

Ilir Hoxha

**My Father,  
Enver Hoxha**

*Memoirs, Correspondence, Journalism*

***Publisher's Note***

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## BEYOND THE “RAISED CURTAIN” OF A FAMILY LIFE

When, at the beginning of 1998, the author of this book, Ilir Hoxha, as it seemed to me, somewhat hesitantly, asked me to prepare a review — “that could also be published as a foreword” — I agreed without much thought, without any deep inner conviction, accepting it more as a moral act. I had not yet read the book, and the author, through it, was putting himself to the test by stepping into somewhat unfamiliar professional territory.

As is well known, over the past decade, documentary literature — memoirs and notes on the past — experienced an almost overwhelming surge. I had read a good number of these books and had not liked them. Some were presented as works supposedly “written during the time of the dictatorship,” but it was obvious that their age was fabricated to artificially enhance their value in the eyes of readers. Just like shady wine merchants who, with a simple label, give their products decades of false depth, so too did these “writers,” aware of their shortcomings — their lack of creative talent — try to stay relevant in public opinion through blatant deception: strangely enough, they claimed to have thought the same way back then, in times when perhaps half the planet considered itself superior to the other simply because of its political system.

There was also a category of books where the only “positive” heroes were the authors themselves, while everyone else made up “a hateful world.” Around that time, I had just finished reading a memoir by a former member of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour, where everything was portrayed in reverse, exactly as the “pragmatic philosophy” of interest-driven transformation required: his former leaders —

once glorified in reports and even poetry — had now turned into annoying eccentrics, arrogant, moody, shallow, quarrelsome types, while he himself had become a kind of icon, a sanctified figure! In over 200 pages, the only character who knew everything, who never made a mistake, who had no flaws — not even those minor flaws that might earn the old saying “you’d better walk barefoot through hell” as Migjeni put it — was the author himself! Everyone else was “a hostage of the doctrine.”

As I recalled this “abundant influx” of publications, I thought that perhaps readers themselves have also been poorly prepared: they’ve been led to expect “forbidden masterpieces,” yet masterpieces are either nonexistent or extremely rare. They’ve been fed the notion that now had come “the time of truth” and that they would finally have the chance to discover the “Albanian dissidence.” But instead of actual works, “dissidence” often delivered more bitterness and outbursts than substance.

I began reading Ilir Hoxha’s book with the anxiety brought on by this troubling pattern, and with the weight of responsibility that naturally bears down on you when you must pass judgement on matters that have become a *communis opinio* — where everyone favours their own opinion, and where even a “different view” can provoke. It was a difficult read: on one hand, I carried the burden of negative impressions from the documentary literature published up to that point, including some memoirs written by relatives of political figures (Stalin’s daughter, Khrushchev’s son-in-law). On the other hand, I was encouraged — like a flickering candle of hope — by the books of Churchill, Zhukov, and even those of former British missionaries in Albania during the anti-fascist war. On one side I feared the danger of blatant apologism, while on the other, I felt an opposing need — the need for a broader col-

lective self-awareness, especially in a climate where everything had been cast into doubt. To such an extent, in fact, that even the fundamental moral references — those that uphold a society and form the basis of its social contract — had begun to unravel.

In Ilir Hoxha’s book, I found material that immediately freed me from my anxiety. The first thing that struck me were several chapter titles reminiscent of the works of Jonathan Swift. After barely three or four pages, I was suddenly overcome by an uncontrollable laugh in front of my computer screen. The main concern I had was eliminated. There was no sanctification or apologism in the book. The author had written it with an almost defiant indifference to the political turmoil that took place in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s. This book could have been published a decade ago, it can be published today, and it could just as well be published many years from now. Ilir Hoxha, as readers will see for themselves, has not made even the slightest effort to alter his experience of family life with Enver Hoxha. I believe his success begins precisely here. Books like this only gain value once they meet this condition: once they pass the test of creativity as a moral act. This is a book written with sincerity, and everything in it is conveyed and stated in good faith. It is the book of a citizen who understands and respects reality, yet does not deny himself the right to experience the “space of freedom” that society offers — even if only for image, even within the framework of the “new political morality.”

Most importantly, within the pages of this book move real people — courteous and well-mannered, but at times with their own flaws. The author himself, breaking from the pattern I mentioned earlier, does not hesitate to present himself to the world as someone who, when necessary, made use of small tricks, youthful mischief and the occasional harmless

lie — things that often come across as charming games. In Ilir Hoxha's book, a different, previously unknown reality is revealed to the reader — the reality of life inside the home of the former number one figure of the Albanian state over nearly half a century. This is the life of Enver Hoxha within his family — as a parent and head of household, as a father and grandfather, as an ordinary man in this world of many — a world that holds space for both the great and the small, for joy and sorrow, for order and disorder, for peace and provocations.

Political analysts often turn to the family relationships of public figures involved in debate in order to better understand their character. Through these relationships, they attempt to draw conclusions about the personal orientation of these individuals. A statesman seen through the eyes of his children has, at times, revealed far more than a dozen works written by biographers and historians. This “view from the inside” — meaning on a personal level, beyond political activity — is a unique opportunity for those who live alongside public figures, if they are able to make use of it. With this book, Ilir Hoxha demonstrates his intellectual capacity to present readers with a different performance of Enver Hoxha — building a character through entirely ordinary events and conversations, the kind that take place in every household, including those of public individuals.

One of the most emotionally charged and compelling parts of this book is the section devoted to the exhumation of Enver Hoxha. As I read it, I recalled a question once posed to me by a Norwegian ethnologist regarding this event. She was unsure whether to interpret the desecration of monuments and the exhumation of the dead as an act of blind political revenge, or whether the issue ran deeper — perhaps tied to the Albanian ethno-psychological makeup, to some ancient

tradition that had long lain dormant in the dark corners of human consciousness. To answer her, I had to carry out some psycho-critical investigation into the tradition of posthumous punishment among Albanians and, more broadly, in the Balkans.

Punishment after death is a typical motif among the ancient peoples of Southeastern Europe. Priam, the mythological leader of the Trojans in Homer's poems, begs the Achaeans not to drag the lifeless body of Hector after he is defeated by Achilles. For the proud Priam, the dishonour to Hector after death (he makes no plea to the Greeks to spare his son's life beforehand) is more unbearable than death itself. Likewise, in the tragic Theban cycle, the central conflict revolves around this question: Is the state permitted to punish after death? Or does death settle all debts? Does a person have the right to violate the dead, or is the deceased now surrendered to the final judgement?

In the Albanian epic cycle of the *kreshnikët* — the legendary frontier warriors — Halili, the proud brother of the main hero Muji, refuses under any circumstances to accept his challenge. He only relents after the opposing commander comes to his grave, strikes it, and insults him with harsh words for not rising to test his strength in the warriors' arena. It is precisely this punishment after death — the desecration of the grave by an adversary — that forces Halili to abandon his arrogance and beg Muji to come to his aid. Because, according to traditional mentality, “death is for the brave,” but shame — dishonour after death — “is worse than death.” This is a well-known proverb among northern Albanians.

Posthumous dishonour has been a horror above all horrors in the traditional Albanian ethical code, even in later periods. And yet, it has continued to deeply unsettle people. The Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti was buried in the

cathedral of Lezha, but he does not have a real grave because the Ottoman armies (at least according to official Albanian historiography) exhumed him to make a *haimali* — an object of spiritual or magical significance.

In Albania, the toppling of statues is one of the most widespread forms of desecration — something that, according to inherited beliefs, should have remained a strict taboo. In Albanian cities, there are many pedestals, but they are empty. An Albanian journalist who had visited the Arab world in the late 1970s, after a period of political turmoil, returned to Albania and wrote with great zeal — publishing with near-absurd triumph — a report titled “The Pedestals Await the Monuments.” Ten years later, he pulled the piece from his drawer and republished it with the same enthusiasm, under a new title: “Empty Pedestals” — a call to the nation to reward the “heroes of democracy” — especially its leader — by raising their statues in place of the toppled ones. Only the names of the people and places had changed. The idea of judging history based on the number of “empty pedestals,” more than reflecting human conformism, perhaps reveals a certain mindset — one that equates the destruction of monuments with social progress.

In fact, there is a peculiar Albanian perversity when it comes to monuments. Dritëro Agolli, in his novel *The Devil's Chest*, almost sounds the alarm over this perversity, shocking the reader with the barbaric acts carried out against archives and other historical traces. The truth is, this has deep historical roots. The head of Ali Pasha Tepelena displayed above the “arch of shame” is a “textbook example” of posthumous punishment. The message from ancient works — “learn from catastrophe” — is at the core of what the ancient Greeks called *katharsis*, meaning to be entertained through terror. In 1939, the fascist armies removed the bust of a former officer of

King Zogu who had saved him from an assassination attempt in Vienna. In 1991, anti-communist demonstrators toppled Enver Hoxha's statues and smashed his busts into pieces. Then, in May 1992, the former Albanian president Berisha ordered the exhumation of his remains from the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation, along with those of several former anti-fascist fighters.

In April 1992, while the exhumation of Enver Hoxha and his comrades-in-arms was being prepared at the highest state offices, I was still serving as assistant to the president of the republic — despite the fact that Ramiz Alia had already resigned and Dr. Sali Berisha had been elected in his place. During those days, amid the many Democratic Party activists flooding in morning and afternoon to meet “the doctor,” as they confidentially referred to their president, I was struck by the almost daily presence of two “intellectuals” who entered and exited Dr. Berisha's office with folders in hand, bypassing the rule that documentation had to be submitted to the secretariat. Overloaded as I was with all sorts of information — and by then disinterested in the relationships the former president was building with his circle (as I had formally requested to resign) — I likely wouldn't have discovered the purpose of these “intellectuals,” had Dr. Berisha not, one day at the end of the workday, handed me one of their letters along with the day's documents for archiving. The letter bore the signatures of the two “intellectuals.” It argued for the urgent need to resolve “an important political issue” concerning the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation. “May 5 is approaching, and you will be obliged to visit the Mother Albania monument,” the letter stated. “This means you will inevitably pass by the dictator's grave. Under these circumstances, we propose: either the dictator is exhumed, along with the other former communist leaders, before that date, or a decorative wall is erected

in front of their graves, running the entire length of the cemetery entrance up to the monument.”

The letter had been submitted in handwriting on a sheet torn from a squared notepad. Besides the proposal I mentioned earlier, it also contained drawings and sketches for implementing the exhumation project. Its authors hadn't dared entrust anyone with typing it. Perhaps even to this day, they don't know that, despite having bypassed proper procedures in Dr. Berisha's office, it ultimately ended up on my desk — both of them knew me, and surely found it unbelievable that I was still working in that office.

The moment I read the letter, I felt a real shock, and honestly, I felt sorry for Berisha. I couldn't understand how those two “intellectuals” — one of whom was an activist with the Albanian Helsinki Committee for the protection of human rights (while the other was an architect and translator of lyrical poetry) — had come to take such an initiative. That Dr. Berisha's government might carry out such an act as a political gesture was something I didn't rule out. But that two citizens of the country, people of the arts and “defenders of human values,” would propose such a thing — I had not imagined it. Disheartened, I had to consider that perhaps building a political career on the misfortune of a predecessor had become a dangerously widespread *forma mentis*. The only thing I could do was to order the letter to be properly archived — a letter that, someday, will deserve to be published. Not to absolve Berisha, nor to condemn the two “intellectuals,” but as an object of interest for socio-psychology, for understanding the psychoses and complexes of Albanians at the crossroads of two eras.

A century or so ago, the Russian Empress Catherine, when she was proposed a monument in honour of her great contributions to Russia, replied: “Do not rush to raise monu-

ments. Wait until I am gone from this world. Then wait ten more years, to see whether people would still love me as if I were alive. After that, do as you wish.” When I first read this wise advice from Catherine the Great, I felt a certain relief within myself. It seemed right to believe that every monument always carries a risk — wherever it may stand. Not just in Albania, but everywhere in the world. At the very least, it wasn't an exclusively Albanian curse. By reading Ilir Hoxha's book, I revisited documents already known by others as well, regarding Enver Hoxha's rejection, while still alive, of the glorification of his figure in monumental works.

In Ilir Hoxha's book, the reader will find the emotions of two events: the burial and the exhumation.

Through the author's voice, the reader will have the opportunity to see beyond the “raised curtain” of an ordinary life within the family of the former number one of the Albanian state.

Meanwhile, those in power who seek to carry out their version of justice after death achieve nothing more than revealing the totalitarian character of their rule.

*Shaban Sinani*

Tirana, July 1998

## TO THE READER

I wrote these memoirs during the time I was sentenced to one year in prison by the “democratic” state — simply for giving an interview in which I answered questions from the newspaper *Modeste* about my father, Enver Hoxha. During the trial, I stated publicly and clearly that no one should think such a political and vindictive punishment would frighten me into silence about my father. On the contrary, I would find the strength to express my thoughts freely — even from a prison cell — about him, about the past and about Albania’s “modern era.” These memoirs, besides giving me the satisfaction of writing them and of experiencing a different emotional state, also serve as a form of defence for someone I deeply love.

In these memories, I have described my father as I knew him throughout the life we shared while he was alive. He was an exemplary parent — he loved us, corrected us, advised us, and taught us the ethics and morals of society. He did the same as a grandfather with our children — his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I also knew him as a leader who worked his entire life for Albania and its people. The great victory that the Albanian people achieved in the National Liberation War — defeating the nazi-fascist occupiers and their collaborators with their own forces — ensured that Albania stood alongside the victorious states of the Second World War. The strengthening and reconstruction of the country, pulling it out of centuries of backwardness and the total destruction caused by the war, the development of industry and the scientific transformation of agriculture, the building of a powerful and integrated energy system and the complete electrification of the country, the development of art, culture, education and science, the emancipation of women, and the great international respect

that Albania gained — all these were also the merit of Enver Hoxha, as the leader during the entire period he was at the head of the state.

As I will try to present to the reader through my reflections, he was a true democrat in his relationship with his people — with workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and the youth — just as he was harsh and strict with both external and internal enemies who tried to undermine the victories and achievements, and violate the independence and sovereignty of the new democratic Albania.

He died and was honoured by the entire nation because he had dedicated his entire life to this people.

Five years after Enver Hoxha's death, the people's democratic socialist system — built over 45 years with great effort and sacrifice — was overthrown. It was toppled by dark forces, both internal and external, who unleashed all their vengeful fury for everything they had lost politically and materially, as former collaborators of the occupiers.

These forces, now politically organized, tore down his monument. Under cover of darkness, fearing the people, they exhumed Enver Hoxha — Commander-in-Chief of the liberators of Albania — in a macabre act from the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation, with the aim of separating him from the fallen partisans so that they would remain without their commander. This also made it easier for the descendants of the fascist collaborators who had come to power to desecrate graves, statues, memorials and commemorative plaques dedicated to Albania's heroes — to bury the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War itself, which had in fact already buried them once and for all. In Albania, the “democracy” of those same forces that had failed half a century earlier was established.

They called Enver Hoxha a dictator. There was nothing — no insult, no slander, however low — that was not said

about him.

Persecution began against his family. In the press — whether left or right, dependent or independent — I am now referred to as “the son of the dictator,” but this does not affect me in the slightest. I knew my father and will remember him as he is etched in my mind: an exemplary parent, a far-sighted leader, determined to defend the achievements gained, a people's democrat — not at all a dictator.

I dedicate these memoirs to my three children: Ermal, Shkëlzen, and especially to my youngest son, Besmir, who spent only three months with him — so that they may better understand who their grandfather was and be proud of him, just as their father is.

In preparing these memoirs, I have also made use of documentary materials, parts of correspondence, testimony from recorded tapes, and other materials from the family and personal archive.

*Ilir Hoxha*

August 1995

**PART ONE**

## LIFE IS TRULY STRANGE

And it really is. It had never crossed my mind that I would one day write down my memories of my father, Enver Hoxha.

When I was young and he was still alive, out of the love I had for him, I would occasionally write in a notebook, expressing how kind and loving a father he was. After writing five or six pages in a new calendar notebook with dates — the kind he gave us every year, encouraging us to keep a diary so that, once grown, we could read it and enjoy recalling the moments of our childhood and youth — I closed the notebook and left what I had started to write about my father unfinished because it felt as if I were praising him too much. After all, most fathers, generally speaking, are good to their children.

I closed the notebook and left it to be forgotten over the years. I reopened it recently and realized that in those short notes I had written with a child-like love — which now held a different kind of value, especially considering that during the transitional years (beginning in 1990), dark and vengeful forces launched brutal attacks on this central figure of national history from the last half-century. But to a son, a father is always a father and remains in his memory just as he was in daily life — not as others might describe him. What I mean is that no campaign, no inquisition, no legal or constitutional ban can change the image a child forms of their parent.

As I mentioned, every year our father gave us a calendar notebook to keep a diary. In truth, I never kept a diary through to the end. It felt like an obligation. In fact, we were happy when the calendars were small — they seemed easier to fill. But clearly, I was wrong, and this task shouldn't have been treated as a burden or chore. As a rule, I would keep a diary up until around March or May, and very rarely until the

end of the year. So, we'd write memories for half the year, and never for the second half — as if life only happened during the first six months.

Still, our father insisted. At the start of every year, he would hand me a new calendar notebook with the same wise advice to keep a diary — and I, with the same old habit, would only write about events that took place in the first part of the year. How naive and amusing that seems now!

When I read my notes now — no matter how simple or fragmentary they may be — I find myself fully agreeing with my father and mother who also encouraged us to write. They are incredibly engaging. They take you back to your distant childhood, to your toys and mischief, though I didn't get up to much of that myself. Then comes youth, with all its beauty — but just as “closely watched” by a parent — accompanied by a rich correspondence between my father and me, including the letters we exchanged during youth volunteer work or military training, none of which I ever missed. It surprises me now when my 20-year-old son — the same age I was when I wrote those diary entries — hears these stories and says:

“But how did you, Dad, go to youth actions and military drills, being the son of the country's top leader?!” — and then adds with a laugh, “If it were me, I wouldn't have gone!”

Perhaps, being young, he only knew the affectionate side of his grandfather — as the saying goes, grandchildren are loved more deeply — and he hasn't yet understood that their grandfather raised his own children to be humble and to never separate themselves from their peers, in school or outside, in every kind of activity. There were even cases where we were sent first — like during the earthquake in the Dibra district in 1967. Symbolically, he even sent his 13-year-old daughter to help the victims during that bitterly cold winter. Following our example — or rather, following the decision our father

made for the family, which we received with great joy — the entire student body of the university (at the time I was in my first year of mechanical engineering) joined the effort to help those affected by the earthquake.

Life goes on, strange as ever, though short. It passes so quickly. Back then, I never thought the time would come when our father would part from us. Age did its part, but in my eyes, it never showed.

I remembered my grandmother, who used to say to my father: “Sit here next to me so I can kiss your cheek — it's a good one.” He would laugh heartily and reply, “What are you saying, grandma? Mine's like leather — kiss the kids' cheeks instead, theirs are soft.” “No, no — I want yours,” she would say, then add, “We'll all pass through that hard stone in the end.”

My father would recall this when he started getting older, repeating his mother's words to us. When my grandmother said those things, I didn't understand their meaning. I thought maybe it was some kind of folk proverb or philosophical expression — who knows — and I never really tried to figure it out. I figured I'd have time to ask her eventually. But she passed away. Surely my father could have explained it to me, and I had plenty of time to ask him too. But it wasn't meant to be — I never learned it from his mouth either.

The concept of time, of life, is relative. Time — life — can be short, it can be long, it can be empty or full. It all depends on the meaning you give it. Now that he's gone, it feels to me like we never truly had our fill of each other. Maybe he was just too busy, always thinking more about the people's hardships, the good of the state. The time he had for us was limited. We got used to that reality. Life truly is strange.

## HOW MY FATHER KNEW HOW TO DISCIPLINE

Don't be surprised! This is a question every person, once they've grown up and left childhood behind, ends up asking themselves — or answering without being asked — by sharing stories from the times their father may have disciplined them.

I can't recall a single instance where my father ever slapped me. It might sound unbelievable, but it's true. When we did something wrong, he would become serious — and that was the harshest punishment for us. Afterwards, we would kiss him and promise never to repeat the mistake. I'll recount two cases in which my father wanted to teach us respect for the soldier, the police officer, the officer — the person who stands guard, the one who carries out their duty. And no matter how young you are, those lessons get imprinted in your memory for life.

The first incident is tied to something that happened when I was around six years old and we were on holiday in Moscow. We had been settled in a house the Russians called a *dacha*. Stalin had once stayed there. It was a house in the middle of the forest, outside Moscow. One day, on our way back to the *dacha*, the soldier who opened the gate saluted us in the Soviet style. Naturally, he saluted my father, but I, as a child, responded to his gesture from inside the car. I saluted — but I had made a mistake: I had saluted not by placing the palm of my hand to my forehead, but only with two fingers. My father immediately noticed this and, as soon as we arrived at the villa, he said to me:

“Now go on foot back to the gate, apologize to the soldier and salute him properly — the way he saluted you.”

I set off alone down the path that stretched through the

forest, and with my small steps, it took me a full 15 minutes to reach the gate, as the villa was in the middle of a very beautiful natural forest. I saluted the soldier as I should have, and then started walking back alone again — perhaps even with the natural fear of a child, worried that I might run into a bear or a wolf.

Maybe the soldier was surprised and pleased that I went back and saluted him. He probably hadn't even noticed how I had saluted him from behind the car window. He never knew that I had been sent back by my father to correct my mistake. From that day on, every time we entered or exited the villa, I saluted with an open palm — and then looked my father in the eye to silently ask, “Did I salute properly?” — and he would nod in approval.

The second incident happened much later in Tirana. My father had just come out of the office and started walking around the house garden. It was summertime, and the gardener was watering the flowers. When he saw my father approaching, he left the hose and stepped away so as not to disturb him during his walk. We were still small, and we often chatted or played with the civilian guards around the villa. Sometimes we would play a quick game — for example, passing the ball around. But this time something unusual happened. I don't know what came over me, but I picked up the hose and started spraying the officer with water. Instead of stepping aside — which I thought he would do to avoid the stream — he stood at attention, while I burst out laughing. Five metres away, his commanding officer — my father — was walking by, and I hadn't noticed him! I froze when I saw him. As the saying goes, I was caught red-handed. Even though I was a child, I immediately knew I had made a serious mistake. He was looking at me with displeasure. But now I had some experience. I didn't wait for him to say,

“Apologize” — I immediately dropped the hose and ran over to hug the guard, until my father resumed his usual walk through the garden. I can say the incident ended in a completely natural and calm way.

As young as I was, these two episodes stayed with me. The way my father handled both situations left a lasting impression on me. I’ve always respected soldiers, police officers, officers — people in service — because they carry out important duties. I feel the same way even now that the system has changed — I still respect the everyday people in uniform, because they are fulfilling responsibilities they’ve been assigned.

So, my father always educated us through advice, gestures, silent actions — and never through slaps.

I also don’t recall ever having used even a single slap on my children. But I can admit that I’ve let out my “anger” through shouting — something that’s not at all more effective than a calm way of speaking or explaining things logically, the way my father used to do with us. What can you do — not all people are the same.

## THE “EVIL EYE” IN ENVER HOXHA’S HOUSE

Could it really be true? Of course it could. It happened to me. I decided to tell this story now, after more than forty years, because I judged that by now it can’t harm anyone. Two of the people involved have passed away, and two are in prison. The ones who have died are my maternal grandmother, Naxhije — my mother’s mother — and my nanny, an old woman who always dressed in black. Her name was Bone. The two people now “in prison” are my mother and me.

But let’s go back in time, to when I was around five years old. That day I had a fever, and both my grandmother — who may not have been particularly religious — and the nanny were fully convinced that the fever had been caused by the “evil eye.” That day I had gone outside to play, and a saleswoman had said, “What a beautiful boy.” That, they believed, was the cause. So much so that they didn’t even consider calling the doctor. They told me they would heal me themselves, but on one condition — I was not to tell my mother.

Overjoyed at the idea that the doctor — who might give me a shot — wouldn’t be coming, I immediately agreed to keep the secret. Like all children, I hated injections. Since it was winter, the wood stove was lit. They took a glass of water, pulled a hot coal from the fire, and dropped it into the glass. Meanwhile, my grandmother muttered some words I didn’t understand, while the other one handed me the glass and said, “Drink two sips.” Long story short, happy at the thought I might be healed and escape the needles, I drank it — even took an extra sip. Everything seemed to be going smoothly until suddenly, my mother walked in. They quickly tried to hide the glass, but they were laughing so hard they couldn’t stop.

“What are you laughing at like that?” my mother asked. They, even if they had wanted to explain, couldn’t — the laughter just wouldn’t let them. Then my mother turned to me, and I ended up resolving the situation by telling her everything, detail by detail, about what had happened.

It was during the early post-liberation years, when my mother was actively fighting for the emancipation of the youth — especially girls and women — encouraging them to leave behind the backward customs that hindered their progress toward true liberation. That’s why she lashed out at both of them:

“Shame on you — imagine if people found out that this kind of thing happens in Enver Hoxha’s house! I’ve worn myself out spreading awareness among other women about this very issue, and here I have the fanatics right in my own home. Looks like the propaganda needs to start with you two!”

Still, their laughter wouldn’t stop, and my mother stormed off angrily, saying:

“Call the doctor!”

To tell the truth, I don’t remember whether I got better because of the coal dropped into the glass of water — to remove the “evil eye” — or because of the doctor. But that episode came to an end.

Even as we got older, my grandmother and I continued to have conversations that brought us joy, but we always remembered that incident. When I got married, she told the story to my wife, Teuta, as well. She lived with us, though when her husband — my grandfather, Tefik — was still alive, she had lived in a different house.

Since my grandfather passed away early, I remember him only vaguely — but I don’t have any specific stories with him. With my grandmother, however, I have plenty. I want to share one episode that still makes us laugh every time we recall it.

It was the time when two new little beings had come into the world — my son and my brother’s daughter. According to the medical advice and literature of the time (and from my mother as well), for new mothers to produce as much milk as possible to feed their newborns, they had to eat *hashure*,\* custards, *muhallebi*\*\* and similar dishes. So every night, my grandmother would be brought a plate of *hashure*, the next day a plate of custard and so on — every night before bed.

We had a little tradition: before going to sleep, we would stop by my grandmother’s room to chat a bit and say “good night.” That’s exactly when the *hashure* would be brought in, and she, fed up with being given the same thing night after night, burst out at the nurse who brought it:

“What are you doing, girl? Stop bringing me that — or I’ll start producing milk myself!”

We laughed so hard we couldn’t hold back the tears.

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\* Wheat pudding.

\*\* Milk pudding.

## AN EPISODE WITH MY SISTER

Who among brothers and sisters hasn't argued when they were kids? It was the same with us. My sister, Pranvera, being the youngest and a girl, seemed to have a more privileged place beside our father — or at least that's how it felt to us. It was likely because she was the youngest and a daughter.

After the first two or three years, our mother tried to send us to kindergarten like all the other children, but we resisted “heroically,” and in the end, we won the battle — we didn't have to go. I even remember that when I started first grade, my eyes filled with tears, but there was nothing I could do. I watched my brother and sister, who had come to see me off, and I envied them for getting to go back and play in the park in front of the house. My mother told me:

“Don't cry — you're a big boy now!” And I really was seven and a half years old, because at the time the rule was you had to be at least seven to start school. There was nothing I could do — I had dodged kindergarten, but there was no avoiding school.

A few days earlier, I had broken my arm after falling from a balance beam, so I started school with my arm in a cast. As I was leaving for school on the first day, on the steps of the house, my grandmother, Naxhije, poured a jug of water at my feet for good luck. She wouldn't let go of her traditions. I remembered the water with coal that I had once drunk. My mother saw it, but there was nothing she could say, so she pretended not to notice.

This story repeated itself with my son, who — just like his father — didn't like kindergarten at all. I didn't insist, and my mother didn't say a word either — maybe she wanted to keep the little ones close during her old age. Still, we decided to give it a try — maybe he would enjoy going. We took him to

kindergarten and, just as I expected — like father, like son — he didn't stay even ten minutes and came right back to play in the green park in front of the house, just like his father had done many years earlier.

When he returned, his grandfather called him over and, after kissing him, asked what he thought of kindergarten. Ermal, then four or five years old, stood there looking guilty — because on one hand, he knew his grandfather would have liked him to go, but on the other hand, he hadn't liked it at all. So he let out a child's sigh and said:

“Can I ask you a question, Grandpa?”

“Well, let's hear it!” she replied.

“Grandpa, who invented kindergarten?!”

Grandfather, ever the diplomat in politics, understood perfectly the “diplomacy” of a child. He laughed, handed him a piece of chewing gum, and said:

“Go play now — your game is getting away!”

Relieved, the child took off running, but after a few steps he suddenly remembered something, ran back, gave his grandfather a kiss, and then dashed off again.

But let's return to our own childhood. As I mentioned, my sister held a privileged place next to our father. To prove it, I'll share a story. One day, the three of us were playing at home, and she teased our brother, who was three years older. Pranvera was about five years old at the time. Toli hit her, and she began to cry — but only for a short while. Almost instantly, like someone had pressed a button, she stopped crying and the game resumed. She realized her tears would go to waste since our father wasn't home — he had gone to the office. About an hour later, while playing in the street in front of the house, she suddenly began pretending to cry — this time, with no actual tears. Still, she kept at it. I asked my brother:

“What's wrong with her now?”

“How should I know?!” he replied. But just a second later, a deep “oh no!” came from him when he saw our father walking out of the office and heading toward us. That’s who Pravera had been waiting for — so she could tell him that we had hit her in the morning. Our father understood the situation, called over our brother and pretended to pull his ear. He cried out, “owww!” in mock pain. Once our sister was sure that the one who had “wronged” her had received the “deserved punishment,” she resumed playing with us like nothing had happened.

## SOMETHING ABOUT MY GRANDMOTHER

We called our paternal grandmother *aneja*, and our grandfather *xhaxha*, because that’s what our father called them too. Their names were Gjylo and Halil. I remember *xhaxha* only vaguely, as he died early, but I remember my grandmother well. What I do recall about *xhaxha* is that he wore a nightgown and had a moustache. Whenever he kissed us, it would prick our faces.

They told me that when I was born, he whispered something in my ear and later I was told he had given me the name of his deceased son — as a tribute. But that remained only in the old man’s mind, because my father gave me the name I have today.

As I said, I remember that when he kissed me, it stung. I’ve tried growing a moustache myself. The first time was during our final military training after university. Two of my friends grew moustaches, and then I followed suit — and after me, the whole squad. The commander called me aside and said:

“Shave the moustache — if you do, the others will too.”

The next day I shaved mine off, and so did the others — some by choice, some after getting a stern look from the commander. Only the first two who had grown them, Conia and Bimi, kept theirs.

The second time was when I was arrested. This time there was no one to force me to shave, nor anyone I had to set an example for. I kept my moustache up until the day of the trial. When my young son came to visit me, I kissed him — and was reminded of my grandfather with his moustache, pricking me when he kissed me. I did the same to my son — I pricked him when I kissed him.

I wrote to my mother from prison telling her that I had grown a beard and moustache. She replied that my father had also grown a moustache during the war to disguise himself and avoid being recognized, since he had been sentenced to death by the fascists. It's strange — some grow a moustache as a sign of manhood, some to look a certain way, and some to disguise themselves, to avoid being caught, to escape a death sentence.

But let's return to my grandmother, *aneja*. She was a noble woman who had been through many hardships. It wasn't a small thing to have a son sentenced to death by the fascists — it was wartime, after all — but in the end, her son emerged victorious, and she could finally enjoy her old age in peace. Still, even that peace was often unsettled, unpredictably so. I remember that every time the Party Congress was held and my father was re-elected First Secretary, she would make *hal-va* and bring it to the house officers.

Nonetheless, new concerns — of a different nature — often stirred her thoughts. Let me tell you about one of these “worries,” which was related to technological developments, and specifically to television.

When television first came into our home, it was a major event for all of us. Thanks to a transmitter setup adjusted by the talented engineer Lulzim Topçiu, we were able to receive Italian stations. At that time, Tirana didn't yet have its own broadcasts. A television was also placed in the room where my grandmother stayed. My father had a habit — every evening before dinner — of going to visit *aneja*, and they would chat for a while. Then she would kiss him goodnight, and he would say, “Good night.”

