the concrete at the filling of skips. With a cousin who was our guest, my father took them and brought them here to the mine in the third shift, "Just to see, to see the mine and visit and see the condition, because you think it's not dangerous." And so on he explained.

So he said, "In shifts," because two people work at the skips, one the first four hours, the other one the last four hours, "I was the first to load the skips and I went to the office, because there's lighting there and there offices in levels." Them, my younger brother, Ramiz and my cousin, he actually worked in the mine and he died a few years ago, my cousin, four or five years ago. My father said, "I thought they thought it was good because I only took them to the offices so I took them to hard places in the mine, when the ore comes out and I went through the mine for three hours with them."

When they came home, they slept for three-four days, because they were tired and then they explained how it was dangerous and how it was and that's why he said, "You have to learn, to not be a worker working hard physical jobs like me." So, maybe this was the influence, the inspiration to learn for me and my other brothers, because back then I was a first-year student when they went into the mine.

I was in the third year when I did the practice. We did the practice for two weeks, but also during our education, we came here and finished the practice because we have a general direction which means both the underground usage and the surface usage as we call it.

Anita Susuri: What did it look like to you when you went in for the first time? Did it seem similar to what your father told you, was it worse, better?

Beqir Maliqi: No, to tell you the truth, as much as someone explains it here, you experience the hardships. So, it's different. That's why it's written here, "Good luck," in the entrance, you've seen it, so in the entrance of the mine it's written, "Good luck." The moment you go in at the signalman, or as we called the cage, everything changes, even the breath and movement, especially for beginners who go

in for the first time. Air pressure affects the ears, for example, it's said that it deafens the ears. The elderly taught us, "Swallow if you want to open your ears." (smiles) or something. But there's panic, a silence while going there and especially when you go into the working places, for example, which are dangerous.

Sweaty people working, high temperature, air pressure is huge near the well, for example, it's especially problematic when you go to hot places and you sweat and, when you want to get out, the air is cool, because it comes through the main well. So, you have to be careful, for example, I had advice from my father, to wear thick clothes and be careful because the mine can ruin your health. I had enough advice.

Anita Susuri: What's the difference when you go down into levels? I think it gets worse. Is it harder?

Beqir Maliqi: Not harder but the pressure of the air affects your ears, especially if you go deeper because the oxygen lowers that way. It is said that up to 400 meters, three cubic meters of air is needed for a person. Going more than 400 meters you need four cubic meters, so the need for air increases. But, especially in blind places where there's no penetration of mine objects, there is the temperature because wherever there is air pressure and moving objects because the mine is mechanically ventilated with the help of a main fan that absorbs the used [air] and puts it out into the atmosphere, while fresh air comes in through objects, the main well in Tuneli i Parë and a well in the north {shows with his hands}.

But, this main fan has enough capacity somewhere in the first phase up to 12,000 cubic meters per minute. One of the largest electric motors of the main fan is 1,300 kilowatts, the largest electric motor in the Stari Trg mine is the fan motor. However, in those blind places that I am saying, it is hotter and there is no penetration in the mines, we have learned it in school as well, but here we have practically used and seen it, there is separate ventilation, local ventilation. So it's put in place where there is air flow in a smaller fan and takes it to the main work that can be compressive {shows me hands} or depressed to suck the air and put it outside.

Anita Susuri: In '81, so after the demonstrations, it was also important for Trepça, I think the slogan "Trepça works, Belgrade builds" came out then.

Beqir Maliqi: Belgrade builds, yes.

Anita Susuri: What did you think? Was this true? What was it like? What was it like for the workers?

Beqir Maliqi: Well, it wasn't well expected, and we know to be honest that our sweat isn't only going to Kosova, but it also goes to Belgrade because this was one of the biggest mines in Europe, where there was a production up to 700 thousand tons a year. There were foundries where lead, zinc, gold,

silver, cadmium, bismuth were extracted. The finalization of materials was done then, while now we don't have the same conditions. We now extract a quantity of ore because we do the processing in flotations and it's sold as a semi-product. But then, with that great productivity, for example, there was great value.

Actually, it was said then that Yugoslavians couldn't take loans without the guarantee of Trepça. There were these kinds of conversations. There was a high level of production, because apart from our mine, we also had the mine of Novobërda, we had Kishnica, Hajvalia that also produced up to a million a year, and all of this was processed. So, they had their own flotation that they processed, but the smelting was done in the lead metallurgy in Zveqan and in the zinc metallurgy in Mitrovica here in the complex in Mitrovica where we have it. Unfortunately, none of the metallurgy is working now.

Anita Susuri: You told me earlier about the marches. A march was done to Mitrovica, then to Prishtina. Was it like this?

Beqir Maliqi: First, it was done to Prishtina, to Prishtina sometimes on 17 or 18 November '88. As the pressure towards Albanians and professors increased, they said, "They're retiring them ahead of time." The miners said, "We are the ones who should retire ahead of time because of rough conditions, so professors have conditions to continue working." But, then there was pressure on the University of Prishtina, they wanted to retire the professors ahead of time or something.

But, the repression increased, as miners were experiencing it, they chose the road while following the leaders of Kosova, the dismissals that were being done in the aspects of protecting the leadership and Kosova, miners walked from here to Prishtina.

Anita Susuri: What was the day of organizing like? How did you decide to go?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, it's hard to talk about organizing because groups of workers are talking to each other, "Look what's happening. We can't stand it anymore!" They did bad things then, to tell you the truth, soldiers were being killed, then, when they went into military service, allegedly they killed themselves, the bodies would come, our children, everything affected this and the situation got complicated and, actually the problems piled up, and we can't say him or him about the organization. So those repressions were noticed by itself and, in a certain moment, came the idea to go protect them walking in our working clothes, with our helmets talking here in Prishtina, and I also took part there. So this happened on 17 or 18 November '88.

Anita Susuri: What was that day like? Were there police? Were there obstacles?

