

# Oral History Kosovo

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## INTERVIEW WITH EDITA TAHIRI

Pristina | Date: May 4, 2018

Duration: 153 minutes

Present:

1. Edita Tahiri (Speaker)
2. Aurela Kadriu (Interviewer)
3. Donjeta Berisha (Camera)

*Symbols in transcription, nonverbal communication:*

*() - emotional communication*

*{ } - the interlocutor explains some gestures.*

*Other rules of transcription:*

*[] - addition to the text to help understand*

*Footnotes are add-ons that provide information about places, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you introduce yourself and tell us some of your early childhood memories, so your family background and whatever you remember from your childhood?

**Edita Tahiri:** I am Edita Tahiri. I come from Prizren. Known for my work as a politician, diplomat, negotiator, as well as one of the main leaders of the Movement for Independence. At that time, the Democratic League of Kosovo<sup>1</sup> as a Peaceful Movement for Independence, and my entire life journey was a commitment to the national cause, for the independence and freedom of Kosovo. But there were periods of time when I also devoted myself to academic life doing my education at Harvard, then my doctorate at Johns Hopkins and the University of Prishtina.

I got a master's at the University of Essex as well, and at the University of Prishtina I studied at the Faculty of Electronics. And the rest, since Harvard and the rest, were connected to my master's and doctoral studies in political science. I have lived in Prishtina since I was elected chairwoman of the Democratic League of Kosovo in 1991. Before that I lived in Prizren, except for when I studied in Prishtina and in Britain, Essex.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was your childhood like in Prizren and your family background, what family do you come from?

**Edita Tahiri:** My childhood was quite difficult as well as my whole family's, because I come from a patriotic family. My father was one of the main activists of the illegal movement known as the National Democratic Movement,<sup>2</sup> whose goal was to unite Kosovo with Albania. And due to his political activism

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<sup>1</sup> *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 First political party of Kosovo, founded in 1989, when the autonomy of Kosovo was revoked, by a group of journalists and intellectuals.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.

<sup>2</sup> *Lëvizja Nacional-Demokratike Shqiptare* - The National Democratic Albanian Movement aimed at unifying all territories inhabited by Albanians and was thus considered illegal by Yugoslavia.

he was imprisoned during the Ranković<sup>3</sup> regime, it was a very difficult period, where Albanians were oppressed and persecuted in the most severe ways due to the commitments to the rights of Albanians and the commitments of national unity.

He was in prison for five years, sentenced nine years, it was the time I had just been born, when he went to prison I was eleven months old. When he came back, I was six years old. And that family situation was such that my mother had no means to take care of us, she had to work to ensure the family's survival, but she also had to take care of my father in prison. For me, I defined it as an imprisoned childhood, because that period was all about that tragedy, but also about our pride, because my mother taught us to be proud when we go to school or when we are in social circles.

[She would say] Because, "Your father is in prison for good things, for the nation and you should be proud and not feel bad." Despite the socio-political context at that time, it was that most were not committed to the national cause, patriotic families or patriotic individuals were few. So, we belonged to this patriotic minority and the others in a way came to terms with the communist system and with the fact of the division of the Albanian nation. This was not accepted by my parents, but then it also became our cause, for the children of this family.

So, we deeply understood the division of the Albanian nation, we deeply understood the injustice and where did this injustice come from that happened to the Albanians living in four - five countries due to the decisions of that time of some great powers, which was then exploited by Serbia and Yugoslavia to oppress and leave the Albanians as backward as possible. However, it is important that when living in a family with a patriotic spirit, you have your ideals in life, you have your life purpose. Not because I was immediately involved in politics, but that patriotic inspiration lived within me.

Also, Prizren as the capital of Albania gave us an additional inspiration, because as children we often visited [The League of Prizren].<sup>4</sup> So this is the context in which I grew up as a child. I was an excellent student, in all stages, both elementary school and high school. From the descriptions that the family gives, they say that I was wise and polite. And then when I became involved as one of the founders of the Democratic League in Prizren, opposing the Serbian occupation, even to our family it seemed somewhat like an energy or an internal force that grew inside me expressing itself through this direct commitment towards the establishment [of LDK]. And then soon after I became part of the leadership of the Democratic League.

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<sup>3</sup> Aleksandar Ranković (1909-1983) was a Serb partisan hero who became Yugoslavia's Minister of the Interior and head of 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.

<sup>4</sup> The 1878 Albanian Alliance that fought against border changes decided at the Congress of Berlin by the Great Powers. The League demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. The building where the Albanian leaders made their *besa* (sworn alliance) is on the river, upstream from the center of town. It is now a museum. The current building is a reconstruction of the original one, which Serbian troops burned down in 1999.

I was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo for ten years from '91 until 2000. After Kosovo was liberated, then came the UNMIK [United Nations Missions in Kosovo] institutions, but until then I acted as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The reason why I was appointed to this position was not that I had any political or diplomatic experience, but as they explained from the presidency of the Democratic League, it was because firstly I came from a patriotic family, nationally formed, patriotic. Secondly, I was educated in the west and spoke fluent English, because as I told you, after studying at the University of Prishtina, I got a master's degree in electronics and telecommunications in Great Britain at the University of Essex.

So I had a {opens her arms} a *background* [speaks English] that gave me the opportunity to get involved in the diplomacy of Kosovo. It was a very important period because the activity took place in Kosovo and my activity was divided into two parts. In Kosovo together with the entire leadership and president of the LDK [Democratic League of Kosovo], Dr. Ibrahim Rugova,<sup>5</sup> we worked in preserving the resistance, the spirit, the resistance of the people through organization of the society. Practically, the Democratic League of Kosovo as a movement for independence was successful in the sense that it organized the [parallel] institutions in the circumstances of occupation. Also another strategic initiative that we had was the internationalization of Kosovo's case and in this task I was mainly responsible as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I can also say that political-diplomatic engagements gave me the opportunity to do something that I had not planned at all as a life mission, to be in the service of the nation, liberation, independence, these became my primary commitments and to this day. So, these 30 years all my commitment and dedication is connected to the Albanian nation, to the state of Kosovo, to make our nation as strong as possible, to make Kosovo a state as strong as possible internationally, fully accepted and an Euro-Atlantic state. Where Western values, our values as an ancient and European nation converge and therefore are integrated in this Euro-Atlantic community.

**Aurela Kadriu:** I would want to go back to Prizren once more, you mentioned that your father was politically involved, I would want you to tell us more about elementary and high school, but also tell us more about how your father's involvement reflected on your life, so in school and in general?

**Edita Tahiri:** I finished primary school near my house, at that time it was called 17 Nëntori School. While in high school I attended the gymnasium.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the influences that the family or the nation was under, my father, although tortured in the prisons of Serbia, in Sremska Mitrovica as one of the worst prisons, he did not want to dictate our political leanings. Besides, he drew a red line, he did not allow us to become members of the Communist Party, because he was a democrat, he was committed

<sup>5</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.

<sup>6</sup> A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

to democratic values. And because he thought, and I think he was right, that communism was in the service of Slavic interests and we Albanians suffered from such a system. So, that was the reason why I never joined the Communist Party.

On the other hand I did not join the *llegale*<sup>7</sup> movement as my older sister did for example. It is not because our father intended to discourage us from underground activism and dangers that come with it, but rather he wanted us to be aware that if we commit to political activism, we should know the consequences that follow because he has suffered. From a well-known figure in the city of Prizren, from a leadership position, when he came out of prison he was mentally ill. And I and everyone else lived with a father who for ten years refused to sit with us at the lunch table. He lived in a house prison because his psycho-social condition was terribly damaged.

Not to mention that he rarely talked about his tortures, but when we grew up we insisted. I insisted when I turned 18, I said, “Now is the time to know more of tortures you underwent.” I can say that torture has gone as far as electric shock. So the forms of torture used by Serbia and Serbian structures against Albanians were severe. And practically all his story, but also his attitude was an inspiration to me, because he said, “Whoever is in the prisons of Serbia should not be accused if they betray a friend or collaborator.” But, as he would he say, “I could not do it, therefore the torture against me was greater.”

And it is true that at the time when my father and his friends were imprisoned, no one was imprisoned after my father because he stopped it, so he managed not to give out the names of his friends, and that was a great value. But, I believe that it has influenced our and my personality, in a way, whatever work you do but especially commitment to the national cause, do it with principles and values and with honesty as such as the nation and society deserves. Especially for the fact that we, Albanians, have had a tragic fate. This tragic fate of the nation’s separation was directly reflected in my household, because my mother was from Albania and she got married to my father during the Second World War and the border was immediately closed [after the war].

You probably know the story that Albanians from Kosovo during the Second World War did not want to fight against the German and Italian occupation, because at that time we practically united as a nation. Schools in Albanian language were opened, a perspective opened up. But in the end, in the last period of the war, there was an offer from other nations of the former Yugoslavia to recognize our right to self-determination if we were to take part in the war. It was this event known as the Bujan Conference,<sup>8</sup> which adopted a resolution allowing Kosovo to join Albania after the end of the Second World War.

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<sup>7</sup> Constellation of underground militant groups fighting for Kosovo separation from Yugoslavia and unification with Albania during Tito’s Yugoslavia.

<sup>8</sup> The Conference of Bujan (31 December 1943 – 1, 2 January 1944) was a meeting of Yugoslav partisans in which a resolution was passed that promised to let the people of Kosovo decide democratically whether they wished to be part of Albania or of Yugoslavia after the war.

However, immediately after the war ended, the betrayals of the communist structures and the Assembly of Prizren began, so the parliament of... excuse me, the Parliament of Kosovo, the Assembly of Kosovo declared a union by force with Yugoslavia and Serbia as part of the same package. So we were again forced to remain under the domination and oppression of Yugoslavia but mostly executed by Serbian policies. So I wanted to tell you that my father did not prefer to influence our commitment to the national cause, but his own tragic story, his own vision and commitment to the nation, I believe became an inspiration for us, and for me since every day as a child and as an adult I have faced the fact of the nation's separation.