One day, *aneja* was saying to my father:

“Oh Enver, what kind of device is this television — it's on all day and never gets tired! And look, now in the evening

there's always some Catholic priest who comes on and just keeps rambling on and on without stopping. I don't understand a word he says, but that fellow always shows up right at the time when I'm undressing and putting on my nightgown. But I don't let it slide — as soon as I start undressing, I turn it off, then turn it back on after. That fellow's trying to spy on me while I change!”

My father laughed out loud, but we laughed even harder. He would say:

“You're doing the right thing — never leave it on during that time!”

“Oh, what are you saying!” she'd reply seriously.

Who knows what our grandmothers would say nowadays if they saw us rushing to change the channel or turn off the TV — not because we're worried the people on the screen are watching us, but to keep our young children from seeing the endless nudity and blatant pornography that's broadcast not just on private stations, but now even on the country's own public television. How times change! It's hard to say anymore who's really backward!

## MY FATHER THE FAN

Don't think he was a "crazy fan." In fact, I could say he wasn't really a fan at all. But, as I'll explain below, he had chosen "Besa" of Kavaja as his "favourite team." This was partly because Besa had a football tradition and played beautiful matches — even if they didn't win championships.

Once, when my father went to visit a newly-built facility in Kavaja — I believe it was the nail-and-bolt factory — while speaking with the workers, one of them said:

"Comrade Enver, we know you have a soft spot for 'Besa' of Kavaja."

Everyone burst into laughter. Apparently, my father's cook, Qemal, who was from Kavaja, had spread the word about this through his local connections.

My father was a regular sports enthusiast — he enjoyed good football, but wasn't a "die-hard fan" like we kids were. I supported Partizani. I didn't miss a single match. Sometimes we'd be thrilled, other times disappointed, depending on how our "team of the heart" performed. On Sundays, as we finished lunch, we'd have to ask our father for permission to go to the stadium. He always knew what was coming, but sat calmly, waiting for the request:

"Dad, can we go to the stadium today? Partizani is playing 17 Nëntori."

"And who are you going with?" he'd ask.

"With Isuf," we'd reply right away. He already knew the answer, since the request always came with the same name — Isuf Çoba, my father's longtime driver, who used the match as a chance to break away from duty for a couple of hours of football. My father would tease me:

"But why is Isuf coming? Isn't he a Dinamo fan?"

As a child, I didn't know how to respond, but I would

later boast to Isuf that, even though my father had asked me a tough question — essentially teasing, "Why ask me for permission if your companion is a Dinamo fan?" — I still managed to convince him and get the green light. The adults understood each other, while we six-year-old kids were simply happy to have received permission.

When we got back home from the stadium, if the result was in our favour, I'd immediately tell him that we had won.

"I know," he'd say, "because when the goal was scored, the cheering was so loud it woke me from my nap. I even heard your voice."

That the stadium cheers could wake him wasn't surprising — the stadiums were close to our house — but the strange part was how he could claim to hear my voice! As a little kid, I was amazed at first, but later I understood it was just a joke.

It was tougher when we had to follow Partizani all the way to Kavaja. Getting permission for that was really hard, since it meant using up gasoline. So we had to come up with excuses, like: "The car needs to go out for a test drive" or something like that — though most explanations weren't very convincing.

Even when I grew older and went on youth volunteer actions, he would always write to me with humour, reminding me of the jokes he used to make when we were little. Here's what he wrote in one letter he sent while I was away on such an action:

*"...Today, when I woke up from my nap to the shouting from the stadium, I said to myself, 'Partizani must have scored 10 goals on Durrësi.' But when I asked around, they told me it ended 0-0. Bravo Partizani! Real mastery on display! Give them some encouragement! With that, I send you a hug — stay well and work hard. Goodbye, Enver."*

When we lost — meaning when Partizani lost — he

would tease me:

“I told you, join Besa, but you won’t listen.”

“Never, ever,” I would reply. “I’ll never betray Partizani.”

“As you wish,” he’d say. “You’re right not to switch teams. You have to give them courage, even when they’re struggling.”

Only recently have I come to truly understand how important it is for a person not to change their team of the heart — their character, their flag...

## HOW I LEARNED TO PLAY BILLIARDS IN KORÇA

We used to go with great joy for holidays to the beautiful city of Korça — whether in summer or in winter, when snow covered everything. In both seasons, the city had its own unique charm. My father loved going there for another reason as well: it was where he had spent part of his youth. It was a city rich in culture. As for us children, we had our own interests. One of them was the small horse and cart in the villa’s courtyard, used by the villa’s caretaker, whose name was Todi, for his daily tasks. Every day we would beg him to take us for a ride. We enjoyed it immensely.

In Korça, we would go with our father on picnics to the many picturesque places around — to the hills and forests, to Lake Prespa. One day we went to Voskopoja — a very beautiful place. Everywhere we went, our father would tell us the history of the area and the events connected to it.

One day, unable to join us himself, he told us we should go to Helmës — the place where the Anti-Fascist Youth Congress had been held. My brother and I set out together. Along the way, we were accompanied by S. Gradeci. We exited on the Korça-Shtylla-Panarit side until we reached Helmës. The car took us as far as the road allowed — from there, we had to continue on foot. Some locals were waiting for us with two mules. On one hand, I wanted to show that I wasn’t tired, but on the other, I was thrilled at the idea of riding a mule — we had never done that before. At first, it was quite difficult, as it felt like you’d fall off from side to side, but you quickly got the hang of it, and it turned out to be a really fun experience.

That night, we slept in a villager’s home. In the warmth of their hospitality and generosity, they told us about the events that took place in Helmës — and we listened closely, because

we were hearing it from the mouths of those who had lived through it.

After they finished telling us the stories, since it was late and we were tired, we went to sleep. For the first time, we experienced what it's like (or not like) to sleep with bedbugs. We told our father about it later and he laughed — he had apparently dealt with that kind of discomfort countless times during the war.

The celebration in Helmës went very well, and when we returned, we shared the whole experience with our father.

In the winter, in Korça, we played snowball fights, built snowmen — all the classic winter fun for kids who truly enjoy the snow.

In the villa where we stayed, there was also a billiards table. My father was a master at playing. With patience, he taught me how to play, and over time, I even started winning. Many years later, when we had a billiards table in our house in Tirana, and the weather was rainy and he couldn't go out for a walk, he would say to me:

“Well, son, shall we play a round of billiards?”

I always looked forward to that because I loved showing him how far his student had come. I used to play with Klemi, my sister's husband — we'd get through as many as 50 games in a day — and sometimes we wouldn't finish until one in the morning. So it was pretty clear that I could beat my father. Sometimes, I would even let him win — using the same tactic he once used on me when he taught me how to play, giving me a few advantages. Still, we played seriously, and what mattered most was that we moved around the billiard table with cue sticks in hand — because, like any sport, billiards requires movement, activity — something so necessary for him at his advanced age.

## “JANUARY 11”

That's the name of my beloved school, where I studied up to the seventh grade. I have many memories from that school.

Even though governments later changed its name — because “January 11” of the “second Albanian republic” clashed with their very identity — for me, it will always remain with that name. That's how it will be known by all the generations that passed through that school. Even my children, who also studied at this school with strong traditions, still call it that. The new name, although respected, cannot replace it in our minds.

My first teacher was named Andromaqi. She taught me how to read and write. We loved her very much because she was kind and tireless with us.

When I defended my doctoral degree, I made sure not to forget to invite her — to attend my defence and see her former student, whom she had once taught to write, read, count, add and subtract.

I also remember the pioneer group leader. Her name was Halime. We had a kind of unspoken compromise. I was annoyed when we had to do activities and I was always chosen to recite — while on the other hand, her desire to include me, naturally, because I was Enver Hoxha's son, was strong. Once, we even performed in a play together with Rikard Larjen.

My mother gradually began to get more involved in helping me, since Bone hadn't gone to school and didn't understand schoolwork. With my mother, we always wrapped the books and notebooks, labelled them and drew red lines along the notebook margins. Good grades followed one after another, and I would proudly show them to my father.

How hard my mother tried to help me improve my handwriting — I did make some progress, but not as much as she

had hoped. Often, my father would point out this shortcoming, like in the case when he “asked” my two-month-old son, Ermal, to make Teuta his secretary when writing to his grandfather, because his father — meaning me — had ruined his eyesight with handwriting that looked like chicken scratches. Or in another case, when he mocked my “calligraphy,” not sparing even the flaws he found in his own writing. In a letter he wrote to me on February 26, 1980, among other things, he wrote:

*“...Good that it occurred to you to write us a few things, so we wouldn't get tired trying to read them. As for the calligraphy, we have no reason to complain. Even if I've made some spelling errors, or don't have good handwriting, I'm old. We speak and write the old language, I have some dialectal expressions, but I've received permission from Eqrem Çabej to use them. That's enough for now. I'll put a full stop to this letter, so I don't leave you without lunch or without sleep. A kiss from me, yours, Enver.”*

In addition to our daily school duties and activities, our parents also involved us in extracurricular activities, either individually or in organized groups, such as at the Pioneers' Palace. I was part of the radio technicians' group, and our first success was building a crystal radio. We worked with such dedication under the guidance of the talented engineer Lulëzim Topçiu!

I remember that one Sunday, the radio technicians' group planned a bike excursion to the radio station in Kashar, for a visit. Lulëzim instructed us how to ride our bikes properly, as he was worried because it was a busy motor vehicle road. He strictly forbade riding the bike with no hands — warning that anyone who tried it would receive “the deserved punishment.”

In the group there were plenty of “master” cyclists, for whom riding a bicycle with no hands was a normal thing.

But this time, we were under the command of Engineer Lulëzim. One of these “masters,” who really did have good cycling skills, started showing off and riding without hands. He received his “deserved punishment”: the professor — as we called Lulëzim — stopped all of us, took the key and removed the bicycle seat, so the “master” could no longer ride without hands, as the bare seat post hurt too much. We burst out laughing at the sight. He realized this wasn't something that could go on for long, apologized to Professor Lulëzim, and the bike excursion continued normally.

Our parents also tried to teach us music. They even bought me an accordion, which they brought from Moscow. We also started piano lessons with the well-known pianist Lola Gjoka, but in the end only Pranvera continued — Sokol and I “deserted,” because we didn't have an ear for music. We excused ourselves to our parents by saying we weren't going to become musicians, but drivers: I would be like Isuf, and Sokol like Ziniu, our mother's driver.

We also took lessons in drawing and sculpture with the well-known artist Kristina Hoshi. That actually wasn't without results. There, we learned to draw, colour, and work with modelling clay and plaster. Our teacher even made a very beautiful bust of Pranvera, adorning it with a crown of daisies on her head — a bust she still keeps as a cherished memento. She also made an open book out of plaster, on which was written: “Others have spring once a year, but I have it always.”\* With this small plaster piece, our father decorated part of the wall in his room, where he had it hung.

At that time — we're talking about the years 1958-59 — we also began taking Russian lessons individually, in the afternoons, with a Russian teacher who was working in Al-

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\* A reference to Pranvera's name. In Albanian, *pranvera* means spring.

bania. I remember that I didn't really enjoy it much, but we still learned. One day, we felt like playing football instead of going to our Russian class. We left the house a little earlier, just so the maid would see us — since only maids worked in that house — and, when it was exactly time for the lesson and the teacher hadn't arrived yet, we hid behind some bushes along with my friend Ladi. We waited to see whether the teacher would come or not. Barely two minutes had passed and she showed up — but didn't find us. We had already decided that we'd play ball that day. We returned home, put down our books and notebooks and told our mother, "The teacher didn't come," then ran off to play.

Despite that course, plus three years in high school and two years at university, I never managed to make Russian a usable language for myself. Still, when I watch a film, a lot comes back to me, and I notice that with a bit of effort I could reactivate it.

Our parents were very committed to ensuring that our early school knowledge took root. They needed to be present at all times — even when they were far away on work — and that shows in this letter my father sent me from Czechoslovakia, dated January 22, 1959:

*"...Today I'm heading to the Soviet Union by train, and on Saturday, January 24, we'll arrive in Moscow. My Lilka, I'm wondering how things are going with school. Did you get any 4s? I'll be very happy when I return and see that you've only gotten 5s. Are you getting along with Sokol and Pranvera? I trust you're not bothering them but making them happy. See you soon, my Lilka. Enver."*

## HOW I GOT MY DRIVER'S LICENSE

We were on holiday at Mount Dajti. Holidays in the mountains were enjoyable — it was much cooler than the sweltering heat in Tirana. We always went on walks, did target shooting with sport rifles, revolvers and Belgian pistols. It was something we kids looked forward to. We'd compete by aiming at rocks, bottles or signs. Even my father did some shooting, and then we'd all turn to our mother. We'd say:

"Come on, you've already proven yourself a top-notch shooter since the Conference of Peza, September 16, 1942." We'd even state the date of the conference, just to remind her she had to come out on top in target shooting. We were pushing her pride.

We'd all play ball together — with our father and some of the officers. That's how the days passed, while we waited for the start of the school year.

Bit by bit, I was approaching the age when I could get my driver's license. And who doesn't dream of driving a car! I had already done some driving practice with Isuf, and also with other drivers, namely Emin and Sokrat — all three were excellent drivers and proper instructors. I listened to their feedback carefully, corrected my mistakes and did my best not to repeat them. I followed all the traffic rules.

I told Isuf that I wanted to get my license. He said:

"All right, all right, but we have to let the Commander know too."

"What's my father got to do with this? He's not the inspector who gives out licenses, is he?!"

Of course he wasn't an inspector — but Isuf "didn't dare" let me drive without asking permission from his commander. Oh, what I went through! In the end, when I lost my patience, I decided to trick Isuf a little. I went to my father, who

was reading in a tent at the far end of Mount Dajti — from there, you could see a beautiful view of Tirana — and after thinking it over a bit, I said:

“Dad, Isuf told me that when we get back to the villa, I should drive so you can see for yourself, because I want to get my driver’s license.”

“Agreed,” he said.

When lunchtime came, around 1:00 p.m., Isuf and Axhemi, my father’s accompanying officer, were waiting by the car — a Russian GAZ (this was in 1966). My father, holding his walking stick, and I, at his side, approached the vehicle. My father said to Isuf:

“Let’s grant his wish this time, Isuf — let Hini\* drive so we can see whether he deserves to get a license or not.”

Isuf realized I had “set him up,” but he had no choice — he couldn’t say no. We got in the car: I at the wheel, my father in the front seat, Isuf behind me, and Axhemi on the other side. We set off. I was calm, focussed on my task, following all the advice I’d been taught. Isuf kept tapping my shoulder with his finger. I watched him in the mirror — he was drenched in sweat. It wasn’t me who was under pressure, it was him. My father jokingly said I had picked up all of Isuf’s habits. Isuf laughed, but from what I saw in the mirror, he was nervous — this was the first time he wasn’t in control of his commander, but instead it was his commander’s son, his own student, at the wheel.

When we arrived — those five kilometres surely felt to him like the longest and hardest drive of his life — my father shook my hand, and then shook Isuf’s as well. By now, Isuf was grinning ear to ear. The “road inspector,” my father, had finally given the green light for the licence. Once I reached the legal age, I took the test and earned my licence like everyone

\* A nickname for the author.

else. You never forget how to drive — and you’ll never have an accident if you follow what your instructors taught you.

## MY NANNY

Our nanny's name was Bone. She was a middle-aged woman whose husband had died early, so she was deeply attached to us. She was from Gjirokastra. She raised all three of us. She fed us, bathed us, stayed by our bedside when we were sick and would bring us a piece of bread in the middle of our play — something we really disliked, but we had to eat it.

Our mother was always busy with work, both on and off schedule, so most of the responsibility fell on Bone. We loved her, and she loved us. Later on, when I was finishing high school and she had retired, I would go visit her at her home. She would always make me a fried egg or some *tërhanë*, just like when we were little. When I started working, I gave her a little something from my first paycheck and it made her so happy. When she passed away, we were heartbroken.

We have many memories with her, too many to count — like, for example, when we got a bit older and a *bacë* (as people from Gjirokastra call a slap) didn't really bother us anymore. In fact, we'd show off the five fingers of a palm printed red on our bare backs to each other, laughing about it. Despite not having gone to school, Bone tried with all her heart and soul to raise us the best way she knew, often clashing with our mother's wishes.

Let me tell a story in which her image rose even higher in our eyes. One day, just as lessons were starting — I was in the second grade of the “P.N. Luarasi” high school — a car arrived and out stepped a familiar face: the officer assigned to the father of one of my classmates. After speaking briefly with the principal, we saw two boys — my friends — get into the car. They went home and returned about half an hour later. Later, it became known that they had been taken home because they had left the house that day without making their

beds. When we got home from school, we proudly shook our nanny's hand, and I said with great ceremony:

“Bravo to you for not ‘snitching’ to Dad that we don't make our beds.”

She replied:

“Oh, since when do boys ever make their beds!”

Maybe that wasn't very educational and went against what parents might want — but that was Bone, and in our eyes she was elevated for “not snitching,” unlike the Czech nanny of my two friends, who had told on them. Even today, I don't know how to properly make a bed, and I don't recall ever really trying — except during military training or youth action brigades, when I had no choice, and more recently in prison.

## LOVE FOR FLOWERS AND ANIMALS

Everyone loves beautiful nature. In both cases — whether it has been shaped by human hands or left completely untouched — it holds its own charm. In this nature, my father found his relaxation. On Mount Dajti, he would walk through the cool, lush, green forest, together with his walking stick, deep in thought. Eventually, he would arrive at a small shelter covered in a type of plant called *fier* (bracken), which grew everywhere and offered excellent shade from the sun, much like the coolness of the forest. From there, you could see the quiet city of Tirana, which at night transformed into a city full of lights, surrounded by darkness.

In Vlora, he would stroll through the winding paths that passed through groves of oranges, lemons and mandarins, planted by human hands. Their fragrance, as people say, gave life. Again, he walked with his stick, meditated and sat beneath a canopy, which this time opened up to a view of the Ionian Sea, the Bay of Vlora, Karaburun and Sazan.

In Tirana, he would walk in the yard of our home and in the beautifully arranged park across the street, full of all kinds of flowers, while on Sundays he would often visit the Palace of the Brigades.

This love for nature was also reflected in his care for forests, pastures and the fairytale beauty of the citrus plantations opened in Lukova and all along our stunning southern Riviera — magnificent views, perhaps unrepeatable, now destroyed.

This love for nature, he passed on to us — his children — and to his grandchildren as well.

When we were little, during his walks, we would follow him like ducklings. Our children did the same. Whenever he saw a violet, he would pick it and hand it to us with such af-

fection, as if he had discovered something rare and beautiful — and indeed, it was beautiful. That same gesture, learned from both father and grandfather, was something we always repeated — we, the two following generations, his children and grandchildren: every time we came across a violet, a lily, or a fresh and lovely wildflower, we would bring it to him. Depending on the moment, he would either place it in a glass of water or gift it to our mother. This rule did not apply to the garden flowers, the ones planted by human hands. Those were not to be picked, except on rare occasions.

My father knew the names of all the flowers, even in French, having learned them back when he had been in Montpellier, France. He nurtured in us a love for beauty. The gardener of the park — a man from Tirana named Ceni — took great care to ensure everything always looked fresh, as if alive. He understood Enver Hoxha's taste. He never let the flowers wilt — once their time passed, he would replace them, changing things according to the season. He greeted my father every day, and my father was always kind to this simple man, who performed his work with passion and love.

One day something wasn't quite right — it wasn't to "daj\* Ceni's" taste, as he was affectionately called. My father stopped, called him over and asked:

"What's happened here?!"

Daj Ceni, with his strong Tirana accent, shrugged and said:

"Agronomist Zana."

My father misheard him and thought he had said "the agronomist of the zone."

"What agronomist of the zone? Do it the way you know how!" my father told him.

It wasn't actually about the district's agronomist, but rath-

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\* Title for a male elder.

er a young female agronomist named Zana. She had wanted to try something new she had learned in school, but had done so without consulting the veteran gardener, *daj* Ceni. Later, we laughed because of how Ceni's Tirana accent had caused a misunderstanding with Enver Hoxha.

He also taught us to love animals. With a child, communication is direct — while with a flower, it starts indirectly, and only as you grow older do you begin to understand its meaning and the message it conveys.

When we were little, we used to raise pigeons — they made a mess with their droppings, but it was something you just had to put up with. We also kept canaries, which sang beautifully — in fact, we even bred them, watching how they laid eggs and raised their chicks. We had colourful parrots too, and although we tried in vain to get them to talk, naturally they weren't the kind of breed that could learn words.

When we went to Vlora or Dajti, our father and mother would buy us a small lamb to play with all day. The same ritual was repeated later with their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Once, someone gifted our father a baby deer. The little ones were overjoyed, but it was soon taken away and moved to the Palace of the Brigades, where there were several large wire enclosures. The reason was that the deer had started eating the garden flowers.

A cousin of ours who lived abroad brought us two small “poodle” puppies — they were beautiful and the children were thrilled. But the joy didn't last long. One died quickly, because the kids didn't know those dogs required special care and selective feeding. One day, there was *imam bayildi* on the menu — something the kids didn't like — so they decided to kill two birds with one stone: impress their parents by making it seem as if they had eaten a dish they normally refused, and

also make the dog happy. And the dog was happy — but the next day, it died. The children were very upset. That sadness was made worse by the second dog, a lovely white curly pup, who — a few days later — slipped out of the yard and made a run for the train station. An “alert” was raised, and the dog was found, but the same thing happened again. So we decided that, before it ended up in the hands of a stranger, we should gift it to someone.

After some time, the children pleaded again for a dog. I didn't want to disappoint them. This time, I chose a newborn puppy, a shepherd dog, gifted to me by a friend. It was beautiful and healthy. It didn't care about anything, wasn't delicate — the kids were really enjoying it. But it wasn't meant to stay with them for long — this time, for a completely different reason.

As is well known, the house was guarded by security staff. But even those who had permission to enter for a visit — though they passed the checkpoint — still had to deal with Balo, who stayed in the yard and wouldn't let them approach the house. On one hand, S. Gradeci granted visitors permission to enter Enver Hoxha's house; on the other hand, Balo didn't care about Sulo's orders. Regretfully, we ended up giving him away too. Now that we live in an apartment, the children are once again insisting that we get a watchdog — but this time, we'll need to think it through more carefully.

We've also kept decorative fish, rabbits, the occasional tiny yellow chick, some live turkeys around New Year, a pheasant or two.

As I mentioned earlier, these animals or birds were temporary. The only animal that lived with us for 15 years was the cat named Guci. She belonged to my sister. Every day at lunch, she would take her place beside the dining table and, even though she had her own food, she absolutely had to be

given something from my father's or mother's plate — placed on a scrap of paper. In the evening, she had a different routine: while we were watching a TV program, she would pass under our legs, brushing us with her tail to let us know she was there, and we'd pet her in return. If we didn't pay attention, she would go over to my father's armchair and gently touch his hand from underneath with her paw. That meant: your affection alone is enough for me — as if she knew exactly who the head of the household was. He would gently stroke her, saying: "Guci, Guci."

I can even share a strange story about the cat.

The strange incident happened one day while we were sitting down to watch television, and my father's armchair was empty — he had passed away about six months earlier. As the old cat did her usual round with her tail held high, brushing up against us, the TV began speaking about my father and then played a recording of his voice. At that moment, the cat froze. She stood still, staring at the empty chair, then glanced over at the dining table — but it was in vain. His voice stopped. The cat resumed her thoughtful pacing. Old as she was, she died some time later.

I've gone on a bit, but I wanted to show how, as a father and grandfather, he taught us to love nature, animals, flowers — all that is beautiful.

And the things he loved so dearly — flowers — have never left his side. Every day, fresh flowers can be found on his grave, placed with love by ordinary people who loved him and whom he loved in return. A flower laid on a grave, especially by a hand that never knew the person, is a message of love and remembrance.

## “PETRO NINI LUARASI”

This is the name of the school where I completed my secondary education. I saw the 35th anniversary of its founding on television, still bearing the same unchanged name. I couldn't attend as one of the school's first students because the regime has imprisoned me. It doesn't like intellectuals, nor does it tolerate their free thinking when it clashes with its own mouldy ideas, stuck in the past for over 50 years.

The television mentioned the names of the few professor-doctors the school has produced, but mine was left out. Not that I expected them to mention it — that outlet serves the same regime that threw me in prison. They listed those in high positions and ignored those with differing views from the authorities, or those the state has locked away. That's their business. I still consider that school mine, because that's where I learned, where I have nostalgia, respect and countless fond memories.

Those four years prepared us to continue our path toward knowledge — to university and beyond, into science. I remember the order and discipline required by our strict principal, Riza Hajro, and the dedication of the teachers to pass on their knowledge. I won't mention names, because I hold deep respect for all of them without exception and haven't forgotten any.

Our parents' concern for school grew over time. My father strongly emphasized learning foreign languages, which he considered essential for everyone — especially for intellectuals. For three years, twice a week in the afternoons, we studied English with the distinguished Professor Mahmut Bobrati. Later, we studied French. One afternoon a week I took extra math lessons with Professor Milo (Kristian Bukuroshi).

Later on, I also took a short course to familiarize myself with the history of philosophical doctrines, dialectical and historical materialism, etc. These were explained to us clearly and concisely by Professors Servet Pëllumbi, Xhemil Frashëri and Zija Xholi.

When the final exams ended, we all parted ways — each friend continuing on to university in the field of their choosing.

## IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION SCREEN

The television — this device that brings the world into our homes — has now become present in almost every household. It holds the attention of both young and old, children and elders, everyone interested in watching whatever suits their age and preferences. The only disagreement among family members gathered around the TV is about which program to watch.

New, strange and incomprehensible — that's how this type of broadcasting seemed, especially to my 80-year-old grandmother. She would watch television while constantly making comments that made us laugh. In the evening, she would come and have dinner with my father and the rest of us. Since my father had a habit of eating dinner at a set time (because of his diabetes), it almost always coincided with the news broadcast. For my father, the news was like the bread he ate. My grandmother would say:

“Oh, Enver, this television of yours is just full of talk. Come see what's going on with my television! There, they eat, they dance, and those wretches even kiss!”

My father and we would laugh, but she insisted. Dinner would end — and at the same time, so would the news — so when my grandmother returned to her room, she'd turn on the TV and say to those of us who accompanied her:

“There, you see what's on here?! And you were laughing at me back there! Go tell Enver too!”

In the beginning we only picked up Italian stations, and it was something new and beautiful — but also strange — because through it you could see world events, movies, football matches, children's films and many other things. New, strange and fascinating.

When the television was on and he wasn't interested in the program, my father would read or check the ATSH news or some book. He followed political debates, historical and scientific programs, and mostly watched sports when there was a final match. He liked watching interesting films — historical or comedic.

Later, Albanian television began broadcasting. He watched all the Albanian films and enjoyed them. There were some he watched more than once — something he rarely did. He also listened to musical programs, especially folk songs, which he loved. He had cassette tapes of folk music from all regions — he wasn't a localist. He also liked patriotic songs, like *Për ty atdhe* sung by Mentor Xhemali. But he also liked when children sang. Here's what he wrote to me in a letter while I was on a youth volunteer action, dated June 28, 1968:

*“My dear Lilo, We were at a concert today — a performance by pioneer groups from all over Albania. The most beautiful show I've seen was today's. I wanted to share my feelings about these marvellous little artists with you, but you are... a sportsman. Too bad, but I don't follow football matches! When I was your age, I also played with the ball — but I sang too, and you don't sing. What a pity! You and your mother must learn to sing Lab songs. That way, we could make a trio: you start, I follow and your mother holds the drone... I embrace you. Enver.”*

Our television also honoured heroes — it aired programs about them and the martyrs. He watched them in silence, with respect. There were times I saw tears running down his face. We would glance at him out of the corner of our eyes but said nothing. We couldn't interrupt in those moments. He was completely among them — that moment wasn't ours. Many of them had given their lives under his command to liberate Albania — the dream of the whole nation. Now they rested in the martyrs' cemeteries across every district,

arranged more beautifully than in any other country. They had their representative site in the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation, where Mother Albania stood watch over them.

And their commander would always go to them, bowing with respect and love. Wherever he travelled throughout the districts, he would always first pay tribute to the martyrs — his comrades. Even in his final year, he stood before them. The wind blew through his greying hair, but it couldn't stop him from visiting them. It was a significant day — Liberation Day — the day for which they gave their lives. Nothing could hold him back.

This moment, both for us, his children, and for his grandchildren, was full of meaning. It carried the message that martyrs are immortal — they lived in his heart and had taken root in ours, and in our children's as well. His last wish was to be buried next to his comrades, in a simple grave — and so it was. The commander joined the partisans, the martyrs, those who gave their young lives for the future that Albania enjoyed.

But for those who had been defeated and had fled fifty years earlier with the occupiers — those who generations of children had come to know in play as “Ballists” — the sight of this army of martyrs, with their commander at the front, resting in the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation in Tirana, was unbearable. That image blocked their plans to stab “Mother Albania” in the back. In a macabre act, they exhumed their commander, vandalized graves, smashed monuments, destroyed busts and removed commemorative plaques. It was a war of the living dead against the immortal dead — the martyrs. Can corpses ever win? Never. Victory lies with the martyrs, because their blood is in the foundation of Albania.

But let us return to the room where we would gather to

watch television. We would all be watching an interesting film, while he would be reading. When he finished reading — even if the movie was nearly over — he would ask:

“What happened?”

For my mother, who was completely immersed in the film, there were only two options: either stop watching and explain everything that had happened so far, or continue watching and ignore the question. He did it on purpose — just to tease her. When she and the rest of us kept watching the movie, he would, with quiet cunning, grab the remote control and switch the channel. We would all jump up in protest — he always managed to do it right at the most interesting moment.

“Oh, excuse me, I didn’t mean to! Which channel did you want me to put it on?” he would say, and then change it to the one we asked for. But that wasn’t the end of it — five minutes later, he would tease us again by switching the channel. That’s when we’d say:

“Come on, Dad, don’t do it on purpose!”

He would laugh, hand us the remote and look us in the eye, pointing at Mom to show how completely focussed she was on the film. But when there was a football match on, everyone went to their own rooms — we were afraid he’d pull one of his “scherzos” during a crucial moment, like a penalty kick, and change the channel right then.

Maybe what I’m writing here isn’t very interesting, but now that so many years have passed, I remember these scenes fondly — especially the jokes he used to make.

## AN EARTHQUAKE THAT SHOOK US OUT OF OUR HOME, TOO

I had just started my university studies, in the mechanical engineering faculty, already prepared for the idea that after graduation, work would take me all across Albania.

I had only just begun adjusting to the new student life when, in December 1967, a powerful earthquake struck the entire Dibra region, destroying many villagers’ homes and leaving them homeless in the middle of winter — in the cold and under the snow that had blanketed the whole country.

As with every natural disaster, the Albanian state stood by its people — not only morally, but also by rebuilding their homes. In such situations, the solidarity of the people toward those affected became evident, with volunteers coming from all over the country to help.

This time, we — the three children of Enver Hoxha — would also be volunteers. Two or three days after the earthquake hit, our father called the three of us and said:

“I’ve spoken with your mother, and we think it would be good for you — our children — to go to the Dibra district to help those affected by the earthquake.”

We were surprised that Pranvera would come with us too, as she was only thirteen at the time. Of course, Pranvera wasn’t going there to rescue victims, but Enver Hoxha was sending his youngest daughter as a symbolic gesture, to say: “I, and my family, are with you and here to help.” But let’s give Pranvera her due — she worked enthusiastically and didn’t want to fall behind her older peers from university.

We set off and were accommodated in the homes of villagers whose houses had survived the destruction. The girls all slept together in one house. One of our fellow volunteers, Meto, was joined by the daughter of Sul Baholli, who at the

time was the district party secretary, while his son Tosi came to stay with us. All the boys slept in one room, on mattresses laid out on the floor, and in the centre of the room we had a stove that we lit in the evening when we returned tired from the day's work and frozen from the cold.

Since I've started describing the environment we stayed in, I'll continue with that before talking about the work. In the evenings, we would sit and chat about "a thousand things," as the saying goes. With us also stayed a man we called *mixha* — which means uncle — who knew the area very well and told us about local customs and various events from the region, stories and history. Tosi, who was our age and considered himself a local, also tried to help us however he could.

Because we were so tired, we'd fall asleep instantly — or at least we would have, if it weren't for another volunteer, Neli. Whether at drills or volunteer work camps, he was always very punctual in the mornings, got ready quickly and worked hard. Wake-up was set for 7:00 a.m., as the sun rose late, but his voice replaced the horn of the action camps and drills — he'd wake us up at 6:30 a.m. sharp by saying:

"Keep sleeping, keep sleeping — you've got another half hour left."