Beqir Maliqi: There were different obstacles. There were obstacles here at Tuneli i Parë, in Kqiq, also in Sprekonica {shows with his hands} there at the Prison of Sprekonica, there was the police cordon in

Malisheva. So, they tried to explain it to us. In Malisheva, I remember Remzi Kolgeci came, he talked to the miners, but there was no one who could back us away. So, they walked there. They broke the cordon on both sides of the road, because the police had blocked the road, militia, both sides of militia {shows with his hands} the workers went through the field and we continued walking to Prishtina, to the Palace.

Anita Susuri: It was Ramiz Sadiku.

Beqir Maliqi: Yes, we went in there, and there the workers held speeches, they criticized why that was happening, why they were removing Albanian leaders, and like this.

Anita Susuri: Did anyone else speak there? I think there were also some politicians and activists who participated?

Beqir Maliqi: I think Kaqusha Jashari spoke, back then, I think she was head of the Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo. I don't remember much who else spoke.

Anita Susuri: What did she say? Do you remember what they spoke about?

Beqir Maliqi: Regarding the situation more specifically, look what is happening to us and they are pressuring us, they also thanked the miners for their support. In this regard, the problems of that time were mainly discussed.

Anita Susuri: How did the situation continue after that?

Beqir Maliqi: They scattered from there, the workers went back home, but to tell you the truth, the situation got more aggravated each day, it got worse, miners got angrier. Actually, I remember, after that time, I went to the mine and on the level in the offices, the workers had scattered in the workshop when they got the schedule, I met Mon Peci, I will never forget it, I told him, "Let's see the situation." He said, "Oh no, work," he said, "There is no more. There is no more work here. We can't stand what is happening. I don't know how long it's going to last!" But then since November, for example, December, so they gathered, the miners didn't know what to do, what to do since no one listened to them and the strike began.

Anita Susuri: Was it known beforehand that something big is going to happen?

Beqir Maliqi: It was known, it was known because repression was increasing and the anger of miners culminated and by itself and, as you said, groups of people talking to each other, "Look what happened here. Look at the torture that is being done to Albanians, the politicians." They were

imprisoned, maltreated in different ways. So, slowly it culminated and exploded with the strike in the mine.

Part Two

Anita Susuri: Can you begin talking about what you remember in the strike? How did it start? How did it continue? What did you see? What did you experience? What was that situation like?

Beqir Maliqi: Well, to tell you the truth the first day of strike was February 20, it was a Monday. I was in the first shift, I was head of produce. We had as we call it, "Office of Circulation", an office there and for the first time I was notified by the signalman, I remember Murat Latifi (smiles), he was the signalman. I said, "Did the shift come out?" Because it was the time for shift to come out. He said, "No, they're not coming out." "Why?" "They don't want to." I didn't talk more and I called a supervisor on the ninth level, it was Shyqyri Sadiku, now he is the head of the Syndicate, back then, he was a young boy and he was a supervisor in the ninth horizon.

I called him, I said, "How are you? Are you okay? Are you coming out?" "They don't want to come out." "Why?" Because of the situation, because..." he couldn't talk, "But, they don't want to come out." We informed our superiors here, the directors.

Anita Susuri: Were they Serbian or Albanian?

Beqir Maliqi: No, they were Albanian, Burhan Kavaja was the director of the Mine with Flotation back there. Ibish Jonui was the technical director, Mensur Fejza I was a leader and the other coworkers I had who were in lower levels than me, but we were a huge number of people and we held a meeting in the last offices as we call them, they're not coming out and we split into levels in groups to go ask them to come out.

I remember I was appointed to the sixth level, someone on the ninth, someone else on the eighth, someone in the seventh, because the workers were in all levels and we went there to convince them that they should come out because of the conditions and health. "You'll talk in vain, there's nothing you can say, we have decided to stay here until our requests are realized." And the second shift came and joined the first shift and the third shift and so on.

It was impossible for us to get them out of the mine, and it continued in that way. However, then, to tell you the truth, after two days, they decided. They agreed among themselves that the conditions in some horizons are very difficult, but scattered they couldn't talk and be informed. So, to tell the truth,

on the second day, they decided to stay on the ninth and eighth level. So the workers gathered from all over the mine, but, to tell you the truth, the conditions were difficult because a large number of workers, over a thousand workers, 1,200-1,300 workers were then in the mine, small spaces. Fortunately, the fan worked and the air was somewhat good, but the conditions were very difficult.

Anita Susuri: Did you stay there or did you move?

Beqir Maliqi: We moved. We stayed for a few hours, but we mostly moved. But we also went during the night, we contacted them, we checked the mine, especially regarding air, but we also moved. To tell you the truth, I was also sick. A large number of workers were sick. Around Thursday, sometime from Monday to Thursday, we couldn't sleep, we couldn't rest, the conditions were hard and, in a way, we got tired without sleep and so on. We actually improvised a hospital over the circulation office.

I was there and we made the offices, I was in a bed in the office where I used to work and I was there until the strike ended, so until the last day of the strike. A lot of workers were there, they had problems with blood pressure, someone's feet were swollen and they didn't want to get checked. They would go get checked, and go back to the mine sick because they didn't want to leave their coworkers. They stayed there sick and no one could get them out, because, in a way, they had made a deal with each other to reach their goals.

Anita Susuri: Many people came to visit then?

Beqir Maliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: There were visitors who were let in, some weren't let in. But when they came, what did those people talk about, and who came?

Beqir Maliqi: Well, mainly, mainly they came and tried to get them out of the mine. They talked, they came. But even the directors, Aziz Abrashi, who was the director of the plant, to tell you the truth, he was here the whole time, Burhan Kavaja also, they were here in contact with the miners. In a way, they tried to convince them to come out thinking something bad would happen that they might get sick and the miners, because, as I said, the conditions were very hard. They came, different politicians came back then, to tell you the truth.

