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**The repatriation of Albanians from 1946 to 1963 and their  
integration into the communist society:  
The case of Korça region**

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## Special Issue

**Face Up. Faces from the past. The fight  
for freedom and democracy in Albania  
during the regime of Enver Hoxha**

A cura di / Edited by

Michele Rabà - Gaetano Sabatini



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Special Issue

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## The repatriation of Albanians from 1946 to 1963 and their integration into the communist society: the case of Korça region

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### *Abstract*

The establishment of communism in Albania and country isolation happened after the WWII. When repression of authorities got stronger, there were individuals who repatriated to Albania. According to documents in the Archives, nothing has been written about them. In this paper, are analyzed data obtained from the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on time when these people repatriated, countries they came from, reasons of their return, authorities' behavior and their integration to Albanian society of the time.

### *Keywords*

Repatriation; Communism; Albania; State Security.

### *Riassunto*

L'instaurazione del comunismo in Albania e l'isolamento del paese sono avvenuti subito dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Quando la repressione delle autorità si intensificò, alcune persone furono rimpatriate in Albania. La storiografia albanese ha scritto poco su questo fenomeno. Questo articolo analizza i dati ottenuti negli archivi, circa il momento in cui queste persone sono state rimpatriate, i paesi da cui provenivano, le ragioni del loro ritorno, il comportamento delle autorità e la loro integrazione nella società.

### *Parole chiave*

Rimpatrio; comunismo; Albania; polizia segreta.

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1. Introduction. - 2. Data on repatriates of Korça Region in the years 1946-1963. - 3. Repatriates and state security. - 4. Repatriates integration in communist Albania. - 5. Conclusions. - 6. References. - 7. Curriculum vitae.

### 1. Introduction

Albania, a poor country during its political life, has had high economic and political immigration. The independence of Albanian state in November 1912 created rivalries and political clashes in the country, which resulted in the first political immigrants of independent Albania, while the lack of economic development forced Albanians to leave the country. After 14 months as prime minister, Ismail Qemali left Albania without having the opportunity to return<sup>1</sup>. At the end of the First World War, Esat Pashë Toptani was one of the most powerful people in Albania. He had many political opponents in the country who were gathered to prevent him from returning to his homeland, despite the negotiations that took place between parties. His goal was to return at least as head of government, although his ambition was to be placed as the head of the state (Ikonomi, 2016, p. 507).

The intensification of political war in 1924, especially the events that took place in June-December of that year aggravated the political conflicts and as a result a large number of politicians and civil servants left the country. Initially, in June 1924 Ahmet Zogu left the country with his supporters. A Political Court was established in July. 107 people were convicted; including former members of High Council of Regency, Speaker of Parliament, several former prime ministers headed by Ahmet Zogun, as well as several former ministers, deputies, army and gendarmerie commanders (Austin, 2003, p. 106). After the return of Ahmet Zogu into power in December of that year, hundred Fan Noli's supporters left the country as political emigrants (Historisë, 2020, p. 698).

The invasion of Albania by Italy in April 1939 led to the departure of King Ahmet Zogu and many of his supporters who never returned in Albania. The Second World War and the installation of communist regime created another source of political immigrants. A large number of Albanians, collaborators of Nazi-fascism and anti-communists left the country at the end of the war. Most of them received severe punishments and were undesirable to the new regime.

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<sup>1</sup> From November 27 to December 7, 1912, Ismail Qemali led the Assembly of Vlorë, where Albania's independence was proclaimed. He was elected the first prime minister of Albania. He was in power until January 22, 1914 when he resigned to pave the way for the implementation of the decisions of the Great Powers, regarding the future of Albania. See: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike. Instituti i Historisë. *"Histori e shqiptarëve gjatë shek XX"*. Vëllimi I, (Tiranë: Botimet Albanologjike, 2020).

