

# *The issue of Kosovar identity*

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## **Abstract**

With the re-proclaimed independence of Kosova on 17 February 2008 and with the foundation (establishment) of Kosova's state among the public opinion began to circulate the idea that "since Kosova became a state, now we can also find the "Kosova nation", because every state should have his own nationality, different (divers) by other national-states. The aim of this study is to argue that the idea of the Kosova state has not born with the purpose to create the new national identity of Kosova's people (so the Kosovo nation) because the Albanian national identity of Kosova has been solid, established and determined. Besides the political unit not necessarily imposes the changing the national identity of the people (even if in the occupation circumstances). In fact, the efforts of Kosova people for liberation, independence and state building had the aim to protect guarantee and cultivate their determined and formed Albanian national identity which was being violated by Serbia. The paper will explain the idea that the "Kosova identity" as the "new national identity of Kosova" is more an artificial construction that ignores the historical and political conditions on the road of Albanian of Kosova for independence, than a real natural identity aspiration of Kosova's people. Moreover, this idea is in contradict with the theoretical principles of modern nation building in general. At the end, will be concluded that Kosova state was projected from elites and the people of Kosova as a second Albanian state, temporarily unable for the union with the (natural Albanian state), Albania, so the "Kosova's identity" is only an Albanian sub-identity with distinguished characteristics, but this is normal for all the modern national identities. As an actual obstacle of natural compliance of the Albanian identity with the state of Kosova are the "Ahtisaar principles" of the actual Republic (the republic of 17 February); which the political elites of Kosova after 2007 accepted as a compromise for the "recognition" of Kosova independence from the Security Council of UN (even after this compromise the council does not recognize Kosova's independence).

**Key word:** *Identity, nation, state, Kosovar, Albanian.*

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## ***Introduction***

With the re-declaration of independence of Kosova on 17 February 2008 and with the foundation of Kosova's state among the public opinion began to circulate the idea that "since Kosova became a state, now we can also find the "Kosova nation", because every state should have his own nationality, different (divers) by other national-states. The propagation of this idea was stimulated especially by the fact that the re-declaration of independence of Kosova was possible, relying on "Ahtisaari proposal", which designed the multi-ethnic premises of the future state of Kosova. So, according to the supporters of "Kosova nation", Kosova by declaring the independence on 17 February 2008 and building the state under the multi-ethnic premises, actually has declared also the national independence! The state of Kosova declared the independence from Serbia and made the commitment to not be united with any other state with clearly here we have an intimation (allusion) for Albania (it was sanctioned in the proposal of Ahtisaari). The Kosova state is pretending to be the fundamental purpose of the people of Kosova. Therefore, if the greatest aim of people is the independence as a purpose in itself, then the citizens between themselves will union on a new political identity which is the state of Kosova. In a manner of speaking, this "common will" will present the foundation of "Kosova's political nation".

However is possible the creation of the "Kosova's multi-ethnic political nation"? Has been this the purpose of the efforts for independence, freedom and liberty by Albanians of Kosova for nearly a century, so they could found the Sovran state and after that the "new nation"? Or the war for liberation and independence of Kosova from Serbia has intended only a pragmatic step toward the union of the only national state, with the Republic of Albania? Serbs of Kosova have taken part in the liberation war for Kosova's Independence or they fought and even today they fight against the Kosova's independence? The Republic of Kosova is the second Albanian state in the Balkans or a new state with a "new nation in formation"? The

national identity and the state identity exist in parallel when they are not unified with each other?

The above questions pose dilemmas and claims raised in Kosova's public opinion last years, especially after the declaration of independence. This paper aims to argue that "the idea of the state of Kosova and its realization was the project of the elite and the Albanian people of Kosova as a mechanism to protect guarantee and cultivate the Albanian national identity of Kosova, unable to unite in a unique national Albanian state. As well, this research will prove that the ideas on "multi -ethnic society or multi-ethnic identity in Kosova" are improvisations and constructions that do not stand. Furthermore, these ideas are contrary to the theoretical principles of the foundations of national identities, as with the historical and political attempts of the people of Kosova (Albanians of Kosova) for liberation and independence from Serbia.