His brother, Ladi, would scold him for waking us up early, but Neli would say:

"I'm not waking you up — I'm just letting you know that you still have half an hour to sleep."

This became a daily routine.

Our food was the same as what the villagers ate, or what was cooked in the kitchens set up for volunteers — because soon after us, university students from all over came to help those affected by the earthquake. Beans were the staple, sometimes we had pilaf. One day, Sul Baholli invited us to his

home in Peshkopi and I remember we ate a *halva* that would have tasted great even in normal circumstances — but especially in those days, after eating nothing but beans, it seemed absolutely incredible.

We worked from morning until nightfall. In a letter I sent to my father and mother, I wrote:

*"...The weather has started to turn and the rain has begun. It's also getting cold. Work is going well. There's a lot of mud, but we have boots and don't mind at all. At first we were in Çernina, then we went to Kovashica and now we've come to Allajbega (Burimi). We work from 7:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. We take a one-hour break for lunch, then we start again. We get along very well with the villagers — they've been very welcoming.*

*"Our specialty is clearing around the bricks and roof tiles that fell during the earthquake, throwing tiles onto the newly built roofs and, at times, even placing them ourselves. Don't worry — we won't fall, the houses are low. This Sunday, December 17, there's a match between Albania and Germany. It's quite the match — one of a kind. This match won't come around again. Read this paragraph again and try to decipher it!!! Both of you — I know you're good at deciphering and you'll understand what your son means. Kisses with love, Lilua."*

They did manage to decipher the final paragraph and understood what their son meant — but we still didn't get to watch the match (at the time there was no television in Dibra, and we hoped they'd let us come to Tirana to watch it).

One day, while we were working alongside the girls, Vera Kapo — a third-year architecture student — was eagerly putting into practice all the knowledge she'd gained at school. She was staking out the layout for a new house, marking the foundation spots using stakes and string. After working for a good three hours and finishing everything, just as she was about to show us her work, a self-dumping truck loaded with

bricks came and ruined everything she had done — erasing all the markings by dumping the load right in the middle. Fuming, Vera declared solemnly:

“An architect’s job is a shitty job.”

Toward the end, when the houses were nearly completed, Enver Hoxha came to Dibra to meet with the earthquake victims and the volunteers who had gone to help them.

The press at the time covered this visit, but I’ll note a couple of things beyond what is commonly known. He met with all of us. He asked us questions, and we responded. Sul Baholli said to my father:

“Since I’m the commander of the action here in the district, I can tell you that your daughter, Pranvera, has fulfilled her duty — and when you return to Tirana, you should take her with you.” My father said, right in front of Pranvera:

“I have no say in this — here, you’re the one giving orders! Did you hear that, daughter? You’ve completed your duty and we’ll return to Tirana together.”

She was a little sad to part from all of us, but also happy to be leaving with her father.

For New Year’s, we would be in our homes, with our families. The same went for the villagers, who would celebrate in their new houses with gratitude for the Party that had stood by them and helped them through those difficult days.

## FROM THE LETTERS DURING VOLUNTEER WORK

The older we grew, the more our father spoke to us and prepared us for life — for the responsibilities that awaited us in building our lives, wherever the interests of Albania might take us.

Whenever I was away from home, I received many letters that he sent to me during the various volunteer actions I took part in — in agriculture, in the construction of the Rrogozhina-Lushnja and Elbasan-Përrenjas railways, or during military drills.

Alongside advice on how we should work and behave, he often included humour and lighthearted stories from the family.

Here are a few excerpts from his letters:

*My dear Lilo,*

*...You have difficult duties and not the slightest privilege: you must rise from your first sleep and be the first to go to work, to the most difficult place, to tire yourself more, and to be the last to leave work. Be very humble, modest, kind with your comrades (this means neither opportunistic nor spiteful), and go to sleep last — don’t fall asleep right away, so your comrades can rest peacefully and fully. I trust that you’re fulfilling your duties and will always do so with honour.*

*The rain isn’t letting you work — but I assume it’s not stopping you from eating. I read the “Studenti” newspaper, saw a cartoon, cut it out, and I’m sending it to you. I thought to myself: “If Lilo happens to be in that brigade, he really embarrassed us.”*

*Many football matches are being lost — but it’s well known that when there’s a match, you need to exceed your quota by 150 per cent and just forget about it...*

*A warm embrace, Enver.  
Tirana, June 15, 1968.*

\* \* \*

*Dear Ilir,*

*Right now, as I'm writing to you, the footballer Pelé is shooting at the opponent's goal. The score: nothing. So don't feel bad that you couldn't watch the match.*

*We received your letter and were happy to hear that you are well and working hard. In work, my son, you must be tireless, because work strengthens both the body and the conscience. That's what's essential in life — it will make your life happier and more fulfilling. I'm very happy that you are kind and humble with people — that's what matters most. Life over there must be joyful, surrounded by enthusiastic youth. How lucky you are for the conditions the Party and state have provided. No doubt, after work there's singing and joking around. When you come back, you'll have to tell us everything, because we old folks need the freshness of youth.*

*...As you know, Pranvera will be coming to the railway site. So, good luck with your work, my dear Lilo.*

*I kiss you with longing and we look forward to seeing you,  
Yours, Enver.*

*Tirana, June 24, 1969.*

\* \* \*

*My dear Ilir,*

*I send you a heartfelt hug. We haven't received a real letter from you, just a "scrap," as the Korçars say, but I can imagine — "you're busy" and "don't have time," right?*

*I was very happy you went and visited Pranvera. I believe she'll return the visit. But make sure not to leave her out of the*

*things we sent you — you boys in the tent are like wolves! You devour things so fast that you blink and they're gone, not just the snacks, but the whole mess hall too. But I know you're gentlemen with the girls, and you'll take good care of Pranvera.*

*You'll be back soon. Isn't a month of work short? But that's what we assigned you — it's our "fault," not yours. You're like "lions," not afraid of hard work. I'm hearing good things about you engineering students — that makes me happy. But don't get cocky — there are others who work even harder, like the girls from the teaching college.*

*Goodbye for now, my dear Lilo.*

*Kisses, Enver.*

*Durrës, July 8, 1969.*

In these letters, as I mentioned earlier, there were always family stories that my father described with humour, like this one:

*"...When I come up the stairs in the evening, after dinner, I sometimes call out for you, but no one answers — and your mother just laughs. I've saved that joke to tell when you return. It seems that when you were home, there was enough noise that the mice didn't dare come out. Now that you're gone, they're strolling through the rooms and terrifying Pranvera and Dhurata. We've assigned Isuf (the shepherd) to 'take care' of them for you..."*

And in another letter:

*"...The mouse hasn't forgotten us — he visits every evening. We've placed a trap in the hearth room, but the old rascal is a crafty one. He knows all the tricks and still hasn't stepped onto the rotten plank..."*

After we finished the Faculty of Engineering, we had to complete our final military training. Here's what my father wrote to me at that time:

*My dearest Ilir,*

*I'm taking advantage of Teuta's visit to send you a few lines. Yesterday I returned from Korça and spent a few hours in Elbasan, which seemed even more beautiful than before — perhaps because you're now living your military life there. May you complete this sacred duty in good health, with success and honour. Study well, my son. Pay attention to every detail, because military education is of vital importance for our homeland, for socialism. These must be defended at all times and against any danger. That's why courage, bravery, military knowledge and political-ideological clarity are necessary. Give Teuta some encouragement — she's still young and feels sad to be separated from you. We'll keep her close to us, bring her joy, just as we would to you. That way, the time apart will pass quickly and without notice.*

*Last night we gathered in the "new inn" (this refers to Villa No. 4, where my father stayed for a while while our house in Tirana was being built). After dinner, we watched some TV, I stayed up a bit longer and then went to bed because I was a bit tired from the trip. In the morning, when I woke up, I did everything quietly so I wouldn't wake your mother, Pranvera, Toli or Sano. But when I opened the bedroom doors, I found them empty — "the birds had flown." When your mother got up, she told me that "the brave one and the brave young lady," along with Sano — all three "musketeers" — had gone down to Tirana during the night. A mouse had appeared in their room. You can imagine the panic! And Guci (the cat), who would've protected them from that unwanted guest, was nowhere to be found!*

*Kisses full of longing and love,*

*Lilo, write us when you can.*

*Yours, Enver.*

*Tirana, August 31, 1972.*

## **A VERY SPECIAL BIRTHDAY GIFT**

Together with Teuta, we thought that for his birthday, instead of a material gift, we would give him a very joyful and equally special piece of news — one that would be fully "delivered" nine months later.

But let's not drag it out — here's the story of this mysterious and happy gift.

I took an envelope and, after writing his name on it, I marked it with "extremely urgent" and underlined it with three red lines, just like they used to do with important office documents. I placed the following letter inside and handed it to the officer, so that the next morning, when he woke up, it would be delivered to him along with the newspapers, which he read every day before heading to the office.

They gave him the letter in the morning — he opened it and was surprised by the joyful news he received on his birthday. Here's what it said:

*Dear Dad,*

*Teuta and I wish you a happy birthday — may you live to be 100!*

*When we were little, on your birthday we'd draw you a picture or promise to do well in school. Now those things are behind us, and we've prepared a gift we think you'll really like — although we're sorry you'll only get to "receive" it in nine months.*

*"Long live Grandpa for giving us toys!" (these words were placed in the mouth of a baby I had drawn)*

*Kisses, Lilo.*

*October 16, 1974.*

He was overjoyed. When we met, he hugged us with all his heart for the gift we had given him. But, as I said, the gift

would only arrive several months later, and time at moments seemed to pass quickly, other times slowly. As the long-awaited day approached, I would ask my father:

“What do you think Teuta will have?”

He would reply:

“I can’t say what it will be — a boy or a girl. You can guess what I want. I want — whether it’s a boy,” and after thinking a bit, he added, “or a girl,” and laughed. “Either way, I’ll welcome them with joy. But I’d prefer a boy, since you’re already my eldest son. The other one gave me a beautiful and lovely girl, and now I’d like you — meaning Teuta,” and he laughed again, “because you don’t do much — Teuta should give me a boy, one who will grow up brave, determined for the homeland, smart and a good student.”

On the day of the “gift,” the whole family was filled with joy. Once again, it was the mother who learned the news first, even though we had planned for the father to be the first to hear it this time. But it wasn’t meant to be. We had arranged for the news to be delivered in an envelope — and so it was — but at that moment, he had his hands full drinking coffee and told mom to open the envelope for him. She opened it, and when she read the letter announcing the birth of the boy, she let out a joyful cry. So once again, she was the first to hear the news.

The next day, father sent this letter to Teuta at the maternity ward:

*My dearest Teuta,*

*You can imagine how indescribable my joy and the joy of the whole family was when we received the happy news that you were relieved and gave birth to our dear little boy — just as we had hoped — and that he was born healthy and beautiful. You filled my heart with immeasurable happiness, my dear daughter. May*

*Ermal live long — as we had chosen and decided together — as long as the mountains. May you and Ilir live long, and may you raise him happily and joyfully, for he will also bring happiness and joy to us old folks — to grandma and grandpa. I wait with longing and impatience for you and Ermal to return home as soon as possible. I’ll push through these days, but my thoughts are with you, my dears, whom I kiss and kiss with love.*

*I heard Ermal’s voice recorded on the tape recorder. Truly, it was a strong voice — like that of the partisans in the mountains, like the wind that blows powerfully from the mountains and pushes the enemies of the homeland into the sea. That’s what he seems to be — a little dragon — a perfect match for Valbona, Lumi and Mali, who, when they grow a bit more, will fill the house with joy. It will ring with their voices and toys, and I will feel young again and share in their joy.*

*My dear Teuta, just like when Valbona was born, I was the last to find out the news when Ermal was born. I had hoped that, this time, I would be the one to bring the good news to her — to Nexhmije — and I got the chance, but it slipped through my fingers. When you come home, I’ll tell you in detail how it happened.*

*When we found out, we were in the dining room — not in bed, like the night Valbona was born. If only you had seen us from somewhere: we were all on our feet, overjoyed, shouting at the top of our lungs: Long live Teuta, Ilir, Ermal! We were kissing and hugging each other! Sulo was filming us, Dr. Isuf had turned on the tape recorder and Ermal was wailing.*

*We called Reshat and Behnie\* on the phone, congratulated them, and let them hear the baby’s cry — they were over the moon with joy.*

*Ilir was bursting with happiness that you were well and had given birth to a boy. He was boasting, almost as if to say: “I know*

\* Teuta Hoxha’s parents.

*what I'm doing — everything goes according to plan.”*

*My dear Teuta, I kiss and hug you with longing. Don't be sad — you'll only stay a few more days in the maternity ward. We're waiting for you with impatience, to welcome you into the arms of your loving family. We're waiting for you eagerly — your grandfather and grandmother, who love you and Ermal so very much.*

*Your father, Enver.*

*June 9, 1975.*

While to his wife, he addressed a kind of improvised poem — born out of the joy of the moment and his distant memories. Here's what he wrote:

*To Nexhmije, to read while sipping her tea, when she has a moment. Sent by Enver, the grandfather of Valbona and Ermal.*

*I received your letter,  
Read it with a thirst,  
I learned what you wrote,  
With open eyes I dreamed!  
Of Teuta and the little boy,  
I missed them so much — oh joy!  
I wished for Ermal to arrive,  
To come and wrap me in a hug,  
What joy that would revive!  
Lucky us, my dear Nexhmije,  
Life fills up with such glee!  
Valbona sings like a bell so clear,  
Ermal answers with wonder near:  
“Grandma, grandpa, we love you so.  
For in rivers and in mountains,  
Where you once fought,  
There you met and love was sought.  
That is where we have our roots —*

*Albania is our motherland.”*

*Written on June 9, 1975, after reading Nexhmije's letter — which she wrote last night, past midnight, after returning from the maternity hospital, where she visited our dear Teuta and Ermal.*

*Enver.*

Eagerly awaiting the day his grandson would arrive home, he said, “Just don't forget to let me know when the boy comes — don't leave me sitting at the office.”

Sanoja, laughing, told him:

“Oh, don't go to the office that day — ask your comrades for the day off.”

We all laughed, and he explained why Sanoja had said that.

When his mother died, he stayed home for three days, and on the fourth day he went back to the office. On that exact day, an old woman from Gjirokastra came to offer her condolences. After expressing her sympathy and being offered a coffee, she asked:

“And where is Enver?”

“He's gone to the office,” Sanoja replied.

“What's this nonsense?” the old woman exclaimed. “He should have asked his comrades at the office for permission to follow the customs of the people — you don't just mourn for three days then rush back to work.”

When father returned from the office, Sanoja told him what the woman had said. Despite the grief he still carried from the loss of his mother, he laughed.

The long-awaited day finally arrived. I went over in the morning and asked my father how he felt. He replied:

“Today is June 14. Nature is smiling — look at all that greenery — and the heart of a grandfather smiles too, because

today my dear little boy, Ermal, the son of Ilir and Teuta, is coming home for the first time. I can't wait. I got up this morning, looked at the photo I keep of him by my bedside, and said: 'Buçko, today you're coming to me and I will hold you in my arms and carry you to your bed — the same bed your father slept in when he was as little as you. My hope is to live long enough to one day see your son sleeping in that same bed too, Ermal. That's not impossible — your grandfather is made of strong bones. Now go and see what your grandmother is doing.'"

I went to my mother and found her with a shawl wrapped around her shoulders, reading a book. "Look," she said, "I've wrapped this whole shawl around me because I'm cold — I'm emotional knowing we're going to pick up the little one from the maternity ward and bring him home. I'm reading a book about how to care for newborns."

When the boy, accompanied by his "suite," entered the house, my father said:

"Well done, Teuta, bless you" — and he kissed and embraced her. "Welcome, grandson, welcome. Give him to me, give him to me now in my arms. Oh, how beautiful he is! What a beautiful boy! Move away, don't crowd the boy," he said, as we were all gathered around the head of the bed. "Come here, Valbona, look at your little brother."

After we took photographs, filmed video and recorded audio on the tape recorder, with the boy in his arms, we went to the room where he would be placed in his crib.

"Slowly now, let grandpa be the one to lay him in his bed. There now, grow strong. He's a handsome one, isn't he! I forbid anyone from kissing him — only Teuta is allowed. Look, I'd say his face resembles Teuta's, but he has a nice head like Lilo's. Smile for us, you brave grandson! Wait, let me speak to him in Dibran dialect. 'No, no,' says my mother, who's from

Dibra. Okay then, I'll speak in Gjirokastrite: What colour are your eyes, green or coal black? See how grandpa's smelling your cheeks? That's why we named you Ermal. Grandpa took your picture and filmed you — when you grow up, you'll see it all."

From all the chatter, the boy started to stir, and he said:

"Cry just a little so grandpa can hear you — look how your lip trembles." And then everyone slowly stepped away to leave him in peace, to sleep in his new space.

My friends also shared in my joy, offering congratulations. Among the many memories from that time, one stands out — with Muharrem, who worked at the foundry in the agricultural machinery plant in Durrës, where I had just started working as an engineer. On Saturday, as I was heading to Tirana, he said:

"On Monday, when you're back, write up and bring me the report from the organization — to help me out a bit."

I never said no to him — not just to him, but to others as well — but that day I told him:

"Of course, but on one condition: if I have a son, I won't be able to do it."

"I accept the condition," he said.

On Monday, when I went back and we met at the plant, he asked me:

"So, did you make that son?" — confident I'd reply:

"No, I brought you the report!"

But he was surprised when I said:

"I made him yesterday," as if it were something ordinary, something that could be commanded. He congratulated me and I treated him and other friends.

I also remember an incident with my friend Niku, who just a few days earlier had a daughter — but he had wanted a son at all costs. His disappointment was obvious. The guys

teased him, since he had boasted: “It’s either a son or nothing.” Dr. Isuf had dropped by his house and started teasing him:

“Things are really quiet around here. Word must have gotten out that you had a daughter. Let them know to bring some cake.”

He was annoyed and we all laughed. Then it was my turn. God had decided that I would have a boy just days after him, and cakes came in endless numbers. I called Niku and said:

“I want to ask you a favour!”

“What is it?” he replied, ready to help.

“Do you have room in your fridge so I can bring you some cakes to store for me in case they go bad? Mine is full and there’s no space. When I need them, I’ll come pick them up — you’re my neighbour, after all!”

He laughed, but there wasn’t much he could say — he had to take the teasing and the jokes. But it’s all temporary. Now he’s proud of his wonderful, beautiful Anja, and he also had a son later on. Meanwhile, I tried to have a daughter, but couldn’t succeed. Still, now I say thank goodness I didn’t have a girl, and I’m proud of my three boys — each one better than the next.

Summer holidays arrived, and as usual, my father went to Pogradec while we went to the beach in Durrës. The separation between grandfather and grandson had its emotional effect, and from Pogradec he sent a letter:

*“My dearest ones, Ilir and Teuta,  
my little and precious soul, Ermal,*

*“I kiss you all with much longing and tell you that I miss all three of you — but don’t take offence — I miss Ermal the most. I send you my best wishes for Ermal, who turns two months old the day after tomorrow. We are spending the holiday days happily.*

*We see Valbona growing up, laughing and enjoying her new toys, while for Ermal — who is growing, who smiles and goes “goo-goo” freely — we imagine him, and I’m gathering a mountain’s worth of love for the little one to give him when we come back and see him. But what can I say — through letters, it’s hard to express everything I feel for Ermal and for you both. Kiss him — or better, take in a deep, deep breath of his scent from his little neck, and find some way to send it to me, to us here. Take care of him, keep him safe from the wind.*

*“I kiss you, I hug you, I wish you health and joy.*

*“Until we meet again, Enver.*

*“Pogradec, August 7, 1975.”*

And the two-month-old boy “responded” to his beloved grandfather’s letter:

*“Dear Grandpa — and Grandma too,*

*“I say ‘and Grandma’ because only Grandpa had written my name alongside Daddy and Mummy’s, while Grandma just wrote ‘Dear Ilir and Teuta.’ She had forgotten to include me, even though the whole letter was about me.*

*“I’ve grown a lot and have started smiling even without anyone talking to me. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I noticed my eyebrows have darkened. My cheeks are chubby now because Mummy fills me up with a white liquid she calls ‘chu-chu.’ She gives me ‘chu-chu’ at all hours — and I don’t hold back either, I go ‘pee-pee’ and ‘poo-poo’ whenever I feel like it. I’ve also picked up a bad habit: I can’t fall asleep unless someone rocks me. I wail — not out of habit, I’m a calm baby — but because I want to imitate my kind Daddy, who apparently was a big crier when he was my age and kept Grandma very busy.*

*“I take after my dad in height — I’m already 61 centimetres tall — and from Mummy I inherited my eyes, although Daddy*

doesn't want to admit it — not because of beauty, but because of the eye colour.

*“Grandpa, I can't wait for us to meet because I miss you a lot. And I also want you to come soon and restore some order — they won't stop pinching my cheeks with kisses. No one has brought me any toys either, apparently because I'm still small and put everything in my mouth.*

*“I also have a great-grandmother who loves me very much and is doing well health-wise. Everyone else is also in good health — I can tell because no uncles in white coats have shown up, the kind they call ‘doctor.’; Only one doctor-uncle from Bulgaria came to see me, and a little old man named Sulçebeg, who was also Daddy's doctor — he's kind, but I don't like him at all because I'm healthy as an apple. He only comes out of obligation, since I overheard him telling Mummy that on the 20th I have to get a shot for polio.*

*“I miss my big sister a lot — she's up there in Pogradec. She's the only one I can truly talk to, along with Grandpa, who understands what we want just by looking at us.*

*“Daddy and Mummy are doing well. Mummy told Daddy that we're heading back to Tirana on the 27th because ‘I have to go to university.’ Looks like my Mummy must be some big historian. I've also heard Daddy tell Mummy that, ‘we've kept good track of the accounts and Grandma will be pleased.’ Anyway, I don't know what accounts are, but people say those who keep them have worries. Me, Valbona and Grandpa — we don't care about any of that.*

*“Now I'll say hi to everyone and end this letter because I'm tired of writing.*

*“Kisses with love — from Ermal,  
two big ones on both cheeks for Grandpa.”*

*“Durrës, August 14, 1975.”*

At the end of the letter was drawn the imprint of his tiny

hand and footprint, with the signature:

*“Stamped: the hand of the illiterate himself, Ermal Hoxha.”*

Not long after came the reply from the grandfather:

*“My dearest, my little soul, Ermal!*

*“I'm dying of longing for you. It's been 15 to 17 days since I last saw you, but it feels like 17 years. I think of you day and night, and I know you're growing, that you're smiling, that you're moving your little hands and feet. That's exactly how I want you to be — full of life. Daddy and Mummy told me on the phone that you're growing, and I have no doubt.*

*“The photos I received — even though your daddy and your uncle are terrible photographers and didn't manage to take a good shot or get the lighting right — they still brought me joy. The photo of you in the cradle melted my heart. You, my dear little Ermalush, in all the pictures look just like your grandpa who loves you so much. You've become quite chubby, my sweetheart — you've filled out, even your legs have thickened. You'll play football well when you grow up a bit more, and you'll play like Grandpa Enver — not like your daddy, who also used to play, but never scored goals. He just ran around like a horse in a threshing field.*

*“And in that picture with Mummy and Daddy, you looked great. Don't let Daddy squeeze you too tight and kiss your cheeks too much, because Daddy's like a zhdërha (if you, Ermal, don't know what a zhdërha means, ask Grandpa and I'll explain it to you).*

*“Ermalush, you wrote such a lovely, delightful, and affectionate letter — I never would have imagined something so sweet. Even your father never thought to do such a thing when he was born — to write a letter to his own father, your grandfather, who was with Stalin at the time. You can imagine where the*

*fault lies for that forgetfulness — your daddy never wrote to his father because Nexhmije didn't do it either, as if the letter were actually written by her newborn son — Ilir Hoxha Jr.*

*"But your letter was also full of great humour. You really impressed Grandpa — I'm very glad, because you must always have a strong sense of humour.*

*"So, my sweet and wonderful Ermalush, I know very well what kind of boy I have in you, for you remembered your grandpa. Now, your mummy will likely scold you a bit and say we have to go to the beach, since Grandpa writes such long letters. But I know you didn't get bored of Grandpa's words, because you love him very much and you're waiting for him. So wait for me — I'm on my way.*

*"Send my regards and kisses to Mummy and Daddy, and as for you — I kiss you, I kiss you, and I hold you close to my heart.*

*"Your Grandpa, Enver."*

And the little one's reply:

*"My dearest Grandpa and Grandma,*

*"I'm in very good health. It looks like we've already started our correspondence.*

*"I'm having a great time here. They take me out for strolls, especially in the afternoon, because it's hot in the morning and I stay out on the balcony. Now I've become a calmer boy and I don't fuss in my crib every time I want to sleep. Only after my evening bath do I still like to be rocked.*

*"Speaking of baths — I love bath time. I move my legs like I want to swim. Grandpa, next year let me bathe and sunbathe too, otherwise I'll be upset. I know you'll let me, but it's that grandma who doesn't leave a single book unread — one says this, another says that — and we little ones are the experiment, meaning no one asks us if we're okay with it. They say Grandma, who*

*is very kind and reads books and gives advice so that we grow up healthy, has many professions and specialties — just no diploma. She's followed Grandpa's advice, who says everyone should learn many trades.*

*"When Grandma gives Mum and Dad the side-eye, I understand they've done something wrong with me — even though I don't really get what, since they're treating me like a prince. I saw Valbona and I was very happy. We even held hands. Valbona's shaved her head — looks like Valbona's dad misses having a boy.*

*"Oh Grandpa, I want to grow up to wear a 'big hat' (like a commander), I don't want curls — they're ugly. My head is now as big as Valbona's, but she holds it up better, while mine still feels heavy.*

*"Grandpa, I want to grow a moustache soon — so I can poke Daddy, because he doesn't shave and when he kisses me it's prickly. I don't say anything because I love him, but Mum gets annoyed and doesn't let him because he scratches me. Besides, he's a grown man — he should understand on his own. But no, he's hard-headed. I miss you both very much — it's been too long since we've seen each other.*

*"Daddy told me you've gone to Korça. How long will you stay there, and when are you coming back to Pogradec? Write us a letter quickly, please.*

*"Grandpa, next year we'll have fun and I won't let us part. Wherever you go, I'll come along with you and Grandma.*

*"I don't know how to write as long and nicely as you do, because you write so much. You even write during your rest time — so much that it annoys our dear Grandma. So don't upset her, because we love her dearly.*

*"I can't do anything from afar, but when you come to Tirana, I won't let you write during your rest time anymore — because then no one will play with me, tell me stories, take me for a ride on the 'tu-tu,' feed me biscuits and do so many other things.*

*“Now I’ll end this letter by kissing both Grandpa and Grandma on both cheeks.*

*“Yours, Ermal*

*“P.S.: Let there be as many grandchildren as you want — 4, 7, 10 — as many as you like, Grandpa, but I want you to appoint me commander of them all.*

*“Durrës, August 19, 1975”*

The grandson’s reminder to Grandpa to “write a short letter, for heaven’s sake” was taken seriously, and the very next day this urgent letter was sent from Korça to Durrës:

*“My dearest Ermal,*

*“I received the letter you sent me and it made me so happy, my dear boy. I miss you so much — more than I can say. But you’ll feel it when I come there, and that day is drawing near. ‘That’s enough,’ I said to Grandma, ‘we’ve been separated from Ermal. Next time I won’t leave without taking him in the cradle. One lung isn’t enough to live with — I want both of them with me, close to my chest.’*

*“You saw your sister, didn’t you? You have such a beautiful, sweet sister. That photo where your mum is with both of you — there’s no better idea. Your mum has always been kind and loving. I really like that photo, even though it came out a little dark.*

*“Your father likes to criticize, but he should take a look at his own head first. Do you know what he says? That you don’t hold your head straight. He should sort out his own head — he’s a father now, and it wobbles from side to side. But even so, it’s a charming wobble, and if you wobble like that too, well — as people say, ‘like father, like son.’ But you’re going to be an athlete.*

*“You say you want to be the team’s captain — and I agree — but I won’t give up being the referee. I’m keeping that job for*

*myself.*

*“Everyone tells me such good things about you — they bring me great joy. But the greatest joy for Grandma and me will be when we finally hold you again in our arms and against our hearts.*

*“For now, we send you kisses and more kisses from afar.*

*“Your Grandpa, Ermal*

*“P.S. My dear little one, I have a request — please make your mum my secretary next time. Your dad ruined my eyes with that handwriting of his — it’s like he wrote with chicken feet!*

*“Korça, August 20, 1975”*

And after reading the letter, Mum added a note before sending it:

*P.S. “Ermal has taken over Grandpa’s head so much, he even forgot his own name at the end when he signed it: ‘Kisses from your Grandpa, Ermal.’ We all laughed a lot when we read it — that’s why we left it as it was. You laugh too!” (N.H.)*

## A PHOTOGRAPH THAT CONVEYS A MESSAGE

Myslym Peza — or better yet, Baba Myslym, as everyone called him — had his birthday anniversary. It was May 1, since that was his birthday. The May Day parade had just ended, and my father went to wish him well. I was there too, along with my son Ermal, who at the time was just starting to toddle around the room, always heading toward people he recognized. That's exactly what my son did — after a few steps, he made his way to his grandfather:

“Ermal, go sit in this man's lap. You don't know Baba Myslym yet, but when you grow up, you'll learn who this great man of Albania is.”

Meanwhile, my son had taken his place on Baba Myslym's lap, looking at him attentively while listening to his grandfather's voice. Baba Myslym couldn't see — he had gone blind by then — but he could feel that the little one was watching him closely, and my father was gently encouraging him.

This moment was captured in a photograph, and it has become a keepsake that, as time goes on, carries an even stronger message. As soon as the flash went off and the photograph was taken, my son climbed down from Baba Myslym's lap and went to his grandfather, looking him in the eyes as if to say: “I fulfilled your wish.”

Now, my son is 21 years old. Baba Myslym has been exhumed — just like his grandfather — by those who fled defeated alongside the occupiers 50 years ago. Their descendants committed those acts of vandalism, desecrating the graves of partisan commanders. Today, my son knows exactly who this hero was — the man his grandfather once urged him to pose in a photo with. He knows who the partisans were and who collaborated with the occupiers.

That photograph — and the message from his grandfather that may have seemed unclear to him at the time — is now, as a grown man, perfectly clear to him, as bright as daylight.

## SHKËLZEN — A MOUNTAIN, A NAME

The birth of a child in a family is always a joy. Especially for grandparents, it is an event that brings them to life.

My father felt this joy — this sense of renewal — in a very special way. His grandchildren, whom he loved deeply, were for him a kind of magical comfort, and he never tired of speaking to them in their sweet, child-like language.

Let me make a brief digression. My father often spoke to us about Kosova — about that part of Albania unjustly separated from the motherland, about the patriots Kosova had produced, about the Kosovars who were forced to flee under persecution, scattered throughout Europe and the world, about the youth of Kosova who worked under difficult conditions and constant repression. It was 1979, when the situation in Kosova had worsened and, as we know, in 1981 the youth uprisings broke out there.

There is a majestic mountain — Shkëlzen.

“From there,” my father would tell me, “you can see Albania on one side and, on the other, the part torn away from Albania — martyred Kosova. It is a mountain that connects these two inseparable parts. Just as the Shkëlzen mountain cannot be levelled, neither can Kosova be separated from Albania.”

But why this digression?

You can draw your own conclusion.