As soon as they took power, the Albanian communists paid attention to the control of territory and population. In Albania, all those who were considered enemies by the communist party and the new government were arrested. Courts-martial instituted by the National Anti-Fascist Liberation Council sentenced dozens of innocent people to severe punishments, death or long term imprisonment (Butka, 2008, pp. 9-29). In late 1944 and early 1945, was established the People's Defense Division. Based on People's Defense Division was created the Border Force. The Special Border Battalion, placed in Korça, guarded and defended the border from Qafe Thana sector in Pogradec to Ura e Peratit in Përmet. Their task was to control people's movement on the state border of Albania with neighboring countries as well as to interfere with any kind of illegal activity that could be carried out through the state border (Qirici, 2017, pp. 55-56). The strengthening of border control made impossible not only escapes but also legal border crossings.

Parallel to these arrests, were organized operations to catch and eliminate opponents who still lived in Albania. During the years 1945-1947, the anti-communist resistance groups, being fragmented and uncoordinated, were destroyed by the 3rd Communist Corps (Dervishi, 2006, pp. 544-546). While communists' opponents were killed in the mountains or by military courts, their family members were deported to concentration camps, where suffered 45 years of torments (Dervishi, 'Burgjet dhe kampet e Shqipërisë komuniste', 2015 , pp. 7-30). Thus, the only way to escape the communist violence was to flee the country. In the first years of communist power, was possible escape, but with the strengthening of power and border control, escape became very difficult and Albanians found almost impossible to leave the country.

As a result of emigration, in the 19th century after the creation of national Balkan states, several colonies of Albanian immigrants were created in Romania, Bulgaria, and Egypt. At the end of this century and in the first half of the 20th century, Albanians began to immigrate to the USA, Australia, and Argentina and Western Europe countries. The end of World War II found many Albanian immigrants living in these countries. The beginning of the Cold War, the division of the world into two blocs changed the immigration trend, because the irritation of East-West relations also affected people movement. Many of these people left their country because of economic conditions. Their goal was to earn some incomes for their families and then return to their homeland. The establishment of communist regime affected lives of many Albanian immigrants, because it put

them in front of the dilemma of whether to return in Albania or not. A part of them, not having any political activity in Albania, thought to repatriate without knowing that Albania had fundamentally changed. The region of Korça has been one of the regions with large emigration to several developed countries of that time such as: USA, Australia, Argentina, etc. As a border region with two states, this region also had a large number of fugitives who in some cases have been repatriated.

## 2. Data on repatriates of Korça Region in the years 1946-1963

Based on the documents that we have been able to access until now from the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>2</sup>, it appears that the places from which the Albanians were repatriated in the Korça Region are shown on the table below.

Table no.1 Data were obtained from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania. The table and data are processed by the authors.

The places from which Albanians returned during the years 1946-1963									
Australia	USA	Argentina	Greece	Turkey	Yugo- slavia	Cana- da	France	Italy	Belgium
252	80	16	5	5	4	1	1	1	1

The largest number of repatriates is from Australia, United States of America, and Argentina, followed by other countries. It is difficult to determine all the reasons for the repatriation of Albanians from rich countries to Albania at a time when the communist dictatorship was established.

However, documents give us a number of reasons for their return. Many of them were married and had their families in Albania; some others were old and thought of repatriating to spend the rest of their lives in their homeland. However, the number of repatriations is small if we compare it with the number of economic and political immigrants outside Albania during this period<sup>3</sup>. If we refer to the

<sup>2</sup> Arkivi i Ministrisë së Brendshme (hereafter AMB) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs), file no. (117) 200, year 1955. Lists of economic returnees from Western countries.

<sup>3</sup> It is very difficult to determine the number of Albanian immigrants from the independence of Albania until 1944. In the years 1925-1939 Albanian authorities made efforts to register immigrants and equip them with passports. According to data from

sources of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, between the years 1944 to 1963, 693 people escaped from Korça Region<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the table shows that only 12 political immigrants were repatriated in this period.