### ***Does Kosova need to build a new Kosovar national identity?***

First, with the acceptance of "Ahtisaari proposal" by the Albanian political elite of Kosova, that represented Kosova in negotiations with Serbia and the international community in order to define the "final status of Kosova" was made a "big compromise" which alienated the very nature of the idea of independence and state of Kosova. With this act the political elite deviated the road of independence of Kosova, from a second Albanian state in the Balkans to a multi ethnic state where the Albanian Nation is not recognized as the nation-founder of state of Kosova, but is reduced (in the name of equality) to a community equal with other minority communities, those contributions in the major part has been hostile to the political will of the Albanian majority for liberation and independence.

Furthermore, on this basis is clear that this deviation and alienation of the idea of Kosova state have affected the creation of claims, mainly by anti-Albanian circles, since was reached the prohibition of the project of "Kosova as the other Albanian state in the Balkans", already started the imposition on the project for the alienation of the Albanian identity of Kosova. The realization of this

project was started by imposing new symbols, so-called state symbols in which were prohibited each Albanian element. On the flag of Kosova, except the map was not included none of the national identifying elements of Albanians, meanwhile the hymn was left without text not coincidentally. According to Benedict Anderson: "are precisely national hymns, poetries or national songs the singing of which, among others, makes the evocation or "imagination of the common community", so of the nation"<sup>1</sup>. Because, as also a known connoisseur on the identity issues, the French writer with Lebanese origins, Amin Maalouf, "identity first is an issue of symbols, even an issue of appearance"<sup>2</sup>. So, new state, new symbols, new identity and the new nation! So this is the tendency and the platform on which are working those who are pretending to create "the new national identities of Kosova".

Hence, the main question raised in this paper is: which is the new identity aspiration of people of Kosova and how can we evaluate this aspiration? Or, which is the connection between the idea of Kosova's independence and the identity of the Albanian people of Kosova?

Before returning to the theoretical obstacles of the project on the "Kosovar nation", which are neglected furtively by "kosovar", should be said that the attempts and the liberation war of the Albanian people of Kosova for liberty and independence has been an effort and a war first of all for national liberation and not a war for state-nation building. The whole resistance, nearly a century of Albanians of Kosova aimed the realization of the right denied by the International Conferences as London Conference (1913) and the Conference of Paris (1919), therefore their aspiration for liberation and the union with Albania, respectively, for independence and the foundation of the state of Kosova must be understood as continuity of the process of the Albanian national building. Respectively as a process of consolidation of the nation till the formation of the unique national Albanian state. According to the modern theoretician of nationalism Ernest Gellner,

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson "Imaginary communities" – *Reflection on the origin and the spread of nationalism* (Tiranë: 2 Lindje & 2 Perendim, 2013), 193.

<sup>2</sup>Amin Maalouf, *Killer identities* (Tiranë: Onufri, 2006), 112.

“the sentiment of nationalism is deeply offended by the violation of the nationalist principle of the compliance of the state with the nation”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, under the modernist outlook of nation and nationalism that is represented by the authority of Gellner, nations in order to realize their nationalist aspiration (that’s how they realize themselves) should create their own national state. The Albanian nation, as all other free nations of Europe and World aspired the creation of their own national state which would include within borders all the people who lived historically in those territories. The fact that the national state in 1912 was not recognized by the Great Powers and was invaded by state Balkan neighbors, does not mean that the Albanian nation was reduced in those territorial borders assigned to the Republic of Albania.

