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Embassy of Switzerland in Albania



REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

MINISTRY FOR EUROPE  
AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS SWITZERLAND-ALBANIA

29 SEPTEMBER 2020



years of diplomatic relations  
1970 - 2020



Switzerland - Albania



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## Albanian-Swiss Relations – A Story to Be Told!

(Media coverage, former diplomats' memories and human profiles)

**By Armand PLAKA - Researcher**

The following study has been drafted in light of the activities on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Albanian-Swiss diplomatic relations and aims to empirically and analytically presents these 3 main aspects:

1. The presentation of Albania in the Swiss press and vice versa, particularly focusing on the moment of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries in vitin 1970.
2. Introducing the testimonies of the protagonists of these relations by former Albanian ambassadors and diplomats, who have contributed to the better acquaintance of the two peoples, by focusing primarily on their experiences, assessments and memories.
3. Highlighting the profiles, opinions, memories and human aspects of Albanian personalities who currently live in Switzerland, and who with their work and contribution have attained the respect and gratitude of their community, by serving as the best example of integration and true bridges between the two peoples.

### Part 1 – Albanian – Swiss relations through the lens of the press of the time

While rummaging through the Swiss press over the years, focusing especially on the Cold War period, in the variety of topics as well as languages it entails, conveying the flavor of the German, Frenach and Italian speaking cantons, long ago I noticed quite a disproportionate ratio, in an extreme and singular fashion, between

how the Helvetic press presented Albania and Albanians and how their Albanian counterparts in turn presented Switzerland and the Swiss.

I am convinced that the Swiss may be baffled, a subject to be truly noted, but I take it for granted on the other hand that to Albanians, especially field specialists, such findings is not at all surprising, since the place that Switzerland and other Western (and later Eastern revisionist) countries held or thought to hold in the Albanian press, throughout the communist period in our country was rather modest, rather negligible.

It is thus quite surprising that through its pages one would find not only news and announcements about the then actual situation of our country, but many detailed chronics and reports, political analyses and prognoses that attested not only to an emancipated and curious audience but also to an interested and well-educated one on the developments of this country and the region, of which on another level, one would think that there was no interest whatsoever.

They are distinguished by a serious, often favorable, understanding reporting, with accurate references, even though the reality they faced in a hermetically isolated country was completely contradictory and unconceivable according to the norms of human development, as known to the civilized world, especially Switzerland with its far emancipated model.

It is quite interesting to find in the Swiss press the key moments of our communist past, from the relations with the Yugoslavs, their breaking off, and as a consequence the Sino-Soviet relations saga, to the death of the dictator and the fall of the communist system. It mentions the suffering of the clergy and persecution of Albanians, and it does not shy away from talking about the

achievements and opening to the Western world.

More specifically, the following was written about Albanian reality as attested in this excerpt from a Swiss newspaper reportage in the late 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

*On a different planet?- The foreign visitor initially has the impression of being on a different planet. Albania does not have a civil airline company, whereas the International Airport of Rinas in Tirana seems to have been abandoned. One or two planes land daily from "distant" places, as well as Swiss Air which lands on Mondays and Thursdays ..... One can stay in Albania only for two weeks and, upon leaving, the passport is stamped with two seals of the "People's Republic of Albania" as Albania is officially named, and described by Karl May as the 'Land of Skipetarve [Albanians]'. It is also the only country in the world to have officially renounced any religion affiliations.*

However, many years ago, during the 1950s, one could encounter another interesting statement, which seemed precisely as a plea or putting one's finger on the wound that the West had left the land of the eagles to its own fate, as attested by the following quote:

*Anyone who has the opportunity to talk with an Albanian refugee eventually understands this sad statement: "Had the West aided us two years ago, Albania would have been able to split from the Eastern Bloc, just as Yugoslavia did". There is some truth to these statement.*<sup>2</sup>

Pretty realistically one sees the first signs of the opening, brought through a reportage, which does not hesitate from stressing that Albania is the poorest country of the continent while also turning into "The Beijing Bridge in Europe":

*Albania often described as "The Beijing Bridge in Europe", is the poorest country in our continent. Its party leader proudly calls himself a Stalinist and turned his back on Moscow when it started its destalinization process. These past several months it has become yet possible for western tourists to travel to Hoxha's country, albeit only in small groups. Those who have travelled there before and draw comparisons with the current situation. They all can observe signs of change. Albania, as they believe, is seeking to free itself from the isolation that has been rooted for years<sup>3</sup>.*

Likewise, the Swiss press would not hesitate from voicing reports pertaining to the religious persecution perpetrated by the Albanian government, as attested by the following excerpt from a French-Swiss newspaper, which echoed the messages of the Holy See for the Albanian people:

*Radio Vatican denounces the persecution in Albania: yesterday Pope Paul VI called to prayer for the "Church of Silence". The Pope, addressing the 6,000 believers gathered at Saint Peter's Square on the Day of the Angel, alluded to, without mentioning its name, that it has been reported that the fate of believers in Albania has been quite dramatic recently ... On Saturday, Radio Vatican expressed its surprise by the silence of human rights advocates while religious freedom and even priests were forcibly removed in Albania. "No one has raised their voice to denounce these violations on the rights of consciousness [...] neither organization nor movements which are always willing to protest against the suppression and limitation of freedom in other countries" In 1967, religious beliefs were declared illegal and their practice was equal to committing a crime.<sup>4</sup>*



Facsimile of an article in a French-Swiss newspaper reporting of religious persecution in Albania. "La Liberte", Switzerland - 2 April 1973, p. 1



Facsimile of an analysis on Albania printed on the first page of "Freiburger Nachrichten" on 8 September 1949

There is no lack of positive statements, which when viewed from today's optics constitute quite positive assessments that highlight not only Albanians' generosity and hospitality, but also their efforts to be professional and serious in their relations with foreigners, as affirmed by this quote:

Albania welcomes tourists with great care. The buses, available to tourists are comfortable, and most of them are equipped with air conditioning. The food, although not assorted, is good. There are no professional tour guides, however, those who serve as guides are all university graduates. It is important so that they may answer all the curious and delicate questions of tourists. Thus, oftentimes the guides are able to fluently speak several languages. <sup>5</sup>



Facsimile of a reportage printed in 1966 in the Swiss press, titled "Albania is turning the page!" 28 March 1966, "die Tat", p. 5

As regards to the establishment of diplomatic relations in the Summer of 1970, the Swiss media would pay great attention, as the news on the decision made by Bern would be followed by complementary material featuring detailed information on Albania and the Albanians, the economic capacities of the small country on the Adriatic coast, and even analysis on the benefit of establishing direct diplomatic relations between the two countries. Alas, nothing similar was happening on the other side.

In Albania one could find only some dry news inserted within a box on the front page of "Zëri i Popullit" [People's Voice], the main press body of the time, or the "Bashkimi" [Union], where among others it emphasized:

*Yesterday, at 13:00 hours, Haxhi Lleshi, the Assembly Presidium Chairman of the People's Republic of Albania, welcomed, in the Palace of Brigades, the extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the Confederation of Switzerland in the People's Republic of Albania, Hans Keller, who presented his credential letters.* <sup>6</sup>

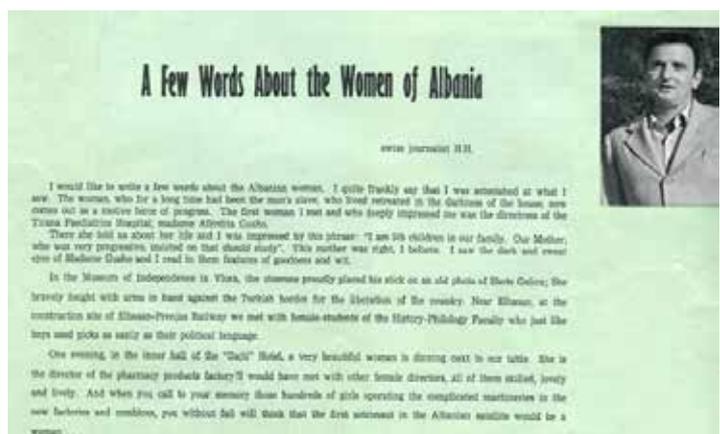
Such news was certainly echoed in the propagandistic foreign language publications of the time, as attested in a quite minimalist volume in the "Albania in the World" rubric in the inner pages of the illustrious journal "New Albania".

*The government of the PR of Albania and the government of the Confederation of Switzerland agreed upon establishing diplomatic relations and exchanging diplomatic representatives at ambassadorial level.*



Facsimile of the news published in "Zëri i Popullit", 3 October 1970

The same number of the same journal, and most probably, not at all coincidental, as if supplementing the lack of a thorough and well-deserved political, diplomatic or at least economic analysis on the benefit or the prospect of the two countries, would publish the praises of a Swiss (most likely a Marxist-Leninist) journalist with the initials H.H., pertaining to the achievements of Albania and the progress made by the Albanian women at the time. <sup>8</sup>



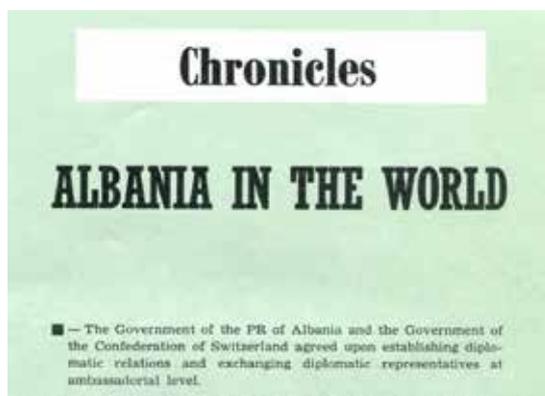
Facsimile of the Journal "New Albania", No. 4, 1970, p. 8, presenting the testimonial of a Swiss journalist with initials H.H. on the emancipation of women in the People's Republic of Albania.

On the other hand, there is a quite interesting brief news, extracted from the Italian-Swiss press in the Canton of Ticino, which besides the news from Bern, conveys the bafflement of the staff of the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

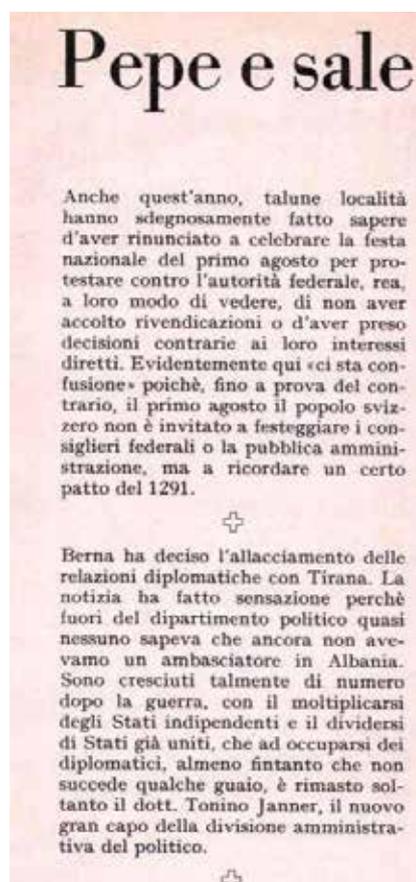
Following is the complete news in Italian (with the English translation):

*Berna ha deciso l'allacciamento delle relazioni diplomatiche con Tirana. La notizia ha fatto sensazione perchè fuori del dipartimento politico quasi nessuno sapeva che ancora non avevamo un ambasciatore in Albania. Sono cresciuti talmente di numero dopo la guerra, con il moltiplicarsi degli Stati indipendenti e il dividersi di Stati già uniti, che ad occuparsi dei diplomatici, almeno fintanto che non succede qualche guaio, è rimasto soltanto il dott. Tonino Janner, il nuovo gran capo della divisione amministrativa del politico.*

*(In English: Bern has decided to establish diplomatic relations with Tirana. The news caused a sensation since aside the political department, no one hardly knew that we did not have an ambassador in Albania.)*



Facsimile of the Journal "New Albania", No. 4, 1970, p. 9 with the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.



