



## **Coalition of Albanian American Organizations**

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

CC: Michael R. Pence, Vice President of the United States  
Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State  
Members of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Members of the United States Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Members of the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
Members of the United States House Committee on Armed Services  
Members of the Albanian American Issues Caucus  
Philip S. Kosnett, US Ambassador to the Republic of Kosovo  
Yuri Kim, US Ambassador to the Republic of Albania

Dear Mr. President,

We, the undersigned, Albanian American civic, religious, cultural and humanitarian organizations, with a constituency exceeding one million nationally, most concentrated in electoral districts throughout NY, NJ, CT, MA, MI, IL, TX, FL, PA, WI and AZ, are writing to affirm our appreciation of the United States (US) direct involvement in the Balkans, most recently to resolve the Republic of Kosovo's (also referred to as "Kosova" in this document) normalization process with Serbia.

We are also writing to express our serious concerns over the direction of US foreign policy related to Kosova Serbia relations. As you are undoubtedly aware, the liberation and state-building in the Balkans has been a very successful US bipartisan endeavor with a considerable US, EU and NATO investment over the past 20 years. However, these

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achievements may be sullied due to short sighted diplomacy goals of certain officials in Kosova, Serbia and perhaps the United States – all in your name.

Kosovars are fearful that Serbian lobbying may have impaired the US moral compass and that the US may look away as Kosova is potentially further chopped up to suit Serbia's nationalist ambitions. While the US formally denies pushing for a particular outcome, the fact is that the US is putting its weight behind certain figures in the hopes of extracting a deal, when there is very little popular or diaspora support for such initiatives at this time. Furthermore, since Albanians reside throughout the Balkan peninsula, we are gravely concerned that any concomitant border changes will reignite conflict and once again destabilize the whole region. Thus, we protest in the strongest possible terms, the recent actions of certain US representatives which have fueled Serbia's obstinance in these talks and created an unnecessary political crisis in Kosova by seemingly siding with political figures that support potentially destabilizing policy pursuits for Kosova and Serbia, with far reaching affects beyond these two sovereign countries.

To be clear, we wish for success in talks between both countries at the right time and under the right conditions. Regrettably, recent US tactics in the Balkans have not aided in creating these necessary conditions, but instead resorted to bullying the victims of the recent conflicts in the hope of appeasing Serbia (and by extension Russia's interests) while endeavoring to extract an "expedient deal". All this, despite Serbia ignoring the terms of 33 past bilateral Agreements between the two countries and showing no sign of reciprocity in its dealings with Kosova, let alone recognizing Kosova's sovereignty. US foreign policy in the region must be altered immediately to prioritize and promote lasting peace and justice in this troubled region. We have taken the liberty to summarize and attach to this letter our "Recommendations for Addressing the Normalization of Relations with Serbia" that should serve as the critical pillars to these negotiations.

Let's recall that Serbia turned loose its military and police apparatus, killed more than 12,000, raped over 20,000 women and men, and displaced more than one million innocent Kosovars and destroyed much of their economy and personal property. It is also important to mention that around 280 objects of cultural heritage have been destroyed by Serbian forces during 1998-1999 and are now completely non-existent. In addition, over 7,000 movable cultural heritage objects were removed from the National Museum of Kosovo and were taken to Serbia. Lastly, there are six massacre sites in Serbia filled with the corpses of Albanian civilians, one of them just 16 miles outside of Belgrade. Around 700 corpses of Albanian civilians, including children, were excavated from that site alone, while 1,460 people are still missing. Serbia also has numerous prominent intellectuals, human rights activists, lawyers and civil society members who have similarly expressed their concerns over the Serb government's continuing bloody nationalist policies. We agree with them that not recognizing the atrocities committed in Kosovo during 1998-1999 is preventing a true democracy to ensue. Similarly, Serbian state diplomacy has very actively and publicly been pushing a series of negative campaigns aimed at achieving de-recognition of Kosovo's statehood, very much against the US held policy position recognizing Kosova's independence. These hostile and deliberate interferences seriously contribute to destabilizing factors in the region.

