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**The Albanian-American Community in the United States :  
A Diaspora Coming to Visibility<sup>1</sup>  
Nadège Ragaru and Amilda Dymi\***

The Albanian-American community in the United States became visible at the time of the NATO intervention in Kosovo in the Spring of 1999. The US government had promised to shelter 20,000 Kosovars expelled from their homeland by Serb-dominated Yugoslav forces (Michael Kranish and Mary Leonard, 1999). As refugees hit American soil, stories of family reunion and community solidarity were told in the local and national press. True, there had been earlier rallies in Washington organized by Albanian-American organizations that had hinted at the wish, on the part of the Albanian immigrants, to weigh upon US foreign policy towards the Balkans. Yet the by the end of the 1990s 200,000 to 400,000 Albanians remained little known to the average American public<sup>2</sup>. As the Kosovo events receded into the background, the upsurge of interest faded away. To this day, the literature on the geographic location, social belonging, internal differentiation and identity-bulding of the Albanian-American community remains scanty. In particular, no academic research has addressed the dynamics of this new diaspora beyond occasional journalistic coverage of crime and gang-related issues in the New York area.

As early as 1988, Dennis Nagi, a second generation Albanian and one of the few scholars who attempted to document the history of the Albanian-American community in the United States, lamented the scarcity of data on the rather recent diaspora<sup>3</sup>. Twenty years later, little progress has been made: Unlike the older Greek and Italian colonies<sup>4</sup>, or even the Croat and the Serb diaspora<sup>5</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> On demographic estimates of Albanian immigration to the US, see below.

<sup>3</sup> A few publications are listed as dealing with the Albanian diaspora in the US: Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration of Massachussets, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 1938; Demo, Constantine, *Albanians in America: The First Arrivals*, 1960; Rocek, Joe, *One America*, 1954 and Tochka, Robert, *The Development of the Boston Albanian Community, 1900-1920* (unpublished manuscript). See Nagi, Dennis, p.12. Among later studies, one may draw attention to Piotrowski, Thaddeus, *The Albanian Community of Manchester*, New Heaven, 1977; Myers, Nick, *Belmont Hills and the Albanese Immigrant*, Philedelphia, 1988 and Trix, Frances, *Albanians in Michigan*, Michigan: Michigan University Press, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> On the Greek diaspora in the United States, see, among others, Stephanides, Marios, *The History of the Greeks in Kentucky, 1900-1950*, Lewiston, NY : Edwin Mellen Press, 2001; Clogg, Richard, *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke : Macmillan Press Ltd ; New York : St. Martin's Press, 1999; Kourvetaris, George, *Studies on Greek Americans*, Boulder : East European Monographs ; New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1997; Moskos, Charles, *Greek Americans, Struggle and Success*, New Brunswick, N.J. : Transaction Publishers, 1989 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1980); Zervakis, Peter, "The Greek

the Albanians have failed to attract sustained attention<sup>6</sup>. Although – or perhaps, because - little is known about Albanians in the US, demonizing pictures of its supposed compelling influence on American politics have been flourishing. Xavier Raufer's controversial work on *La mafia albanaise* bears witness to such a stereotyping process. His presentation of Albanian political lobbying focuses nearly exclusively on the role former Congressman James Traficant is said to have played in convincing the US to support the Albanian rebel movement in 1999<sup>7</sup>. Building upon the dubious – and well documented – past of this unique figure, the author makes a case for denouncing the connivances between the Albanian mafia, the Italian mafia, the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK, *Ushtria çlirimtare e Kosovës*) and the Congress. While connections of this kind may well have existed, such a presentation offers a very skewed perspective on the Albanians in the US and of their attempts at garnering support for intervention. Beyond this particular work, Balkan diasporas have been typically perceived as a

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Lobby and the Reemergence of Anti-Communism in the United States After World War II”, In Fiebig-Von Hase, Ragnhild and Ursula Lehmkuhl, *Enemy Images in American History*, Providence, RI : Berghahn Books, 1997. The Italian community in the United States has also received extensive coverage. See, for instance, Luconi, Stefano, *From Paesani to White Ethnics : the Italian Experience in Philadelphia*, Albany : State University of New York Press, 2001; Magnaghi, Russel, *Italians in Michigan*, East Lansing : Michigan State University Press, 2001; LaGumina, Salvatore, *The Italian American Experience : An Encyclopedia*, New York : Garland Pub., 2000; Talarico, Ross, *The Journey Home : Eleven Italian-American Narratives and An Utterance of Joy*, West Lafayette, IN : Bordighera, 2000; Sorrentino, Franck and Jerome Krase, *The Review of Italian American Studies*, Lanham, Md. : Lexington Books, 2000. A more comprehensive description of “ethnic America” can be found in Berry, Kate, *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America : Race, Space, and Place*, Reno : University of Nevada Press, 2002 which includes a chapter on Greek Americans - Stavros T. Constantinou, “Profiles of Greek Americans” –; Levinson, David and Melvin Ember, *American Immigrant Cultures : Builders of a Nation*, New York : Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1997; Portes, Alejandro and Ruben Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> The wars in former Yugoslavia gave a strong impetus to research on diaspora mobilization among the peoples that once coexisted in the Federation. On long-distance nationalism among the Croats in Canada, see, for instance, Winland, Daphen, “‘We are Now an Actual Nation’: The Impact of National Independence on the Croatian Diaspora in Canada”, *Diaspora. A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1995. The case of the Croatian-Americans is notably reviewed in Duric, Ivana, “The Croatian Diaspora in North America: Identity, Ethnic Solidarity and the Formation of a “Transnational National community”, *Spaces of Identity*, 1,3, 2001. A outlook on literature about the Serbs in the United States may be found in Smic, Andrei and Joel Halpern, “Serbs”, In: Levinson David and Melvin Ember, *American Immigrant Cultures. Builders of a Nation*, New York, 1997, vol. 2, p.785-791. The anthropologist Birgit Back also provided an interesting approach to conflict perceptions and identity processes among the American Serb diaspora in Back, Birgit, “Imagining the Future in the Light of a Violent Past: Serbian Exiles in the US Envision Global Political Futures”, 7<sup>th</sup> ASN Conference, April 11-13, 2002 (manuscript).

<sup>6</sup> An exception to this rule includes Nazi, Fron, “Balkan Diaspora 1: The Albanian-American Community”, In: Buckley, William J., *Kosovo. Contending Voices on Balkan Interventions*, Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, pp.132-136.

<sup>7</sup> See Raufer, Xavier (with Stéphane Queré), *La mafia albanaise. Une menace pour l'Europe. Comment est née cette superpuissance criminelle balkanique?* Lausanne: Ed. Favre, 2000, esp.p.101-104. According to the author, who links the former Pittsburgh sheriff to the Italian mafia, “James Traficant is the staunchest supporter of the UCK in the American Congress. House of Representatives, media: He is everywhere to be heard in the first Semester of 1999. The United States must Arm the UCK! Acknowledge Kosovo's independence. (...) This ‘Pitbull-like politician’ is the American herald (héraut) of the UCK. As commonsense knowledge puts it, ‘birds of a feather flock together’”.

major tool of ethnonationalistic radicalization with the distance from the motherland accounting for the extreme reappropriation of an often half-forgotten national identity. To what extent this pattern may be applied to the Albanians in the US is a question worth asking.

Against this background, the present paper aims to offer some insights into the socio-history of the Albanians in America, their location, community life and ethnic organizations, with a particular stress on the changes brought about by the opening up of Albania's borders after 1990 and the crisis in Kosovo that culminated at the time of the NATO airstrikes in March-June 1999. Both events have paved the way for a stepping up of Albanian immigration to America and provoked major identity and political realignments within the Albanian community. Our focus, therefore, will be both on the ethnic processes prompted by the changing situation in the Balkans and on the emergence of Albanian-Americans as a political actor in American policy-process. In order to address these issues, we will proceed in several steps. In section one, we will try to conduct a brief assessment of the state of our knowledge about the Albanian American population in the country – putting into perspective the major waves of immigration and the geographic distribution of the newcomers. Early attempts at political lobbying will be studied in a second section, that will concentrate on the period between 1989 and the Albanian uprising in Kosovo. The third and final section will further detail the role played by the diaspora during the 1998-1999 conflict in Kosovo, both in terms of influencing policy-making in the United States and in providing assistance to refugees. An attempt will also be made at assessing the overall impact of the Balkan crises on the structuring and community-awareness of the Albanians in America.

### *I. The Albanian American Community: History of a Settlement*

Albanian emigration to the United States started in the late XIXth Century, albeit at a very slow pace. The first wave of Albanian immigrants came from Korça and other areas of southern Albania. They were predominantly orthodox young males who hoped to return home after they made money on the new continent (Dennis L.Nagi, 1988, p.32-33). Their main center was Boston and the Greater Boston area. By 1907, several hundreds Albanians worked in the mills of New England, in newfound factories (shoe, wood, leather,etc.) or in restaurants and hotels. At that time, an unofficial census suggested the following breakdown: Boston, seven hundred, Worcester and Southbridge four hundred, and Natick two hundred (Dennis L.Nagi, 1988, p.35). Until the late seventies, Boston was to remain the major center of Albanian immigration in the United States.

As was the case with other European immigrant communities who came from stateless nations at the turn of the Century – such as the Poles, Lithuanians,

Slovaks, Croatians or Slovenians -, the experience abroad was to play an important role in the nurturing of a national movement and distinctive collective identity among the Albanians (Dennis L.Nagi, 1988, p.6). At that time, indeed, the lands that were to make up the state of Albania were still under Ottoman dominion –independence was not to be achieved until 1912 and recognized at the London Conference in November 1913 -, and the emergence of a national feeling among the local population had been hampered by the weakness of the urban and educated elite. Most of the early Albanian immigrants who reached the US had a rural background and little knowledge of literary Albanian. A minority of the *émigrés*, however, had received education and was to agitate for independence at home. It is in Boston, for instance, that the first Albanian weekly newspaper, *Kombi* (The Nation), began publication in 1906. Its founder, Sotir Peci, a graduate of the university of Athens was instrumental in instilling a sense of Albanianhood among his fellow nationals and in encouraging the spread of literacy in Albanian. Beside him, several major figures of the Albanian national movement were active in the US diaspora. The most prominent is undoubtedly Fan S.Noli, an Albanian immigrant from Qytezë in Eastern Thrace (and future Harvard graduate) who settled in Boston in 1906, was to be ordained priest two years later, and set up the first autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church in 1908. At that time, no such Church existed in the Ottoman empire<sup>8</sup>. In 1907, F. Noli founded *Besa-Besen* (Word of Honor), the second Albanian-American organization<sup>9</sup>, whose support was key to the creation of *Dielli* (Sun), a weekly newspaper launched on February 15, 1909 and committed to the popularization of the cause of Albanian independence. Eventually Fan Noli returned to Albania in 1921, and headed the government set up after the ephemeral June Democratic Revolution (June 10, 1924)<sup>10</sup>. Unrecognized by West European powers and the UN, Noli's government was forced out by Ahmed Zogu on December 24, 1924, when his armed forces entered Tirana. F. Noli then settled in the United States definitely and devoted most of his energy to the development of the Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese whose metropolitan he was to remain until his death in 1965. One of his most active friends and supporters was Faik Konica, the

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<sup>8</sup> The creation of an Albanian autocephalous Orthodox Church was a long and protracted issue. In 1922 an Orthodox Congress meeting at Berat (Albania) unilaterally proclaimed the autocephaly of the Albanian Orthodox Church, leading most Greek bishops to flee the country. An attempted compromise with the Patriarchate of Constantinople was rejected by the Albanian authorities in 1926. Three years later, a new Albanian Synod convened and asserted its will for autocephaly. It was not however until April 12, 1937 that the status of the Albanian Orthodox Church was recognized by Constantinople.

<sup>9</sup> The first Albanian-American organization, *Malli i Mëmëdheut* (Longing for the Homeland), was set up in 1905 in Buffalo with the help of Petro Nini Luarasi, a school teacher who emigrated to the United States in 1904, after Ottoman authorities closed down the Albanian secondary school he headed and was active until 1908 when he returned to Albania and was assassinated. Shortly thereafter, other societies emerged, such as *Koha e Lirisë* (Time of Freedom) in 1906 based in New York and *Lidhja* (League) in 1907 in Saint-Louis, whose role however was more modest (Skendi, 1967, p.160).

<sup>10</sup> A committed political activist his whole life who traveled extensively throughout Europe, Fan Noli also devoted much of his energy to academic and intellectual life. A confirmed polyglott, he also translated into Albanian classic Western literature (Fan S.Noli, 1960).

descendant of a wealthy Albanian Moslem family (educated in the Ottoman empire and in France) who emigrated to Boston in 1909 to become *Dielli's* editor-in-chief. In the 1930s, Konica was to become King Zog's minister to America (Skendi, 1967, pp.156-159).

The nineteen twenties saw a first major shift in the nature of Albanian immigration to the US. Access to independence had led some *émigrés* back to Albania. Yet to most of them, the first years of sovereign state brought bitter frustrations. Economic difficulties and the hope for a better future convinced entire families and even at times entire villages to look for a permanent settlement in the United States. Although Albanian immigration increased during the '20s and '30s, it continued to come essentially from southern Albania, with only very few known cases of immigrants from the north of the country. The shift from a predominantly male-dominated emigration to a family pattern was accompanied by attempts at better integration within US society: While before 1920, only 6% of the immigrants had sworn the Oath of Citizenship in America, by 1930, they were 28% (Nagi, 1988, p.52).