Facsimile of the news in the Italo-Swiss journal of the canton of Ticino, "Illustrazione Ticinese", 7 October 1970, p. 51, "Pepe e sale" [Peper and salt] rubric

Whereas the newspapers of the German cantons covered very interesting information on Albania which accompanied the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries as attested by the following passage:

*Obwohl die Schweiz Albanien als Staat bereits 1913 anerkannt hat und Albanien in Bern und Genf zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen Honorarkonsulate unterhalten hat, bestanden bisher zwischen beiden Ländern noch keine diplomatischen Beziehungen. Die Schweiz hatte noch nie eine Vertretung in Tirana. Allerdings hat Albanien im*

Juni 1929 mit unserem Land ein Niederlassungs- und Wirtschaftsabkommen unterzeichnet, das nie aufgehoben worden ist. Albanien, das 1946 zur kommunistischen Volksrepublik proklamiert wurde und 1955 der UNO beigetreten ist, zählt kaum ein Dutzend Staatsangehörige in der Schweiz, und nicht viel grösser ist die schweizerische Kolonie in Albanien. Der Handelsverkehr zwischen beiden Ländern ist sehr bescheiden, jedoch im Zunehmen begriffen. Letztes Jahr hat Albanien für 1,3 (1968: 0,6, 1967: 1,1) Mio Franken Waren hauptsächlich Teppiche und Rohkupfer, Uhrenfournituren, Tabakpfeifen und Folkloreartikel an unser Land verkauft. Die Schweiz exportierte für 6,1 (1968: 2,6, 1967: 2,1) Mio Franken, vor allem verarbeiteten Tabak (Zigaretten) 1969: 2,5 Mio Franken Medikamente, Farbstoffe, Schädlingsbekämpfungsmittel, Watte, Motoren, Apparate und Webstühle nach Albanien.<sup>10</sup>

(In English: Even though Switzerland recognized Albania as a state since 1913 and Albania continued to keep open its honorary consulates in Bern and Geneva during the interwar period, diplomatic relations between the two countries have been inexistent. Switzerland has never had a representation in Tirana. However, in June 1929, Albanian signed an economic representation agreement with our country, which has never been repealed. Albania, which declared itself a communist People's Republic in 1946 and joined the UN in 1955, hardly counts a dozen Albanian citizens in Switzerland and the Swiss colony in Albania is not larger. Commerce between the two countries is fairly modest, albeit growing. Last year Albania exported to our country goods at a value of 1.3 (1968: 0.6, 1967: 1.1) million Swiss francs, mainly carpets and unprocessed copper, watch fittings, tobacco pipes and folklore items. Whereas Switzerland exported to Albania goods in the value of 6.1 (1968: 2.6, 1967: 2.1) million francs, mainly processed tobacco (cigarettes) in 1969: 2.5 million francs in medicine, paint, pesticides, wool and cotton products, motors, devices, and looms).

würtige Angelegenheiten. Dr. Rudolf Kirchschläger, den Vertrag zwischen der schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft und der Republik Oesterreich über den Verlauf der gemeinsamen Staatsgrenze, das Abkommen zwischen der schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft und der Republik Oesterreich über die Vermarkung der gemeinsamen Staatsgrenze und die Erhaltung der Grenzzeichen sowie das Protokoll zu diesem Abkommen unterzeichnet.

### Diplomatische Beziehungen mit Albanien

Die Regierungen der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft und der Volksrepublik Albanien sind übereingekommen, diplomatische Beziehungen aufzunehmen und Vertreter auf Botschafterebene auszutauschen. Zu diesem Zweck hat der Bundesrat Dr. Hans Keller, schweizerischer Botschafter in Jugoslawien, zum ausserordentlichen und bevollmächtigten Botschafter in Albanien ernannt. Botschafter Keller behält seinen Sitz in Belgrad bei. Obwohl die Schweiz Albanien als Staat bereits 1913 anerkannt hat und Albanien in Bern und Genf zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen Honorarkonsulate unterhalten hat, bestanden bisher zwischen beiden Ländern noch keine diplomatischen Beziehungen. Die Schweiz hatte noch nie eine Vertretung in Tirana. Allerdings hat Albanien im Juni 1929 mit unserem Land ein Niederlassungs- und Wirtschaftsabkommen unterzeichnet, das nie aufgehoben worden ist. Albanien, das 1946 zur kommunistischen Volksrepublik proklamiert wurde und 1955 der UNO beigetreten ist, zählt kaum ein Dutzend Staatsangehörige in der Schweiz, und nicht viel grösser ist die schweizerische Kolonie in Albanien.

Der Handelsverkehr zwischen beiden Ländern ist sehr bescheiden, jedoch im Zunehmen begriffen. Letztes Jahr hat Albanien für 1,3 (1968: 0,6, 1967: 1,1) Mio Franken Waren — hauptsächlich Teppiche und Rohkupfer, Uhrenfournituren, Tabakpfeifen und Folkloreartikel — an unser Land verkauft. Die Schweiz exportierte für 6,1 (1968: 2,6, 1967: 2,1) Mio Franken, vor allem verarbeiteten Tabak (Zigaretten) — 1969: 2,5 Mio Franken — Medikamente, Farbstoffe, Schädlingsbekämpfungsmittel, Watte, Motoren, Apparate und Webstühle nach Albanien. Wie am Montag im Bundeshaus zu erfahren war, hat der in Belgrad akkreditierte Schweizer Botschafter Dr. H. Keller bereits im Jahre 1969 mit der Regierung in Tirana Verbindung aufgenommen.

men. Der Bundesrat erachtete den Zeitpunkt für die Aufnahme diplomatischer Beziehungen für gekommen, nachdem er bereits im Frühjahr 1968 in den Regierungsrichtlinien festgestellt hatte: «Die Universalität unserer Beziehungen ist Ausdruck unserer Neutralitätspolitik.»

### Gitterstäbe durchsägt

Mit einer Eissäge betreten sich am Montag zwei Strafgefangene des Zuchthauses Crèbelonne in Sitten. Sie durchsägten die Gitterstäbe vor dem Zellenfenster und flohen. Trotz einer alsbald eingeleiteten Grossfahndung fehlt von den «Ausrückern» jede Spur.

### Strochfenfahrt mit tödlichem Ausgang

Wie die Appenzell-Ausserrhodische Polizei am Montag bekanntgab, entwendeten in der Nacht auf den Samstag mehrere Jugendliche in Trogen (AR) ein Motorrad, um eine Spritfahrt zu unternehmen. In der Nähe des Dorfes kollidierten sie infolge übersetzter Geschwindigkeit und mangelnder Fahrpraxis mit der Strassenabschränkung und wurden zu Boden geschleudert. Der 17-jährige Finne Hannu Kalevi Kassalainen aus dem Kinderdorf Pestalozzi in Trogen wurde dabei sofort getötet. Sein 16-jähriger Mitfahrer, der zuvor ebenfalls das Motorrad gesteuert hatte, kam mit einigen Prellungen und Schürftungen davon.

### Vandalen am Werk

Rund 30 parkierte Autos und Motorräder wurden in der Nacht auf den Sonntag in Chur durch Vandalen beschädigt. Die noch unbekanntesten Täter rissen den Fahrzeugen insbesondere Radioscheinwerfer und Seitenspiegel weg.

### In den Bergen tot aufgefunden

Der seit vier Tagen vermisste 57-jährige Hans Salzmann aus Bern, der im Wallis seine Ferien verbrachte, ist am Montag am Fusse einer Felswand tot aufgefunden worden. Der Verunglückte ist oberhalb von der Station Leukerbad vermutlich nach einem Sturz den schweren Verletzungen erlegen.

### Kleine Zeitung

Siegen die Reformer? Die Stadtväter von Jefferson (USA) werden sich mit einem Gesetz aus dem Jahre 1837 zu befassen haben. Einmal da.

Facsimile of the article titled "Diplomatic relations with Albania", of "Thuner Tagblatt" newspaper, Vol. 94, No. 167, 21. July 1970, which provides relevant information on the level of commercial-business relations as well as a historical background of the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

## Part 2 – Albania-Switzerland in former diplomats' memories

The first contacts are evidenced since 1431; later on, Switzerland became one of the first countries to recognize Albania in 1922, actually 2

years after becoming a member to the League of Nations, and in the same year as did the United States of America.

Switzerland was the model that Albanian patriots of the National Awakening envisioned for of the organization of the future Albanian state. It still remains to this day. Ismail Qemali quite often referred to it as an administration model and the Swiss cantons were continuously mentioned during the years preceding the establishment of the Albanian state.

Sami Frashëri, openly asserted "Let's make Albania a second Switzerland". During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, numerous Albanian intellectuals would graduate in Swiss universities or would find themselves in Switzerland. Elena Gjika Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Mid'hat Frashëri, Leonik Tomeo, Lazër Shanto, Pol Adhamidhi, Gjergj Kokali, Ajet Libohova, Ali Këlcyra, Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, Luigj Gurakuqi, Faik Konica, Mustafa Kruja, Eqrem Bej Vlora, Visar Dodani, Aleksandër Moisiu, Mihal Turtulli, Bajram Curri, Avni Rustemi and many others would visit and stay there<sup>11</sup>.

Andon Zako Cajupi would also study for a few years in Switzerland. And activist Dervish Hima would carry out his notable political endeavors.

By mid-1930s, a consulate would also open, however the representation level would remain quite modest. Beyond the diplomatic and interstate aspect, during the interwar period, Geneva and Switzerland would become the center of Albanian political emigrants, but also the place where Aleksandër Moisiu would perform and grow professionally.

Switzerland allowed the publication of numerous Albanian newspapers such as "*Shqipëria-l'Albanie*" (1903-1906), in Geneva; "*Shqipëria-Albanie*" (1915-1916), in Lausanne; "*Liria kombëtare-La liberté Nationale*" (1925-1935), in Geneva and "*Biblioteka*:"

*Zëri i Shqipërisë - La Voix de l'Albanie 1935-1936*". It is said that in 1556, the work of Marin Barleti, "*Rrethimi i Shkodrës*" [Siege of Shkodra] has been printed (reprinted) in Basel. Other works by Albanian authors have been published there, such as the books by Dora D'Istria - "*German Switzerland and the climb of Mönch*", Paris 1856,... the work of the patriot Mit'hat Frashëri (with the pseudonym Lumo Skëndo), "*Les Albanais chez eux et à l'étranger*", Lausanne 1919 and the renown Albanian author, Krist Maloki "*Leksikon der Frau*", in Zürich<sup>12</sup>.

In 1946, even though a communist state, Tirana would send signal for the (re) establishment of relations, and a document from the Swiss diplomatic archives attests that at the time only a handful of Swiss people were living in Albania, and Albanian presence in Switzerland was about the same. It was only more than two decades later until both countries realized that they had lost quite some time, fearing the mentalities, balances and ideologies of the time, and that it was about time that they reinstate normal diplomatic relations.

Thus, in the hope of sticking to an illustrative chronology, I would like to mention a quite interesting testimony of the former Swiss chief diplomat in Beijing appraising our ambassador in China in the 1960s, which was unknown even to his son Mr. Petrit Nathanaili. In that document, his father and mother were praised for possessing a broad culture, and ambassador Vasil Nathanaili was valued among others as an open-minded person with a strong will for the establishment of the relations between the two countries, overstepping the official protocols of the time.