Kosova has no greater ally than the United States and supports strong American leadership in the world. Furthermore, while Serbia maintains that European Union (EU) membership remains its foreign policy aim, it is concerning that Russia, China and perhaps now even the US, wittingly or not, are fueling the notion that redefining borders is sound 21st century foreign policy in the Balkans despite history repeatedly demonstrating to the contrary. It's also hard to appreciate the logic of the US aligning with a leader like Serbia's President Vucic, who has made many inflammatory remarks against the United States, including a recent incident where he told US lawmakers that American servicemen and women should be extradited to Serbia to face prosecution for NATO's intervention.

The US diplomatic pursuit of a pyrrhic "victory" is unfair and departs from American values, especially considering that Serbia orchestrated a campaign reminiscent of a modern-day Holocaust in Southeastern Europe. We could not have imagined US representatives today being complicit with short-sighted policies, which do not serve the interests of the people of Kosova and risk tainting your legacy of engagement in this region as the situation continues to devolve. As Americans and as representatives of the broader Albanian American community, we urge broader participation and transparency with a direct expression of the will of the people of Kosova in these talks. The Albanian-American community is very supportive of an ongoing normalization process premised on reciprocal and friendly relations between neighboring countries, with the oversight and participation of Euro-Atlantic structures but not without the highest priority being placed on justice for Kosova, which suffered greatly from Serbian aggression.

Albanians are among the most steadfast allies of the US in the world, and we have always supported the United States foreign policy priorities in the Balkans and beyond. We, as Albanian-Americans, represent all that is best about America as proud US military members, business owners and executives, and citizens eager to fulfill our civic duties. An improvement in communication channels and cooperative efforts between the U.S. Government and the Albanian-American community is desirable, as our community stands ready to offer its expertise, knowledge, experience, and contacts in order to achieve a sustainable peace and stability in the Balkans.

Finally, we are for a strong, mutually beneficial, and ever-lasting partnership between the Republic of Kosova and the United States of America, between the Republic of Albania and the United States of America, and ethnic Albanians everywhere who look to the U.S. as a beacon of freedom, democracy, and hope. True friendship, such as the one the Albanians offer to America, must not be neglected or forgotten. Let us use the most recent unfortunate experiences as a learning opportunity and a steppingstone toward the establishment of a true partnership for the advancement of the mutual U.S., Albanian and other democratic interests throughout the Balkans.

Thank you kindly for your consideration and attention to our concerns.

Respectfully submitted by,

*Albanian American Association - Ana e Malit – NY/NJ/CT*  
*Albanian American Association “Gjon Buzuku” – Chicago, IL*  
*Albanian American Association “Prespa” – Chicago, IL*  
*Albanian-American Association “Uskana” – Chicago, IL*  
*Albanian American Association “Valet e Liqenit” – Chicago, IL*  
*Albanian American Community Association*  
*Albanian American Community of Illinois*  
*Albanian American Cultural Center of Texas*  
*Albanian American Cultural Center – Phoenix, AZ*  
*Albanian American Cultural Center – Los Angeles, CA*  
*Albanian American Cultural Foundation*  
*Albanian American Cultural and Islamic Center, Inc. – Waterbury, CT*  
*Albanian-American Islamic Center of Queens, NY*  
*Albanian American Moslem Society of Detroit, MI*  
*Albanian American Muslim Community Islamic Center - Waterbury, CT*  
*Albanian American National Organization*  
*Albanian American War Veterans*  
*Albanian American Womens’ Organization – “Motrat Qiriazi”*  
*Albanian Community Television – Detroit, Michigan*  
*Albanian Diaspora Business Association*  
*Albanian Media Group / Albanian American Yellow Pages*  
*Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese of America*  
*Albanian Professionals and Entrepreneurs Network*  
*Albanian Youth Center of Greenwich, CT*  
*Albdreams Television*  
*Bytyqi Brothers Foundation*  
*Don Simon Filipaj Foundation*  
*First Albanian Teqe Bektashiane Monestary – Taylor, Michigan*  
*Foundation UNË E DU KOSOVËN*  
*Global Albanians Foundation*  
*Great Malsia Association – Michigan and NY/NJ/CT*  
*Harry Bajraktari House*  
*Kosova Association of Michigan*  
*Kosova Society of Boston*  
*Kraja Patriotic Association / Shoqata Kraja*  
*Kuvendi Magazine*  
*League of Albanian Diaspora from Macedonia – Chicago, IL*  
*Lukaj Foundation*  
*Massachusetts Albanian American Society “Shoqata Besa” – Boston, MA*  
*Our Lady Of The Albanians Catholic Church - Michigan*  
*Patriotic Association of Dibra*  
*Plave and Guci Foundation*  
*Rugova Association / Shoqata Rugova*  
*Ulqini Albanian American Association / Shoqata Ulqini - Chicago, IL*