The number of repatriates from Western European countries is very small. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of Albanian political immigrants settled in these countries after the war. These political emigrants, being the most educated part of the society, understood the Albania situation better, and at the same time they were quite active in denouncing what was happening there. In western countries there was information that Albania was a dictatorship country where political prisoners were subjected to forced labor. In the first years of communism, these convicts were sent to labor camps and their families were interned (Borici, 2021, pp. 121-122). They had started propaganda about what was happening in Albania. In their testimony, the repatriates testify that during their stay in the city of Bari, Italy, when they were returning to Albania, they met some Albanians who advised them not to repatriate because the situation in Albania was quite bad<sup>5</sup>.

Repatriates in Korça Region divided by years during 1946-1963

Year	1946 1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Total	3	76	123	7	0	7	1	0	3	6	31	23	37	24	19	3	3
Economic/ Politic	3	76	123	7	0	7	1	0	3	6	30/1	20/3	33/4	22/2	18/1	3	3
Australia	1	76	120	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	12	5	14	10	5	1	
USA	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	0	1	5	12	12	17	12	12	0	2
Argentina			2	1				0	0	0	5	2	3	0		2	1

Albania in the period 1930-1944, 152,000 albanians emigrated. See Akademia e shkencave të Shqipërisë, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. III, *Periudha e pavarësisë 28 nëntor 1912-1939*, (Tiranë: Toena, 2007), 510-522.

<sup>4</sup> File no. (122) 204, year 1955, *Listat e të arratisurve që kanë vepruar dhe vepronë kundra vendit t'onë fl 1-13*.

<sup>5</sup> File no. (171) 267, year 1957, reports on returnees from Australia.

Repatriates in Korça Region devided by years during 1946-1963																
Others	2			1					2	1	2	4	3	2	1	

Table no 2. Data were obtained from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania. The table and data are processed by the authors.

Through analyzes of table no. 2, we extract quantitative data, i.e. how many Albanians have been repatriated in these years and when they were repatriated. It is noted that most of them exactly 198 returned during the years 1948-1949, from whom 195 Albanian returned from Australia. In the years to come, the number of repatriates from Australia decreased, occurring at lower rates. This may be related to the fact that at the beginning of the 50s Albanian refugees also arrived in Australia.

From the files of some repatriates, we have evidence that they have started to spread propaganda about the difficult political and economic situation in Albania<sup>6</sup>. Repatriations from other countries are in small numbers, including also immigrants who came from USA. For several years, the number of repatriates decreased up to 1954, when there were no more returnees. This is the period when USA and United Kingdom tried to destroy the communist regime of Tirana by sending armed people to Albania. From 1950 to 1956, the number of repatriates is 24.

For several years there were no repatriates from Australia, starting again in 1957 when repatriations restarted. The number of repatriates began to increase in the following years, reaching 30 people in 1957. In the period between 1957-1961, 133 people were repatriated, the largest number of them coming from USA, followed by Australia. This increase in repatriates is related to the amnesty that the Albanian government made in 1956<sup>7</sup>, because there are some repatriates who testify this fact. This data also appears in repatriates testimony given to the security authorities, that many people who were aware of the amnesty had expressed their own will to be repatriated<sup>8</sup>, in some testimonies was mentioned also the fact that

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, *Relacion mbi të riatdhesuarin N.Q nga Vithkuqi*, f. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Decree no. 2205, dated January 5, 1956 (on the amnesty of Albanian citizens who fled abroad).

<sup>8</sup> File 168 (264), year 1957, relations on repatriates from Yugoslavia, report on the question of the repatriate E.P from Katundi Potgorie. File no. (171) 267, year 1957, relations on



many people were not repatriated because of the delays in documentation from Albanian consulates<sup>9</sup>. This is related to the care of the Albanian authorities to have more accurate information about the persons who returned.

Age of repatriates												
Age	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71-75	76-80
Total	7	10	22	51	44	48	55	41	40	24	18	6
Australia	3	9	17	45	39	42	46	24	18	1	5	2
USA	1			1	2	1	7	13	19	21	11	3
Argentina			1	2	2	3	2	2	2		2	
Others	3	1	4	3	1			2	1	2		1

Table no 3. Data were obtained from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania. The table and data are processed by the authors.