In parallel, Albanian-American organizations, which had been exerted a leadership role in the political struggle for an independent Albania, started refocusing on American local issues once this goal was achieved. Charitable, cultural and educational activities came to the foreground, reflecting the wish of now permanent Albanian settlers to prosper in America. This evolution is evidenced in the case of the *Pan-Albanian Federation of America-Vatra* (Federata Pan-Shqiptare "Vatra"), which was started in April 1912 in Boston by Fan Noli and Faik Konica and was politically active during World War I. Following the creation of an Albanian Nation-State, it shifted its attention to helping young generations of Albanians get educated in the United States and become successfully integrated in America. A students' scholarship fund was thus set up in 1921 (Constitution and By-Laws of the Pan-Albanian Federation of America, Vatra, 1954). Several other community organizations shared a similar profile, such as the *Albanian Ladies Union* created in 1923 – which contributed to the reconstruction of Korça, in southern Albania, after the 1928 earthquake - and the *Daughters of Saint George*.

This pattern of Albanian emigration - mostly from Albania - came to a halt by the end of World War II, when the country's borders were sealed by Enver Hoxha's communist regime. Few are those who managed to cross over after 1944. The rare successful defectors often chose to establish themselves in Europe. Eventually, in the 1950s a small anti-communist group reached the United States, typically after a first stop in a European country<sup>11</sup>. Among them

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<sup>11</sup>Some Albanians are also believed to have emigrated from Albanian inhabited regions within Greek borders after 1944, and to have settled in the Boston area. They were fleeing Greek repression against those who were suspected of having collaborated with the Italian, and later on, the German occupants during

were representatives of the major anti-communist parties – *Partia e Legaliteti* (Legality Party) and *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) - who tried to denounce Albanian policies and to monopolize opposition to the new Albanian leader. By and large, for over fifty-five years, the biggest waves of Albanian immigrants were to come from Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia. As a rule, also, the newcomers that arrived after World War II were more educated than the Boston forerunners from the beginning of the century.

After 1960, Tito's open border policies facilitated Yugoslav Albanians to settle down abroad. Most of them, however, preferred to go and work in Europe rather than to leave for distant USA. Yet this choice of destination was periodically reconsidered following social upheavals in Kosovo (1948, 1968, 1981, 1989). In 1948, after the break-up between Albania and Tito's Yugoslavia, Kosovo was held in suspicion by Yugoslav authorities, which feared that its Albanian population might be used as a fifth column by Hoxha's communists (Malcolm, 1998, pp.319-323; Ramet, 1992, p.188-189; Reuter, 1982, p.45). As a result, it was subjected to harsh control until the dismissal of head of Secret Police and minister of the Interior, Aleksandar Rankovic, in 1966, thus favoring chronic flows of emigrants. Yet, the pace of migration to the US increased mostly after 1968. Several factors explain this trend. First, while the political situation of the Kosovars improved after the mid-1960s, from an economic standpoint their fate was not compelling. Industrialization (mostly under the form of heavy mineral-based industries) did not bring about the expected improvement in the average standard of living of the population. In comparison with other regions in Yugoslavia, Kosovo still lagged behind (Roux, 1992, p.235-338). In addition, from the 1960s onwards, the Albanian community in Kosovo underwent a demographic explosion that the resources of the province were not sufficient to accommodate. Unemployment remained high and the setting up of a university in Prishtina/Priština in 1970 ended up creating a new category of college educated students who did not find room for professional realization in their place of origin. From the early 1970s onwards, a new wave of Albanians from Kosovo left for America. They comprised Kosovars as well as some Albanians from Albania who had earlier sought refuge in the Yugoslav province.

The student demonstrations of 1981 and the brutal repression that ensued initiated a new phase in the history of Kosovo under Yugoslav rule. More Albanians decided to leave, some to Germany, Switzerland and Belgium, others to the United States and Canada. To this day, however, it remains difficult to assess how many Albanians arrived in America. Often they entered the United

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World War II. Properties were confiscated and 1.930 collaborators were condemned in absentia. For further details, see KONIDARIS, Gerasimos. « Examining Policy Responses to Immigration in the Light of Interstate Relations and Foreign Policy Objectives – Greece and Albania », paper delivered at the International conference on « Albanian Migration and New Transnationalisms », Sussex University, September 6-7, 2002, especially note 4.

States with Yugoslav or Turkish passports<sup>12</sup>. Others still were illegal and therefore not recorded. Statistical information remains rare. According to some estimates, around 45,000 Kosovars left the province between 1971 and 1981. What percentage reached the US cannot be ascertained. In 1981, the number of Albanians in the United States was estimated at around 70.000 people (Nagi, 1988, p.25).

Events took on a more radical turn in 1989, after the autonomy of Kosovo was taken away by Slobodan Milošević, then head of the Serbian communist party. The 1990s saw a dramatic worsening of the situation of Kosovars with mass job dismissals, increased police repression, and curtailment of collective rights (Roux, 1992, p.365 and follow.). New flows of migrants from former Yugoslavia ensued. Meanwhile, the demise of communism turned Albania into a country of high migratory potential. The world public became aware of the horrendous situation that prevailed there after decades of autarky in 1990, when thousands of Albanians besieged Western Embassies in Tirana to find a path abroad. Aborted economic reforms, high inflation and soaring unemployment all contributed to convince Albania's relatively young population to search for alternatives beyond the confine of their homeland (Barjaba, 2000; Dhori Kule *and al.*, 2000)<sup>13</sup>.

Consequently, emigration to America witnessed a new boost. From Albania alone, in 1999, according to data provided by the Albanian Ministry of labor and social affairs, 12,000 Albanians left for the United States (12,000 for Germany and 5,000 for Canada) (Barjaba, 2000, p.59). These numbers cannot compare to the 200,000 Albanians who were estimated to be in Italy at the same time, even less so with the 500,000 immigrants in Greece (Barjaba, 2000, p.59). A representative survey conducted in 1998 at the initiative of the European Union, however, showed that 1,9 % of the 703 interviewees (out of 1,500 respondents) who declared they had emigrated at least once between 1990 and 1998, chose the

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<sup>12</sup> For various historical (the Ottoman legacy) and political reasons, Turkish identification among the Albanians was not uncommon until the 1980s. In the 1950s, Yugoslav authorities encouraged Turkish identification among the Muslims in Kosovo. According to the census, the number of Turks in the province thus increased. Several thousands of these "Turks" emigrated to Turkey after 1953 following the signature of a bilateral agreement between Yugoslavia and Turkey. At the same time, there existed a small urban Muslim community in the Republic of Macedonia, for instance, that identified as both Albanian and Turkish, was fluent in both languages, and explained this complex identity make-up through a history of mixed marriages. For further details, see Nathalie Clayer, "L'islam, facteur des recompositions internes en Macédoine et au Kosovo", In Xavier Bougarel et Nathalie Clayer (eds.), *Le nouvel islam balkanique. Les musulmans, acteurs du post-communisme, 1990-2000*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001, p.181 & p.20-210; Eran Fraenkel, "Urban Muslim Identity in Macedonia: The Interplay of Ottomanism and Multilingual Nationalism", In: Eran Fraenkel and Christian Kramer (eds.), *Language contact-Language Conflict*, New York: Peter Lang, 199", p.27-41.

<sup>13</sup> In 1989, the 15-24 year-old population accounted for 19,5% of the overall Albanian population. Quoted in Kosta Barjaba, *Integration Pauses. Youth under the Focus of Sociology*, Tirane: Europa, 1995.



United States as their destination (vs. 56,0% Greece and 29,9% Italy) (Dhori Kule *and al.*, 2000, p.14).

## ***II- Albanian Communities in 1999 : A Glimpse into Diaspora Life***

Before the 1999 war in Kosovo, the picture that emerged from these successive migratory moves was the following. Historically the biggest concentration of Albanians had been located in the Massachusetts area, namely Boston and Worcester. From there, Albanian immigrants had spread throughout the Atlantic coast states, as far West as Chicago. Nowadays settlements can be found in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Michigan and, to a lesser extent, in D.C., Virginia, Maryland, Florida, Texas and California, although there are small pockets of Albanian-American colonies elsewhere in the US. It is in the extended tri-state area of NY, NJ and CT that the Albanian community is expanding at the highest rate.

How many American citizens of Albanian descent currently reside in the United States is still difficult to determine. For at least two reasons – first, some of them came as illegal migrants and have not been officially registered; second, Albanians from Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia – whose citizenship was Yugoslavian until the break-up of the Federation - often hesitate between declaring themselves as Yugoslavians, as Turks or as Albanians. In his brief overview of the Albanian-American community, Fron Nazi quotes unofficial estimates of between 250,000 and 500,000 Albanian-Americans<sup>14</sup>. The results obtained from the 2000 Census Supplementary Survey about ancestry are much more conservative<sup>15</sup>. Although they should be treated with caution, they provide some picture of the Albanian communities in the US. In 2000, the number of Albanians was estimated at 107.310 (anywhere between 87,048 - lower bound - and 127,572 -higher bound-). Meanwhile, 288,347 people claimed Yugoslavian ancestors (between 260,238 and 316,456). Since there were separate categories for “Croatian” and “Serbian”, it might be hypothesized that these comprise mostly Montenegrins, Bosnians and Kosovars. (see Table 1).

### **Table 1 – Ancestry-First Reported – Census 2000 Supplementary Survey Summary Tables**

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Nazi, Fron, op.cit., p.132.

<sup>15</sup> The Census 2000 Supplementary Survey is a Decennial Census program separate from the Decennial Census. It uses the questionnaire and methods developed for the American Community Survey to collect demographic, social, economic, and housing data from a national sample of 700,000 households. Group quarters were not included in the sample. The Census 2000 Supplementary Survey was conducted in 1,203 counties with monthly samples of about 58,000 housing units. Respondents were able to provide multiple answers. Second ancestry was reported in separate tables. In 2000, 8,750 people selected “Albanian” as a second ancestry – between 5,833 and 11,667 according to the estimates.

United States	Estimate	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Total	273,643,274	-	-
<b>Albanian</b>	<b>107,310</b>	<b>87,048</b>	<b>127,572</b>
Croatian	258,733	238,682	278,784
Serbian	99,413	86,002	112,824
Yugoslavian	288,347	260,238	316,456

Source: US Bureau of the Census - Census 2000

In fact, by the end of the 1980s the older Albanian-American community in Massachusetts had entered a process of slow desintegration. The forcible disruption of ties between the Albanian diaspora and their homeland after 1944 - Albania was one of the very few countries the US had no diplomatic relations with between 1946 and 1990 - contributed to the assimilation of ethnic Albanians into broader American society and to the progressive decay of community life. The Orthodox Church remained a source of collective awareness and preserved social ties. Several cultural events continued to be organized, notably annual food and music festivals and the celebration of independence day (November 28). But formerly influent Albanian-American institutions lost impetus as second and third generation Albanians were often no longer fluent in Albanian and identified strongly with their new American homeland. Even the Albanian monthly, *Liria* (Liberty), the organ of the *Free Albania Organization* (Shipëria e lirë), an association founded in 1941, was compelled to close down in 1996 for financial reasons<sup>16</sup>. This state of affairs also reflected the rather high rate of intergenerational social mobility recorded among Albanians in the Boston area. A survey conducted by Dennis Nagi in September 1981 with 248 Albanian households in the Boston and Greater Boston area showed that among the third generation, only 16,9% of the respondents declared they used Albanian language at home "half of the time" (83,9% rarely) as opposed to 25,4% (71,4% rarely) among the second generation and 69,2% in the first one (26,9% rarely). While settlement patterns revealed no particular geographic concentration of Albanians in the Greater Boston area, the loosening of community ties was also evidenced by a progressive change in marriage patterns: If a large majority of the first and second generation respondents chose an Albanian bride (78,6% and 58,2%

<sup>16</sup> In 1939, an *Albanian Freedom Committee* was formed in Boston to protest the invasion of Albania by Italy on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Two years later, a convention of the Committee decided on the creation of the *Free Albania Organization*, headed by Jon T. Nasse, which was to start the publication of *Liria*. Initially, the editors of the journal threw a lenient eye on E.Hoxha's ascent to power, since the stress was laid on his role as a state-builder. Throughout the Cold War, they were to remain perceived as left-wing. On the opposite side stood *Dielli* - which was published in New York and identified itself as right-wing, pro-monarchist, and close to the *Balli Kombëtar*. In 1958, *Liria* was to organize the first post-war trip of Albanian-Americans to Albania. Until 1990, Dhimir Trebcka assumed the position of editor in chief of the paper. He was succeeded by Van Christo in 1991 (...). For further details, see Bajrami, Vehbi, "An Activist's motto: Go for the Goodness", *Illyria*, August 22-24, 1998.

respectively), among the third generation immigrants, non-Albanian spouses were the rule (77,8%). In the meantime, the share of upper middle-class Albanians rose from 6,5% among first generation immigrants to 28,3% among third generation Albanians, as the number of working class people decreased (from 54,8% - mostly fruit peddlers - to 26,1%) (Nagi, 1988, p.70-86).

Finally, the weakening of the original Albanian-American community owed to the emergence of deep political cleavages that espoused generational fault-lines. Some of the Albanians who had escaped Hoxha's regime in the mid and late forties and emigrated to the United States in the 1950s, had brought along strong anti-communist feelings. This new generation of Albanians was eventually to take control of most community organizations and publications. *Vatra* in particular was faced with an identity crisis as its founders (Fan S.Noli in the first place) who had originally welcomed Hoxha's ascent to power as a step towards the consolidation of a sovereign Albania and were little informed about the exact nature of Albanian communism were confronted with the evidence and testimonies brought by the newcomers<sup>17</sup>. With the blessing of the American government *Vatra* was thereafter to embrace a stringent anti-communist discourse in the late 1950s. Meanwhile, an *Albania Free Committee* (Komiteti Shipëria e lirë) was created by the US State department as part of its containment strategy during the Cold War. Until the end of the 1950s, the organization hoped to topple the communist regime in Albania. Several Albanians received military training with the support of the US and were parachuted in northern Albania. Once it became obvious that E.Hoxha was in full control of his country, the organization shifted to providing information about the communist regime in Albania, and later about the situation in Kosovo (Nazi, 2000, p.133). Their offsprings, though, who reached adulthood in the 1970s were less interested in home politics and more in America-related social and professional issues. Under their aegis, *Vatra* retreated into cultural affairs, while progressively losing influence.