## **Recommendations for Addressing the Normalization of Relations with Serbia**

While the historic friendship between Kosova (and more broadly, all Albanians) and the United States is indisputable, it is hard to understand how a US representative could justify upending Kosova's institutions in the early stages of progress against nearly 20 years of tolerated institutional corruption. US foreign policy should not be siding with the self-interest of both Serbian and Kosovar politicians (some of whom may well be facing criminal prosecution) in order to exploit such compromised individuals to support Kosova's partition and ultimately an inexplicably bad deal for Kosova, the US and perhaps even Serbia. We believe, as Albanian-Americans, that we have the right to demand that the White House, US Dept. of State (DOS) and the U.S. Embassy in Prishtina serve as instruments for the furtherance of democratic principles and economic development in Kosova, rather than facilitating compromised interests and agendas.

Thus, we implore you to consider our specific recommendations for the ongoing dialogues, below:

*We must not rush!* We plead with every party involved from US and EU circles that this process be treated seriously and afforded the proper time to afford appropriate deliberations and real reciprocity in the exchanges.

*We must appropriately address the recent attempted hijacking of the Kosovar government before proceeding any further with Serbia negotiations.* There has been a huge public outcry against what recently occurred with the no-confidence vote in Parliament and this must now be addressed with new elections so that any further steps have the legitimacy and express the will of the people in the negotiations. Anything short of this is simply an illegitimate imposition and reflects US abandonment of the great friendship it has enjoyed with the people of Kosova. Numerous former DOS representatives with over 30 years of involvement in the region, serving in both Republican and Democratic administrations, have implored with you and your office to interject, knowing very well what has transpired in recent decades in the region, most markedly the crimes against humanity that have been executed by Serbia, including those committed by many of the same leaders leading that country today. History also tells us that a comfortable peace does not come from injustice and illegitimate procedures, but rather from justice and revelation of truth.

*No deal should involve territorial exchange and no areas of special status.* Kosova has evidenced its maturity and affords extraordinary treatment under its constitution for all its various ethnic minorities and people of all faiths. Serbs are disproportionately represented in the government as a form of affirmative action volunteered by Kosova's Constitution and are afforded a variety of "super-citizen" attributes by Kosova statutes. Initiatives to divide and add further dysfunction have no popular support and threaten to add instability to a fragile region and perhaps thrust the region back to bloodshed when cooler heads, with proper shepherding, can deliver a true peace between neighbors premised on mutual respect, reparations and justice. Kosovars obviously seek to avoid the perils of Bosnia, which still suffers from being carved up and essentially left in

unresolved limbo for a generation. Kosova is ready to move on from the nightmare of its past entanglements with Serbia and advancing to build a constructive future. Lastly, the international community should demand that treatment of Albanians in Serbia should receive the same rights Serbs enjoy in Kosova.

*Economic reparations must become part of any peace process.* Serbia should relinquish claims to all the funds held in trust from recent privatizations as a down payment for the harm it imposed on the citizens of Kosova. These privatizations also depleted much needed liquidity from the Kosova economy, which has further stagnated their economic growth. Releasing these funds can be of great relief and provide a small sense of justice. Other material remaining assets, like the Trepca mines, must also be operated for the economy of Kosova and, if privatized, must have all proceeds go towards further reparations for Kosova.