Important data obtained from the Ministry of Internal Affairs are those related to the age and profession of repatriates. For study purposes, we have divided these into age groups of 5 years. From data analyses it appears that the returned persons are of different ages, but the age groups differ according to the countries from which they were repatriated and the time when they were repatriated. People repatriated from Australia were the youngest. About 201 people belong to the working age group under 55 years old. This is a secondary clue to the reasons of

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Australian Repatriates, on the repatriated from Australia I.F. Feim from Sinica village of Bilisht district and resident in the city of Korça, floor 1, *ibid*. On the repatriate from Australia S. GJ. Mico from the town of Osoj i Opari, living in the city of Korça.

<sup>9</sup> File no. (171) 267, year 1957, relations on returnees from Australia, report on repatriate from Australia named S.T. Dishnica, from Dishnica village and resident in the city of Korça, f. 3.

their return. Since they returned in the first years after liberation, this can be related to the hope that Albania would be a better opportunity for their lives. On the other hand, the returnees from the USA are older. Most of them are over 65 years old. This data makes us think that their repatriation is related to their age, they return to their homeland to spend the last years of their lives.

From the depositions taken by authorities, the reasons for the return are not clear because they were afraid of the consequences and tried to be discreet. Interesting data that emerge from the documents are also those of the education and professions of repatriates. From the documents we have come to the conclusion that repatriates were mainly: farmers, workers, barbers, drivers and less often traders<sup>10</sup>. Only two of the returnees practiced the teaching profession in Yugoslavia.

### *3. Repatriates and state security<sup>11</sup>*

Albanian historiography of the communist period has not dealt with topics related to the movement of Albanians. Documents about refugees and repatriates could not be used by researchers, as they were state secrets. After the fall of communism, various researchers studied the escape phenomenon of Albanians during the communist regime, while there are still no studies on the repatriation of Albanians during the communist period.

The communist government in Albania was characterized by the obsession of having everything under control. This obsession was not only limited within the country but also abroad. The government of Tirana paid special attention to Albanian immigration. During the first two years after the country liberation, Albanian immigration offices in USA and in other countries supported the communist government. The relations between Albanian government and Albanian associations in the USA were strained after the deterioration of the relations between Albanian and American governments. After that, the Albanian government, through its officials, interfered in the activities of Albanian

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<sup>10</sup> File no. (117) 200, year 1955, lists of economic repatriates from Western countries.

<sup>11</sup> The 1st Branch (part of the 1st Directorate of Security) dealt with the surveillance of two categories of persons, those who entered the country legally, repatriated or as tourists, and those who entered illegally as diversant. (All those Albanians who entered Albania illegally in 1945-1990 with the aim of overthrowing communism, were called diversants).

organizations in the USA, such as Vatra and Shqipëria e Lirë (Free Albania). Through their control, it sought to prevent the entry of political immigrants in them. In order to achieve this goal in some countries, the Albanian government asked for the support of communist parties such as in Australia, Argentina and the USA (Akademia e shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2009, p. 265).

The greatest attention of Albanian government was towards political immigration. The military mission in Bari had accurate data on political emigration to Italy and had forwarded this data to official Tirana (Boriçi, 2021, p. 116). In order to anticipate any kind of possible organization that could endanger the new power in Albania, PKSH (Albanian Communist Party) started its propaganda through exhibitions and documentaries with photographs of the national liberation war. This happened not only in Italy, where were situated most of the political emigrants, but also in America, France, Egypt and Turkey where were sent magazines such as "New Era", "New Albania" etc. (Boriçi, 2021, p. 116).

The Albanian state, based on the fact that its political opponents left the country and could establish their own organizations outside Albania, began to take measures and monitor the political emigrants. At this time, according to a report that the Albanian representative in Rome sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it turns out that there were 1000 Albanians in Italy. Most of them knew the political situation of Albania and only a small number would be repatriated (Padelejmoni, 2021, p. 47). Albanian repatriates were monitored by state security agencies. They were interrogated by the authorities and many of them had files. The group of repatriates was divided into those who had left Albania before November 1944 and these were economic immigrants and those who had fled after the liberation of the country. The second group was the group that caused the most concern to the state security bodies.