The following is an excerpt from the report:

*Nathanaili and his wife speak several western languages, and despite being Southeastern European, they are quite flexible and open, unlike*

*most diplomats from other communist countries. During my farewell visit yesterday, Nathanaili repeated his amiable suggestions towards our country, political institutions, which he seems to know quite well.*

Below the reader may find the full document in English (as well as the facsimile of the original document in German), obtained from the diplomatic archives of the Helvetic Confederation:

### **Embassy of Switzerland in CHINA**

*Beijing, on 13 December 1966*

Ref. No. 332, 010.22.Alb. HK/mo

For the Department of Political Affairs of the Political Department of the Confederation

#### **Bern, Relations with Albania**

Mister Ambassador,

As the new Albanian Ambassador, Mr. **Vasil Nathanaili**, made an introductory visit a few months ago, I had the opportunity to return the visit by bidding him farewell.

Nathanaili has previously been Foreign Deputy Minister of his country; his predecessor holding his post, is currently in Tirana serving as Foreign Minister. Both representatives of Albania, who for known reasons, play a special role here, have always tried to have proper relations and when possible, amiable relations with the Swiss Embassy.

I am also aware that my homologue has recently expressed his gratefulness to the Chinese on how other Albanian diplomats and himself have been able to obtain without hindrances Swiss visas at any time, especially when participating in international summits in Geneva.

Nathanaili and his wife speak several western languages, and despite being Southeastern European, they are quite flexible and open, unlike most diplomats from other communist countries.

During my farewell visit yesterday, Nathanaili repeated his amiable suggestions towards our country, political institutions, which he seems to know quite well. During our conversation, he also mentioned the modest, albeit growing, commercial exchanges between our two countries; he expressed the possibility of international transport of goods and finally stated that he would be very pleased if I were to visit Albania from Belgrade.

Nathanaili has formerly been a diplomat in Belgrade and he also expressed his hope that the tense relations between his country and Yugoslavia, would improve in the near future.

At the end, Nathanaili raised the question whether it would be possible that our *de facto* relations with Albania will eventually become official?

Albania has often expressed its desire to have closer contacts with Switzerland as well, and whether we would consequently agree to establish consular or diplomatic relations.

I personally thanked my conversational partner, nonetheless, I emphasized that I was not authorized to speak on such matters. However, I did not wish to miss the opportunity to inform You on such matter.

I extend my highest consideration Mr. Ambassador.

Swiss Ambassador

Signature

AMBASSADE DE SUISSE  
EN CHINE

Peking, den 13. Dezember 1966

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An die Abteilung für Politische Angelegenheiten  
des Eidg. Politischen Departementes

Bern

Ref. A. B. 22. 71. 15. (A/D)  
b. B. 15. 14. A/D.

Beziehungen mit Albanien

Herr Botschafter,

Da der neue albanische Botschafter, Herr Vasil Nathanaili, mir vor einigen Monaten einen persönlichen Antrittsbesuch machte, habe ich ihm gestern einen persönlichen Abschiedsbesuch abgestattet.

Nathanaili war früher stellvertretender Aussenminister seines Landes; sein Vorgänger hier ist jetzt in Tirana Aussenminister. Beide Vertreter Albanien, die hier aus bekannten Gründen eine besondere Rolle spielen, haben sich immer bemüht, korrekte und nach Möglichkeit freundliche persönliche Beziehungen zur Schweizerischen Botschaft zu pflegen. Ich wies auch, dass mein Kollege sich kürzlich bei den Chinesen anerkennend über die Art und Weise geäußert hat, wie er und andere albanische Diplomaten jederzeit ohne weiteres schweizerische Visa erhielten, besonders zur Teilnahme an internationale Tagungen in Genf.

Nathanaili und seine Frau sprechen mehrere westliche Sprachen und sind als Sprechende nicht nur zugänglich, sondern auch sichtlich aufgeschlossen, im Gegensatz zu Diplomaten aus den meisten andern kommunistischen Ländern.

Bei meinem gestrigen Abschiedsbesuch wiederholte Nathanaili seine freundlichen Bemerkungen über unser Land, dessen politische Institutionen er sichtlich gut zu kennen scheint. Er kam auch auf den zwar bescheidenen, aber zunehmenden Warenaustausch mit uns zu sprechen, wies auf Möglichkeiten für den Fremdenverkehr hin und erklärte schliesslich, er würde sich freuen, wenn ich von Belgrad aus auch einmal Albanien besuchen würde. Nathanaili war früher in Belgrad als Diplomat tätig und sagte mir noch, er hoffe,



Former Ambassador Vasil Nathanaili (third from right) besides the former Chinese supreme leader, Mao Tse Dun and the members of the two delegations from Albania and China at the peak of their relations by the second half of 1960s. The Swiss Embassy in Beijing affirmed that during its meetings with Ambassador Nathanaili had received informal invitations on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, as well as quite favorable assessments regarding their prospects.

Facsimile of the (declassified) diplomatic report, dated 13 December 1966, which favorably mentions the former ambassador Vasil Nathanaili

Furthermore, the testimony is supplemented by a confidential assessment that the son, Mr. Petrit Nathanaili, shares from decades-long memory when with regards to Switzerland his father stated:

*"According to my father, Switzerland inspired sympathy due to its neutral policy towards the political blocs of the time", which by deduction clearly and succinctly attests to the opinion prevailing among the political and diplomatic circles of the time, both in the East and West, to which even communist Albania subscribed.*

Surprisingly, as later attested by Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu, pertaining to this matter, beyond diplomacy, *"Considering Switzerland's neutrality and the fact that there was no "unsettled issue" or clash and dispute - as it was the case with other countries - between the regime in Albania and the Swiss government, it's still inexplicable to me how come that the diplomatic relations between our countries were established as late as 1970"*<sup>13</sup>.

Nonetheless the fact remains that (alas) we have inherited none or very little memories or testimonies in writing that would expose the feeling, the atmosphere or snippets of personal stories experienced at the time pertaining to Switzerland, for obvious reasons.

In the declassified diplomatic reports of the time, either in Switzerland or Albania, in the meetings with former possible protagonists and their heirs, as well as in the media reporting in both countries, apart from a very isolated case, one finds very few opinions expressed by communist leaders at the time in their confidential, often informal, meetings, even formal ones (following the establishment of diplomatic relations), whereby the neutrality aspect of Switzerland and the Wilhelm Tell story characterized what the Albanian regime thought of the Helvetic Confederation and the Swiss people<sup>14</sup>.

In one particular case, we have the testimony of a former delegate of the high communist nomenclature, who talks exclusively on the order he had to fulfill in Switzerland on account of the leader, Enver Hoxha, as well as on what he had done and experienced in Switzerland by the mid-1970s.

*In February 1975, I went to Switzerland on the order of Enver Hoxha. I had passed in transit by train in November 1961, exchanging trains in Basel, although I had my 6-month old son and baggage. I later travelled through in 1965 with my wife and kids and this time we faced a problem as the train did not have hot water to prepare the milk for my 5-month old daughter Rozeta, ... From Paris to Geneva I flew by plane and this time my wife was accompanying me, as my friends were busy with the leaders who were there for medical treatment. In Geneva, I rented a car and headed to Lausanne, where after leaving the city on the right, I drove through the mountains and reached the company "Kudelski-Nagra Recorders", where I met Urs Gallman, export service supervisor, who helped me buy a cassette player and equipment for Enver Hoxha, who, as I later learned, was quite pleased. Urs was a Swiss engineer who had studied in USA, he thanked me for choosing to purchase from this company and had a positive attitude towards our country. I was well*

*received and I finished pretty quick. On my way to Geneva, I took some photographs by stopping in very beautiful places. These photos are the most beautiful that I have ever taken, as the weather was nice and the Swiss sights were amazing. When someone saw my photos he suggested that I could participate in artistic photographs competitions. I never did, even though I have photos from Moscow, Paris, Albania, etc. Before arriving in Geneva, we ate some fruit and without making a full stop, I approached a trash bin on the side of the road and tried to throw it in, but it fell outside the bin. Meanwhile, from the front building, an old woman yelled at me, and gestured: "in the bin, sir, in the bin!"<sup>15</sup>.*

But as it may be surmised, in a very disproportionate ratio, we often have confidential reports by former Swiss diplomats, who reported on Albania while stationed in Belgrade, following visits that they were allowed to carry out before and after the establishment of relations.

In one of them, conducted on 1- 4 June 1969, thus, only one year prior to establishing relations (reported on 9 June at the relevant Department in Bern) submitted by the former Swiss ambassador in Belgrade, we encounter compelling and balanced assessments regarding not only our country but also characteristics of our former diplomats.

Thus, for example, somewhere in his 8-pages long report, he points out that together with his wife, had passed through Durrës on their way to Fier and Berat and had been invited (and as he emphasizes, very few foreigners were allowed such a thing) and they had observed a modern plastic production plant and the Textile Combine in Berat<sup>16</sup>.

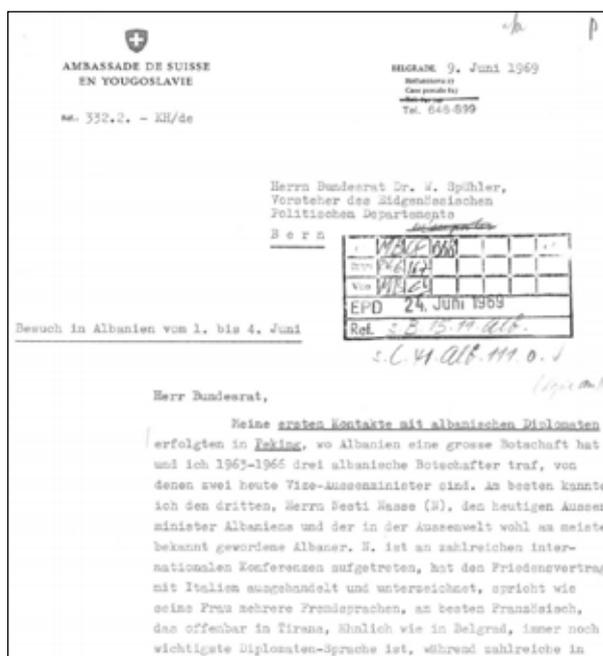
*I knew best Nesti Nase, the current foreign Minister of Albania and the most well-known Albanian abroad. Nase has partaken in numerous international conferences, has negotiated and signed the Peace*

*Treaty with Italy, and like his wife, he speaks several foreign languages, French being his strong one, which seems that in Tirana, just as in Belgrade, remains the most important diplomatic language*<sup>17</sup>.

In that same report, one finds a significant statement in order to understand that unlike as it may be surmised, it was the Swiss government that surprisingly insisted on the *status quo* and would not open the green light for the establishment of relations.

*Nesti Nase, since 1965-1966 in his Beijing meetings, had submitted his proposal on establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries, an idea that was not supported by Bern*<sup>18</sup>.

Sadly, this renown diplomat, about a decade later (in 1982) would suffer a total degradation and his memory would fall into oblivion, following the events of the "Mehmet Shehu" file.



Facsimile of the former Swiss ambassador's report, dated 9 June 1969, following the three-day visit he carried out in the People's Republic of Albania

The 1980s were quite an interesting period, when Albania and Switzerland connected on another level (one that already been established): i.e. Geneva being the headquarters of United Nations activities, where Albania strived to be very active and used it as a platform for its most respectable diplomatic representation in the conditions and circumstances of the time.

Hence, we have another protagonist, Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi, one of the most rounded representatives of the Albanian diplomatic corps over the years, distinguished not only by his diplomatic background, but also his legal background and passion for history.

