

CLASSIFICATION RESTRICTED **RESTRICTED** REPORT   
 CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
 INFORMATION FROM  
 FOREIGN DOCUMENTS OR RADIO BROADCASTS CD NO.

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COUNTRY Yugoslavia; Albania  
 SUBJECT Sociological - Minorities  
 HOW PUBLISHED Daily newspaper  
 WHERE PUBLISHED Zurich  
 DATE PUBLISHED 10 Jun 1951  
 LANGUAGE German

DATE OF INFORMATION 1951  
 DATE DIST. 19 Oct 1951  
 NO. OF PAGES 3  
 SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO.

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SOURCE Neue Zuercher Zeitung.

UNDERTAKE EUROPEANIZATION OF ALBANIAN MINORITY  
 IN KOSMET REGION OF YUGOSLAVIA

In addition to the Slavic peoples comprising the Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Montenegrins, and Macedonians, there are non-Slavic minority groups within the borders of Yugoslavia which present special problems for the state. One of the minority areas is Istria, in which numerous Italians still live despite large-scale emigrations. There are strong Hungarian and Rumanian minorities in the fertile plain of the Vojvodina, directly north of Belgrade. Another minority area is the Kosmet, the autonomous region of Kosovo and Metohija, a region of over 10,000 square kilometers with its northern border approximately 200 miles directly south of Belgrade. Essentially, the Kosmet consists of Kosovo Polje, through which flows the Sitnica, a tributary of the Ibar River, the Metohija region through which the Drina River flows, and the hills separating and surrounding the two plains.

People who are personally familiar with the Kosmet are amazingly rare in Belgrade, although the Kosovo Polje can be reached by train in 15 hours or by a fast car in 7-8 hours. Members of the once landed class who were accustomed to visit London, Paris, and Berlin before the war never came to Pristina, the capital city of the Kosmet region, 364 road kilometers from Belgrade, or Prizren, 75 kilometers south, the city of 36 mosques, the residence of the Serbian national hero Tsar Dusan 600 years ago. Most people in Belgrade know of the Kosmet only as a wild region on a "low cultural level." As proof they point to the ragged figures wearing white brimless felt caps who saunter through the streets of Belgrade, Albanians from the Kosmet who earn their bread as porters, handymen, wood choppers, and vendors of sweets in the capital city.

The Albanians are considered the direct descendants of the old Illyrians. Most common among them is the dark-haired Dinaric type with sharp-cut facial features, to which most Serbs belong. They speak an Indo-Germanic language which displays many Romance forms, but does not belong to the Romance, or, still less, to the Slavic language groups. This people numbers somewhat more than 2 million, of whom 1,100,000-1,200,000 live in Albania, 750,000 (according to the 1948 census) in Yugoslavia, and the remainder in Greece.

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In the Kosmet, according to the latest Yugoslav figures, 68 percent of the total population of 498,000 is Albanian. Of the rest, approximately 172,000 are Serbians, 28,000 are Montenegrins who immigrated in the interwar period, and a group of 9,700 is designated in statistics as Moslems of undetermined nationality. They may be partly Turks and partly Mohammedan South Slavs. Also, the great majority of the Albanians of the Kosmet are of the Mohammedan religion which the older generation and the people of isolated villages observe very strictly. The strict maintenance of the fasting month Ramadan each year impairs productivity in the great lead mine in Trepca and in its processing installation. Upon conclusion of a marriage, a high purchase price must be paid the wife's parents. The bridegroom sees the bride for the first time at the wedding. In the villages the large patriarchal family is still intact. The work methods of the Albanian farmers are extremely primitive. Diligence and productivity are low. The wooden plow is still in use. Consequently, poverty prevails not only in the mountain villages, but also in the Albanian settlements in both fertile river areas of the Kosmet.

The peculiarities of the Kosmet can be explained by the fact that the region was under Turkish rule until 1912. When an independent Albanian state was formed after the collapse of Turkey's European kingdom in the First Balkan War, the Albanians took it for granted that the Kosmet, the most fertile land inhabited principally by Albanians, would be awarded to them. Since, however, Albanian was under Austrian protectorship and the Powers did not desire too great an expansion of the Austrian sphere of power, the Kosmet was awarded to Serbia.

In the interwar period the Kosovo Polje was made accessible to trade by the Belgrade-Kraljevo-Ibar Valley-Pristina-Skoplje railroad line. However, this transportation link has to all appearances furthered the economic development of the region very little. It was obviously neglected by the Karageorge regime. The concession for the development of the mighty lead-zinc ore deposits of the Trepca near Kosovska Mitrovica at the upper end of the Kosovo Polje was granted to a British company under conditions highly unfavorable to the Yugoslav state. In the Albanian regions the denationalization policy was intensified. It was believed that acquaintance with the higher culture of the Serbs would cause the Albanians to give up their national feeling. However, outright transformation of the entire Albanian region by the Yugoslav state could not in this way be brought about.