Because my mother tried for forty years to go to Albania and meet her family. As you know, we had an Albanian Berlin Wall between us. She died without meeting her family and I lived in an environment where my mother almost every morning either woke up with a dream that she went to Albania or with a dream that she met her mother and brother. So this was a very particular childhood I had. On the one hand my father was in prison for his commitment to the national cause, on the other hand my mother was in a constant longing due to the nation's tragic separation. And when I started my political engagement in the years '88-'89, only later have I analyzed these circumstances, so the family and national circumstances influenced that at a certain moment I set out to work for national aspirations.

**Aurela Kadriu:** It seemed very interesting to me that your sister was in the *Illegale*, do you have any stories that she has told you, what was it like for you...

**Edita Tahiri:** My older sister was a student at the High Pedagogical School in Prizren, studying mathematics. And those high school students joined an underground group, as they did all over Kosovo. These are the students of the 1968 demonstrations.<sup>9</sup>

**Aurela Kadriu:** Aha.

**Edita Tahiri:** So, my sister was one of the main figures, they were held all over Kosovo, in Prizren when the [Albanian national] flag was raised... even though, since we are talking about this, let me tell a story about myself at that time. At the time they were preparing to raise the flag, student meetings were usually held in our house and they needed to sew the edges of the flag, they had the flag but its edges weren't sewn. And I was around twelve years old, and they asked me to take it to the tailor. I immediately accepted, I accepted and I went there. The tailor was the mother of one of those who were part of the '68 group and when the job was done, I came back, I handed it over to them.

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<sup>9</sup> During October and November 1968, many demonstrations were organized by the Albanian population across Kosovo. The main demand was to recognize Kosovo's right to self-determination. The first and most massive demonstration was organized in Prizren on October 6, 1968. This demonstration ended in front of the League of Prizren, where for the first time the demand for Kosovo Republic was publicly articulated.

Now when they were ready to go to the League of Prizren to raise the flag, I asked to go with them and my sister and the others told me, “No, no, you are too young, you cannot come.” So I said (laughs), “I was not young to take the flag” {points left}, because I had to go through the city, “So I did that and I want to be there.” So they took me with them. So, since then I have been indirectly involved in these events and practically some of my sister’s friends and collaborators have been imprisoned, and after that my sister was vocal about the need to increase the intensity of the political engagement as something recommended by her friends in prison.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you remember in more detail when you gathered to go there?

**Edita Tahiri:** We were all there, my older sister Shyhretja, then the sister with whom I live here Myfidja, we were all there. I also remember that before we went to the League of Prizren, there was a parade with the Albanian flag on all the main streets of Prizren. Then we ended up at the League of Prizren and two of the students managed to put it on the pole {points up} to the League of Prizren and at the moment when the flag started to fly the police immediately intervened, beat and arrested several people.

However, the effect of that event was very great in Prizren. So, they were the first sparks of a new movement, because Albanians since the nation’s tragic separation at the London Conference in 1913, have organized in different movements and sought self-determination, freedom and independence. And this event and the student’s political commitment... In it were reflected all the movements of all the generations, including the Democratic League as a peaceful movement and the Kosovo Liberation Army<sup>10</sup> as an armed movement and many others known to our history.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which year did you come to Prishtina to study?

**Edita Tahiri:** I started my studies in 1974, after graduating from high school I studied, as I told you earlier, at the Technical Faculty, the Department of Electronics with Telecommunications. A field that was not my first choice. Here, too, I want to share an important event. I was always interested in studying psychology, the reason being, I was very eager to understand my father’s state of mind and the damage that the Serbian prison had done to him. Because at that time there was no Department of Psychology at the University of Prishtina, there was a department in Zagreb and other cities. And, since my family did not have the financial means to invest in my studies, I was forced to change my field of study.

At that time electronics seemed like a modern field, Kosovo was far from any technological development, but it was more of a trend than a designation. And, since I always felt this unfulfilled desire to study psychology, then in parallel I constantly read literature on psychology, psychoanalysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), was an Albanian guerrilla paramilitary organization that sought the separation of Kosovo from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbia during the 1990s.

I have read almost all known psychoanalysts and their works. In the coming days I will bring my personal library from Prizren, since I finally moved to my apartment after 30 years of work for Kosovo and the nation.

Why did I do the reading? I was not studying but attentively reading to be able to... to understand a bit my father's inner world, but also that of other Albanians, not only the ones who were in prisons but also of those that disappeared, who were killed and tortured, and how that national tragedy was reflected in the Albanian nation. However, initially, my main motivation was to understand my father's fate. Even though he didn't bring attention to his condition, he had... even though he isolated himself from the rest, he held his pride. When he decided to meet us, I'm talking about the first ten years [after prison], because later he rehabilitated. If he decided to meet us in the hallway or in the living room, he had a pride which reflected strength, and I liked that.

For that reason, seeing all that suffering... and on the other hand he had a very dignified attitude, and my studies or active readings I would say in psychoanalysis helped me in a way to achieve this life desire, not to let it fade away, but accomplish it. So I successfully completed the Faculty of Electronics and Telecommunications. I was a good student, and even later as a teacher of these subjects I wrote the first book in Albanian, the book *Electronics* for high schools. This also had a patriotic incentive, because when I started teaching in Prizren in the technical school, it was the time of the student demonstrations of '81,<sup>11</sup> I graduated in 1980, I started teaching in '81.

And some of my students were arrested, so we had to confront a new reality, and that year in September, assigning the reading materials to my students on the board, on the spot I had the thought, why are there always books in Serbo-Croatian? So I did not have a book to recommend in Albanian. But also the relations with Albania, the border was closed, we could not get books from Albania because there were books written in Albanian or translated and this was the moment when I decided (laughs), "I will remove one of these books in this language," and for several years I worked on that book, then it was published by the Kosovo Schoolbook Bureau.

So I chose the field of electrical engineering and telecommunications and was committed to it. I also went to study in Great Britain at the University of Essex. I got a master's degree in this field, in digital telecommunications, which was also very far from the realities and level of development of Kosovo. But it was a commitment that in the future I could contribute to, in the field of telecommunications in Kosovo. However, my life changed from '88, '89 when I became politically engaged. And then I also studied Political Science and International Relations.

[Video stops]

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<sup>11</sup> On March 11, 1981, a plate was broken at the student canteen expressing dissatisfaction with poor student conditions, after which many students joined flipping tables. The event sparked a widespread student-led demonstration. The demand for better food and dormitory conditions was emblematic of the Albanian demand for equal treatment in Yugoslavia.



**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you confront your father about the reason for his isolation from his family, as an adult or after all your readings?

**Edita Tahiri:** As I told you he was isolated long after prison, some part of the time he came to the living room was when he listened to Voice of America on the radio, then quickly watched television because my mother bought a television that my father to be able to, to communicate at least through television. And, at the time when he came to listen to the news we would ask him why he is so dedicated to hear out the news, what's happening? About such issues he was more open, so he spoke about politics, what should happen to Albanians, how the West will engage, especially the USA. And he practically would show a degree of optimism that one day we will overcome the issue of nation's separation, we will have political agency to achieve our national aspirations.

However, he would shut down all the questions concerning his experience in prison. There were a few moments that I managed to encourage him to vent out, and usually this has happened when we went on summer vacation. At that time the main destination was Ulqin, an Albanian environment and he relaxed. There, I had the opportunity to talk about these topics. Especially when he went to swim, I noticed a mark, a hole here in the back {points with her hand} and from there his story began. I said, "What is this?" "No, no..." he minimized it. Then he began his testimony, that during the tortures he had endured {touches her back} he was injured and had to undergo surgery {she pretends to sew something by hand} to close the wound, because of the lashings that happened.

And I remember at that time, not only a summer, but for a few summers he talked about his political activity, he talked about the movement in which even his cousin was involved. He was the main leader for the area of Prizren and Kukës and he went missing, to this day we don't know his whereabouts. He told me about their activities and in particular about a secret operation to bring some American paratroopers (smiles) who at that time wanted to observe closely the situation of Albanians on this side of the border but also in Albania. He then said that they had managed to establish a radio link with which they had maintained Kosovo-Albania communication, in order to form a military resistance to liberate Kosovo from Yugoslavia and to join Albania.

He also told me a very interesting case, one of his friends who had come down from the mountain to see his family, and at that time the Yugoslav Secret Services<sup>12</sup> found out and went to his home to catch him. He had a shelter room and he entered into that shelter and {holds her fist close to her chest} killed himself, he had a bomb with him. He always brought up these cases. He also mentioned the friends he had in prison, with whom he had great relations, especially a friend from Rahovec. While my father was in prison we would spend the summer with them. The reason was that they wanted to help my mother survive the economic hardship, because our means were very limited. He also spoke about

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<sup>12</sup> The State Security Service was the secret police organization of Communist Yugoslavia. It was at all times best known by the acronym UDBA.

moments of torture, he singled out this electric method, due to which he lost conscious for two weeks. There may have been medical treatments but only after two weeks he regained consciousness.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How was this reflected in your mother, she had to take care of you on her own?

**Edita Tahiri:** Mother was always busy, she had two jobs. Before noon she worked at the textile factory, she got that job after my father was imprisoned, and since my father did not betray his friends, all of them were free and so they made efforts to find a job for my mother. And my mother had to become a tailor, she took a course and became a tailor. So, in the first half of the day, she had an eight-hour shift, and then she worked at home. So, she was busy making sure we survived. But what I appreciated her for, is her commitment to our education. Too much, so that when we had to study, she would never interrupt us because of house chores.

She also talked about her family in Albania which was also persecuted, all six uncles and two aunts there. Meanwhile, my grandfather was the mayor of Kukës and since one of the uncles was against the regime of Enver Hoxha,<sup>13</sup> he ended up with life imprisonment. He was released from prison only when the democratic changes took place in Albania and practically she said that all her brothers were educated and she wanted us to be educated too, because she would say this, “The nation cannot move forward without education.” She did not bother us much, but there were times when she told stories about dreams or when she missed her family, she certainly could not hold back her tears.

I remember how she always sang songs of exile (smiles). Well, that was my mother. Also, mother was known as one of the strongest women of Prizren, because... I don't know if you are aware of this, but at that time, the Serbo-Slavic regime not only would imprison Albanian patriots, but had a tendency to abuse their spouses. So, I remember her saying, “Whenever I go to prison I have a pair of scissors in my bag.” As a tailor, they were her working tools {pretends to hold a pair of scissors in her hands}. “I have my scissors in my bag in case someone attempts something.” And this behavior of hers showed great strength of character, moral strength, and that turned her into a Prizren icon. So, whenever the most powerful women of Prizren are talked about, my mother is among them.