Meanwhile, the center of gravity of the community moved slowly away from Boston towards New York, and, to a lesser degree, Detroit and Chicago<sup>18</sup>. In the US metropole, Albanians are to be found mostly in the Bronx – where their number was estimated between 26,000 and 80,000 in 1999<sup>19</sup>-, in Queens and

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<sup>17</sup> In December 1949, Fan Noli himself sent a telegramme to British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, asking for an international recognition of the “provisional democratic government of Albania”. For further details, see Fan Noli (ed.), *Fiftieth Anniversary Book of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America, 1908-1958*, Boston, 1960.

<sup>18</sup> According to Boston Family genealogy resource website, there were in 1999 approximately 35,000 Albanians in Greater Boston, including 1,000 Kosovar Albanians.

See: [http://www.bostonfamilyhistory.com/alb\\_1950.html](http://www.bostonfamilyhistory.com/alb_1950.html)

<sup>19</sup> The low-end figures are quoted in Flynn, Kevin, “Empty Seat Hinders Talks to keep peace in Bronx”, *New York Times*, June 26, 1999. K. Flynn has interviewed Robert DeSena, the head of the Council for Unity – an organization specialized in soothing and arbitrating between community gangs in high schools - but does not explicitly tell where the data comes from. An estimated 100 (out of 4,000 students) were

Brooklyn as well as in some neighborhoods in Long Island, Yonkers and Waterbury. Those who have undergone rapid social mobility usually move out from these peripheral areas to find housing in Manhattan, notably around 5<sup>th</sup> and Park Avenues or in affluent areas North of New York City. The majority of the community, there, came from Kosovo and Montenegro after World War II. At that time, they settled mostly in the Northern and North-East part of the Bronx as well as in the Pelham Parkway and Belmont area. In the latter, the concentration of Albanians from Albania is the highest. The area used to be occupied by Italian and Irish immigrants who progressively moved out to more affluent neighborhoods. In part, because they speak Italian, a lot of Albanians from Albania started out in the US working for Italian bosses in restaurants and hotels. From a cultural standpoint, they also felt relatively close and got along well. The slow change in the “ethnic” paysage of the area has been very aptly described by Anthony LaRuffa in *Monte Carmelo. An Italian-American Community in the Bronx*<sup>20</sup>. Based on an anthropological investigation into the demographic and social dynamics of the Belmont area – 100 square blocks with an approximate 30,000 Italians in the 1960s whose forefathers had come to the US at the beginning of the century, often to work as shoemakers, barbers, operatives, fruit vendors, etc. -, the author has documented the transformation of the area into a multiethnic neighborhood with the progressive departure of Italian immigrants and their replacement with Puerto-Ricans, African-Americans and “Albanians and Yugoslavians”: The “Yugoslavians and the Albanians”, he writes, “had little difficulty integrating into the Italian-American dominated neighborhood. Many of the Albanians speak Italian and both groups are viewed as White and consequently are more like one’s *parenti* or *paesani*. Blacks and Puerto Ricans have emerged as the threatening *stranieri* for the Monte Carmelesi. According the census data from 1980, at that time, Italians represented only 32% of the population of the community (7,420), Puerto Ricans and African-Americans 50% and of the approximately 1,600 remaining residents, the majority were Albanians and Yugoslavians”<sup>21</sup>. In time, some of these former Albanian employees have become their own boss. Interestingly enough the Council of Belmont Organizations, which used to be headed by a member of the Italian community at the time when LaRuffa wrote his book and which was responsible for “political patronage” guaranteeing loyalty to the Democratic party, is now headed by an Albanian, Rrustem Celaj<sup>22</sup>. In fact, today most of the Albanian community

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attending the Herbert Lehman High School in 1999, and 250 (out of 3,400) Christopher Columbus High School. The upper-end data has been often referred to by US media in their coverage of the Kosovo crisis in 1999.

<sup>20</sup> See LaRuffa, Anthony, *Monte Carmelo. An Italian-American Community in the Bronx*, New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1988. The author changed the name of the district from “Belmont” to “Monte Carmelo” to preserve the anonymity of his interviewees.

<sup>21</sup> See LaRuffa, Anthony, *Monte Carmelo. An Italian-American Community in the Bronx*, *op. cit.*, p.20.

<sup>22</sup> See LaRuffa, Anthony, *Monte Carmelo. An Italian-American Community in the Bronx*, *op. cit.*, p.25. The Council of Belmont Organization (Këshilli i Organizatave të Belmontit), is located on 2411 Arthur Avenue, Bronx, NY.

institutions in New York are located in that same Belmont area, especially on Arthur Avenue. This holds true for instance for the *Illyria newspaper*, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the Albanian media group, *Bota Sot*, etc. In addition, one can find there a variety of small businesses, restaurants, grocery shops, travel agencies, hardware shops and accountancy firms that bear witness to the lively economic activity of the Albanian community there.

### ***III – Albanian-American Political Lobbying before 1999: Putting Kosovo on the US agenda***

Well before the crisis in Kosovo, the Albanian American community in the United States had created several organizations whose goals ranged from the preservation of cultural heritage and communal solidarities to providing support for newcomers. Yet it lacked in overarching structures that might propose a common definition of identity and set up widely defined goals. Part of the reason for this absence of unified movement stems from the vary internal diversity of the Albanian American community. Lack of unity in the emigration mirrored the lack of unity among Albanians themselves as a result of a complex and belated process of national consolidation. Albanians from Albania proper, Montenegro, Kosovo or Macedonia had experienced divergent patterns of identity building. They were also divided along religious as well as social lines. Even though, abroad, these differences became less salient, some stratified affinities remained. Once in the US, the stress was led on inward-oriented activities and on a reproduction of the settlement patterns common in the region where the immigrants originated. One more impediment to common action stemmed from generational cleavages: Those who made it in the new land at the beginning of the Century were eager to become integrated. After one or two generations, they lost the usage of the language and moved onwards. As Van Christo, the founder of the *Frosina Foundation* in Boston, emphasized, these old generations regarded the new waves of settlers in the 1990s with suspicion<sup>23</sup>.

Despite the very scattered nature of Albanian community mobilization, several stages in organization-building can be identified that closely follow the patterns of Albanian immigration to the US. They correspond to various preferential locations as well as to changing dominant issues. Basically three major phases can be identified when depicting community structures among the Albanians: the turn of the century; the period after WWII, and the 1980s-1990s. Decisive actors include the Churches, cultural organizations as well as representations from the home political parties. Their activities, it is worth

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<sup>23</sup> See Bajrami, Vehbi, “An Activist’s Motto: Go for the Goodness”, *Illyria*, August 22-24, 1998. The new foundation was specifically designed to strengthen communal ties and to foster a better integration of new settlers in the Boston area.

recalling, have been more or less politicized depending on the situation in the Balkans and on the broader international environment.

Until the 1970s, attempts at uniting or representing the entire Albanian community came from Albania-born Albanians because they were a majority and had more historical roots in the US as an *émigré* community. But later the balance started to change as Kosovars arrived from Yugoslavia, were not yet assimilated in American society (while the descendants of the older Albanian immigration were starting to be) and took over the leadership. The war in Kosovo has only reinforced this long-term trend. The motive behind the exodus from Kosovo were often more political than economic. Consequently the new immigrants were more prone to be politically active once in the United States. By contrast, the Albanians who left Albania in 1944-1945 knew they would not be able to go back since the border was closed. They had to reconcile themselves with the idea of staying in America indefinitely. The situation of the Kosovars in the US was significantly different. They were able to send money to their family and relatives, to exchange mail and to remain in touch with evolutions in their home country. They preserved a much stronger sense of identification with their original state. Perceptions of self also differed: Kosovo was seen as under foreign occupation, while Albanians from Albania came from a country that was "oppressed" by their own co-nationals. Liberation could not come from the withdrawal of a foreign dominion, but depended on settling internal conflicts of ideology. There were two sets of radically diverging issues.

Efforts to influence media coverage of the events in Albania and Kosovo as well as bringing attention of the US decision-makers started early in the 1950s...under US sponsorship. At that time, a major impulse was provided by the US State department. Its major tool was the *Albania Free Committee* that soon overpowered the older *Vatra* organization. Yet step by step concern shifted from communist issues to the situation in Kosovo, especially after Belgrade engaged in forceful repression of the 1981 student movement. At that time, the first Albanian demonstrations were organized in Washington D.C. as well as in cities with significant immigrant presence. Contacts were also established with Congressmen and U.S. State department officials. While still inexperienced in lobbying practices, several new Albanian-American organizations endeavored to put Kosovo issues on the government's agenda. In 1986, they succeeded, thanks to the support of Congressman Broomfield (a Democrat from Michigan), in convincing the State Department to threaten cancelling most-favored-nation status for Yugoslavia in case Pjeter Ivezaj, an Albanian-American from Detroit who had participated in the 1981 Washington anti-Yugoslav demonstrations, did not get released from the Yugoslav prison he had been sent to upon returning home for a visit (Nazi, 2000, p.134).

It is not until January 1989, though, that major inroads were made in the field of Albanian-American advocacy when former Republican congressman Joe DioGuardi set up the *Albanian American Civic League* (AACL, Liga Qytetare Shqiptaro-Amerikane) in New York. An American of Arberesh descent<sup>24</sup>, J.DioGuardi had started raising the question of Milošević in Kosovo as early as 1986. In June of that year, he had tried – to no avail – to bring a resolution in Congress that condemned Yugoslavia for violation of human rights of Albanians<sup>25</sup>. Parallel initiatives were undertaken by senators Robert Dole and Paul Simon<sup>26</sup>. A year later, he had managed to rally fifty-five congressmen in support of a similar resolution<sup>27</sup>. Following this diffusion of a “Memorandum on the Persecution of the Albanian Population in Yugoslavia” by the *Albanian Youth of Kosovo in the Free World*, a New York-based Albanian-American organization set up by Arif Malcici in 1977, seven US Congressmen accompanied DioGuardi on a visit to Kosovo in August 1990 - during which they were introduced to Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the *Kosovo Democratic League* (LDK, Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës). In their later assessment of the situation in the Yugoslav province, some were to remain deeply influenced by this first-hand experience with Serb repressive policies – notably, Sen. Don Nickles (R-Oklah.), who was to co-sponsor the Nickles-Bentley Amendment passed in October 1990 that required the US government to suspend economic aid to Yugoslavia until the Secretary of State certified that the Yugoslav government was respecting its obligations under the Helsinki Accords and ceasing human rights abuses in Kosovo<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Born in the Bronx in 1940, Joe DioGuardi was a public accountant before he was elected to the US House of Representatives in November 1984 on the side of the Republicans. He did not get reelected to a second mandate.

<sup>25</sup> The exact reference of the resolution is: 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d Session, H. CON. RES. 358, “Condemning the repression of ethnic Albanians by the Government of the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia”. The text of the resolution can be found on the AACL’s website.

See: [http://aacl.com/Congressional/Congressional\\_dir/Congressional\\_2.htm](http://aacl.com/Congressional/Congressional_dir/Congressional_2.htm)

<sup>26</sup> Senator Robert Dole submitted Sen. CON. RESO 150 to the 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2nd session “Expressing concern over the condition of ethnic Albanians living in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia” on June 18, 1986. It was concurrent with J. DioGuardi’s resolution 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2d Session, H. CON. RES. 358 submitted in the House. See: [http://aacl.com/Congressional/Congressional\\_dir/Congressional\\_6.htm](http://aacl.com/Congressional/Congressional_dir/Congressional_6.htm)

<sup>27</sup> The resolution is referred to as H. CON RES. 162, 100<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1st Session, “Expressing concern over the conditions of ethnic Albanians living in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”. It was introduced in the House of Representatives on July 15, 1987. The text of the resolution can be found on the AACL’s website. See: [http://aacl.com/Congressional/Congressional\\_dir/Congressional\\_12.htm](http://aacl.com/Congressional/Congressional_dir/Congressional_12.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Amendment by Rep. Helen Delich Bentley – a Serbian American who was active in opposing most of the Congress resolutions that called attention to human rights abuses in Kosovo and were perceived as “pro-Albanian”- led to a conservative understanding of the Nickles text. It was restricted to fiscal year 1991 and concerned only \$ 5 million of direct assistance. Supposed to come into effect six months after it was voted (May 5, 1991), the Nickles-Bentley Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act was never implemented – following Secretary of State James Baker’s certification in Congress. Nonetheless, this piece of legislature is perceived by some observers, chief among them former Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmerman, as bearing testimony to the detrimental role played by Congress in the US management of the Yugoslav crisis. This “foolish congressional action”, W. Zimmerman wrote, hit “the clarity and consistency of US policy” at a time when the dominant line was in favor of preserving Yugoslav unity. For further details, see Zimmerman, Warren, “Yugoslavia: 1989-1996”, In: Azrael, Jeremy R. and Emil A.