Here, I’m simply sharing what he wrote in the family diary on March 27, 1979:

*“Today, a very joyful piece of news reached me at the office — Teuta and Ilir have had their second son. At 10 a.m., Teuta gave birth to a beautiful boy, tall and with very good weight, with cheeks red like apples. I felt immense joy and immediately began*

*thinking of a name. Without hesitation, I decided we should name him Shkëlzen, after the great alpine peak in the highlands of Tropoja. I believe we should call him that, because in those heroic Alps of that district lies Dragobia — the place where Bajram Curri lived and where our partisan comrades fought. Shkëlzen is mentioned with admiration and affection also by Albanian Kosova, whose men have fought — and continue to fight — all their lives for freedom. I believe both his father and mother will like this name.*

*“In other words, I’ve turned to the mountains for inspiration. Valbona is the pseudonym of my struggle, the name of the clear-water river that flows from the high mountains of Tropoja, winding around Shkëlzen; Ermal recalls the fresh mountain air of our ranges, which have always been — and still are — fortresses of our people’s freedom. The third child, whom they named Shpati, bears another of my wartime pseudonyms — the name of a mountain in central Albania, where I fought and where the patriotic villagers of that region gave me shelter. And the fourth child, Dritan, was born on October 25, the day of Albania’s complete electrification — a name that evokes the light brought by the Party.*

*“When Lilua came home, I suggested the name. ‘You’ve chosen beautifully,’ he said, pleased. Nexhmije liked it right away too.*

*“‘Wonderful,’ I told everyone. ‘Now we just need Teuta’s approval.’ The message was sent to her at the maternity hospital, and she agreed. So it seems that the name I picked for the boy fits well — after all, it’s a beautiful name, and we want him to live long and strong like Mount Shkëlzen. I’ve told the children not to stop at just five grandchildren — while I’m still alive, I want them to reach fifteen. After that, they can go on and have even more, if they like.”*

After them came Blerina, my sister's daughter, and my youngest son, Besmir — a name that, according to my father, represents one of the core virtues of the Albanian character.

## **DURRËS — AN EXPERIENCE THAT LEFT AN INDELIBLE MARK ON MY LIFE**

Durrës holds a special place in my memory — not so much for the city itself, but more for the people who live there, some of whom I came to know through my work as an engineer at the agricultural mechanics plant.

The development of mechanical industry was gaining importance in the reconstruction of Albania, and this was also the reason why my father recommended the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering. At that time, the industry for manufacturing agricultural machinery was also beginning to develop in Durrës. This marked the beginning of my first job in this important field for agriculture. Another reason was for me to work not in Tirana, but in another city, to help me gain independence from my family and develop a deeper understanding of work and people.

On January 3, 1973, I reported to the agricultural mechanics plant in Durrës to director Pavllo Roko, who welcomed me as a young engineer and assigned me to one of the factory's departments — the experimental unit, one of the most important, because it was responsible for designing new types of agricultural machinery. These machines, after being built as prototypes, were tested in the field, any defects were corrected, and they received approval from the Ministry of Agriculture — preparing them for production in the coming year. In this sector, although Director Pavllo worked tirelessly because he was passionate, we — the young engineers like Fatmir and me — learned a great deal from him. We were among the first engineers at the plant. Later, 20 more engineers joined the team.

We felt a special satisfaction in our work, because what we

created, we brought to life — we built it, tested it, discussed it with farmers, who welcomed these machines that carried out several agricultural processes.

My father used to ask me about their production and was very interested. We would discuss cooperation, which at that time was significantly lacking, the failure to respect contracts between enterprises, the methods, means and challenges of ordering raw materials, the overall economic feasibility, and specific cases involving certain machines or installations — like, for example, the corn-drying plant, which consumed diesel fuel, a resource in short supply.

On one occasion, while on holiday, my father expressed his concern by writing to me in a letter:

“...I’m a bit worried about work. Some comrades here told me that the corn-drying machines aren’t economically viable, they use a lot of fuel and require the corn to be shelled first. I don’t know how accurate this is. Look into it with the engineer comrades and workers — could they possibly be converted to use coal, if it would be cheaper?...”

*“August 1975”*

Thanks to the tireless work of the workers and engineers — the wonderful collective of the agricultural mechanics plant — during the years I worked there, the plant continued to grow and successfully fulfilled the tasks it was assigned for the production of agricultural machinery and spare parts.

Just as seriously as they worked, this collective also had a strong sense of harmony among its members. I had built friendships with everyone, and we would often joke with one another — sometimes with sharp, humorous banter.

I remember Kristaq, who one day was walking out alone through the factory gate, while we were standing nearby with the main managers of the enterprise.

“Where are you going?” I asked him.

“I’m going to find an L 20 x 20 x 5 profile — I’m missing some in the department and can’t complete the plan. Come with me.”

The director, who was eager for the plan to be completed as soon as possible, said to me:

“Go with him, Ilir, it’ll be easier for him to get it if you’re there too, since people know you.”

The two of us set off and, after walking a bit through a small alley — which I didn’t even know led to any enterprise where we might find the material we were missing — we entered a very small bar. We each had a cold beer and a *suxhuk* sausage. After we had finished, I asked him where we were going to find the profile we needed.

“We already got it,” said Kristaq. “Twenty leks for the beer, twenty for the *suxhuk* and five leks for half a sandwich (those were the prices back then) — all together, that makes exactly: L 20 x 20 x 5. It’s a code we use, we workers, so management doesn’t catch on — but I’m telling you because we know you’re one of us.”

We burst into laughter. And every time I saw him heading out, I’d ask jokingly:

“L 20 x 20 x 5?”

“Yes,” he’d reply, “are you coming?”

“Go on — I’ve got work. Next time.”

How could I ever forget Suat, who had once worked as a rural supply agent and was now the supply officer of the factory, doing everything he could to find the materials we needed — but he never forgot to help the farmers he had once worked with. He’d knock on my office door:

“Ilir, a roasted chicken is circling around. A farmer brought it for me. Shall we dispose of it?”

And the three of us would get to “disposing” of the chicken in the “range.”

I remember Luli, the reckless “Zuk” driver, with whom we roamed across Albania, through the fields, conducting field tests for agricultural machinery. He never once left us stranded. I would say to him:

“What kind of shape is this vehicle in?”

“Don’t insult it,” he’d reply, “because it has two things just like a Benz: steering and brakes. As for the rest — leave that to the saddle bags!”

He never drank alcohol in the mornings — only in the afternoons, after work. Whereas the director’s driver, Osman, drank even in the morning. We used to tease him and warn that the police would catch him, but he boasted they wouldn’t dare — he knew them all.

I also remember Engineer Ferit, who at the time was the director. One day I saw him upset — he had just returned from the Ministry of Agriculture, where they had rejected the technical specs of the ploughshare, arguing the blade needed to be sharper than 0.5 mm.

“Don’t be upset,” I told him. “I don’t understand why they didn’t approve it — it was going to till the soil. Or maybe they wanted to shave their beards with it?”

He burst out laughing.

When we met again 20 years later, and were talking about “our situation” during the transition period we were going through, he reminded me of that story — and we laughed just as hard again.

I also remember Selami Deliallisi, an outstanding welder, once persecuted back then — and me, now persecuted in this time. We got along well then, and we still do now.

I remember Besnik, a worker and painter with a “questionable background” because of his wife’s biography. Back then, I had helped him — now he has come to visit me, both at home and in prison.

Yes, I also remember a meeting. Its purpose was to select a volunteer engineer from the Agricultural Machinery Factory to be sent to work at the Metallurgical Complex in Elbasan. But who in Durrës would willingly leave their city? They gathered all of us — 20 engineers — and each of us had to give reasons not to go. The management and the party bureau would listen and then decide on the “unlucky one” to whom the “lottery” would fall.

The excuses were impressive. The two female engineers said they were fine with it — knowing full well no one would send them since they were married. Pandi, who was 45 and doing his party internship, said:

“I’m ready to go wherever the homeland calls, but it’s the youth who should speak,” clearly implying, “don’t consider me, I’m too old.”

Dhimitri, with whom I later worked at the institute in Tirana, gave the excuse that both his parents were retired and he needed to stay with them.

There were many other excuses from the engineers. Finally, they asked me, always jokingly, since I had already been transferred to Durrës and they didn’t intend to send me back to Elbasan. I replied:

“My parents have also reached retirement age, but they won’t let them retire — especially my father.”

Everyone laughed and the meeting ended.

Together with Gëzim Nushi, who worked as an engineer at the television factory, we lived in one of the beach houses in Durrës. Almost every midweek, we met with friends we had known since our university days in Tirana, though work had since scattered us across different regions. Tata, Gimi, Canci, Alqi were regulars, but others also joined — like Ladi, Neli, Leko and many more — even though life, under certain circumstances beyond our control, had separated us.

We always had a great time in the evenings, often staying up late talking and debating, eating and drinking, and sharing stories. We'd even watch Muhammad Ali's matches, which aired at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m., cheering for him. Sometimes we placed bets on who would go swim in the sea in the middle of the night — especially when it was mid-winter. Afterwards, we'd lay mattresses in the room and get a few hours of sleep before waking early to catch the train that would take each of us to the districts where we worked, while those of us in Durrës returned to our respective factories.

I also remember a friend from Durrës with whom I always got along well — later he left the country, like many Albanians, and has since settled in Italy. One day we met again. He had come because his father was ill and visited Tirana specifically to see me, knowing the hardships I had gone through. He even told me:

“Bring your eldest son to Italy and don't worry at all — I'll take care of him in my home like he's my own son. We even have the same last name, which the Italians won't notice anyway.”

I thanked him for his sincere offer.

He — and many others whose names I haven't mentioned here, though I always carry them in my thoughts — are people I met and worked with in Durrës. We've always preserved our friendship, a bond that neither time nor circumstances can break.

## FATHER'S DOUBLE-BARRELLED SHOTGUN

I want to say that he was a skilled hunter. He had great aim. We had gone hunting with him in the snowy mountains of Czechoslovakia, where he hunted deer with a scoped rifle. It was truly a beautiful experience. The Czechs always let him keep the antlers, which we preserved as keepsakes.

I'm including an old letter he sent me when I was 10 years old, written from the Tatras in Czechoslovakia on March 22, 1959:

*“My dearest Lilkë,*

*“I kiss and hug you with great longing, because I miss you very much. We've been here in these beautiful places with your mother for four days now. Where we are now, there are only snow-covered mountains. We even went hunting. I shot two deer with large antlers, like the ones we have on the wall outside. I also shot a wild goat and a fox.*

*“Farewell and see you soon, my Lilkë. Enver.”*

But I can also say that he hunted wild ducks and geese. I always accompanied him to Kune and it was a great joy for me. He explained how the double-barrelled shotgun was loaded, how to aim when targeting a bird flying swiftly. He wasn't fond of wild boar hunting, because when lying in wait he couldn't smoke — so I don't recall him ever going. Whereas, when he hunted ducks and geese from his camouflaged hide-out in the reeds, cigarette smoke would drift upward — in fact, he often ended up firing with the pipe still in his mouth.

Sometimes a flock would pass right over his head and he wouldn't shoot, and when the officer nearby would ask, “Why didn't you shoot?” he would reply:

“I didn’t see them — I was lighting a cigarette.”

I can say that he went hunting no more than four or five times a year. That happened because the responsibilities he had didn’t allow for more. And who’s the hunter who, if given the opportunity, wouldn’t go every week? In this regard, any hunter could understand my father — who, on the one hand, had the means to go every Saturday, and on the other, the impossibility because of the work he had. As time went on, he only went when the hunting season opened and maybe once or twice otherwise, until, after 1974, when he had a heart attack, he stopped going altogether.

Before he gave up hunting in his later years — around 1970 — he had a Holland & Holland double-barrelled shotgun, a high-quality English make that only serious hunters might recognize by name. My dream, as a young hunter, was for my father to give it to me or pass it down to me.

When my 25th birthday was approaching, and he had already stopped hunting, I said to him:

“Dad, what a beautiful birthday gift you picked for my 25th. You picked exactly what I wished for!”

He paused, unsure about my suggestion — because, usually, it was my mother who handled gifts; he only gave them. I say he paused because he didn’t recall the gift — and how could he, since he hadn’t thought of it at all. Then he asked, with his usual smile:

“Well then, tell me — don’t keep us in suspense.”

I wanted to laugh at the exchange we were having. He was telling me not to keep him in suspense about the gift he was going to give me!

“The Holland & Holland shotgun,” I said — and without waiting for a reply, I said a big “thank you” and hugged him. He laughed. And so, his shotgun became mine. When my mother walked in, my father said:

“I’ve already given the gift to our son.”

She was surprised — maybe she thought, “Where did he find that? I had hidden it,” thinking, of course, about the gift she had prepared.

“I gave him my shotgun,” he said.

My mother, being very strict about preserving my father’s belongings, hesitated to say “no.” But seeing that there was no point — the gift had already been given — she joined in our joy as well.

Since we’re on the topic of hunting, I want to share a letter my father sent me, in which, alongside family events, he naturally updated me about other happenings. Here’s what he wrote when I was in Sweden for work:

*“My dear Ilir,*

*“I send you kisses and hugs with longing, even though it hasn’t been long since we parted. You’re living now in cold places, while we’re in hot ones — not to say tropical — so I’m sending you with this letter my warmest, most heartfelt kisses...”*

*“I miss you dearly, but the best thing you’ve done in life so far (because I’m sure you’ll do more later) are the two boys. The two little doves we have here near us bring joy to my life.*

*“Ermal — no words needed — he’s a gem. So sweet, so calm, not at all nervous like his father. Teuta is doing very well, she’s happy with the boys, but she’s getting through the days with effort. Every morning, I’m sure she says to herself, ‘Another day gone, just a few left to go.’*

*“One day, Ermal didn’t catch the whole phrase — he only heard: ‘...just a few left...’ and he asked: ‘Why, mom, are there only a few chewing gums left? That surprises me!’*

*“Teuta told him: ‘Go to Ali Baba’s cave — it’s turned into such a state that if a mouse falls in it, it’ll break its snout!’ (She was referring to the drawer where the “Baba” — me — kept*

some chewing gum, lollipops or chocolate to hand out to the kids whenever they visited — your dear I.H.)

“He digs around in that ‘cave’ and eventually finds some leftover sweet, which he doesn’t split in two — he cuts it into four pieces.

“The grandfather ended up like that old man in the story, who waited 30 years for his son to come back from war and bring him a razor to finally shave the beard that had grown down to his feet. So for sure, Ali Baba’s cave will shine again once Lilua comes home.

“For now, I’m surviving on candy, but no one wants it. Still, grandpa doesn’t let the kids leave empty-handed. I give them a good kiss on both cheeks — which are like two little meatballs — and I ask: ‘Mai, where’s your bike?’

“He says: ‘It’s broken.’

“And I say: ‘Take a photo of it, send it to dad so he can find the spare parts.’

“But the most beautiful of all beauties is Shkëlzen. Do you know what I tell him? When you come, you won’t recognize him — but he knows us, he smiles at us, jumps around, especially when he sings. His song has a Lab-style tone to it, not like Xhev-det Avdalli sings it, but more like how Labo Erindi brings it out. Meanwhile, I, his grandfather, join in the song of the little one, who, while singing, tears apart a plastic ‘duck head.’ It looks like his teeth are coming in and he’s already sharpening them — probably because he’s figured out that dad has bought a hunting jacket, and in the future there will be wild ducks and quails to shoot. Shkëlzen is taking his precautions early.

“But listen, Lilo — just in case — since you’re in Sweden, notify the ‘duck kingdom’ that when the time comes for them to migrate south, they’d better send a few divisions our way. Don’t forget — they might not recognize the area, thinking Velipoja has been rebuilt elsewhere, with beautiful new homes and gardens.

All the villages ruined by the earthquake have been rebuilt, and all by the deadline. The Yugoslavs haven’t even made the lists of damaged houses yet, while we’ve rebuilt all the homes, even better than they were — and with less money than theirs. We build them ourselves in four or five months, while theirs are built by foreigners and might not be finished even in five or six years.

“That’s how it is with Shkëlzen. He climbs into bed, turns on and off the reading light above the bed. Sometimes he even puts me to sleep. What can I say — at this age I can’t keep up. One thing I’ve noticed: nothing bothers him.

“Nexhmije, as always, is kind, loving, caring, hardworking, a documenter and adviser. Grandpa has settled down a bit, working with the dictaphone. Look, I’m sending you the cassette you asked for, but if you find a better one than what I’ve got (and if it lasts longer), buy two of them, not just one — they break, after all.

“The other little ones are like doves — when I go to the office, they block the way to the car. I give them their ‘ration’ and a kiss each, line them up and they salute me when I leave.

“Xuqja (Gëzim Nushi), your friend, got engaged. And Ylli is getting married this coming Sunday. What else can I say? You asked me to write something — and I can’t say no to the youth.

“As for the work you’ve gone for — as I’ve advised you — try to learn as much as possible, ‘absorb’ as much as you can and ‘sell’ as little as possible — preferably nothing at all. Listen carefully to what they explain to you, ask questions and observe attentively so you gain as much as possible.

“I have nothing else to write or send except kisses and hugs.

“Yours, Enver. August 26, 1979

“Note, or P.S.: What you sent for the kids — of course I gave it to them, but only after the ‘censorship’ of their mother intervened. So, in a few days, Ali Baba’s cave will likely start being visited by mice again, scratching their snouts. Keep in mind the

*condition of this grandfather — but only when you return. Also keep in mind not to get too slim — I'm afraid you might not fit through the door when you come back.*

*“Postscript, or second P.S.: The most delightful moment, just after lunch, around the 28th — they brought Shkëlzen to bed, but you had to be in the room to hear his laughter. I felt bad that I had already given my little tape recorder to Teuta to record Shkëlzen for you. I believe she recorded something, but this burst of laughter that he gave us went unrecorded. He had mounted me like a horse, and I was turning the bed lamp on and off for him, saying: ‘Call your mum, call your mum!’ — and oh, the laughter! We were amazed. So for you in Stockholm — that’s what you missed.*

*“Mai was thrilled with the bicycle — rode it back and forth, and then sat on the doorstep to rest and watch. I asked: ‘Do you like it?’ ‘Yes,’ he told me.*

*“You asked me for a real letter — I wrote you one.  
“Enver”*

## **POGRADEC — EVEN MORE RELAXING**

Pogradec has always been a pleasant city for summer holidays, especially for its cool climate. The promenade along the beautiful lake, where my father would go for evening walks, was full of flowers. The tall poplars cast shade all along the walkway. The tranquillity of Volorek or Drilon was deeply relaxing. The willows hung over the gently flowing spring waters.

These beautiful surroundings — so restful for someone engaged in mental work — were, for us children who weren’t tired, simply a visual delight. We continued with the kinds of antics any child would: we’d swim as much as we could in the lake, go on the occasional boat ride, play “hide and seek,” “who’s got it,” catch a film at the club, buy Turkish delight with walnuts and sip orange soda. The absence of television — which barely picked up any stations and always showed static — didn’t bother us, due to the town’s location. Our days passed joyfully.

Even when I got older, I would still go to Pogradec with Teuta, but we’d only stay four or five days, since our holiday time passed quickly. We visited not just to see the parents, but also to enjoy that beautiful setting. As young people, Durrës was more appealing to us.

Our parents were happy whenever we came. They’d even organize a picnic at Volorek, with grilled Koran fish, but in truth, they no longer felt our absence. Our place had been taken by the grandchildren. They brought life to the space, and their holidays couldn’t have gone better. The little ones did all the things kids love to do — free from the control of their parents but under the “strict” supervision of their grandmother and the affectionate, playful words of their grandfather.

They had even found a small donkey and a cart it pulled, and they'd go for rides with it. They had a blast, while I recalled that the horse was nobler — with its graceful, semi-quick gait and us seated in the carriage in Korça during our childhood.

I also remember another event, here in Pogradec, when we had come with Teuta (we had just gotten married at the time). Petrit Dumja was there too. He had some very beautiful horses. He invited both of us to ride. I didn't hesitate, as I had some experience riding mules back when we went to Helmës, and Teuta climbed on as well. We did a few laps. The tricky part was when the horse trotted — we bounced up and down — but it was still a wonderful experience.

But the children were thrilled with the donkey's "barely moving" pace. They even shared a few biscuits from their own rations, which the donkey devoured — because once the children's holidays were over, the hard agricultural work would begin for him too, as expected from a donkey.

Since Grandpa would arrive in Pogradec a bit earlier, while the little ones continued soaking up the sunshine and sea salt at the Durrës beach — so essential for them — he could hardly wait for them to come. He would send letters, which we would read to the children, and they would light up with excitement. Here's what he wrote in one of those letters:

*Pogradec, July 14, 1975*

*To the kids, from their grandpa, who loves them very much.*

*My dear little ones — (the nurse) Valbona, (Commander Rrapo) Ermal, (Commissar Memo) Dritani, (the rookie soldier, Toçi, Mijushi, Lepurushi) Shpati, and the most handsome of all (who still doesn't have a nickname in the squad ranks) Shkëlzeni.*

*I kiss you all tightly because I miss you terribly — your beautiful, sweet little faces that smell as nice as the flowers in*

*Pogradec, your chatter, your games and scuffles, especially when Shpati jumps on Ermal, Valbona and Commissar Memo, who with his toy machine gun mowed down the nazi Germans and the Ballists, but still gets scared when the TV turns on and shouts "turn it off, turn it off!"*

*I've been here in Pogradec for eight days, but it feels like I've been away from you for eight months — not to mention how much I miss Lilo, Toli, Klemi, Liljana, Pranvera and Teuta — then we're talking years. Still, I live and rejoice for the moment when you all arrive, one after the other, or better yet, all together.*

*It's so beautiful here in Pogradec. You older little ones might remember the calm lake, the lovely green-arched park full of flowers and trees. We've even got plums here. And then there's Volorek, and over there, Grandpa will buy each of you a walnut Turkish delight, as sweet as Shkëlzen's little hand.*

*When I hear your voices on the phone in the evening, it's like a sweet lullaby. I fall asleep to the music of your voices: Mai, your voice is like a cello, Boi's is like a violin, Tani's is like a rattling machine gun, Shpati's is like an amunice (that's a Gjirokastra word — ask Sano what it means when you get here) and Shkëlzeni goes "coo-coo-coo" like a pigeon.*

*So, my beloved ones — you're both a battle squad for hard times and an orchestra for the good ones.*

*You got a little pinch from those shots they gave you, but it was just a small pain — like a mosquito bite. What do Commander Rrapo and Commissar Memo care about a little pain when there's a war going on? Especially with nurse Boi by your side, soldier Miuçi up front and Shkëlzeni guarding the rear.*

*Grandpa and Grandma are "doing their thing" — meaning Grandpa records on the dictaphone, Grandma works and Sanua sings. But we also sleep like usual, just a bit less than you do. We eat in "measured portions," while you all eat heartily and give poor Miço the cook a hard time. Then we stroll by the lake,*

*through the park, read newspapers and books — and that's how our days and nights go by.*

*Now I'm eagerly awaiting you all — and your parents, too.*

*Looking forward to that joyful day, I send you my kisses full of longing, and from Ali Baba's cave — which has run completely dry — I send just two pieces of gum per soldier. For Pati, I'm sending a few hazelnuts. For Shkëlzeni — my heart.*

*Your Grandpa, Enver*

And of course, they never left him without a reply. I had found an original way for the children's letters to be written as if they themselves had composed them — telling Grandpa how they were spending their days, how much they missed him and so on. This creative idea delighted him. From the correspondence he kept with the little ones (and sometimes even with us), he would often share his thoughts in writing as though they were coming from one of the children, especially when writing to a sibling or parent who was far away.

## HIS BOOKS

Books held an important place in my father's life. While outdoor relaxation for him meant walking in fresh air, at home — or even when sitting outside — reading books was his way to unwind.

He had a vast collection, about 25,000 books. Most of them were in French, a language he knew very well, but there were also many in Russian, dating from the time when relations with the Soviet Union were still strong. He also had a few books in Italian or English, though these were rarer and included specific volumes such as special editions or dictionaries.

At first, we had also started cataloguing them, but as the house expanded, so did the number of bookshelves and collections. My father reorganized them. Until the end of his life, he knew exactly which bookshelf and even which shelf each book was on, and he could easily find what he needed — even guiding us when we were looking for something. He insisted that every book we borrowed be returned to its original place after reading. You would always find him with a book in hand, and whenever we visited, he would pause his reading to spend some time talking with us.

He would often tell us about the book he was reading. His books were very diverse — political, historical, philosophical, literary. He had geography atlases, beautiful albums of museums and selected paintings, various kinds of dictionaries, Larousse encyclopedias and many more.

He never made notes in the books or folded their pages. He always kept his notes in separate notebooks. The books always looked like new. There was also a collection of books published in Albanian, both by local and foreign authors.

The “light reading,” as he called it — Agatha Christie

novels, Simenon's "Inspector Maigret," Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes," etc. — were only for before bedtime, since he read them without any particular focus.

*"...We received the books," he wrote to me after I had sent him some of those kinds of books. "We've started reading. They're the kind that make you sleepy — that's really their only value, to help you fall asleep and leave nothing in your head. But fine, they'll do for the holidays in Vlora. March 9, 1980."*

In another letter he sent to the three of us — me, Klemi and Pranvera — he wrote, among other things:

*"...Now that the reader 'Tubi' has arrived in Paris, there's no need for us to tell you what books to send. Pranvera, you know what books we have in the library, which ones we need to help us fall asleep, which ones we read at the table for pleasure, and which ones we need to study for work. So, Pranvera, think also about the holidays in Durrës and Pogradec.*

*"Pranvera is 'like a kidney nestled in fat' — who could enjoy themselves more than her, thanks to you. Anyway, instead of sweets, buy her books — that's what she really needs. Vlora, March 16, 1980."*

In another letter, at the end, he wrote:

*"...Lilo, if you run into Ambassador Misto Treska, tell him not to forget me with a new book — something entertaining, funny, and full of curiosities, because we already have plenty of serious, complex books to study. Tirana, May 7, 1980."*

With the birth of his grandchildren, as a grandfather, he enriched his library with many beautiful and colourful books for children. These were filled with fairy tales and fables, full of pictures. He would take the little ones on his lap and read them the stories, showing them the animals and imitating their sounds. He taught them how to care for books and not scribble on the pages with pencils. When the children wanted to take a book home because they liked it so much, he would

tell them: "This one stays with Grandpa, and whenever you come, Grandpa will read it to you." He wasn't worried they might tear it — he trusted them — but he wanted the books to remain available for the other grandchildren still to come. As he used to say: "They'll all pass through that same little hole in the rock."

Here's how my father once addressed me, writing as if his granddaughter Valbona — who was just one year old — were sending a letter to my one-year-old son Ermal, about the issue mentioned above:

*"My dearest little brother Mai,*

*"I miss you so much. I look for you in the living room, in the kitchen, in the park, but I can't find you. I don't understand where you're hiding. Where does Tuta take you? And I call you: Mai, Mai! But you don't answer. Sometimes I even wonder if maybe you're mad at me — maybe because, do you remember, sometimes I would pull those beautiful curly locks of yours?"*

*"Do you know why I pulled your curls, brother Ermal? Not because I didn't love you — on the contrary, I love you very much. But let me whisper in your ear: 'I was jealous of your beautiful curls.'"*

*"Grandma misses you a lot. When we both call you, it becomes a kind of 'duel' — me, Boja, says 'Ma-Ma' like that little goat who goes 'me-me' (like in the storybook Mommy reads to us to teach us good manners), while Grandpa says 'Ma-Ma' in a deep voice like an old billy goat. I didn't make this up — I heard it from Grandpa himself, because he and I love each other very much. You're such a good boy, and you let Grandpa kiss you a lot. I love him just as much, but I don't let him kiss me as often..."*

*"When you come, Mai, I'll tell you lots of secrets. For now, I just kiss you, kiss you, kiss you."*

*"Your Boja. August 1976"*

And in another letter:

*“My dearest brother Ermal,*

*“I miss you very much. I call out for you and look for you, but in vain. You exist only in my heart and my thoughts...”*

*“Ermalush, in the first letter I told you that when you come I’ll tell you some secrets. But I can’t wait — I’m writing them in this letter, because I know you don’t tell anyone. You’re discreet and you keep confidences...”*

*“This grandpa and grandma are good people, but they have some strange habits!*

*“They have some books with animals and they show them to me. I pretend to be surprised and laugh, but I’m really laughing at them — they imitate a bird, a cow, a magpie, a lobster... I’ve even learned how to bray like a little donkey. You’ll be amazed! When I come, we’ll do a duet together, or we can even do a solo — don’t worry, we won’t wake Grandpa up. He actually loves these ‘songs,’ because whenever I bleat, for some reason, they both start laughing.*

*“But there’s another secret, Ermal, and it’s also a big one: Grandpa and Grandma are turning into animals — like a goat and a cat! One time, while they were playing with me, I heard them say: ‘Ho, look — her teeth are starting to come in like a kitten’s!’ And sometimes I overhear them whispering: ‘Her curls are like a lion cub’s.’*

*“But enough of these things — I don’t think you’ll understand everything I’m saying, because you’re still so little. You’re three months younger than me!*

*“I’ll tell you everything else when I come there, because I’m feeling a bit bored here.*

*“Goodbye, Valbona. Pogradec, August 11, 1976.”*

And once more, in a later letter:

*“My dear Ma (Ermal),*

*“...Grandpa, as Mom says, was four years old when the flag was raised in Vlora. Do you know, Ermal, that Grandpa has a very heavy book called Petit Larousse? On the first page, it has lots and lots of flags. I’ve already learned how to find Grandpa’s flag right away. Mom taught me. When I come, I’ll teach it to you too. But Mom knows so many things, so we should always stick close to her so she can teach us too — because we’ll need to know them when we grow up...”*

*“All right then, goodbye and may you be well when I come.*

*“Valbona. Pogradec, August 20, 1976.”*

The library is the only inheritance our father left us, and we, valuing it as a treasure for the state as well, left it untouched when we moved out of the residence. But the hands of the so-called “democratic pirates” plundered it. To cover their tracks, it was said that Enver Hoxha’s library had been handed over to the National Library — but only 2,500 books were delivered out of the 25,000 titles. These are likely the “banned books,” and sooner or later, they will “burn” their unlawful new owner too.

## THE REGIMEN AND TASTES IN FOOD

Since our father had suffered from diabetes since the early years after the liberation, he maintained a strict diet throughout his life. We always remember that he ate at fixed times, completely regularly, and never overindulged in food — let alone alcohol, which was entirely out of the question.

He would wake up very early, around 5:00 a.m. In winter, he would light the fireplace himself and begin reading the newspapers. In the meantime, he would drink a coffee with milk and eat a type of croissant produced locally. After this, he would light his first cigarette.

Around 7:00 a.m., he would begin his morning toilette. I want to emphasize that he wasn't "conservative" like some elderly people when it came to accepting modern innovations in this area — such as razors with dual blades instead of the traditional straight razor, or shaving foam canisters instead of the traditional brush and soap, and so on. For cologne, he used "Mennen," a light aftershave, because he did not like strong scents. At 8:00 a.m., he would eat breakfast, which always included a small piece of lightly pan-fried cheese (without butter), as Gjirokastra people say.

Cheese, for him, was the best of all foods. He could replace any other dish with cheese if he did not like the main course. He never got tired of it. He also knew the cheeses of France — which he had enjoyed in his youth — but he would tell us:

"We have only one type of white cheese, but it's the best of them all."

He also enjoyed *trahana*, which he ate during the winter — a habit left over from childhood. He would tell us that his mother used to prepare it very well, though instead of cheese, she would add brine with a few cheese crumbles, naturally

to save on cheese. She used to say that *trahana* was "for the poor."

*Paça* (a type of stew made from lamb or cow head) was also a favourite of his. On other occasions, he would have an omelette or a sausage, drink a coffee and head off to the office.

There, during his break, he would eat some fruit and drink a coffee.

Lunch was entirely ordinary. During the summer, he preferred *tarator* (cold yogurt and cucumber soup), while in winter he enjoyed various soups. He used to recall that when he was in France, he had once eaten a fish soup called *bouillabaisse*, which he had really liked. Even though the cook at home also made a very good fish soup, he still insisted that the *bouillabaisse* had a different taste.

"When you go to France one day, try it," he used to tell me, "and you'll see I'm right."

And when I did go to France, a friend was taking us to a restaurant and asked what we felt like eating. I remembered the *bouillabaisse* soup and told him I'd like to go somewhere it was served. He took us to a restaurant that specialized in it. It really was excellent.

He liked both meat and fish.

And other dishes too — starting from stuffed vegetables, mixed stews, beans — always accompanied by cornbread and cheese. He especially enjoyed *byrek* and *shapkat* (a type of cornbread pie). He preferred his food spicy, using a lot of black pepper and hot red pepper, just as he used plenty of vinegar in his salad, while he avoided using oil altogether, since it added calories, which he needed to limit.

On holidays, birthdays and sometimes Sundays, we would make a dessert. His favourites were ice cream, *zupa* (layered dessert with cream and sponge), *strudel* with thin pastry and apples, or occasionally *millefeuille* — all light desserts made

with *levusol*, a type of sugar substitute for diabetics.

He drank rarely and preferred Greek ouzo (Metaxa), the occasional beer, or the Italian wine *Pinot Grigio*. He did not drink *raki*, as it was too strong and alcohol aggravated his diabetes.