*No amnesty for those who have committed unthinkable crimes.* No person on either side of the conflict should be free from prosecution and punishment if they committed crimes before, during or after war time, either within their respective countries or in the Hague (under special prosecution). In this instance, we must also mention that there must be justice for the murder of three Albanian American brothers. Agron (23), Mehmet (21) and Ylli (25) Bytyqi were American citizens of Kosovo Albanian origin, born near Chicago, Illinois and living in New York City. They were murdered in cold blood after the war in Kosova during a humanitarian mission and their murderers have yet to be brought to justice. President Vucic has promised US officials and the American public that he would see the case resolved, but thusfar has only shielded those responsible. Amnesty is not a panacea and will not allow for healing in the area. We firmly believe that only restorative justice after prolonged conflict allows for a lasting peace. In short, we cannot whitewash the recent past and press for a reconciliation between the countries without the perpetrators acknowledging their crimes and accounting for the people they harmed and for those still missing.

*Free Trade and freedom of movement.* With evidence of respect, reciprocity in its dealings and upholding the laws derived from the final peace treaty between Serbia and Kosova, there can be free trade and freedom of movement and proper trade between the countries. All parallel Serbian institutions, acting with impunity in Kosova since the war, must be declared illegal by both parties and prosecuted if they do not cease and desist from their activities. Border crossings must also demonstrate the professionalism of other European countries with clarity, proper language skills and respect for guests coming and leaving of any ethnicity.

*Increased US and NATO military presence in the region is welcomed.* The US has historically been the most reliable voice for peace in the region and Kosova would avail necessary access for enhanced presence in the region. We applaud the Trump administration for green lighting the Kosova Security Force, but the US should also never again use the threat of removing peacekeeping troops to deepen political divisions within Kosova at a time when national unity is most needed to deal properly (with efficacy) on normalization matters with Serbia.

*Kosova's water supply must not be interrupted.* There was some recent discussion of Kosova losing sole control of its most critical water supply as part of land and economic swaps between the parties. This must not be allowed to happen as it leaves the country so perilously vulnerable without its own self sustenance with water. These areas are also sources of energy from Hydropower, which Kosova requires desperately. Given the harm caused by Serbia's damage to Kosova's core infrastructure, much more dependency now relies on Kosova having access to these facilities to be a normal functioning state.

*The religious institutions inside Kosova of all faiths must flow all incoming funds through transparent and reported accounts.* This will eliminate any nefarious extraterritorial ambitions from outside forces and appropriately treat these organizations as charities and not allow agents for instability to masquerade as faith-based organizations. Albanians are a multi-faithed society, respectful of all religions, or even someone's choice not to believe, but must be allowed to protect itself from forces seeking to use religion to bring hateful division and further harm to the region.

*Kosova and Serbia should adopt a considerable plan for US investment and long-term economic engagement.* The US should work with the EU and other donor countries/organizations to support a common economic development agenda between the two countries that most notably fosters redevelopment of war-torn areas. These investments may be necessary to lean Serbia towards peace and to help Kosova more fully recover. These proceeds should be proportional to areas most damaged by the war, with particular attention to Kosova's power sector and other critical infrastructure. American business interests are welcomed by the people of Kosova as part of these initiatives and will contribute to enhancing business practices and formalizing the legal infrastructure in the country.

*Kosova and Serbia should be afforded integration into the EU body if they both abide by the terms of a proper treaty between them and should enter simultaneously. In the interim, Serbia must stop all efforts to thwart Kosova's independence recognition and ascendancy into international organizations, like the United Nations etc.* Until EU integration, citizens of both countries should have their educations, pensions, insurances etc. respected in both countries reciprocally. Serbia (and Kosova if it has similar cases) shall also be required to remove denigrating materials from their education materials to address the brainwashing and discrimination still being taught in Serbia towards Albanians.

*Any peace treaty must be recognized and guaranteed by the UN Security Council, EU, US and NATO, but only after the agreement garners widespread support within each country.*