

Kosovo

Nora Sefa interviewed **Rexhep Qosja**

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Sefa: We're here today with Professor Rexhep Qosja at the Albanological Institute in Pristina. Professor Qosja, thank you for having me and for finding the time for this meeting.

Qosja: Welcome to the Albanological Institute. It is an honour for me to be included in the European Archive of Voices.

Sefa: I am Nora, and I'll be your interviewer today. Let's start with some questions, we have various topics to cover and the first, Professor, is to ask about your origins, your home, where you were born, your childhood. You were born in the village of Vuthaj in Montenegro, an Albanian enclave, which I believe still exists today. What was your childhood like, do you remember it well?

Qosja: I was born in the village of Vuthaj. According to Eqrem Çabej [Albanian linguist, 1908-1980], the name of this village is derived from the Albanian words *vu* or *vëne*, the location where they were "placed," meaning where some people who came from Kelmend were placed, and where they "settled." The village is on the border with Albania. Actually, it is a village that belongs to the Valley of Plav and Guci [or Plav-Gusinje Valley]. This valley has two small towns which played a historic role at the time of the League of Prizren, a unique historic role at that time. During the time of the League of Prizren, which gathered in the town of Prizren, in Kosovo, the Valley of Plav and Guci had their own representative in the League. He was a significant figure called Ali Pasha Gucia.

Shkodra was the largest, most important town for Albanians at that time and it was also the closest to Vuthaj. At the time when those cursed political borders were drawn, Albanians of the valley were unable to communicate with the town of Shkodra and with those Albanians who lived on the other side of the border, in Albania. They were obliged to orient towards and communicate with Peja [in Kosovo]. All those goods that the villagers had to buy in town, such as sugar, salt, and gas to light their homes, which previously they had purchased in Shkodra, now had to be bought in Peja. Only in Peja.

I went to primary school in Vuthaj, and completed seven years of school in Guci. At that time, when I was young, school lasted seven, not eight years.

Sefa: Is that when your life in Vuthaj ended?

Qosja: No, no, I returned later to Vuthaj and I still go back during the summer holidays.

After completing seven years of school, I registered at Peja High School, but since I could not afford food and lodging in Peja, I had to interrupt my education, and I lost a year. The next year, in 1954, I came to Pristina and I registered at the Pristina Normal High School in 1954. The Normal was a high school for teachers.

Sefa: Before we move on to Pristina, let's stay a bit longer in Vuthaj. Did you live there with your family, with your father and mother? Do you have sisters and brothers?

Qosja: Yes, we were seven brothers and sisters: Four brothers—I'm the second-eldest—and three sisters. I grew up there until the age of fifteen or sixteen, with my father, mother, brothers, and sisters. Then I moved to Kosovo, and I usually returned to Vuthaj for the winter holidays, when the term had finished, and for the summer holidays, at the end of the school year. But after 1981, when the demonstrations by university and high school students happened, it was dangerous to go there and to spend the summer in Vuthaj. So, after 1981, I didn't go back home for about fifteen years.

Sefa: We'll talk about the demonstrations of '81 later. In Vuthaj, as a child, how did you imagine your future: did you think you would always live in Vuthaj, or did you imagine a life in a different place?

Qosja: In primary school, at the end of the Second World War, I learned . . . I studied using books that had been published in Tirana. It was there that I learned, for the first time, the poems of Naim Frashëri [Albanian poet and writer, 1846 – 1900], and I was raised with a vision, a love for that poetry, for that poet and that town, for Tirana. So while at primary school I had already heard, I had heard and I had learned the poems of Naim Frashëri, Ndre Mjeda, and Gjergj Fishta. You know, I knew many of Naim Frashëri's poems by heart. I could also recite most of Gjergj Fishta's *The Highland Lute*. Back then, when I was starting school, *The Highland Lute* was a book that was typically found in most Albanian homes in Plav and Guci. I knew most of it by heart. But then the Montenegrin government prohibited Fishta's work.

