

## **AUTONOMOUS MUNICIPALITY OF GORA AS A GUARANTEE OF THE ETHNIC AUTONOMY, ENTITY AND IDENTITY OF GORANIES\***

Goranies have two important characteristics. The first of them is that they have always been devoted to their state Serbia and Yugoslavia, and have always been ready to defend it against any enemy, that they love their nation while not hating others, that they love all nations and ethnic minorities in the country, are loyal to the state, and that they cooperate with them.

The second of them is that they have always sought employment outside their municipality in all quarters of the former and present Yugoslav states, throughout Europe and the world in order to support their families. In this choice, dictated by necessity, they have learned to behave internationally. They respect the laws and Constitution of the states in which they work, they respect the people in the environment in which they work. They are flexible in consultations, communicative and supportive.

And the last, but not least, they love Gora above everything else, and all they earn they bring back to Gora. Gora, one of the župas (roughly: districts) in Šar Mountain, is inhabited by Goranies, the Slavic people Islamised in the second half of the 18th century, who retained their ethnic characteristics. They declare themselves as Serbian-speaking Goranies. In the final analysis of our origin, we have never subscribed to the notion that our people - Goranies - should be obliged to change their nation or creed. but only to the idea that we should know and remember our roots. It is a moral obligation of the present generations and the Gorany intelligentsia to genuinely recognize their origin once and for all.

Gora today comprises 19 ethnically pure localities, populated solely by Goranies: Dragaš, Ljubovište, Leštane, Radeša, Kukuljane, Brod, Dikance, Bačka, Mlike, Vranište, Orčuša, Krstac Gornji, Krstac Donji, Rapča Gornja, Rapča Donja, Restelica, Zli Potok, Kruševo, Globočica.

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\* Behadin Ahmetović, former director of "Šarproizvodi" company in Dragaš

Apart from these, there are nine Gorany localities in Albania: Šištevac, Orešek, Borje, Orgosta, Očikle, Pakiša, Zapot, Crno Levo and Košarišta. Also, there are two localities in Macedonia: Urvič and Jelovjane.

From time immemorial, Gora has been a separate municipality with its seat in Dragaš. After World War II, Dragaš was made the seat of the Gora srez (administrative district), which comprised two župas - Gora, populated by Goranics, and Opolje, populated by ethnic Albanians. Gora had four municipalities: Dragaš, Brod, Vranište and Kruševo. Opolje had three: Brodosavce, Belobrod and Lopuški Han.

A mistake was made in 1960 when, probably in accord with Tito's policy of brotherhood and unity and the aspirations of the ethnic Albanian cadre of the day, the srez of Gora and all municipalities in Gora and Opolje were abolished and in their stead, one common municipality, with its seat in Dragaš, was formed. For the first few years, the Gorany cadre predominated in the municipality, only to be superseded as of 1970 in all spheres: leadership structures, employment, education, etc. Since then, until 1990, ethnic Albanians from Opolje started settling in Dragaš, political leaders and administrators being the first newcomers, and then also private individuals. Thus, today, Dragaš is the only Gora locality with a mixed population in the ratio of 70% Goranics to 30% ethnic Albanians.

However, history has played a cruel trick on Gora, making it ever the loser. In 1925, under a compromise effected between the states of Serbia and Albania, an unnatural common border was traced, giving nine Gorany villages to Albania. Fortunately for us, Goranics in these villages have managed to hang on to their ethnic identity.

Before World War II, in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Gora had been part of the Vardarska banovina (governorship). At that time, Macedonia, rich in livestock but short of pastureland, applied to the Ministry of Mining and Forestry to be allowed to take some of the Gora's pastures on lease. The Ministry yielded 7,600 hectares of pastureland. After World War II, the matter slipped the mind. It was first raised in 1962, and on several later occasions, but the answer invariably was that it should be set-aside in the interests of good relations between the republics (of Serbia and Macedonia, both in Yugoslavia at the time). *The last time that we moved for its settlement was in 1989, but the issue has remained open to this day as an outstanding problem in inter-state negotiations about the common border (between Yugoslavia and Macedonia, now separate states).*

NATO seemed to be well aware of the Goranics' loyalty to the Republic of Serbia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia when it bombed Gora more fiercely than the rest of Kosovo and Metohija in the spring of 1999. It destroyed 5 border posts, all television repeaters and all new facilities for medicinal herbs processing, distilleries and other objects, causing damage estimated at 10 million German marks.

