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Enver Hoxha and the turning points in Albania's history

Albania has rarely been among the front page news in the world press. But the death of Enver Hoxha at the age of 77, on 11 April 1985, was a leading article of every news agency. Hoxha had been at the head of the Party of Labour of Albania since 1941. His activity can be and will be evaluated in several different ways, but it is certain that this uniquely long leadership, that lasted for more than four decades, had an epoch-marking role in the life of this small Balkan country.

Enver Hoxha was born on 16 October 1908 in Gjirokastra /in Southern Albania/, one of the most beautiful small towns in Albania. At that time Albania belonged to the Turkish empire and became independent only four years later, in 1912. The Turkish domination lasting for five centuries turned Albania into the "darkest Europe", citing the words of the outstanding Hungarian balkanologist at the turn of the century, Ferenc Nopcsa. Backward tribal conditions, religious obscurity, extreme poverty, backwardness and oppression of the masses, limitless despotism, corruptness and nationalist arrogance of the ruling circles - i.e. all that is called "Balkan conditions" - were more characteristic of Albania, a state established at the beginning of the 20th century, than of any other country of the peninsula. The most prominent representatives of the Albanian people struggled exactly against this extreme back-

wardness.

The father of Enver Hoxha was a wealthy Moslem tradesman.

/The meaning of the Turkish word "hoxha" is Moslem priest./

Enver Hoxha was given a careful education. He completed his high-school studies in Albania's most famous institution of this kind, the French high-school in Korcha. Since he was an eminent student, he was given the possibility to continue his studies with scholarship from the state in France in 1931. He attended the Montpellier Technical College but before long the revolutionary activity became more important for him. He entered the French Communist Party and published articles critical of the Zogu-regime in l'Humanité. For this reason the Albanian government interrupted the payment of his scholarship. In Paris he met several Albanian professionals who were opponents of the Zogu-regime. In 1936 he worked as the private secretary of the Albanian consul in Brussels but soon he was fired.

In 1936 he returned home and started to work as a French teacher in the high-school of Korcha. After a short while he joined in the work of the local communist group.

After the Italians had occupied Albania in April 1939, he was sent by the Korcha Communist Group to Tirana where, under the cover of a tobacco shop, he was working for the establishment of the Albanian Communist Party and the organization of the struggle against the occupants.

It was partly his merit that the three largest communist groups - of Korcha, Shkodra and Tirana -, which had been competing with each other before, established the Albanian

Communist Party on 8 November 1941. Then he was elected only to be the interim leader of the party. His election was the result of a compromise because the three groups did not want to elect any of the three group leaders.

During the one year and a half following his election he showed excellent organizing capabilities: under his leadership the position of the party was stabilized and it reached great successes in the fight against the fascist occupants and their Albanian proxies. The 33-years old leader distinguished himself among his companions not only with his tall figure and sonorous voice but also with his well-stored mind and his ability to work out compromises. This was appreciated by the first conference of the Albanian Communist Party in March 1943, on which he was elected the General Secretary of the party.

Enver Hoxha played a great role in organizing the dispersed guerilla groups into a unified liberation army. In 1943 he obtained the post of political komissar and in 1944 he became the commander-in-chief of this army.

In May 1944 he was elected the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Antifascist National Liberation Council of Albania, and in October he was elected the Premier of the first interim government which replaced the above organ. On 28 November 1944, the eve of Albania's complete liberation, Hoxha, as a recognized leader of the party, the government and the armed forces, expounded the popular democratic government's program for the construction of a new, socialist Albania.

However, the removal of the antidogmatic Sejfulla Maleshova and several followers in 1946 had already signed the victory of the sectarian and dogmatic line within the Albanian communist movement. This dogmatism was partly consequent upon the condition of the international communist movement of the time but it also had very strong internal sources: the dominance of the backward peasant masses in the country and in the party, the small size and short history of the working class, its low level of class-consciousness and its petty bourgeois attitude, the weak theoretical grounding of the party leadership and the influence of nationalist ideas. These internal factors had a decisive role in the fact that dogmatism remained dominant in Albania even after the death of Stalin, when its harmful effects were more and more overcome in the international movement of workers.

The Yugoslav communists had a significant role in the establishment and structural reinforcement of the Albanian Communist Party. The Yugoslav state and party machinery and the Yugoslav army served as models for the creation of similar Albanian organs. The liberation war, which they fought independently but supporting each other, and the many-sided assistance of Yugoslavia after the war strengthened the pro-Yugoslav feelings in Albania and also those tendencies which were directed toward an Albanian-Yugoslav confederation. There also existed an opposite tendency of anti-Yugoslav feelings resulting from the traditional hostility between Albanians and the Serbs, and it was strengthened by the failure of the attempts to find a solution

to the Kosovo problem, which would be satisfying for both countries.