Sefa: What is the book about?

Qosja: *The Highland Lute*? It is a patriotic poem. An epic dedicated to the freedom and independence of the Albanian people. It is a wonderful patriotic poem, truly the greatest patriotic Albanian epic. It mentions, it sings of characters from Plav and Guci.

Sefa: So as a young boy, as a child, did you perhaps dream of a life in Albania?

Qosja: Yes. I did dream of life in Albania. Albania was the idea, the ideal of the poetry with which I was educated. My ideal of a life in Albania was created by that poem.

Sefa: Did you spend the Second World War in Vuthaj as well?

Qosja: Yes, yes.

Sefa: How did a child in Vuthaj experience this war, do you remember?

Qosja: Up to 1943, the Italians were in my birthplace because Plav and Guci were part of Albania then. In 1943, I don't know which month it was, perhaps in the autumn, the Italians capitulated and they left. The remaining years were full of fear, and dread, as we had heard that the Chetniks [Serbian nationalist paramilitary and political organization] might come to Plav and Guci, and we were terrified of the Chetniks. We fled Plav and Guci and spent three months in Krasniqi, in Albania. Krasniqi is the name of the area of Albania that borders Vuthaj.

Sefa: As refugees?

Qosja: We stayed there for a few months. Some of the Vuthaj girls got married in Krasniqi. And then we returned.

Sefa: But the Chetniks did not come?

Qosja: No, the Chetniks did not come, but we heard that the partisans had arrived instead and so we returned home.

Sefa: Do you remember the first time you crossed the border, the first time you went outside your home country?

Qosja: Yes, of course. It was in the mountains. It was summer when we crossed the "border" and we went over the mountains, we climbed over the peaks and through pastures until we got there. I don't know how high they are, but to me, at that time, they seemed the most glorious mountains, peaks, meadows, streams, and beech forests in the world.

Sefa: Was this during the Second World War?

Qosja: Yes, during the war. But we didn't experience war there, I mean there was no war in those mountains.

Sefa: Does that mean that you didn't talk about the war with your parents, with your grandfather and grandmother?

Qosja: No, I didn't have grandparents. They had died in Shkodra during the Balkan Wars. The population of Plav and Guci was displaced, they went to Shkodra to escape the Montenegrins, and many fell sick. They were in camps; typhoid spread and my grandfather and grandmother died, so did my uncle and my aunts. Only my father survived, and one uncle.

Sefa: As a child in Vuthaj, did you know that Europe existed, Europe as an idea?

Qosja: Yes, I knew, I knew that there was a continent called Europe. Gjergj Fishta's *Highland Lute* sings of Europe. But there was a negative view of Europe where I lived because Europe had divided us, it had split up Albanian lands. And Fishta's epic is very critical of Europe. It says in the verse that Europe committed a great injustice towards the Albanian people by dividing them among five states. I was brought up under the influence of that poem.

Sefa: Was this after the Second World War? Or earlier?

Qosja: Europe divided the Albanian lands at the Conference of Ambassadors in London in 1913, thus at the time of the Balkan Wars, but also again after the First World War.

Sefa: Okay, yes.

Qosja: This division, later, was also recognised at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Sefa: Yes, that's what I meant.

Qosja: And it was at this time that this view of Europe was created among Albanians in general, the view that Europe had done a great historic injustice to the Albanian people.

Sefa: Has this view of Europe changed today?

Qosja: It has definitely changed. When I was in high school, I learned the history of Europe, I learned the history of the peoples of Europe. There are other views of Europe. Albanians have an alternative, very positive view of Europe, that differs substantively from that created by *The Highland Lute*. And it is a concept that was originated, above all, by Naim and Sami Frashëri, in their works. It is a concept of European enlightenment, of the light that rises in the West, as Naim Frashëri used to say.

