

Speech for Victory University Prishtina Graduation Day ceremony, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2012

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I would first like to thank the University for the award that has been made to me today of an Honorary Degree, and the invitation to come here to receive it. I have been involved with Kosova and its future for over twenty five years in my life, and I am deeply moved by this award. It is a marvellous event for me. I am very grateful.

Higher education is central to social progress and development in all nations, and in new nations in particular. Looking around this hall, I see that some, perhaps many, of you were not born when I first began to work in Kosova in about 1988, and very few indeed perhaps, when I first travelled through Kosova as a university student over forty years ago in the summer of 1969 on my way to earthquake-wracked Skopje. In those days, after the alleged relaxation in Yugoslav revisionist communist rule over Kosova, there was no higher education at all here, and very little good secondary education, and all that there was took place in the Serbian language.

After 1988, I then saw the imposition of more and more severe restrictions on education, and the end of the relative democratisation here that has started in the early 1980's. The iron rule of the Milosevic system followed and with it the abolition of the remaining vestiges of independent education in Prishtina University. The 1990's here were very dark years, as I have tried to indicate in my book about that time, *Kosova Express*, when the

main objective of daily life for the majority community was bare survival and Albanian culture and education had to continue to try to struggle ahead in a shadowy, unsatisfactory existence. Publication, which is the life blood of scholarship, was all-but-impossible, after the relative freedom of the time after 1982.

The same tendencies were visible in the Albanian world in neighbouring countries. In Albania itself, Tirana University was developing but within a very constrained governmental framework, and with an autarchic approach to Albanian history. Intellectual freedom was absent, and although in my own field of modern history some notable work was done, the same cannot be said in most subjects. In Macedonia, where I have been involved in the campaigns for Albanian language higher education since 1993, the same processes of Slav-majority cultural repression have taken place, until the opening of the state-financed Tetovo University in recent years. The struggle for higher education in Tetovo is exactly linked to the wider struggle to deTitoise and democratise Former Yugoslav Macedonia, particularly in spheres involving the use of the Albanian language in public life.

So it is a great step forward for Kosova that new institutions like the Victory University exist in freedom and the graduates of today have a heavy responsibility to carry the heritage of struggle forward into the future. Many people had to die to achieve this, quite recently, in the heroic Kosova Liberation Army and I have tried to reflect their struggle on my new book on the history of that organisation.

There is much to do to safeguard the national cultural tradition. In all countries, with the cuts in higher education funding, humanities studies are under threat, and humanities are at the heart of the historic Albanian culture, the poetry, the history, the geography, the archaeology and ancient history, the songs, music, the epics of war and revenge. Like all small nations, the language and culture of the Albanian people have benefitted from some aspects of globalisation, but they also are threatened by the ubiquity of English and mechanical processes of daily life, what the German theorist Walter

Benjamin called the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Kosova culture is little known outside Kosova; this needs to change, and you graduates of a privileged institution such as this one have a heavy future responsibility in this direction. I am very encouraged here by the work in the Diaspora, above all the development of Albanian educational and cultural institutions in Switzerland like the Albanian College in Geneva. In my view Kosova would not have achieved the partial independence we see today without the work of the Diaspora in Switzerland and we see it continuing in new spheres all the time.

What role will universities and university graduates play in the future of Kosova? Most young people I meet here see the future of Kosova in a uniting and maybe federal Europe, in which Kosova would have an honoured place. This is a positive and natural ideal but it may be open to question now in a way it has not been for many years. The European Union is in very serious economic and political trouble, some observers see the EU as in a beginning of terminal decline and I think given the failure of transnational ideals in Kosova's recent history, of which Yugoslavia is the most obvious but not the only recent example, the European ideal needs to be examined critically. It is not a substitute for building up Kosova, step by step, brick by brick, reviving agriculture, and mining, and building strong businesses, trades unions and religious institutions and other civil society development. It is not a substitute for the integration of the Kosova project with the wider Albanian world, particularly in the trade and economic sphere, now that the new road to the Adriatic is open.

Clearly Kosova is part of the south-east European mainland as a component state, but it is a new state surrounded by neighbours who are not necessarily friends, most obviously Serbia, and defence and security are important. The Ahtissari Plan had many weaknesses, and gives Belgrade a continuing ability to prevent the normal development of a strong and effective and normal Kosova state in the region. Kosova has no army or citizen's right to bear arms in law. Is this right? Nationalism is returning in Serbia again, as the recent election results indicate, and there are many dangers as well as opportunities in the current situation.

So my advice to the young in Kosova, whether they are in higher education or not, is that it is time to look at Kosova's own resources and to develop them as soon and as effectively as possible. The European ideal may turn out to be an illusion, particularly financially, and the real security of Kosova rests with the United States, the UK, and NATO. Clear thought about these matters is necessary and I do not see it always coming from Kosova government components. This mature thinking is not taking place sufficiently seriously, given the continuing nature of the world economic crisis.

The idea seems to be present in some quarters that Kosova's problems are going to be solved by a large infusion of European Union money as membership approaches. I think myself this is a deeply foolish and fallible perspective. The example of Greece is nearby to show what happens when debt financing becomes the rule in a developing society. Debts have to be paid and the Greek working class and population in general are paying the price now for the profligate policies of the European-obsessed elite. Could this happen in Kosova? It is not for me as a guest – even if I hope you might feel a well informed guest – at an occasion of this kind – to comment on internal Kosova party politics. But with growing unemployment, increasing differences in wealth and a spiralling import bill as opposed to local national production, the dangers I think are obvious.

I hope these observations are not depressing. University should be a time of hope, intellectual development, opening out and optimism and this is the case in every country. I have not come here today to depress you, I hope! I know this institution has much to be proud of, and I met when I was in Prishtina last year graduates from this college who were already playing an important role in public life in Kosova, in business and in the professions. But I think the time of depending on outsiders in Kosova should now be firmly over. The current semi-independence and avoidance of difficult issues has gone on far too long and the realities of the region need to be faced by the international community. The future of Kosova cannot any longer be mortgaged to the manipulations of

a small minority of the population, with a powerful and divisive neighbouring kinship state.

It is time for the new generation in Kosova to grasp a new future in the wider Albanian world in the Balkans. We need a Kosova Spring. Thank you.

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