Two groups emerged within the ACP leadership, in accordance with the above contrasting tendencies: a pro-Yugoslav, internationalist, federalist group and an anti-Yugoslav, nationalist group which adhered to Albania's independence and did not give up the aim of obtaining Kosovo. Between 1941 and 1948 the two groups were struggling with each other with alternating results, but most of the skirmishes ended in the victory of the pro-Yugoslav wing headed by Kochi Dzedze. The excellent manoeuvring capabilities of Enver Hoxha revealed themselves in this period: although he was the leader of the anti-Yugoslav faction, he did not pledge himself definitely to it; when it was necessary, he withdrew and exercised self-criticism, and although he was defeated several times, he always succeeded in retaining the leadership of the party for himself.

In the summer of 1948, armed with the well-known anti-Yugoslav decision of the Information Bureau and with the support of the Soviet Union, he gained a decisive victory over the pro-Yugoslav wing and he was not so tolerant to his defeated adversaries as they had earlier been to him several times.

In November 1948, on the first congress of the Albanian communists, the name of the party was changed into "Party of Labour of Albania". On this congress Enver Hoxha spoke triumphantly of the victories over the internal and external enemies and determined the most important tasks of the construction of socialism. These were: industriali-

zation and electrification of the country, socialist re-organization of the agriculture and cultural revolution.

Between 1949 and 1961 close cooperation with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party was the decisive factor of Albania's political, economic and cultural life. The mechanic imitation of the Soviet methods under circumstances significantly different from the Soviet ones caused similar problems as in the other socialist countries. The strained development of the industry, above all of its sector "A" /roughly the heavy industry/, the forced collectivization of the agriculture, the repressive measures taken against the middle class, even the low-middle class and against all kinds of dissidents, the pullulation of the bureaucracy and the "cult of the personality" caused distortions in the construction of socialism that were compensated only partially by the numerous successes in the material production and in the improvement of the cultural level and the sanitary conditions of the masses. The Albanian leadership tried to overcome the insufficiency of the material and financial resources, the shortage in trained speicalists and other difficulties with the help of the COMECON countries. Albania practically blackmailed the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries with its poverty and relatively modest demands, and with its "status" of the smallest and less developed European socialist country. At last Albania obtained the help it had claimed but then another difficulty emerged: it often could not adequately use the help it had been

given because its forces of production were so poorly developed.

However, it is an undeniable fact that the construction of socialism in a backward and semifeudal country like Albania was only possible through the large-scale assistance of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. It was especially important for Albania to join the organization of economic and /later/ politico-military cooperation of the European socialist countries. This made possible its breaking through the international isolation of the country and relying on the experience and help of the more advanced socialist countries in a more effective and more organized form than earlier.

At the same time it is also undeniable that the helpers, while offering generous internationalist assistance, did not always and in the same degree consider the specific features of the Albanian circumstances and respect the "small-nation pride" of the Albanian people and leaders. The socialist countries were sending a great number of experts who did not always understand the specialities of the Albanian situation. All these contributed to the intensification of the Albanians' traditional xenophobia. The Albanian leaders were able to take advantage of this situation when they decided to break off relations with their allies /first with Yugoslavia, later with the Soviet Union and finally with China/.

The close Soviet-Albanian relations were on the highest level demonstrated by the meetings of Enver Hoxha with

Stalin between 1947 and 1952. He gave a detailed account of these summits in his memoirs published in 1979.

This was the formation period of the "personality cult" around Enver Hoxha, which was the Albanian version of the Stalinist "personality cult" and the similar phenomenon in the other people's democracies. As a consequence of the victory in the liberation war and the successes achieved in the country's recovery, delusions started to circulate and spread about his infallibility and omnipotence. Hoxha himself also had a share in their propagation.

After Stalin's death the "personality cult" around Enver Hoxha was also restrained for a short time: in 1954 he gave up some of his posts and in 1956, on the third congress of the Albanian Labour Party, he had to criticize himself the symptoms of the "personality cult", which also took root in Albania. But after the repudiation of the reform ideas of the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party, the system of the "personality cult" around Enver Hoxha unlimi- tedly prevailed again.