Launched shortly after DioGuardi failed to be re-elected in Congress, the AACL was thus created as a tool for influencing US response to developments in Kosovo. Some of the well-off Kosovar *émigrés* supported the initiative, including financially. Others joined his organization like Sami Repishti, an Albanian from Shkodër and a renowned lawyer. The AACL's priority went to publicizing the Kosovo issue. For that purpose, in 1990, the Civic League created the *Albanian American Public Affairs Committee* (AAPAC) to support congressmen who accepted to champion Albanian-related resolutions as well as an *Albanian-American Foundation*. Fund-raising was a major part of the job, collecting and spreading information another. Under the Clinton administration, these efforts were made easier by the presence in Congress of several known supporters of the Albanian cause, among whom Senate minority leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.), Representative and Chairman of the House International Relations Committee Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), Senator and chair of both the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and the National Republican Senatorial Committee, Mitch McConnell (R-KY), Sen. Alfonse d'Amato, Rep. Tom Lantos and Representative and co-chair of the Albanian Issues Caucus Eliot Engel<sup>29</sup> (D-NY) – some of whom were J. DioGuardi's personal friends.

Tensions, however, arose between the AACL's leader and the community shortly after the regime change in Albania. Reasons behind these disagreements were fourfold. First, as early as 1991 Joseph DioGuardi – with the help of his wife, Shirley A. Cloyes -, went to Albania with the hope that he might act as an intermediate between the United States and the Balkan state coming out of several decades of autarky. Several Kosovar supporters of the advocacy organization disapproved of what they saw as an overstretch<sup>30</sup>. Second, they also started worrying that J. DioGuardi might be trying to monopolize ties with the Albanian world. Assessments about the role of S. Berisha in Albania also differed. In 1994 information about the authoritarian tendencies of the Albanian leader reached the United States. Those in the diaspora who had hoped for a

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Payin (eds.), "US. And Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of force", Rand, CF-129-CRES, Santa Monica, California, 1996.

<sup>29</sup>Rep. Eliot Engel has been one of the most active congressmen in support of the Albanian "cause". A Democrat, he is a representative of the Bronx. His interest in Albanian issues stemmed from his awareness of the existence of a strong Albanian presence in the Bronx. Engel was among the first members of Congress that the Albanians of the Bronx community started to approach about the Kosovar question around 1989. Cooperation with the A.A.C.L. but also with NAAC and the LDK representation in the US have been regular since that time. Whenever Engel stood up for reelection, Albanian-American community organizations did fund-raising for him. Beside Rep. Eliot Engel, Rep. Benjamin Gilman and Rep. Tom Lantos were members of the Albanian Issues Caucus in the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress. The full list of the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress Albanian Issues Caucus members may be found at:

[http://www.frosina.org/advisories/Alb\\_caucus.shtml](http://www.frosina.org/advisories/Alb_caucus.shtml)

<sup>30</sup>In 1991, when Albanians crossed to the foreign embassies and large demonstrations were organized in Tirana, this situation in Kosovo was very tense. In Albania, rumors started to spread according to which the Albanian secret police (*sigurimi*) was working with the Serb special services to allow Albanians to get into foreign embassies so as to divert attention from the Kosovo issue.



close partnership with Berisha became highly disillusioned and started advocating a shift in priorities. J. DioGuardi did not follow suit. In addition, opinions diverged with regard to the strategy to be applied in Kosovo. DioGuardi was an early sceptic of the chances for peaceful resistance to succeed. As he distanced himself from I.Rugova, dissatisfaction grew in some segments of the Kosovo-originated diaspora where the LDK enjoyed a high level of prestige. Finally, rumors have it in the Albanian-American New York community that disagreements over the usage of funds contributed an equal share to internal infighting. Well aware of the need to be present in Congress, J. DioGuardi had advocated raising funds for the Congressmen who vowed to put the Kosovo issues on the agenda. Yet some members of the diaspora doubted the efficiency of this procedure.

The split finally occurred in 1995, with Sami Repishti leaving the organization to initiate a rival structure, the *National Albanian American Council* (NAAC, *Këshillin Kombëtar Shqiptaro-Amerikan*), alongside people like Harry Bajkraktari, *Illyria's* owner. NAAC was officially set up on October 1, 1996 as a non-partisan organization that purports to link the Albanian-American community to the US government and the Albanians in the Balkans<sup>31</sup>. Based in Washington<sup>32</sup>, NAAC ambioned to become *the* official Albanian-American lobby and to differentiate itself from AACL in terms both of focus and of tone. The AACL started as a Kosovo-based structure. By contrast, NAAC appeared more concerned with developments in other Albanian-inhabited lands, notably Albania and Montenegro, as well as with Western assistance and business-related issues. The background of its leading figures are not foreign to this hierarchy of priorities. As mentioned earlier Sami Repishti, NAAC's first president, is from Skodër; Ilir Zherka, who was executive director between November 16, 1998 and June 2000, comes from **Krušev**, an Albanian town in Montenegro<sup>33</sup>; Ekrem Bardha, one of the co-founders of NAAC, left Albania in

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<sup>31</sup> NAAC's goals were officially formulated in the following way on the 1998 website of the organization – taht has, since then, been entirely redesigned -: “NAAC is an independent, nonprofit community association dedicated to representing the interests and concerns of the Albanian-Americans, and to fostering a better understanding of Albanian issues in the United States. NAAC is committed to strengthening the friendship between the people of the United States and the Albanian people living in the Republics of Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece. NAAC seeks to persuade the White House, Congress, foreign policy experts, the media, and the American people that the United States can and should exert leadership in helping to address the plight of Albanians, and thereby securing peace and stability in the Balkans. In particular, NAAC seeks: political, economic and military support for the Republic of Albania; support for the self determination of the people of Kosova; full participation and representation of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia; as well as full minority rights wherever the Albanians are not a majority. NAAC is also dedicated to involving Albanian-Americans in the political process here at home”. See: <http://www.alb-net.com/about.htm>

<sup>32</sup> In 2001, NAAC opened two new chapters, one in Massachussets – July 24, 2001 - and one in Michigan – October 4, 2001 - thus reaching out both to the old Albanian immigration and to a region that has witnessed continued growth of its Albanian community over the past years.

<sup>33</sup> A lawyer residing in New York, Ilir Zherka immigrated to the United States in 1968 and settled in the Bronx. He graduated from Cornell University and the University of Virginia. In 1996, I.Zherka joined the

the 1950s<sup>34</sup>. While starting to develop its network, NAAC also decided to turn not only to wealthy Albanian-Americans, but to those that were educated and had made it high on the US professional and social scale. Lawyers, bankers and successful businessmen were invited to join.

Beside differences in social targeting, AACL and NAAC offered divergent understanding of the proper solution to Albanian issues. J.DioGuardi often spoke of the seven millions Albanians unfairly divided by history with a highly emotional wording<sup>35</sup>. Independence for Kosovo was an explicit goal. While refraining from advocating a "Greater Albania", the *League* did not shy away from nationalistic slogans. From the very onset, NAAC was more discreet and moderate. Part of its founding – besides donations from the Albanian diaspora – came from US governmental agencies. Several US officials were also invited to sit on the board of the organization from 2000 onwards, among whom Congressmen Eliot Engel and Sue Kelly, Ambassador William Ryerson and Ambassador William Walker. Understandably, the Albanian-American organization claimed to pursue Albanian interests, but only within a framework acceptable to US officials. The stress was laid on lobbying for a democratic Albania, for the development of Albanian-inhabited areas in the Balkans as well as for extended cooperation with the region. Typically, NAAC organized conferences for business people interested in investing in Albania or in South-East Europe at large.

At an early stage, gaining influence over AACL and NAAC became a major stake for Albanian parties – both from Kosovo and Albania. One of the

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Clinton-Gore re-election campaign and was responsible for organizing Americans of European and South Mediterranean descent and served as the spokesperson for the President during rallies, and for ethnic radio, television, and newspaper interviews. He started out in politics as congressional staffer for Congressman George Miller (D-CA) between 1994 and 1997. On that year, he was appointed to the Department of Labor by President Clinton and served as Senior Legislative Officer until 1998. He has been one of the most frequent speakers in Albanian-American rallies in Washington.

<sup>34</sup> In June 2000, Richard Lukaj replaced Ilir Zherka as chairman of NAAC. A senior managing director of Bear Stearns and graduate from New York University Business School, R. Lukaj is son to an immigrant from Ulqin, Montenegro. He was born in 1969 in a refugee camp outside Napoli (Italy). Together with his family, he immigrated to the United States in 1970, and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Within the Albanian-American community, he is often perceived as a role model for having made a successful career in finances and achieved recognition by his peers (R. Lukaj made the cover of the November 1999 issue of *Investment Dealer's Digest*). In 2000, while he was still just a member of the Board of Trustees of NAAC, he donated \$ 100,000 to the organization. For a lengthy interview with 32-year-old Richard Lukaj, see: <http://www.alb-net.com/pipermail/alb-club/Week-of-Mon-20000320/003284.html>.

<sup>35</sup> The presentation of the scope and goals of the AACL on its web-site is illustrative: "The purpose of the Civic League is to further the human rights and the national cause of the divided nation of more than seven million Albanians living side by side in the Balkans in Albania, Kosova, western Macedonia, southeastern Montenegro, Presheve, Medvegje, Bujanovc (southern Serbia), and Chameria (northern Greece). By bringing the political perspectives of 400.000 Albanian Americans to the US Government, the civic League works to end the repression and oppression of Albanians living under hostile Slavic Communist regimes in the Balkans and to preserve the culture, identity and human rights of Albanians throughout the world". See: <http://aacl.com/about2.shtml2.htm>

major contenders was the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), which had opened a representation in the United States as early as March 3, 1990. Its chairman for the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut branches was Rustem Ibraj, a Kosovar Albanian who had studied at Pristina university before coming to the US at the end of the 1980s. From 1990 to 1998, Rustem Ibraj was to be responsible for collecting funds for the LDK and for trying to promote Albanian issues in the media and among the political elite<sup>36</sup>. A large majority of the community members remained actually faithful to their commitments and regularly gave 3% of the revenues to the LDK- at least until 1998 and the strengthening of the UCK in the diaspora. While originally positive, relations between Joe DioGuardi and the LDK strained when it became obvious that both were competing for the same pool of donors, and that the US politician adopted stands that did not espouse the LDK's closely enough. NAAC was more enduringly favorable to the Democratic League. Its rallying to the UCK was to come only at the time of the war in Kosovo –when peaceful resistance was no longer an option.

Which advocacy organization was most efficient before 1999 is difficult to determine. In various ways, they all contributed to pushing the needs of the Kosovo-based resistance in the public eye. At the beginning, unlike J. DioGuardi's *Civic League*, the LDK enjoyed little insider access in Washington and it turned to PR firms. In so doing the Kosovo representatives were not following a very unique path. Since the end of the Cold War, the PR and lobbying industry has been dramatically growing in the United States. Its major clients come from countries and regions that did not formerly have official relations with the US and need visibility. In 1995, four lobbyists were registered with the Federal Election Commission's (FEC) filings under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) as promoting Kosovo's interests<sup>37</sup>. These were Ruder Finn, Inc.<sup>38</sup> – 235,292.58 \$ for a 12 month period ending on November 30, 1995 - Arnold and Porter – 2,616.00 \$ for a six month period ending on June 4, 1995 ;

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<sup>36</sup> He was later replaced with Ramazan Bekteshi as a coordinator of the LDK for North America. Marjan Cubi is now secretary of the LDK chapter in New York and Naim Dedushaj, leader of the political bureau of the LDK. Both have been involved with the LDK in the United States since its foundation.

<sup>37</sup> The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) was adopted in 1938 by the US Congress in “response to the large number of German propaganda agents in the pre-WWII U.S” (quoted as in FARA Q & A). It compels companies that are hired to promote a given foreign country's or corporation's interests to register with the Department of Justice and to provide information about their activities, income and expenditures. The full text of the act is available on the Internet at <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fara/FaraIndx.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Ruder Finn is reputed for being one of the first consultancy firms that started working for Balkan governments in the 1990s. It initially represented the governments of Croatia and Bosnia, and then the Kosovo parallel government of Ibrahim Rugova between 1992 and 1997. James W. Harff, who headed Ruder Finn's Global Public Affairs division until he joined Global Communicators in 1997, described their work in the following terms: “People had no idea where Kosovo was, what the issues were, who the personalities were, or what US policy interest were in the region. Our challenge was to bring them into contact with people who needed to have an understanding and a desire to understand. Part of the decision-making is having information from a diversity of sources”. Quoted in Geman, Ben, “Diplomacy for Hire”, *Boston Phoenix*, June 1, 1999.

Shafiq Nuri for American Trade & Investments – amount unknown – and Bardhyl Tirana, an Albanian who came to the US shortly after the advent of communism in Albania and later became a financial analyst and a PR person<sup>39</sup> – 868.34 \$ for a 12 month period ending October 31, 1995 -. Asked to prop up interest in the human rights situation in Kosovo, the firms coordinated meetings with congressional staffers, US officials and members of Congress, American media and Washington think tanks.

Although there is little doubt that public-relations operations increased awareness of Kosovo issues among the US public and the elite, their influence needs to be put into perspective. By comparison with the PR offensives simultaneously deployed by neighbouring states, such as Croatia, the amounts of money spent by the Albanians on official lobbying were rather limited. In 1995 alone, 713,150.16 \$ were officially devoted by Zagreb to US consultancy agencies<sup>40</sup>. Yet, over the course of the decade, members of the Albanian-American community were to rely on PR firms more and more. Several other public-relations agencies were thus hired in 1999<sup>41</sup> – chief among them *Washington International Group* (WIG), a PR company headed by former Balkans Desk officer for the US State Department Marshall Freeman Harris which advised the Albanian negotiating team during the Rambouillet talks in 1999<sup>42</sup> -, *Patton Boggs, L.L.P* – a participant in the organization of Hashim Thaçi's trip to the United States - and *Global Communicators* (GC)<sup>43</sup>.