So there was real resilience, not only individual but also national. She told us, as a child I didn't remember, my brothers and sisters I think remember the raids that took place after my father was imprisoned. And he told me that when she came as a bride, she had the Albanian flag in her pocket and said that, “We had to find a way so that this flag does not fall into the hands of Serbian police.” And, then she tore off the flag that was made of gold so that they would not identify it and destroy it. There are many other life stories related to the role of my mother, but also the role of father in my upbringing.

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<sup>13</sup> Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was the leader of the Albanian Communist Party who ruled Albania as a dictator until his death.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you visit him while he was in prison?

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes, yes, we... my mother would go to Sremska Mitrovica every month. Some women would go (smiles), there were some patriotic men who were in prison at the time and they all went together. They went by train from Prizren to Belgrade and then continued, I don't remember, I think by bus. And I went there, so did my siblings, we went in turns. My father told me that he was touched when we met, he took me in his arms and hugged me. I moved away {she moves her hands towards herself} I said to him, "Who are you? You are not my father!" And, he then constantly mentioned this to me and he was very touched after he returned to his prison cell. I remember a little bit but they told me the story, I was one or two years old then.

I also remember when he came back, some news came out and he sent a letter that he might get released ahead of time, so before his sentence was over, and that morning my mother got up to go to work and told us all that, "Your father might come back today." And we had a, I mean a special feeling, joy and sadness mixed together. So the joy that he is coming back, the sadness of why he had to be there, and I remember it was before I started going to school, I was waiting in the neighborhood and a family in the neighborhood who were constantly taking care of me, since my mother was at work, I grew up there {points to the floor} Nushi family, childhood... and that day they said to me, "Why aren't you coming today?" My mother would go to work, I would go there. I said, "No, today I am waiting for my father." They told me about it, but I also remember it myself. All the time I was waiting outside until he came... (cries). I can't talk anymore about this because I get emotional {drinks water}. I never talked, I haven't talked about these things for a long time...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you want to rest for a while?

**Edita Tahiri:** I don't want to talk about my mother, I will get more emotional. Once we went to the [Kosovo-Albanian] border, I'll finish it then maybe I'll calm down. We went to the border, we were here {points at herself} my mother and brothers went that way, on both sides of the border, and my mother was talking to the [Kosovo] border guard, her mother was talking to the Albanian border guard, I mean it was guarded. Then my grandmother after that moment when she went home she got paralyzed and spent her whole life paralyzed. Life is very interesting, not only mine, but my life was very specific. But many Albanians had tragedies like this happened to them. I do not want to magnify it, but ours was like that.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like for you to be a student in '74, the University was founded in '74?

**Edita Tahiri:** The University of Prishtina was our greatest national achievement, because all the intentions of the Serb-Yugoslav structures that were lined up against the Albanians were against the University of Prishtina. Known Serbian slogans at that time said that Albanians should not have a university because then we can't stop their demands to join Albania, they will grow, will develop, will

be empowered. But really the University is probably the beginning or the basis of the independence we have today, because without an educated nation we could not progress.

When I came to Prishtina, it was the time when Kosovo's political status advanced, it had [an almost] federal status and the situation was a little better than during the Ranković regime, or other time periods. But in general, those who looked at the political position of Albanians more thoroughly, it was never good. We were constantly exposed to imprisonment, discrimination, inability to access international education and so on. So we began to see the light (smiles) in the long tunnel of Albanians on this side of the border.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What can you tell us about student life, what was it like for you, you came from Prizren to Pristina as a young adult?

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes, yes. First, Prizren is very beautiful, it is an inspiring civilized environment with a lot of national cultural heritage. So, it takes a great power to leave Prizren, it is a challenge, it is not easy to leave. However, Pristina was the center of education, it was a student world and for me it was all a novelty. Although I was disappointed by not being able to study psychology in Zagreb, I nevertheless began to get into sciences I chose, so telecoms and electronics and I built many friendships. Being a person who didn't prefer electronics, but preferred more social sciences, I built my friendships in a way that I spent the period of studies with college colleagues, but the rest I was usually in the company of artists and painters.

So, in a way I had the two components that gave me the ability to fulfill how I was feeling inside. So, the studies were not easy. I studied for five years and showed commitment to my studies, I collaborated with colleagues, I would say I have put in all the work to receive my degree. I told you that my mother wanted us to have an education, and this instilled in me that desire to have an education. While on the other hand, the socializing part and having fun (smiles) happened with my friends who were either artists or painters, most of them were painters, sculptors. So, it was a good life.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you live in the dormitory?

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes, I lived in the dormitory...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you have any memories?

**Edita Tahiri:** ...most of the time.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Do you have any instances that you remember from life in dormitories?

**Edita Tahiri:** I'll tell you the first, every time I went to live in a dorm room it wasn't very clean and I would paint the room. I would take all the equipment, I am not very hardworking in this sense (laughs). But the rooms were dirty and I could not stand that situation. So, every year the first thing I did was, I took the keys {pretends to unlock the door} and painted. I had roommates, they were surprised, I told them, "Just leave the room, I will do it," That was it. Secondly, there was the problem with water, we could not use water every day and this was a problem especially when it came to hygiene.

Then keeping order, or running to keep order, who first, who... There were some challenges, they were beautiful but also difficult for life. There was a life... the dormitories I lived in also had some libraries, so a hall where you could go to read. Then came the parties, the socializing, the creation of new friendships. For example, in the dormitory I met a friend who has been my friend for forty years, from Tetovo. So we met there and our friendship has developed for forty years now, and not just between me and her, but between my sister, between my family and her family. She was the daughter of the famous writer Murat Isaku, Luljeta.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Maybe we can talk a little more about you, you came from a patriotic family, I think that Pristina was culturally and ethnically mixed, whether there were contact between you, between Serbian colleagues, I believe there were, were there Serbians who studied here?

**Edita Tahiri:** I think there were, but I don't remember if we had contact, I don't remember, maybe... I can't explain why we didn't interact. But life at the Technical Faculty was very dynamic, many exams, many tasks and we always met only those who were more open to meet. So group colleagues, those who had the opportunity to discuss studies with, so I don't remember contacts and I can't explain whether it was a matter of nationalism or because life was very dynamic, student life, and there was no interest in these things.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were there any activism in this period in which you were involved in any form?

**Edita Tahiri:** No.

**Aurela Kadriu:** It was a period...

**Edita Tahiri:** It was a period of my studies, I didn't engage, then when the demonstrations of '81 took place I had finished my studies because I graduated in December 1980. So, I did not belong to these eventual structures.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like when you returned from studies in Prizren, I am talking in terms of the political context and how was it reflected in you?

**Edita Tahiri:** When I returned to Prizren, I decided to work in education and not in production, because my profession led me to industry and production. I preferred education more and as soon as I started in January 1981, the movements towards the March demonstrations started. The demonstration took place in Prizren as well as in Pristina, it became the main event of developments in Kosovo and there was interference from the secret services of the Communist Party and some of my students were arrested. There I had an extremely sharp reaction, which is probably the beginnings of my patriotism, which was formed in me but was not manifested. Several Communist meetings were held in collectives, they were also held in the technical schools and they demanded that teachers distance themselves from the demonstrations. Not only did I not distance myself, but I gave a harsh criticism for the students who were innocently arrested.

So, that is where the first divisions started, I remember the principal was scared after the meeting, as if he wanted to discuss with so I would be more calm, and I reacted that, "Not only me as a teacher, but you are the principal and you should be the first to protect the students, then come the others." But I told him, "Here we, our paths separate. I have a different orientation, a different story and a different commitment, but be careful because in the long run in history you may be on the wrong side." I remember this conversation. What did I do for those students, since they kept them in prison for two months, for two initials KR, people were imprisoned at that time, "Kosovo Republic." I made it happen that when they returned, they were able to graduate with their generation, and I created all the opportunities for them, I convinced my colleague teachers to provide them with private exams.

## Part Two

**Edita Tahiri:** And so it happened, so when they came back from prison all the teachers showed solidarity and they graduated with their generation. This was not just a solution for them as individuals, but according to me it was encouragement for the next generations to not be scared by imprisonment cases or different concerns because that was our luck. And the stronger the new generation would get, the better for our future. So all the students and teachers in the school talked about how I created the opportunity for them to graduate with their classmates.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Until which year did you work in education?

**Edita Tahiri:** I worked from 1981 to 1989. In the meantime, in '87, I started working in a bank as the director of an electronics center, but at the same time I continued to teach. The dedication to the teaching profession gave me a lot of pleasure and inspiration, because I was dealing with the new generation and I had the opportunity to transfer knowledge from the fields I taught but on the other hand when you are in the teaching process you have the opportunity to influence the upbringing of the personality of the new generation. It was also an opportunity for me to share with them those

aspects of the personality of importance, character and principles so that tomorrow they would be a vital and positive part of society.

I remember that it was an opportunity especially for the students who came from the villages to have the opportunity to face a school and civilized environment to challenge themselves in terms of progress and I took care of them more in order to... their life journey to be more normal because normally the village-town differences were very large at that time. Today practically due to different transformations there aren't many differences but at that time those who came from the village felt inferior and so I encouraged them not to feel this difference. On the other hand the explanations that had to be given about the circumstances of the demonstrations or why they are done, why they should be done, what are the national problems.

I discussed these things with them but not during class, but during break time or during the time when they participated in demonstrations and returned to show some pride that they were there and the debate continued. But, especially when the students were arrested, it became the dominant topic. Among the students, there was also Nait Hasani, who was arrested at the time, in 1983, when I was studying for a master's degree in Britain. From school I remember some things or some changes I brought to that school. First, technical schools not only in Prizren, but in almost all of Kosovo were undervalued. Usually the concentration of both the teachers and the students was on the gymnasium. And when I went, I found a situation, to say, as chaotic, without discipline, without respect, there were also students with traits, so of some kind of adolescent mischief and so on.