In his related memories, he states:

*My first visit to Switzerland took place in April 1980, when, together with the former Head of international organizations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Murat Angoni, we would participate in the regular session proceedings of the Economic Commission for Europe, a body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council*<sup>19</sup>.

Further, in the chapter "Switzerland and Albanians", Prof. Krisafi emphasizes:

*Slowly I would uncover its strong and early connections with the Albanian world. Numerous compatriots had lived and worked there and in other Swiss cities. The earliest contacts go back as far as in the time of the Dardans*<sup>20</sup>.

Prof. Krisafi goes on to explain the entire history of the place named Dardagny and its surroundings, the toponym of which links to the Albanian language, even alluding to the name of Geneva itself. He also points out the contribution for the recognition and furthering of the Albanian question in former Yugoslavia, and the support of Swiss society.

But, things would start to change after the fall of the communist system and the restoration of a democratic one.

Consequently, the protagonist would become the heir of one of the most prominent intellectual families of the capital, persecuted by the old regime, a civil engineer and university professor, Gazmend Turdiu, who on the related occasion states:

*My appointment to Bern was clearly political. Nevertheless, I accepted to trade in my profession as an engineer and lecturer for the ambassador. It was a service I had to temporarily deliver as an exchange of my political engagement. Truth is I became so fond of diplomacy that when returning from Bern in September 1997 I decided to have a career in diplomacy. I am deeply grateful to Switzerland, the country I was appointed to, for this decision<sup>21</sup>.*

But, what stands out the most from the said interview, is the following observation:

*I would use three adjectives in my effort to define the Swiss administration, institutions and society: punctual, predictable and reliable.<sup>22</sup>*

He also talks about the beginning of the first real communication bridges between the two countries and peoples in the new realities of the time:

*The political processes in early 1990s made Switzerland grow more interested in our country. Swiss observers landed in the country to aid their Albanian fellows to monitor the elections of 31 and 22 march. Exchanges took place at different levels, thus contributing to the intensification of relations in all fields<sup>23</sup>.*

As he lists the many concrete contributions of the Swiss, which of course bear their relevant value, Ambassador Turdiu recalls bits of cooperation with Swiss personalities and activists, who as he

emphasizes, had become inseparable friends of his family and the Albanian people.

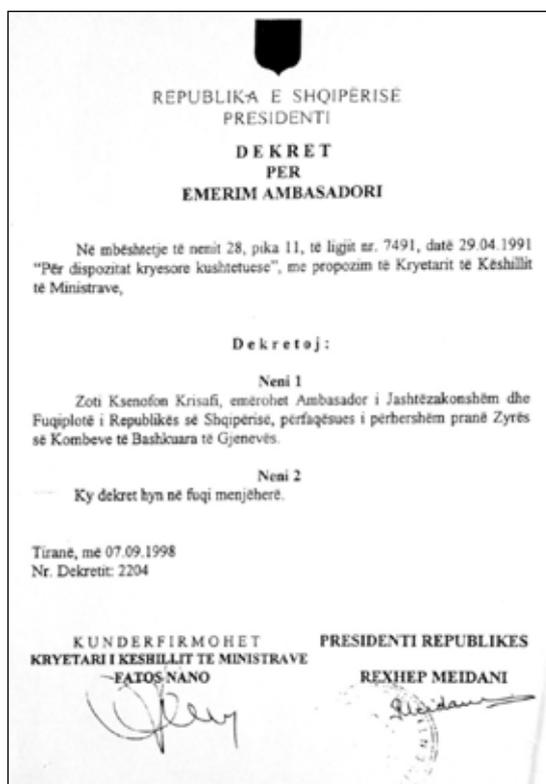
A bit further in time, as he recounts on the many things that link Albania and the Albanians to Switzerland, in his memoir, Prof. Krisafi offers details from the life and work in Geneva during the last years of the communist period, and expresses his pleasure of returning years later as the Head of the Albanian Mission in 1998.

*The Albanian diplomatic representation to Geneva was reestablished nearly half a century later (it had been temporarily open in 1953), in September 1987. Its current name is the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations and other International Organizations in Geneva<sup>24</sup>.*

As he provides a brief background of the Mission, pointing out especially the earliest contribution of its founders like Fan Noli, Mehdi Frashërit etc., what stands out is the Albania's withdrawal from the mission upon the occupation of the country by Fascist Italy, by a decision signed from the then quisling Prime Minister, Shefqet Vërlaci.



The former Head of the Albanian Mission in Geneva, Amb. Krisafi in a meeting with Mrs. Ruth Dreifuss, President of the Swiss Confederation



Facsimile of the Decree on the appointment of Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi, as Ambassador in Geneva. Tirana 1998.

Whereas the former ambassador Genc Muçaj, currently an advisor to the President of the Republic in Tirana, has a pretty special experience pertaining to Switzerland and its commitment to Albania. For several years now, he runs the Albanian section of the "People to People" organization, which was established by former USA president Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 with the aim of bringing Americans closer to other people, believing that in this way world peace would be more attainable. One can sense in his statement the enthusiasm and pleasure of cooperating with Switzerland, thus, bringing the experience of an organization aiming to get closer to people in a more active way.

Beginning with the Kosovo crisis, more than 20 years ago up to the present, his organization has carried out a respectable amount of activities towards humanitarian aid, professional training and developmental aid for rural areas in Albania, of which he is very proud.

*"It so happened that at continental level, the Swiss branch of "People to People" was one of the most well-organized organizations. In a way, Switzerland offered to become our patron, with wonderful leaders and individuals who have contributed in making Albania known not only to Switzerland but also to Europe and the rest of the world",* affirms Ambassador Muçaj.

*"The name of Albania started to be mentioned not simply through the TV chronicles, which to our misfortune were rarely positive, but by identifying it with those values that Albania and Albanians truly embody in themselves, in their homeland".*

He does not forget to thank and recall the support of Swiss branch president, Mr. Ernst Honecker, calling him a dear and great friend of Albanians.



Amb. Genc Muçaj during an activity of the Organization "People to People" - ALBANIA, in Tirana



An aid activity carried out by the Organization "People To People" - ALBANIA, in rural areas of Albania

### Part 3- Successful Albanians at the heart of the Alps – A story to be told

It is quite interesting that by mid-1960s the presence of Albanians from Kosovo and former Yugoslavia was ever-growing, whereas the emigration of Albanians from Albania to the Swiss Confederation was made possible only after the fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe, that brought about the installation of several contributions, whose presence nonetheless remains quite modest in numbers.

It is not at all difficult to find Albanian names from former Yugoslavia, who already constitute inspiring examples for the Swiss themselves, people who thanks to their tireless work and opportunities provided by the Helvetic land, are today success icons.

However, it is somewhat difficult to find those

from Albania. Nonetheless, they are not totally absent:

We can thus mention several names known beyond the Albanian community in Switzerland, such as the successful manager Florian Haçkaj, information expert, the "Pestalozzi" library director in Zürich, Suela Jorgaqi, the football coach Ilir Paço, the lecturer Lolita Poda Jorkievitz, or the talented pianist Ermira Zyrakja, the director of the cultural association "Swiss Albania Even", Aina Hoti, and Bledi Yzeiraj, currently senior finance specialist in the prominent holding group "Richemont".

Furthermore, we could point out the name of Dr. Enit Karafili Steiner, the lady from Albania who has been appointed lecturer in the English Department, University of Lausanne, with a rich American experience. She is one of the most prominent personalities of the Albanian Diaspora in Switzerland and involved with activities organized by the embassy for the promotion of Albania. Similarly, Zhaklina Dhimojani Blattler represents the role model of the Albanian dedicated not only to his/her country of origin, but also a worthy symbol of the Albanian well-integrated and respected in Swiss society. Robert Hoxha, assistant professor in the Research Center of Music in the Italian part of Switzerland, who is also quite a talented saxophone player highly valued by critics as well as the local public.

Gjon Guralumi, an Albanian of the Diaspora in Switzerland, who through his work, enjoys a high reputation in the artistic community of Switzerland and beyond.

We can further mention Mimoza Nazarko, a popular singer and activist artist, who has greatly contributed to the promotion of our country's artistic and cultural values in Switzerland. Alfred Papuçiu, one of the most well-known figures

of the Albanian Diaspora in Switzerland, with tangible contributions in the spreads of Albanian cultural and literary values.

They naturally join their compatriots who have long achieved success in their respective professions, like the artists: Elina Duni and Markelian Kapedani, as well as the writer, member of the Swiss Society of Authors, Elvira Dones.

While some of them divide they lives between Italy and Switzerland, or between Belgium, Switzerland and Albania, others have decided to live in the USA after two decades of living in Switzerland. But more interesting and quite inspiring is the case of the lecturer Lolita Poda Jorkiewitz, who following years of work and efforts in Switzerland, has finally decided to share her experiences with Albanians, while living in a small, albeit inspirational, town that is Saranda.

Success examples are not lacking even from later generations, while the real success is that of common people, of everyone of them who through their work contribute to conveying the best image of Albanians in the famous Alpine country as well as better understanding and greater exchange between the two countries.

Their personal stories, feelings and experiences have made them inevitable and deserved protagonists of what could be characterized without any hesitation as "A story to be told".

Although the figures provided by Swiss institutions should be taken slightly with reserves, one may still tell that the total number of Albanians from Albania currently living and working in Switzerland is around 1500, without taking into account those who possess another citizenship or passport, such as Greek or Italian (or rather EU citizenship).

If we were to calculate Albanians as nationality, thus including Albanians from Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Presevo Valley, then the figure is overwhelmingly larger, up to 250.000, which in turn makes the Albanian community in a country like Switzerland with 8.57 million people<sup>25</sup> a community with a certain influence and remarkable profile, which goes well beyond their real figure.

In a conversation with the successful manager and Diaspora activist, Florian Haçkaj, we learn that:

*Officially, 258,415 individuals of Albanian origin are registered in Switzerland, but the unofficial figure may reach up to 350,000. Zürich has about 50,000, but in recent years, many Albanians have migrated from Italy and Greece, who have been registered with their new citizenships rather than as Albanians<sup>26</sup>.*

Whereas Albanian, is the third language spoken in Switzerland after the four official ones, or the seventh, after German, French, Italian, Romansh, English and Portuguese.<sup>27</sup>

And even though in a foreign land, certain features make Albanians distinguishable not only among the Swiss but even among themselves. However, their integration to Swiss society is subject to the same logic. Thus, in a conversation with Suela Jorgaqi, who has studied in Tirana and Switzerland, and is currently the director of one of the most well-known libraries in Zürich, she states:

*My fingers suffice to count the Albanians from Albania, and I know almost everyone of them here in Zürich. Integration is possible through work and the fact that I can hardly see them, as they are too busy working, means that they are well-integrated<sup>28</sup>.*

What they appreciate the most is Swiss punctuality, inclination to order, and multiculturalism. This is affirmed by many compatriots, just like Suela who emphasizes:

*I think that one of the main things that I like in Zürich is multiculturalism. And then you notice that people are the same all over the world, it is the conditions, i.e. social circle, education, the opportunities they have that make them differ from one another<sup>29</sup>.*

Whereas, in confront with the alpine mentality, what an Albanian misses the most is, according to Florian Haçkaj, spontaneity:

*We often miss the spontaneity of Albania, although I believe that order is an important factor which has enabled the progress of Switzerland<sup>30</sup>.*

When asked about similarities between Albanians and the Swiss, people immediately agree on several matters, as suggested by Florian Haçkaj:

*Historically there are many similarities between the Albanian and the Swiss people. They, like us, have been poor subsiding on farming, herding and mercenarism in large armies, as they were known for being brave warriors<sup>31</sup>.*

A distinct feature of this community, even though small in numbers, is its quality as compared to Albanian communities in other European countries or in the rest of the world. Summarily, we may gladly note that this community is the best ambassador of Albania and its people in the Helvetic state. Hence, the future appears more hopeful, when thinking of how this generation of Albanians has already overcome numerous barriers and prejudices, and it is further consolidating the columns of the bridges of cooperation and friendship both old and new between the two people.



