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ALBANIAN POPULATION GROWTH

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Summary: This paper reviews the latest data on the population growth in both Albania proper and the largely Albanian-inhabited province of Kosovo. The Albanians have the highest growth rate in Europe, with those from Kosovo having a higher rate of growth than in Albania. In Kosovo, which is one-third as large as Serbia, the population increase this year will be 39,000, whereas in Serbia it will only be 30,000. Suggestions have been made to curb the high rate of growth. In Albania the opposite is the case, with the authorities urging a continued population increase.

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The Albanian population (in Albania and in neighboring Yugoslavia) has the highest growth rate in Europe, with an annual increase of 100,000 people. In Albania proper, with a current total population of 2,800,000 the annual population growth for the past 10 years has been 54,000 (2.2% a year).[1] The annual population growth of Yugoslavia's Autonomous Socialist Province of Kosovo (with some 1,500,000 Albanian inhabitants) is 39,000 (2.6% a year).[2] If one takes into account the growth of the approximately 400,000 Albanians living in the republics of Macedonia and Montenegro, then the total annual increase easily reaches the 100,000 mark.

The demographic structure of the Albanians in the Balkans is of more than local and sociological interest. It has a potential effect on international relations in a region where two opposing systems exist and actively compete for ethnic Albanian loyalties: sovereign, "Staliniet" Albania and Kosovo, an autonomous province of "Titoist" Yugoslavia. Further complicating factors are the official, nationalistic claim of the Tirana leaders that theirs is the motherland of all Albanians; Kosovo's Serb-Albanian antagonisms; and the question of preventing the formation of a pure Albanian ethnic bloc in Kosovo. The 1971 census showed the

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Albanians' numerical preponderance in Kosovo to be 73.6%. This preponderance remains unchallenged and is growing, because of the high birthrate of the Albanians and the emigration of Serbs and Montenegrins from the province. Today, the Albanian nationality group is 77-80% of Kosovo's total population.

Two studies from Albania and Kosovo about the regions' respective policies on population growth recently became available. In this field, too, there are strong differences in ideology and demographic policy. In Kosovo, for example, despite some signs of growth "transition," the population continues to increase at dramatic rates, the highest recorded in Yugoslavia as a whole. As a consequence, senior provincial officials have not begun to suggest to the people the application of some sort of birth control, a taboo theme until now. It was the Albanian Fadil Hoxha (no relation of Tirana's Hoxha), Kosovo's representative on Yugoslavia's collective State Presidency, who discussed the question of population growth in Kosovo during a recent visit to the province.[3] He made, for instance, the startling announcement that in Kosovo, which is one-third as large as Serbia, the population increase this year would be 39,000, whereas in Serbia the increase would be merely 30,000. He then suggested that his audience should pay some attention to the problem of growth, though he added quickly that he was not recommending birth control through measures such as contraception but the establishment of some sort of "order" and that everyone strive for the "best and most secure" future for his children. In the field of demography also, as in many other areas, the watches run differently in Kosovo from the rest of the country. Because of the low overall birthrate, Yugoslavia as a whole has initiated a policy of population growth, yet to his Albanian audience in Kosovo Fadil Hoxha repeated his appeal for caution, because, "like everything else, in this direction also some sort of order and family planning exists."

Of course, as Fadil Hoxha himself implied, the problem of population growth in Kosovo is not confined to the question of the creation of an ethnic balance in the province but is also related to other issues, such as unemployment and youth problems, which continue to act as strong destabilizing factors there. When he spoke about the "security" of children, he had in mind the job factor, which, with the province's current 80,000 unemployed (in addition to the 50,000 migrant workers), constitutes one of the most pressing issues. Then there is the youth problem and the question of education. He pointed out, for example, that in Vojvodina the schools remained empty, while in Kosovo, despite the construction of new schools, there was overcrowding.

Quite a different picture is presented by Albania. There, the attitude is "the more the better," especially in view of a slight drop in the rate of population growth in recent years. In a recent article the theoretical monthly *Rruga e Partie* examined the country's past, present, and future demographic processes.[4] Apparently, the annual increase of 54,000 people during the past 12 years had been 4 times higher than the average annual

increases in other European countries. During the same period the urban population had grown annually by 22,000 and the rural population by 32,000, in accordance, therefore, with the established policy of proportional population growth. Through a strict control of domestic emigration and by curbing deruralization, Tirana has managed to keep unemployment under control. Moreover, Albania has a population in which the young generation predominates: those under 15 years constitute 37% of the total population, in contrast to 21-27% in other European countries. The article pointed out that the population under the age of 15 had been growing during the past 10 years at a slower rate than the population of working age, something that might affect the availability of the labor force in the coming 5-year plan period. In quoting Enver Hoxha, the article recommended that the rate of population increase should be kept "more or less" at the present level, by increasing the number of births and by lowering the infant (up to one year old) mortality rate. To overcome the apparent drop in the rate of population growth registered in the 1970s, Tirana had passed a law in 1981 to extend the period of child birth leave for mothers from 84 to 170 days. As a result, it was claimed in the article, the average number of annual births had grown from 71,400 in the period 1978-1981 to 77,300 in 1982, an increase of 8.3%. A similar growth picture was also given for marriages: in 1970 there were 6.8 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants; in 1980, 8.1 per 1,000; and in 1982, 8.9 per 1,000.

The article predicted a population of 4,000,000 in Albania by the year 2000 and said that growth was likely to continue at approximately the present annual rate, whereas the average age of the population would be about 28 years compared with 26 today.

1 *Rilindja*, 8 October 1983.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 "The Way of the Party," August 1983.

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