In the afternoon, he would have some fruit and drink a coffee — always without sugar. He did not use saccharin; he didn't like it. Sometimes, during the summer, he would eat a piece of cold watermelon. They always gave him the heart of the watermelon, and we would jokingly say:

“Go ahead, Dad, see how well they're treating you — giving you only the heart.”

“Who knows how much you've already eaten, and you've left me just this small piece,” he would say, laughing.

Dinner was simple: besides cheese, there might be a small additional item.

In winter, once a week after dinner, we would eat roasted chestnuts, from which he also benefited — they would bring him only 10, but he would take advantage of our “offerings” as well.

This was our father's diet — which, in medical terms, could be translated as: 1,200 calories per day.

## PARTING FROM AN “ENEMY” FRIEND

I thought I'd include in these recollections something about a “bad friend” — a constant companion of my father's, one he eventually parted with, or more accurately, one my father gave up willingly, but also out of necessity: I'm talking about the cigarette.

He told me he started smoking when he went to France as a student, and didn't quit until the end of 1973, when he no longer felt well and stopped immediately after suffering a heart attack.

During the war, he told me he smoked, and at times even rolled his own with cornhusks.

Even though he smoked a lot, there are two positive things I can say: he was a strong advocate for us not picking up the habit, and I don't ever recall — even when we were little — him entering our bedroom or wherever we were, with a cigarette in hand. He didn't even smoke in his own bedroom.

When we grew up and would sit with him in his study — whether to chat or to watch television during his off-hours — the room would be filled with cigarette smoke. I could never stand the smell of smoke. Whenever I walked into his study, I would joke:

“Thicker fog than in London!”

He'd laugh and explain himself:

“I haven't smoked much — but your mother won't open the window, it's too cold.”

When we went to bed and took off our clothes, they smelled like smoke.

Once, as I approached his desk to greet him, I noticed that his “Pelikan” fountain pen had melted in one spot, because a cigarette had slipped from the ashtray and burned it. I said:

“You’ve burned your pen!”

He gestured with his head toward my mother, who was sitting in the armchair reading, and said in a low voice:

“Leave it. Don’t bring this up — it’ll be just one more argument for your mother against my ‘destructive’ cigarettes, that burn not only lungs, but also clothes and pens.”

“I get it,” I said. “World War Three has begun.”

We both laughed loudly. Meanwhile, my mother figured out why we were whispering and laughing, and she joined in with a smile:

“You cause the damage and expect mama to fix it and pay for it.”

“Well, that’s how it goes,” I said. “You should’ve seen it when the cigarette rolled off the ashtray — right?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what happened,” replied my father, still laughing.

That pen was placed in the museum, accompanied by a note in which my father more or less said to the pen: “You’ve grown old writing — your time has come to rest, especially now that you’ve taken a wound from a cigarette.”

As I mentioned earlier, we always celebrated New Year’s at home, but around 7 p.m., my father would go visit his friends, who would gather to wish each other a happy New Year and spend a few hours joking around. One New Year’s Eve, when they returned home, my father looked amused.

“So, how was it?” we asked.

“Ask your mother,” he said.

“There were about 50 of us — friends, men and women,” my mother began. “We had a great time. This year I didn’t get involved with the evening’s organizing committee, but the others had prepared some fun jokes and games. There were skits where we had to guess the captions. One was for people who smoke too much — someone was lying at the bottom of

an ashtray. I made up a caption for Enver and some friends — and I won first prize. But the committee — which included Enver — played a little trick on me. My prize box had onions, carrots and two packs of cigarettes. So, as Enver said to me: “You can keep the onions — give me the cigarettes.”

In the morning, when we’d go greet him before heading to school, we often found him refilling his cigarette case, and we’d say:

“Loading up the cartridges in the magazine?”

“The problem is, one reload isn’t enough,” he’d say. “That case only holds 20.”

When Zhou Enlai came for a visit to Albania and saw how much he smoked, he told him that he should smoke Chinese cigarettes, made with denicotinized tobacco. Very soon after, he sent several round porcelain tins, hermetically sealed and beautifully packaged, each containing 50 cigarettes. He would smoke one of those a day. They didn’t have filters, but he used a cigarette holder that allowed a filter to be inserted inside.

When we criticised him and pleaded with him not to smoke so much because it was bad for his health, he would answer, half-jokingly:

“They’re nicotine-free — otherwise Zhou Enlai wouldn’t have recommended them.”

He continued smoking those until he quit for good, as I mentioned earlier, after he had his heart attack.

You can also see how and how much he smoked through these excerpts from the correspondence between him and Nexhmije, when they were apart from one another:

**From Nexhmije to Enver:**

**Moscow, February 16, 1959**

*“...For a few days I pictured things wrong — I imagined, like always, that you were getting up and going to the library to drink your milk and start smoking. But then I remembered that now you don’t need to get up early, because you can lie in bed and freely puff on that ‘monster’ of mine — the cigarette, which I detest. I hope you’ll take measures so that, when I come, I won’t even smell it. As for at home, it’s clear that my love still hasn’t managed to beat that habit. But don’t be upset — I won’t insist to the point of annoying you.”*

**Moscow, March 2, 1959**

*“I’m with you every minute. I follow you when you sleep, when you get up, when you eat, when you play and chat — and you, when you smoke. Who knows how full and then emptied the ashtrays are these days from cigarettes, especially while preparing those reports and long speeches! When I read them in the paper, I’ll feel the state of mind you were in when you wrote them.”*

**From the Enver-Nexhmije correspondence:**

**Tirana, November 18, 1965**

*“Before I start the letter I’m writing to you, naturally I lit a cigarette — I haven’t smoked much until now.”*

**From Nexhmije’s diary:**

**April 3, 1969**

*“Last night and the day before I wasn’t in any condition to read, but last night I met my quota. I ended up like Enver with his cigarette — when there’s a meeting where he can’t smoke, he makes up for it afterwards, one after another, as if he needs to get his proper dose of nicotine.”*

**February 12, 1972**

*“We’re listening to the news and commentary about Nix-*

*on’s visit to Beijing. Enver is smoking at the intense pace of his thoughts. We talk in the evening.”*

**August 13, 1973**

*“In the afternoon we went for a walk with Enver along the forest path, but we didn’t even make it 300 metres before sitting down — Enver was short of breath, felt heaviness in his chest. His pulse was normal. We blamed it on the four-hour conversation with Hilmi. We hadn’t rested after lunch and he smoked quite a few cigarettes.”*

**February 28, 1975** (from my mother’s diary, after my father quit smoking)

*“I get the impression that the chimney no longer draws him in. Now, instead of reaching for a cigarette, he picks up his pen and immediately writes down whatever he’s reflecting on...”*

The idea of my father’s attempted departure from cigarettes goes back to the time of the National Liberation War, as we find in a letter sent to him by my mother, where, among other things, she writes:

**September 22, 1943**

*“How’s it going with the ‘Nocigarette’? I’ve been praising you for this heroism, so don’t embarrass me! I’m ready to send you anything you want — pardon, anything that can fool your craving for tobacco.”*

Here are some excerpts from his family diary, where he records his continued efforts to reduce smoking, just like everyone who wants to quit and thinks that by cutting back they’ll manage to stop — but always end up right back where they started.

**Year 1964**

**November 14, 1964**

*"I had a check-up with the doctors, they examined me with X-rays and found everything normal — only the cough is bothering me. It must be from the smoking. I need to cut back on this poison — tobacco is harming me."*

**December 6, 1964**

*"I started cutting back. From 50 cigarettes a day, I've come down to 37, and today to 22. If I can reduce it further, I'll have done a good thing for my health. The cough has started to disappear."*

**December 7, 1964**

*"Today I got down to 20 cigarettes. If I keep going like this, it'll be good. I want to bring it down to at least 15, though even 20 is a success. Nexhmije is sceptical."*

**December 11, 1964**

*"Today and for the next three days I won't go to work, as I have a sore throat and the doctor put me on a treatment. I'm continuing to smoke less — only 20 today. If I can maintain this and keep reducing, that would be great."*

**Year 1965**

**November 6, 1965**

*"The truth is, you smoke when you're upset and also when you're happy."*

**Year 1967**

**January 7, 1967**

*"The doctors examined me — everything seems fine. As usual, the same old tune: 'quit smoking.'"*

**January 9, 1967**

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*"Attempting again to reduce cigarette intake from 45 to 25 a day. Let's see how long this will last?"*

**Year 1969**

**August 29, 1969, Vlora**

*"After bathing, I usually had a piece of fruit and a coffee — pleasures that were always accompanied by a cigarette, 'Nexhmije's enemy.'"*

**Year 1970**

**June 8, 1970**

*"I'm making efforts to reduce smoking. Today I smoked only 30 cigarettes."*

**June 9, 1970**

*"Today I smoked 20 cigarettes."*

**June 10, 1970**

*"Today I smoked 20 cigarettes."*

**June 11, 1970**

*"Today I easily smoked 19 cigarettes."*

**June 12, 1970**

*"Today I smoked 15 cigarettes."*

**June 18, 1970**

*"I continue to keep the cigarette limit at 15 per day."*

**June 27, 1970**

*"I'm keeping to the routine — only 14 or 15 cigarettes per day."*

**Year 1971**

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**January 27, 1971**

*“Today I started a new smoking regimen. It’s a bit difficult until I get used to it, but I will adjust — health demands it, and age doesn’t tolerate it anymore.”*

So, as can be seen from the family diary, every year the same pattern repeats itself: an attempt to reduce the number of cigarettes, and then a return to the old habit, only to begin the effort again sometime later.

Still, even while he smoked — as the saying goes, “with a pipe” (even though he never actually used a pipe) — and even more so after quitting, his campaign against smoking for us children was strong and persistent, and in my case, it worked.

Finally, let me close with a little curiosity. The day my father decided to quit smoking, I came to him with a piece of paper. I asked him all sorts of questions — when he started, how much he smoked during different periods, and so on.

“What do you need all that for, son? You’re not an historian, you’re an engineer.”

“Well, since I’m an engineer, I’m doing some calculations,” I told him, and I measured the length of a cigarette and started multiplying.

“And what did you come up with? Tell us!”

“Do you know how many kilometres of cigarettes you’ve smoked in your life — I mean, over 43 years of smoking? Fifty-two kilometres!”

## AN ENGLISH CHEQUE FOR ENVER HOXHA

During my father’s free time, when he took his daily walk, we sometimes joined him for part of it, keeping him company along the way. Naturally, we didn’t stay the whole time, since he would walk for up to two hours a day. During these walks, we would have different conversations — he would ask us questions and we would ask him in return.

I remember once, while we were on holiday in Pogradec, during a walk surrounded by lush greenery, blooming flowers and the cool air of the lake, I asked my father to tell me about the story of the Albanian gold that had been blocked in England.

He told me the version of the story that is now well-known and has been made public in various historical and political documents. He explained that it was not just a matter of monetary value — although that also held some importance — but rather a matter of principle. By blaming our state for the Corfu Channel incident, where two British warships were sunk by mines that had not been placed by us, the British government was holding the Albanian people’s gold hostage. Although we never accepted any responsibility for that incident — despite the manipulated ruling by the Hague court which placed blame on us — the British kept our gold frozen.

What is perhaps less known is the story of a cheque that came from England to Albania, in the name of Enver Hoxha.

After explaining the broader story, he told me:

“Since you asked about the Albanian gold held by the British, I want to tell you that not long ago I received a cheque from England. It had exactly the same amount as the gold that had been unjustly held by the British. Of course, the bank interest owed to us for holding that gold in their banks

for so long was missing. I gave the order to verify whether the cheque was legitimate, and the response from the Bank of England confirmed that it was entirely valid and the funds could be withdrawn at any time. The British know that this gold belongs to the Albanian people, and the day will come when we will take it back — because justice always surfaces. If we had accepted the money, it would have indirectly meant that we were accepting responsibility for the Corfu Channel incident. So I gave the order for the cheque to be returned — and that's exactly what happened.”

Now, so many years later, with my father gone, it's said that a decision was made to return the gold to Albania. How, how much, when and under what conditions — that I do not know. But I believe this, too, will one day come to light through the hands of politicians or historians when they have the documents in front of them.

## PAPANDREOU'S "DEBT"

Many people are curious to know how much and in what way Enver Hoxha discussed political and state matters within his family — at least with us, his children. He never, under any circumstances, consulted his family before making a political or state decision. Most internal and foreign affairs matters, we learned about just like everyone else — through official materials that were made public. Naturally, however, because we lived close to him, we would often discuss various political, social, economic and cultural issues. Sometimes we'd also learn the background of an event and what role he had played in it.

I'll share two examples related to relations with the neighbouring state of Greece — including a “favour” exchanged between two heads of state for the benefit of the nations they led.

There's no need for me to detail in my memoirs how highly Enver Hoxha valued friendship between the Albanian and Greek peoples. As a politician and a statesman, once he had drawn a firm line for the chauvinists who made territorial claims in the name of so-called “Northern Epirus,” he pursued a policy of friendship with the Greek people. He took great care to protect the rights of the Greek minority living in the south of Albania. Even though propaganda surrounding Northern Epirus persisted and the legal state of war between Albania and Greece technically remained in effect until it was eventually repealed, during Enver Hoxha's lifetime, these two peoples never went to war with each other.

That is a fact — despite the political systems in our countries being very different.

One day, we were watching a television broadcast of the ceremony marking the opening of the Kakavija border cross-

ing. It was no ordinary ceremony — and anyone who saw it would have been moved. From both sides of the Greek-Albanian border, entire villages had come. There were tears — tears of joy and hope — a wonderful display of friendship between peoples and goodwill between states. Even my father seemed no less emotional than those we saw on the screen. When the broadcast ended, we said:

“How beautiful!”

“And all that worry from our comrades was unnecessary,” he replied.

“Why? What were they worried about?” we asked.

“Well, they presented me with the plan the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had prepared for the ceremony — a purely protocol-based event: a few dignitaries from their side, a few from ours, a cocktail reception, some official speeches, television coverage, and that’s it. I told them, ‘Why not turn this into a popular event between the Greek and Albanian peoples, to strengthen the trust and ties between the Greek minority and our people?’ Then I proposed exactly what you saw on TV today.

“Yes, but...’ — the secretary of the Central Committee who presented the plan hesitated — ‘what if something undesirable happens? What if certain individuals decide to stay across the border with their relatives over there? Or if circles from Northern Epirote organizations try to stir up a scandal by convincing some to remain on the Greek side...’

“None of that will happen,’ I told the comrades. ‘The minority here has families, homes, work, property — this will only strengthen their hope that they’ll be able to communicate more frequently and freely, something they’ve long dreamed of...’”

And that’s exactly how it went. My father was a man of firm decisions — well-considered, made at the right time

and under the right circumstances — a necessary quality in a high-level political leader, in a statesman. These decisions are well-known in the 50-year history during which he led the state — decisions that were tied to the defence of freedom and independence, to the consolidation of the state, and to the dignity of the people and the Albanian nation.

Let me also tell you about another case — one that involved a Greek statesman: Papandreou.

I want to emphasize that the centuries-old friendship between our two peoples, which was further strengthened over those 50 years when Enver Hoxha was at the helm of the state, bore its fruit even in the present day. After the fall of the system, due to the severe economic hardship that followed under the current regime, hundreds of thousands of migrants turned toward Greek soil. Though many entered illegally, breaking the laws of a stable neighbouring state, they were received by the Greek people. They were given jobs and a sense of hope to help support their families back in Albania.

Despite political difficulties and moments of tension, it must be said that Greek politicians and government officials have generally held fair and respectful positions — especially considering that approximately 300,000 Albanians have settled in Greece.

While I was in prison, one of the prominent figures of Greek politics and state, Andreas Papandreou, passed away. Knowing that my father had always fought for our two peoples to live in peace and friendship — and that Papandreou was one of those high-ranking figures of the Greek state who had shown solidarity with Albanian emigrants — I decided to send a personal letter of condolence to the Greek Embassy in Tirana. In the letter, I emphasized this figure’s role for the Greek people and asked that my condolences be conveyed to Papandreou’s family.

Afterward, I wrote to my mother — who was also in prison — about what I had done. She replied:

“You did very well. Let me tell you a story that you don’t know, about the relationship between your father and Papandreou.

“During the time when the military junta ruled Greece, Papandreou was in exile, persecuted by the regime. Meanwhile, one of his friends had been politically sentenced by the junta and was serving time in a high-security prison in Corfu. At an opportune moment, he escaped and, after many hardships, crossed the Corfu Channel and reached Albania, where he was immediately apprehended by border forces and imprisoned.

“When Papandreou learned that his friend had escaped from prison and had arrived in Albania, he wrote a letter to Enver Hoxha, explaining who the person was — a fellow political exile — and asking that he be released and granted permission to leave Albania for a destination of his choosing.

“Enver Hoxha immediately gave the order for the man’s release and that he be allowed to leave for the destination he requested.

“When Papandreou came to power, on one occasion he told one of our embassy staff in Athens:

“I haven’t forgotten — I owe Enver Hoxha a debt...’ — and he recounted the above incident.

“Maybe he repaid that ‘debt’ to Enver Hoxha by receiving all those Albanian emigrants who were fleeing economic and political persecution under Berisha’s regime in Albania — perhaps remembering the friend Hoxha had once saved from persecution. Or perhaps he was thinking even more broadly, of how Enver Hoxha had helped many sons of the Greek people’s resistance during the Second World War when they too were persecuted and struggling, by allowing them to enter and find refuge on Albanian soil.”

## MY FATHER’S LAST JOY

We had always celebrated New Year’s, but these celebrations became much more beautiful when our grandfather celebrated with his grandchildren, who grew and multiplied with each passing year. It became a tradition that, every New Year, we would take pictures around the New Year’s tree — now decorated by the little ones themselves. The old man of the New Year had become their grandfather. We found him a red cloak, a hat, white moustache and beard — just like the New Year’s figure seen all over the world. Of course, what most interested the children was the bag of toys he carried on his shoulder.

The first time they saw him, they were surprised — but as soon as he spoke, they immediately recognized their grandfather. Around the New Year’s tree, the beautiful toys were handed out, from the youngest to the oldest. You could see how they stood there, waiting their turn. Naturally, the grandfather — or better said, the New Year’s old man — would prolong the toy-giving process, making them all the more curious. Everyone rejoiced, and after the gifts were distributed, they would get busy playing with their new toys: one with a remote-controlled car, another with a toy gun or a ball, and the girls with dolls and so on. But there were also “heavy calibre” gifts, like bicycles, which the old man couldn’t fit in his sack, so he would say to the child receiving it:

“Go and get it — it’s in the middle of the road, because the old man couldn’t carry it.”

As soon as the child opened the door to go look for the gift, there it was. Their joy was immense — and so was their grandfather’s. Of course, before New Year’s, during conversations with the children, he would test them to see what gifts they liked: chocolates, candies and chewing gum were never

missing.

We adults were not excluded from the gifts either. We men would get a tie, some cologne, or shaving cream, while the women would receive perfume, a scarf, or something similar.

Then we would have dinner, watch TV, the children would do impressions or performances, and we played different games like bingo, which, of course, included prizes.

It was New Year's Eve 1985 — the last New Year we celebrated together with my father. He was happy, as in January he was about to become a grandfather for the seventh time. So, during the gift-giving ceremony, there was one more gift in the New Year's old man's sack. The New Year's old man called over Teuta and gave her two small dolls — very cute, one dressed in sky blue, symbolizing a boy, and the other in pink, symbolizing a girl. He said:

“Here is a gift for the baby who will come very soon and bring us great joy. Whether it's a boy or a girl, for me it is a pleasure that they will call me ‘grandpa, grandpa.’ So, through this symbolic gift, I want to show that for me it's all the same.”

It was morning. Seventeen days had passed. He didn't yet know that Teuta had gone to the maternity hospital. I went in, hugged him and handed him the doll dressed in sky blue. He took it, thought for a moment and immediately remembered the gift he had given for New Year's — but this time, he understood the reason I was giving him only the “boy.” He stood up and, full of joy, hugged me and shouted:

“May our boy live a long life!”

Naturally, just like for all the other children, we held a small ceremony for Besmir when he came home.

But he didn't get to enjoy him for long. He held and cuddled the baby for only three months. We took some photos,

which we now have as memories. One of them — which has been published — is especially beautiful: in it are my father, myself and little Besmir in the middle. I've named that photo “Three Generations.” In my father's expression, you can see the satisfaction and great affection for his youngest grandson. That's why I've titled this section — My Father's Last Joy.

Besmir is now twelve years old and has already formed a clear understanding of who his grandfather was. Nothing he hears from the unrestrained propaganda of those in power gets through to him. In fact, when he was younger and our family was being persecuted — and he understood that this was because of his grandfather, as he heard it on television — he once said to me, with a child's reasoning:

“Dad, these people are wasting their time insulting Grandpa. He's already dead and can't hear them. Grandpa was very good, because I can see on the tapes how much the people loved him. He was a partisan and fought for Albania and came out victorious.”

That was how this little grandson defended his grandfather.

## LOVING SPOUSES AND GOOD PARENTS

Both of these qualities were perfectly embodied by my parents. My father and mother celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on January 1, 1985, though they had first met during the war. United under a common ideal during the war, they emerged victorious — and remained united throughout life, devoting themselves fully to the building and strengthening of their homeland, offering their entire beings and lives so that the people could live happily in their own country.

It was a life full of sacrifice that demanded complete dedication to their ideals. Together, they faced every difficulty, always helping one another — she with her special care for him, even though she herself carried many responsibilities, and he, working tirelessly and without pause, so that the victories won with the blood of the martyrs would not be in vain, so that Albania, the country he loved so deeply, would grow stronger and develop, and his people could live in peace and happiness.

Throughout their life together, they were also a model for us children. Their perfect understanding radiated respect and love for one another — qualities that would later reflect in my own relationship with my wife, Teuta, and with my children.

We never once saw them argue. My father always found a way to highlight the special and well-deserved place that a mother holds in the lives of her children.

In response to a letter I had written from a volunteer work action, which I began with the phrase, “Dear Dad and Mom,” and where I had drawn arrows switching the order of the names, showing that “Mom” should come first — accompanied by my note “emancipation” — my father wrote:

*“...Despite all the arrows you drew on the letter, I understood*

*very well that the weight of your heart leans a little more toward your mother. I understand this completely and I approve. You must love your mother with a special kind of love. What can you do — fathers must also be loved very much, but mothers just a little more. And the weight of that is hard to measure.*

*“Tirana, June 14, 1968.”*

## FATHERHOOD, TOGETHER WITH MOTHERHOOD

My father, along with my mother, through their example and their meaningful and respectful behaviour toward us, ensured that the fruits of their efforts did not go to waste — whether in terms of how we conducted ourselves in society, in line with its moral norms, or in our studies and the responsibilities assigned to us by the state.

Already over seventy years old, he wrote to me while I was away for specialization:

*“... I trust your studies are going well. In this regard — and in others — I’ve never had a headache because of you, or Toli, or Pranvera. That’s the result of the education your mother gave you, whom you love very much. Of course, I contributed a little with words too, but your mother has the upper hand over me, because she contributed both with words and with her hands.”*

The remark about her contribution “with her hands” was a playful jab at my mother — a teasing reference to the idea that discipline sometimes came with a physical touch. Of course, we all laughed, knowing full well that it wasn’t true. Our mother, beyond her patience, explanations and the practical help she gave us, never used anything else. The jokes in our family were always light-hearted and sincere. They weren’t made with the thought that one day they might be published.

By now, in his old age, my mother’s care for my father had become even more devoted. He could sense that age was catching up to him, but he didn’t want to accept it — it clashed with his spirit, which always felt young.

It was only in their later years that we first noticed small “conflicts” between our parents. On one hand, my father worked intensely; on the other, my mother stood over him, telling him not to overdo it, that it would harm his health —

and that’s what the doctors were saying too. At that, he would snap at her, as if she were to blame:

“Doctors, that’s their job. They don’t know how to say anything else. But why are you siding with them?”

She would become upset at his response and, visibly discouraged, would go on reading or working on something nearby without responding. It was always my father who broke the silence, saying:

“All right, fine. Come on now. Put your papers down, and I’ll set mine aside too. Let’s call in the little ones — I haven’t seen them today.”

Reconciliation was made. A momentary consensus had been reached, and the children — in their child-like way — didn’t care that their grandfather had work to do. To them, he was simply theirs.

In old age, a parent needs to have their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren close. Life begins to feel too short, and they feel they haven’t had enough time with them. Here’s how my father expressed it at the end of a long letter he sent me while I was far away:

*“...Lilo, with this I’ll end the letter. I’ve nothing more to say or do except to think of you and kiss you with longing from afar.*

*“I remember my mother and father (his parents — Ed.) — how they too used to think of me when I was far away, just like I think of you now. I remember my mother’s words when she used to say: ‘What I feel for you, you will one day feel for your own children.’ The old woman was right. These thoughts of my old mother, and of Nexhmije — who now thinks like her — will one day pass through your own mind too, though for now you are still young.*

*“We will all pass through that same hollow stone.*

*“That is the great truth that binds us to life: the love of a*

*parent for their children, and of children for their parent, for the mother of their children and companion in life, for their loved ones, for people, for society.*

*“March 9, 1980*

*“A kiss from me, yours, Enver.”*

My mother, until the very moment he closed his eyes, stayed by his side and showed extraordinary care for him. Perhaps every woman does this for her husband — I can't say for certain — but I speak from what I witnessed with my own eyes. Despite the immense pain she felt from losing her beloved and our father, she was left with no regret, no sense that she had failed to fulfil any duty of care. That's why he loved her so deeply — because he had a life companion who never left his side. And that's why I am proud of my mother.

It pains me that, as I write these memories from prison, she too, at 74 years old, is imprisoned — sentenced as a political prisoner — a political revenge of today's anti-democratic regime, made up of the offspring of those who once served the Italian and nazi occupiers.

She was convicted as a former partisan, as an early anti-fascist, as a woman who contributed to the emancipation of Albanian women — but above all, as the wife of Enver Hoxha, the man who disrupted their plans to destroy Albania. They try to discredit his figure, but this is impossible when your roots are deep in the people.

Even though he has now passed away, in my mind and in that of my family, the love he had for his country and his people is deeply rooted — as are his efforts for the strengthening and reconstruction of Albania. He raised us through personal example, through concrete actions, his conduct, his wise words — and at times, his sternness — always certain that we would never bring him shame in life.

## PART TWO

## EXHUMATION

Before describing my impressions of this event — the most bitter one in my life — I'll briefly recount the moment of death, the burial and then the exhumation.

On April 9, around 9:00 a.m., my father suffered a heart attack and fell into a coma. My mother, who as always was by his side, immediately notified the doctors. They arrived right away, as they were already on standby due to my father's deteriorating health condition. They managed to get his heart beating again, but he never regained consciousness.

I was at work. I was informed and rushed home immediately. I found him in his bed, surrounded by medical equipment. A knot formed in my throat. I stroked his head and said:

“Dad, it's Lilo!”

The hours passed, but his condition didn't change — hope was slowly slipping away from me. From time to time I would sit by the bed, hold his hand and say to myself:

“He must feel my touch, he must sense that I'm near.”

I spoke to him, hoping he could hear me, even though he wasn't responding. This state lasted until April 11, around 2:00 a.m., when his heart finally stopped beating. I had just lain down to rest a bit on the bed, fully dressed, as I hadn't slept in two days. I got up immediately and went to his room. I kissed him — it was the final farewell. After that intimate moment, I would no longer have the chance to be alone with him, because the funeral ceremony wouldn't allow it. He didn't belong only to us anymore, but to his people.

I returned to my room and cried, to release the immense pain I felt, but I pulled myself together because I had to tell the children, who were still young — ten and six years old — while Besmir was only three months old and didn't under-

stand anything. It was a heavy moment for them too. Their grandfather, whom they loved so much and who loved them just as dearly, was gone.

In the morning, everyone had gathered in front of the house. My father was leaving his home for the last time. There wasn't a black "Benz" at the door, but a white ambulance. He wasn't heading to the office, but to the morgue. The driver of the ambulance was the same as always — Myslym. When they closed the door, my mother, crying, said:

"Myslym, where are you taking him today?"

And he couldn't even reply through his own tears.

After that, everything became public. The ceremony in the People's Assembly, where a long line of people didn't stop for days. The farewell from the people, silent but visible, with the coffin placed on the artillery carriage, draped with the national flag. The ceremony in Skanderbeg Square, and then the burial at the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation.

This time, "the fallen" had "stood up" — they were waiting for their commander. How many times had their commander visited them across Albania, not just in Tirana, telling them:

"Rest in peace — the blood you shed, the ideal you fought for, was not in vain."

The people accompanied Enver Hoxha to his final resting place with pain, crying — a clear sign that he had dedicated his entire life to them.

But let us return to the exhumation — to this macabre act.

One of the first days of May 1992, at 9:00 p.m., someone knocked at the door. I opened it. An unknown person handed me an envelope containing a notice from the municipality and then vanished like the wind. I closed the door and opened the envelope. Inside was a notification informing us

— the family — that the next morning, at 6:00 a.m., we were to present ourselves at the public cemetery in Sharra, because the (re)burial of Mr. Enver Hoxha was going to take place.

How could this be possible?! To be notified at 9:00 p.m. to appear at 6:00 a.m., before the sun even rises, for something so shocking?! How could the exhumation be carried out in secrecy, at night, without the presence of family members?!

It was a very difficult moment for our family. Our 70-year-old mother had been taken to prison. Who knows how upset and devastated she must have felt there in her cell, alone, when she heard about this.

I informed my brother and Klemi. We found a car and immediately headed for the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation. Police had blocked access to the cemetery and weren't letting anyone through.

"We have orders from above not to let anyone pass," they told us.

But I replied:

"No one can stop me from being beside my father when he is exhumed."

They made some calls, and after seeing how determined we were, they told us to go home and that they would notify us when the body was taken out so we could come. Naturally, our place that night was not at home — but as close to our father as possible. We spent the entire night at the gates of the cemetery. Up on the hill, under the light of floodlights, work was being carried out intensively. You could hear the noise of jackhammers (used by miners). Later, the noise stopped, and a vehicle sped away. The equipment used to break through the concrete covering the grave had been damaged.

After two hours, they had found other tools — who knows from which mine. They couldn't meet their "plan" to complete the exhumation and reburial by 6:00 a.m., before

sunrise. There was great haste because they were terrified of the dawn. Dishonourable deeds are always done in secret, at night, without the presence of witnesses.

After much struggle, around 10:00 a.m., an official car sped off to notify the superiors that the task was done. As I was told later, when they brought him out, their faces turned pale as lemons. Among them were also doctors, to formally confirm that it was indeed Enver Hoxha — deceased — so they could proceed with their assignment. But they were shocked: he was completely intact, appearing as if alive.

There are many ways a person may seem dead — or alive.

They told us we could approach the coffin. We went. What did we see?! The place was a construction site of exhumations. Around ten exhumed graves. Ten holes. The people who had worked there were visibly exhausted. They weren't used to doing this kind of work.

We approached our father's coffin. It was 11:00 a.m. The first thing was to make sure that he was really there and hadn't been removed. From that moment on, I never left the coffin.

We took it and transported it to the public cemetery. There, again, we found ten open graves. The graves had no cement slabs. We were told: "We don't have any." We buried him directly in the ground.

From the very first day onward, several veterans — former partisans — stood guard at his grave. They were protecting their commander. From those who had exhumed him, anything could be expected.

A few days later, we had to open the grave again. This time, we properly fixed it with reinforced concrete slabs, welded shut, while the outside was left completely simple.

This macabre exhumation was carried out right before May 5 — Day of the Martyrs. The highest authorities were going to lay wreaths at the Cemetery of the Martyrs, at the

"Mother Albania" monument. But they could not do so if Enver Hoxha were still buried there — alongside the other commanders of the National Liberation War.

The (former) President, Sali Berisha, was to honour the fallen — the same man who decorated criminals that murdered and slaughtered partisans and civilians, including women and children. So was Pjetër Arbnori, the (former) Speaker of the People's Assembly — son of a fascist, whose father fought against the partisans. And so was Aleksandër Meksi, the (former) Prime Minister, who led Albania into total collapse — something we are all witnesses to.

What hypocrisy and irony!

But the ceremony failed. Where Enver Hoxha's grave was located, the site had been surrounded by many young people who had placed numerous flowers and a large national flag. They, along with many relatives of the martyrs, began shouting:

"Leave! Go pay your respects at your own cemeteries. These are the sons, brothers and sisters of our people. Let the martyrs rest in peace!"