Director of "Pestalozzi" Library in Zürich, Suela Jorgaqi



Florian Haçkaj, one of the most prominent young Albanians of the Albanian community in Switzerland.

## Appendix:

**Full exclusive interview with Ambassador Turdiu** on the occasion of celebrating the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations established between the two countries, associated with the most symbolic footages he was able to retrieve when serving in Bern during 1992-1997.

*Honorable Mr. Ambassador,*

**You have been appointed Albanian Ambassador to Switzerland at a time of system changes and democratic reformation of the country. Is there anything special that jogs in your memory in the personal and human plane, taking into account what your family and you represented to the former regime?**

**How did you receive the proposal?**

Well, I was appointed Ambassador to Switzerland at a time when the Albanian people was actually confronting the communist regime. People were eager for change and freedom. They wanted to take their own lives into their hands and decide on simple things such as the course of their studies or their dwelling place. They were hoping for a better quality of life, a normal life, fair treatment, normal economic situation and - last but not least - a country aligned with the civilized part of the world. Those living in that era may easily recall how the hope to leave the past behind turned into a motif to try better, not only as professionals, but also as individuals, to speed up the torrent raging across the Albanian society. I also got caught up in the torrent. As a construction engineer and part time lecturer at the Faculty of Construction at the University of Tirana I did my best to give my very own humble

contribution to bring about the changes that followed from the mid 1990 up to mid 1992.

When serving in the foreign relations department of one of the parties who won seats in the elections of 22 March, I was told in May 1992 that I had to meet Mr. Maxhun Peka at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As soon as I entered his office, I was requested -to my surprise- to handwrite a brief resume of mine and have it submitted. The person addressing me such a bizarre requirement was actually the Human Resource Manager. The question why do you need my resume for was firmly answered "as long as I was asked to take care of your case, it means that you are about to appointed ambassador". I asked in astonishment whether the submission of the resume implied I was actually consenting. "Do you have any objection?"-he asked. "No, it's just... it never crossed my mind. It's a huge change in my life and I want to talk it over with my dearest, for they will also be impacted by this decision. I have a mother, a sister and a fiancé. I can't just walk in and say to them: It's all done and settled. Before consenting I want to know where I will be appointed to". Considering my cry, Mr. Peka took me to meet the minister Alfred Serreqi, who though well-minded as he was, answered sharply: "Certainly not to...". Two weeks later the President's Decree appointing me ambassador to Bern came out. I wasn't sure about trading in my profession (although I assumed it would be temporary) and I was fearful if I would be good at it. However, I felt very good.

My appointment to Bern was clearly political. Nevertheless, I accepted to trade in my profession as an engineer and lecturer for the ambassador. It was a service I had to temporary deliver as an exchange of my political engagement. Truth is I

became so fond of diplomacy that when returning from Bern in September 1997 I decided to have a career in diplomacy. I am deeply grateful to Switzerland, the country I was appointed to, for this decision. Cordiality, friendly reception and respect for a troubled country like Albania, the unsparing aid given to our country over the years through major projects made me realize the worth of this new profession in my life.

**What did you know about Switzerland, its people, the political system and the standards it applied? Did your imagination match the reality you discovered upon arriving in the country as the Albanian ambassador?**

Nothing more than any ordinary Albanian citizen who had never crossed the border and had no other source of information besides those permissible before the '90s. I believed it was a beautiful country. I had heard about some wonderful infrastructural and transport works such as Gotthard and Simplon tunnels that were regarded as major engineering works - I was a construction engineer after all. I had also heard that it was a prosperous country, running like a "Swiss Clock", but I had no other details.

Everything was actually beyond my expectation, at least during those five years I got to work there. From the professional perspective, I can certainly say that I have been given the warm shoulder and a positive affirmation by almost any office I've knocked at in my quest to cooperate and procure funding for projects that were critical for Albania back then. Swiss projects and public investments have always been a history of success, with very few exceptions (out state was to blame).

I would use three adjectives in my effort to define the Swiss administration, institutions and

society: punctual, predictable and reliable.

From my own personal perspective, I can say that I haven't had enough of its breathtaking scenery, nature and landscape which people treated and protected so attentively and carefully.

**What is your current perception of the Swiss influence over Albania and vice versa in the light of the mission your fellow predecessor Albanian diplomats represented?**

Considering Switzerland's neutrality and the fact that there was no "unsettled issue" or clash and dispute - as it was the case with other countries - between the regime in Albania and the Swiss government, it's still inexplicable to me how come that the diplomatic relations between our countries were established as late as 1970. I could easily infer why Albania had no diplomatic relations established with the USA, Soviet Union, Israel and Holy Seat - the logic and the ideology of the regime back then was a fine explanation to that. However, I couldn't explain why such relations were missing with Switzerland. The case perfectly illustrates the gist of the diplomacy in the past, as employed by the diplomats of the time. Isolation. Self-confinement. The duty we were charged with from 1992 was to "open up" and "cooperate".

The political processes in early 1990s made Switzerland grow more interested in our country. Swiss observers landed in the country to aid their Albanian fellows to monitor the elections of 31 and 22 march. Exchanges took place at different levels, thus contributing to the intensification of relations in all fields. The visit the Albanian parliamentary delegation led by the Spokesperson Mr. Kastriot Islami paid to Switzerland in the summer of 1991 on the

occasion of celebrating the 700th Anniversary of the Helvetic Confederation was actually the first high-level political exchange.

The intensification of relations in this period climaxed with the decision of both governments to open their embassies in the respective capital cities. The Swiss Government took the first step. Their Embassy in Tirana was opened early in the summer of 1992, while our embassy took six weeks more - it was opened in August of that same year.

Ever since, exchanges have been quite frequent and not only political in terms of content. The technical and financial assistance of some public carefully selected Swiss projects have positively imprinted on the Albanian economy and society.

**Was Switzerland during your term ranked as one of the “avant-garde” countries in terms of support it provided to Albania to overcome its economic, social and human rights crisis? Can you provide us with a specific example or number?**

Definitely yes. Switzerland was in the front line of the countries that gave Albania a helping hand.

Its economic support for the Albanian state started as early as 1992 with its emergency aid, which consisted of the partial funding of imports (critical to our country), mainly transformers and spare parts for the power grid distribution during winter 1992-1993.

From 1994, the Swiss economic assistance in Albania shifted its approach by giving priority to the funding of strategic projects such as telecommunications and energy (rehabilitation of Drini HPP). Despite these major projects, some multi-year financial and technical support projects were devised and implemented in sectors such as agriculture, health, education etc.

Albania was one of the four countries benefiting from the financial support program along with Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania. The program placed Albania in a favorable position.

In tandem with the technical and financial support program, an immense work was carried out to lay the foundation of the joint legal framework that would actually guide the economic and commercial exchanges in the future. We started to work immediately on the:

- Agreement on Boosting and Protect Mutual Investments;
- Agreement on Economic and Commercial Cooperation.
- Agreement on Avoiding Double Taxes.

**Which were the most important projects that were implemented in our country back then?**

Under the auspices of the Federal Office for Cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe several important projects on health, professional vocation, agriculture, administration etc. were funded.

The package of projects funded by the office targeted first and foremost the health and social sector. I would like to point out in this regard the reconstruction of Tirana Pediatric Hospital, Tirana Maternity Hospital “The Queen Mother”; Berat, Elbasan and Kukës hospitals; disabled child home in Berat and Shkodër etc.

Some of these projects were funded and supervised by the same institution, while being implemented by third parties such as CARITAS, VESKA, GEHVAL, Rotary Club and medical hospitals and schools who managed to twin with counterpart institutions in Albania.

A very important and long-term project was the transformation of the Hygiene and Epidemiology

Institute in Tirana into Public Health Institute. The project concluded within four years with a cost of almost \$ 6 million.

In education it's worth mentioning the reconstruction of the vocational school in Durrës which with a cost of \$1 300 000.

In terms of financial assistance, the Development Cooperation Office at the Federal Public Economic Department funded over the years some projects crucial to the infrastructure such as telecommunication (\$12 million), reduction of non-technical losses in the power distribution grid and rehabilitation of Drini HPPs (\$15 million), technical support for the Albanian Power Cooperation (\$ 500 000), the rehabilitation of the power distribution and transmission grid (\$9 million), contribution of \$ 5 million for payment balance sheet etc.

All projects implemented by Switzerland have had a considerable impact on the improvement of services for citizens. From the above list, I would like to set apart the support provided for telecommunication (\$12 million): All those living back then can easily recall how difficult it was to make a call abroad in early 1990s. One had to spend minutes to be able to reach the line. The situation changed completely upon the establishment of the new telephone switchboard in Tirana and new line of the Albanian telecom for abroad calls, funded 100% by Switzerland.

Symbolically speaking, it was the Secretary of State at the Federal Public Economy Department, Mr. Franz Blankart, who made the first phone call on 23 October 1994. He had actually landed in Tirana to attend the new telephone switchboard inauguration event on 23 October 1994. From that day on, there was no need to dial a number more than once to reach the international line.

**Who are the diplomas, statesmen, politicians or high-level Swiss representatives that you share the best of memories and who were those that knew or wanted to get to know Albania best, either by relying or not on the Albanian authorities help (including with the help of the Embassy)?**

**What were they mostly interested in?**

I have good memories with all my acquaintances back then, be them officials or friends. I can mention the Secretary of State Blankart who was very inclined to simply official conversations for you. He was always willing to address the needs of the Albanian economy and to act in this regard whenever possible. The Chief of Political Division at the Federal Foreign Affairs Department Mr. Franz von Däniken was always open to communication. I've had excellent professional relations with the diplomat covering Albania Jean-Jacques Jorris, who eventually became my family friend, as encouraged by his superior. Same applies to Volker Schulte who used to cover health projects. The first Swiss Ambassador to Albania Thomas Feller is actually a very good friend of mine even nowadays.

A special collaborator of ours whom we've had excellent relations with and I would definitely call him "a dear friend to Albania" is the Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee at the Swiss Parliament Mr. Victor Ruffly.

There are many other distinguished collaborators who were indeed very cordial. It's been a pleasure to have them as friends. I would like to mention the Ambassador Indermühle who helped talented Albanian students to get scholarships in the Gstaad Music Academy, the Charmian of the Bern Rotary Club supporting hospitals in the most remote areas in Albania,



20 October 1992: Ambassador Turdiu when submitting the Letter of Credential to the Swiss President, Dr. René Felber



the President of the foundation Karl Popper, who mediated the purchase of 4 search and rescue helicopters Alouette III (those red helicopters in Farka military base operating from 1995 that have saved the lives of so many people) etc. It's impossible for me to mention all of them, but I would nevertheless like to thank you for bringing such beautiful memories back to my mind.

**Interviewer:** Armand PLAKA – Journalist, Scholar

Footage of the apartment headquartering the Embassy of the Republic of Albania in the Helvetic Confederation, Bern, located in Eigerstrasse 46 3007. 1992. Retrieved from the Ambassador Turdiu's private collection.