Goranies, however, whether in a separate municipality or not, have always protected with honour their ethnic individuality, Serbia and Yugoslavia, whenever there was a need. They did so every time ethnic Albanian separatists struck in 1968, 1981, 1989, and again, when NATO and the United States of America swooped down on our country. At the time of the NATO and the United States aggression, Goranies responded 100% to the call-up by the army and the police, and there were a large number of volunteers as well. They defended also the neighbouring region of Opolje. When ethnic Albanians fled Opolje for Albania, Goranies did all in their power to protect Opolje against destruction and possible torching. And they succeeded. Opolje was the best-protected area in Kosovo and Metohija precisely thanks to Goranies.

Goranies have always wanted a multiethnic and multireligious Kosovo and Metohija, and good relations with ethnic Albanians in neighbouring Opolje and in all of Kosovo and Metohija. Through their long history, tradition and practice, they have adhered to the principle of multiethnic coexistence, working all over the world, Europe and Yugoslavia.

Exacerbation of relations between Goranies and ethnic Albanians in neighbouring Opolje began with the emergence and onslaught of ethnic Albanian separatism. It peaked in 1989, when ethnic Albanians rose against Serbia, and demonstrators attacked Gora and its centre of Dragaš on 10th February 1990. They abandoned the common party and jobs and seriously disrupted coexistence in the shared municipality. Goranies then made a choice: **if the ethnic Albanian cadre in Opolje publicly distanced itself from the separatists, we could stay in the same municipality; if not, Goranies would form a separate one.**

In late July, specifically on 26th July 1991, under a law promulgated in the Serbian Assembly (parliament), the municipality of Gora was set up, with its seat in Dragaš, picking up the thread dropped in 1960.

Recent developments in Gora, triggered by the so-called KLA (ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army) invasion, the return of Opolje ethnic Albanians and the occupation of Gora, have vindicated the decision to form a separate municipality.

Numerous crimes have been committed since the invasion by the KLA and gangs of bandits from Albania:

- Albanians have ill repaid our kindness in protecting and defending Opolje at the time of the aggression;
- they have abolished the municipality and sacked all Gorany employees;
- they have also thrown out of their jobs all those working in other companies and institutions;
- they have banned the use of the Serbian language in public and forbidden the people to declare as Goranies;
- they are seeking to introduce Albanian or "Bosniak" language instruction in schools;

- they are preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid;
- they have torched a number of homes;
- they have plundered a large number of houses;
- they have murdered, abducted or beaten up a dozen Goranians;
- they have forced 60% of the Gorany population to flee the area.

There is collusion between some officials of the Democratic Action Party (SDA) and ethnic Albanians. Some people in Gora have always been eager to serve the enemy, trying to disrupt the Gorany entity and obliterate their identity. However, there are still officials remaining in Gora who are willing to resist and prevail over these aspirations.

### *Conclusions*

Any kind of settlement applicable to Kosovo and Metohija should provide for a separate Gora municipality.

The functioning of the municipality with its employees and its offices in Dragaš should be secured through the UN civilian mission.

The Gora, Sirinić and Srećska župa should be brought together as a single administrative unit in all further administrative and other forms of organisation, as an important enclave of kindred non-Albanian populations;

Regular humanitarian aid deliveries should be secured.

A bus service to central Serbia should be started.

Efforts should be made to nurture good relations with all ethnic Albanians in Opolje who want coexistence in Serbia and Yugoslavia.

Gora should be reunited with the nine localities in Albania and two in Macedonia.

A serious strategic programme should be worked out to keep Serbs and other non-Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija.

The highly respected and revered Muslim leader Mufti Hamdija Jusufspahić has wisely said: "Serbs are our brothers by blood and Albanians (of Opolje) by religion."