The balance sheet of the 1990s until the emergence of a guerilla insurgency in Kosovo can be summarized as follows: Since the 1970s the Albanian-American community has been steadily growing. While a majority of the settlers were blue-collar workers or ran small businesses, some exiles who fled Kosovo after Serbian

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<sup>39</sup> Bardhyl Tirana also sits on the Honorary Board of NAAC.

<sup>40</sup> The data is public and was available on the web site of FARA at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fara/indextxt.html> in June 1999. Complementary information may be downloaded from the O'Dwyer Washington Report, a bi-weekly based on the United States Senate Foreign Agent Registration Act monthly files at [http://www.odwyerpr.com/washington\\_report/](http://www.odwyerpr.com/washington_report/)

<sup>41</sup> It might be interesting to note that the White House also resorted to the services of PR firms in its management of the Kosovo-campaign. At the end of May 1999, Leslie Dach, vice-chair of PR Edelman Worldwide and the head of its Washington Office was asked to work with White House chief of Staff John Podesta on dealing with NATO air campaign and atrocities in Kosovo. See "Dach Gets Special Kosovo Assignment", *O'Dwyer's Washington Report*, May 19, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> According to FARA bi-annual report for the first half of 1999, WIG received \$151,720.00 for a period of six month ending on January 31, 1999 and "arranged a trip by the Prime Minister of Kosova to the United States to meet with U.S. Congressmen and participate in a number of media interviews. The registrant also was interviewed by the media on behalf of the foreign principal and acted as a consultant during the Rambouillet Peace talks held in Paris in February, 1999".

See: <http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/fara/fara1st99/COUNTRY/KOSOVA.HTM>

<sup>43</sup> Let us note that the name of Global Communicators does not appear in FARA's 1999 and 2000 reports. Yet, on the website of GC the "Republic of kosova" is mentioned as one of the clients of the firm. GC was hired to "publiciz[e] drive for independence from the former Yugoslavia".

See: <http://www.globalcommunicators.com/cpp.html>. No date is being provided, though.

control over the province increased started to get mobilized and to attempt, from the United States, to influence local developments back home. During the decade that followed the collapse of Yugoslavia, these people engaged in a variety of activities that ranged from the creation of Albanian-American media to political lobbying. Over the course of the decade, some experience-capital was to be garnered in Washington, notably through the AACL, the LDK and the NAAC. Yet, in all respects, the 1998-1999 crisis was to represent a major test for Albanian-Americans. A test of unity, first, since the conflict forced a reconsideration of previous internal differentiation among the various waves of immigrants. A test of commitment, second, as humanitarian and aid initiative flourished that built on pre-existing communal and religious networks as well as on *ad hoc* mobilization. And, finally, a test of influence. The growing strength of the UCK in the diaspora represented a major challenge, as infighting with LDK representatives was feared by some. Once some degree of cohesion was achieved, shaping US policies in favor of military intervention and in order to legitimize the quest for Kosovo independence confronted the Albanian-American community with the need to make up for its relative weakness in terms of sheer numbers by maximizing the efficiency of its connections in Congress as well as in the Clinton administration<sup>44</sup>. More than ever, media visibility was a decisive springboard. In this respect, the influx of about 15,000 refugees from Kosovo after the start of the NATO-led bombings was undoubtedly helpful. The ability of the Albanian diaspora to come together and shape the Clinton foreign policy agenda in the Balkans, however, should not be reified – as will be seen further down.

#### *IV – Coming to politics: The effects of the Kosovo war on the Albanian-American community*

When considering the impact of the UCK-led uprising and the NATO bombings of Spring 1999 on the Albanian-Americans, several levels need to be kept in mind – identity dynamics, communal mobilization and Albanian-American politics. These various dimensions will be reviewed in turn, as one moves from attempting to grasp the reactions of the community to the creation of the UCK and the armed struggle in Kosovo, to envisioning humanitarian mobilization in the United States in the Spring of 1999 and finally to the nurturing of an “Albanian lobby”.

##### **1. Rallying to the UCK: Beyond divisions, Together we stand**

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<sup>44</sup> By comparison, let us recall that the Croatian diaspora in the United States and Canada is approximated between one and 2,5 million strong. Quoted in duric, Ivana, “The Croatian Diaspora in North America: Identity, Ethnic solidarity, and the Formation of a “Transnational National Community”, *op. cit.*, p.1

The war in Kosovo precipitated a restructuring of the Albanian American community and a generational change in community leadership. The impact was felt not only among average Albanian Americans, but also in the organizational structures of the community. Before 1925, the dominant theme had been the national question, that is Albania's independence. The period after 1945 had revolved around the communist/anti-communist ideological motive. Meanwhile, the question of the unification of the entire Albanian nation under the same roof had been relegated into the background. With the downfall of the Hoxha regime, the anti-communist cause faded away and left part of the old notables of the community without an overarching theme for continuing to mobilize their supporters. Some of them find themselves at a loss to taking the new turn. Others followed the new trend and progressively shifted emphasis from strictly Albanian issues to the Kosovo theme. All in all, however, the idea of the broader unification of the nation did not appeal to a majority of the community. Bridging the gap between Albanians from Albania proper and from the new Kosovar emigration would have requested a shared understanding of national identity that was hard to come by. Beyond the surface discourse on commonalities and Albanian-ness, feelings of solidarity remained very parochial.

The shift from a peaceful to an armed form of resistance to Milošević's regime in Kosovo, however, encouraged a form of reconnection between the various Albanian groups and a reactivation of the willingness to cooperate across organizations. News of Serb repression contributed to blur the boundary between the Albanian and the Kosovar immigration. In fact, not all those who enrolled with the UCK structures in the US came from Kosovo. When a Homeland Calling (*Vendlindja thërret*) office opened in New York, its leader - Shefki Maxhuni<sup>45</sup> - was a first generation Kosovar immigrant, but the secretary was born in Tirana. In the same way, at least two of the eight members of the *Provisional Government of Kosova's* office in New York were Albanians. The Government's spokesperson, Shinasi Rama, a Ph. Candidate at Columbia University, had previously made a name for himself as one of the leaders of the 1990 student demonstrations in Tirana. Part of his family was based in Skodër; more distant relatives lived in Kosovo.

Still, the move away from the LDK to the UCK did not occur overnight, nor was it easy. The choices made by the major Albanian-American organizations need to be understood against the background of political alliances on the Albanian scene. Until the beginning of 1999, *Vatra*, for instance, held the UCK in disbelief. Out of anti-communist solidarity, the Boston organization followed the line adopted by Albanian president Sali Berisha who was then favorable to Ibrahim Rugova. As Berisha changed his position and let UCK

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<sup>45</sup> The UCK fund was located in the Bronx – on Arthur Avenue -. In charge of UCK funding, S. Maxhuni also contributed to financing the office of the *Provisional Government of Kosova* that was created in New York after the failure of the Rambouillet negotiations in March 1999.

members establish training camps in northern Albania, and also for the sake of unity in the Albanian American community, *Vatra* later softened its tone. Commitment to the guerilla did not come naturally to NAAC either. Some of its members, who kept in close relations with *Vatra*, knew of the UCK's relations to the marxist-leninist People's Movement of Kosovo (LPK, *Levizja Popullore e Kosovës*) based in Switzerland. Information on cooperation between Albania's Socialist party and the Kosovar rebels, confirmed by Western media reports, did not go unnoticed either among the Albanian-American community. All the strongly anti-communist groups remained suspicious of the Liberation Army – until the US intervention in March 1999.

Among the Albanian-American immigrants in the New York area, the UCK started gaining influence after a Serb police raid that left over 25 people dead in the Drenica region in February 1998. Some efforts at raising money had started earlier, notably thanks to Florin Krasniqi, a Kosovar and former geometry teacher based in Brooklyn, NY since 1989 whose cousin, Adrian, was killed by the Serb police in October 1997<sup>46</sup>. But March 1998 was the moment when many of the former members of the LDK as well as ordinary Albanians-Americans started sending volunteer donations to the new-found US chapter of the Homeland Calling<sup>47</sup>. It is approximately around that time that Rustem Ibraj, the LDK representative in New York and New England, decided to shift sides and rallied the UCK. Like others, he was disappointed with what had been achieved in a decade of peaceful opposition to the Serb authorities, and became convinced that there was no alternative to military confrontation. Also, he thought that in face of a situation of emergency the community had to show unity of purpose. In his view, LDK and UCK were bound to cooperate<sup>48</sup>. After eight years of raising funds for the LDK, R. Ibraj enjoyed an extensive network of contacts in the diaspora and was instrumental in helping the new UCK leaders to locate potential donators<sup>49</sup>. His decision was strongly reproved by some LDK activists

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<sup>46</sup> Florin Krasniqi's story has been often told by the US media. See, among others, "Albanian-Americans Help fund the KLA", AFP, February 20, 1999; Sullivan, Stacy, "From Brooklyn to kosovo, with Love and AK-47's", The New York Times, November 22, 1998 and Sullivan, Stacy, "Albanian Americans Funding Rebels' Cause", *Washington Post*, May 26, 1998. On Albanian-American fund-raising, see also Ruppe, David, "Albanian-Americans Fund the Kosova Guerrillas", *ABCNEWS.com*, April 30, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> One of the fund's bank account was located at People's Bank in Stamford, CT 06902-6014 (US account number: 0617008215; 328 Shippin Ave.). After the war ended, the fund changed its name and became the Fund for Kosovo (*Fundi e Kosovës*).

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Rustem Ibraj, New York, April 18, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> In the United States, raising money for a foreign rebel armed group is not illegal so long as the group is not listed as a terrorist organization by the State Department. By contrast, smuggling weapons into Kosovo was not allowed in 1998 and 1999, since the province, still officially part of Yugoslavia, fell under the UN arms embargo against Yugoslavia (resolution 1160, March 31, 1998). "The Security Council", the resolution said, "decides that all States shall, for the purposes of fostering peace and stability in Kosovo, prevent the sale or supply to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, by their nationals or from their territories or using their flag vessels and aircraft, of arms and related material of all types, such as weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment and spare parts for the aforementioned, and shall prevent arming and training for terrorist activities there ". On September 23, 1998, a new UN

in New York proper. Yet, by the beginning of 1999, a majority of the community had swung towards the guerilla.

Contributions to the UCK ranged from sending money, to arranging shipments of humanitarian aid and weapons, and finally to signing up fighters. How much money was finally raised is difficult to ascertain. During fund-raising events, dinners and cocktail parties in New York – often organized in Albanian-run restaurants -, no less than \$30,000 to 50,000 were usually collected. By May 1998, US journalist Stacy Sullivan quoted a Krasniqi family member as having declared that between \$3 to \$4 millions had already been raised in the United States<sup>50</sup>. And the digits undoubtedly increased in the Fall of 1998 and following the Raçak massacre in January 1999. Uk Lushi, one of the participants in the Atlantic Brigade (*Batalion Atlantiku*), a group of about 200 Albanian-Americans who departed from the US to fight in Kosovo, mentions that \$3 million -whose final destination has been disputed by some sources- were gathered by the Albanian diaspora in North America for the brigade<sup>51</sup>. In fact, much of the money was sent home in cash through a variety of channels – most of them not centralized by the UCK. Besides, not all the remittances from abroad was earmarked for the guerilla, although it seems that part of the humanitarian aid was finally used to buy weapons. After rumors started spreading about funds being diverted by some unscrupulous UCK leaders in 1999, members of the US-based diaspora became even more cautious. Some used family-based networks to make sure that the dollars did reach their relatives.

Another source of funding for the Albanian rebel army often mentioned in the Western press has to do with organized crime<sup>52</sup>. Yet, if the role of Albanians from Kosovo in drug-dealing and other crime-related activities linked to the so-called « Balkan route » has been underlined by various official agencies – notably in the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee (NNICC) 1996 Report<sup>53</sup> – and if part of these networks started operating in the New York area

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resolution (1199), however, went further. Recalling the obligations of all states to implement resolution 1160, it also requested “States to pursue all means consistent with their domestic legislation and relevant international law to prevent funds collected on their territory being used to contravene resolution 1160”. No particular action was taken in the US to prevent fundraising by Homeland Call. For further details, see Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-general, *Use of sanctions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The former Yugoslavia* (updated January 2002) at: <http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/1999/19990101.unsanctions.html>

<sup>50</sup> See Sullivan, Stacy, “Albanian Americans Funding Rebels’ Cause”, *Washington Post*, May 26, 1998.

<sup>51</sup> For further details, see Lushi, Uk. *New York-Prishtine-New York Batalioni Atlantiku. Shënime Luftë dhe Paqeje* [New York-Pristina-New York. The Atlantic Brigade. Notes on War and Peace], Prishtinë : Rilindja, March 2001, p.132-133.

<sup>52</sup> On the supposed links between crime and UCK, see, among others, Roberto Ruscica, “Albanian Mafia, This Is How It Helps The Kosovo Guerrilla Fighters”, *Corriere della Sera*, October 15, 1998; Michel Chossudovsky, “Kosovo Freedom fighters financed by organized Crime”, April 7, 1999 (on the Web at <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/chossudovsky/#balkans>); Boyes, Roger and Eske Wright, “The KLA Drugs money linked to the Kosovo Rebels”, *The Times* (London), March 24, 1999.

<sup>53</sup> See U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Intelligence division, “The Supply of Illicit Drugs to the United States”, *NNICC Report*, Washington 1996. According to the report: “drug



long before the Kosovo conflict started<sup>54</sup>, it is difficult to demonstrate the existence of links between Albanian crime in the United States and the UCK. Much less to provide data about the funds thus raised. As Tim Judah made it plain in a thoughtful article published in the *New York Review of Books* in August 1999, « All sorts of charges have been leveled against the KLA. These include accusations that they are drug smugglers and, recently, that they have executed political opponents and dissenters. Certainly the KLA has taken money from the Kosovo Albanian mafia but this does not make the KLA, per se, a drug-smuggling organization”<sup>55</sup>.