In this line of nation-building after 1912, precisely the nation-consolidation of the Albanian national part left outside the national state which was declared on the Assembly of Vlora, the idea of independence and of the state of Kosova constitutes an idea of Albanian nationalism, which was projected more concretely by the political and intellectual elites of Kosova during the years 1990, as a pragmatic step against the other nationalist movements of Kosova who fought for national union (known as “Illegal”). The project of independence of Kosova from Serbia who initially aimed the realization through the request for equality with other federative units of the Yugoslav Federation at that time, subsequently with the secession and full sovereignty from this federation, thus it wasn’t a project with pretensions of “Kosovar national-building”. State of Kosovo become a necessity to protect, guarantee and to cultivate the Albanian national identity of Kosova, whom all along the XX century was intended to extinct through classical forms of colonialism, apart aid and ethnic cleansing of Albanian people of Kosova by the Serbia state politics.

Therefore, not always the political unit responds to the aspirations of the nation, especially when this political unit is not the result of self-determination, but is the result of the imposition of invading

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Prishtina: Rizoma, 2009), 221

forces or geo-political global circumstances. Furthermore, not always the new political unit means also the formation of the new national identity. Such has been the case of the Albanian nation, one century after independence and national self-determination; it was in the process of fulfillment of this substantial principle of nations, the formation of the unique Albanian national state. The part left outside the national state in 1912, naturally enforced becomes part of other invasive political units, especially Serbia- Yugoslavia. But being part of another political unit, not voluntarily does not mean that the national identity should adapt itself to another political unit. In fact, the purpose of Serbs in Kosovo has been the formation of a new national identity for Albanians, a new identity as different as possible from Albania. The proclamation of "Yugoslav identity", respectively the purposely difference Serbia used to do with Albanians from Kosovo by Albanians of Albania, the first were called "siptari" and the seconds "albanci". This was done "for reasons of obstacle the political orientation of Albanians of Kosovo from Albania"<sup>4</sup> and also in order to gestate the seeds of the new national non-Albanian identity of Kosova.

Furthermore, a major part of the cultural and political elite of Kosova as a Yugoslav region (predecessors of Kosovars), being educated and socialized in the main capitals of ex-Yugoslavia as Beograd, Zagreb, Sarajevo (etc.), Created the conviction that nations and peoples of these ex-federation may merge under "one common Yugoslav identity", so this was the way to be followed also by Albanian of Kosova. As a matter of fact was precisely the bilingualism of the intellectual formation of the other dominant part of the intellectual elite of the years 1970 and 1980, was exactly this that would help in strengthening consciousness as a need for the national revival of Albanians of Kosova. It is similar to what Benedict Anderson writes on "Imaginary communities" on the role of bilingual

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<sup>4</sup> Oliver Jens Schitt, Kosovo: Kurze Geschichte einer zentralbalkanischen Landschaft ( Prishtinë: Koha, 2010), 181

intellectual elites of colonized countries played in the formation and the rediscovery of their national identities and in the liberation wars<sup>5</sup>.

Another argument that the political unit not necessarily is the basis for the formation and changing national identity, is also the fact that the Albanians of Kosova had their own political unit, known as an autonomous province even under Yugoslavia, but their aspirations for advancing of this unit from Province to Republic was not realized because they wanted to form a new national identity through advancing the autonomy of the unit. Quite the opposite, Republic was aimed because this way was consolidated, promoted and guaranteed the Albanian national identity of Kosova on an equal level with other nations of Yugoslavia. Precisely the identification of the requests for Republic with the protection and cultivation of the Albanian national identity of Kosova, was the reason why was denied this progression on the Yugoslav Federation, they even devaluated the autonomy of Kosova. Albanian nation in Yugoslavia was "reduced" on the level of "nationality" or, "national minority" (narodnosti) in Yugoslavia, but without the right to self-determination to have a Sovran political unit in Yugoslavia, because it was considered that Albanians (as "minority") had their own national state (Republic of Albania) that is why they cannot have a second state, on this case Republic of Kosova, as a second Albanian state inside Federation of Yugoslavia. "Albanians in Yugoslavia were treated as a national minority, although they were the third nation in Yugoslavia after Serbs and Croats"<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, even if the re-declaration of independence of Kosova on 17 February 2008 it seems as an act of political willpower of peoples of Kosova, the imposition of the nature of the state of Kosova as a multi-ethnic state constitutes equally an obstacle to the promotion of the Albanian identity of Kosova same as when it was stopped, interrupted and obstructed by Serbia- Yugoslavia. "The Kosovar state of Ahtisaari" allows the promotion of the Albanian identity of Kosova

