

We have to change the mentality

Interview with Qemal Minxhozi when he was retiring as a chargé d'affaires in Copenhagen. April 2005

BA: Obviously, Albania played an important role in the Kosovo-crisis in 1999, when some hundred thousands fled from Kosovo to shelter in Albania. What role is Albania playing in the Balkans now?

Qemal Minxhozi: A role as a mediator since we have good relations to our neighbours, and since these relations are improving.

A few days ago the ministers of culture from 10 Balkan countries visited the Nordic ministers and signed an agreement. The purpose is to establish an organization of cooperation in the Balkans.

When our president, Alfred Moisiu, took initiative to the Tirana Summit in December 2004, together with UNESCO, it was an initiative of the same kind. Albania wants to establish and consolidate good relations between the Balkan countries.

A few weeks ago our foreign minister, Kastriot Islami, was the host of a meeting in Durrës with the Balkan Foreign Ministers from Serbia-Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Croatia. The German Minister, Mr. Fischer, attended the meeting too. The purpose was to discuss our mutual interest in the integration of our countries in the European structures.

BA: For some years Albania has aimed at being a member of NATO and the European Union. Possibly Albania will be a member of NATO in some years, since there is some progress in the cooperation in the military field. What is missing is perhaps more training in military management etc.?

An admission to the European Union will last a little longer, we suppose, maybe many years - since the European Union has expressed herself concerning the big black economy, the level of corruption, the level of organized crime - and the very deep, nearly insurmountable obstacles in the political field.

The Albanians have a very difficult task, it seems. Some of your partners in this process are the Nordic countries. Are we doing what is needed?



Photo: BA, April 2005

Qemal Minxhozi: Yes. You're quite right. We have to oppose many and very deep problems. We have made progress in some fields. Albania today is in another situation now than back in the first part of the 1990'es. In other fields we really are lacking behind. Sometimes we have to take small steps to move forward - we have to combine energy and patience. The only thing we will *not* do is to give up.

The Albanians like and admire the Nordic countries - Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark - very much indeed. As Albania, the Nordic countries are small countries. We are happy to be in a situation when we are at an eye level with our partners. It is much easier to have a real dialogue then. We also admire the good traditions you have in many fields. In the political field. In the field of public discussion. In the field of human rights.

One of our new institutions is the Ombudsman, the People's Advocate - as we put it. Such an institution is very important when you are building up a modern democratic society. The Ombudsman institution is of a great importance to us - but in fact the problems are deeper and therefore we have to dig much deeper. What it is about is to build up a new culture, a new mentality, not only in the very core of Tirana but throughout the country. In the other cities, in the countryside and in the remote areas in the mountains.

Fundamentally, it is a job the Albanians have to do by themselves, but we need to have good and close friends to discuss things with. In principle it is not a question of material support, but some small material support would be highly appreciated - foremost, it is about good and persisting communication and cooperation. The Albanians have to visit other countries, to study other countries to be acquainted with them - and the Albanians would appreciate visits from the Nordic countries. Short visits, tourist visits - but also longer visits and recurrent visits. And - definitely - we have a need of long lasting cooperation on many issues which are important to us in the process of being integrated in Europe and in the European structures.

BA: You said it, mostly it is not about material support. But one of the keystones in any development *is* the economic development, isn't it?

Qemal Minxhozi: Definitely. We are making some progress in that field. In Tirana - and other cities - many buildings are being constructed these years. And we have reached the situation where it is important to re-arrange some thing. Therefore we have started a big project to make a better planning of the development of Tirana. In this area we are happy that the *Henning Larsen Tegnestue* is involved. The *Henning Larsen Tegnestue* is a key partner in building an important building at the central square in Tirana, the Scanderbeg Square. The project is offering some new good aspects to Albanian architecture, I think.

In some fields we are facing some sort of a paradox. We are producing very good vegetables - visit the markets in Albania and look at all the good things from our countryside. Taste them. We can eat the vegetables ourselves, but because of the market situation, the market regulations etc. the export will be very limited. What can we do then? To develop we have to export some thing. Without export to other countries we are too much depending on money which is being sent back from Albanians in Greece, Italy, Germany etc. - and too much depending on material support from the European Union, the World Bank and other countries and organizations.

If we can not develop the economy, many Albanians will find that they have to recur to act in the »black« and - in some instances - sinister economy. We are in a bad trouble here, but we have to address that openly and firmly - first of all in Albania, but also with our good friends in Denmark and in the other Nordic countries.

BA: A few Danish companies have invested in Albania. Possibly, it is because of problems with the infrastructure, imaginations - correct or not - about the »climate«. And thirdly, because the Albanian market is a tiny one. What can be done and what can Albania offer?

Qemal Minxhozi: We have a fundamental need of foreign investment in many fields, and I'm happy to say that some foreign companies have established in Albania. Companies from various fields and various countries, bankers, industries, companies in the service sector etc. But many more investments from abroad are needed to develop the Albanian economy.

We have to admit that we have had - and still have - severe problems influencing the economy. But some of our main roads are being improved by now. We have had a lot of problems in supplying electricity, at least in the quantities which are needed, but also here we are improving. The situation is much more stable than previously.

One of our main assets is what we can offer in the touristic field. We have very good opportunities and I suppose this will be a field for a cooperation with companies from the Nordic countries.

Some Danish travelling agencies are offering travels to Albania now, and that is a very good thing. We will listen carefully to the experiences from these agencies. How can we improve to offer better opportunities to the travellers.

BA: Denmark was supporting Albania from the beginning of the 1990'es to the end of 2003. We gave some transitional support. You think it was a little premature to step out, I suppose?

Qemal Minxhozi: We are happy because of the support. It made a good *impetus* to the development in Albania. I think the Danes acted in a very good way.

Maybe the start was a little widespread, but as the support was concentrated to some specific fields in which the Danes really had something special to offer, we made a lot of successes.

Your support to development of new institutions in the Dibra region was important as well as the support to the development of the Dibra police.

I'm happy to mention your support to the development in the field of the media, in the fields of the human rights and of education of judges - and there are other good examples, for example the development of the schools and education of teachers - and in the field of labour education as well.

But - yes, it was a little premature to step out, since we still are very weak. What I'm aiming at is not that our development should be financed from the Nordic countries or the European Union, we have to do the things by ourselves - but we need to have some close support. In Denmark you're speaking of *'hjælp-til-selvhjælp'* (assistance supplementary to own efforts), that's exactly what I'm speaking about. And how could that be done: By continuing some of the projects the Danes already have been involved in and to make similar projects in other parts of Albania. Secondly by supporting us in projects organized within the framework of the European Union, the Council of Europe, Unesco and some other countries.

BA: You would have liked to stay longer in Denmark, we know, but since you are a candidate in the parliamentary election you have to return to Albania. Where is it you are a candidate?

Qemal Minxhozi: In Burrel in the Mat region - North to Tirana. My family is from Burrel, you know, so if I should be elected, it should be there. Politics in Albania differs from politics in Denmark, it is not the same issues we are discussing. The main issues in Burrel will be economic development under special circumstances. Without economic development the area is in danger of 'thinning'. Some of the young people are moving to bigger cities or even to foreign countries if they have the possibility. Some qualified people are moving to more prosperous places, so we have to change the development. It will be a tough job, I'm sure.

BA: Thank you. We wish you and your family good luck. Hopefully, we will meet again in Denmark as in Albania.

From: »*Two steps forward? Albania and the Albanians*«

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