After Stalin's death a struggle started also within the leadership of the Albanian Labour Party concerning the line to be followed. There were two main tendencies: the faction headed by Enver Hoxha supported the maintenance of the previous methods and concepts while the other faction demanded a reform of the party. At first Enver Hoxha and his followers tried to accomodate themselves to the changes following Stalin's death, but the events of the party congress in Tirana in 1956 showed that the reform



spirit of the 20th congress jeopardizes their power positions. Therefore they pursued a manoeuvring policy between 1956 and 1960: they seemingly accepted the new ideas and expressed their everlasting loyalty to the Soviet leaders, but at the same time they relentlessly liquidated all pro-reform ideas and their representatives. /Among the victims of this showdown were some outstanding combatants of the party like Bedri Spahiu, Tuk Jakova, Kocho Tashko, Liri Gega and Liri Belishova./ The lesson of the Hungarian counter-revolution for the Albanian leaders was that it was necessary to suppress all ideas different from the official one.

In the early sixties a new period started both in Albania's domestic and foreign policy. On the third congress of the Albanian Labour Party in the spring of 1961, Enver Hoxha could point out with justified pride that the foundations of socialism came into existence in a historically short period and the question of "who defeats whom" had been settled, and all these made the accelerated construction of the material and technical basis of socialism possible. As far as foreign policy is concerned, Enver Hoxha stressed yet the enormous services of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Communist Party in the successes of the Albanian people, but behind the scenes it became more and more obvious that the Albanian leaders defied the new line elaborated by the 20th congress of the Soviet Communist Party and stood up against the majority of the international communist movement which had adopted this new line.

Enver Hoxha expressed his opposition to the new line and

his approval of the Chinese Communist Party's line for the first time behind close doors on the conference of communist and workers' parties in November 1960. Following this the Albanian leadership broke off all kinds of political, economic and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union from 1961 on, and it is reluctant to renew them even today. At the same time the struggle against the "Khrushchevtype revisionism" became one of the ideological pillars of the regime. /A dogmatic, strongly biased and subjective narration of Albania's cooperation and breaking-off with the Soviet Union can be found in the selected documents "The struggle of the Albanian Labour Party against modern revisionism" by Enver Hoxha and in his memoirs under the title "Khrushchevists"./

The ultra-revolutionary, petty bourgeois, radical ideology of maoism was much closer to the Ottoman-feudal traditions of Albania than to any other country. This fact together with the alliance against the common enemy, "the Khrushchev-type revisionism", promoted the spread of maoist views in Albania. The main cohesive force of cooperation between Albania and China was the concord of the leaders of the two countries against the reform ideas of the 20th Congress and in the dogmatic interpretation of Marxism-Leninism.

After the break-off with the Soviet Union and its allies, the economic and political support of China became vital for Albania. At the same time Albania and the Albanian Labour Party became important for the chinese leadership

for two reasons: on the one hand as the only ally in power in the struggle against the Soviet Union and the majority of the international communist movement /according to Mao Tse-tung Albania was "the pharos of socialism in Europe"; on the other hand as an outpost of the diffusion of the maoist ideas and as an experimental field for their realization. Therefore Albania proved to be a favourable partner with relatively low costs for the Chinese leadership.

However, their cooperation was hampered by the large geographical distance and difference in size between the two countries, by their very different historical, political and cultural traditions and in many respects by their different international interests.

The intimacy of their cooperation and its limits were equally revealed by the reception of the Chinese "cultural revolution" in Tirana. The two-volumed political diary of Enver Hoxha /"Notes on China"/, which was published after Albania had broken off with China, indicates that the Albanian leader was watching the power struggle in Peking sceptically and anxiously from first to last but publically he welcomed it enthusiastically as an internationally valid example of "how to liquidate modern revisionism". Between 1966 and 1969 Enver Hoxha - partly guided by his own extreme left dispositions, partly as an expression of solidarity with his Chinese ally - also initiated a "mini cultural revolution" in his country. Under the slogan "revolutionizing the party and the country's life further" a series of campaigns took place also in Albania. The Albanian

party leader - contrary to the Chinese example - kept a firm hand on the events all the time.