Sefa: What do you remember from school? Something important that you learned, or a moment at school in Vuthaj. Did you have a male or female teacher, probably a man at that time, who

Qosja: I had various male teachers, but no female teachers.

Sefa: who had an impression on you?

Qosja: As I've said: It was the poetry of Naim Frashëri. He was my teacher. Still today we call him "The People's Teacher." I feel strong emotions when I think of his poems, I learned them by heart and I can recite them.

Sefa: About two weeks ago, I found at my parents' house *Porosia e Madhe* ("The Great Commandment"), the book you wrote about Naim Frashëri.

Qosja: Yes, I wrote a monograph on Naim. He was called the people's teacher for a reason. For Naim it was a nationwide, deeply loving commitment.

Sefa: And you have retained your love for his poetry in your work, right up to the age you are now.

Qosja: Yes. I think Naim Frashëri is one of the principal authors who inspired me to study the national renaissance, and to write a three-volume history of it.

Sefa: You said that you went to Pristina. What year was this?

Qosja: '54. In the year 1954.

Sefa: And you registered at the Normal High School?

Qosja: It was the teacher training school, called the Normal School of Pristina.

Sefa: Did you study there to become a teacher?

Qosja: Yes, I studied to become a teacher. It was the best school in Kosovo, an elite school, with the best teachers in Kosovo at the time. Kosovo needed teachers, to educate people, to advance people. Teachers were highly valued.

Sefa: Were there not enough teachers before, or were they Serb?

Qosja: No, no, there were not enough Albanian teachers. And in the summer, at the Normal, they organised a course for those who needed to qualify as a teacher. They did a course, one or two months, I don't know how long, to qualify to become a teacher.

Sefa: To qualify to teach primary school, the reception class at least. Does that mean that at that time many people were illiterate?

Qosja: Yes, many. And very few women were educated. The number of women who went to school was tiny at that time, tiny.

Sefa: But in the end, you didn't become a teacher?

Qosja: I was a teacher for one year—

Sefa: Really? You worked for one year as a teacher?

Qosja: I was a teacher for one year in the village of Shipol, Mitrovica.

Sefa: Shipul?

Qosja: Shipol, that's what the village was called, and now it is part of Mitrovica [in Kosovo]. I was there for a year as a teacher because they gave me a scholarship for one year. That's how it worked: You got a scholarship for one year, and then you had to work as a teacher for one year or more!

Sefa: But you did not like being a teacher? Did you want to do something more? (laughs)

Qosja: (smiles) Yes, I wanted to study at university.

Sefa: So afterwards you went to university, to study at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Pristina?

Qosja: Afterwards I registered at university, in the Albanian language and literature department, in what was initially the Faculty of Philosophy. The faculty's first department was that of Albanian language and literature, which is where I registered and from which I eventually graduated.

Sefa: As part of the first generation of students?

Qosja: It was the first generation in that faculty at the University of Kosovo. It was the Faculty of Philosophy, and the first department was that of Albanian language and literature. I was the first generation to be registered in that faculty.

Sefa: Was it a great honour, a good feeling for you to be in that faculty?

Qosja: Yes, yes, without doubt. At that time, for Pristina to have a university faculty, for Kosovo to have a university faculty was a huge achievement for everyone.

Sefa: But you didn't only study in Pristina, you went to Belgrade at some point too?

Qosja: I registered in Belgrade for post-graduate studies, a master's program, which was called a post-diploma at that time. In 1967-68 I studied for a post-diploma in Belgrade.

Sefa: What was it like then to study in Belgrade as an Albanian? Were you frightened? How did you experience that time in Belgrade?

Qosja: Not many Albanian students studied in Belgrade then. Few, very few Albanians studied medicine, engineering, sciences, other professions. That attitude, full of discrimination, injustice, and violence against Albanians, which would develop later, later, especially after the seventies, was not openly displayed then. At that time, before the seventies, that discrimination was not so apparent, there was a tolerance displayed toward Albanians, a tolerance that was sort of formal. The number of Albanians in Belgrade was significant then: some did manual labour and some studied.