I remember Professor Minir Dushi had also come, he tried to get them to come out. Azem Vllasi had also come, he came in the beginning and they didn't want to let him in, to be honest, but, in the end, they let him in. They let him in, during the day politicians in Yugoslavia's level also came, Stipe Šuvar¹

¹ Stipe Šuvar (1936-2004) was a Croatian politician and sociologist who was considered to have been one of the most influential communist politicians in the League of Communists of Croatia in the Socialist Republic of Croatia during Yugoslavia and later in modern Croatia.

come, Radisha Gacić from Serbia, Jurij Bajez. These three came on the third or fourth day and came into the mine on the eighth level, I was on the eighth level with them.

A huge number of workers, the spaces were small and the miners welcomed them. I remember Veli Osmani had opened the gathering and, in the beginning, he thanked them for coming, he said, "Even though you came late." Then Avdi Uka spoke, he was one of the most outspoken miners. Remzi Kolgeci was with them. Actually Remzi Kolgeci translated for them, I remember well. Stipe Šuvar was the head of the Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia then and begged them to get out. "My," he said, "Father was a miner and I'm begging you for your health, for your children, your family," and I don't know what. They didn't want to.

I remember some Mursel Haziri spoke, Mursel Haziri also spoke good Serbian. He was a supervisor of the mine here and he spoke to him and he explained Yugoslavia and, as I can remember about Montenegro, they removed the arm of Comrade Tito, but he spoke such fluent Serbian, he asked, "*Šta si po zanimanju?*" "What's your profession?" He said, "*Kopač*, [Serbian for excavator] I am a miner." He thought he was a lawyer. Indeed, he was a mining technician and a mine supervisor, but he was fluent in Serbo-Croatian so well that it gave him the impression that he wasn't a miner at all.

And in those moments to be honest, I remember (smiles) Milazim Istrefi was, a worker there and he was further than me, very dense {shows with his hands} we could barely breathe. He said, "Go away," he started yelling, Milazim Istrefi fainted and they caught him in between the rails toward the eighth level there was a scream, the workers started screaming and the leader who were there talking started running because they were scared something would happen to them. They went over the workers and went out, Stipe Šuvar with those people.

Anita Susuri: You also had some requests, so the miners, in general, and did you expect that those requests were going to be met? Were they just to raise awareness?

Beqir Maliqi: To be honest, they had around eight, but I think, if I'm not mistaken, eight requests that were different, from the professors not to retire or something. Not to mention the main demands were the resignations of some Kosovo Albanian leaders at the time. For Rahman Morina, Hysamedin Azemi...

Anita Susuri: Ali Shukriu.

Beqir Maliqi: And Ali Shukriu. I mean, the crucial request, the main request was that they should resign and it was also their last request to go to the United Nations there at high world levels that it bothered them, "Why are saying that the voice of the miners should be heard on a world level there." And these were the main requests and it happened, to tell you the truth, that when the miners accepted to come out, they told them that they resigned, they resigned, they guaranteed the miners.

It was written, the stamp, because they checked if there was a stamp, if it was written and, in a way, based on the realization of those requests, but the main request for their resignation of them made the miners leave the mine on the eighth day. But, they were fake. But, the miners started coming out from the mine at midnight. To tell you the truth, I was sick so I was in bed in my office. I followed them as they went out, since they hadn't left the mine in seven-eight days, they put bandages on their eyes, they barely got out while people were holding them.

Many nurses were waiting for them, the doctors here have made a great contribution, the teams of doctors were here in this improvised hospital always. I remember Skender Boshnjaku as the most important, I think he was the one who checked me when I was sick. They held meetings, decisions were made on how to work, because there was a big hall where the gatherings were held. It was filled with beds, the surrounding offices also. Even in the new facility, it was not functional at that time, and it was made into an improvised hospital because of the large number of workers that were sick.

Korab Krasniqi: Do you remember the requests? What did the miners discuss?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth...

Korab Krasniqi: How were the requests complied?

Beqir Maliqi: The miners made the requests there in the mine, except where they put them out, we saw them. So they circulated inside the mine. I said I didn't stay there all the time, I stayed for hours, three or four hours and five or six hours, or a night, but I moved. Mostly my work was with the delegations that came that we took to the last office where we gathered and took them there, and led them and the entry and exit with the directors that we had.

I remember Aziz Abrashi, then the general director of Trepça, when he begged them, he begged them to come out on the eighth horizon, begged them, begged them, "Oh, come out for the sake of your families, the sake of your children. I'll cut my hand," he said, "my hand if it is needed, just you go out and save not only your life but your families also," But by no means did the miners accept it.

Anita Susuri: Do you think it was more about... that the miners were scared or so the political situation doesn't get worse? So, since he asked them to come out.

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, they were mostly scared for their health, but luckily no one died. Then it was rumored that a worker's wife had died and he didn't want to go out and bury her. So, health, the lives of those people, because even the technical-supervisory staff saw our situation. We were pleased that no one was in that direction, but the miners were the ones who played the main

role, for example, as a body, as a body, the miners who had made decisions and were committed in that way.

Anita Susuri: You also mentioned the families. Did those who were down there constant with their families? Or did you go home?

Beqir Maliqi: No, no, here. I didn't go home. No, no, here. Rare were those who contacted their families, then there were no mobile phones. But, for example, families came here, my brothers came here at the mine, but also others came to the mine, to the door, but no, those who stayed in the mine didn't have any contact with their family. Most of them, they didn't go out for eight nights and said, no contact.

Anita Susuri: After, after the strike finished, another situation began where they were asking for the organizers...

Beqir Maliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: How did it continue?

Beqir Maliqi: It continued, they went out during the night...

Anita Susuri: Yes.

Beqir Maliqi: From the mine and they scattered {opens his arms}, the next day we came to work {points rights}, the directors came, I remember Burhan [Kavaja], we talked about the situation and so on. In the afternoon, that day, we got the information that they imprisoned Burhan Kavaja, Aziz Abrashi and some others.