The officials witnessed the anger of the people and couldn't even complete the ceremony.

I thought that now, at least, his grave would be "more personal," but no — many people still go there, not only on commemorative days, but even on ordinary days, leaving a bouquet of flowers or lighting candles at this simple grave, the resting place of Enver Hoxha.

## WHERE IS THE MARBLE BLOCK NOW?

Immediately after Berisha's regime had exhumed my father from the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation, I went to inquire about purchasing both the red marble block and the letters of his name, along with the numbers marking the years. This same request had been made by other families of those exhumed, and they had been granted it. But with me, things turned out differently.

After a tired political back-and-forth with the director of the enterprise, I was finally told — what could've been said from the beginning — that those items would not be given.

I understood that the director had no authority to grant them, but he wanted to assert some importance. I didn't blame him.

Not long after, while walking one day in the Grand Park near the artificial lake — where, in a beautiful area of the park, the graves of British soldiers who had fallen in Albania during the Second World War are located — my attention was drawn to the obelisk.

The marble block of the memorial caught my eye. I approached, and immediately recognized the red marble block from my father's grave. You could even still see the marks where the letters had once been mounted.

In front of this now-upright block of red marble — beneath which Enver Hoxha had once been buried — the Albanian people had paid their respects countless times. And now, that same red marble block had been removed and placed as a monument for the graves of the British army. It had been set vertically, as a memorial. Where it once read: "Enver Hoxha, 1908-1985," it now read: "1939-1945 — in memory of British soldiers who fell in Albania during the Second World War."

As if it weren't enough that these soldiers of the Second

World War are buried far from their homeland and their families — now they must also bear the burden of Enver Hoxha's gravestone!

It is undignified for our state that the gravestone of a war-time leader — who led the anti-fascist National Liberation War during the Second World War, in the same alliance as Britain — has been repurposed as a memorial for British soldiers. On the other hand, this is also an insult to the United Kingdom, whose servicemen fell in Albania during the war, and for whom the state could have made a proper, dedicated effort. At least, that's how I see it.

## MY MOTHER'S IMPRISONMENT

After that event, visits to our family increased significantly. People we didn't know — young and old, men and women, veterans and others — began to come. These weren't like those who, when Enver Hoxha died, came two or three times to offer their condolences with tears in their eyes, and we were left comforting them, as if their father had died, not ours.

The new visitors were ordinary people, with integrity. Many came from Kosova — not the ones who could enter freely with passports issued under who-knows-what decree or order, but those who crossed the border through the mountains to visit their Albania, the motherland that Enver Hoxha had protected so strongly. Along the way, they would pay a visit to us as well.

During this period of darkness and destruction in Albania, my mother's trial also took place. The propaganda campaign against our family was intense, but I won't dwell on that too much, as the goal was clearly to discredit Enver Hoxha's legacy.

The state television, hoping to publicly shame us, aired all the court sessions, but people saw for themselves the absurdity of the accusations. In the end, the trial became known as "the coffee trial," because she was sentenced for a supposed abuse involving 300 dollars — which they "found" to be the amount she had spent on coffee for the hundreds of people who came to honour Enver Hoxha on significant commemorative days. For that, she was sentenced to 11 years in prison.

Immediately after the verdict, my mother quickly scribbled a short note to us before being taken into custody:

"My children, don't be upset about the sentence. My only concern was not to bring shame to Enver — my husband

and your father — and we achieved that. We won the trial. I embrace you all."

After spending more than two years in complete isolation, in the cold cells of the Tirana prison, on a mattress thrown on the floor, she was transferred to the high-security prison of Tepelena, where she remained for about a year. It was a men's prison, and my mother was the only woman there.

Even for us, those years were difficult — especially the period when my mother was in the Tepelena prison, as the journey there was long and unsafe.

When Fatos Nano was sentenced, the prison administration was forced to transfer my mother to the only women's prison in Tirana, so that her cell could be given to Fatos.

Teuta, our eldest son Ermal and I had to travel to Tepelena many times, facing numerous difficulties. Ermal, who had a driver's licence, helped with the trips. I would drive there, and he would drive back. Sometimes, we brought our other two children as well.

I don't want to go into details about the difficulties we faced in communicating or visiting my mother, or the many incidents that occurred — she will write about those in her own memoirs. But I want to mention two brief things that have stayed with me.

"On the occasion of Liberation Day," my mother told me during a visit to the Tirana prison, "they were launching fireworks outside. I was lying on my bunk in the cell and watching the fireworks that Zhulali (the former defence minister who fled abroad in 1997 when the people rose up against Berisha's regime and seized army weapons that he had 'reformed' — *my note*) was launching. And I thought, 'Who is celebrating Liberation Day, while we, the first anti-fascists, are in prison?'"

The second case involved another situation. She was

called in and informed that, on the occasion of the founding of the Democratic Party, Berisha had granted her a two-year pardon. Outraged, she told the official:

“I never asked to be pardoned. Don’t bother me with such gestures. Send me back to my cell.”

I also recall another incident from her time in the Tepelena prison. During a visit, she asked me to bring her Enver Hoxha’s memoirs. But the guards told me, “Enver Hoxha’s books are not allowed inside.” I replied:

“I’m not bringing her Enver Hoxha’s books — I’m bringing her the memoirs of her husband and my father. These are personal things, even though they’re published and you’ve read them yourselves.”

More than five years of imprisonment have now passed, and she is free, writing her memoirs. Despite her advanced age, prison and the suffering she endured did not break or embitter her. She faced it all with high moral strength, because her sentence was unjust and driven by revenge.

## MY ARREST

The trial against my mother failed. And little by little, her sentence was also coming to an end. Protests from many foreign organizations were increasing and pressure was mounting for her release. It was a disgrace to keep an anti-fascist woman in prison — she was the only anti-fascist woman in all of Europe who remained imprisoned for political reasons.

For those working behind the scenes, the situation called for another member of Enver Hoxha’s family to be imprisoned. They found the pretext in an interview I had given to a small newspaper, *Modeste*, where I spoke about my father. This interview should have passed entirely unnoticed — it was simply a son sharing impressions about his father. But my arrest took the situation in a completely different direction.

On the eve of April 11, 1995 — the anniversary of my father’s death — a journalist from *Modeste* asked me for an interview. I told him to give me the questions and we agreed on a meeting spot, since he hadn’t prepared them yet. I worked late into the night and gave him my responses. The interview was published on April 13. As for the content, the reader can find it later in this book.

Before publishing the first part, the journalist insisted on continuing the interview with a second part. I wasn’t particularly interested, as I had already said what I had to say. However, the second part was still written and published — while I was already under arrest (though still awaiting trial). I had changed my mind and insisted on continuing, to show that I had my own views and could express them under any circumstances, even while imprisoned. The court’s verdict did not concern me.

But let’s go back to the moment after the interview was published. Many people approached me to congratulate me

on it, because until that point, we — Enver Hoxha's family — had not spoken publicly about the events. Not because we didn't want to, but because the Albanian press had its own agenda and was not interested in hearing our perspective (whereas, in contrast, foreign journalists never left us alone).

We returned home at 8:00 p.m. on April 17 to our house on the outskirts of Tirana — a dilapidated and abandoned building where the authorities had placed us “to put us in our place.”

Five minutes later, someone knocked on the door. The youngest child looked through the peephole and, frightened, said to Teuta:

“Mum, it's the police!”

Teuta opened the door and saw two plainclothes officers and a group of uniformed police. They asked for me. Two SHIK (State Intelligence Service) agents had previously gone to my uncle's house, posing as my friends. After confirming I wasn't there, it seems they had come to wait for me at home.

Teuta called me, and after showing me a document, they told me I needed to go with them to the prosecutor's office “for some clarification” — a tired phrase with an all-too-clear meaning.

“One moment,” I told them. “Let me get dressed.”

I went inside.

“What did they want?” Teuta asked, worried.

“They're asking for some clarification at the prosecutor's office.”

“They want to arrest you — the bastards!”

“Don't worry. It's not the first time they've taken revenge on us. We're used to it, but we'll face it.”

Meanwhile, the children were silently watching my every move. I dressed warmly to withstand the cold of the cell, because even though it was April, it was still chilly. I hugged the

children and my wife, and said to the youngest:

“Don't worry, my love. You're a big boy now and very brave. Daddy will be back again.”

To my eldest son, Ermal, I said:

“You're the man now — you'll take over for Daddy in everything and take care of Mum. And you, Shkëlzen, help your mum and look after your little brother.”

As I walked away, I could hear my wife speaking loudly to those who had been ordered to take me — making sure those who gave the order would hear through them:

“You came at night when you notified us about my father's exhumation, you did the exhumation at night, you searched our home for weapons at night, you forced us out of our house at night — and now again at night, you come for Ilir.”

Both she and I clearly understood that I was being arrested, and even though we had no time to talk, we both knew the cause was the interview — though not their true motive.

As I left, I told her:

“Go back to the kids — especially the little one. Don't let them worry.”

As I walked down the stairs, I thought of my 74-year-old mother in prison, and gave myself courage:

“She's enduring prison at her age, so why shouldn't I — her son — be able to face it too?”

By now we had come down the stairs. There, a police van and a Mercedes with plainclothes officers were waiting. I must have been considered a very dangerous person for the Berisha regime. He had even labelled us a “criminal family” in front of Ms. Christine von Kohl, a representative of the International Federation for Human Rights based in Vienna, when she asked him: “Why is Enver Hoxha's family being persecuted?”

After giving that response, she told him:

“In a democracy, there are no criminal families, only criminal individuals. You should know this — you’re a president.”

After that exchange, Ms. Christine von Kohl never returned to Albania. Perhaps she wasn’t allowed to, because the mission of the organization she represents didn’t align with the goals of the former president or the so-called democratic authorities.

I got into the police van. I greeted the officers — they were all polite. The van followed the Mercedes with the plainclothes officers. One of the policemen broke the silence:

“Here — I have the newspaper with your interview,” he said, pulling it out of his pocket. “It was really well done.”

Even they — the police — seemed to know that I was being arrested because of the interview, even though no one had officially told them who they were escorting to the prosecutor’s office. But they recognized me. I had always respected the police, because I saw them as people who make sacrifices to protect public order, never as enemies of the people.

The others started encouraging me too, saying things like, “These people are scum — they’re dragging us all down,” and other similar remarks. One of them summed it up as the van pulled up at the district prosecutor’s office, saying:

“Enver Hoxha was a great statesman who cared about the country and about us.”

Hearing these words from young police officers lifted my spirits even more, as I climbed the steps of the prosecutor’s office.

Inside, a prosecutor named Genc Gjokutaj read out an indictment: “For inciting conflict and hatred between races and nationalities.” I looked at him in disbelief, wondering if he was out of his mind, because the indictment began with:

“After carefully studying the interview..., etc.”

But I too listened carefully to the entire accusation and could find no incriminating element in the interview I had given — let alone anything that could be interpreted as inciting conflict or hatred between races or nationalities.

Readers can judge the interview for themselves — just as several international human rights organizations did, including Amnesty International, the U.S. State Department and others, who classified me as a political prisoner. They insisted that the accusation had no basis — and on the contrary, the interview was a call for tolerance.

I was formally informed of my arrest. I received it calmly and, strangely, felt no anger. In fact, the prosecutor seemed pathetic to me — someone to be pitied.

Teuta had gone that same evening to inform my sister, telling her that the police had taken me. By then it was 10:00 p.m. Some friends of mine had notified the newspaper *Koha Jonë* about my arrest, and the next day, the paper published the news. That same day — “illegally” — the newspaper also ran an interview with me, which the journalist titled “Exclusive for *Koha Jonë*, one day after the arrest,” published on April 19.

But how had my mother — in prison — found out about the arrest?

The next morning, like every day, she turned on the radio to listen to the news on the BBC — a station that provided unbiased information.

“Last night,” the BBC news began, “the son of Albania’s former dictator Enver Hoxha — Ilir Hoxha — was arrested.”

It hit her like a bomb. She couldn’t even focus on the rest of the news. She didn’t have access to newspapers — we used to send them to her ourselves. She was convinced it was a political arrest. Later, she read the interview and wrote to me:

“You navigated well through that sea full of underwater rocks.”

Many others told me the interview had been a trap, and that the journalist had been sent by others to ask me those specific questions — the ones that, according to my mother, were like “underwater rocks.” I disagreed. I told them it didn’t matter to me whether the journalist had come on his own or been sent by someone else — what mattered was that he published my thoughts without any alteration.

Right after the incident, Teuta went to see my mother in prison and explained how it had happened. That calmed her — as much as a mother can be calmed when her son is taken to prison. She gave her all the press clippings covering the arrest, along with the newspaper that printed the interview.

Later on, under prison conditions but still before the trial, I gave the second part of the interview to the newspaper *Modeste*. The journalist struggled to get it published, as no printing house was willing to take the risk due to the pressure they faced. This is covered in the third part of these memoirs.

The pre-trial period was an intense time of preparation. I looked for a lawyer and was recommended a young man I didn’t know personally, but I did know his father — a talented photographer and a very decent person. The lawyer’s name was Arben Ristani.

We met and had a long discussion. He was going to prepare my legal defence, which he did with great competence. He argued the case thoroughly and dismantled every charge the prosecutor had brought against me, one by one.

Meanwhile, Teuta reached out to all the embassies, international human rights organizations, the Council of Europe, and our friends and allies inside and outside the country.

It wasn’t an easy task — everything had to be drafted, translated, typed and finally distributed in the form of press

releases.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Teuta and I worked like a team to face the workload. We even surprised *Rilindja Demokratike*, the newspaper that, on June 7, 1995, after my court defence, wrote

“In his defence, he delivered a lengthy lecture not in defence of himself, but in defence of Enverism.” (Here, they were somewhat close to the truth, because my aim really was to defend my father — whose name was Enver — not to promote “Enverism.”)

The article continued:

“Everyone present understood clearly that the lecture wasn’t his. That lecture was probably drafted somewhere in the offices of the Socialist Party’s Political Bureau late last night.”

The poor soul writing that piece clearly had a Socialist Party obsession and didn’t know what he was talking about — maybe he hadn’t even realized that the Socialist Party had long since distanced itself from Enver Hoxha and saw no value in defending him.

But that poor journalist ought to know that there are people outside the Socialist Party Political Bureau — as he calls it — who are capable of preparing lectures a hundred times better than my simple defence of my father.

## THE DAY OF THE TRIAL ARRIVED

The courtroom was packed with people who knew me — friends, acquaintances and journalists. In the front row, I saw Teuta, Ermal and Shkëlzen, who had also wanted to attend my trial. I waved to them to say, “I’m doing just fine,” and they smiled back.

In difficult times like this, the unity of the family — this core of society, as it’s called and truly is — takes on an irreplaceable value.

I don’t want to dwell at length on my memories of the trial or how it unfolded, as it was widely covered by the press — even my full statements delivered in court were published, where I argued my innocence against the baseless charges brought against me.

The prosecution, a tool in the hands of the political regime — a regime that used it thoroughly for its own interests and then tossed it aside as useless — requested a sentence of three years in its final argument. The press at the time, including *Koha Jonë* on June 6, wrote:

“Only five minutes of closing argument from the prosecutor shocked the packed courtroom during the second session of Ilir Hoxha’s trial. The Prosecutor Gjokutaj requested three years in prison for the defendant.”

The court sentenced me to one year in prison.

I received the decision calmly. We filed appeals at both levels of the judiciary, always hoping the courts would free themselves from the “claws” of political power. But that didn’t happen. Both the Court of Appeal and the Court of Cassation upheld the ruling of the trial court. In truth, despite our efforts — both mine and my lawyer’s — we knew this would be the outcome, since the law was being applied politically. The Albanian justice system was entirely dependent on the

political regime, which manipulated it for its own interests. This wasn’t just my opinion.

A number of international human rights organizations got involved. They protested not only to Berisha, but also to the Speaker of the Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice and others, regarding these violations of human rights. They also protested the subordination of the courts and prosecution offices to political authority, and even classified me as a prisoner of conscience.

This mattered to me because these international organizations were clearly signalling — to the president and others — that they were using the judiciary and prosecution as tools of revenge against me simply because I was Enver Hoxha’s son.

## BEHIND PRISON BARS

I'm recalling some sad things, because life in prison is extremely limited. At first, I stayed in the Tirana prison. Before I even settled into the cell, the small serving window opened and someone passed me some food: a few sausages, chicken, cheese, olives.

"They're from Ylli," he said (Ylli was another inmate whom I had known from outside prison).

Then there was the moment someone even brought me coffee — real luxury in a prison cell. Prisoners come up with all sorts of creative solutions. They also brought me cigarettes, but I didn't smoke.

Even two months after my appeal verdict, I was kept in solitary confinement. A coincidence — I had been placed in the same cell where my mother had been held during her two years of pre-trial detention. I wrote to her about the cell, and she replied saying now she knew where I was and could imagine how I was settled in and what I was doing there.

I was eager to see Teuta, to ask how the children were doing, especially the youngest one. After a few days, a guard came and told me to get ready for a visit. He warned me that he would have to handcuff me — it was the rule. I extended my hands in front, but he said they had to go behind my back. He loosely fastened the cuffs — if I hadn't held them up with my hands, they would've fallen off. I looked at him, and he looked back and gave me a wink. We understood each other.

When I got to the visitation room, Teuta was there. So many times we had both come to this place as visitors to see my imprisoned mother. We were very familiar with the annoying procedures and the cold environment. But this time, things were different: I was the prisoner and Teuta the visitor.

That first visit was full of emotion. We hugged and started sharing everything — I told her how my first days in the cell had gone, and she told me what had happened at home in my absence. We gave each other strength during those difficult moments.

The meeting ended quickly, and we parted.

The days in the cell dragged on monotonously. The sense of day and night disappeared. The cell had only a mattress on the floor and nothing else. A small barred window, about 20 cm by 20 cm, was the only source of light and air. Seeing outside was impossible — it was placed very high. Food couldn't be left on the ground because there were large cockroaches crawling out of the floorboard cracks. I noticed that the holes had been carefully stuffed with paper, and I later learned my mother had done that during her time there to block the path of these "cellmates" over two years. There were also big rats, but they didn't enter the room — I could tell from the screams of the female guards in the corridor, because there were two women's cells nearby.

The heat was intense. Sweat poured down endlessly. I was allowed fresh air in another room with a large window, where I could look out over a courtyard and see the state archive in the distance. I walked laps for about half an hour, then they brought me back to the cell.

On visiting days and the day after, I would eat the food Teuta prepared, which was delicious. Her meals are good at home — let alone in prison. But many foods couldn't stand the heat, so she tried to prepare meals that would last for a week, until the next visit. As for the prison food: there was no breakfast. At lunch, we had soup, which was relatively okay and I occasionally ate it. Dinner consisted of pasta, which I never touched — you could tell just by looking at it that it wasn't any good.

After four months of my sentence, one day the police came and told me to get ready — I was being transferred elsewhere. In about five minutes I packed the few belongings I had, and they put me in a van along with a young guy who had been sentenced to a few months for theft. The police van turned on the siren and we headed toward Durrës. I said to the officers:

“I believe we’re going to the Bardhora prison.”

“How do you know that?” they asked.

“I can guess,” I replied. “We’re not going to Tepelena — otherwise this young man wouldn’t be travelling with me. He’s not dangerous enough to be sent to a high-security prison like Tepelena.”

Meanwhile, the vehicles on the road were moving aside to make way for our speeding van. Once we entered Kavaja, we turned right towards the Bardhora prison. The road was in terrible condition — full of potholes. I wasn’t worried for myself — I’d only be travelling this road twice: once now, going to prison, and again when I’d be released. But I was worried for Teuta and the kids, who would have to travel this broken and almost impassable road every week. A high-clearance vehicle was necessary.

I figured they would come two days later, since that would have been the visitation day in Tirana. Once they got there, they’d find out I’d been transferred — but with great difficulty, because not only was the road damaged, it was also confusing to navigate.

And that’s exactly what happened. After waiting for about two hours in line at the Tirana prison, when it was finally their turn, they were told: “Ilir has been transferred.” But they weren’t told where — they were instructed to ask the prison administration. A police officer approached and said I had been moved to the Bardhora prison in Kavaja.

Worried, Teuta and the two boys set off immediately toward the unfamiliar destination — Bardhora.

That day, I was waiting at the camp square, where all the inmates would line up daily to see their relatives approaching the entrance, since you could see the gate from there. Suddenly, I saw all three of them arriving! We waved to each other from afar. After they completed the entry procedures, we met and hugged.

“Well,” I said, “you found me, didn’t you?”

“And even if you were at the end of the world, we would have found you,” all three of them chimed in. “Now we’ve learned the way” — and they told me about the difficulties they’d faced getting there. They said they barely made it, since our car couldn’t manage the road — it was too low.

“Did you ever hit the bottom?” I asked Ermal, who was driving.

“He’s a top-class driver,” Teuta jumped in. I found out later that, of course, they had hit the bottom, but they hadn’t told me so as not to worry me. They even used our car to pick me up when I was released from prison. Other times, thanks to our son’s friends, they managed to find more suitable vehicles for visiting me.

Bardhora was a completely run-down camp. International organizations that had visited Albanian prisons had declared the Bardhora prison totally uninhabitable. It had once been a labour camp where prisoners collected bay leaves that had been planted by the cooperative. Now, nothing was left. All the bay trees had been uprooted. In the past, the camp had received water by tanker truck, but now the prisoners drank water filled with lime. There were no showers. Inmates bathed over the same pits where they relieved themselves — in the bitter cold of an unforgiving winter. The kitchen was ten metres away, and flies made their “rounds” on the prisoners’

food. The food in the canteen was terrible. Like many other prisoners, I cooked in what was called the private kitchen. The weather was cold by then, so the meals and half-prepared food that Teuta brought me wouldn't spoil.

The canteen was filthy.

The sleeping barracks held fifty people each, with naval-style bunk beds. There were a total of four barracks. They were covered with a kind of cellophane sheeting — and at first, they didn't even have windows. In the summer, mosquitoes swarmed through the cracks; in the winter, the cold was biting, as there was no place to warm up. I was assigned a bed on the bottom.

In the summer, the camp had no shade at all where you could take cover. It was located in a dip in the land — you could see only the sky above. Even though the sea was just 500 metres away, it was only visible on the horizon. In winter, you were at the mercy of the wind. When it rained, the only walking area — a football field — turned into a giant mud pit. That was the only place inmates could take walks.

There were about 250 prisoners. Most were serving time for serious crimes — murder, rape, armed robbery — and the rest were in for minor offences.

Despite the fact that most inmates were doing time for serious crimes, and despite me being Enver Hoxha's son, I was treated in an entirely humane way. Regardless of their differing views, they felt my conviction was unjust — “anyone would have defended their father, no matter who he was.” That didn't sit well with the prison director, who had been appointed the same day I arrived at the prison. He was dismissed immediately after the incident when I was struck in the head while sleeping. I found out exactly who had done it — from the organizer to the perpetrator — because people came and told me right away.

The Prosecutor General's office also came. I was surprised and said to the representative, “What's happened that warrants this kind of attention? I didn't file a complaint!”

It was no longer worth dealing with those who committed that shameful act — so shameful that the entire prison camp condemned such a despicable act, hitting someone while they were asleep. But how was it possible that, after my wife's complaint to the prison administration and to the relevant bodies and the press, the head of that administration declared publicly:

“An investigation has been conducted into the incident. The perpetrators have been identified and the appropriate legal measures will be taken against them. Furthermore, measures will be taken to ensure such incidents are not repeated — but not by fulfilling the inmate's request to change the prison where he is serving his sentence.” (So, according to this official, my request to be transferred from that prison was considered a personal wish, not something based on an objective reason.)

The official went on to say:

“Measures will also be taken against Mr. Ilir Hoxha, as he provoked the situation by saying that the other inmates respect him because they respect his father.”

This was published in the newspaper *Dita Informacion* on October 22, 1995 (I was attacked on the eve of October 16, my father's birthday).

Naturally, these were fabrications — no such provocation had ever come from me towards the inmates. But clearly, “informants,” trying to score points with the director, were feeding him all sorts of lies and slander.

I've noticed that painful events always seem to befall our family around commemorative dates for Enver Hoxha.

On April 11, I was arrested. On October 16, I was struck

in the head while sleeping. On another October 16, Klemi, my sister's husband, was arrested under the accusation of "participation in a terrorist group" (what a laughable charge — the political motives were clear, especially considering that after five months in solitary confinement, he was released).

One of the few questions they asked him was about where he had copied the design of the Palace of Congresses from. A truly relevant question for the accusation of terrorism against this "terrorist" architect by some "enigmatic" prosecutors — given that the case prosecutor never even showed up.

Klemi had told them:

"I was arrested for political reasons, because I'm the son of Teki Kolaneci and the son-in-law of Enver Hoxha."

The prosecutor replied:

"No, we have respect for your father, and it's not as you say."

"And do you have respect for Enver Hoxha?" — Klemi had asked them.

The prosecutor couldn't continue with that line of reasoning because he would be contradicting himself entirely. With no evidence or link whatsoever to the so-called terrorist group he was accused of being part of, they changed the charge to "failure to report a crime," and later he was released from prison altogether — once the system collapsed, once all the state institutions led by Sali Berisha crumbled like a sandcastle under the weight of the popular revolts against that regime — and later, he was amnestied.

I digressed a bit from my own imprisonment, but I mentioned this case because Klemi was arrested after I had been released, and my mother still had three more months left until her release. So, the political authorities needed at least one member of the family to remain in prison. As I've said before, these incidents always seemed to happen on commemorative

dates for Enver Hoxha. What a coincidence. How conveniently the "competent organs" would uncover our crimes exactly on those remembrance dates for our family.

But let's return to the incident. Why did the representative from the Prosecutor General's Office come only much later, asking me who I suspected of carrying out the act against me — instead of questioning the head of the prison administration who had "identified" the perpetrators on day one and promised legal action would be taken and such incidents would never happen again? Did he perhaps know it before it even happened?

The only actual measures taken were: the dismissal of the prison director, and for me — the denial of my request for parole by this very same director who had just been dismissed, even though I had served half my sentence. No other legal measures were taken against anyone else.

So that left us with two possible culprits for this disgraceful act: either the director had attacked me, or I had attacked myself!

In that prison, through the BBC, I also heard the decision of the Court of Cassation to uphold the previous verdict — meaning, one year. I had no real hope that my sentence would be reduced, since it was political — just as I, like many others, had no hope that I might be released after serving half of my sentence. The request was denied, because I had "not repented for the crime I had committed." In other words, they wanted me to write in my request: "I made a mistake by defending my father, and I deeply regret it and ask for your mercy."

As I mentioned, I got along well with the other inmates, regardless of whose son I was. They would tell me their stories, ask for my opinion on complaints they were submitting — most of them regretting the crimes they had committed — talk about their problems, and express frustration toward

the Democratic Party for the promises made by its MPs and prison officials during election campaigns. Once they got their vote, they were forgotten and left to suffer. I truly felt sorry for them. They were people sentenced to 20-25 years. Of course, they had committed crimes — some intentionally, some not, some out of honour, some over land — all of them sentenced during the democratic era, in a time when laws, prosecutors, courts and especially the six-month legal training courses produced results that left much to be desired.

My family always brought me newspapers, and little by little everyone began asking to borrow them so they could read. We also did crosswords together. At the end of the sleeping barrack there was a television, and when the news began and the anchor would start by saying “at the police station of...,” everyone would jump down from their bunks and gather silently in front of the TV to see who had been arrested — since they all knew each other.

I could never leave unmentioned, in these memories, two of my fellow inmates — Meti and Vasi. They were the first two prisoners to approach me and stay by my side the whole time. Naturally, for their support, they were “punished” a bit by the prison director who had recently been assigned to Bardhora. I say “a bit” because he couldn’t do much more. Both of them had been sentenced for murder, but they hadn’t committed the act directly. One had taken the blame for a crime someone else had committed. The other had been charged because the actual perpetrator was an only child and had connections, while he had three other brothers — and what harm was done if his mother lost one son, since she still had three left? What a “beautiful logic” for justice.

“Ramiz Alia spared my life,” he used to tell me. “He granted pardons every month — not like this one, who never remembers.”

The days of imprisonment were coming to an end. Teuta told me that the boys had become very close to one another since the day I was imprisoned and were helping each other a lot.

It’s a good thing when a family is united. But for Teuta, beyond the burden of my situation, another challenge had arisen. Not that my situation wasn’t a burden — but I was the one in prison, and it was up to Teuta to handle all the family’s difficulties. The eldest son had to emigrate in order to support the family. We met and I gave him the usual advice. Two months later, he came to visit me in prison — something unexpected. I was very happy. Then he left again. Now, the second son, Shkëlzen, became Teuta’s right hand.

I want to say that the family played an irreplaceable role in helping me get through the prison time as easily as possible. I also can’t fail to mention those who helped my family to come and visit me in prison — because, although the prison was only 14 km from Kavaja, it took an hour to reach it and required a high-clearance vehicle, since the road was impassable for regular cars, as I’ve already mentioned.

But finally, the day of freedom arrived. Every prisoner dreams of this day. I used to sit in a specific spot in the camp from where the sea could be seen — it seemed to me that only the sea was free, as it appeared endless and no “prison” could contain it. That night I didn’t sleep at all. I had packed my personal belongings long beforehand. In the morning, I completed the handover process, said goodbye to my friends, and around 9:00 a.m., I walked out of the camp.

Now I was on the upper side, while the inmates were in the lower yard of the camp — the place where they would gather and watch their family members arrive to visit their imprisoned loved ones. That’s where I used to wait for Teuta and the boys during the designated visiting days, in the mid-

dle of winter cold or summer heat, rain or blazing sun.

My second son — since the eldest had emigrated to support the family — was waiting for me outside the camp perimeter. I couldn't wait to get home. They suggested we stop for a coffee somewhere along the way, but it felt like a waste of time. At home, Teuta, my youngest son and the rest of the family were waiting. I said to my son:

“You see? Dad came back after all!”

We spoke with the eldest on the phone.

The next day, I went to visit my mother in prison, where we met in person, and right after that meeting I went to my father's grave. I placed flowers, I cleaned the grave, I didn't cry, but I felt prouder than ever.

## PART THREE

## THE INTERVIEW THAT LED TO MY ARREST

(Published in the newspaper *Modeste*, on April 14, 1995,  
titled “I, the Son of Enver Hoxha”)

**Question:** Ilir Hoxha — a name preserved from antiquity and a surname that time seems eager to forget. What kind of person, what kind of character stands behind this identity?

**Answer:** It’s true that the name Ilir comes from antiquity, while I have the fortune of carrying the surname Hoxha from my father — who, for the Albanian people at least, has been known since November 8, 1941, when the Communist Party of Albania was founded. The very fact that you’ve come to interview me is because I carry this surname. That’s why you say time tends to forget this name, but that’s not true. And if time doesn’t tend to forget it, it’s certainly not because of me, but because of the colossal work Enver Hoxha did for Albania and its people.

**Question:** Being the child of a prominent figure — beyond the privileges, do you believe it also comes with difficulties?

**Answer:** Of course, there are difficulties, which are much greater than the benefits. One of the main ones — and it was true while he was alive, and even more now after his death — is that, as his son, I must never bring shame upon him.

**Question:** What would you consider the most significant advantage and the most significant sacrifice?

**Answer:** His total dedication to his work meant sacrifice for us — the time spent together as a family was limited.

**Question:** For 45 years, Enver Hoxha led an entire nation. But for you personally, he was also your father. Which side of him do you value more — the parent or the leader?

**Answer:** That's not something you can separate. I valued him as a father, but at the same time I respected him as a leader — like everyone else. The first kind of appreciation is personal.

**Question:** Times have changed. Enver Hoxha, once an idol, is now considered the misfortune of the nation. You, from the position of an ordinary man — how would you judge Enver Hoxha?

**Answer:** Times may change, and the fact that he's no longer considered an idol doesn't concern me, because he never fought to become one. As for your statement that he's "the misfortune of the nation," in order for that not to sound fictional, you would need to cite clearly where and by whom that has been said, so that I can respond accurately. Personally, I do not consider him a misfortune for the nation. In fact — and I say this with modesty, because he is my father — I might even call him the pride of the nation.

**Question:** What would you consider Enver Hoxha's greatest merit?

**Answer:** The creation and consolidation of the new Albanian state, giving it recognition and stature around the world.

