

## Preface

*I belong to the generation of Albanians born and raised in Albania during the years of self-isolation and extreme centralized economy. Kosova has been always a very popular theme among us, not only because of what we heard in the media, in schools, or what we read in books of history and ideology, but it was highly attractive for the fact that it was the second country with the biggest number of Albanian habitants. Imagination was projecting: well, it could have been one country, and for us imprisoned in self-isolation, it meant that one could travel, visit and move there, if things were different. However, for some reasons, on both counts, fate decided it should end in two different states. Practically we could not exchange or travel among ourselves, even those that had families and relatives there. For us, the border in Kukës city, up in northeastern Albania, seemed to be the end of the world, part of the "iron curtain" and the Berlin wall.*

*By the early 90's Albania entered in a phase of transformation and freedom, but we still could not travel to Kosova. Often tensions were raising there, which also produced tension in Albania as well. Both countries were like twins that never met together, up to the spring of 1999 when NATO troops intervened to stop another escalating bloody war for the Balkans. I still remember NATO airplanes flying over above the capital, Tirana, and heading towards Kosova. Soon we faced waves of 1 million war refugees that suddenly entered Albania via Kukës and Macedonia. At that moment, 1 in 4 people living Albania, was a newcomer from Kosova. We practically met each other in the most difficult time for both countries: the war in Kosova, and the collapse of pyramid schemes in Albania. However, it was a time of survival, great solidarity and national upgrade. Mine and my friends' immediate reaction, today colleagues at POLIS University and Co-PLAN Institute, was how to help these war refugees to settle.*

*End of June 1999 brought the liberation of Kosova and a great opportunity for me to enter for the first time in the "forbidden" country. A dream that became true! This time as an expert of the Co-PLAN Institute, and on behalf of FAO and World Bank, we undertook a 6-months*

*countrywide survey on war damage assessment, which later on helped the international donor community to channelize first-ever aid and finances for post-war Kosova. This is a work I am highly proud of. It gave my Co-PLAN colleagues and me the possibility to see for the first time Kosova's reality, the same way they saw Albania during the escapes from war massacres. I visited every city and village, almost all communities and minorities, working passionately with more than 300 students and professors of the University of Prishtina, which I praise for joining us in very difficult but inspiring moments of post-war. I still cannot forget my first contact with organic-modernist Prishtina. That was my highlight. We entered from Kacanik to Lipjan and to the hills of Cagllavica. I could clearly see the silhouette of the small beautiful capital, nowadays swallowed by the growth of radical urbanization. At that moment, I had a vision that one day I would be working to envision Prishtina as the newest European capital, a dream that any city planner would have in such specific moments in history.*

*Twenty years later, together with our students and staff of POLIS University, as well as with the researchers of our International Double Degree Program of PhD (jointly organized in cooperation with UNIFE, University of Ferrara, Italy), we prepared this vision through a 1-year research project focused on such inspiring theme. The coordinators of the project have been also cooperating and exchanging information and ideas with many local professionals, intellectuals and (municipal central) institutions in Kosova to whom we are grateful. Such exchange symbolizes the real liberation of Kosova and Albania from the dark days of our pasts. We strongly believe that it is also the way to lead for a useful regional cooperation and Europeanization in the near future. It is the moment to reconsider the re-foundation of Prishtina, now as the newest European capital. We must all contribute and prepare for that!*

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