[The interview cuts here]

Beqir Maliqi: So that night, through the television, we found out that they started imprisoning people, allegedly as organizers. But they mostly mentioned the directors: Burhan Kavaja, Aziz Abrashi, Avdi Uka actually... but, I think he was imprisoned later, but they started. So, the next days, the police came here, surrounded the place, a gloomy atmosphere, a different atmosphere. It was a point in time in which the miners thought that something good was achieved and that their demands for resignation [of the politicians] were met, and that those were received well. A curfew was imposed, a situation in which you would see people of state security roaming around. The police wouldn't let people gather, they would mistreat them in different ways, interrogating them, "Why you this, why you that?" In this way they started to tell you the truth.

After some time, we were all sent home and they started calling us back one by one, one by one, especially the heads of departments, we were not called back to work, we were not called for days on end. More concretely, myself, I used to be Head of Production, I was not given anything to do, absolutely not. I came to the office, but I was not given any responsibility. After six months they removed me from the production section, they took me to the investment and development section, a much lower place and they didn't call some to work at all. They imprisoned those 14 people. Around a year after the grave, they started a strike again on February 20, in Mitrovica, they went to Mitrovica {raises his hand and points right}, there different protests then, I think that day a student was killed, Selman Vojvoda.

After that, they gave to workers these decisions {pretends to write}, around 1,400 workers, the workers were punished with one to three months [of jail time]. I recall that after the strike, for four months, I was... I, together with some colleagues, with Xhafer Nuli, with Enver Kelmendi and... we were four months without work. After four months, we were kind of called back to work. But the production was going down, the political situation was unstable in Kosovo, so, bit by bit, they fired us from work. On August 8, 1990, when the first shift came to work, the police were at the main entrance. The third shift got out, and the first shift was not allowed to go in and we came to the door two or three days, but they didn't let us in and, unfortunately, from that time, all of us were left {puts his hands up}, Albanians unemployed.

Anita Susuri: Did they tell you to sign beforehand that you accept... or how was it?

Beqir Maliqi: No, to tell you the truth, there was nothing. The police blocked the door, they didn't allow us to go in. Buses came, the workers came as they used to but at the door {shows with his hands} we saw many police pinzgauer and Serbians, Bosnians and so on, those who worked, we saw them walking around, some engineers at the door.

We saw Serbians and Bosnians mostly. Albanians were allowed past the door. I mean we came here two or three days, we tried {puts his chest forward forcefully}. In the Workers' Council there was held, that day, it was the Workers' Council, above the Directorate where it was, in the Workers' Council there was held a meeting in some form they promised, "One for all, all for one. Either we will all go to work or none of us." Even after three days, in fact, we couldn't come to Stari Trg anymore, we were all fired.

Anita Susuri: What did you do after?

Beqir Maliqi: What did we do, most of us, all of us depended on this mine, the salary from the mine. Whatever we could. I remember immediately after that summer, solidarity was high, around 300 or more miners went to Malisheva to harvest grapes {lifts his finger}. Malisheva accepted us, the villages of Malisheva, as friends, do you know what kind of a welcome they gave us? I wasn't a regular, but I was among the organizers with Xhafer Nuli and some other leaders, engineers. We went several times

during that time to visit the miners there, but we would also have dinner in some *oda*² there, someone would welcome us. Do you know what kind of a good welcome they gave us? It's indescribable.

They worked there for more than a month, they were paid, it was welcome, as much little {pretends to give money} value it was, just to ensure flour. Then there was the Family Helps Family campaign, this was after the harvesting. Around November '90. Where mainly on the side of Peja, they came, Dukagjini, for example, they came and we made our registers, we made them, our engineers made our registers, we chose the poorest people. And the Family Helps Family campaign began, so they came from Peja and said, "You have this person with this many family members." They got into contact {meets his forefingers} and then there was no need for more organization.

They talked to each other {separates his forefingers}, only them. "How many members? Where is your house? How much do you need in a month?" And this campaign continues. If it weren't for that campaign, the miners would have been in very hard conditions. Around 600-700 connected at that time with Family Helps Family. And they helped many people. The contact came through the Syndicate and some organizers and it has functioned privately, they have... However, it functioned for years {raises his forefinger}. Not to mention that I still have good friendships with people to this day.

And then, to be honest, personally we were dependent on this mine because then also my brothers were working in Trepça, they fired us, we were all unemployed. We had to do something completely different. To be honest we are fine, since '93, we've been dealing with wood processing, with circular saws {pushing fists forward}, and working with wood. Fortunately, my brother, the architect, was a good handyman and us the other organizers joined him and we worked with wood processing. We lived from that work, we even had a benefit, even though we were like a rabbit to a greyhound {moves his hand zig-zag}, because we didn't have a registration permit, we didn't have a company {opened his hands} nothing. But secretly we went into the yard, we worked behind walls.

Not only did we not need aid, but we helped others. We created a situation, hard work, physical work, to be honest, dangerous with those circular saws and stuff. But thankfully, God helped us and we worked since '93, maybe until a bit after the war. But we had a good life, it was hard work, but we worked with Bosnians from Novi Pazar, Rozhaja, for example. We get the first matter from them and we work, we were... But, everyone could have. However, they started, the year '91, or '90, maybe, yes '91, '92, people started to leave.

People... a huge number of miners took their children and left. I remember Maliq Ahmeti, a worker here {points behind} I met him, the end in '91, he was my worker here for years, he said, "Have you heard?" I said, "No." He said, "I'm going to leave." He said six or seven sons, around nine or ten members. I said, "Where is Maliq?" He started crying. He said, "I'm taking my children and going to

² Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

Sweden.” Not just him, but many other, not to say around 500-600 families, ‘91, ‘92, ‘93, during that time they left because they didn’t have a way to survive.

Part Three

Anita Susuri: How... How did the war find you?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, the war found my whole family in Kosova, because we worked and that’s how we survived and we thought this situation will pass and we will go back to normal life, we will... the goal as to pass it, to survive and we will always be here in Kosova. Since ‘80, we don’t live in Kutlllovc anymore, we are living in Vushtrri there, in a village called Dobërlluk, so we live there. We were all here, then... the war began in Shala, I remember when the war began, us brothers were there, six brothers, why wait, the atmosphere was created to leave.