One ends up being compelled to add up data from UCK fund-raisers and Albanian-American community leaders and from Serb-police or pro-Serb sources. In both cases, there is a likelihood that figures will be magnified - to suggest the strength of ethnic solidarity and sacrifice in the first case, to demonize the “all-powerful Albanian lobby”, in the second one. Trying to assess the role played by the US and Canada based-diaspora in joining the UCK fighters in Kosovo might provide one more opportunity to appreciate the role of the Albanian diaspora...as well as the instrumentalization of the media by political actors on both sides of the ethnic divide. Much has been said about the thousands of representatives from the diaspora that were believed to have answered the call to arms to rally the Albanian uprising in Kosovo<sup>56</sup>. In the US context, the initiative behind the creation of what was to be known as the Atlantic brigade (*Atlantiku batalioni*) came from some New-York-based Albanian-Americans. Among them were Shinasi Rama, the spokesperson of the recently set-up *Provisional Government of Kosova* in the United States, and a former

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trafficking organizations composed of ethnic Albanians from Serbia’s Kosovo Province were considered to be second only to Turkish groups as the predominant heroin smugglers along the Balkan route. (...) There is increasing evidence that ethnic criminals from the Balkans are engaged in criminal activities in the United States and some of that activity involves theft of licit pharmaceutical products for illicit street distribution”. The full report, however, is no longer available online on the website of the DEA. Abstracts may be found on Serb websites. See, for instance, the site of the Serb Unity Congress: <http://www.suc.org/politics/kosovo/html/NNICC-report96.html>. Let us note, however, that no reference to the Albanian mafia is made in the September 1999 DEA Report on “Drug Trafficking in the United States” (<http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/99024/99024.html>), nor in the September 2001 version of the report (<http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/intel/01020/index.html>).

<sup>54</sup> One of the early cases evidenced in police records dates back to 1985 when Skender Fici, an Albanian who ran the Theresa Worldwide Staten Island travel agency was indicted on federal charges of drug dealing and racketeering and received a eight-year prison sentence after helping the police to dismantle a drug ring in New York that imported heroin from Turkey. S. Fici has started shipping drugs in 1979. At that time, the share of the “Balkan route” in US heroin supply was estimated between 25% and 40% by the Drug Enforcement Agency. For further details, see DeStefano, Anthony, “Giuliani and Kosovo-Albanian Drug Mafia in NYC”, *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 1985.

<sup>55</sup> See Judah, Tim, “Kosovo: Peace Now”, *The New York Review of Books*, August 12, 1999.

<sup>56</sup> Among others, see “US volunteers join Kosova rebels”, *BBC*, April 21, 1999 on Internet at: <http://www.alb-net.com/kcc/042199e.htm#6> (Kosova Crisis Center). “A huge influx of volunteers is flooding into Albania to join the Kosova Liberation Army in its fight against Serb forces. Ethnic Albanians are leaving their jobs across Europe and the United States to return to their homeland”, it is claimed. Yet no accurate data is being provided though.

member of the advisory team to the Albanian delegation in Rambouillet, and Dino Asanaj, a Kosovar who had made a career in the construction business and was the head of the Kosova Office. In selecting potential candidates, the UCK supporters were helped by Gani Shehu, a former Yugoslav Army officer and a member of the UCK earlier brought to the US to receive treatment after a wound in Kosovo. About 400 Albanians gathered on April 12, 1999 outside an Albanian-run hotel, the Royal Regency Hotel in Yonkers. The NY and US press at large had been warned about the event. Several reporters came to interview the young and often second-generation teenagers, most of whom had never even visited their parents' home country and spoke only broken-home Albanian, as they got ready to depart for training camps in northern Albania<sup>57</sup>. Few are those who had prior military experience either in the US military or in the Yugoslav army.

In practice, though, the number of recruits that actually left for the Balkans seems to have been somewhat inferior to the 400 originally announced, in part because some of the volunteers had to be turned for medical reasons or for lack of proper US legal documents. Journalist Bert Roughton provides a conservative estimate of "approximately 80 Americans, three of whom are women" in a May 1999 feature article on the Albanian-Americans trained at a camp situated seven miles away from the town of Burrel, north of Albania<sup>58</sup>. At the same date, reporter Jonathan Landay mentions "several hundred" recruits. By all accounts, however, in mid-May, the Atlantic Brigade was still receiving instruction close to the Albanian-Yugoslav border<sup>59</sup>. Some local observers suspected that the UCK, already plagued by internal divisions and weak-command, was reluctant to let the US recruits face a certain death in war-torn Kosovo. Three weeks later, S.Milošević was to bow to the NATO air-campaign. Participation in combat in Kosovo was thus rather limited for the soldiers who had come all the way from the United States<sup>60</sup>. And so was the number of casualties. Rrustem Ibraj thought in April 2001 that one recruit had died<sup>61</sup>. A few victims were to be later identified<sup>62</sup>. Six soldiers was said to have been wounded

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Dobnik, Vera, "Albanian-Americans Volunteer to Fight", *The Boston Globe*, April 12, 1999; Dobnik, Vera, "Albanian Nationals in the US join fight against Serbs. Outfitted in store-bought uniforms; recruits leave to join Kosovo Struggle", *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 12, 1999; Gonzalez, David, "Albanians Aim to Refresh Tree of Liberty", *The New York Times*, April 14, 1999; Rupert, James, "Albanians Worldwide Answer Rebels' Call; thousands Volunteer to Join the Fight", *Washington Post*, May 10, 1999.

<sup>58</sup> See Roughton, Bert, "Americans Joining Kosovo Rebels. From urban neighborhood in New York, Detroit and Chicago, sympathizers are being drawn back to fight for a homeland they never knew", *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, May 18, 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Landay, Jonathan, "From USA to a KLA boot camp", *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 18, 1999.

<sup>60</sup> For further details on the Brigade's military achievements, see Smith, Jeffrey et Finn, Peter, "Yankee Rebels Seize Kosovo Watering Hole; Bar at Grand Hotel, a Serbian Outpost, is Liberated by KLA's Atlantic Brigade", *Washington Post*, June 28, 1999.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Rrustem Ibraj, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> On March 3, 2002, the bodies of three brothers from Long Island who had fought in the Atlantic Brigade were repatriated in the US. They were said to have been "executed" by Serb forces. See "Albanian-

during one of the most notable UCK operations in which the Brigade participated – “operation Arrow” started on May 20, that aimed to open a corridor around Mount Pashtrik, a remote region on the border of Southwest Kosovo, and seize both banks of the Beli Drin (Drini i Bardh)<sup>63</sup>. In fact, the Atlantic Brigade was essentially important as a living proof to the will and the solidarity that members of the Albanian diaspora were able to feel despite living on the other side of the Ocean. Community mobilization in favor of the refugees from Kosovo offered one more illustration of this strong commitment to the homeland.

## **2. The Albanian American response to the NATO airstrikes and the refugee crisis in Kosovo:**

The history that led to the UCK-uprising and the NATO air campaign is well known. The roots behind the Albanian organization lay in a tiny Enverist opposition set up in Switzerland at the beginning of the 1980s<sup>64</sup>. Although some UCK structures emerged as early as 1993, operations on the field – murders of Serbian police and of Albanians suspected of “collaboration” with Serb authorities – did not become significant until 1996. It took one more year – and the rampage of arms depots in Albania following the collapse of the so-called “pyramids” and a deep state crisis - before uniformed and masked UCK fighters made their first public appearance at a funeral on November 17, 1997. At that time, though, they remained poorly equipped and small in numbers. A qualitative shift was to occur after the Serb police murdered Adem Jashari and most of his extended family (fifty-eight people) in Donji Prekaz, a Drenica village on March 4, 1998.

News of Serb repression spurred quick reaction on the part of the Clinton administration. On March 9 and March 25, the six-nation Contact group - comprising the United States, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia - was convened to discuss the deteriorating situation in Kosovo. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, a proponent of a strong warning to Milosevic, emphasized

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Freedom Fighters Memorialized”, *The Bronx Times*, March 14, 2002, [http://www.bxtimes.com/news/2002/0314/Boroughwide\\_News/040.html](http://www.bxtimes.com/news/2002/0314/Boroughwide_News/040.html).

<sup>63</sup> These figures were given by general Wesley Clark at Royal Regency Hotel in Yonkers – the place where the initial gathering of the Brigade to be had taken place - when he was invited to present his book *Waging Modern War*. For further details on the offensive and the air support it received from NATO, see Hajzari, Isuf, “Gen. Wesley Clark Receives a Hero’s Welcome in New York”, July 2, 2001 on the Web at: <http://www.alb-net.com/pipermail/albsa-info/2001-August/002092.html>

<sup>64</sup> On the origins on the UCK, see Judah, Tim, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000; Marc Weller, *The Crisis in Kosovo 1989-99: From the Dissolution of Yugoslavia to Rambouillet and the Outbreak of Hostilities*, Cambridge: International Documents and Analysis Publishing, 2000; Garton Ash, Timothy, “Le Kosovo en valait-il la peine?”, *Le débat*, mars-avril 2001.

how serious the issue might become<sup>65</sup>. In London, renewed sanctions against Yugoslavia were envisioned. Meanwhile, in the House, Rep. Benjamin Gilman, Rep. Eliot Engel, along with Reps. Sue Kelly (R-NY) and Jim Moran (D-VA), co-authored a resolution (H.Con.Res. 235) “calling for new sanctions against Yugoslavia, United Nations Security Council consideration of the Kosova crisis, and a strengthened U.S. and international presence in Kosova” – which was finally passed by the House on March 28, 1998 (406 vs. 1 votes)<sup>66</sup>. Besides, twenty-two congressmen wrote a letter to President Clinton in which they stated that: “We are gratified to hear the recent statements made by Madeleine Albright that ‘we are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosova what they can no longer get away with in Bosnia’. (...) However, we believe that such declarations must be backed up with concrete actions”<sup>67</sup>. On March 31, 1998, the United Nations passed resolution 1160, imposing a new arms embargo on Yugoslavia<sup>68</sup>.

Around the same period, the UCK-leadership in the Swiss diaspora – which did not originally intend to engage in a large-scale offensive until 1999 – decided to use the unexpected window of opportunity to start progressing from its bases in northern Albania into Kosovo where bits of territories were “freed”. Its advance was made possible by the weaving response of Belgrade. After several months of hesitation, Milosevic’s regime was to opt for a full-blown repression in July 1998. Yet Kosovar civilians were to be the first targets of the Summer 1998 counterinsurgency operations, as the guerilla combattants preferred to withdraw rather than suffer a certain defeat. The Serb special forces burned the villages they “cleaned” of rebel presence. By October 1998, about 200,000 Albanians have been forced to abandon their homes and the UCK structures were on the verge of collapse. With the support of Madeleine Albright

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<sup>65</sup>Emphazing once again the importance of the Bosnia precedent in her assessment of the Kosovo crisis, Secretary of state Madeleine Albright stated that: “We have to remember that progress has only come about through sustained pressure. If we want more progress, we have to stick together to maintain that pressure. For if we give President Milosevic even a glimmer of a hint that he has done enough, he will most assuredly do nothing more. If we settle for half-measures, all we will get are half-measures (...)Think of all the peace plans that were advanced during the Bosnian war. How many times did one party or another appear to accept our proposals, only to walk away? We saw then that in the former Yugoslavia, promises mean little until they are implemented with safeguards. Incentives tend to be pocketed; warnings tend not to be believed. Leaders respond not to the distant threat of sanctions, but to the reality of sanctions”. For the full text of the intervention, see “Statement by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the Contact Group Meeting on Kosova in Bonn”, at: <http://www.kosova.com/r980326a.htm>

<sup>66</sup> In the *USIA Electronic Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 1998, the H Con Res 235 is described as calling “for a range of steps to resolve the ethnic conflict in Kosovo, including sanctions against the government of Serbia and Montenegro, intensification of efforts by the International Contact Group in support of a resolution of the conflict, and unspecified measures “to promote human rights and democratic government throughout Serbia and Montenegro”. Yet, as a “Sense of the Congress” resolution, it does have the force of law.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in “Engel Calls for No-fly-zone in Kosova; Requests Meeting with President Clinton”, <http://www.bosnet.org/archive/bosnet.w3archive/9803/msg00149.html>

<sup>68</sup> For further details on resolution 1160, see note 71.

and thanks for the mediating role of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the Clinton administration then brokered a cease-fire and decided to deploy an international observer mission. NATO leaders had threatened the use of airstrikes in case the Serb leader refused to withdraw some of its special security forces. The UCK used this pause to reinvestigate part of the territory it had abandoned in the Fall and led a series of small-scale attacks against Serb security forces.

Against this background, the January 15, 1999 Raçak massacre of about forty-five peasant farmers came a watershed. To most international observers it signaled that the Serb regime would not change its repressive course. On January 19, a new peace plan was discussed by Secretary of state, Madeline Albright and President Clinton's top aides, while NATO airstrikes were once again threatened. A last ditch attempt at international mediation started in Rambouillet on February 6, 1999. Initially sceptical, the Albanian delegation finally approved a three-year-temporary deal that included deployment of international forces in Kosovo and did not explicitly rule out independence during the March-second round of talks. But the Serb delegation did not. On March 24, NATO finally launched operation *Allied Force*. The decision was to convince Serb leaders to move ahead with ethnically cleansing Kosovo. Within a matter of days, 800,000 Albanians were driven from their homes and forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, Macedonia and Albania in the first place. Within Kosovo itself, about 500,000 persons were internally displaced.