Interview with

**Mrs. Suela Jorgaqi – Director of “Pestalozzi” Library in Zürich,**

**7 September 2020**

**For years now you live in the Helvetic Confederation, where you have created your own family and work in a library in the city of Zürich, for which you finished the relevant specialization after graduating for German culture and literature in Tirana. What was**

**the reason or the cause that drove you to choose Switzerland, the most developed and interesting part of the German world?**

It was simply a coincidence. After finishing my German language studies in Tirana, I got acquainted with a Swiss couple who wished to help someone to study abroad, the biggest wish of our generation back then. So, with luck and my desire I focused on Chur, Switzerland, where I studied “Informationswissenschaft”, i.e. information science while at the same time working in a library. But coming from a big city like Tirana, I really missed the vitality and bustle

of the city, so, after finishing my studies, I moved to Zürich, which I find a very fascinating albeit calm city. I still live here with my family.

**What were some of your first impressions when you went there? Did your image of the place match with what you encountered, and on the other hand, what was their perceived impression of you and other Albanians, considering that a number of Albanians (those from Kosovo) had been living for quite some time in Switzerland thus leaving their own imprint.**

The first week that I arrived in Switzerland I saw a dream as if I had left during the night!!! Everything seemed completely different. I think that when people are not complete, they hold on to security, they long for the known that is otherwise translated into HOMELAND. So I did the same, although all my contacts back then were Swiss. Even in university, I was the only non-Swiss student! I felt rather lonely. It is quite hard to come from a communist country, where teaching and learning were face to face, unlike here, and having to do all by yourself. Nonetheless, I was privileged, for however challenging the studies, they paved my path for the future. I cannot compare myself with the Albanians from Kosovo who emigrated here to work in factories. Everyone kept saying: you are different from the rest of the Albanians, and when I speak, they assume I am American based on how I spell the letter "rr". I did not consider it a compliment, as it was a positive stereotype. But, I haven't heard this comment for a long time now!

In reality, I did not have many preconceptions about Switzerland, I was simply curious to live in a new country whichever it may be. I had actually visited once, but it is quite something else to be there on vacation and to settle there permanently. I remember that I enjoyed the first months through discovery. But afterwards,

the emptiness sunk in, I missed my old acquaintances, and it took me quite some time to create new ones.

**Could you elaborate a little on your career and everyday life?**

Initially, I worked in a trade union which was a source of strength and where I better realized how Switzerland worked. So, not everything was perfect as thought, not everyone was rich, and there were many violations of the law, especially labor laws, which really took me by surprise. Getting to know its politics and judicial system, including the common people was a separate school for me. There I could be more myself, because my colleagues were Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Swiss and any of them remain my friends to this day. As a friend of mine often says, the trade union is a lifestyle, not just work. It thus opened my eyes and my path to work in an intercultural field, which is my specialty.

For 7 years now I am the director of "Pestalozzi" Library, one of the 14 libraries in Zürich, and also responsible for the events of all 14 libraries, which occupy a big part of our everyday work. It is a fascinating job, as I get to know many people, I try to mediate and offer uniqueness and individuality in my library. Besides my intercultural staff, we carry out numerous activities from all over the world. I am open to cooperate with any institution, thus creating synergy and valuable projects. In many job applications that I receive, people often write: I would like to work in a library because I love to read. But this is not enough anymore. In order to work in a library these days, one should be outgoing, flexible and loving to work with people. For me the priority has always been the clientele, what they want, hence we try to keep up the pace, such as the digital offers.

My everyday life is the same there, as in any

other part of the world: I send my son to daycare, I take the tram to the library, I have appointments or guides, we never forget the morning coffee, which we have together as staff, when we also exchange the latest news. Then I carry out various tasks in the library, including administrative ones. When I have some free time during the lunch hours I practice yoga, or Zumba in the evening, and then I go home. I pick up my son if my husband hasn't already, and we have dinner, then read or play together. As an auteur cinema lover, I enjoy watching a movie in the evening, however, my son sets the priorities, so it depends. When I have some extra time, I enjoy going to the theater or opera, but I often tell myself that I need to take more advantage of the cultural diversity that Zürich has to offer.

**How many Albanians live in your city and in Switzerland overall?**

There are few Albanians from Albania, approximately 1500 in Switzerland overall. Whereas there are many more from Kosovo and North Macedonia, about 200,000. They are a source of my clientele, the children in particular often frequent the library.

**Do Albanians there organize in order to preserve their traditions, and on the other hand, are Albanians a good example of integration in that society?**

The integration issue is complicated. The more you integrate in another country the less you give importance to being with your compatriots, because you do not choose people according to their nationality, but to your liking. The same happened for me; my circle of friends is quite mixed, otherwise I would feel culturally poor if I surrounded myself only with Albanians or only with Swiss. I think that one of the main things that I like in Zürich is multiculturalism. And then you notice that people are the same all over

the world, it is the conditions, i.e. social circle, education, the opportunities they have that make them differ from one another.

The second generation, or "secondas" of Albanians from Kosovo and North Macedonia have integrated quite well, far better than their parents who had it more difficult and came here working the hardest jobs. You may find them in management, services, and increasingly even in leadership positions. Whereas, my fingers suffice to count the Albanians from Albania, and I know almost everyone of them here in Zürich. Integration is possible through work and the fact that I can hardly see them, as they are too busy working, means that they are well-integrated.

**What could you point out regarding the similarities between Albanians and the Swiss? Is there an aspect, a line or event that is memorable to you?**

My husband is Swiss. Every time that we argue, we go back to nationality, however, these are not intercultural disagreement, simply husband-wife disagreements, like in the rest of the world. He speaks fluently Albanian, although our son excels him now?! The mere fact that we live together means that we have much more in common rather than differences.

A memorable event: When I got the citizenship, they came in our home to check the whether our marriage was real. I was really surprised and told the girl, who was younger than me: I was under the impression that this happened only in movies (there is a famous Swiss movie, "Die Schweizermacher")!!! And offered something to drink: She replied: no, no, when we see that everything is in order, we leave quite soon! – and I thought to myself: well, maybe she expected an Albanian flag, or maybe a sofra table?!

**Interviewer:** Armand PLAKA – Journalist, Researcher

## Conversation with Florian Haçkaj -

- 7 September 2020

Florian Haçkaj, is undoubtedly one of most prominent young Albanians of the Albanian community in Switzerland. Graduated in the University of Applied Sciences in Bielefeld, Germany and later in the University of Applied Science in Lucerne, Switzerland (Post-graduate studies in Tourism Management), completed with many more qualifications, Florian has over 10 years of experience in the international sales sector, business development as well as experience in aviation/tourism industry consulting, and in many complex environments for information management services.

He has achieved renowned and proven successes in sales and new client acquisitions at international level. In the last 4 years his work has focused on the cooperation with various UN agencies such as WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, ILO etc. and large NGOs like ICRC, IFRC etc.

Aside from being a highly achieving professional, Florian Haçkaj is also one of the most renown Albanian climbers who has climbed Mount Everest, Aconcagua, the highest peak of the Andes, and other worldly famous mountains.

**You have been living in Switzerland for a long time now, but this appears to be only one of the stations of your private or professional life.**

**What was the reason or the cause that drove you to choose Switzerland, the most developed and interesting part of the German world?**

Actually, after completing my university studies on international management in Germany and following several work experiences in Germany,

Austria and Belgium, I decided to return to Albania, but in September 2010, my wife moved to Zürich to follow her graduate studies in ETH Zürich for civil engineering and I decided to move from Albania to be closer to her.

**What were some of your first impressions when you went there? Did your image of the place match with what you encountered, and on the other hand, what was their perceived impression of you and other Albanians, considering that a number of Albanians (those from Kosovo) had been living for quite some time in Switzerland thus leaving their own imprint.**

Not only the Albanians from Kosovo, but also those from North Macedonia, Montenegro and the Presevo Valley, who had emigrated during the 1970-80s, had already established a large and respected community. In recent years, this culminated with the Albanian players in the Swiss National Football Team. However, being a foreigner in Switzerland, like in other countries of the world, aint' far from easy. I struggled for a long time to be where I am now, even though I possessed a German diploma, spoke 5 languages and had a vast international experience in management. Maybe due to the fact that I grew up in post-communist Albania, but also based on the manner of how I was raised by my family, i.e. to be grateful of what we have, both my wife and I enjoyed every moment in Switzerland, despite the challenges we faced. I am on very good terms with Albanians, either because of work, friendship, sports, and mainly simply being Albanian. I cannot say what imprints have I made, but I believe that given the promotion within my company, from assistant consultant to department head, I have made a fine impression of Albanian culture in general and the work culture of a dedicated Albanian in particular.

**Could you elaborate a little on your career and everyday life?**

Surprisingly, the day in Switzerland has the same hours as in Albania, but it seems shorter as the week passes by quickly. Home, work, home and in between some sport activity and family commitments. Weekends are reserved only to relaxation, or family activities, and it is actually funny, but in Switzerland you have to schedule meetings with family and friends quite in advance in order to set a date. We often miss the spontaneity of Albania, although I believe that order is an important factor which has enabled the progress of Switzerland. In 2014, if I recall correctly, the Swiss held a referendum on increasing the leave days from 5 weeks to 7 weeks per year, however, they decided against, by taking into account the long-term impact it would have on the country's economy. I will let you draw the parallel with Albania.

**How many Albanians live in your city and in Switzerland overall?**

Officially, 258,415 individuals of Albanian origin are registered in Switzerland, but the unofficial figure may reach up to 350,000. Zürich has about 50,000, but in recent years, many Albanians have migrated from Italy and Greece, who have been registered with their new citizenships rather than as Albanians.

**Do Albanians there organize in order to preserve their traditions, and on the other hand, are Albanians a good example of integration in that society?**

Albanians organize quite well and regularly in order to preserve their traditions. There are student organizations in the most prominent universities in Switzerland, cultural and sports associations, Albanian schools, football championships, dance courses, business networks, etc. there are countless examples of

successful Albanians from the National Football Team players like Xhaka, Shaqiri etc, to well-known businesspeople and politicians like Ylfete Fanaj who holds the post of President of Lucerne Cantonal Council, or Mrs. Qendresa Sadriu, president of local cantonal council here in Zürich, and numerous others like them.

**What could you point out regarding the similarities between Albanians and the Swiss? Is there an aspect, a line or event that is memorable to you?**

Historically there are many similarities between the Albanian and the Swiss people. They, like us, have been poor subsiding on farming, herding and mercenarism in large armies, as they were known for being brave warriors. The success of Switzerland as a confederation began exactly in 1516 by declaring neutrality, among which there is an event that very few Albanians and Swiss are aware of, and each time I tell the story they are taken aback.

Mercurio (Märkur) Bua (from the Gjin Bue Shpata family) was a famed *stratioti* (captain) of the time. His services, together with his 600 soldiers were often bought by the armies at the time and were regarded as a great victory factor in battles. Precisely in 1515, Mercurio was vested in glory when in the Battle Marignano, the Venetians and the French defeated the Swiss, mercenaries contracted by the Holy Roman Empire. Mercurio Bua and his horsemen saved the life of the French king, Francis I, and were a key factor in that battle. The Swiss (known as the Old Swiss Confederacy) suffered their heaviest losses ever and due to this great defeat, the Swiss signed a peace treaty with Francis in November 1516. It was during that period that the Swiss Confederacy decided on "perpetual peace", i.e. not engaging in any wars by remaining neutral, thus, ever since, it has achieved only successes and has become a safe place for the deposit of

vast amounts of money by other countries and rich people from all over the world. For example: Switzerland has not engaged in any of the world wars, despite being surrounded by the countries that fought one another.

In summary, a famed Albanian army commander had an impact on the course of history so that Switzerland would choose to avoid future wars, followed thus by an unprecedented economic growth.