**Question:** And his biggest mistake?

**Answer:** I haven't identified any mistakes — especially not a major one.

**Question:** The figure of Enver is also tied to accusations about the years of the war, even though the anti-fascist struggle is seen as a glorious page in Albanian history. How do you explain this?

**Answer:** You should know that the accusations against Enver Hoxha regarding the National Liberation War come from the defeated — from those he put in their place and didn't allow to exploit the people. The goal Enver Hoxha

set for himself, naturally together with all the partisans, the youth and the people — to fight the occupiers and their collaborators and to liberate Albania — was fully achieved on November 29, 1944. For the victors, accusations hold no weight, because those victories were sealed with the blood of martyrs.

**Question:** It is a fact that the merits and privileges of the war (including an amnesty for the 50th anniversary of Liberation) have been denied even to your mother. How would you explain this?

**Answer:** My mother was one of the first anti-fascists. The fascist regime sentenced her to 13 years in prison in absentia because she was an illegal fighter and a partisan. Now she's been imprisoned and sentenced to 11 years — to carry out the punishment originally handed down by those who had fled with their tails between their legs alongside the occupiers.

Like my mother, and like us, we do not ask for forgiveness or mercy — because the innocent have no reason to ask for forgiveness, even if they have been sentenced (not for guilt, but out of political revenge).

**Question:** Was the cult of personality something Enver himself encouraged, or was it a result of the people's admiration for their leader?

**Answer:** Enver Hoxha never sought to create a cult. On this point, it's better to ask those who met him, who spoke with him, and especially those who knew him more closely.

**Question:** Nevertheless, it was the people who, in revenge against the former regime, chose specifically to destroy its symbol. What do you believe was the reason?

**Answer:** One shouldn't misuse the word "people," because it wasn't the people who tore down the monuments, but rather a few organized gangs that were unleashed to commit acts of vandalism. The people were those who came out after

the monuments were torn down and held counter-protests. Like it or not, those people still exist.

Still, the toppling of the monuments wasn't as painful compared to what these bands of vandals did afterward. They tore Albania apart — taking it even below rock bottom. Today we have neither dignity as a state nor dignity as a people in the eyes of the world, and this will go on for a long time.

**Question:** The loss of a loved one is undoubtedly painful. But how did you feel about the destruction of the monument?

**Answer:** The monument was not a person — it belonged to the people, and we didn't have a personal obligation to it. But my father's disinterment was done in secret, at night. The people in power acted like thieves and cowards because they were afraid to do it in the light of day — even the dead made them tremble in all the ways a person can tremble. That, yes — I felt it was my duty to build a grave and protect his remains.

**Question:** Did you ever think that the same people who cried for Enver five years earlier would react that way?

**Answer:** As I said — and I repeat — it wasn't the people who reacted that way, but specific political forces. The defeated.

**Question:** The Hoxha family in prison! That's a slogan often repeated. Do you think it's really the will of the people or the aim of certain political circles?

**Answer:** I've never actually heard that demand. But you should know that going to prison can happen either as revenge — like in my mother's case — or because you broke the laws of the country you live in. As for me, I've never broken the law. I've respected the laws — both of the previous system and the one we live in today.

**Question:** Whom would you accuse for the treatment you received?

**Answer:** Who else but those seeking revenge against Enver Hoxha — the man who put them in their place fifty years ago. Albania has regressed significantly. Still, the names are there, and you can easily recognize them by reading Enver Hoxha's memoirs, in books such as *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania*, *Laying the Foundations of the New Albania*, *The Titoites*, etc. I recommend these memoirs to citizens — they're for their own good. But there are also new names, blind instruments, who may now be in government — like Genc Ruli and Blerim Cela — who made those ridiculous and baseless reports and accusations, or prosecutors like Teodor Mosko, who “dignifiedly” defended these charges, and judges like Nikoleta Kita, who sentenced my mother to eleven years in prison. All of them were educated under Enver Hoxha's regime, and the day will come when they'll be held accountable — because that's what we'll demand. There are others I won't name — not out of revenge, but in the name of justice.

**Question:** Nevertheless, your mother is currently in prison. How valid are the accusations of misappropriating public assets?

**Answer:** My mother is a political prisoner — and everyone knows it, at least the international bodies do. Still, there's nothing but silence from the Albanian state. Naturally, we don't expect much, knowing that even an entire party can't manage to get Fatos Nano released. The accusations made in parliament by Genc Ruli and Blerim Cela turned out to be bluffs and falsifications — pure propaganda, but with consequences for us. No state property was ever misappropriated or abused. The official state documentation, maintained by the authorized body — the reception directorate — was provided to Blerim Cela's inspection to count every single coffee served to those who came to honour Enver Hoxha's memory. Everything was authorized by the highest institutions.

**Question:** Do you believe the treatment toward you is political revenge?

**Answer:** It doesn't take much thought to understand that. A democratic state should activate its intelligence to build and move forward. Meanwhile, I'm a professor and PhD holder who's unemployed — but I must say, there are many engineers, officers, teachers, etc., who have been cast aside, not to mention workers. So, I'm not the only one facing this government's revenge. Yes, I've been punished. I admit that.

**Question:** We are now a democratic state. What do you see as achievements, and what do you consider the fatal mistakes of these past three years under the new system?

**Answer:** To be accurate, we're not a democratic state — or rather, we are only in words. To even call ourselves a state, we should at least have a constitution, like every other European country that we claim to be part of. I haven't seen a single achievement in these three years — only destruction.

The fatal mistakes are many, but two stand out:

— This government encouraged revenge, and revenge will never allow Albania to lift its head.

— Secondly, the phenomenon of blood feuds was allowed to resurface — a phenomenon that had been previously resolved through reconciliation. I call on everyone involved in blood feuds to be tolerant and reconcile, because it's in their and their children's best interest. It's not shameful to forgive blood. I call on you to reconcile with each other directly and not wait for mediation, because there is no more people's state power or Enver Hoxha to help you. Do it, at least, in honour of the man who wanted you to be united and at peace with one another — and you'll see that only good things will come of it.

**Question:** Do you feel shunned by society?

**Answer:** I walk proudly and openly. I have no reason to

feel rejected by society — and I owe that to the tireless work my father did for the good of Albania and its people.

On the other hand, you can ask anyone — in Durrës or Tirana — where I worked and how I worked. But that doesn't matter much, because like me, many others have worked with honesty and integrity.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much!

## ARREST DECISION

### Decision

#### On the initiation of criminal proceedings

In Tirana, today, on the date of April 17, 1995

I, Genc Gjokutaj, Deputy Prosecutor of the Tirana District, after reviewing the interview given by citizen Ilir Hoxha, published in issue no. 18 of the newspaper *Modeste*, which concerns the criminal offence of inciting disputes and hatred between nationalities and races, as provided for in Article 56 of the Penal Code,

Find that:

In issue no. 18 of the newspaper *Modeste*, citizen Ilir Hoxha published an interview titled: "I, the son of Enver Hoxha..." In this interview, the author makes appeals that aim to disrupt public peace and incite hatred against parts of the population, by insulting and defaming them through expressions such as: "the defeated," "vandal gangs," and insults directed at various social or state groups, such as: "blind tools," etc., as well as openly threatening that "a day of reckoning will come and we will demand it."

Since there is sufficient evidence that the criminal offence was committed by Ilir Hoxha,

I have decided:

To initiate criminal proceedings against Ilir Enver Hoxha for this case.

Deputy District Prosecutor

Genc Gjokutaj

## I HAVE CALLED FOR PEACE, NOT REVENGE

### Interview with "KJ"

(The day after the arrest, exclusively for this newspaper)

April 18, 1995

**KJ:** When did you give the interview to the newspaper *Modeste*?

**Answer:** The journalist came and met with me on April 9, and the interview was published on April 13.

**KJ:** Had you ever thought you might be arrested for this?

**Answer:** It never even crossed my mind that I would be arrested just for giving an interview. I have always respected the laws of the state and never broken them.

**KJ:** What went through your mind when you saw the police at your door?

**Answer:** I saw a van full of police officers, and one of them told me I needed to come in for questioning at the prosecutor's office. All kinds of things went through my head: arrest, imprisonment. Then I thought of my mother and said to myself: if a seventy-five-year-old woman can endure prison, how could I not, her son?

**KJ:** After the police picked you up, where were you taken?

**Answer:** To the office of the Deputy Prosecutor of Tirana, Genc Gjokutaj, who was already waiting for me. He informed me of the charges and, after reading them aloud, asked me to sign. At first I refused, but then he convinced me by explaining the procedures and rules. The signature only meant that I had been informed of the charges, not that I accepted them. Still, I haven't yet understood the accusation made against me.

**KJ:** Why not?

**Answer:** I don't understand what criminal offence I've supposedly committed. I've thought about it a lot, but nothing makes sense. The charge seems completely absurd. I'm not a newspaper publisher, to be arrested over publishing an interview that might stir up racial or divisive sentiment. I simply expressed my views on the legacy of Enver Hoxha and on those who have labelled him a dictator. In the published interview, I call for tolerance, not revenge. I speak of the need for the state to combat blood feuds and other negative social phenomena that have emerged in recent years — issues that didn't exist during Enver's rule.

Everyone who has read the interview says they can't find a single word that would justify blaming me, let alone arresting me. I don't know how those who arrested me interpreted it.

**KJ:** Do you believe this arrest is politically motivated?

**Answer:** What else could it be?

**KJ:** Who do you think was frightened by the interview?

**Answer:** Go and ask those who arrested me. No one can stop me from defending my father and being proud of him.

**KJ:** Why do you think your defence of your father's legacy led to your arrest?

**Answer:** I'm certain it was solely because of defending him that I ended up in this situation — because I speak the truth about my father's legacy. That truth scares some people. Still, I am Ilir Enver Hoxha, not Enver Hoxha himself. I don't understand why the current regime is afraid of me. As his son, I have the right to defend my father to the end, just as I have the right to pursue legal action against anyone who insults his name.

**KJ:** What have you lost in your everyday life because of this arrest?

**Answer:** What saddens me most is that I won't be able to accompany my children to school. It was something I did

every day, something that brought me joy, especially during this time I've been unemployed. Still, I'm optimistic — I know my eldest son will take my place.

**KJ:** If your arrest continues for a long time, what steps will you take?

**Answer:** I would prefer this issue to be resolved quickly, and I truly hope the prosecutor will close the "Ilir Hoxha" file. But if this drags on, then I will seek assistance from the Albanian Helsinki Committee and contact all the embassies, informing them that the persecution of the Hoxha family continues.

**KJ:** How long do you think this persecution might continue?

**Answer:** I don't know, and I can't imagine. But I can say this: the Hoxha family will remain under the spotlight for the rest of our lives — all because of Enver Hoxha. No Albanian can deny the love Albania experienced during his rule. What is being said today is just political chatter from opportunists. I don't understand the statements made by Blerim Çela, who is head of the state control office, and said them on national television. If he has found my father's supposed treasures, I'd be happy — I truly mean that. But I can't accept his claim that Enver aimed to become some sort of pope of Marxism-Leninism. Enver Hoxha will always be Enver Hoxha — and a pope is a pope. You can't combine those two ideas under one name.

**KJ:** The interview published in *Modeste* continues underneath the headline.

**Answer:** The journalist left me the questions, but I don't know if he still intends to publish it as an interview. Who knows — maybe he'll end up arrested too, just like I was. As for the accusers, I would tell them to read the interview first, then decide whether to issue an arrest order against me.

**KJ:** Do you think your last name is at fault for everything

that's happening?

**Answer:** Certainly. I'm taking your word "fault" in the sense of "cause." All these acts of revenge against us stem solely from my last name. But I am proud to be a descendant of the Hoxha family.

**KJ:** Do you now feel like you are in the same position as your mother, Nexhmije Hoxha?

**Answer:** Since I am indeed in the same position — very close to her — I'd like to send her a message through the newspaper, to tell her not to worry about me:

"Mother, it is an honour for me to be accused of defending the one we loved. A warm embrace from Ilir."

## WHETHER POLITICIANS LIKE IT OR NOT, HE WILL NOT REMAIN "OUTSIDE THE LAW," AS HE IS TODAY

(Part two of the interview, submitted to the editorial office of the newspaper *Modeste* on May 14, 1995)

**Question:** You said you don't feel scorned. But do you feel disappointed? If yes, who disappointed you the most — from whom did you least expect it?

**Answer:** I'm disappointed by the hypocrisy of certain people, but I can say that in my own mind, things became clear very quickly. I have internally separated those "friends and comrades" of mine who distanced themselves in order to secure positions in the new ruling establishment that was being formed. My association with them would have made them appear less reliable for the roles they were aiming for — from the lowest to the highest — so I was a problem for their careers. (There are also those who, despite the positions they received, behaved with integrity and showed political and democratic maturity.)

But your question was about those who disappointed me. Some distanced themselves out of understandable fear — to avoid putting themselves and their families at risk. Naturally, I'm not referring to the many friends and colleagues, both from work and outside it, who didn't care about this "storm" I was going through — or that my family was going through. On the contrary, we came to know many new friends and supporters who stood by us during these difficult moments. We will never forget their help and solidarity.

**Question:** It's a fact that Enver Hoxha still has admirers. What was different about this year's anniversary of his death compared to the previous four April 11ths?

**Answer:** It's absurd to think that anything has changed for Enver Hoxha's admirers. The difference this year from previous years was that many people came to our home from other districts — from places like Mirdita, Vlora, Tepelena, Tropoja, Korça, Fier, Kavaja, Kruja, Peqin, and of course Tirana — to honour his memory. After visiting his grave and laying bouquets of flowers, they returned to our home to express their respect for him — on behalf of themselves and many others who, due to the very harsh economic conditions, couldn't make the trip but had asked that their messages of support and encouragement be passed on to us.

As for me, I didn't have the chance to go to my father's grave that day because people were visiting our home all day long. Later, I was arrested, so the very first thing I will do when I'm free is to visit the grave of my beloved father — and then go see my mother in prison.

**Question:** A while ago, the association of "Volunteers of Enver" was established. What is your opinion on this association?

**Answer:** In general, associations or foundations have a status and a program. I'm not a member of any association or political party, and specifically, I don't know the status or program of this association because I haven't seen it. But logically, foundations and associations — whether it's that of Enver Hoxha, Fan Noli, Faik Konica, Emin Duraku, Gjergj Fishta or others — exist to promote the work of the person to whom they're dedicated, and to commemorate events related to their life and contributions to their country. That's how I see it.

The number of members that make up an association depends on the personality it represents. From the footage and reports shown by the "non-partisan" television, it seemed to me that there were quite a lot of members — compared to other associations. They say there were nearly one mil-

lion members. For now, Enver Hoxha is outside the law. But whether politicians like it or not, a day will come when he will be reinstated within the law, once a new constitution is approved.

**Question:** In public opinion — especially official circles — every supporter of Enver is labelled as nostalgic for dictatorship. How fair is that perception?

**Answer:** Those who support Enver aren't concerned with how others label them.

**Question:** The Socialist Party is constantly under pressure from this same accusation, while the party itself declares it has reformed and has no ties with the political past of the Party of Labour. How do you assess that?

**Answer:** Naturally, the Socialist Party is not the Party of Labour — everyone knows that. Most former Party of Labour members joined the Socialist Party, along with many young people who are now becoming members. They do this because the Socialist Party is a left-wing party. The Socialist Party should not suffer from complexes or labels — that's just politics. They should focus on what's best for the people and for Albania, and by doing so, justify the electorate they have.

**Question:** Certain political forces label Enver Hoxha not only as a dictator but as a criminal, citing as evidence the persecution of the intelligentsia, the imprisonment and internment of political opponents, and even of ordinary people. How valid is this accusation in your opinion?

**Answer:** This accusation doesn't hold. Tell me — what hasn't Enver Hoxha been accused of in the last four or five years? But let me ask you a question: who would you call a criminal — someone who defends the constitution and the laws of the state, or those who tried to overthrow the government by force and sabotage Albania's progress?

**Question:** Enver is also accused of eliminating his closest

collaborators in order to maintain absolute power — from Qemal Stafa during the war, to Mehmet Shehu and his group. How true is that?

**Answer:** I already explained earlier, in the first part of this interview, that such questions are hardly worth answering. Nevertheless, since you mentioned the name of the Hero of the People Qemal Stafa, I'll respond using logic — because at that time I wasn't born.

During the National Liberation Anti-Fascist War, Enver Hoxha held many talks with members of the Balli Kombëtar and other figures who had previously aligned with the occupiers in the hopes that they would change course and join the people in the just fight against fascism and nazism. Their fate is known.

So the question arises: how could this man — Enver Hoxha — who called on Balli Kombëtar, whose program was entirely opposed to his, to join the national cause, turn around and “eliminate” a young man like Qemal Stafa, who was a key organizer of the anti-fascist movement? Judge for yourself.

**Question:** What would you identify as Enver Hoxha's most outstanding leadership quality?

**Answer:** He was extremely determined when it came to making decisive decisions, especially concerning the defence of independence and the strengthening of Albania.

**Question:** And any particular obsession or tendency?

**Answer:** He was very passionate about reading. He had a vast number of books in the home libraries and knew exactly where each one was — which library or shelf — among nearly 25,000 titles. When we asked for a book, he would say: “Go take it from this or that place.” And he always wanted it returned to its proper spot. If that can be called an “obsession,” then that would be it.

**Question:** A somewhat dismissive, though more moderate, stance toward the accusations against Enver Hoxha has also been taken by former president Alia. How would you assess that?

**Answer:** It's not my place to make that assessment. Ramiz Alia is a complex political figure, having served as president in two systems: socialist and capitalist. I think that, over time, history and the people will judge him and determine the place he deserves. He has one major advantage: being alive, he can answer the very question you are asking me. He even wrote the book *Our Enver*. And even though he is no longer in power, he can still write about what the people should do in these times, what future awaits us, how we can overcome division, and how to achieve spiritual and national unity — and the people will be the judge. Accusations have been made against him; he doesn't need a defence lawyer, because he knows the truth better than anyone else. This time, the judge is the people.

**Question:** The opposition has accused the current right-wing government of using leadership methods similar to the previous one-party system. Do you observe any similarities?

**Answer:** The opposition would know better, since they are closer to power. I can't say anything on this, as I don't have concrete facts.

**Question:** Even President Berisha is accused by various political forces of having strong totalitarian tendencies. What is your opinion?

**Answer:** My view is that he exercises the powers given to him by parliament under the constitutional provisions as President of the Republic. To formalize these powers in the constitution, the President called for a referendum — and the people responded with a “no” through their vote.

**Question:** Do you generally pay attention to politics?

**Answer:** Being the son of a man who spent 50 years in politics, I've followed political developments closely, through a political lens, even though I've never engaged in politics or party activity myself.

Nowadays, though, it feels pointless to pay special attention to politics, because the political direction of our country lacks structure, and it's hard to follow. With all the visits from heads of state, parliament leaders, prime ministers, MPs, politicians, ministers, advisers and numerous military delegations that have come to Albania — plus all the trips our own officials have made abroad, starting with the president — you'd think Albania would have seen at least a glimmer of light after the long dark night we've been through.

**Question:** Does the current political struggle in Albania seem fair to you?

**Answer:** More or less, yes. The Democratic Party, which is currently in power, should allow more space for the opposition — for example, in television — which in fact should belong to everyone.

**Question:** What about the internal practices parties use toward different individuals or factions within them?

**Answer:** I'm not interested and I don't follow what parties do internally. Each party has its own practices.

**Question:** In your opinion, has parliament justified the trust placed in it by voters?

**Answer:** The work of parliament shouldn't be dismissed. But MPs need to understand each other better, because behind them stands the people who gave them their vote. As a personal conclusion, since you insist, I'd say that, given parliament has failed to draft the country's fundamental law — the constitution — after more than three years, I would say it hasn't justified the trust the people placed in it.

**Question:** What do you think Albania needs today — a

strong hand or a credible alternative?

**Answer:** In my view, Albania needs a clear-headed mind.

**Question:** What, in your opinion, would be the most suitable alternative at this moment?

**Answer:** To be honest, I support a presidential republic. It's very difficult to govern our country under the framework of a parliamentary republic, given the political and economic conditions and the mentality of the people.

**Question:** And who would be the right person to lead the state?

**Answer:** In the context of the answer I just gave, based on the idea of a presidential republic, it follows that the people — through their vote — would directly choose the person they want to lead them, and in turn, that person would bear personal moral responsibility to them. It's a very difficult duty.

**Question:** How do you foresee the upcoming elections?

**Answer:** I'm not a fortune teller, but I know the people will vote with much more care. The time of "let's just give it a try" is over — every experiment comes at their expense. I know exactly who I'll give my vote to.

**Question:** Does this conclusion stem from the result of the referendum?

**Answer:** The referendum results regarding the constitution were a consequence of the people's growing political maturity.

**Question:** Was the referendum loss a rejection of the constitution or a response to the government's policy?

**Answer:** I believe the more important issue was the non-approval of the constitution. I didn't understand how a people could vote for a constitution without having read it — to vote blindly. It was and still is both lawful and necessary for the constitution to be approved by parliament first, and then followed by a popular referendum. That's not to say there

isn't dissatisfaction with the current policies too. Personally, I voted "no" simply because of the constitution, while for the government's policies I'll have my say during the next elections.

I did not appreciate the appearance of certain public figures from Kosova on the podium in support of the constitution, because approving it in that form was an unlawful act. It would be better if they focussed first on the issues in Kosova, which are not going well, and refrain from advising the Albanian people. As they saw for themselves, they left embarrassed, carrying defeat on their backs.

**Question:** Do you believe the current difficulties in the country are due to the inherited economic backwardness?

**Answer:** Under the previous system, our country achieved several positive results. From a very backward country, completely devastated by the Second World War, it underwent massive transformations that don't need repeating here. Enver Hoxha did all that was within his capacity.

That's why I say today's difficulties are not due to inherited backwardness but are tied to the transitional period — the shutdown of industry, widespread destruction, unemployment, high prices, lack of foreign investment, and the government's inability to lead democratic processes and resolve them. These are the true causes of the difficulties Albania is facing today.

**Question:** What would you single out as the greatest achievement during Enver Hoxha's leadership in the economic field?

**Answer:** The construction of a strong energy network, with hydro-electric power plants that are still operating at full capacity today, as well as the development of agriculture on a scientific basis — which has since been completely destroyed.

**Question:** And in the social field?

**Answer:** The establishment of the educational system — from the eradication of illiteracy to the creation of academies — the emancipation of women, the expansion of the health care system to every corner of the country, and all of it free of charge.

**Question:** The current economic reforms being undertaken — how much guarantee do they offer for Albania's rapid development?

**Answer:** I can't say. Those who have designed these reforms presumably know the expected results. However, unless the much-talked-about investments come in, unless industry starts functioning again and people are employed, there can be no real development in Albania.

**Question:** State institutions and democratic processes — how do they relate to one another?

**Answer:** State institutions should support democratic processes based on the fundamental law — the constitution. Since we're without a constitution, my answer can only be general and imprecise. In these democratic processes, institutions must do more to ease the burdens of the people.

**Question:** What do you think is the reason for the obstacles Albania is facing in integrating into Europe?

**Answer:** The supposed obstacles — the "new code," "approval of the constitution," the "Nano case," etc. — may exist, but they're not the main issue. In my opinion, Albania will be accepted into Europe when it serves the interests of the European metropolises. Still, we are geographically in Europe — membership is merely a formal act, which won't change anything unless we ourselves get to work on building a new society. Otherwise, accepted or not into Europe, we will remain far behind.

**Question:** How independent do you believe today's Albanian judiciary truly is?

**Answer:** The Albanian judiciary will move toward independence, and the sooner it breaks free from political dictate, the more it will strengthen its reputation — both in the trust it builds among the people and in the respect it gains in the eyes of the world, thereby honouring Albania. We should not generalize, because many civil and criminal cases have been handled fairly. However, in politically charged cases, the Albanian justice system has left much to be desired.

**Question:** How do you explain that many politicians have been accused of corruption and various financial scandals, yet the judiciary has generally failed to reach a verdict?

**Answer:** It's hard to explain — unless the judiciary lacks the evidence. The truth may be delayed, but it always comes out.

**Question:** Do you think the judiciary is a victim of politics, and does political power encourage corruption?

**Answer:** Everyone should be committed to ensuring that this does not happen.

**Question:** How do you foresee Albania's near and distant future?

**Answer:** If we continue down the path of revenge against each other, as we have begun, Albania's future will be bleak. If we set that aside, show tolerance, seek understanding, help one another and achieve national reconciliation, then Albania's distant future will be one of hope. That was the very purpose of my call for tolerance in the interview you published. The charge brought against me by the Deputy Prosecutor of Tirana, Mr. Genc Gjokutaj — that I committed the crime of “inciting discord and hatred among nationalities and races” — is absurd. To this day, I still don't understand which races and nationalities are being referred to. That's why I ask the Deputy Prosecutor to fully understand this call for tolerance, which I have addressed to all people — those with leftist be-

liefs as well as ordinary and honourable people who may belong to the Democratic Party or any other party. I respect them all, regardless of their differing views. This call must not be misinterpreted as “inciting discord and hatred among nationalities and races.”

We must all commit to building up Albania, not destroying it. Europe, of which we are a part, is not here to carry all our burdens. It offers advice — and how we interpret and apply the “wisdom of the elders” is up to us and for our own good.

Finally, I want to thank and greet all Albanians, both within the country and abroad, who have sent letters and messages expressing their support for me and their outrage at the political acts of revenge carried out by the current so-called democratic state — which loudly claims to protect individual rights and freedoms, yet imprisons people. As someone who is currently under arrest, I extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to them through this interview.

## LETTER TO FRIENDS OUTSIDE THE HOMELAND

*Addressed to all Albanians outside the territory of the Republic of Albania, living in their native lands or who have emigrated around the world, supporters of Enver Hoxha.*

Dear brothers,

I address you as “brothers” because, regardless of the fact that you considered Enver Hoxha your spiritual leader, you also called him “Uncle Enver.”

I am deeply grateful to you, for from the very first days of our family’s persecution, you stood by us — whether through messages or in person. You were there when our mother was arrested, and likewise when our father was exhumed in a horrific and degrading manner. You came because you felt that along with him, a part of you was being exhumed — your “Uncle,” as you used to call him.

Most recently, just a few days ago, I was arrested on absurd charges — in essence, for defending my father — and once again, you are by my side, giving me strength. I have received many messages, from you and also from your fellow Albanians in the homeland, since under arrest conditions, visits are not permitted.

But a day of freedom will come, and we will see one another again to talk.

I am writing you this letter to thank you and to tell you how deeply moved I am by the support that means so much to me. I promise you that I will always defend my father, just as you have defended him — and his just cause — wherever you may be. You, who have endured prisons, who have been persecuted, even killed, who left behind your families and are now scattered around the world, along with your burdens —

burdens that were also Enver Hoxha’s.

He loved you deeply. Didn’t you see on television, on May Day, the joy in his spirit when he waved with that bouquet of red carnations gifted by young men from Kosova — and how he would then toss the flowers into the crowd, to the children, to the youth, to the people, with the message: “Take them — these are carnations from your brothers beyond the border.”

Now in Albania, Enver Hoxha is legally banned, and Albanian citizens are prevented from seeing such images on television — but you still can, because you have recorded them on videotapes.

Today’s government is faced with a question: “Fine, we’ve banned Enver Hoxha for Albanians here — but what about the Albanians who live outside our borders, where our laws have no effect? What can we do to erase him from their hearts?”

And so the machinery of forgery is set in motion — manufacturing false documents to claim that Enver Hoxha betrayed or sold out Kosova or who knows what else — just to sever your connection to him.

Do not believe it. Dismiss that burden (if anyone has it) that they’re trying to plant in your hearts. You already carry enough hardships. There is no document that proves such slanders. Take it from me — his son — who has personally heard his concerns and the deep regard he had for Albanians living in Kosova, in their native lands in the former Yugoslavia, and anywhere else they may be.

He was the one who took major steps forward in the spiritual unification of the Albanian nation — by forcing Belgrade to recognize the autonomy of Kosova, by standardizing the language, by sending there folk song and dance ensembles, university professors and more, while at the same time, the Albanian state was strengthening and served as strong sup-

port for Albanians living outside its borders.

When he died, my mother placed on his chest the badge with the Albanian flag that you had given him.

When they exhumed him and handed me the coffin, I opened it to make sure it was him inside. I saw that, alongside the medal of the party he founded and led, on his chest still lay that same badge. And I left it there.

It is impossible for a man like him to “sell” half of his heart — because he held you in his heart. So, do not listen to pseudo-politicians, but listen only to your heart — because it will never deceive you!

With love and greetings, from the state of arrest,

*Ilir Hoxha*

Tirana, April 24, 1995

## DEFENCE STATEMENT IN COURT

(June 3, 1995)

Honourable Court,

I listened carefully to the indictment presented by the Deputy Prosecutor of Tirana, Mr. Gjokutaj, through which I stand accused of the criminal offence of “inciting strife and hatred between nationalities and races,” as provided in Article 7 of the Penal Code, paragraph two of this article, added under Law No. 7769, dated November 16, 1993.

I am accused of having made “calls aimed at disturbing public peace and inciting hatred against parts of the population by insulting and slandering them,” through expressions such as “the defeated” and “vandal gangs.” I am accused of “offending certain social or state groups” through terms like “blind tools,” etc., and even of openly threatening that “a day of reckoning will come, and we will demand it.”

I categorically reject these accusations. I not only deny them but will refute them as unfounded and fabricated, by presenting before this honourable court my arguments and thoughts, which demonstrate the falsity of the charges, all while maintaining trust in the independence of the Albanian judiciary from the interests of the political forces currently governing the country.

I gave an interview simply as a free citizen of this country, within the norms of contemporary civic life, without any political intent. I want to make it clear from the outset that I do not engage in party or political activity and am not a member of any political or social organization — and it is not my fault if politics chooses to concern itself with me.

In this specific case, I exercised my right to defend the name and dignity of my father, and no one has the legal right

to prevent me from doing so, let alone prosecute me for it.

I will now address in more detail each part of the indictment.

— I am accused of having made “calls aimed at disturbing public peace.”

Allow me to pose the question: Who, in fact, disturbed public peace? I gave a modest interview to the magazine *Modeste* and simply answered the questions asked by the journalist. That should have been the end of it. What actually disturbed the “public peace” was precisely my arrest — completely unexpected, unjustified and unlawful — which caused an uproar and outraged that portion of public opinion that still has hope and faith in the democracy of a state governed by the rule of law. My arrest has been called absurd and an attack on freedom of thought. Why did I have to be arrested — especially at night? Why was I taken in directly as a defendant, as if I had committed some serious crime?

What did I say that was any more controversial than what is said and written in today’s free and pluralistic press? Can you imagine what would happen if every person who used offensive, harsh or even destabilizing language in interviews were arrested? The prosecutor’s office would do well to truly pay attention to those kinds of cases while they’re still in their early stages — to avoid more serious consequences down the line. And what about journalists, who are responsible for transmitting individuals’ words to the public? What reality would they face? Would it be something like: “Everyone in jail, better off without newspapers or media?”

My arrest appears to have been politically motivated, timed just ahead of the start of the electoral campaign, with the aim of silencing the name of Enver Hoxha. Others are not obliged to mention him, but I am his son, and I don’t care whether the electoral campaign is beginning or not. It is

my duty to defend my father at all times. You, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor — or whoever else it may be — don’t think for a moment that you will stop me from speaking about my father. Or perhaps, indirectly, you want to suggest that anyone who speaks about Enver Hoxha will suffer the consequences — just as his own son is now suffering?

I want to point out that many Albanians who live in their native lands outside the mother state have been imprisoned, tortured, persecuted — forced to flee across the world by enemies of Albania — solely because they defended the figure of Enver Hoxha. I mention this because, paradoxically, today in Albania, the son of Enver Hoxha is being arrested and put on trial, with the same accusation, right in the middle of Tirana. This is unbelievable, shameful and — unfortunately — true.

As many respected jurists in the history of global justice have expressed, in the judicial practices of many countries — whether democratic, fascist, communist, monarchist, etc. — it has never happened that defending your own father, his views or his work (even though in my interview I did not actually delve into his views or work), would be considered “incitement of hatred and conflict between ethnicities, races and religions,” as claimed under the articles cited in the indictment by Deputy Prosecutor Mr. Gjokutaj.

But things like this seem to happen only in Albania.

— I am accused of “inciting hatred against parts of the population.”

This accusation is the complete opposite of the appeal I made in the interview — a call for tolerance and blood feuds to be forgiven.