Look, it cannot be said that, at that time, the position toward Albanian students was openly negative, but in Belgrade there was nevertheless a hidden attitude that was contemptuous toward us Albanians. I think that Serbs consistently had a scornful disregard for Albanians, as a people who were primitive, uncultured, a people capable only of manual labour, cleaning, or polishing peoples' shoes in Belgrade, of chopping wood for the stoves and chimneys of the gentlemen of Belgrade!

Sefa: So they held this negative view even though they had no schools in Kosovo?

Qosja: Yes, absolutely. But a reaction, such as the intolerance that developed much later, was not yet apparent.

Sefa: So that started after 1971?

Qosja: It was in the seventies, when Kosovo was granted autonomy, that autonomy of 1973 [the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution granted Kosovo substantial autonomy]. That granting of autonomy to Kosovo drove the Serbs mad, it really upset them. They said, “Look, the Albanians are becoming emancipated.” After the Brioni Plenum in 1966 women started to go to school, the number of students rose, the number of Albanians working in the Secretariat of Internal Affairs increased. This worried the Serbs and so they started their discriminatory behaviour toward Albanians. Then Serb nationalism got out of control, and after Slobodan Milošević came to power [Milošević became President of Serbia in 1989], it became open chauvinism, total violence against Albanians.

Sefa: I believe that there in Belgrade they lectured in Serbo-Croatian.

Qosja: Yes, in Serbo-Croatian.

Sefa: Serbo-Croatian. But in Pristina, at school, you learned in Albanian? And in Vuthaj, did you learn in Albanian or Serbian?

Qosja: In Vuthaj, primary school lessons were in Albanian. My generation at high school had some teachers, but none for lessons in the Albanian language.

Sefa: Was it a good feeling to speak Albanian in the faculty?

Qosja: Yes, of course. It was a special experience. We had Albanian professors. Idriz Ajeti was the first teacher who taught us. He was a cult hero for us. We listened to his lectures on the Albanian language. Later there were other teachers. Some subjects were still taught in Serbo-Croatian, for example the theory of literature was taught by a Serb professor, world literature was taught at the start by another Serb professor, and Yugoslav literature—also taught by another Serb professor.

Sefa: Were your parents in favour or against further education? What did they think of their son going to study in Kosovo?

Qosja: (Smiles.) They were very, very happy. They were proud that their son was being educated. My dad wanted me to become a doctor, he’d often call me “doctor.”

Sefa: There are some parents who obstruct their children’s education for financial reasons.

Qosja: As a pupil at the Normal, coming from Montenegro, I had no grant until the penultimate year, when the wife of Fadil Hoxha, Vahide Hoxha, who was my teacher, got me a scholarship. They found me a scholarship in Mitrovica, in the municipality of

Mitrovica. For the other years, I had no funding so I had to pay for my own room and board. I paid for it with money my mother got from selling her jewellery.

Sefa: The jewellery given to her when she got married?

Qosja: Yes, when she got married. My father was alone, I mean, he was an only child and he had property, land, a house. My mother sold all her jewellery to send her son to school. You see? But to educate your son was a great joy for parents. And later, all my brothers were also educated, only one sister did not go to high school. The others were all educated here in Kosovo, in Pristina—all of us.

Sefa: Are they younger than you?

Qosja: Yes, all except one.

Sefa: Let's talk a bit about your work. After finishing your service as a teacher in Mitrovica, you returned to Pristina? At some point, you became an academic. How did it happen?

Qosja: When I came from Mitrovica to Pristina, I could not get a scholarship, so I got a job at Radio Kosovo.

Sefa: As a journalist?

Qosja: As a journalist. And I worked there for three years. I received a small salary, which I used to pay for room and board. And I studied.