I tried to change this and I managed to be quite rigorous, I tried to make it clear to everyone the definition, so, what they're doing there as a student or as a teacher. Why do we need respect, why do we need cooperation? Also the changes I made are related to what I found in the technical school laboratories, but unused, while all the tools were there, they were not being used, electronic subjects require the practical side. So I revitalized those labs and even the students helped me because some of them started professional engagements through various technical services and they also brought the missing parts, the electronic parts so that when we did the exercises to illustrate the theoretical part were completed.

And almost immediately I applied the methodology of theoretical teaching and practical work through realizations that created a very interesting complement and gave dynamics to the learning process, and even learning happened faster. Because they had the opportunity to experience the practical side, because science of electronics is sometimes abstract, so we are all users of information technology of electronic devices, but what happens inside the deceive there's a few who know except those who are professionals. Thus, they also got familiar with the internal processes of semiconductors and others, elements that form the basis of electronics.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You told me that in '83 you started studying for a master's degree, how did the circumstances for you to go there come about?

**Edita Tahiri:** Actually after I started studying in... sorry, after I started working at the Technical School, I thought I should study at the same time, and in 1981 I had the opportunity to go to Zagreb. I started going to lectures once a month. In the meantime there was a competition for British-funded scholarships awarded here in Pristina and I competed in order to stop in Zagreb and continue on to Essex, which is in Colchester town near London. I won the British scholarship, I chose the field where I would, I would study and my thesis mentor helped me, Professor Naim Bejtullahu, helped me, I consulted with him on the thesis and the field.

So, my final decision was digital telecommunications or digital broadcasting. A very advanced level of technological developments for that time, but it was with the vision and in anticipation that Kosovo would develop, today we have digital applications but it was just the beginning of the field of digitalization. I stayed there for a year, it was a more professional master's rather than a master's degree. It gave me a lot of experience with experienced teachers, with colleagues from all over the world. And, I also learned a lot more English because I learned English in school and from my interests, but there I also got extra lessons for English. Even with a professor who is now my friend, who was extremely capable, especially for foreign students, and gave me the opportunity to advance and pass the language exams successfully.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You moved to Britain at that time, right?

**Edita Tahiri:** I lived in Britain for two semesters, so, one calendar year. In the city where the University of Essex is, I was in Colchester most of the time, but I spent the weekends in London with some friends who I met in accidental circumstances. I also had contacts with some Albanians who lived there. So the weekend was for companionship, relaxation and visits to London. While, during the week I was regularly there, I had an office since I was a student and also as a researcher. I had contacts with students from Japan, who at that time were part of the university team to shape the fax machine... {turns to the camera} what is that machine called? The one which was used to send fax, how can I say it in Albanian?

**Donjeta Berisha:** Printer?

**Edita Tahiri:** No, no {moves her hand horizontally} these... There was no email back then, fax, with letters...

**Aurela Kadriu:** I don't know its name...

**Edita Tahiri:** But you which {moves her hand horizontally} with the letter.



**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes, yes.

**Edita Tahiri:** Anyway, {turn to the camera} you will cut it {pretends to hold scissors } here because I ruined it.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You can continue.

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes, so at that time they worked and while I was there the fax machine was discovered, it was a great joy for the whole university (smiles) and also for me, knowing something that was coming, and later we all used it . Now it isn't used at all, but for that time faxing was the main machine for fast news or correspondence. My mentor during that study was one of the most famous professors of telecommunication sciences and I benefited a lot from his instructions in which direction, I should deepen my knowledge in digital broadcasting. I highly appreciate that he was so supportive in that process.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What was it like for you at that time that not many people from Kosovo traveled to European countries, can you tell us about that, about your family but also for you, what was it like that a girl from Kosovo going to Britain at that time?

**Edita Tahiri:** Interesting question but I had challenged my family much earlier. At the time when I was in high school there were some programs for students to go to America for a year, there were some exchange programs and I begged my father to allow me, my mother agreed, he didn't allow me (smiles). He thought I was too young to face an advanced Western society, then there were some dangers he foresaw and so on. So he stopped once, so when it came time for me to go there after the studies these barriers fell because he stopped me once now the barriers fell.

I remember I told my mother, "Look, if I got here and I like it, I might stay." And since she lived in longing for her family, she said, "If you find better, tell me." (smiles). She was right, she knew what longing was, I didn't. I was just starting a life abroad and I didn't know the power of longing or connection to the earth, to the people, to the family, to the nation and I had no dilemma at the end of of my studies, nor did I have a dilemma whether I am staying or coming back, I immediately returned. However, going abroad is an experience that challenges you with things you don't have in this environment. It opens up your vision, among the difficulties, because you have to have an opportunity to communicate compatibility in the district where you live.

All of these were additions that I appreciated. On the other hand it was very interesting that when I met the professors or students in Essex, I said I am an Albanian from Yugoslavia. At that time, most people told me, "But there are no Albanians in Yugoslavia." This was the first time I was confronted with the external perspective for us {points at herself}. Albanians who were left unjustly in the former

Yugoslavia, although we were the third largest population in the former Yugoslavia, so the world didn't know at all that there were Albanians, in other words the world didn't know that the Albanian nation was divided and half remained under foreign domination. So, I wasn't prepared or planning to lobby for the nation, but I was just bothered by the fact that they did not know who we were and I emphasized this all the time. This was a surprise, perhaps even an understanding where Kosovo was or where the Albanians were in relation to the world, in relation to international relations.

**Aurela Kadriu:** You mentioned earlier that in '88, '89 there was a turning point in your engagement, maybe now we can talk about this period, tell us more about what happened at this time exactly that made that turning point?

**Edita Tahiri:** In fact, the turning point for me happened among the turning points that were happening in Kosovo and that had a negative and damaging direction for Kosovo. At the time when Serbia with some Yugoslav structures prepared the campaign for the occupation of Kosovo, it began a process of violent change to the constitution of the former Yugoslavia so that Kosovo lost its federal status and in a way was incorporated into Serbia. This was the period of the harmful constitutional change for us and the Communist Party undertook to consult with the collectives at that time, every working organization.

At that time the first voices of intellectuals in Pristina began, of the elite in Pristina, those who were against change, who were a few, but they were elite figures, who gave their opinions in the media. I remember the newspaper *Fjala* was one of the main sources to hold debates and give instructions on how wrong those constitutional changes are. At that time my father had died, so it was '88-'89, he passed away in 1987, if he were alive he would have helped me a lot to understand better what was happening, since I wasn't politicized. So, when these changes were happening I was at the Bank of Kosovo working in Prizren and I started an unplanned volunteerism, I engaged to discuss with colleagues what was happening.

First I was the director and I had my own team, but then I started discussing within the organization in the sense that these changes are harmful, these will degrade the position of Kosovo and Albanians and that we should work together in the bank, that when the official debate ends, we should reject it. During this time, it was interesting that the office turned into a library because the newspapers were coming out, especially the newspaper *Fjala* (smiles) and we all read what the intellectuals in Pristina were saying, the world was not talking much about this issue at that time. Some friends that I had in the bank, so I created a group with people I trusted and patriots, we managed to convince all Albanians (smiles) who worked at the Bank of Kosovo in Prizren, it was called Bankos at that time, when the debate organized by the Communist Party happens to say no to constitutional changes.

And that really was my first political work, but also successful that the bank was known by its non-politicized employees and with a strong presence of Serbs in leading positions in the bank we

managed to come to the conclusion that Bankos of Prizren is against the constitutional changes that Serbia had foreseen. This is practically where my first engagement began, because there was talk all over the city about which organization is responding to the changes. So, in a way we were the first organisation who said no. We encouraged many others to say no to the constitutional changes. Of course, it had consequences, because then I had different pressures, the director was not Albanian, these communist figures would come there, why? How? Pressure. But I withstood the pressure because I knew that the constitutional changes were damaging the Albanians and Kosovo.

Then the organization of unions began until the LDK was formed and I immediately got involved, we formed the independent union of employees of Bankos. We were so well-organized that some colleagues from the field of public communication gave statements and even sent them to Radio Zagreb, which was a radio station when Serbia closed the media institutions, the only public communication was through Radio Zagreb. I remember some of our statements (smiles) I signed them, they were against the occupation, against the oppression, against other tendencies. And in addition to these two actions, I had already entered the process of forming the Democratic League in Prizren together with some other colleagues. I knew some of them from family patriotism, I informed others in the process and we quickly formed the Democratic League of Kosovo, in December it was formed in Pristina and in the spring of the '90, it was formed in Prizren.

For the founding of the Democratic League, as women we also took actions which were very powerful. First we organized a large gathering of women at the sports hall in Prizren. I can say maybe five thousand women, and I was the leader. There was no leadership, but we spontaneously did it so I went on and moved that process further. I led that gathering that lasted two hours, and our decisions, so, leaving the Communist system, joining the Democratic League, opposing the occupation, the commitment to freedom and independence was boldly articulated by women. And this created an even stronger basis that later in the leadership of LDK there were half men and half women, but I believe that all these commitments gave greater push to what happened, namely the nationwide movement for the independence of Kosovo led by the Democratic League of Kosovo.

In 1991 the Democratic League organized the first elections and in those elections I was chosen to become a member of the General Council and also a member of the presidency of the Democratic League of Kosovo, it was May 1991 and in October I was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo. Because either way in the leadership of the LDK there were few who spoke English and knew international communication, firstly the language was required. So, the education in the West, the patriotic and family background and my commitment to be part of these processes made me one of the main leaders of the LDK and to take the post of foreign minister for ten years.

However, if you ask me which was an emotional moment, I had no choice but to calm myself down, it was the killing of some children in the yard of a primary school in Zhur. This was probably the beginning, January or February of 1990. I was not working at that time because we were fired, but my

contacts from the founding of the LDK made it possible for all of the founders to visit their families. We also went to school and listened to the stories, it was a defining moment in my life, from that moment on, to give maximum effort to stop the oppression, murder, torture against Albanians and for us to finally get to where we belong, to be free, to have an independent state and to create a democracy that would serve everyone.

**Edita Tahiri:** As all over Kosovo, our commitment to say no to the constitutional changes, even though then the Communist parliament of that time in Kosovo was forced to say no. But the public debate brought a big “No” against the constitutional changes and this debate, this commitment created a process, a movement that later resulted in the founding of the Democratic League of Kosovo as the first movement in the processes of the former Yugoslavia which was not only democratic but also national in terms of commitments for the future of Albanians and Kosovo. And practically this was the process that created the arrival of many intellectuals in processes that would advance our future.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What were those ten years as a Minister like?