None of the Allied forces had anticipated a refugee crisis on such a large scale. Initially, the US hesitated on the best response. The Clinton administration was reluctant to accept large numbers of refugees for fear it might signal to the Serbs acceptance of the "ethnic cleansing" underway, but at the same time it was willing to relieve pressure on the improvised refugee camps in Macedonia. US officials first came up with a plan that envisioned housing Kosovar refugees at the US Guantanamo Bay military base in Cuba. The move was heavily criticized by several congressmen as well as think tanks and human rights organizations - being confined in a prison-like camp was definitely not the best option<sup>69</sup>. Several technical difficulties also argued against the original proposal: The US administration had a hard time finding Albanian-speakers ready to abandon their work and family for an unknown number of weeks to settle in Cuba and assist with the refugees.

On April 21, 1999, a decision was finally made to resettle 20,000 Kosovars in five large cities with a strong Albanian population – New York, Boston, Detroit, Chicago and Newark, NJ. Priority went to refugees with relatives in the

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<sup>69</sup> This protest is alluded to in Kranish, Michael and Mary Leonard, "State may be desitnation for refugees. Policuy aims to unite ethnic Albanian with Americans relatives", *The Boston Globe*, April 22, 1999.

United States, followed by the “vulnerable” – the mothers and the sick -<sup>70</sup>. Being granted refugee status under the emergency consultation provision (INA, §207(b))<sup>71</sup>, the Albanians coming from Macedonian camps received a social security number and were thus allowed to work in the U.S. They were also eligible to food stamps and welfare benefits. And although they were expected to return to the Albanian province once it was safe, their status allowed them to apply for permanent residence after one year in the United States. Still, US official policy stressed that those willing to go home would be encouraged to do so, including financially – with transportation being arranged by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)<sup>72</sup>. In practice, the first wave of refugees reached Fort Dix, New Jersey where a temporary Refugee Processing Center had been set up on May 5, 1999<sup>73</sup>. All in all, in FY 1999 only 15,825 out of the 20,000 anticipated Kosovo-Albanians were admitted in the US, before being resettled across the nation with the help of US federal agencies and Albanian-American humanitarian associations<sup>74</sup>.

**Table - Refugee Admission Ceilings 1996-2000**

Region	FY 1996	FY 1997	FY 1998	FY 1999	FY 2000
Africa	7,000	7,000	7,000	12,000	18,000
East Asia	25,000	10,000	14,000	9,000	8,000

<sup>70</sup> By comparison, Switzerland accepted about 50,000 and Germany 14,614 refugees. Quoted in Cota, Lulzim, “Albania Nixes Forces Return of Refugees”, May 21, 2000, United Press International.

<sup>71</sup> Refugee resettlement is legally regulated by the 1980 Refugee Act, which incorporated into American law the international definition of a refugee contained in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), amended by the Refugee Act of 1980, includes a provision for emergency situations. Before being used for the Kosovo-Albanians in 1999, this provision had been applied three times - in 1980 by President Carter for 3,500 refugees from Cuba; in 1988 by President Reagan for 15,000 refugees from Eastern Europe and in 1989 by President Bush for an additional 22,500 refugees, mostly from the USSR.

<sup>72</sup> The refugees arrived in the United States by July 31, 1999 –that is, 11,200 people – were eligible for a special US return home program, in case they accepted to leave by May 1, 2000. By December 3, 1999, 2,748 (25%) had made use of that opportunity to return to postwar Kosovo. Figures quoted in 98-668: Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy: Facts and Issues at :

<http://cnie.org/NLE/CRSreports/Population/pop-6.cfm>

<sup>73</sup> Out of this number, 4,050 went through Fort Dix. The refugee center of the camp was closed on July 16, 2001.

<sup>74</sup> About \$100 million were provided for resettling Kosovar refugees in the United States (plus additional funds for transporting them there). See Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act - “Making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1999, and for other purposes”. H.R.1141 sponsored by Rep. Young, Became Public Law No: 106-31 on May 21, 1999.

Europe (total)	45,000	48,000 (18,000)	51,000 (25,000)	61,000 (25,000)	47,000 (17,000)
-Former Yugoslavia					
-NIS/Baltic		(30,000)	(26,000)	(23,000)	(20,000)
-Kosovar Albanians				(13,000)	(10,000)
Latin America/Caribbean	6,000	4,000	4,000	3,000	3,000
Near East/Asia	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	8,000
Unallocated	3,000	5,000	3,000	2,000	6,000
Total ceilings	90,000	78,000	83,000	91,000	90,000
Actual Admissions	75,682	70,085	77,056	85,006	NA

*Source:* 98-668: Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy: Facts and Issues at : <http://cnie.org/NLE/CRSreports/Population/pop-6.cfm>

The initial reactions of the Albanian-Americans to news about the bombings were understandably positive<sup>75</sup>. Yet as information kept on arriving about relatives who had disappeared, the need for some form of collective action was felt. Albanian-American community leaders, however, were originally critical of the US relocation program. They argued that it was tantamount to supporting Milosevic's policies and to turning a blind eye to the ill-treatment of the refugees by the Macedonian government. Also Albanian-Americans worried that the refugees might not be able to return to their destroyed home soon<sup>76</sup>. But, once the influx of refugees started, a flurry of initiatives was deployed that relied on family networks as well as church infrastructures. Internet sites were set up to help locate the refugees across Europe and the US<sup>77</sup>. A national Kosovo refugee

<sup>75</sup> Several media features have reported on the Albanian American reactions to the bombing. See among others, Grunwald, Michael, "Praying for Safety of Military; Albanian Americans Grateful for Strikes", *Washington Post*, March 26, 1999.

<sup>76</sup> For further details, see Harden, Blaine, "Crisis in the Balkans. Immigrants. Kosovars relocated to US would be Eligible to remain", *The New York Times*, April 23, 1999.

<sup>77</sup> One of them was [www.web-depot.com-kosovo](http://www.web-depot.com-kosovo). It was set up by a Cambridge-based Albanian computer engineer. For further information, see Hayward, Ed, "Kosovo crisis – Cambridge-Web site creator hopes to

hotline was established (800-727-4420). The *Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America* created a Kosovo Relief Fund and offered clothes, aid in finding housing, as well as psychological support. It worked alongside the *New England Albanian Relief Organization* (NEARO) in sending food, medicine and clothing to the Kosovar refugees in the Albania camps. Given their more limited strength, the Albanian Catholics turned to larger Church structures with more experience at handling immigration and the federal government. Similar initiatives were undertaken by the Albanian Islamic Centers across the country.

Interestingly enough, in the US media, the stress was laid on the fact that, although most of the refugees were Muslim, religion was not considered a problem by the Albanian Orthodox and Catholic charity organizations<sup>78</sup>. Attempts at downplaying the impact of religion stemmed both from Albanian community leaders – the purpose was to show will and unity – and from the American press. Very few are the articles that underlined the role played by Islamic solidarity in providing help for the refugees. Although the mostly-Kosovar-based Muslim structures were no less active in creating Kosovo-related funds, their part was hardly ever mentioned. A similar display of unity was emphasized during the numerous rallies and marches organized in Washington.

### **3.Supporting US intervention: Advocacy in action and the limits of the Albanian-American lobby**

Beside establishing the Atlantic Brigade and providing assistance to the refugees, the Albanian-American community set out to get mobilized in two other ways during the Spring 1999 NATO air campaign. The first realm of activity had to do with publicly voicing support for the bombardments and with pressing the Congress and the US administration to arm the UCK as well as send troops on the ground during rallies. The second, with intensifying direct contacts with State department officials.

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reunite Kosovo Kin”, *The Boston Herald*, April 13, 1999. Created as an international forum for Albanian students and professionals, <http://www.alb-net.com> also provided information about the conflict as well as the refugee location.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, O’Brien, Ellen, “Mas. Albanians Back Intervention. Crisis in Kosovo. Serbs go on the Attack. Local Reaction”, *The Boston Globe*, March, 28, 1999; Ellement, John, “Kosovo Refugees Coming to Massachusetts. Catholic Charities to Help with Effort”, *The Boston Globe*, April 24, 1999; Davis, William, “The Albanian Next door. Longtime Balkan Community in South Boston finds itself in Spotlight with Kosovo Crisis”, *The Boston Globe*, May 10, 1999.



Demonstrations started shortly after the beginnings of the airstrikes<sup>79</sup>. They were typically coordinated either by the Albanian American Civic League (AACL) or by the National Albanian American Council (NAAC). Both endeavored to guarantee participation of Congressmen supportive of the Kosovo intervention, Rep. E. Engel (D-NY), Rep. T. Lantos (D-Calif.), Sen. J. Lieberman (D-Conn.), Sen. M. McConnell (R-KY)<sup>80</sup>, former Sen. Bob Dole and Rep. J. Traficant (D-Ohio), in the first place. While NAAC did not publicly raise the issue of independence for Kosovo, the slogan figured high on the AAAC agenda during the marches in Washington, in New York and in other US cities with significant Albanian population. For both organizations, however, timing was important. The demonstrations were supposed to coincide with discussions of major resolutions in the House of representatives and in the Senate. The first of these events took place on March 30. A 3,000 Albanian-American protest was organized by the AAAC outside the Yugoslav mission at 67<sup>th</sup> street and Fifth Avenue, after a march from the United Nations. While welcoming the bombings, the demonstrators called for ground troops to support the airstrikes. Two days later, on April 1, 1999, a rally in Chicago brought together about 500 Albanian Americans who also insisted on the need to deploy ground troops in case Milošević refused to yield<sup>81</sup>. These were followed by similar protests in Detroit, Los Angeles and Washington – typically across the White house, in Lafayette Park.

As the weeks went by and reports of continued “ethnic cleansing” kept flowing with little hope that the Serb authorities might concede defeat, the Congress started feeling uneasy about the White House’s strategy. Some critics denounced the risk of a war of attrition. While the US public opinion remained on average supportive of the NATO-led operation<sup>82</sup>, anti-war activists mustered

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<sup>79</sup> Some protests were also organized by the Serb American community in Washington and across the country, notably in Michigan and in California. But they were on average more modest in size and did not arouse much attention on the part of the US media. Also the Serbian American community was slower in getting organized to oppose the bombings. One of the driving forces behind the mobilization was the International Action Center, a peace-NGO with a strong pro-Serb bent. One of the largest “anti-war” protests took place at the pentagon on June 5, 1999. It was attended by about 30,000 people. For further information, see: <http://www.truthinmedia.org/Kosovo/War/day74.html>. For a list of the peace-protests, see: <http://www.iacenter.org/natotrig.htm>

<sup>80</sup> On April 21, 1999, Senators McConnell and Lieberman cosponsored a bill – S.846 - that would have authorized the President to give grants of up to \$ 25 millions to the “interim government of Kosova” “to be used for training and support for the self-defense forces” to protect the civilian population in Kosovo “against armed aggression”. The bill proposal was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations, but never reached vote. It came a week after Rep. Engel had introduced a similar text in the House – H.R. 1408 – which did not fare better.

<sup>81</sup> See Jackson, Brian, “500 attend Rally, call for ground troops”, *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 1, 1999.

<sup>82</sup> A survey of 1,014 adult Americans conducted between April 30 and May 2, showed that 58% favored “the United States being a part of NATO air and missile attacks against Serbian military targets in Yugoslavia”. Only 36% of the interviewees opposed the bombings. A majority (67%) also supported the idea of sending US ground troops as part of a peacekeeping operation in the event of a peace agreement. When it came to determining who should “have final authority for deciding whether the United States should continue the current airstrikes in Yugoslavia – The Congress or President Clinton”, however, most

strength. On April 27, for instance, the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based civil and human rights group, declared that the “war in Kosova is flatly illegal” and “violates both the U.S. Constitution and U.N. Charter” since it was being waged without explicit congressional consent<sup>83</sup>. On Capitol Hill, those who wished to reascertain the prerogatives of Congress in foreign policy could not but empathize with similar statements. Meanwhile seventeen Congressmen (15 Republicans and 2 Democrats) filed a suit against President Clinton for violating the 1973 War Powers Act which requires Congress to declare war or otherwise authorize military action.

Dissatisfaction was evidenced during a series of votes in the House of Representatives in the last week of April that failed to either declare war or support explicitly the bombardments (see Table - The US Congress and the NATO bombings in Kosovo: major resolutions introduced between January and June 1999 – esp. the failed votes on resolutions HJ RES. 44 and S.CON. RES. 21). Hoping to influence the outcome of the vote, the AACL led a demonstration on April 28 that followed a by-then ritual trajectory from the Capitol to the White house. It was attended by former US representative Joseph DioGuardi (D-N.Y.), Rep. Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) with about 1,000 marchers - some brought by buses from New Jersey and New York<sup>84</sup>. A few days later, however, a proposed resolution by Sen. J. McCain that aimed to give President Clinton “all means necessary” to conduct and win the war ((S.J. Res. 20 - A joint resolution concerning the deployment of the United States Armed Forces to the Kosovo region in Yugoslavia) was watered down in Senate.

Meanwhile the Albanian diaspora was trying to multiply meetings with National Security Council Advisor Sandy Berger, Deputy National Security Advisor Jim Steinberg, senior state department officials and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff<sup>85</sup>. But, seen from Washington, Albanian messages appeared at times scattered and confusing. More importantly, until March 1999, the Clinton administration did not always know to whom to turn in order to locate *the* actual representatives of the Albanian-American community in the country and, especially, people with strong connections within the UCK. Its original reluctance towards the rebel group had left some stigma. US officials started feeling the need to make up for its lack of contact with the Army when the Albanian delegation in Rambouillet unexpectedly refused to sign the peace plan

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respondents privileged the first option (60% vs. 34%). For further details, see Holland, Keating, “Poll: Congress Should Have Authority over US Involvement in Kosovo”, *CNN*, May 3, 1999.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Non-Violent Activists, <http://www.warresisters.org/nva0599-4.htm>

<sup>84</sup> See See Wheeler, Linda, “Marchers Strut Support for Independent kosovo”, *The Wahington Post*, April 28, 1999.