The Communist regime sought to solve the Albanian problem in another way. The autonomous province of the Kosmet was created from the Kosovo and Metohija area, the greater part of which belonged to the South Serbian banovina of Vardar before the war, and a smaller part of which belonged to the Montenegrin banovina of Zeca (Zetska Banovina). In a Communist one-party state with a central planned economy the concept of autonomy is naturally always questionable; however, it is a fact that the Kosmet today is administered by local officials. Consequently, the Albanian segment of the population has played an increasingly important role in recent years. The president and secretary of the supreme regional government are today Albanian, both vice-presidents are Montenegrins, while their assistants are Albanians, old-time Serbs, and Montenegrins. Of course, these men are Communists and fellow travelers.

In the autonomous province of the Kosmet the Serbian and Albanian languages have equal rights. The Albanians have their own newspaper. Directives and official decrees are in two languages. In Pristina, the provincial capital, a theater has been set up in which a Serbian and an Albanian ensemble play alternately. Above all, today, for the first time, the Albanians of the Kosmet have their own elementary and intermediate schools. Recently, Turkish elementary schools were also opened, to the dissatisfaction of the Albanian nationalists, who assert that the Turkish-speaking portion of the population consists

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of Albanians who were denationalized during the period of Turkish domination. This may be correct, although one meets Turks in the Kosmet whose forebears once sat in Belgrade as officials, who then moved to Nis after the loss of Belgrade, and who reached the Kosmet only after being ejected from Nis by the Serbs. In any case, the colloquial language of a considerable part of the population in a number of cities and villages of the Kosmet today is still Turkish, and many children learn the Albanian language for the first time and with great effort in the first grade.

In March 1951 a test of strength occurred in the Kosmet, which showed that the old order has been severely shaken. The regime succeeded in passing a ban on the wearing of the veil, a practice general among Mohammedan women. Rewards were offered and threats of force made. Women who voluntarily laid aside the veil within the prescribed period of time received textile points for a new dress, while husbands were threatened with imprisonment of up to 3 years and a heavy fine if they forced the wife to continue to wear the veil. Now one sees in the Kosmet women with modestly lowered eyes, their pale faces tightly enclosed in cloths, their mouths covered by a scarf -- without a veil. The regime has moved a step closer to its goal, the destruction of the old order. The state has recourse to such means as the vacation trip to Opatija in Istria, to which it invites 300 unveiled Mohammedan women, some accompanied by their husbands. They remain for 2 weeks in the former Italian shore resort at the other end of Yugoslavia in an atmosphere which is quite strange to them. The state may with some certainty count upon the fact that they will return to their villages as enthusiastic propagandists of the new style of life.

The regime in the Kosmet is proceeding with greater care in the economic sector than elsewhere. Ambitious industrialization projects have not yet been undertaken. Progress has been limited to the development of the textile, building materials, and ceramics industries, and to the expansion of housing and general construction. At the Trepca lead and zinc mine, largest industrial enterprise of the province, the processing plant has been greatly expanded since the war. Since the Trepca mines do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Kosmet, this province benefits from the wages but not the profits. Agriculture is 30 percent industrialized, and collectivization has had some success. Farming methods in Kosovo Polje were formerly so primitive that the modern machinery used by collective farms has actually increased production.

The Albanians of the Kosmet feel close ties to their racial brethren across the nearby Albanian border. However, few favor annexation to Albania at present. Secret paths in the hills afford ready access to Albania, and the news from there is gloomy. Everywhere, only words of disgust at the terrorist regime of Enver Hoxha are heard. Even the fiercest Moslem anti-Communist realizes that conditions are considerably worse on the other side of the border. It is possible, however, that large numbers of the Kosmet population might favor annexation if Albania had a non-Communist regime in power.

Europeanization of this remote corner of the Balkans was sooner or later inevitable. This historic mission fell to Marshal Tito's regime because the former masters of the land were not capable of fulfilling the task. The content of the new order, the ideas imprinted in the people's minds, are consequently those of the Yugoslav variety of Communism. However, the Yugoslav Communists are striving to bring about Europeanization while preserving the Albanian feeling of nationalism and with the active cooperation of the greatest possible number of Albanians. The principle of cultural autonomy applied in the Kosmet is excellent, but unfortunately the Communists alone are the agents of this policy. Almost all the anti-Communist Serbs show only contempt, lack of understanding, and the typical Serbian blindness toward the worth and natural nobility of this primitive people. The Tito regime in the Kosmet could be even more favorably judged if economic misery, lack of goods, and great unbalance between wages and prices did not prevail here as in all parts of Yugoslavia.

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