**Edita Tahiri:** First Kosovo was occupied, it was a very rough situation, because Serbia with all the mechanisms, not only of military forces but also the police, paramilitary, secret services, tried to suppress the movement for independence, to arrest, to kill, frighten us so that we would retreat. So it was an extremely rough situation. I especially remember the mass demonstrations of the people at that time, including the miners’ protests and others. In those protests there was a lot of oppression against Albanians, especially, a defining moment for me, for my engagement was when the citizens got tired of the killings, injuries and oppression, they protested but then they sat down in order to mitigate the attack of the Serbian forces.

I was very touched when I saw the people sitting down, I was scared that we would submit {bends down her body} and this strengthened my decision to be there to help my country and fight for freedom. So, these circumstances and the political commitment on top, when you are endangered by the occupier were two components that went through my mind. So I had a lot of willpower, a lot of inspiration, a lot of pain, but I did not dare to submit to emotions because it would get in the way of my work. That is why I gave myself the task to work, because we were not able to protect one hundred percent of Albanians from the murders of the Serbian occupier.

But we did what we could, so the Democratic League of Kosovo determined strategic directions. The first was to establish state institutions in Kosovo even in the circumstances of occupation, the second strategic direction was the internationalization of Kosovo’s case and the Albanian’s case in order to make the world recognize the tragedy that is happening in Kosovo, and support us for independence and self-determination. And on the other hand was the constant commitment to talk to the citizens through meetings, gatherings in the name of raising morale, endurance, in the name of resistance and to prevent the occupier from finding any collaborators among Albanians. And I can tell you that we

have successfully managed to maintain the unity and homogeneity of the people for eight years. So, we maintained unity for our common goal that was {counts with her fingers} Kosovo's independence, our common goal to correct national injustice against Albanians and our common goal that there would be no turning back and that despite Milošević and a regime of terror state we will succeed. And for eight years we committed to this.

For me, the main commitment was to travel the world to internationalize Kosovo's case, to explain the reasons, the causes of the war in Kosovo, to argue why Kosovo and its people deserve an independent state over political arguments, legal-constitutional arguments, ethnic, historical arguments. Because all these arguments were on our side {points to herself}. Firstly we were a divided nation, we remained across the border against our will, secondly we were indigenous people, Albanians and Greeks are indigenous people in the Balkans, others came later. So these were our lands and the majority of us managed to remain in these lands despite many deportations that have happened to Albanians. During the twentieth century there were four, five major waves of deportations, so the deportations to Turkey mainly, in order to clear the Albanian lands of Albanians.

So, these were the historical arguments to be explained, then there was the legal-constitutional argument that Kosovo first was a federal unit, the former Yugoslavia was dissolved and as a federal unit we have the right to self-determination and secession, because we were, like the other seven veto-wielding federal units, in the former Yugoslav presidency. So, with a well-analyzed constitution, our right came from the Constitution. Also, the arguments were politically related to the political will of the people for the independence of Kosovo, so the declaration of July 2, 1990, by which we declared the independence of Kosovo, but then a referendum was held for the independence of Kosovo in September 1991. Then came the elections. So the first multi-parliamentary, all these constituted our political arguments that Kosovo's independence is the result of the will of the people in Kosovo, which were two million, and that there legitimacy in these arguments.

We also explained that the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia was necessary, it came as a result of the great changes in Europe, the fall of communism, the Berlin Wall and the opening of the prospect of democracy and self-determination of the oppressed people. So, it was not only domestic circumstances but also international circumstances, which created opportunities for us to argue. Of course, I wanted the arguments that I have made during these ten years of occupation to be accurate, arguments that are understandable by the international factor, without exaggerating because there were many arguments on our side. There was no need to exaggerate, and I tried to be precise in giving elaborations and messages in order to strengthen the image that Albanians are looking for a state, but we also have the capacity to create a state.

I did not have experience in the beginning, but I went by the system of doing by seeing or learning by doing. So I have practically mastered the work of diplomacy and international relations. Of course at that time I tried to read a lot so I would not seem like an amateur. It was not easy but my studies in

Britain, international communications and English language helped me a lot. But, more than that, I was serious in whatever work I did, even when I studied in Pritina, and when I taught, even when I wrote a textbook. So, I am determined to do the work I want to do with quality and seriousness and especially helping the liberation of the nation. I had a lot of inspiration {clenches her fist} a lot more motivation to do the best I could.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were you part of the organization of the parallel system in Kosovo?

**Edita Tahiri:** Well that was all the work of the Democratic League of Kosovo as a movement for independence, so being in the leadership of the movement the whole architecture of the parallel school system was done by us, as a leadership, but also the branches of LDK in Kosovo and in the diaspora. Whereas, I am the one who drafted the architecture of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kosovo and the strategic orientations. Our strategic foreign policy orientations were Western orientations and we, our goal was to persuade the United States of America and the Western European countries to support us. So, this vision of foreign policy together with an architecture, when I say architecture I mean we did not have a ministry in normal conditions but I created teams.

For example, as a minister, I had a team of advisers who came from all important fields, from the political field, from the historical, demographic field, then from international relations in order to have collaborators in the process of developing diplomacy. Also, at the time of the 1992 elections, the first democratic parliament emerged in occupied Kosovo, the parliament's Foreign Policy Committee, which was elected at the time. The parliament did not manage to constitute due to obstacles from the Serbian occupier, but the commissions were constituted and the commissions were composed of more parties, because besides LDK at that time there were several other parties such as the Peasant Party, Social Democratic Party, Christian Democrat Party. So, they became part of the commission and they were also part of the diplomacy.

Then I had created professional groups in the fields of politics, economics, security, international relations, the legal-constitutional field, which helped the preparations in our diplomatic platforms. Later in 1995 I founded the Center for International Studies of Kosovo within the Democratic League, where several experts, analysts were engaged and did their job to analyze international developments and advance Kosovo's position in international relations. Those analyses have been very valuable to see how the diagram of world support is growing, especially of the Western partners for independence and the commitments to stop the war and eventually free Kosovo and make it independent. So I designed this according to the circumstances. Otherwise, it would be easy to become the Ministry of Foreign Affairs if the conditions were normal because there are examples, there are experiences but this was something authentic, original that matched the opportunities we had.

Also, the Democratic League of Kosovo had its branches all over the world, and these branches also served as centers or diplomatic missions. So, they acted like our embassies in joint commitments to

internationalize Kosovo's case. It's important to mention that when I started the first meetings, in October 1991, as soon as I took office I was faced with a very unfavorable reality for Kosovo. Most of the diplomats I met didn't even know where Kosovo was. But it happened once in an international office, I was talking but the interlocutor didn't even know where it is, but luckily he had the globe {describes the globe with her hands} in the office and I had to approach the globe (smiles) and show him {pretends to touch something with her index finger} "This is Kosovo." And then explain the broader context that Kosovo is only part of the unresolved Albanian case. And then I usually talked about the Albanian case, the case of the Albanian nation, violent and tragic divisions and I explained that Kosovo is only one component of the unresolved Albanian problem. So these are the beginnings.

I often say that when I started in diplomacy, Kosovo was *terra incognita* for the world. A country completely unknown to the world, not to mention that Albanians were also unknown because Albania was also in the isolated system of Enver [Hoxha], we were suppressed, we didn't have the chance for our voice to be heard in the world. And for ten years Kosovo managed not only to create an alliance with the United States of America and that is the merit of the Democratic League of Kosovo, but also ours that we have dealt directly with diplomacy, as I did, President Rugova, Professor Fehmi Agani, Bukoshi and others. Of course, our diplomacy developed even more during the war in Kosovo, because when the Kosovo Liberation Army came out, it strengthened our struggle for independence and it gave an additional level to the internationalization of Kosovo's case.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Were these diplomats you met at the beginning of your career in diplomacy involved with Yugoslav propaganda or did they just not know what was going on?

**Edita Tahiri:** In fact, to answer that, I just want to emphasize that the former Yugoslavia was a multiethnic state but it was led mainly by Serbs. There were also participation from other federal units, but I would say that all the main power in diplomacy, finance and the army was held by the Serbs and those Serb nationalists who had hostile positions especially towards Albanians, and with different scenarios involving Serbian academics, deportation of Albanians such as Vasa Čubrilović<sup>14</sup> or Ilija Garašanin<sup>15</sup> and others. Plus, the church was very oriented, the Serbian Orthodox Church was against the Albanians. So this, this was the context

As Serbs led Serbia's diplomacy around the world, they managed to convince the world of a negative image for Albanians. So the propaganda was terrible and when I came out on the diplomatic scene as a woman it was one of the main challenges. Given that they were fed up with Serbian propaganda, it was certainly a surprise that an educated English-speaking woman (smiles) is representing Kosovo and

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<sup>14</sup> Vaso (Vasa) Čubrilović (1897-1990) was a Yugoslav historian, politician and academic, decorated with the decoration of the Yugoslav federation for the practice of the Holy Serbian Doctrine. He is known for drafting the study *Expulsion of Albanians*.

<sup>15</sup> Ilija Garašanin (1812-1874) was a cultivator of the Holy Serbian Doctrine, he prepared the platform in the work *Načertanije*, which was based on the program of extermination and expulsion of Albanians by force.



Albanians. I have often had questions about whether I live in Kosovo or not. Because they thought that I could be an Albanian from diaspora and represent Kosovo. So, the first international prejudice that was put down was especially for the fact that I was a woman (smiles), who challenged an image that Serbia had painted that Albanians are uncivilized and so on. Meanwhile, Albanians and Greeks are the ancient people of this peninsula of Europe.

But in international relations false realities are built depending on who has the power in hand in the political-diplomatic plans. So, a change started and later it developed and strengthened international relations. I would like to emphasize that the United States of America was the first and main state that was immediately interested in the situation in Kosovo, the violation of the rights of Albanians, the massive violation of the rights of Albanians. It was the various delegations that came to observe what was happening, how deep the suppression of state terror and the ethnic cleansing policies that Serbia started in Kosovo are.