**Interviewer:** Armand PLAKA – Journalist, Researcher

### **Memories of a former diplomat: My journeys and stay in Switzerland**

**(1980-2002)**

**By Ksenofon Krisafi\***

My first visit to Switzerland took place in April of 1980, when, together with the former Head of International Organizations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Murat Angoni, we would participate in the regular session proceedings of the Economic Commission for Europe, a body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In Belgrade, with Sokrat Plaka and Murat Angoni on our way to Geneva

On the morning of April 15, we went to the Palace of Nations where the session proceedings took place. After the impressive entrance, on the square facing the main entrance we encountered a gigantic chair standing on three legs – one had been broken, as a symbol of the consequences of anti-personnel mines - followed by an “aisle” of flags of all UN member states placed on both sides in alphabetical order.

The Palace of Nations, a building of unusual dimensions, one of the international diplomacy temples of the period prior to and after World War II, left an indelible impression. It stood as a silent and stately witness of the drafting of the scenarios of significant events concerning

the fate of the World's people. It represented the virtual and immense arena of diplomatic conflicts, polemics, and the place where thousands of speeches, declarations, debates and compromises had occurred, where hundreds of international treaties and conventions had been discussed and signed.

In the following days, in addition to participating in the Commission's proceedings, we would also find time to visit and travel around the magical and beautiful city of Geneva, lying on the bay of Lake Geneva (Leman), the largest lake in Western Europe, at the foot of the Jura Mountain, at the Alps. This city, characterized by its beauty, charm, architecture and its numerous values, would be forever engraved in our memory as the city of the grand Rousseau, Voltaire, Calvin, Diderot, Isabelle Adjani, Alain Delon, Charles Aznavour, etc., as a multilingual city also renowned for cultural dialog. Albert Cohen referred to Geneva as the grand cosmopolitan theater of feelings, ambitions, vanity and projects, a city both Swiss and European, and of a universal nature.

I would visit the city again a year later, in August of 1981, due to the proceedings for the second part of the tenth session of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (3-28 August).

### Switzerland and Albanians

Slowly, I would uncover the deep and early connections of the country with the Albanian world. Many compatriots had lived and worked there and in other Swiss cities. Their first contacts dated since the Dardania times.

When I worked as an extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador, Head of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva, an occasional event would make me discover an interesting and nearly implausible history, which, as I would later find out, was not entirely unknown. Around April or May of 2000, on a weekend, I was dining with friends at the restaurant "*Le Pavillon du Lac*", across Lake Geneva. It was a restaurant with good food and service. Its manager was a young man from Kosovo, named Sokol Agushi. What stood out to me among the many alcoholic drinks was the *Dardagny* wine. Its intriguing name prompted me to ask the owner about details. He explained that the wine was produced locally by a nearby winery in the village of *Dardagny*.

The conversation in "*Le Pavillon du Lac*" regarding the *Dardagny* wine's name seemed to have ended there. However, several weeks later, a completely random event reminded me of Geneva's *Dardagny*, and it later actually lead me there. On a casual day, while having coffee at the Mission's premises with Bujar Marika, who had been living in Geneva for a long time, I expressed my desire to visit nearby wineries that produced and stored quality wines. He had moved to Geneva years ago and, thus, I believed that he could help me. A few days later, Bujar notified me that he had found the name and address of one of the most famous wineries in the region, located precisely in *Dardagny* and owned by a man named Pierre Mermier. When I called Mr. Mermier on the phone and mentioned that I was part of the Albanian Mission to the

UN, he promptly interjected to ask me "How are you doing my brother?" Taken aback, and also wondering that I may have misheard or misunderstood him on the phone, I explained again who I was and expressed my wish to visit his winery. Once again, eagerly, he told me that he had understood me well and said, "I am glad to have this opportunity to talk to a fellow Albanian". He explained that he and the majority of inhabitants in the village of *Dardagny* were of ancient Illyrian origin from Dardania. Their ancestors had moved to the village and in several other settlements around Lake Geneva during the battles of Julius Caesar and at later times. Those areas were generally named toponymically, ending in "*gny*". Many of the inhabitants were brought up with the reminder of their Illyrian-Balkan origin, a reminder that, as Mermier explained, was passed down through generations. He agreed to tell me more about this when I would visit *Dardagny* and the Mermier winery.

This conversation with Mr. Mermier, whom I would recall often afterwards, seemed strange, far from reality, and almost unbelievable. All of a sudden, a new connection with Albania and Kosovo was emerging in my public life and activity, the village of *Dardagny* in Switzerland.

In the first week of July 2000, I visited the village of *Dardagny*, located approximately 8 kilometers west of Geneva, bordering France. It was surrounded by numerous vineyards, arranged in an exemplary manner. The Mermier winery was now under the ownership of Pierre's grandson, Bernard Vaugnat Mermier.

We saw several "generations" of containers made of wood, cement, glass, and plastic material and once again wood, as per the technological advancement. They gathered and processed grapes collected from highly esteemed wine-producing vineyards in the region of Geneva and nearby French regions. Part of them laid

down as museum ruins. While we were sat down and proceeding with wine degustation, Pierre continued telling me the detailed story of the Illyrian-Dardanian origin of the other towns, villages and settlements near Lake Geneva. Among others, he said that the first waves of ancestors who had settled around Lake Geneva had arrived somewhere during the middle of the century I B.C, when Julius Caesar conquered the area. To manage these regions, he appointed several Dardanians, who were Roman citizens from Dardania, that had been occupied by Rome almost a century before. The most renowned figure amongst them, *Dardanicum*, whose name was given to the village we were in, had brought with him relatives and friends from Dardania, who were put at his service. Thus, according to Pierre, Illyrian Dardanians had arrived and settled into these areas, and their descendants currently inhabited the villages of Cologny, Pregny, Chatingny, Satigny, Céligny, Chougny, Cartigny, Germagny, Juvigny, Martigny, etc. In "*Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*" by Jacques Davierle, 22 August 2005 edition, it is stated that until 1093, Dardagny was called Dardanicum. It also mentions the battles of Julius Caesar in the second half of the first century before Christ. He also stated that other toponyms also remain, such as *Mies*, a small municipality in the district of Nyon in the canton of Vaud, the name of which is said to be derived from the Albanian word *mëngjes (mjes) (morning)*, *Copet* - from the Albanian word *kopë (herd)* and even the name of Geneva itself, which in the school books of the canton of Geneva is said to be derived from the Illyrian words "*gjer në gju ujë*" (which literally translates into "water level is up to the knees"). In one such book it is stated that "The name of Geneva undoubtedly derives from the Illyrian (Balkan people) words: *Genusus (river)* and *Genau, Genaua (knee, elbow)*. During Medieval times, there were three names for the city: *Genaua, Genava, Genua*. Often in writings

there was some confusion with the city of Genoa in Italy, which bore the same name, until it was decided that the latter would be called the Maritime Genava."

My Albanian language and literature professor, the poet and writer Agim Shehu, and the writer Sulejman Mato, said that Professor Eqrem Çabej had found that in the suburbs of Geneva, there were more than 50 toponyms that can only be explained and understood in Albanian. S. Mato further references the Italian Encyclopedia. He states that in the item *Switzerland*, page 54, it explicitly writes, "The south of Switzerland must have been the settlement of what seems to have been Illyrian people. It is believed that Illyrian people and other similar ones, such as *Rechts*, inhabited the area."

Pierre insisted that the Illyrian origin of the Swiss Dardagny was not simply a legend, but a historical fact also included in written documents. In order to demonstrate this, he showed us one of the Swiss Encyclopedia editions, wherein it was written, "Dardanicum derives from Dardania". I asked him to make a photocopy of that page and he obliged.

The first contacts of Albanians with Switzerland date back in 1431. One of the most significant bodies at the time was the Council of Basel, wherein debates regarding church matters were conducted. Invited to participate from Albania was Andreas von Krim, known also as Andrea Zamometisch, who had been living and working as a bishop in Granea, Albania.

Switzerland was the organization model that Albanian Renaissance figures dreamed of applying to the future Albanian state. Sami Frashëri openly stated, "Let us make Albania a second Switzerland." Later, particularly at the end of the century XIX and more so in the century XX, many Albanian intellectuals were laureated in Swiss universities and several settled and found jobs in Switzerland. This is what happened with

Helena Gjika (Dora d'Istria), Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Mid'hat Frashëri, Anton Zako Çajupi, Leonik Tomeo, Lazër Shanto, Pol Adhamidhi, Gjergj Kokali, Ajet Libohova, Ali Këlcyra, Ismail Qemali, Fan Noli, Luigj Gurakuqi, Faik Konica, Dervish Hima, Mustafa Kruja, Eqrem Bej Vlora, Visar Dodani, Aleksandër Moisiu, Mihal Turtulli, Bajram Curri, Avni Rustemi and many others.

Switzerland also allowed the publication of a number of Albanian newspapers, including "L'Albanie" (1903-1906), in Geneva; "L'Albanie" (1915-1916), in Lausanne; "La liberté Nationale" (1925-1935), in Geneva, and "La Voix de l'Albanie" (1935-1936). It is also said that in 1556, in Basel, was published (republished) the work of Marin Barleti "The Siege of Shkodra". Moreover, books by Albanian authors were also published at the time, such as the books of Dora D'Istria "La Suisse Allemande Et L'Ascension Du Moench" (German Switzerland and the rise of Munich), Paris 1856, in French, and the same book in German entitled "Die Deutsche Schweiz Und Die Besteigung Des Mönchs", Zürich 1858, "Switzerland the Pioneer of the Reformation or La Suisse Allemande", London 1858, "Die deutsche Schweiz: Land, Volk und Geschichte, Erster Band" (German Switzerland: The land, people and history), Zürich 1860 (3 volumes); "Une Rencontre de Voyage Souvenirs de la Suisse Italienne" (A recounting of travels - Memoirs from the Italian Switzerland), Paris 1861, etc.; the work of the patriot Mit'hat Frashëri (alias Lumo Skëndo), "Les Albanais chez eux et à l'étranger", Lausanne 1919, and the work of the renowned Albanian author Krist Maloki "Leksikon der Frau", in Zürich.

At the end of World War I, Albanian patriots who were making efforts to obtain international affirmation of Albania by ensuring its membership in the League of Nations found wide support in Geneva, Lausanne and other Swiss cities.

During the harsh Serbian-Yugoslav repression against the Albanians of Kosovo, Macedonia,

Montenegro and Preševo Valley, thousands of them migrated to Switzerland. In the early 2000s, the Albanian community in Switzerland comprised more than 270 000 people. After the fall of the communist regime in Albania, a modest number of Albanians migrated to Switzerland, where they currently live and work. Switzerland has now become their second homeland that they honor, cherish and respect. There are also a considerable number of post-university Albanian students in Switzerland, who feel at home there. In the Helvetic Confederation, the Albanian language is spoken by roughly 2.5% of the people, thus coming in fourth, after German, French and Italian. As evident, it is actually the first foreign language in the country, as the other three above are the official languages of Switzerland.

During the first visit to Switzerland, at the Palace of Nations, I had the opportunity to meet a young man from Kosovo, who had been working as part of the service and administration staff at the Palace for years. During the second trip, while on a night walk along Lake Lemman's shore, I came across a group of youngsters, wearing blood-red T-shirts, with the black two-headed eagle of the Albanian flag stamped on the front, while on the back was written "Kosovo Republic". We sat at a café nearby and they told us that they were part of a Movement aiming to change the status of Kosovo from an autonomous territory at the time, to a republic under the name of the *Albanian Socialist Republic in Yugoslavia - LRSZH*, with the same status as the other six republics comprising the Yugoslav Federation. They had found shelter and were accepted by the Swiss authorities and the traditionally welcoming Swiss people.

I met some of them again 17 years later, when I returned to the country as an Ambassador. By then, they had gotten married, mostly with women from Kosovo, had their own families and children and were finally settled in.