Me and my fourth brother came from the Great Dobërlluk, we didn’t dare come to Tuneli i Parë because there were police there, but we went to the village Reka through the mountain to our village where the headquarters were. They were formed and guarded because there was a point of the Yugoslav army in our village there, they call it Maja e Madhe [Great Peak], it was there since the Second World War, not to say even before, it is a strategic point where there were permanent soldiers. As a child, so when we kept the sheep there, the army was there in the summer and winter, so we took our sheep there and they had a military base {explains with his hands} at the top. It’s a high level, the whole Kosovo is seen from that point, you can even see Prishtina.

We went to Kutlllovc, we said, “We’re from Kutlllovc,” an officer there, he was called Feriz Kapetani. We came, “We’re from Kutlllovc, we want to join you.” We stayed there all day, it was the house of an officer who was in Shala, Hysni Ahmeti, Hilmi Ajeti stayed in their house, and the headquarters was there. The officer who was there said, “We have soldiers here,” he said, “but we don’t have armament,” he said, “we need food and help, if you could go get aid.” Our village dealt with agriculture and it had rich people. “No, it’s not a problem.” And we went, during the night, we went and organized the village. We took potatoes, money, we filled a tractor and took it to Kutlllovc, in my village, we took that aid there.

But war continued. The ‘98 offensive took place sometime in September, in Shala, where all {points left} the infantry entered, the army, they killed a number of people here in Melenica as well. However, they were relocated from, from Shala at that moment. Then, they came back late in ‘99 and they got us in Dobërlluk, in Dobërlluk, they entered on April 16 sometime, on April 16, they ruined the village of Dobërlluk. Those of us who were part of Shala left to go Albanian with them. But we relocated to a

village near the prison of Smrekonica, village Smrekonica, our brother-in-law was there. But a huge number of people didn't go to Albania, they relocated in some villages that were more quiet and so on.

To tell you the truth, then... in April there was another offensive, I didn't know what to do because we were a lot of people. I took my nephew, he was 20 years old and I went to Shala so we wouldn't all be in the same place. I thought maybe someone could survive. We didn't know what was happening. And we went to the village... in Bajgora to a relative, we spent the night there. I remember I was going to the headquarters, it was a neighborhood further away. As I was going there at the school of Bajgora, I was with my nephew, as we were walking there at the school {explains with his hands} an airplane flew above. Fast *vuup* {onomatopoeic}, I told them, "Get down!" I got down {puts his hands behind his head} I protected myself like we learned in the military to protect our heads.

Vuup {onomatopoeic} it dropped a bomb, a few bombs, the last bomb was 30 meters away from us. So, from behind the school, it hit the school and the airplane flew away {explains with his hands}. We went to the school and some women came out, they were from Tuneli i Parë, they went to the school... three or four people were killed there. I remember Adem Trepça, Ismet Haliti was injured, until there {point in front} in another village where there were doctors, he died there. And Adem's daughter, I don't know how but it happened that day. We went to the headquarters, to tell you the truth I wanted to take some aid because I was a burden to them. When I went there, he said, "There's 400 grams of flour." I said, "Don't give me any." I wanted to take a sack of flour to them or something.

However, it didn't last long, and the offensive went back to Shala and they relocated them completely from Shala, we went down there. It was the night of May 2, 1999. When the offensive in Shala was over, they cleaned it up and the Studime massacre took place. We were... we didn't know what was happening in Studime, we were in Smrekonica with my brother-in-law, the army came and threw us out of Smrekonics. We were... only two of my brothers were at the houses in Dobërlluk, the rest of us were in Smrekonica. They threw us out of our houses, they gathered us in Smrekonisa, we were around 26-27 members and to tell you the truth we scattered because it was crowded..

My father, may he rest in peace, was with my oldest brother, he said, "I can't stay in this crowd." And he headed home in Dobërlluk and he knew his two other sons were there, to tell them what's happening. And when he got to the school of Dobërlluk, there's a school there, they had killed him in the yard of the school. The road to Prishtina is there, from that road they shot him. Maybe they told him, "Stop!" He didn't stop. They had killed him there, we didn't know. They gathered us at the prison that night around ten-twenty thousand people, because it wasn't just that village, but also the villages around. But there were probably ten thousand people because we couldn't fit in a huge meadow. And on the other side they said they had gathered others but we didn't see.

And they came in there... it was afternoon, the police came in there and started {counts in his fingers} to separate the young people. They said, "You, you, you." They put them in prison, "You, you, you." To

tell you the truth, I was 45 years old, I didn't hide, youngsters hid {point under the table} to not go to prison. I wasn't scared, I thought if they called me I would say, "I'm old, I'm fifty years old." It wasn't so, they took people of different ages, even old people, the next day we saw that they had tortured them {touches his face} bloody because they beat them. But, we didn't know they had killed our father. They gathered us that night, but during the night, we also found out that the massacre in Studime had happened, because people came from there. But, they brought trucks from Studime and put them in prison. We stayed there until morning.

Anita Susuri: Only the men?

Beqir Maliqi: No, no, women and children, all together. No, no, no all together. The next day around 12 o'clock, they took a huge number of them to prison. Those who were still there, they said, "Take your stuff, tractors and head to Albania." We went to Smrekonia and took them, we had a tractor, truck... Actually my brothers were at the house... that night there was information going around that one of my brothers was killed, but it wasn't so, they had shot him at the bridge, but they had killed a man in Novosella, his last name was Maxhuni, he was killed. My brother went inside a house there all night, he said, "I went out in the middle of the night from there." He passed through Sitnica in the other villages. And then we took the tractor and trauch and we got in there... even other people who didn't have transportations mean came with us and we headed to Albania.

