

“IT IS TIME TO TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT KIND OF GOVERNMENT KOSOVA HAS” by Hon. Joseph J. DiGuardi

My first trip to Kosova was in November 1989 to challenge Slobodan Milosevic about the brutal military occupation of Kosova the preceding March and to meet Albanian journalists and human rights activists (Zenun Celaj, Zakariah Canaj, and others) secretly in their homes to report back to our friends in the US Congress—Congressmen Tom Lantos and Ben Gilman and Senator Bob Dole.

I met Dr. Ibrahim Rugova on that trip when he was the head of the “literary association of Kosova” and thought that he could begin a democratic movement in Kosova. The Albanian American Civic League raised funds to bring him and twelve of his academic and civil society colleagues to the United States in April 1990 to testify in a joint US Senate and House hearing about the threat of Slobodan Milosevic and his dictatorial, Communist regime to the democratic aspirations of Kosova, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia. The rest is history.

Looking back at the development of political parties and elections, and the need for a government to manage an overwhelmingly Albanian majority society for all people in Kosova, I see the economic problems and democratic failures today clearer than ever. After so many elections since the NATO war ended in June 1999, and the criminal trial of Slobodan Milosevic in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague in 2002, and even after the US recognition of Kosova’s independence in 2008, Kosova is divided more than ever.

The recent elections confirm once again that Kosova’s government is based mainly on political party patronage and personalities with little transparency. This has prevented a natural evolution to a participatory democracy, a market economy based on real jobs (not on political appointments and patronage), leaving Kosovars dependent on remittances from abroad and

vulnerable to continuing interference by Serbia.

In short, Kosova's economy and future has become a hostage to parties, patronage, and corrupt political personalities. And this has allowed some to get extraordinarily rich with political party connections, while the majority remains relatively poor and dependent on remittances from families abroad, mainly in the United States and Western Europe.

Why are so many politicians in Kosova very well off economically? For one, political parties are run like private clubs, dispensing jobs for votes and party loyalty, not for merit, and they are not promoting the public good for *all* the people of Kosova. Also, there is a gross lack of transparency about how wealth is accumulated in Kosova, and who really owns assets in Kosova and which corrupt politicians have stashed away ill-gotten gains in Swiss or Cyprus banks. This lack of transparency has created a lack of public trust among Kosova's citizens. The quest for political power and wealth by political "leaders" has led to a mafia-type economy where corruption permeates all levels of government, pushing educated people to leave Kosova to work and live elsewhere, legally or illegally.

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