The commencement of my duty as an Ambassador and Head of the Albanian Mission to Geneva, in November of 1998, would take me to Switzerland a third time.

The Mission I was about to start and the time of my appointment did not solely increase my responsibilities, but also my emotions as well. This was due to the unfortunate situation in Albania at the end of 1998, when the country was undergoing numerous, unusual and painful events. At their core were the powerful political turbulences and tragic conflicts that transformed into a coup d'état. In the other half of the Albanian space, in Kosovo, shocking and dramatic events were taking place. The youth and the entire population were fighting against the repressive Serbian forces.

Following the submission of my letters of credence to the UN Deputy Secretary General, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, on 4 December 1998, nearly a week after arriving in Geneva, I officially began my duty as the representative of my country in the international forums of Geneva. My duty commenced with the explanation of the aforementioned events in Albania and Kosovo and their consequences or the further developments, which run in parallel with the protection of Albania's and Albanian's interests on both sides of the border.

The building next to *Hotel Bernina*, in *Place Cornavin*, where one of its compartments became the Albanian Ambassador's residence after 1999

While in Switzerland, maintaining contact with leading authorities, from those at the highest confederation level in Bern to those at the canton and the Republic of Geneva level, was also part of our work.

### **Cosmopolitan Geneva**

In Geneva are located the headquarters of tens of international organizations, where leaders,

officials, employees and representatives of member states operate, reflect, propose, exchange opinions, negotiate and agree on highlighting the values of international unity and solidarity against the challenges of the current globalization for the future of the planet in the areas of human rights, environment, global health, sustainable development, economy, employment, international trade, arms control, telecommunication, intellectual property, metrology, scientific research, international law etc.

Geneva is composed of numerous parks covered in grass carpets, full of colorful flowers planted in incredible patterns, filling every part of the city with their pleasant scent.

Located in a geographic region with a magnificent relief and view, it remains a key destination of the *Grand Tours* since the beginning of the century XX. The city is surrounded by evergreen centenarian forests and trees, characterized by a mountainous landscape dominated by *Mont Blanc*, located several tens of kilometers away. It is divided nearly in half by Lake Lemman. At the end part of the harbor, opposite the *Les Eaux Vives* park, approximately three to four hundred meters before it meets the Rhône river, is located the renowned architectonic and hydro-technical work of art, the special decorative fountain called by the locals *Jet d'Eau* that was constructed in 1891. Currently, its jetting height reaches up to 140 m. Along with the old city, where urban, social, commercial and religious buildings mainly of a classical style have been preserved, it represents an architectural urban wonder, visited by thousands of people each day from all over the globe, comprising what the Genevans refer to as the "tourist" population. This population also includes delegation members participating in the numerous daily meetings of international organizations, which Geneva hosts generously, as well as entrepreneurs, businessmen, bankers, sheiks and other wealthy people who stay in the

hotels and the super lavish villas of Coligny, and dine at the luxurious restaurants along Lake Lemman.

In this "national treasure" of Switzerland was established the headquarters of the League of Nations, pursuant to the decision of the Grand Council of Geneva. It was also agreed that the rapid and careful transition towards the requirements of a century, which was dominated by rationalism and sound business at the benefit of the citizens of Geneva and all of Switzerland, was imperative. In May of 1919, the Grand Council of Geneva President asked the members to welcome the League of Nations because, as he stated, "though its perspectives are bright, they come with lots of responsibility."

In Geneva, the transition process from secret diplomacy to open (public) multilateral diplomacy took place in an institutionalized and permanent manner. The leaders of "large nations" and small countries began to implement the ideals of peace, international security, and trust in global cooperation, also known as the *Geneva Spirit*. The League of Nations operated universally, by making efforts to avoid conflicts and wars, to encourage peace and cooperation and to handle the economic expansion and the escalation of protectionism and nationalism.

In August of 1920, the League of Nations Secretariat was established at *Hotel National*, one of the largest hotels in the city, located a few meters from the lakeshore. It is currently known as *Palais Wilson*, in honor of the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's contribution for the founding of the League. Later, the headquarters were moved further from the lakeshore, nearby a beautiful valley called *Ariana*, a public property of the city of Geneva, where the international, practical and functional Geneva would be designed and established. The construction of the building currently called *Palais des Nations* (*Palace of Nations*) and its premises, took into

consideration the rightful concern of the inhabitants that it links the future to the past, for tomorrow to be linked to yesterday. After the League of Nations era ended, the Palace of Nations and all of its premises, surroundings, equipment, archives, library and all that it comprised, were transferred to the UN pursuant to the relevant agreement. In this Palace are the UN European branch headquarters, as well as the headquarters of several other international organizations.

The relation of Albania to multilateralism and the peaceful regulation of conflicts commenced with the League of Nations and continues to this day with the United Nations and other international organizations it is a member of.

### **The Albanian Mission to Geneva**

The Albanian Mission to Geneva was first established in December of 1920. In the first weeks, the Albanian delegation, which became a mission upon membership on 17 December 1920, would continuously move in different hotels, such as the "Metropole", "Excelsior" etc. In 1921, it obtained the status of an actual permanent representation, and continued until 1925 when it ended and the representation was thereafter conducted from Tirana. The first permanent representative of Albania was Fan Noli, a polyedric personality, and great activist of the Albanian cause, as well as a statist, politician, diplomat, writer, researcher, translator etc. As the leader of the Albanian Delegation to the League of Nations, at the end of 1920, he provided a significant contribution for the international affirmation of the Albanian cause and Albania's membership in the recently established organization on 17 December 1920.

During 1926-1929 and after 1935, the position was held by Mehdi Frashëri, a renowned politician, lawyer and intellectual. The Mission

started operating again in 1930 after the organic law of MoFA was approved in 1929. Due to economic reasons, its leader, the Permanent Representative to the League of Nations, had to remain in Tirana and travel to Geneva as necessary. Over time, the law was amended to adapt to the developments and foreign policy of the country better. One of the amendments was the inclusion of the provision concerning the establishment of a permanent representation to the League of Nations in Geneva, instead of specific delegations. This would ensure a permanent contact between the Kingdom and the international political circles, as well as provide a better economic solution. In 1936, in Geneva, the first Albanian Consulate was established, directed by Vasfi Xhomo, who also performed the duty of Secretary of the Permanent Representation to the League of Nations. In 1935, Albania had established a consulate in Bern.

In January of 1936, the Directorate for the League of Nations was included in the structure of MoFA, which was considered the most important organization for the protection of the international rights of Albanians. This Directorate would also address the issues of the Albanian Diaspora and process and manage statistics on their numbers and condition. Hamdi Karazi was appointed as Director. Its activity took place until April of 1939, when Albania was invaded by fascist Italy. Several weeks later, the Albanian Mission to the League of Nations would cease its activity and be officially terminated upon formal request by Shefqet Vërlaci, the "quisling" Prime Minister at the time. At the service of the fascist invaders, he delivered to Geneva the notice that Albania had decided to leave the League of Nations, thus undoing and dismantling the significant efforts, dedication and patriotic idealism of the Albanian delegation during 1920 to make Albania a member of said organization. With his anti-national action, he executed one of the aims

of fascist Italy to undermine the independence and sovereignty of Albania and transform it into an Italian region, a *quinta sponta* in the Adriatic and Ionian Sea.

After World War II, in 1953, in Geneva, a new Albanian diplomatic mission was established, accredited by the Economic Commission for Europe, a body of the UN Economic and Social Council. The mission's status was that of an observer delegation, because Albania was not a UN member yet.

However, the Mission did not operate for long. Following Albania's membership in the UN in December of 1955, efforts were made to also establish a mission in Geneva in addition to that in New York. As a matter of fact, the Permanent Delegation of the People's Republic of Albania to the Economic Commission for Europe was still functional, but now it was located in the Albanian legation in Paris. Albanian Embassy diplomats there had also been accredited by the UN European Office in Geneva as a Permanent Delegation of the People's Republic of Albania to the Economic Commission for Europe (!).

The Albanian Diplomatic Representation to Geneva was reestablished nearly half a century later, in September of 1987. Its current name is the *Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva*.

**\*(Exclusive for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing the Albanian -Swiss diplomatic relations. Interviewer: Armand Plaka, journalist, researcher )**

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- 1 On a different planet? Yvone Bausch, "Freiburger Nachrichten", 23.09.1989, p. 4.
- 2 "Que se passe-t-il en Albanie?", - M. I. Cory. Journal de Geneve, p.1, 29.10.1952
- 3 "Albanien - Pekings Brückenkopf? ", Walliser Volksfreund, p. 9, 08.02.1971
- 4 "La Liberte", Switzerland - 2 April 1973, p. 1
- 5 On a different planet? Yvone Bausch, "Freiburger Nachrichten", 23.09.1989, p. 5.
- 6 See: Ambasadori i jashtëzakonshëm dhe fuqiplotë i Konfederatës së Zvicrës paraqiti letërkredencialet. [The extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of the Confederation of Switzerland presented his credential letters.] - "Zëri i Popullit", 3 October 1970
- 7 See: Journal "New Albania", No. 4, 1970, p. 9, Chronicles: Albania in the World!
- 8 See ibid: Journal "New Albania", No. 4, 1970, p. 8, A few words about the women of Albania! – Swiss journalist H.H.
- 9 See: Illustrazione Ticinese: 7 October 1970, p. 51, "Pepe e sale" rubric.
- 10 See: "Diplomatische Beziehungen mit Albanien", "Thuner Tagblatt", Vol. 94, No. 167, 21. July 1970
- 11 See: Appendix: Memories of Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi: My journeys and stay in Switzerland (1980-2002)- Exclusively for the journalist Armand PLAKA, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian –Swiss relations
- 12 See: Ibid.
- 13 See: Appendix to this research/ The complete interview of Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu, taken exclusively for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Albanian-Swiss relations. By Armand PLAKA, September 2020
- 14 See: Swiss diplomatic documents. 1970.
- 15 See: Hasan Luci: The rare account of the former denouncer: I had to buy bananas for Enver where no one could recognize me - Gazeta Panorama Online, 18 March 2018.
- 16 See: Besuch in Albanien 1. Bis 4 Juni 1969 (Visit to Albania 1-4 June 1969) – Swiss diplomatic documents, Report of the Swiss Ambassador in Belgrade
- 17 See: Ibid.
- 18 See: Ibid.
- 19 See: Appendix: Memories of Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi: My journeys and stay in Switzerland (1980-2002)- Exclusively for the journalist Armand PLAKA, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian –Swiss relations
- 20 See: Ibid.
- 21 See: Appendix / Full interview with Ambassador Gazmend Turdiu, taken exclusively for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of establishing Albanian-Swiss relations. By Armand PLAKA, September 2020
- 22 See: Ibid.
- 23 See: Ibid.
- 24 See: Appendix: Memories of Prof. Ksenofon Krisafi: My journeys and stay in Switzerland (1980-2002)- Exclusively for the journalist Armand PLAKA, on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian –Swiss relations
- 25 According to the 2019 census
- 26 See: Appendix: Conversation with Florian Hackaj – Exclusive interview on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian-Swiss relations, by Armand PLAKA, September 2020
- 27 BFS, Taschenstatistik der Schweiz 2019
- 28 See: Appendix: Conversation with Suela Jorgaqi – Exclusive interview on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian-Swiss relations, by Armand PLAKA, September 2020
- 29 See: Ibid.
- 30 See: Appendix: Conversation with Florian Hackaj – Exclusive interview on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian-Swiss relations, by Armand PLAKA, September 2020
- 31 See: Appendix: Conversation with Florian Hackaj – Exclusive interview on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Albanian-Swiss relations, by Armand PLAKA, September 2020

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**years of diplomatic relations  
1970 - 2020**