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson "Imaginary communities" – *Reflection on the origin and the spread of nationalism* (Tiranë: 2 Lindje & 2 Perendim, 2013), 157

<sup>6</sup> Gazmend Zajmi, *Work 1 (Vepra1)*, (Prishtinë: ASHAK, 1997), 19.

only on a private level and apolitical, meanwhile on the state and institutional level, he requested that the state symbols “to represent the multi-ethnic character of the Kosovar society”! In effect, this condition would not be a problem if would be allowed to represent truly the “multi-ethnic” identity, insomuch as is multiethnic the Kosovar society: those symbols would contain 90 % identifying Albanian national elements and 10 % of the identifying national minor elements for Serbs, Turks, Egypt’s, Rumen, Ashkali of Kosova. But this doesn’t happen, symbols that were imposed are not representing nationally anyone in Kosova, but in substance they deny in particular the identity of the major identity: Albanian nationality. The idea of the Kosova independence was the idea and effort of the Albanian people of Kosova in order to solve the unsolved situation of Albanians in the Balkans and the Ahtisaari conditions violates this line of thought.

Through the “Ahtisaari package” were guaranteed the preservation and the cultivation of their national identity, especially Serbs, which are the most known political and institutional nationalities in Kosova (as compared with the majority as well with other minorities), meanwhile the Albanian majority is not mentioned anywhere. Where it comes to the Albanian people of Kosova, so, when should be accentuated the fact that Kosova is 90% Albanian, it’s said “All communities in Kosova”. Hereupon, this is the formula on which is intended the promotion of the “Kosovar identity”, as a new national identity of Kosova, but this only against the Albanians of Kosova and not against other national minorities which have guaranteed their national cultivation and protection.

The question raised on this point is: how and why should be formed the Kosovar nation when the people of minorities are protected on their respective national cultivation? The “Kosovar nation” should be created only by Albanians of Kosova? Why? For what fought Albanians of Kosova to protect their age-long identity which was violated with extinction or to form a new national identity? If the purpose was the second one, then there wouldn’t have been a war at all because Belgrade itself policy had the purpose to create a

new national identity in Kosova, whatsoever a Kosovar identity, a Muslim identity, only not an Albanian national identity!

***“Kosovar nation” as a prejudice, misunderstanding and phobia***

Despite what was said above, in Kosovo has publicists, opinionists and columnists, which think that Kosovar identity should be formed (1) due to differences that exist between Albanians of Kosova and Albania, (2) due to the fact that we have the independent state and people of Kosova should form also their own national identity and (3) each aspiration to unification Kosova and Albania, as a fulfillment phase of the Albanian nationalism and realization of self-determination would provoke discontent among neighbor states and international community. According to them, “Kosovar nation” would be a nation with Albanian ethnic base, but with distinctive identifying features with gegënishte as language, the existence of the Kosovar state and “the willpower of the international community” (read: Albano phobia of neighbor states)

Regarding to the first motif of “kosovarists” that “Kosovar nation” should be formed because has “huge” differences between Albanians of Kosovo and Albania, it must be said that this motif is similar to Serbia purposes to emphasize as much as possible the differences between Albanians, in this way to unidentified Kosova with the Albanian. In essence, even if this difference exists, this motif would be more a prejudice than a sufficient reason, to establish a new nation, substantially unique. Since when the half part remained outside the national state in 1912, for a century are developed two different socio-political realities, inside and outside Albania, and this created specific differences between these realities, but this is more as a result of no communication. However, these differences are not of this dimension is not enough to affect Albanians of Kosova and Albanians of Albania as much as to not knowing more each-other and to see on each other more differentials than unified characteristics.