When we analyze the archive data of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, we notice that the Albanian authorities were very attentive to the repatriates. By exploring and analyzing the files of these persons, we understand that the security officers were more interested in knowing the location, activity and reasons for repatriation. In relation to repatriates from Australia, the first information required was the personal activity. Then the repatriates were asked about the economic and political activity of the economic immigrants. In the last part, the requested information

was related to the political activity of Albanian political immigrants<sup>12</sup>. Thus, a biography was written for the repatriates, which briefly describes their political activity and their family members<sup>13</sup>. This political profile was very important and the behavior of security bodies and other state authorities depended on it. This methodology was used in all reports written by state security bodies. Contacts or relations of people involved in politics were of special importance to the security officer. These data served the security officer to come to the conclusion that the repatriate may or may not be a contingent of foreign services. The tasks that the security bodies had to carry out against these persons were determined on the basis of this data analysis.

In Albanian neighboring countries, that is Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia, the number of emigrants, especially political ones, was greater, but according to the data, repatriates were less since they knew what was happening in Albania<sup>14</sup>. Repatriates from these countries were under stricter supervision by the authorities. This is evident in the detailed reports and information that have been compiled for these people. Thus the I. D returned from Yugoslavia gave data on the Albanian political immigrants, their names, where they stayed and the work they performed. He also provided data on Albanians who entered Albania illegally<sup>15</sup>.

Even the relatives of the most powerful authorities were asked by security officers. J. Gj, the brother of a senior military officer of the time, was subject to the same procedure. He was questioned and monitored. The security bodies show doubts about his behavior, and every meeting he made in the city of Korça<sup>16</sup>.

The data obtained from Greece repatriates are even more interesting. Taking in consideration the conflicting relations between the two countries during this period, the security officers are not only interested in the political and military activity of the Albanian immigrants but also of the Greek state in order to have detailed information on its activity toward Albania. Fugitive repatriates were more

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<sup>12</sup> File no. (171) 267, year 1957, reports on repatriates from Australia; on the repatriated from Australia I.F. Feimi from Sinicë town of Bilisht district and resident in the city of Korça, ff. 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> File no. (168) 264, year 1957, relations on repatriates from Yugoslavia. Report on the question of E.O from S.Poshtme village of Pogradec district repatriated from Yugoslavia.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, file no. 168, f. III.

<sup>15</sup> File no. (143) 236, year 1956, report on the repatriate from Yugoslavia: on the conversation with the repatriate I.D from Potgorie township, born in 1930.

<sup>16</sup> File no. (201), year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Dardha, Korcë district, J. Gj.

closely monitored and described as traitors, dangerous enemies. Repatriated fugitive D.L. Hoxhalli had a voluminous file with detailed information about his entire family. The file describes in detail the organization of Albanians who fled the country, and were put at the service of Greek authorities. There are data on how the fugitives were organized in Greece, their number, their names, where were they from, where did they train, how did they enter Albania, where did they stay, the tasks they were charged with etc.<sup>17</sup> Even other repatriates who had been in Greece were asked in detail about everything they have seen and known<sup>18</sup>. These people, knowing the severity of Albanian state security bodies, tried to be honest and persuasive in the information they provided.

#### *4. Repatriates integration in communist Albania*

The communist regime installed in Albania was paranoid about any activity that took place outside and inside the country. For this reason, the authorities were very attentive to Albanians who were repatriated. After the war, there were no social programs to help repatriates to integrate into Albanian society of the time. Repatriation and socio-economic integration form an important part of circular migration. Based on the data obtained from returnees' files, at that time did not exist orientation assistance toward employment, housing and other services. Authorities were only interested in the fact that these persons were not a danger to the communist government. The government didn't take care to provide favorable conditions for reintegration of these people in their country; all attention was on their political activity.

Reintegration in Albanian society of the time meant that the repatriated person had to convince the security authorities that he did not constitute a political risk for the Albanian state. For this reason he had to be honest in the information he gave to the authorities. In some cases, repatriates were recruited by state security to be used for their own purposes<sup>19</sup>.