We stayed the night somewhere in Klina, the next day we went to Kukës. In Kukës we scattered. When we were at the border we got sad because from torture, to tell you the truth, and maltreatment and beatings they gave us. Before we got to the customs, they asked for bribes {extends his hand as if he's asking for money}, they didn't let us in, they said, "500 marks," or they would remove us from the row, we had to give them the money. I remember I had a gold ring here {touches and looks at his hand}, "Give it to me, give it to me." I couldn't get it out of my finger. He wanted to cut my finger, he almost cut my finger, I had some marks {puts his hand to his pocket} I gave him 50 marks or I don't know how much. Fast because we were in front of the costumes in Kukës.

Anita Susuri: Serbians?

Beqir Maliqi: We didn't... yes, Serbians. When we passed the border... it was a feeling, it was hard, a feeling, when they wanted... half an hour ago they they wanted to kill me on the other side, on this side, "Brother," they welcomed us, they gave... I remember I started crying, I told my brother, "We're lost," you know? He said, "You know what happened, our father," he said, "Was killed." "Where?" He said, "During the night at the school."

Korab Krasniqi: Your brother didn't tell you until you got to the border?

Beqir Maliqi: I found out when we passed the border.

Korab Krasniqi: He knew the whole time?

Beqir Maliqi: He knew and didn't tell me. They had told him...

Anita Susuri: How did he know?

Beqir Maliqi: He knew because people had moved during the nights {moves his finger} walking. A man from the village Mazhiq who lives in Dobërlluk told him, "This and that, when I passed by I saw they had killed you father." During the night, that night we were at the prison.

Korab Krasniqi: What happened to your father's body?

Beqir Maliqi: My father's body, the brothers who were there... because we went to Albania, those two brothers had found out that night that our father was killed. But the next day they went looking for his body at the graveyard, as my brother says. They buried him. They heard that at the school but during the day the workers of Përparimi from Vushtrri, actually the Roma workers, they took my father and Shefqet Maxhuni who was killed at the bridge. They had removed them from there. Later through those Roma people who stayed in Kosova and they had taken my father and they had buried him in the graveyard of Nadakovc, not Dobërlluk, but in Nadakovc. So, when we came back from Albania after all... on our road back we stopped there and found him, we found him {pretends to stick something in the ground} they had stuck the planks R.M, Rexhep Maliqi there.

Korab Krasniqi: Let's go back to Albania, what was it like in Albania, where were you?

Beqir Maliqi: We were in Kukës to tell you the truth, we stayed in Kukës to tell you the truth. We were many family members. For two or three days we didn't settle anywhere there, there was an Arab camp there and they said the conditions were very good, they didn't accept anymore. On the third day we stopped at Mjekët Pa Kufi [Doctors Without Borders] in Gostil, a village there, and we stayed in a big tent {opens his hands}, but we couldn't fit. But we had the truck, five or six people slept there, we slept in the truck, because it was covered {shows with his hands}. In the truck, the rest in the tent.

But the conditions were very hard, food didn't come to Kukës, the bread in trucks was moldy. Like bricks, the truck wasn't covered, like that {pretends to throw something} on the floor. We had some money and we bought food, to tell the truth, in Kukës, otherwise we would have died from hunger. To tell you the truth, as a family, we went everywhere by truck, we had a thousand kilos of flour in the truck. We thought they would stop us on the road in Drenica or somewhere, what would those people eat? Actually I remember I sold it, because the truck was stuck between tents... a baker had bought 700 kilos of flour. You know, just so it wouldn't go bad.

Korab Krasniqi: How long did you stay there for?

Beqir Maliqi: We stayed in Kukës for a month, then we went to Milot. At the bridge of Milot, there was a meadow, there were around 70-80 tents. I was the leader of Sector C, there was A, B, C. but after almost three weeks, the agreement was achieved, there were still empty tents, waiting, but it stopped. They didn't build tents because there was the news that the agreement was achieved, to tell you the truth, the conditions were better there. Each had, the family separated, we were all married, we took five or six smaller tents. They gave us food, better food, we cooked and so on. But life was a little better there, near the river, the conditions were better but in tents.

Korab Krasniqi: How did you experience the news that NATO came to Kosova and it being liberated...

Beqir Maliqi: Well, to tell you the truth, we were sad we weren't there. So, we didn't experience it in Kosova but out of it. We tried to leave immediately, but they didn't let us. It was on the 12th or 13th when we found out. We left on June 24th, 23-24, we came here. We stayed the night in Kukës. Then from Kukës, I think on June 25th, we got to... the house here.

Korab Krasniqi: How did you find the house?

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, they didn't down the houses in Dobërlluk, they didn't. We had some uncles there who took care of them, we also had cows and they took care of them, we found one of my uncles staying there and taking care of the house and... But what did we come back to, the whole yard was covered in grass, even though it was layered with sand. The grass had grown up to our knees. Misery, misery! A whole other world...

Korab Krasniqi: You left your father... your father?

Beqir Maliqi: While coming back from Albania, we stopped at the graveyard in Nadakovc. In those grave we found the sticks "R. Maliqi" and "Sh. Maxhuni", Shefqet Maxhuni, a 20-year-old man who was killed, near my father, 50 meters away {opens his hands}. And we came, we wanted to rebury him to be honest. We asked people... there were 36 new graves near my father's grave, so people who were killed during the war, from different villages. But also the imams, "This was his luck, there no reason..." In God's land, in that sense, and so on. We didn't rebury him.

As people were coming to express their condolences, a person we didn't know came and introduced himself. He was Shefqet Maxhuni's father, the man from Novosella. He said, "This and this and this, I opened," he said, "The grave where it said Shefqet Maxhuni but there was an old man there." They changed their graves, he said, "I heard it's your father." Their graves were next to each other, they mixed up the sticks. And we decided, "Since this happened..." The next day early in the morning, because it was summer, June, we reburied our father. We opened a grave in Dobërlluk, we took...

Korab Krasniqi: Did you recognize him?

Beqir Maliqi: Yes, it was interesting because the graves were damp, the water, it was cold, maybe... with the clothes he was wearing, he had a jacket {pretends to wear something}, we took him. So, we reburied him after two months and brought in Dobërlluk, we took him and put him {explain with his hands} in the truck, brought him there and reburied him in Dobërlluk near our mothers, because my mother had died in '93.