Sefa: Like many students today (laughs).

Qosja: Yes, indeed (smiles).

Sefa: With the intention . . .

Qosja: Of finishing university. After I had finished university, though also during my studies as well, I started to write and publish a few things. At the Normal I also wrote some things. The professors took those articles and published them. I published the texts that I wrote as a student in *Jeta e Re* ["New Life"] and in *Perparim* ["Progress"].

Sefa: At some point, you became the chief editor of *Jeta e Re*, which was a literary magazine?

Qosja: Later on, but when I was a student the chief editor was the famous poet Esad Mekuli. He'd been the chief editor of *Jeta e Re* for a long time.

Sefa: What are the achievements of which you feel most proud? Are they the work you've done as an author or in politics?

Qosja: Look, I have written historical and literary texts; monographs, critiques, many polemics; I have written plays, novels, many opinion pieces, quite a lot! My calling is not politics, it is academic and artistic.

Sefa: You have also published many articles and books outside Kosovo?

Qosja: Yes, yes, in Albania and in France.

Sefa: And in Croatia and Slovenia, I think?

Qosja: My books have been published in Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Holland, Austria, France, and Greece.

My contemporaries, our generation, faced a difficult fate and had good and bad luck, living in a time that is called historic. I call times historic when a people confront big, big problems, and try to solve those problems to their advantage. Those problems with which the Albanian people would struggle in the second half of the twentieth century, and now at the start of the twenty-first century, were, first, the Albanian question, and within that the issue of Kosovo, the freedom and independence of Kosovo. I dedicated my life and a series of works to this issue.

The second question was about building democracy after the fall of Communism. I also dedicated my life to democracy. I have written about democracy—for example, the 600-page book *Fjalor Demokratik* [“Democratic Dictionary”]. It analyses the construction of democracy in Albanian life after Communism fell in Albania and in Kosovo and, specifically, after Kosovo became independent. The third big question to which I have dedicated my life and with which the Albanian people have struggled—and the issue that the Albanian people will resolve one day—is the question of Kosovo uniting with Albania.

These are the three issues that comprise my life’s work, my creative output—three big questions that are the substance of my life’s work.

Sefa: This last issue, the third, the unity of Kosovo and Albania, is an issue that you follow still now?

Qosja: I continually pay attention to this question, I haven’t given up on it like some have who say that Kosovo cannot join Albania. I think the opposite. It will happen. In my life and in my work, I have learned this lesson: When a people want to do something, they will do it. The Albanian people wanted to make Kosovo independent—and they did it. The Albanian people want to unite Kosovo and Albania—and they will unite one day. I don’t know when, the year or month, but I know that they will unite.

Sefa: There is a question as to whether a majority exists now among the population, at this moment, in favour of this issue.

Qosja: Some polls that have been done now indicate that the commitment has fallen somewhat.

Sefa: 50 percent in favour, 50 percent against (laughs).

Qosja: Some polls report that 49 percent are in favour of uniting and 51 percent are against. You understand! (Smiles.) But these are polls that are commissioned by those who think differently, those who are against this idea. But history will discredit them. Those who are against the idea of Kosovo uniting with Albania will be judged by Albanian history.

Sefa: Do you think that your work is valued by Albanian society, and also perhaps by the political world?

Qosja: I have always thought, and I still think, that the author contests reality, the evils of society, politics, etc. Those who don't agree with this creative approach become servile writers; at one time they were called "court writers." I am not a "court writer," and I am not a servile writer. I am an author who, in Europe, they once called subversive, a writer against all evils. I have addressed the evils that have made the life of the Albanian people, and the life of man in general, more difficult, and while addressing these evils, I have created a space for the good, for what is right, for truth. My creativity and my work are a struggle for justice and truth—for universal justice and truth, for the collective good.

Sefa: Is this how you are judged?