In general, the family's biography is described in reports kept for repatriates, where were given data about their family's activity during the period of kingdom,

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<sup>17</sup> File no. (508) 183, year 1954. Materials and forms in charge of former fugitive, now repatriated D. H.

<sup>18</sup> File no. (167) 263, year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Belgium N.B.

<sup>19</sup> File no. (167) 263, year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Belgium N.B.

during the war and after it. Here was also included the repatriate's activity. All reports were closed with the definition about repatriate, if he is dangerous or not. The family's good behavior gave the repatriate the opportunity to integrate by working in his homeland. In the best cases they were provided some good conditions. J. Gj was the brother of a high communist functionary. In the report elaborated by the security agencies, he is seen as "ours" and is asked to find a job<sup>20</sup>. J. Gj lost these privileges when by decision no. 11, the Supreme Court sentenced his brother for "treason against the motherland, sabotage and propaganda agitation against the people's power", with 20 years in prison, confiscation of property, removal of all titles and decorations he held and loss of electoral rights for 5 years. He did not only lose the support of the government, but he was also imprisoned<sup>21</sup>. This case, as well as others, shows that when the family had problems with the regime, the repatriate was viewed with suspicion and often were considered as an enemy.

For most repatriates it was not the same behavior and kindness. There was no concern about their employment. Even insulting epithets were often used against them, such as *dotard, does not speak fluently, has low education, is a simple worker*, etc.<sup>22</sup>. Based on the reports of state security officers we understand that there was no interest in returnees' housing, employment or other activities. Documents simply records their work or requests they had.

The return to Albania also had the difficulties of the time when this phenomenon occurred. Most of the repatriates, especially the elderly, were not a problem for security officers, but the rest, as we have pointed out, were carefully observed by the state security officers. In Albania, after the establishment of communism, with the passing of years, class struggle became more severe. Subsequently, a part of the repatriates suffered the violence of class struggle. From the results of our research, there are at least 10 people who were imprisoned and interned in communist prisons and camps. At least one of these people died in prison<sup>23</sup>. Even the repatriates did not escape the drama of the entire Albanian society of those years. In many cases they were interrogated, with the suspicion

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<sup>20</sup> File no. (201), year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Dardha, Korçë district, J. Gj.

<sup>21</sup> See the website of the Kujto.al foundation, <<https://kujto.al/>>.

<sup>22</sup> File no (171) 267, year 1957. Reports on repatriates from Australia, pp 3, 5, 9.

<sup>23</sup> A comparison was made of the data obtained from the documents of the Archive of the Ministry of the Interior with the website of the Kujto.al foundation.

that they were sent from the enemy to overthrow the communist government. This indicated the insecurity of communist power and in those cases communist regimes choose terror. Class warfare was the order of the day.

### *5. Conclusions*

The establishment of communism in Albania had great consequences for the lives of Albanians. A regime was forcibly installed in the country and the rights and freedoms of Albanians were limited. Free movement was banned both inside and outside the country. Emigration was cut off, separating Albanians from Western European culture and ideology.

What remains painful even today is the fact that none of those who ran the country for fifty years, did not asked for any public apology. Today's trend is even more frightening, where institutions have been created to bring to attention, not only the crimes committed in the name of power as the most terrible, but also the discomfort of people in complete isolation. Institutions that give partial truths about the period of the communist system, making the situation even more complicated. A nation that forgets is destined to repeat history.

In the ordeal of the sufferings of the regime, those who lived their lives under a strong psychological pressure were undoubtedly the repatriates, most of whom returned to their homeland with an indisputable feeling for the country and relatives, a feeling which turned back living only in fear. Totally justified fear, as they remained exposed all the time to the surveillance and suspicions of the system, turning their life into an unlived life.

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### *7. Curriculum vitae*

Dr. Orjon Ago is a lecturer at Fan S. Noli University, for 14 years of experience in teaching history subjects. He is author of many scientific articles published in international journals and has participated in international conferences. He has been part of some national projects and member of European funding based projects that aimed capacity building and transformations in higher education.

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