In the early seventies he came into collision with the opponents of his dogmatic policy again. The clash was going on at several fronts: the military opposition was led by Defence Minister Beqir Balluku, member of the politburo, the economic one by Deputy Prime Minister Abdyl Kellezi, member of the politburo, and the cultural one by Fadil Pacrami, member of the Central Committee, renowned writer. The fight ended up again with the complete victory of Enver Hoxha and his followers: in the "struggle against bureaucracy and liberalism" the "enemies of the people" were unmasked and removed, thousands of their followers were sent to the provinces or imprisoned. /Concerning the fate of the leaders of the opposition Enver Hoxha only disclosed that "they fell in the garbage heap of history"./

After Nixon's 1972 visit to Peking, increasing disorders could be observed in the Albano-Chinese relations. The Albanian leaders were not capable of following the changes of the internal power struggles in China and were even less able to follow the Chinese leadership's quick opening toward the United States, the NATO and the EEC, and its "pragmatist" relations with several rightist regimes. After appearing on the international scene, China needed less and less her small Albanian ally whose consistent dogmatism became an increasing burden for her. The gradual decrease of China's political interest and economic help induced Enver Hoxha - at first, through con-

fident channels, later more and more openly - to try to bring the Chinese leaders to respect Albania's standpoints and interests to a greater extent. After these attempts had failed, he decided to make their disagreements public, shifting the responsibility for the deterioration of the relations between the two parties and countries upon the new Chinese leadership. Enver Hoxha's ambitions to take over the direction of the so-called "true marxist-leninist movement" might have had a role in this step.

The breaking-off with China in 1978 was another turning point in Albania's history: it came into antagonism even with its last "great ally" and thus was left alone in the surrounding "imperialist-revisionist" world. Recognizing this, the Albanian leadership carried out a very cautious "opening" in the Albanian foreign and economic policy. This does not mean a basic change but indicates the anachronism and intolerability - on the long run - of the self-isolationist policy. The opening has been enforced above all by the economic needs. As a consequence of the interruption of the Chinese assistance, the Albanian economy got out of the preceding "greenhouse circumstances" and has been exposed to the world economy. Therefore it seems necessary to pursue a more open foreign economic policy which connects the country with the international division of labour to a greater extent in order to be able to maintain the country's present economic level.

Although Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu spoke of the "monolithic unity" of the party and the people on the 8th

party congress in November 1981, another showdown took place less than a month and a half later, this time with Enver Hoxha's most faithful ally for four decades. After Mehmet Shehu's mysterious "suicide" and the declaration of his being a traitor, Enver Hoxha was left as the last of those leaders who had shaped the Albanian Labour Party.

Enver Hoxha's activity is unique also in the sense that his writings amount to eighty volumes. He was especially voluminous in the last seven years of his life: he wrote down his memoirs in seven volumes and the credo of his dogmatic views in four volumes. The published oeuvre - reflecting the great turns in the author's life - underwent a constant metamorphosis: the passages praising the disowned fellow combatants and international allies were taken out and replaced by opposite interpretations.

In October 1983, on his 75th birthday, Enver Hoxha presented himself and his followers with the following statement: "We say that we are the only country building socialism and we prove it. We have built everything by ourselves, by the sweat of our brow and the strength of our daughters and sons ..."

This double statement is a concentrated expression of the false reflection of the conditions of his country and the outside world in his mind. Albania can only be regarded as the sole country building socialism on the basis of very dogmatic criteria and it achieved its successes - besides its own efforts - with the generous assistance of the other socialist countries.

The rational core of this irrational statement lies with the fact that the Albanian people - led by Enver Hoxha - have in fact achieved considerable successes during the transformations of the society in the last four decades. Referring only to the most important ones: the industrial production has grown by 155 times, the agricultural production by 5.5 times. Insecurity of living, misery and unemployment have ceased to exist, education and medical services were made free and the living standard is constantly growing even if only to a modest extent.

At the same time the breaking-off with the socialist countries and the adherence to the dogmatic interpretation of Marxism-Leninism have caused serious problems in every field of social and economic life and have slowed down the pace of development. It also shows that Albania needs cooperation with the socialist countries, which have already expressed their readiness to restore and develop relations several times. We hope that the new Albanian leadership will sooner or later accept the alive branch offered to it.

The settlement of relations between Albania and the socialist countries would make it for the small Balkan country possible to share again in the advantages of the socialist international division of labour and its isolation could also be ceased. This would strengthen the unity of the socialist commonwealth and improve its strategic situation on the Balkans and in the Mediterranean area.

Its true friends wish this new turning point to the socialist Albania.

Ramiz Alia, Hoxha's successor in his speech on August 26, 1985 emphasised: "Our policy towards our neighbours, as toward all the other states, is a consistent, principled policy. Those who dream about and expect changes in our line, who interpret the normal political and diplomatic activity of our independent and sovereign state as the "opening up" of Albania, as a "tendency" to rapprochement with one side or the other, do so in vain. Albania neither "opens up" nor "closes up" ...

Howev an "opening up" in the Albanian policy, later or soon, seems inevitable.

NB! The official translation of the party's name: the Party of Labour of Albania.

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