<sup>85</sup> One such meeting, for example, took place at the White House on March 31, with representatives from NAAC and was attended by President Clinton. For further details, see <http://www.naac.org/pr/1999/04-01-99.html>

during the first round of talks. While negotiations were going into a short period of recess, former Senator Robert Dole, State Department official, Jim O'Brien, and a general from the Joint Chiefs of Staff were sent to meet with the Albanians and convince them to reconsider their views. At the same time, Deputy National Security Advisor, Jim Steinberg, was meeting with the eight-member board of the National Albanian American Council (NAAC) and asking them to use all their influence over the guerilla leadership<sup>86</sup>. Thus doing, the US contributed to enhancing the relative influence and prestige of an organization that was still very young and not fully structured at that time. In addition, the United States invited the UCK leaders to visit Washington and sought ways of establishing more regular relations with a still little-known group<sup>87</sup>.

The search for immediate ties was significantly eased following the creation of the *Provisional government of Kosova – Delegation to the United States*<sup>88</sup>. The Office, which employed eight people and was financed by Homeland Calling, enjoyed official support from Hashim Tahçi and some of his close followers, chief among them, Ramush Haradinaj, who, like the head of the representation, Dino Asanaj, came from Pe•/Peja. From April onwards, it was to endeavor to centralize the lobbying efforts of the Albanian community in Washington by engaging in a variety of activities – media contacts, exchanges of views with American think tanks, interaction with other diasporas (notably the Muslim diaspora from Bosnia), talks with US officials, etc. These efforts, however, were not always successful as some forms of rivalry persisted with older organizations like the AACL, *Vatra* or even NAAC.

On the basis of the above discussion, how can one assess the influence of the Albanian American community over the handling of the Kosovo crisis by the Clinton administration? The initial reaction of the US government to news about the emergence of the UCK – it is well known - was rather negative. In February 1998, Ambassador Robert Gelbard, then Special Representative of the President and the Secretary of State for Implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords, had described the guerilla as "terrorists", showing the Clinton Administration's initial reservations towards the Albanian rebels<sup>89</sup>. Christopher

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<sup>86</sup> This meeting was followed by a trip to Rambouillet by some NAAC members to meet with the Albanian Delegation. On this visit, see <http://www.naac.org/nl/spring99.html#b>

<sup>87</sup> For further details, see Perlez, Jane, "U.S. Starts Push to Salvage Kosovo Talks", *New York Times*, March 5, 1999.

<sup>88</sup> The Provisional Government of Kosova - Delegation to the United States, was located on 10 East 33rd, St. (5th Ave), 7th floor, New York, NY 10016. It officially closed down on December 31, 1999.

<sup>89</sup> On February 23, 1998, special representative Robert Gelbard had declared at a press briefing held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Belgrade, that "we are deeply upset and strongly condemn the unacceptable violence caused by the terrorist acts committed by terrorist groups in Kosovo, particularly by the "KLA" - the Kosovo Liberation Army. That is a terrorist group beyond any doubt. I will accept no excuses. Having worked on the problem of terrorist activity, I know very well how to recognise a terrorist group, to define it without any rhetorics, sticking to facts only. The activity of such groups is self-explanatory". Quoted in BETA, February 23, 1998, Belgrade.

Hill, US Ambassador to Macedonia and one of the architects of the Rambouillet agreement, also shared this analysis. In addition, a US State Department report issued in January 1999 (based on data from the US Observer Mission) stated that “the KLA harass or kidnap anyone who comes to the police, ... KLA representatives had threatened to kill villagers and burn their homes if they did not join the KLA”<sup>90</sup>. The change of mood was to be rather slow and strongly aided by Serbia’s unrelenting repressive policies and selection of civilian targets. How much can be attributed to the Albanian-American diaspora?

When addressing this question, one needs to bear in mind several facts. First, the definition of the US policy line towards the Serb province always included a variety internal and external factors that went much beyond questions of Albanian human rights in Kosovo. To some extent, it may even be argued that these were second to other considerations – like the future of the US leadership in the post-cold war world, the evolution of transatlantic relations and the definition of US national interests. The fear that the crisis might spill over and turn into a major destabilizing factor in South East Europe was also prominent in shaping the Clinton administration’s course towards Kosovo. Of particular salience was the wish to avoid repeating the mistakes made in Bosnia where failure to use force early enough had led to a major humanitarian disaster. For this latter reason, Kosovo stood high on Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright’s personal agenda, and there is little doubt that she was one of the major driving forces behind the adoption of a higher profile by the US administration. Domestic concerns were not foreign either to Clinton’s ultimate choice to resort to force. Obsessed with opinion polls, the US President also needed to divert attention from the Monica Lewinski affair and to bolster his image as effective leader. In brief, there is no way the Albanian diaspora might have “convinced” the US government to intervene in Kosovo were it not for the intertwining of these various motives.

Where the Albanian American diaspora might have made a difference, however, is in Congress. As suggested earlier, Joe DioGuardi’s AACL was instrumental in bringing the attention of the legislative branch to developments in Kosovo. As a time when the Congress was inclined to demonstrate its say in foreign affairs, this sensibilization to Albanian-related issues did have an impact. But this was long before the 1999 bombardments. And even then, several nuances need to be introduced. In the first place, the role of the so-called “Albanian lobby” needs to be ascertained against the background of other ethnic-based mobilizations – notably that of the Greek American diaspora or the Serb diaspora. In his assessment of US policymaking towards Yugoslavia between

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in KDOM Daily Report, released by the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs, Office of South Central European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC, December 21, 1998; Compiled by EUR/SCE (202-647-4850) from daily reports of the U.S. element of the Kosovo diplomatic Observer Mission, December 21, 1998.

1989 and 1996, former Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmerman, suggests that, despite stronger numbers – nearly one million in the United States, he argues – “Serbian-Americans were not particularly influential (...). The reason was probably that they were divided over whether to support Milošević, who was both a Communist and a nationalist”<sup>91</sup>. Yet a fuller assessment of the contribution of Serb-Americans – and Greek-Americans – to US policies in the Balkans remains to be conducted<sup>92</sup>.

Second, although the presence of renowned congressmen supportive of action in Kosovo did help, it proved insufficient to translate into robust Congress support for the entire duration of the air campaign. Other more salient variables influenced the representatives’ and the senators’ policy preferences. The so-called “Vietnam syndrome” was one of them, although its ultimate effect was complex since it invited contrasted conclusions on whether or how the Kosovo war needed to be conducted. While former Navy pilot, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) concluded from his experience in Vietnam that no war could be waged under severe constraints and therefore favored giving President Clinton free room to maneuver, Sen. Robert Kerrey (B-NE) and Sen. Max Cleland (D-GA) vehemently opposed risking a new Vietnam-like entanglement<sup>93</sup>. More importantly, when, after several weeks of bombings, more and more Congressmen became critical of the Administration’s ill-defined goals, lack of exit strategy and disregard of the regulatory powers of the Congress, the supporters of the “Albanian cause” were unable to reverse the tide. For many a Senator and a Representative, the prestige and the influence of Congress over policymaking were stakes that ranked much higher on the agenda than the tiny Kosovo war-torn province *per se*.

At that moment, though, Albanian demonstrations across the country might have been instrumental in keeping the public aware of the humanitarian and moral issues at stake in what might have otherwise appeared as a far-away

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Zimmerman, Warren, “Yugoslavia: 1989-1996”, In: Azrael, Jeremy R. and Emil A. Payin (eds.), “US. And Russian Policymaking with Respect to the Use of force”, Rand, CF-129-CRES, Santa Monica, California, 1996.

<sup>92</sup> An attempt at providing such an account may be found in Columbus, Frank, “Serbian Americans”, in: Columbus, Frank (dir.), *Kosovo-Serbia : A Just War?*, Commack, NY : Nova Science, 1999. While no Albanian American was ever elected in Congress – Joe DioGuardi is Arbëresh and therefore not always perceived as “Albanian” in the US-based diaspora -, the Serbian community could rely on a Representative (Helen Delich Bentley) and a Senator (George Vinovich). By comparison, the presence of the Croatian diaspora in Washington is also remarkable. Congressmen George Radanovich, Dennis Kucinich, John Kasich are of Croatian descent, as are US Senate candidate Kathy Karpoan, Special assistant to first Lady Hilary Clinton, Capricia Penavic Marshall, CNN headline news sport broadcaster, Jerome Jurenovich, political commentator Mary Matalin...and Legislative Assistant for Arms Control and Foreign Policy to Republican Congressional Leader, Senator Robert Dole, Mirata Beratta. For further details, see “Kasich, Razdanovich, Kucinich, the U.S. Senators of Croatian Origin”, *The Zajednicar*, March 19, 1997.

<sup>93</sup> On references to Vietnam in the Senate’s debate over the 1999 airstrikes, see Mitchell, Allison, “Crisis in the Balkans – Veterans : Vietnam Experience Unites Senators on Everything Except Kosovo”, *The New York Times*, April 23, 1999.

and somewhat obscure conflict. While evidencing the ability of the Albanian American community to remain mobilized, the marches and rallies may thus have helped US decision-makers to convince average American tax-payers that the air campaign needed to be continued until a peaceful settlement was reached. At a time when opinion polls were one of the few indicators the White House might oppose to the growing discontent on the part of Congress, the more vocal the demonstrations of support the better.

For those who would be intent of magnifying the potency of the "Albanian lobby", a consideration at the evolutions undergone by US policies towards Kosovo since the end of the war might have a sobering effect. Even well before the elections of George W. Bush to the Presidency, a reconsideration of the US's foreign policy priorities was in order. One year after the bombings, most refugees have returned home and some kind of peace had been established in Kosovo. In Congress, there was a growing feeling that the US had done their part and that more responsibilities, including financial, should fall onto the EU's shoulders. In May 2000, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted overwhelmingly (23 to 3) to require congressional approval for United States peacekeepers to stay in Kosovo beyond July 2001, showing its concern about an open-ended deployment. US soldiers made up 5,900 of the 37,000 NATO-led peacekeepers. The provision threatening withdrawal of US troops sponsored by Senators Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia) and John Warner (R-Virginia) and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee was narrowly rejected. In March, the House has been at pains to rebuke a similar amendment which would have withheld 25% of the money for Kosovo unless the President certified by July 15 that European countries were living up to their promises to provide reconstruction money for the province.

As the Balkans receded into the background, the stress was more than ever laid on questions of stability. In this context, the idea of independence for Kosovo could not garner much support. With what has become its dominant motto, the Albanian-American community in the United States cannot have the ear of the US Congress. And even among the legislators that had supported the NATO intervention in Kosovo, very few are those who were willing to go as far as to publicly ask for a US stand on the issue. The Fall of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia on October 5, 2000 and the change in administration following the election of President George W. Bush have closed down whatever window of opportunity might have been shortly opened. In addition, a turnover in personnel has also occurred in the House and the Senate that has weakened the circle of Albanian proponents: Joe DioGuardi, who has always failed to be reelected since 1989, is no longer as influential as he used to be and former Senator Bob Dole, who did not get reelected after his 1996 failed presidential bid, is by now less active in politics. More diversified contacts may need to be

established by Albanian Americans and a greater cohesion achieved in order to be able to exert some level influence over the current Bush administration.

Can a evolution in this direction be anticipated? Although there is no wonder that the Albanian Americans have learned a lot in terms of organization, mobilizing and access to US decision-makers over the 78-days of NATO bombings in Yugoslavia, it is too early to determine how much will remain of this experience. On December 31, 1999, the Provisional Government of Kosovo was closed down. Its major animators, Dino Asanaj and Shinasi Rama have since then withdrawn from politics. To some extent, it seems that the influence of the former UCK in the US-based diaspora was shortlived. There are several reasons for this. First, once the war was over, average Albanians Americans aspired to return to their business as usual and, in particular, to help their relatives and families back in Kosovo rebuild their homes and start a new life. The warlike rhetoric of former USK-supporters was no longer appealing. Support for the rebel army did not translate into an automatic endorsement of Hashim Thaçi's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK, Partia demokratike e Kosovës). As for Ramush Haradinaj, the former commander of the Pe•/Peja region and now leader of the Alliance for the future of Kosovo (AAK, Aleanca për ardhmërine e Kosovës), he has turned to Joe DiGuardi and Shirley McCloyes to act as his PR consultants for the US. Yet, in the New York area, the LDK is once again the most visible political actor. Homeland Calling has been transformed into the *Friends of Kosova Protection Force* (Miqte e TMK), whose head remains Shefki Mexhuani, but its resources and influence are now much more limited. Uk Lushi and several other soldiers from the former Atlantic Brigade have decided to set up a veteran organization, but their range of activities is inward-oriented and limited.

This does not mean that memories from the time of the war will go easily. Nor that most Albanian American organizations are likely to face a new identity crisis, but rather that one period is over and new goals need to be set up. Some of them have well understood that time has come for economic reconstruction in the Balkans and that the call of the day will be for greater Western investments in Kosovo and Albania. Likely to be most influential in the future are those that will be able to present themselves as key intermediaries between the United States and their homeland in the development of successful business projects. This seems to be the ambition of 32-year-old senior managing director of Bear Stearns Richard Lukaj, the new head of NAAC.

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