Anita Susuri: So, the old man was right...

Beqir Maliqi: He was right, so my father was buried where that man's name was written, they mixed it up. If it weren't for him, we would have thought that's where our father was. But when we found out the grave was opened and there was an old man there, we went there and it was our father. And we reburied him in the graveyard near my mother.

[The interview cuts here]

Anita Susuri: You said your brothers were here, they were in prison in Mitrovica...

Beqir Maliqi: Yes.

Anita Susuri: Then they were freed after the war, did you all get together after?

Beqir Maliqi: No, when we went to Kukës, so we stayed for almost a month, three weeks, after three weeks, groups of people from the prison of Smrekonica started coming by buses. When the first bus came, some acquaintances came and told us that the two brothers who stayed in Kosova were imprisoned. Then after the third day, my brothers came with the last groups. Then when we got together, we went to Milot and then we stayed there for three weeks and after the agreement we all came back to Kosova.

Anita Susuri: You told us how you found your house, you started to get settled at home. Then work, did you go back to Trepça? What was it like?

Beqir Maliqi: No, when we came here, the house wasn't demolished, it wasn't burnt, we settled there. We buried our father and we started... because the struggle was to work, but we started working immediately, with the activity with the wood processing that we had. That summer we worked like that. Time after time, I communicated with my colleagues and with the Stari Trg syndicate, but to tell you the truth, right after the war, they didn't allow us to come here, even though we tried to come to Trepça.

But we started working here sometime around December 22nd of '99. December 22nd, we came and went into the mine with the mayor of Mitrovica, Demi Sutra, they called him a crisis person. He was the interim mayor of Mitrovica, he only served for about two weeks. But he opened the road to come here, and we came in here {points left} in the mine's restaurant. And he held a meeting with a huge number of workers. Actually, he said, "I opened the window for you to come in, you have to open the door." And I think we went in the mine that day, we went in with civilian clothes just to see the situation up to the eleventh level and we went out.

The next day, we came with groups and our experts, and we turned on it, we turned on the water pumping system. Because here we found a condition where a large amount of water, over one million cubic meters of accumulated water, so, we inherited the condition. From there, on the lower level, on the eleventh level, there is a water door that was closed almost until {raises his hand} from the tenth level and the water had entered, where it was estimated over one million cubic meters of water. We turned on the pumping system and the pumps started working immediately. From that day on, to tell you the truth, we have done some surveillance of the mine, although we suspected that they might have left any explosives, bombs, anything, but there was no such thing.

We noticed that the mine was ruthly exploited for ten years, disrespecting the rules and laws of mining. But they knew that they had to leave the mine so they just stole. They exploited it, but without respecting the rules of mining and without respecting the exploitation system in our mine. So, from that day on, we started pumping water, but it was a large amount of water, and even the pipes were closed with lime, the large amount of water couldn't be lowered. So, we followed the level of water every day. The situation soon came that water came out on the eighth horizon. If the water had come out on the tenth horizon and went through the well, it would sink the eleventh horizon and the mine would be closed.

To tell you the truth, at that time, we informed the institutions, but there were no institutions, it was the interim government. We went to inform some people about the situation, mainly the director then Burhan [Kavaja]. But they weren't aware, there was no opportunity, there was no organization, we tried with our body and soul to save the mine, because we knew the importance of this mine. The situation came, to tell you the truth, if we hadn't put a barricade on the tenth level {explains with his hands} with concrete and physically closed the level and not let the water go through the wells with the sink pumps, the mine would have sunk.

But fortunately we put a concrete barricade there and water came out on the tenth horizon, it was accumulating on the seventh horizon and, in some form, the mine was saved. Later, we took steps to clean the pipes with hydrochloric acid, we had reached some point to, to, to lower the level. But several years have passed. Mostly at the level in 2005, we couldn't open the door of the water I was talking about, which was the accumulated water behind the door. In 2005, we opened it, in 2005, now

the trial production has started, initial as they say. Actually, on August 20, 2005, we started the production and, since then, we have increased production, so in some way, from year to year.

Especially, to tell you the truth, when I was the director from 2008-2014, it was the biggest post-war production in that time. We were a team of colleagues here, engineers who also do this craft and we are dedicated to mining, we were familiar with it even before the war, especially after the war, we wanted at all costs to start production. But they didn't allow us, I remember there was a superior at that time, at the Kosovo level, we would say, "Are we starting production?" He said, "Why do you need" he said, "production? It will only be a political problem with production." We thought at the beginning that we started, immediately to start with production, with production, because like that the capital facilities were in order except for the amount of water that was accumulated there.

It wasn't demolished compared to what period we went during the war, the main well, the compressor station, the fan weren't broken, weren't damaged. The mine was mainly damaged by the method of exploitation and the theft of ore that was done by the Serbs without respecting the rules. So the great damage of the mine was done in that way. However, no one was interested, we started production in 2000. Actually, when we wrote the reports, we didn't dare to say that we are producing, but in the phase of the mine, preparations we have also produced some ore, allegedly while doing preparation. Actually, we extract the ore, the treatment was in that way only in the preparation phase and not in the production phase. Somewhere in 2005, we got a license for research, it said, not for production but for research. At the research access firm, we extracted as much ore as we could to survive.

Anita Susuri: Why didn't you come back until December, I think there were problems with the creation of the board of directors or something? From liberation until...

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, we talked then, we talked about the boards, we weren't, it was said that a board was appointed by the interim government where we didn't participate, but, in a way, we had structures, when we were fired and so we started. So, we started with Burhan Kavaja, with Aziz Abrashi, with other colleagues, Mensur Fejza and these other colleagues. Me, Xhafer Peci, Qazim Jashari, Muhamed Abazi, some colleagues, Zejnullah Azemi, so we started. We knew the mine, to be honest, every place, every... of the mine, we started working in that direction.

Anita Susuri: Now you're the vice director?

Beqir Maliqi: Yes, currently, I was the director from 2008 to 2014, then in 2014, it changed. Currently, Xhafer Peci is the director of the mine.