For me, as for every honest Albanian, national unity is the key to the country’s development. That is why, as a citizen — and especially as an intellectual — I made, and will continue to make, calls for tolerance, understanding and rec-

conciliation, to end blood feuds and abandon revenge, which exhausts the people and creates insecurity in both daily life and the future of our youth.

Your Honour, allow me to address Deputy Prosecutor Mr. Gjokutaj. In the newspaper *Koha Jonë*, dated April 22, 1995 (five days after my arrest), on the occasion of the three-year anniversary of the Meksi government, a journalist writes, among other things: “We forgot that under this government, once again Albanians have returned to the medieval practice of self-judgement,” and the article continues, listing other negative phenomena evident today under the Meksi administration.

I would call that article of his a piece of opposition criticism against the government — if not an actual accusation. But what did I say about the issue of blood feuds that the journalist referred to, while responding to one of the interviewer’s questions? Here is my statement:

“Question: What do you consider the most fatal mistake of these past three years under the new system?”

“Answer: The phenomenon of blood feuds was allowed to re-emerge — something the Party of Labour had once eliminated through reconciliation of all blood feuds.”

Is that not true? I then continued:

“I call on everyone involved in blood feuds to be tolerant and reconcile.”

So, I did not call for inciting hatred toward the population, as Mr. Gjokutaj accuses me of.

I continued in my response:

“...it’s in their and their children’s best interest. It’s not shameful to forgive blood. I call on you to reconcile with each other directly and not wait for mediation, because there is no more people’s state power or Enver Hoxha to help you. Do it, at least, in honour of the man who wanted you to be united

and at peace with one another — and you’ll see that only good things will come of it.”

That was my entire appeal in this interview!

Just like the *Koha Jonë* journalist who criticized the government for failing to take measures against revenge culture, I too made a direct appeal to the victims of this medieval phenomenon — a real tragedy for our people. The aim of both appeals, regardless of our audience — his being the government and mine being the affected individuals — was to bring an end to the phenomenon of blood feuds.

But since this call for tolerance came from Ilir Hoxha, son of Enver Hoxha, then let’s silence him — by accusing and arresting him for the very opposite of tolerance. It seems this state does not favour tolerance or reconciliation!

Judge for yourselves just how far my call for tolerance stands from your decision to indict me, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor.

— I am accused of defamation, through the use of the word “the defeated.”

I am accused of having insulted a segment of the population by using the word “the defeated.” The world has just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the victory in the Second World War, which, in our country, was called the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War. That war, like any other, had its victors and its defeated. This is a reality known to all — it is neither an insult nor defamation. Yet, my arrest happened precisely on the eve of May 9 — Victory Day over nazi-fascism — with commemorative ceremonies held in London, Paris and Moscow, attended even by our president, alongside representatives of the very countries that had been on the losing side. If they considered it offensive to be reminded that their countries had been defeated 50 years ago, diplomacy would have given them every reason not to participate.

Even party leaders and members of parliament, such as Mr. Skënder Gjinushi, wrote in the *Koha Jonë* newspaper, April 27 (still after the date of my arrest): “It’s regrettable that Albanian politics is often dominated by two poles — the Ballists and the communists. I’ve said it before,” he continues, “that the defeated of 1944 and the defeated of 1990 have no future in Albania.” So, according to Mr. Gjokutaj’s logic, Mr. Skënder Gjinushi has also used the word “defeated” as an insult, just like I did — and he has offended not only the Ballists, but the communists too.

Similarly, in another newspaper on May 14, 1995, the writer Dritëro Agolli stated: “By ‘the defeated,’ I mean the Ballists and the fascists. They lost the armed struggle. And they will always remain defeated as long as they carry that inglorious name! Let them not now call themselves victors — after the fact! One must understand that in armed conflicts and revolutions, there are winners and losers,” he concluded.

So, by Mr. Gjokutaj’s reasoning, shouldn’t Mr. Gjinushi and the writer Dritëro Agolli — and anyone else who mentioned the defeat of the losing side — also be prosecuted? I would ask Mr. Deputy Prosecutor to provide a response.

You, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor, asked me during questioning: “Which political forces are you referring to in your interview?” Even though I had explicitly stated in the interview that I was referring to the defeated — the forces that had collaborated with the occupiers — you kept insisting. Following that, I was compelled to mention, among other things (since apparently it had not been noticed that there was a large banner on the facade of the Palace of Culture) the text of a poster that, as far as I recall, read in large letters: “The 9th (or 10th) Congress of the Balli Kombëtar.” Where exactly had the Ballists been holding all these congresses? The Party of Labour held its congresses in Albania. But where were they holding

theirs — outside the country? And for what purpose? Naturally, it was part of the outcome they achieved — displacing the students of December and the true democrats — trying to restart Albania’s timeline from November 29, 1944 (forgive me, from November 28, 1944, according to them).

So, Mr. Gjokutaj, why are you defending these so-called defeated when they themselves perhaps don’t find the term offensive, being today’s so-called victors — when there are even former ministers who go so far as to say, “I am proud to call myself a fascist”? I would not consider it an insult if someone were to call me “a permanent loser.” Let us leave that judgement to history — which always moves forward.

If the laws of democracy were respected, no one could stop me from speaking about the defeated and the victors. The Italians and Germans were defeated too — but no one could accuse me on that basis, because our parents didn’t fight them as a race or nationality, but solely as occupiers.

The “defeated” I’m referring to — those who fled 50 years ago along with the occupiers, or their descendants — are now persecuting our family, either openly or behind the scenes.

With imprisonments, with the exhumation of my father, as I’ve stated in my interview, with the revocation of decorations, and many other acts which have no other name but political revenge. After all this persecution inflicted on Enver Hoxha’s family, do I not have the right to express my dissatisfaction and hope that one day even our rights will no longer be violated — in a state that claims not to be a dictatorship, but a democracy, that claims to fight for justice and democracy for all, while distancing itself from primitive revenge? In conclusion, regarding these accusations, it would be excessive for me to go into a justification of the “guilt” I supposedly bear for having used that word.

— I am accused for using the phrase “vandal gangs.”

Albania had a constitution which guaranteed its protection — not its destruction. Anyone can read the old constitution and see for themselves whether it allowed Albania to be destroyed.

It is a fact that the systemic changes were accompanied by widespread destruction. Buildings were burned — schools, kindergartens, hospitals, warehouses, various socio-cultural facilities. In the countryside, the destruction was massive. Cultural and artistic monuments, protected by law, were torn down and looted. Are such acts not vandalism? And such actions could only be carried out by vandal gangs. Call them vandals or by another name — destroyers are always destroyers, and the law in every country punishes them.

In a more narrow and personal context, related to what I said in the interview, allow me to remind you that the monuments of Enver Hoxha were protected by law, and that all actions taken against them — just like with other cultural monuments or memorials to martyrs — were unlawful.

Those who break the law by destroying and burning — what else can they be called? I called them vandals, because that's what I believe they are, now and always.

— I am accused for using the phrase “blind tools.”

The State Control Office — a highly specialized institution — together with the Ministry of Finance, presented to Parliament, through the Minister Genc Ruli, a report on “the findings of the financial control of the reception leadership.” Based on this, a criminal report was filed with the general investigation office, which, on July 29, 1991, initiated a criminal case against my mother. This report, immediately after being read in Parliament, was published in the newspaper of the Democratic Party under the title “Criminal Abuses by Party of Labour Leaders at the Expense of the People and Albania.”

I will not act as a lawyer for the leadership of the Party

of Labour, but I will speak on behalf of my family, and specifically my mother, who was included in this accusation. On what grounds did Genc Ruli find the right to accuse us of “criminal misuse” without a court decision? Who gave him the authority to call my mother a “criminal” or a “thief”? That is a deeply offensive and serious accusation made by these gentlemen.

That report was full of absurdities and nonsense, but I won't dwell on it — this is neither the time nor place. Some may have forgotten it, but not our family, because it struck directly and harshly at our dignity, without a shred of accountability.

I'm glad to remind you that even the investigators themselves, after holding onto the invoices for more than a year and a half, reduced the alleged misuse amount by 80 per cent, down to 5,500 dollars. Why this reduction by the very control organs supposedly responsible? Was the speech in Parliament purely for defamatory propaganda? Even the Prosecutor Theodhori Mosko — who had previously sentenced those who tore down Stalin's statue in Shkodra, and who was assigned to lead the case against my mother to appear “trustworthy” to the new regime — couldn't carry the case through, despite how pompous his words were. In fact, when he gave his sentencing recommendation, he asked the court for 14 years — a harsher and more vindictive sentence than what the fascists had given my mother when they sentenced her to 13 years in prison during the National Liberation War.

The court later reduced the charge to 300 dollars — a “very criminal” misuse over five years — but of course, a figure had to be stated, and naturally, a nine-year prison sentence was imposed. That was a disgrace and a scandal.

Never has pomposity from high-ranking officials — who controlled everything — been so aggressively protected. And

after the Appeals Court ruling, Ms. Nikoleta Kita, I believe, may have had a conversation with her conscience and perhaps even asked God's forgiveness when she decided to raise the misuse figure back up to 5,500 dollars and, on top of that, increase our mother's prison sentence from nine to 11 years. Apparently, the sentence for a woman over seventy had to get as close as possible to the one she was given by the fascists when she was a partisan.

After all this, I can say without hesitation that the real goal was the discrediting of Enver Hoxha's image — something they will never succeed in doing. Nevertheless, Deputy Prosecutor Gjokutaj claims that I allegedly insulted people by using the figurative expression "blind tools." That was a figure of speech — the most suitable one I could find — and it applied not to them as individuals, but to their concrete actions, regardless of who was involved in this particular case.

If you, Mr. Gjokutaj, can come up with a better or gentler expression for their specific actions, please let me know — I'll use it next time.

— I am accused of insulting social groups or state officials.

If someone could be offended by terms like "the defeated," or "blind tools," and if a figurative expression is now considered an insult, then how should we respond to being called criminals — an accusation made publicly against us?

Enver Hoxha was who he was (it is my right to consider him the pride of the nation — no one can force me to think otherwise), but even if he were a criminal, such an accusation should never have been extended to our entire family. "There can be individual criminals, but not criminal families," stated Ms. Christine von Kohl — journalist and international human rights activist — when she became aware of the persecution against our family during her visit to Albania, where

she encountered these kinds of concepts. According to her, in a pluralist democracy, a family cannot suffer consequences because of the political actions of one of its members.

We live in a democracy — everyone must come to understand this.

Let even a single person in Albania come forward and claim that Ilir Hoxha personally committed an act that harmed them. You can be as sure as I am — such a case does not exist. On the contrary, I have always tried to do good for others. Being the son of Enver Hoxha, people often listened to what I had to say when they found it reasonable — because I never asked for anything for myself, but rather for people in need: for housing, employment, a study opportunity at a university, or for a health issue they might have had, or when they were facing an injustice. In all these cases, when brought to me — always within legal and social norms — I tried to help, naturally within the limits of my abilities. These are the "sins" I committed under the socialist system.

Some of these people had what was then called a "questionable biography," but they were simple people with real problems — many of whom still have not held any position or received any favours. Many of them, despite having had different views or opinions, came and met with me (I don't mean now, when I've been under arrest). They still respect me, even in my current difficult situation, and some have even offered their help. Who they are is known to them — there's no need for anyone else to know.

I will never allow anyone to insult my father or mother with offensive words because I am proud of them. I will not tolerate insults from anyone — whether they are high-ranking state or party officials, prominent writers or public or cultural figures.

I have no objection to the political policies Enver Hoxha

followed while he was the head of the Albanian state being subject to criticism — that is everyone's right. But what I am addressing here are the insults, slander and personal attacks made against him. We must understand that through violence and street-level abuse — such as the recent inhumane and disgraceful act of desecrating his grave — the legacy of Enver Hoxha cannot be buried, as his enemies and opponents claim, because that legacy is a living historical reality.

As a family, if we have remained silent until now, we have done so precisely out of respect for democratic culture and tolerance — ignoring, with indifference and contempt, all the insults and offences directed at us by various people, both in power and not. But when I defended my father through an interview, the current state authorities acted against me immediately, as if I had committed a crime, arresting me.

Regarding Enver Hoxha, I could have written and expressed my sympathy even as a citizen — as many people are doing today in the pluralist, free and independent press — because it is impossible to deny or erase from history the half-century role of the Party of Labour, of the socialist state, and of its main leader. This fifty-year history of the Albanian people cannot be rewritten, as some would like today, because history is history — it is made and experienced by the people, and it cannot be undone, as it has its own laws.

My defence of my father is, at the same time, a defence of the blood of the martyrs and partisans, of the toil and sweat of the people who fought to liberate and build our country.

I do not know of any law in the world that prohibits a son from defending his father when he is convinced that his father gave his life for the independence of his homeland, so that the people could enjoy a freedom earned with blood. Personally, I can withstand physical persecution. But I have never accepted — and will never accept — insults and offences that touch

the dignity of Enver Hoxha above all, and also of our family. Everyone should understand that even from the depths of prison, I will find the strength to defend my father — with my head held high.

— I am accused of having openly threatened that “a day will come when they will be held accountable, because we will demand it.”

Mr. Judge, this accusation also does not hold. The Deputy Prosecutor claims that he made this decision after studying my interview. It's strange how he studied that interview when, following the sentence for which I am accused of issuing an open threat — by saying “a day will come when they will be held accountable, because we will demand it” — the very next sentence reads: “This is not for revenge, but to establish justice.”

To turn to justice, according to the Deputy Prosecutor of Tirana, Genc Gjokutaj, means to issue open threats or to seek revenge.

I do not know what kind of legal defence Mr. Gjokutaj — as a jurist — could offer for this slanderous accusation he makes against me, interpreting my fragmented and partial thoughts to suit his own interests. In my opinion, appealing to justice does not at all equate to issuing open threats or seeking revenge. Does the Deputy Prosecutor perhaps believe he has the authority to deny me, as a citizen, the right to address judicial institutions? He should know that it is my right to report anyone — for insults, slander, or acts of violence committed against my father and my family, through vulgar language or unlawful actions.

I said “a day will come,” because up to now, there has been no justice for my family. Open the drawers, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor, and you will see that as early as December 1992, my complaint against Mr. Sali Kelmendi for abuse of office

has been sitting there — for forcibly evicting us from our home, in violation of the law and of a court ruling that had annulled his eviction order against my mother, myself and my sister. In short — against the Hoxha family. He evicted us illegally from apartments that had been allocated to us by the authorities themselves.

But a day will come when that complaint — filed two years ago and ignored ever since — will finally be addressed. Of course, I am not blaming you personally, Mr. Gjokutaj, but I do blame Mr. Sali Kelmendi. As the mayor of Tirana, he should uphold the law, not break it — especially considering that we are citizens of Tirana too.

I immediately turned to the prosecutor's office, following all proper legal procedures. Yet in retaliation for my lawful actions, the municipal council sent a written order to the local office, instructing them not to provide social assistance to me or my wife, even though we have children to feed. But I won't dwell further on the persecution and injustices I have suffered.

As a person who has been brought here to the accused's bench, I state categorically that I have broken no laws — neither in the past nor today.

In the past, I held no party or high state function. This was also my father's will. The highest position I ever held was as director of a scientific institute. And in these last four or five years of transition, no state or legal authority can claim any wrongdoing on my part. On the contrary, I am the one who has grounds to complain about the deeply vengeful persecution I have endured — as well as other members of our family, both young and old, which I won't repeat here.

I have always turned to the courts. I have appealed to the Constitutional Court over legal violations committed by the government in its treatment of our family.

Likewise, I have addressed international human rights organizations, embassies accredited in the Republic of Albania and the European Community — including Mrs. Lalumière, who has sent us a very positive and hopeful response.

Upon my arrest, I once again turned to the Albanian Helsinki Committee and to all international organizations involved in human rights. This time, I have also reached out to Amnesty International, which focusses on political prisoners. I will be addressing all embassies to inform their governments about the ongoing political retaliation being carried out against members of Enver Hoxha's family in this so-called democratic state. I will also bring the same concerns to the attention of the European Committee, highlighting that in Albania, human rights are not being respected — they are trampled, and even imprisonment can follow simply for expressing a free opinion, contrary to the reassuring response from Mrs. Lalumière, who had stated that the democratic state would respect human rights for everyone, regardless of who they are.

It saddens me that my complaint will reach the international community just as Albania seeks membership in the Council of Europe. Still, inside the country, I will continue to denounce the injustices committed against me and my family, and I will continue to defend the honour and dignity of Enver Hoxha — my father.

Despite everything I have emphasized here, I want to make it clear that I do not threaten anyone with revenge, as Mr. Gjokutaj accuses me of doing. Rather, I am simply pursuing all legal avenues granted to me by this democratic state, just as they are available to all other citizens.

In conclusion,

I consider my arrest to be an act of political retaliation against me, as the son of Enver Hoxha, by the descendants of

those who once collaborated with the nazi-fascists — whose fathers, as I said in the interview, fled the country 50 years ago alongside the defeated occupiers. This is an unprincipled and unequal battle. I have only my free speech, while they have the power — the prosecutor's office, the police, the military, diplomacy, television, threats, prisons and more. Still, they cannot intimidate me, because in defending my father, I am fulfilling a duty that belongs first and foremost to a son. And I am convinced that even my father, though deceased, will protect me where he now rests — because I have not brought him shame.

I call upon the Deputy Prosecutor of Tirana, Mr. Gjokutaj, to withdraw this accusation, as it would be an honourable act — for both himself and for the integrity of Albanian justice.

On the other hand, I trust that the Albanian judiciary will move towards independence from political influence. The sooner this happens, the better it will be for the credibility of the Albanian state in the world. This is what I hope for — and what I hope to see reflected in your decision, Honourable Court, regarding my innocence.

Thank you.

Tirana, June 3, 1995.

## STATEMENT FOLLOWING THE SENTENCING RECOMMENDATION

(In which the Deputy Prosecutor requested  
three years in prison)

Those present at my trial on June 3 were surprised by the prosecutor's request to postpone the proceedings and to deliver his sentencing recommendation on June 5. They were even more surprised by the content of his closing statement, especially by his request to the court to sentence me to three years of imprisonment. This request surprised them because they had followed the trial proceedings and had become convinced of the baselessness of the accusation and the complete lack of elements necessary to constitute a criminal offence. There was no objective component, no subjective intent, no cause and no consequence to support the classification of a crime.

As for me, the prosecutor Mr. Gjokutaj's request to delay the hearing did not surprise me at all. On the contrary, it further confirmed my belief — the one I tried to express during my defence — that this charge, from beginning to end, was fabricated, and that the prosecution is conducting a political trial against me, driven by weak motives of revenge and retaliation by those who were defeated in the past.

The Deputy Prosecutor's closing statement was clearly political — just like the one presented in my mother's trial by Prosecutor Theodhori Mosko, with the only difference being that in her case, the political nature of the trial was masked under the accusation of "coffee misuse," whereas in my case, in Mr. Gjokutaj's hands, there was no coffee aroma — only the unmistakable taste of a political trial. It couldn't have been otherwise.

Reading with extraordinary haste — seemingly out of embarrassment for what he was saying — he not only glossed over the accusations, but deliberately gave them a political colouring, culminating in the call for a three-year prison sentence. He seemed relieved to finally pronounce what had to be said: the punishment.

What he fails to understand is that what matters most is not the length of the sentence, but the strength of the argument supporting the charge. A weak argument diminishes his own credibility, while a harsh sentence only raises mine.

As you may have noticed — both from reading the interview and from my explanations as well as those of the witnesses — the following points are clear:

— I was not the one who sought to give an interview — it was requested by the journalist. Therefore, your claim, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor, that I deliberately chose April 11, a commemorative date, to give the interview, does not hold. The interview was not politically motivated. I simply answered the journalist's questions, and I believe it is not a criminal offence for a son to defend his deceased father against insulting and degrading accusations.

— No, Mr. Presiding Judge, I did not in any way incite the disturbance of public peace. One does not incite unrest by responding to two or three questions from a journalist — which was exactly the nature of my interview with the newspaper *Modeste*. Peace is disturbed only by acts of violence, by unlawful actions that infringe on human rights and freedoms. Peace is broken by the looting of public property, by mass unemployment, by the lack of perspective and progress.

— I explained in my defence statement that, in the interview, I made a call for tolerance, reconciliation over blood feuds and an end to mutual revenge — not the opposite, not for inciting hatred or conflict between parts of the popula-

tion.

The prosecutor accused me of offending a segment of the people who are “making the new history.” I feel sorry for the difficult position Mr. Gjokutaj has put himself in. I have never divided the people into segments. I know only one people — the Albanian people — united and indivisible. To me, the people are those who fought the heroic Anti-Fascist National Liberation War, those who built the factories, the power plants, the hydro-electric stations, those who drained the swamps, developed agriculture, established academies and universities, those who voted for democratic processes, those who build — not those who destroy. It was this people to whom I made an appeal for unity and reconciliation.

— I am accused of insult for using the word “the defeated,” even though it is well known that the Second World War had both victors and defeated — just as the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War did.

I also brought two specific examples of the use of the term “the defeated” by two respected members of parliament. I did this to show that this word has taken on a neutral value, as a result of a historical reality. Therefore, on my part, there was no intent whatsoever to offend anyone.

In my defence speech, I asked the Deputy Prosecutor how he would interpret the use of this word by those two gentlemen. There was no comment from Mr. Gjokutaj. Or perhaps he chooses to carefully study — as he himself claims in the indictment — only the interview of Enver Hoxha's son, while turning a blind eye to others who are trying to seize power by any means, even by force?

— Regarding the accusation involving the phrase “vandal gangs”: I meant nothing more than what I am about to reaffirm here — anyone who breaks the law by destroying and burning things, I have called vandals, because that is what I

believe they are, at any time and regardless of who they are.

Mr. Gjokutaj, how would you feel — not as a state official, but as an ordinary person — if someone destroyed your father's grave, as they recently did to my father's, in that place meant for eternal peace? Would you call them doves of peace? He may call them that if he wishes, but I say they are vandals. Destroyers remain destroyers, and the law punishes them in every country in the world.

In your closing statement, you maliciously conflate the people's enthusiasm for democracy with those who committed unlawful acts by destroying monuments, who tore down memorial plaques for fallen fighters, who removed and damaged statues of heroes. It is those individuals I called vandal gangs — not the people. I have never, anywhere or at any time, accused the people who welcomed democracy. In fact, I haven't even accused these vandal gangs directly — I have condemned their unlawful acts.

This, Mr. Judge, is clearly evidenced in the case file, which disproves this part of the prosecution's claim. Therefore, I address Mr. Deputy Prosecutor by saying: do not abuse your office by slandering me — I will not allow it.

As I have expressed before — and I confirm once again — I have respected and will continue to respect the will of the people as expressed through their free vote, and I sincerely wish them happiness, joy and social well-being under this system.

— The accusation related to the expression “blind tools” was conveniently bypassed by the Deputy Prosecutor, because compared to the accusations made against my mother and our family by the gentlemen I mentioned in the interview — who called us criminals and thieves — my figurative expression “blind tools” was as soft as striking with cotton. Even Mr. Gjokutaj himself, in an interview given to the newspaper

*Koha Jonë* on May 26, 1995, stated the following about a different issue:

“I would publicly denounce and call it immoral — let alone illegal — the fact that people speak with supposed legal authority about a matter where none of them have read even a single page of the case file... Various individuals speak at a time when the case is still under investigation, and no one except the court has the right to declare innocence or guilt,” he concluded.

He is absolutely right. Does Mr. Gjokutaj's statement apply to the individuals I referenced in the interview? I believe it does. Those I labelled as “blind tools” — when they reported to Parliament about the “criminal abuses by the leaders of the Party of Labour at the expense of the people and of Albania” — accused our mother of being a criminal, a thief and so on, not only before any trial had taken place, but even before the investigation had begun. So, Mr. Gjokutaj appears to agree with me — that no one has the right to accuse us without a court ruling (as he himself has stated). Then why are you accusing me, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor, when we both agree on this issue? I do not understand you!

– I was accused of having allegedly threatened by saying “the day will come when they will be held accountable, because we will demand it.”

I would like to clarify something regarding the way this statement was reported on television. In the interview, it referred specifically to two individuals who would have to answer for the extremely serious accusation they made against our family, and not — as the Albanian television claimed in every news broadcast — “those who tore down Enver's statues.” Even in the interview, I clearly stated that the monuments belonged to the people and not to our family, so personally it did not constitute a problem. Let us hope that the

way the news was reported was not intentional, but merely the result of the television arriving late.

But let us return to the accusation. After the sentence I quoted — the one for which I was accused — came the sentence: “This is not for revenge, but to establish justice.” That speaks for itself. Therefore, I am surprised how Mr. Gjokutaj, as a jurist, would interpret this fact — especially since he claimed to have carefully studied the interview, whereas in fact, he extracted my ideas selectively, to serve his own interests. Otherwise, he must admit one of two things: either that appealing to justice is considered an open threat or an act of revenge — or, the only option left, that he grants himself the right to strip me of my legal right to seek justice. Let him choose which of the two he prefers.

I explained before you that I have always respected the law and never broken it, so I see no need for Mr. Gjokutaj to remind me in his closing argument that “my time has passed” — as if I were dividing eras into mine and his (as he might have in mind). I have followed the law equally under both systems. As I have stated, no state or legal body has any grounds to complain about my conduct, which has always been highly correct. Yet today, I am arrested by the prosecution for defending my father, based on charges that do not hold up.

I want to emphasize once again: I have not threatened anyone with revenge, as the Deputy Prosecutor accuses me of doing. I have only followed all the legal paths that a democratic state grants me — rights shared with all other citizens. Nevertheless, the prosecutor of the case remains silent and offers no explanation for this, despite accusing me of issuing open threats and planning revenge.

The sentence requested by the Deputy Prosecutor strikes me as unjustified and vengeful — not grounded in law and driven by political motives. Therefore, I request full acquittal,

because the arguments I have presented clearly prove that I have committed no crime.

You should know that the rapporteurs of the Council of Europe have made it a condition for Albania to change the role of the prosecution service by transforming this institution into a body aligned with the laws, rules and standards of that organization — distancing it from acting as a “political guardian” against so-called “opponents of the ruling caste.” Will the prosecution be able to separate itself from political dictates in order to meet the requirements of the European community? In my opinion, with prosecutors like Gjokutaj, that will not be possible.

The prosecution’s call for my political conviction — just like its request for the dismissal of two cassation judges — I see as harmful actions intended to prevent Albania’s admission into the Council of Europe at the upcoming meeting on the 29th of this month.

You, Mr. Gjokutaj, rejected the claim that this is a political trial by saying in your closing that if it were, it would have taken place a long time ago.

You are gravely mistaken. At that time, convicting my mother was enough — because it wouldn’t have looked democratic in the eyes of the people or the world if the entire family had been sentenced. But now, when the figure of Enver Hoxha is being reassessed and is reclaiming the place he deserves far more quickly than you expected, this no longer suits you — and thus, one member of the Hoxha family must be sacrificed to silence the rest. But I’m not naive. It is absurd to claim this isn’t a political moment, and to deny that my sentence is politically motivated.

In his closing, Mr. Gjokutaj called me guilty for saying “we have no dignity in the eyes of the world.” But I’m not the one damaging the dignity of the state — it is you, with your

official position, who undermine that dignity by fabricating false accusations for political purposes.

In the *Drita* newspaper dated June 4, 1995, in the brief interview you gave, Mr. Deputy Prosecutor, following the conclusion of the first hearing of my trial, you were asked by the journalist:

“Don’t you think that by prosecuting Ilir Hoxha, you’re ‘heroizing’ such a person?”

You responded: “To declare someone guilty based on a provision of the penal code is, for me, not heroism, not a positive quality, but a violation of the law — and someone whom public opinion despises.”

I fully agree with you, because I also despise those who break the law. But I’d like to remind you that this very same public opinion you refer to also despises all those who let their conscience be troubled as “blind tools” of the state — just as I do.

My arrest marks the beginning of the end of your career. The prosecution is seeking my conviction not because I’ve committed any criminal act, not because I’ve violated any provision of the penal code — but because I am Ilir Hoxha, the son of Enver, and because I dared to defend my father’s public image, calling him the pride of the nation.

It is the same figure — the “criminal” one — for which, until recently, hundreds of Kosovar brothers were sentenced by the enemies of Albania. Now, today, Albanians are being convicted in Tirana and in other cities across the country. And now, the punishment of Enver’s son is being demanded as well.

Mr. Deputy Prosecutor, you will gain nothing by imprisoning Ilir Hoxha, because Enver Hoxha did nothing more for his son than he did for his people. You cannot imprison all those who carry him in their hearts.

Mr. Gjokutaj, you and others must be clear about one

thing: even from inside my prison cell, I will find the strength to defend my father.

Honourable Court,

I feel I am innocent, and therefore I request full acquittal.

As one of the first courts to judge under the new penal code, I kindly ask that you judge me solely on the basis of that code — outside of political opinion and the extremely tense situation we are currently experiencing — so that your professional conscience may be at peace.

At the same time, since the new penal code has come into effect, you will be the first to offer true service to the independence of Albanian justice, freeing it from political dictate.

Believing in your independent decision, I hope you will grant me full acquittal.

Thank you.

## STATEMENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL HELSINKI FEDERATION

(Taken from the newspaper *Koha Jonë*, dated  
September 14, 1995)

As certain segments of the Albanian state are seeking the complete subjugation of the highest level of the judiciary in Albania, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, in a press release published yesterday in Vienna, called for the trial of Fatos Nano and Ilir Hoxha to take place while they remain at liberty.

A few days ago, Amnesty International recognized Fatos Nano and Ilir Hoxha as political prisoners. This view has for some time now been echoed not only by international human rights organizations, but also by foreign governments and international media, which continue to send protests to the Albanian president and his executive bodies on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, the independence of the judiciary is being called into question, putting at risk the fundamental pillars of democracy in Albania.

“We are deeply concerned,” begins the press statement from the International Helsinki Federation, “by the continued imprisonment of Fatos Nano and Ilir Hoxha, the son of the former communist dictator. Both appear to be imprisoned as a result of abuses and trials motivated by political interests.”

The International Helsinki Federation notes that the trial of Ilir Hoxha took place after the entry into force of the new Penal Code in Albania, which reflects an attempt to reform the laws of the previous regime. However, prosecutors succeeded in pressing their charges that he (Ilir Hoxha) allegedly attempted “to provoke political chaos.”

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The statement thus casts doubt on the independence of the judiciary and the overall state of human rights in Albania. “To uphold the principles of the rule of law, the court must act freely,” the Helsinki Federation continues. “On the other hand, both trials raise questions about the degree to which people in Albania are free to express their political opinions and, consequently, to what extent Albania adheres to international standards that protect freedom of expression.”

“We believe,” concludes the communiqué published at midday on September 12, 1995, in Vienna, “that both Fatos Nano and Ilir Hoxha should be released pending the final stage of their trials.”

This latest case suggests that the Federation seeks not only a fair trial for Nano and Hoxha, but also the independence of the Court of Cassation in both upcoming trials. Yet, despite the ongoing protests, the political authorities in Albania have still taken no action toward the release of the two defendants.

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# REPORT OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ALBANIA

(January 1995 — December 1995)

## Section 2

### Respect for Civil Liberties

#### A — Freedom of Speech and Press

The law on fundamental human rights and freedoms provides for freedom of speech and of the press. However, in practice, the government at times restricts freedom of expression. Laws against defamation, insults, incitement of ethnic hatred and dissemination of unconstitutional literature have been used to persecute individuals.

In an interview, Ilir Hoxha, the son of the former dictator, referred to those who took part in demonstrations that toppled his father's statue in Tirana as "an organized band of vandals." He went further, calling "thieves and cowards" those who opened his father's grave at the Cemetery of the Martyrs. He referred to those who prosecuted his mother, Enver Hoxha's wife, Nexhmije, including democratic leaders, as "blind tools." He added: "The day will come when they will be held accountable for their actions, because we are demanding it. This is not for revenge, but to restore justice."

For this statement, he was sentenced to one year in prison.

## IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

*(According to Friedrich Nietzsche)*

*I say this as well to those who topple and overthrow statues:*

*More foolish than those who throw salt into the sea are those who overthrow statues in hatred.*

*In the hatred of your contempt the statue lies fallen — but that is precisely its strength, that from contempt, a new life is born, a living beauty!*

*With divine features it shall be renewed, wounded yet compelling: indeed, it will thank you for toppling it, O over-throwers!*

Proof