Qosja: This is what the people think, but not the political elite. But I don't expect, and I don't want, to be appreciated by them, by the political elite. I received a medal, "*Nderi i Kombit*" ["Honoured Person of the Nation"], a medal given to me in Albania by former president Rexhep Meidan, a politician. I refuse all others, and I will refuse everything to the end. Prizes, decorations, and medals are given to corrupt the creator, to manipulate them, own them, make them speak well of the state, to glorify the state and people in government.

Sefa: But perhaps your achievements are valued differently. After the war you were a member of the interim government of Kosovo during the time of the protectorate. You were also at Rambouillet as a delegate. Wasn't this significant, to be recognised in this way?

Qosja: Significant, maybe!

Sefa: But these are perhaps some instances where you were seen as valuable for your political contributions?

Qosja: At that time, it was a war for Kosovo's freedom and independence. At Rambouillet, too, of course. And then under the protectorate. And many problems emerged there too. Now I have published my diary of the protectorate: *Dëshmitar në kohë historike* ["Witness to Historic Times"]. Volume eight is called "Time of the Protectorate: 1999-2001." So the eighth volume of my diary is about the protectorate, led by Bernard Kouchner.

Qosja: How has your work changed, I mean your working practice in recent years? Including with regard to technology. I know that sometimes, not often, but maybe once a

month you post on social media. Do you work the same way you worked perhaps fifty years ago?

Sefa: No, not exactly like fifty years ago. I do write by hand. I always write by hand. Then I type it up on a typewriter. I have an Italian Olivetti typewriter. And I've worked with that typewriter for fifty-five years, I can't work with a computer, I don't like them. Someone else enters it on a computer.

Sefa: For example, your nephew helps?

Qosja: My nephew Valjet, a film director, works with a computer, he's a whiz on the computer, and he types up my articles for me. Before him, I had a technical assistant at the Institute, Fikrija, who typed up most of my works—and there are many—on the computer.

Sefa: So the manner in which you work has not changed much since back then?

Qosja: No, it has not changed.

Sefa: You don't for example use the internet for research or other things?

Qosja: I use the internet, but not myself. My nephew Valjet uses it for himself and also for me.

Sefa: Let's move on to a topic that we'll call "political consciousness." When did you become political, politically engaged—or have you always been?

Qosja: Not always. I can say that I started to be continuously politically engaged in 1968, the year of the demonstrations. But politically, I got involved when the Brioni Plenum was held in 1966 and when we understood what terror the UDBA [Uprava Državne Bezbednosti or "State Security Administration"—the secret police force in Yugoslavia] had inflicted on Kosovo. At that time, they published information that we had not known about before. From that moment, I started to think politically and to be engaged. Whereas "with the pen" I started to be politically engaged after 1981. That's when I started to write about the behaviour of Serbia in Yugoslavia toward Albanians, and in particular about the behaviour of Serbs, Montenegrins, and Macedonians, who behaved harshly time after time toward Albanians. I couldn't publish those articles here in Pristina, so I published them in Zagreb and in Ljubljana.

Sefa: Did you have friends or well-wishers there, or were the publishing houses more liberal?

Qosja: They published my articles, which were critical of the violence and terror of Serbia and Yugoslavia in Kosovo, because they aligned with their political attitude against the Greater Serbian regime. Croatia and Slovenia had their own national movements. They had begun their efforts to achieve national emancipation. Those articles were used to

produce my book *Populli i ndaluar* ["Forbidden People"]. They treated us as a "national minority," but I gave the book the title *Forbidden People*, thus by using that word "people" I was saying that we, Albanians in Kosovo and Yugoslavia, were not a minority, but a people! A people denied the right to be a people, when a people in Yugoslavia had the right to self-determination. We are a people, we have the right to decide for ourselves, to become independent. And that book was published in Zagreb.

Sefa: One of your very important works.

Qosja: Very important. With it, and the articles published in it, began the de-Yugoslavisation of the politics of Albanians in Serbia and Yugoslavia.

