

# *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations Journal*

Vol. 15, No. 3, July 2004, pp. 413-414.

ISSN: 0959-6410 (Paper); 1469-9311 (Online)

The Journal is edited jointly by Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA,  
and the University of Birmingham, UK.

Publisher: Carfax Publishing Company, part of the Taylor & Francis Group.

## **The Search for Greater Albania**

Paulin Kola

London, Hurst, 2003

xvi + 416 pp., pb £16.50, ISBN 1 85065 596 0; hb 45.00, ISBN 1 85065 6649

In his book Paulin Kola offers a fascinating account of the history of Albania and territories inhabited by Albanians from 1941 up until 2001. At last, I thought when I was asked to review it, an Albanian scholar has dared to tackle a theme considered taboo in academic and political circles in the Balkans and the West.

The book is not always about what the catchy title suggests, however. Kola has merged here, not very wisely, perhaps, his PhD thesis 'Albania, its isolation and the Albanian national question with particular emphasis on Kosova, 1941-1992' and his version of the events in Albania, Kosova, and the Balkans throughout the 1990s.

In the 'first' part of the book, chapters one to five, the emphasis is on what Kola sees as the deeply anti-nationalist stance of the Enver Hoxha regime, a policy allegedly followed also by Hoxha's handpicked successor Ramiz Alia. Kola

argues that the communists sacrificed the nation's interests because they wanted to usurp and stay in power. What Kola fails to acknowledge is the geopolitical reality in which the communist government of Tirana worked. He condemns the communists both when they kept silent and when they raised their voice to defend the Albanians in Kosova. In this part of the book Kola somehow compromises his impartiality as a researcher, probably as a result of his affiliation to the Democratic Party of Albania.

The book as a whole is quite an ambitious history text. Kola tells us hardly any unknown fact about the brutality of the Hoxha regime, the ups and downs in Yugoslav-Albanian relations during and after World War II, the making and breaking of Albania's friendships with Tito, the Soviets and the Chinese, and the naïve attitude of the Kosova Albanians towards their Yugoslav rulers, who, in spite of some calculated meagre concessions, always treated them as second-class citizens. The information, however, is presented in a way which readers of different backgrounds will find both inviting and elucidating.

In the 'second' part of the book, chapters six to eight, Kola emerges more as a political diarist than a researcher. This is probably the most interesting half, because the information comes straight from the horse's mouth. Kola the diplomat wants readers to believe that he was instrumental as the representative of Albania at several meetings in Europe and the UK in the early 1990s. This was probably true, but as in the case of the early chapters, this part of the book could have been edited and shortened a great deal. Some of the details are interesting but a lot is superfluous and even out of place, especially the long extracts inspired by party politics.

Unwittingly and indirectly, towards the end of the second part Kola comes to the painful conclusion that the first post-communist government of Albania led by Sali Berisha, like the communists, was forced by big international players, this

time from the West, to keep quiet about Kosova if they wanted economic aid to continue to flow. The book reveals the sad truth that the West, about which Kola adopts a rather pussyfooting criticism, often dictates the politics of the new East-European democracies such as Albania.

Kola rightly concludes that what Albanians conspicuously lack is ‘a central religious authority that might, as in the case of their neighbours, have been instrumental in establishing the psycho-social prerequisites for a nation-state’ (p. 383). He could have paid more attention, though, to how Albanians ended up as a multi-faith nation, and especially to the implications of the introduction of Islam. The West has traditionally ignored Albania because of Islam and Berisha’s unpopular decision (even among his party-faithful) to attach the country to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in November 1992 was bound to raise some eyebrows among Albania’s newly acquired European allies.

The study could have benefited from independent surveys and opinion polls conducted with Albanians both in Albania proper and in territories inhabited by Albanians. Considering the political situation in the Balkans when the book was being written, however, this was hardly the most suitable time to carry out a field study of this nature.

The book will attract attention more for the information it contains than for the analysis provided. The little analysis that peppers the text, however, suggests that Dr Kola will hopefully entice us again with equally challenging themes and promising publications.

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