I often say that the war in Kosovo and the occupation of Serbia are the three most serious components of any war. So it was genocidal war, war of ethnic cleansing and apartheid. All together {joins fingers} combined to exterminate Kosovar Albanians, why? Because the Albanian lands of Kosovo were rich and are rich even today because of the underground resources and these hegemonic and colonialist ambitions, so their intention was Serbia to take over the economic assets of Kosovo. But it didn't turn out as they planned, because as I said we formed a strong alliance with the United States of America and strategically established contacts and deepened relations with Western countries such as Germany, which even during the Second World War was on Albania's side. Then Britain, France, Austria, Italy and others that I'm not going to mention. Everyone was involved in supporting the process for our state, but the process wasn't easy.

### Part Three

**Edita Tahiri:** It is important to emphasize that in the beginning of diplomacy and internationalization of Kosovo's case, the world understanding of Kosovo was very unfavorable for us. Because Serbia had a much more advanced diplomacy at the time of former Yugoslavia. The first views of the international community on Kosovo were such that Kosovo was considered a human rights issue. So, the Kosovo conflict was seen as a human rights issue. Kosovo was treated as an internal matter of Serbia and rarely or almost no one knew that Kosovo was not just autonomous within Serbia, but it had a federal status in the former Yugoslavia with all the powers like the other republics.

In diplomatic engagements, my struggle, our struggle was to first break the worldview that Kosovo is a human rights issue and the argument I used was that the issue of human rights in Kosovo is a consequence, while the cause is the violations of the national rights of the Albanian people. And without resolving Kosovo's, without resolving the national issue this problem can not be solved



through human rights issues. Secondly, another goal was to change the attitude that Kosovo is an internal affair of Serbia, explaining that Kosovo was part of former Yugoslavia, this state no longer exists and all the federal units on constitutional bases and with the will of the people have the right to become independent states.

This, this process of changing international attitudes took a lot of energy, a lot of commitments, a lot of participation in bilateral meetings in America and in Europe. I even traveled to Japan to do diplomatic activities to change this attitude. Then the participation in various world conferences, lobbying in the UN, in the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and many other activities that as much as possible to try to convince them through meetings with diplomats to see Kosovo with federal status and not as an autonomous province. Of course, the first years were not easy, but later we witnessed as foreign diplomats talked about Kosovo, they spoke of it as an international issue and as a matter of federal status and not as a province without rights. The third thing that was important was the argument that independence for Kosovo is a compromise, the right solution for Kosovo is national unification, unification with Albania, not only Kosovo but of all Albanian lands that remained under former Yugoslavia.

So by mentioning that unification is the right solution that corrects injustice against Albanians, independence began to gain weight and support, because they saw that there are maximum demands but we articulated real demands. We had different reactions when we decided on the project of independence from intellectuals, politicians in Kosovo or inter-Albanians, why we weren't requesting national unity. We explained this by the fact that in order for Kosovo's independence to receive international support it must have a legal-constitutional basis among other arguments and in the dissolution of former Yugoslavia the constitutional basis that Kosovo had, it could gain independence. If we were to insist on national unification, then we would put this in the context that, if the internal and external borders of former Yugoslavia would change, then we would also seek national unification.

There is even a document that I consider a national project in which all Albanian political parties in Kosovo, Macedonia, Presevo, Montenegro and beyond in the countries of former Yugoslavia, where we agreed on three options. The first option was for Kosovo to be an independent and sovereign state, in which Albanians in Macedonia would receive state-building status, while the Albanians in Presevo and Montenegro would receive territorial autonomy. The second option was, if the internal borders of the former Yugoslavia change then all Albanians in former Yugoslavia, Kosovo and others would form an Albanian state on this side of the border. And the third option was if the internal and external borders of former Yugoslavia change then we would seek national unification through a referendum overseen by the international factor.

So, in a way, the main elements or pillars of our diplomatic argument were summarized in those points that I mentioned and we constantly analyzed how the international attitude towards Kosovo is

changing (smiles). For example, the first success that I consider important was when the first resolution was issued by the UN General Assembly in 1994 which also mentioned {gestures quotation marks} the will of the people of Kosovo. It was a change that I constantly referred to in the next diplomatic meetings, that achievement, so that other resolutions could come out, I lobbied in other institutions and received support to reflect the will of the people. Then the international attitude began to change in the sense that Kosovo began to be mentioned as an international issue.

This was also a great achievement, so Kosovo as an internal affair of Serbia was forgotten, the US and Western countries began to mention that Kosovo is an international issue and requires international solutions. Later, through lobbying, we managed to make the world consider Kosovo not only an international issue, but also an international security issue, which brought about the Security Council resolutions based on Chapter Seven, which allowed international intervention to stop the war and find solutions for Kosovo. These are the years '95, '96, '97, '98, '99, when Kosovo was not included in the Dayton Summit. We previously officially talked to the U.S. government that Kosovo would not be forgotten, we received guarantees that another summit would be held for Kosovo.

However, people's concerns increased, so a more dynamic scene began, which in time brought the Kosovo Liberation Army, the conflict intensified, killings and deportations increased. On the other hand, the process was moving towards a solution, and the solution envisioned by the American government was to try once again with a diplomatic effort, and that was the Rambouillet<sup>16</sup> Conference. It was the first conference in the history of Kosovo, a conference which was led by the United States of America with the members of the contact group, which were Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia. The Rambouillet Conference was valuable not only because the content of the agreement gave Kosovo the opportunity to declare independence by referendum, but also gave Kosovo the opportunity to be placed under a NATO protectorate. There were many international tendencies for Kosovo to be placed under the UN military protectorate, but we rejected it and we were successful. So we asked NATO to protect Kosovo militarily, and then the solution was found that politically the international administration should be from the UN.

The Rambouillet Agreement where we participated, I was the only woman (smiles) in the delegation of the Republic of Kosovo, but the proposal to be there did not come from within because we never had any proposals. The names for attending the Rambouillet Conference came from the United States. So the actors of the peaceful movement and the armed movement were chosen. But the fact was that I was the only female plus I was the Foreign Minister with a ten years experience in international relations. In Rambouillet we reached an agreement as a delegation that we would accept. The Serbian side refused to sign the agreement and this enabled the international community to decide to intervene militarily. At the forefront of this intervention were the United States and NATO's North Atlantic allies.

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<sup>16</sup> The Conference of Rambouillet (Paris) in February 1999 was the last, failed effort to negotiate a peace between Milošević and the KLA.

And here I can say that the UN or the UN Security Council, although it issued three resolutions based on Chapter Seven and where the UN could authorize military intervention in Kosovo, never did so because in the Security Council there were members like Russia or China who blocked it, so the United States and President Clinton decided to intervene militarily and so the war ended, the genocide ended. It brought out a tragic balance sheet where over twelve thousand Albanians were killed, about eight thousand went missing, about 20 thousand women were raped, many children were killed, the infrastructure of our country was destroyed. So many ruins in housing plans, cultural and religious ruins, Serbia did all this in the process of war and seeing that they were losing, they did even more damage. However, it's important that the chapter of occupation, of dreams, illusions of Serbia that they can still oppress Albanians ended and we came out in the period of freedom and state building that we are in today.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Where were you during the war?

**Edita Tahiri:** During... after returning from Rambouillet, Rambouillet had two phases, the first phase was about three weeks during February, then in March it continued once again until we finally gave our consent to the agreement. After Rambouillet we returned to Kosovo, I remember we landed in Skopje by plane and that evening we stayed in Skopje. Rugova and Professor Agani suggested that I don't return to Pristina, because we already knew that the bombing was starting. Because after the Rambouillet Conference we went to the NATO headquarters to meet with General Clark. On that occasion the plan for military intervention and the deployment of KFOR in Kosovo was revealed to us, and we knew that the bombing was starting. Professor Agani and President Rugova told me, "You stay here because you are a woman, stay in Skopje, we are going back." Of course I refused and said, "No, I was not a woman for ten years (laughs), I was a fighter for freedom, for independence, I am the same now and I cannot make this decision while my people are in Kosovo, I can not stay away." So, I returned to Kosovo.

For two weeks I was in my friend's basement, I lived with her for a year in the period when I joined the LDK, because the rest, the other years I lived with Edi Shukriu, who was also part of the movement for independence. We stayed in their basement during the bombing, while during the day we stayed in the apartment. At one point when Rugova was arrested by Milošević at his house in house arrest, I began to have dilemmas as to whether to stay or leave Kosovo. I was in contact with the American ambassador Christopher Hill, who was also the chief negotiator at the Rambouillet Conference with Wolfgang Petrich as the European representative and a Russian representative, and I communicated with them through the phone. Although mobile phones were destroyed immediately, in that building a telephone worked and all the occupants would come to the basement in the evening and exchange information, so I found out that a telephone was working.

That phone served me to keep in touch with the US Embassy in Skopje, and Christopher Hill informed me of Milošević's intentions that he is trying to take all LDK leaders to Rugova's house to declare a vassal government. So this was Milošević's plan and he suggested that I leave. So that was the decision I made with my friend's mother and sister where I took refuge. I took Edi Shukriu and her daughter Erëleta, we started the journey like any Albanian to Macedonia. After two or three days we arrived in Tetovo, of course with many risks. But those whole ten years were very dangerous for me, I could have gotten killed at any moment. So, this is it briefly, there were many experiences but briefly this is what happened.

I would like to single out a moment when I left Kosovo to go to Macedonia. My sister who went to Macedonia earlier was on the phone {pretends to be holding a cable in her hands} the phone that was working, she called me and I said, "I made a mistake by not taking your passport or your permit, because with my own documents I am endangered." Of course she felt sorry, but I just told her. In the meantime, some friends I had from Skopje called me and one of them decided to bring me my sister's passport. So, I had her passport with me when I left. When we came to the border from Jazhinca, we were walking, we left the cars because the car column was not moving. When we came to the border, the border was closed in front of us. And also Erëleta and Meli's sister went to look for Erëleta's parents, Edi, and Meli was looking for her mother. They took some time, the border was still closed, at some point the Serbian police came out and said, "Get in the cars," but we did not have them, our cars were {she points right} far away and on the way I saw an empty car and we all entered and we even took some children that were in the line with us, we entered and we were eight or nine people in one car.