Anita Susuri: How are things today?

Beqir Maliqi: Well, to be honest, I experienced all the stages of Trepça. I thought, after the war, we would know the importance of Trepça and the wealth that God has brought us here, I thought that everyone in Kosova will rise and will try to recover it. That didn't happen, we are dissatisfied in this sense, I personally also am, because there was no commitment to Trepça. Us here as supervisory staff of Trepça, we didn't know the politics that were happening, what the political issue of Trepça is. We said that technically there was an opportunity and we know what wealth is here in the mine, but no, there was no engagement by the government, in a way, the government changed just so Trepça could survive.

They gave a little each time, an infusion therapy, some subventions in the beginning of the year. Since 2005, they have donated for the preparation of the mine, but so far over one hundred million have entered Trepça, so, subventions for the preparation of Trepça. But, often we could not cover it with the production we produce, so we received both personal income and government subsidies. But there was no interest, to tell you the truth, we were always scared about what would happen to Trepça, we were against the privatization of Trepça, what do I know... Since 2000 and somewhat, 2015 yes, there was a law approved for Trepça, where the government has 80 percent of the actions in Trepça, 20 percent the workers. But even after this, there's no interest, no interest at all. We're working and producing.

But, especially lately, the pandemic has hit us, that prices have fallen a lot. Some big production is not possible because there is no equipment, the equipment is old. The workforce is aging, to tell you the truth, when I was director, the first generation was taken, the first generation of new workers was taken. At that time, Ferat Shala was the general director of Trepça, who was engaged around Trepça and also cooperated with other colleagues with us in the Stari Trg mine and also in the Artana mine. So, a generation was hired then for the first time after the war, 150 workers were hired. If that generation of workers wasn't hired and trained, educated in the spirit of the mine and in the professions of the mine, the mine would have been closed {pretends to lock something}.

But, fortunately, they were hired and we trained workers for the first time in the history of the Stari Trg mine. To hold theoretical and practical lessons there in the mine and train them on mine conditions. There is also an agreement with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the replacement of old workers with their children. So, whoever wanted to retire early, there was the opportunity that somewhere around 56 people, I think, have changed, and over 200 new workers were reached. So, at the moment they are keeping the production in Trepça. There are still a number of old people, but, to be honest, unfortunately, it wasn't done for the older generation. We started the work, I said it was the agreement "One for all, all for one" after the war they didn't have the opportunity...

When we expected it would be good, even though we risked our health... when we expected everything would be good and we could go back to work, we didn't all have the opportunity to go back to work. Initially 200 workers came back, that's how much UNMIK allowed. Then gradually the number

grew. In the 80s, this mine had... the mine with flotation, of course, because flotation was in the frame of the mine, around 3,200 workers. Initially 200 came back to work, there were maximum 500-600 workers. But, now there are some new generations and there are around 770 workers, the mine with flotation.

Anita Susuri: I wanted to ask you something, you mentioned the pandemic, I'm interested to know how Trepça worked during the quarantine.

Beqir Maliqi: To tell you the truth, we didn't have any obstacles moving, each of us got a document, some kind of permit that we work in Trepça, stamped and everything. In the beginning, when it was spreading, we organized and reduced the number, just... there are some equipment here which have to work nonstop, pumps, fans, the well. So we made a register, from all of them we needed around 52 people for four shifts for that essential work. For each moment, if they would stop, but we didn't need to stop the work at all. I think four or five workers were infected in total, who isolated. But in general those who had someone in the family infected didn't work.

But there wasn't a wide spread, some of the workers were even abroad because they visited their families. So, they came back and stayed in quarantine for two weeks, but we didn't stop. But there was some kind of a panic in that sense. But unfortunately the prices have decreased on the stock exchanges, because the metal prices are set on the London Stock Exchange, and the prices have decreased, they have hit us so hard that we're not able to survive, we're not able to keep... to tell you the truth we have encountered a crisis.

The government of Albin Kurti then gave us a donation, a donation of three and a half million, I think. So we could overcome things up to this point, we are currently in a very difficult situation, these months I don't know how we can get out of the situation. If it weren't for that donation of three and a half million, we would have been left without salaries even earlier, if there was no intervention. There are demands of the syndicate and our government, to tell you the truth, they are not dealing with problems. The prime minister was just elected, he should have come to see the mine, because the wealth is here. When Kosova, Trepça could finance Serbia, not to say Yugoslavia, it can do the same for Kosova. But actually no one cares what is happening, they have their own problems, the mine is not on their list at all.

Because this, we thought that after war it will be the main economic pillar of Kosova. Here there are resources of... the mine with around 10-30 million tons of ore, there is lead, zinc, silver, gold. If it were developed, with other units, processing, with finalization of this ore, but we have stagnated for 20 years, almost with minimal production. From a maximum of one hundred in 2013, 140 thousand tons were produced, in contrast to the '80s, 700 thousand tons were produced, it was 20 percent of the maximum production then. But no, to be honest there is no interest. I don't know why, I don't know

why we're stuck in this direction. God has brought us this wealth to take, to use, to develop, to raise Kosova, but such a thing is not happening.

Anita Susuri: Mister Maliqi, thank you for the interview! If you have something to add, if not...

Beqir Maliqi: No, but to tell you the truth, the pensions... the miners gave their contribution, but even those who left couldn't come back, but even us that are retiring, there's a law that says we had to give contributions 15 years before '90. Most of these workers now don't have those 15 years. So, most of the workers are retiring, after all this suffering, with the contribution before and after war, they're retiring with a 90-euro pension. This is the condition now. So, this is the worker's biggest panic, saying, "90 euros aren't enough even for medicine." We asked from the syndicate to do something in this sense, there are promises but there's nothing changed. Let's see, we're hoping something will happen with Trepça, because it's been so long... the government, since it belongs to the government, the government has to, to invest in Trepça, to increase it, to find a solution. That's it.

Anita Susuri: Good. Thank you once again!

Beqir Maliqi: Thank you. Success!