The social, economic and cultural differences are more consolidating nationally on other societies than the Albanian nation, but this reason is not an incentive that every single sub-identity to be

motivated to separate from the complementary identity that formed these nations and national states. If exist specific differences between Albanians of different territories as a consequence of their division since 1913 than is more logical and easier the process of strengthening the national culture, which has historical, lingual and cultural bases than the political enterprise to found the "new Kosovar nation". All the nations in their process of nation-building had specific differences in their societies, extended in very large and distant territories compared to the size and distances of Albanian territories, but as the nationalist theoretician Anthony D. Smith says, national state after their establishment build their identity and unique national culture through national - state policy of "public education, mass media and socio-cultural politics"<sup>7</sup>

If so far, the Albanian nation has preserved the sense of unity based on historical bases, ethnic, blood and common myths, as all the ethnic nations do, now is the time and the possibility that in the process of nation-consolidation to potentate national culture as a modern process apply by all the other European national states. "The duty of identity building started at the end of the XVIII century and allowed the creation of nations not only doesn't end with state-nations, but it intensifies and systematizes"<sup>8</sup>. So, the process of formation and consolidation of the identity and national culture is a constant and unstoppable process.

Regarding to the second theme provided by Kosovars that the foundation of the political unit consequently leads to the foundation of the nation, as a principle is quite the opposite with theories of nation-building, because we all know that nations are formed before the state and the state is built precisely in the name of the nation and for its interest (based on the dominant cases of ethnic-cultural nations). Even as above was sad according to Gellner this represents the fundamental aspiration of each modern nation, which have to

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony D. Smith *Nations and Nationalism on the global era* ( Tiranë: Botimet Dudaj, 2010), 104

<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *The creation of the national identities – Europe of XVIII-XX centuries* (Pejë: Dukagjini, 2004), 296.

create the national state with the borders of the national culture. So, Kosovars confuses state-building with nation-building which in substance are two different things. Meanwhile, even the political or citizen nations of Europe as the French nation or English nation which are considered as "citizen nations", their national culture is dominated by the main ethnicity. As Smith says, civil nations are not as tolerant as propagated, "because civil nationalism as a price for citizenship and its benefits, often requires the submission of community and ethnic individuality, the 'privatization' of the ethnic belief and avoidance of culture and ethnic heritage of minorities inside the borders of the national state"<sup>9</sup>. In the hypothetical case of the "Kosovar political nation" the possibility of the cultural dominance of Albanians as the predominant ethnicity of Kosova is excluded and prohibited totally (by Ahtisaari package). So, the "Kosovar nation" utterly means the alienation of the historical, ethnic and cultural identity of Albanians of Kosova.

The third dilemma of "Kosovarist" has to do with the "risks of regional and international destabilization" in case that the state of Kosova changes the line wherein have placed: the de-Albanisation line. This prejudice that "if Kosova is declared as a national Albanian state and articulate the union with Albania the region will be destabilized", in fact is more a dilemma than a phobia. Maybe this line of thinking has to do with the "vice of survival", characteristic for Albanians, which historically survived from the plans of state neighbors not realizing never what the dignity of a nation is (founding the national state). Denying of the autochthon Albanian people of Kosova the right to have their second Albanian state and the national union with the Republic of Albania, Kosovarist are justifying the propaganda that people of Kosova are allowed to "vegetate" in Kosova, but the territory, land and everything on it is property of Serbia (as a state that sees Kosova as the cradle of the Serbian nation). This is a denial of the right of self-determination to a person which has every characteristic of free people who exercised and fought for

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony D. Smith *Nations and Nationalism on the global era* ( Tiranë: Botimet Dudaj, 2010),114

the right of self-determination. Free nation would never exercise the right to create a new national state only because this is the willpower of neighbor states. This vassal mentality concepts "Kosovar nation" as created and depended by the anti-Albanian willpower of neighbor states.