I told Meli, "Look, can you go and ask why it is closed, so we will know where we are, is the border closed?" She went to ask and the answer was that they were on lunch break, at that moment I remember I told both Edi and Meli, "Look, if the border opened I will not wait for you. I waited for two hours, it's time for me to leave." The border opened, we left. I remember the policeman's first question, "Where are you going?" I said, "We are going to get humanitarian aid." Because in the middle of the border, in the area between the borders, humanitarian aid of the International Red Cross was distributed. I said this on purpose so they would not ask for more clarifications, he said, "Okay, go." That was the moment I left. The U.S. Embassy then engaged with President Gligorov to open the Macedonian border because it was closed. Also, there were all these children with me, who were in our line of cars, who when it was daytime would surround the car windows so that the paramilitaries would not identify me {puts her hand on her chest}.

And now these children and their mothers came with us, their fathers were left with the cars. Now I had the opportunity to go to Macedonia and they asked me, "Will you leave us?" Children of all ages {shows how tall} four-five, maybe 15-16, I said, "No, I'm not going anywhere without you." This is the reason why a phone of Albanian activists was found there in Macedonia, I called Christopher Hill and told him, "I came, the border is closed, but I will not leave alone, I have 16 people with me." And I gave

him all their names, he... Since the border would open for me {opens her arms}, but for this whole group... he talked to President Gligorov, the border was opened, we crossed it. People reacted as to why it is being partially opened, we crossed it, later the border was opened for others as well.

So there are difficult moments when one does not know whether there will be salvation or not. But all this has never bothered me either in terms of fear or in terms of dilemmas. It is interesting when you have a dream, you have an ideal and you have people {brings her hands to her chests} who really suffer, everything becomes that ideal and other developments or risks become insignificant. In other words, I did not know that from me as a personality, a figure who could be ready to work until death for liberation and independence would be developed. But these ten years I acted and I was never afraid, not to mention that every morning when I left home, at the offices of the Democratic League here in Pristina, at the Writers' Association, I was constantly persecuted by the Serbian secret services. To this day, every time I see a white Golf (smiles), I remember that they constantly followed me.

But I didn't have any worries and I always have a message for the peoples who want liberation and who are oppressed, who in times of war and occupation, work and commitment come before any fears or worries. So a force is created, I mean it's indescribable, which sets you in motion and does not... at any moment. I was also arrested several times when I went on diplomatic trips, for example at the Macedonia-Kosovo border, I was constantly under these informative conversations for hours, either going to Skopje airport or coming back. Or I was arrested at the border, from Skopje, I was called to Ferizaj or other cases for several hours and so on. All of these were somehow part of the success of the war. So this is that very proud journey, very brave journey, journey with inspiration (smiles) that only those who were in these processes can know how powerful the inspiration is when you have an ideal that is related to your nation.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Before we get to the post-war period, I want to talk about a very specific part of your life. I know that the LDK Women's Forum, especially in March '98, was very active with protests and organizations. Maybe tell us, maybe chronologically tell us about these protests that were organized in this period, I know that each of the protests had a special symbolism. I believe you remember these freshly.

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes.

**Aurela Kadriu:** If you can tell us about it in more detail.

**Edita Tahiri:** First I want to say that Kosovo women have played an extraordinary role in the process of Kosovo's liberation and independence. And one of the main forces that had this role was the Women's Forum of the Democratic League of Kosovo, which was spread throughout Kosovo. It was originally called the Women's Association, later renamed the Women's Forum. There was a very interesting development of the Women's Forum in terms of commitment to mobilizing women. The first group

that founded the forum or association disbanded quickly. When I came to the presidency of the Democratic League the forum was quite scattered. I gave myself the task of helping with the consolidation, and at the time I was working with some other women to hold an assembly and come up with a new leadership.

And in the assembly there were some trends noticed, some women wanted to detach the forum from the LDK, while I and some others didn't want to because I estimated that the movement for independence, the Democratic League would be stronger if there were women there. And there was some tension, however we succeeded in that the forum remained within the Democratic League and continued its political-humanitarian activity. It was also humanitarian because through the humanitarian approach by supporting families, women, we had the opportunity to mobilize more women or get support and so on. On the other hand women engaging in humanitarian issues also began to make political commitments. So it was a very good strategy for women to move on to politics from the humanitarian approach.

The Forum continued. It so happened that the leader who was elected in that assembly left Kosovo, it was left without leadership. I was practically the figure engaged by the presidency to coordinate the reports of the leadership of the LDK forum, but on the other hand I led all these crises that the forum was going through and I didn't allow it to get dissolved. I made commitments to keep it consolidated so there were no small breakdowns as it happened in the beginning or as it happened with the departure of the leader, despite the fact that they never accepted me as the president of the Women's Forum, I was their spiritual leader, I was the main person who organized everything conceptually and held regular monthly meetings and so on. The forum proved its importance and that it was mobilized, hundreds of women were mobilized within the structures of the forum.

I remember the forums for mothers having two hours of classes with their children at home after the schools and universities closed down by force by Serbia. It was the first idea on which later the education system in Kosovo came up with organizing schools and universities in private homes when we were occupied. The forum also continued to provide health care to women by mobilizing women doctors. Then we stopped a phenomenon that emerged at that time, the elements of fundamentalism were seen in the period of occupation, where a campaign of women covering began {pretends to put a headscarf}. We were very successful in eradicating such trends and above all in maintaining the morale of the resistance by keeping women active.

In the periods when the situation escalated in Kosovo, when Serbian violence began to escalate to unpredictable measures, we organized several protests, among them the Bread March, with which we showed solidarity with Drenica which was surrounded. A protest that managed to internationalize the issue of war escalation in Kosovo. Then there is the protest for peace, so a peaceful solution to the Kosovo issue. Also in 1995 I managed to lead a delegation of ten women to the World Conference of Women in Beijing. The conference which laid the foundations of women's empowerment through the

action plan. So, I included all ten women in the delegation and the goal was not to empower women, but to internationalize the issue of Kosovo. Even at that time, the posters that we distributed for propaganda were related to the picture of Mother Teresa and Rugova.

So we had propaganda materials and the poster we designed was for Rugova and Mother Teresa on the same poster, because women knew Mother Teresa and by approaching her they would understand the independence movement and Rugova and the message was “Prevent the war in Kosovo.” All these women of the delegation were engaged in the distribution of various information materials about Kosovo and we held a workshop within the conference. Of course we participated as part of non-governmental organizations, because we could not be an official part of the conference because Kosovo was not a member of the UN, plus it was occupied. But I wanted to say that women really achieved a lot, both in political and humanitarian ways, and even diplomatically, they made an extraordinary contribution to what we have today, namely freedom and independence.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did it come to the organization of the protests that happened in March?

**Edita Tahiri:** Those... The first motive was the hard situation in Drenica, so the military surrounding where the population was suffering for food {counting on fingers}, for medicine and other things. There, the first idea was to show solidarity with Drenica, on the other hand to raise international awareness that it is time to stop the war in Kosovo. Immediately after that, after the obstacles that the occupier created for us, we faced Serbian police forces here in Fushe Kosove, we verbally confronted them... there are recordings of international news such as CNN, EuroNews and others. We decided to make the next protest in order to continue to make the world react through the voice of women.

So it was the second protest, I wasn't in this protest because I traveled for diplomatic activities that day. But I was part... these protests were not only organized by the Women's Forum, it was the Women's Forum, there was also the Center for the Protection of Mother and Child. At that time Edi Shukriu was the leader of the Women's Forum, the late Sevdie Ahmeti was the director of the center, together with Vjosa Dobruna and other women joined us. So my role, even though I was not directly in the Women's Forum, happened because I was one of the main leaders of the Democratic League of Kosovo.

**Aurela Kadriu:** The Bread Protest seems very specific, how did women come up with that idea?

**Edita Tahiri:** In fact when Sevdija, Edi and I discussed, we had some ideas. There were ideas to use some element that characterizes women, but various analyses led us to the conclusion that we should not do it to identify women, but to do it to identify the purpose. The goal was the lack of food, medicine and hygienic things, so from these three we saw bread (smiles) as a stronger symbol and greater effects. This is how we came to this conclusion.



**Aurela Kadriu:** At that time there was a shortage of basic bread products, where did you get the bread, you each had one loaf of bread?

**Edita Tahiri:** Well it was (smiles) a very large organization, as I told you LDK was organized throughout Kosovo. The bakers were part of the movement, so all of them were activists, and it was easy to knock on the bakers' doors to... tell them how many we need. Then, as we failed to go as far as Drenica due to obstacles, we didn't end the protest there, we went to, at that time it was not the American Embassy but the American Representative, it was opened in, in January of '96, we handed a letter with which we sought more American engagement. Then we went to the ovens and returned the bread.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Did you start with the idea that you will get to Mitrovica?

**Edita Tahiri:** Those of us who were actively dealing with the process of independence and liberation, we also had the obstacles in mind. However, we were aware that the protest itself would be a manifestation with great effects, because the message went all over the world. Even when we started confronting the Serbian police, I spoke English because I could convey the message to the world. While some who were close spoke Albanian and Serbian, I spoke English. Why English? Because the world needs to understand the message that we have, not the Serbian police, because they had decided to stop us anyway.

**Aurela Kadriu:** How did the organizing of women happen, at that time there weren't any tools?

**Edita Tahiri:** They are all structures of the Democratic League and the Forum, it was a completely functional structure. One decision was enough, within a short period of time, you were able to mobilize. Yes, of course, it was not done in a day, as I can remember the preparations lasted a week, and we met as an organizing group every day.

**Aurela Kadriu:** What other protests, what symbolism did they have?

**Edita Tahiri:** It is important that the Women's Forum made a very strong protest on the occasion of the murder of the student Armend Daci.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Yes.

**Edita Tahiri:** This protest comes after two or three years that the LDK didn't have many protests, because there were protests the beginning then for a while the intensity of the protests stopped, giving priority to diplomacy, the media. This broke this silence, this protest organized by the Women's Forum, because the murder of Armend Daci was a tragedy so...

**Aurela Kadriu:** Which year?



**Edita Tahiri:** '94 or '95. There were other protests, I'll tell you about some of them...

**Aurela Kadriu:** The one in March '98 was with keys, white sheets, how did these happen?

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes, yes, they were, they are all manifestations of the awareness of the international factor to intervene. It is also important to emphasize that we as women have managed to send a petition to UNESCO, for the closing down of Albanian schools and universities in Kosovo. Then in the beginning of the occupation a child named Afrim Prebreza was killed, Serbian children killed him in a fight, we submitted a petition to the UN in Geneva, to the Commission for Human Rights, a petition with hundreds of thousands of signatures. Also, we submitted a petition to UNESCO, women organized these (smiles).

**Aurela Kadriu:** Let's talk about after the war, what happened when you came back to Kosovo after war?

**Edita Tahiri:** The end of the war in Kosovo came as a result of the commitment of people of Kosovo through peaceful war, armed war, but also as a result of the maximum engagement of Western allies led by the United States of America. All that diplomatic work of my travels to Washington, Berlin, London, Paris and other centers, to Tokyo, but also to President Rugova and others who contributed in this direction as well as the commitments of the KLA and KLA diplomacy in the last two years, so we got the results we committed to. Kosovo was liberated, the Kosovo-West alliance, Kosovo-U.S., Albanian-West, Albanian-U.S. was consolidated, and today it is the main value of the existence and prosperity of the state of Kosovo, as a country with a Euro-Atlantic vision, European Union integration, in NATO, in the UN.

On the other hand, in the first post-war period we were not the ones who governed Kosovo, because UNMIK was in charge of the process. And I want to show you why UNMIK got all those powers and why we had less of a role in the beginning. In fact, the peaceful war and the armed war had a common goal, but we had divisions among ourselves. We even went to the Rambouillet Conference as separate delegations, but there we managed to unite in this direction. My role was key in homogenizing the delegation, I led the first four hours of the meeting with the help of Bajram Kosumi in order to make the delegation functional and so that differences in the way of liberation, so peaceful or armed, are not divisions in our power to reach agreement. During the war we had practically two governments, the LDK government and the KLA government was formed.

While I was in Macedonia, as a refugee, my diplomatic and political work continued, and I committed myself to forming a government of unity during the war. These are the months of May and June, assisted by the U.S. Government which agreed to mediate the formation of a unity government. I engaged with Ambassador Hill to contact the KLA representatives in order to meet, the decision was to

meet in Geneva at the U.S. headquarters at the UN, to unite these two governments. Efforts to unite began in Rambouillet when we decided to unite, but NATO attacks began and that project did not get realized. Unfortunately we never managed to make this government of unity, because some of the representatives of the KLA were not ready for this project and we had to return to Kosovo with two governments. And it was this post-war division of ours that created space for the international community to decide to take on more powers, so UNMIK took on more powers, while we had less.

This was one of the shortcomings of our process which created some good developments, but some also quite unfavorable. The good thing was that we were also gaining experience in governance from UNMIK, which nevertheless had interesting models of public administration and others, but on the other hand we were not the ones in charge. This created opportunities for politics, so national, the Albanian political factor to not have enough commitment for state-building. The phenomena of corruption and other negative phenomena began, at first they reasoned it pretending that it happened to UNMIK and not us, later when we were in charge we did not work with idealism. So, in a way, the national interest that was the pole star for us in the period of Kosovo's liberation faded and these negative phenomena weakened the state-building process of Kosovo.

On the other hand, instead of laying strong democratic foundations, tendencies of autocracy began among the leaders. This also made me leave the Democratic League in 2004, because internal developments were not democratic, on the other hand I was bothered by the phenomena of corruption and crime. Not only in the LDK, but in the entire political spectrum of Kosovo, whether from the peace camp or from the camp of the former KLA. This concern of mine and the inability to make big changes as an individual not only made form my reformist party Democratic Alternative of Kosovo, but also Serbia's interventions in the northern part of Kosovo deeply concerned me. Also the fact that our national policy in the country, instead of giving priority to these things, began to deal with matters of narrow interest. And I committed myself to first try to make this problem known to the new generation of our country.

To know that at this point we are weak but still not working hard enough to extinguish the parallel structures in the north encouraged me to decide to do my doctorate on this very topic. And in my doctorate, I analyze the failures of UNMIK to implement international law in Kosovo on Resolution 1244, by which UNMIK had to administer the entire territory of Kosovo, while UNMIK failed to achieve one third of the territory. So in the north it failed to extend its administration and the failures of the local factor from the time we took over the powers to solve this problem. This doctoral work lasted for six years, but in the same work I analyzed the problems we created ourselves with a weak government, with a change of local interests, national interests began to take close and personal interests first. I put them all in my doctorate so that I didn't know if I could return to politics, to at least leave an argument for the new generation, a documentation that the work that we failed to do as a round-up of state-building to continue from the new generation.

But politics brought me back to governance, I became Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Kosovo in 2011, in 2010 I was Minister of Public Administration. And when I was Deputy Prime Minister I was elected chief negotiator of negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia with the mediation of the European Union and strong American support. Where practically all the concerns I had with the intervention of Serbia in the north of Kosovo were topics on which agreements were reached. Somewhere around 33 agreements and with which we managed to extinguish the Serbian parallel structures of the police. We established the Kosovo Police in the north of the country, we abolished the parallel customs, we set the customs of our state, we abolished the parallel structures of courts and justice, we established the justice structures of the state of Kosovo.

We closed the border, because the border points in the north, Jarinje-Bernak, were burned after the independence of Kosovo. We returned state authorities to those points, closed the border. We rehabilitated the buildings in a way, so for these seven years of dialogue we managed, in many areas, to abolish the Serbian parallel structures and to extend our state to the north, to extend our sovereignty. This is a problem that we inherited from UNMIK, but also that we, ourselves weren't able to make an idealistic, honest government capable of solving these issues ourselves without needing to go as far as Brussels. So these were some developments that I did not like at all, after the war, I chose the path of reforms, I did not accept being part of these negative phenomena and then when I could not change politically, I worked academically, so with science at least I would leave scientific evidence for the problems. So when the time comes, not knowing that I would be able to repair them again, I did all this work after the war.

Before doing my PhD, I got my master's degree at Harvard University at the John Kennedy School of Government in 2001 and 2002. The reason I left politics when I was at the top {shows the shape of the roof} of leadership in the Democratic League and I decided to go to studies. The main reason, in the period of October-December 2000, I had three assassination attempts. And these assassination attempts, which fortunately didn't result in tragedy for me, even after consulting with American friends in the American Government, I decided to leave Kosovo for a while and the options to leave were different. But I had a dream (smiles) to go to Harvard since I read about Noli, about Fan Noli. And then my American friends helped search for paths of how I could get there and I succeeded.

So one day I left, I improved my security situation because I was no longer a target for someone, I got a master's degree with great success, I can even tell you that I was declared one of the five excellent students of my generation. I have here {describes the object with her hand} the reward in the form of a statue that was given to me. As well as practically when I returned to Kosovo, I started the path of reforms. I knew that being a reformer in a post-war state where the values of idealism had fallen and some anti-values had taken root was not an easy path. However, this was my dream, that ideal of mine that continued from the period of liberation, but also continued from the activity of my father who was an idealist and a patriot. So these are the post-war developments. Then I can also say that Kosovo today on the tenth anniversary of its independence has made significant progress, either in terms of

establishing the foundations of the state, or in terms of establishing institutions and infrastructure because we came out damaged from the war.

We lost a lot of people, material and other destruction, the tragedy I mentioned at the beginning of this interview. Practically considering that we came out crushed, and devastated, not destroyed but devastated. Kosovo was devastated by the destructive schemes of the Serbian occupier, we have managed to lay some foundations, but we are not where we could be. For example, today we have the Stabilization and Association Agreement and our perspective for European integration is clear, but we need to accelerate reforms so that we can be there sooner. I must also emphasize that the Brussels dialogue, where Kosovo is seen as a country that wants peace with its neighbors, even with the former enemy, is a country that contributes to peace and stability in the Balkans and in Europe. It enhanced our image, because our image was badly damaged by the phenomena of corruption.

So, in a way, we managed to pave the way to the European Union, despite the fact that five member states still do not recognize us. So, it was exactly some strategic actions that enabled us to do it. Now I would say that what Kosovo needs is the return of idealism, the decision of politicians who have power in Kosovo, to really work for the rule of law, to really fight corruption, to really punish the corrupt, get their wealth confiscated. If we really want to make Kosovo a country with prospects, where foreign investors would find interest and invest, where the Albanian diaspora would invest and that the new generation would have employment and prospects in Kosovo. This is what we need to do, to make Kosovo a place of hope and not a Kosovo where the new generation constantly has dilemmas about whether they want to stay or leave. On the other hand, the security architecture, the transformation of the KSF into an army must happen because it has already been 20 years since the liberation, not only Kosovo needs an army as a state, but also because of new geopolitical developments that are happening not only in the Balkans, but all over the world.

We have new dangers coming from Russia's geopolitical ambitions, which in a way are transmitted through Serbia or Serbia's destructive activities. Then there are different radicalisms, then there are other tendencies that the new Balkan states don't have the strength to withstand, so our message and commitment now and in the future should be that the United States and European countries together should, not just to increase engagement in Kosovo and the Balkans, but together with us to be on a throne, to not allow the influence of Russia or non-Western countries in the Balkans, because our freedom, our independence was first conceived as state formation but was conceived as a Western value, and we must all work to maintain this commitment, because democratic values are what enable every citizen to enjoy prosperity, to enjoy freedom.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Can you tell us what your life is like now, what's happening currently?

**Edita Tahiri:** Yes {drinks water}. Now at the period when we are talking I've completed my term in government in September last year. And I've used this period that I am on as vacation to get

accustomed to my apartment, I've lived in Pristina for 30 years now, and my political-national activity is 30 years long (smiles). And for the first time I have my own apartment and have been happy that I had time to deal with personal things. In the meantime, I am completing the documentation of, of stories. My project is the beginning of memoirs, so I will write my memoirs. I thank you because this project of yours is also a contribution to my memoirs, and I hope that I will commit myself to lecturing at a university in order to transfer the experience and academic-scientific preparation of the new generations.

**Aurela Kadriu:** Thank you for your time!

**Edita Tahiri:** Thank you as well!