### *Final reflections*

The idea of "Kosovar state" is ahistorical, because: 1- neglect the fact that people of Kosova have been part and is part of Albanian nation-building and nation-consolidation; and 2. Cannot be pretended that the formation of a new nation (totally new) at the beginning of the XXI century, when nations have passed in the fourth century of modernity. As a consequence the idea of the "Kosovar nation" becomes also a non-theoretical because the nation as a modern phenomenon the features and standards were built in the XVIII and XIX century, meanwhile the XX century more that the creation of the new nations, is characterized by the process of nation-consolidation and the formation of the national nations who weren't liberate and haven't created their own national states. Furthermore, needs to be seen if the XXI century will be the dominant century of global politics by modern nations (ethnic and civil) or from mechanisms and supranational organizations. But what is sure till now is that the XXI century will not produce standards, criteria or new type for nation which will be born henceforth, maybe they will not even be called nations, but "something postmodern". Something postmodern will be also the "idea of Kosovar nation, but no way the national reality of Kosova.

According to Anne-Marie Thiesse a nation in order to be with dignity for this label must have completed symbolical and material components as: "a history that continues the continuity with the great ancestors, a series of heroes as model of national virtues, one language, some cultural monuments, a folklore, historical places and a typical panorama, special mentality, some formal representations – hymn and flag- and some scenic identifying features- clothing,

specific dishes or emblematic animals”<sup>10</sup>. So even if you take it separately or all together the elements of this list, would be impossible to fabricate any “Kosovar national identity”, because all the elements of Kosova are identified always as an ingredient of the Albanian nation. Excluding the flag and the actual hymn of Kosova, by which are identified administratively only the state institutions and political elites that deviated the idea of state of Kosova, we can find only authentic elements as Albanian, but not as Kosovar or Serb (since Serbs pretend that Kosovo is their cultural cradle).

The permanent and continuity of efforts by Kosovars inside and outside Kosova state institution in order to no-identify Kosova with Albanian national features will make the state of Kosova increasingly foreign for the major part of people. If the state of Kosova will not represent, guarantee and cultivate the historical identity of its Albanian people, than this Republic will be an unacceptable unite for Albanians same as it was the political unit of the autonomous region of Kosova under ex-Yugoslavia. A nation with dignity does not stop the attempts till the political unit responds to its demands. The process of remaking state of Kosova will be a necessity so that Albanians of Kosova protect their historical national identity.

“Kosovar identity” it’s nothing else than the Albanian identity of Kosova, an Albanian sub-identity that has always been as such. The pretense to build the “Kosovar nation” on the characteristics of Kosovar identity is impossible because Kosova is one of the identity icons of the Albanian nation. The project of “Kosovar nation” is not built on one formed identity, but aims to alienate a historical, age-long formed identity, such as the Albanian identity of Kosova. The “Kosovar nation” and the “Kosovar identity” are two different phenomenon’s: the first is the plan (of Serbia) to make impossible the realization of the Albanian state of Kosova and the second is the Albanian identity of Kosova. Until then, when the Albanian identity of the people, geography and history would not be also the identity of state – institutions of the Republic of Kosova, we cannot say that the

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<sup>10</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *The creation of the national identities – Europe of XVIII-XX centuries* (Pejë: Dukagjini, 2004),

issue of Kosova, as part of the unsolved Albanian issue on the Balkan, is solved. In one way or another people of Kosova will require the rebuilding of the state until it fits to the image and the reflection of the Albanian national identity. Maybe this will be the third Republic of Kosova.

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