Sefa: Later, when your book, your novel, *Vdekja me vjen prej syve të tillë* ["Death Comes from Such Eyes"], was published in Paris, by the famous publishing house Gallimard, Ismail Kadare called you "the writer of a forbidden people." When I read those words, I understood your meaning. You were the writer who was addressing this issue, and perhaps the only one at that time.

Qosja: The only one, sadly, at that time!

Sefa: Let's return once again to the demonstrations, as our listeners/readers might not know what happened in Kosovo in 1981. What happened that year? You were at the university working as a professor, weren't you?

Qosja: I was at the Albanological Institute, and I was lecturing in the Faculty [of Philosophy]. I was engaged for one hour a week on the subject of aesthetics. On 11 March 1981, our young generation, university students and high school students, demonstrated. Most were university students, there were fewer high school students, but the high school students did take part. There are many articles written, statements made, and opinions given about those demonstrations. Whereas the demonstrations of 1968 temporarily halted the Serb and Yugoslav violence, after the demonstrations of '81 it continued. They halted it for a few days, weeks, or months, and then it carried on again. But these were the demonstrations that turned the issue of Kosovo and the Albanian question into an international issue.

Sefa: Thus people abroad also understood that something was happening in Kosovo?

Qosja: Yes, they understood what was happening in Kosovo and what was being demanded. They were historic demonstrations that made the Kosovo issue global, and after that, individuals, politicians, journalists, diplomats, officials, intellectuals with political convictions, they all started to come to Kosovo to learn about what was happening, and from that time on, we had meetings with hundreds and hundreds of journalists and politicians and diplomats and officials from Europe and the United States of America who all came to Kosovo.

Sefa: On what did you base your ideas—someone else's writing? Any particular author? What was the foundation for your ideas?

Qosja: They were my personal ideas and thoughts, based on my own experience, memories, opinions, convictions. But I learned a lot also from some European and American artists: writers, philosophers, scientists. French, the French especially, but also Italians, Germans, and English.

Sefa: I believe you held the same views as the demonstrators, yes? Or were they different?

Qosja: In the demonstrations they demanded Kosovo's freedom, freedom and independence, and then they more or less modified those requests and started demanding a Republic of Kosovo. For a time [it was meant to be] inside Yugoslavia, but later they sought a Republic of Kosovo, meaning an independent Kosovo. And when that meeting of Kaçanik was held, that's where they set out the demand for Kosovo as a republic within a federation or confederation of Yugoslavia!

Sefa: What meeting was that in Kaçanik, who took part in that?

Qosja: It was the meeting which declared the Republic of Kosovo as part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, depending on how socialist Yugoslavia would be organised after it disintegrated. The former deputies of the Kosovo Assembly participated in the meeting. Those deputies had been in the Kosovo Assembly and they left to hold the meeting of Kaçanik.

Sefa: They developed various ideas?

Qosja: The ideas were developed by others, and they implemented them in a resolution for a Kosovo republic.

Sefa: How did Yugoslavia or Serbia respond to this?

Qosja: Serbia reacted with violence, with violence. Many young people were imprisoned, they interrogated many young people and intellectuals. By 1990, when as a delegation we went to the American Congress, approximately 580,000 Albanians had been taken in for questioning by the UDBA [secret police in Yugoslavia].

Sefa: At that time, you had no other option except to become a politician, to participate in politics. Although often intellectuals refuse to get involved in politics?

Qosja: I couldn't be an intellectual who kept quiet, no. I had not joined a party, but I thought and worked politically. As a result, my office and home became an office and house visited by politicians, diplomats, journalists, senior officials, and foreign intellectuals who wanted to talk about the situation in Kosovo, its present and future. At some point, with a group of intellectuals, we created an organisation, an organisation of intellectuals

that dealt with the issue of Kosovo, that defended Kosovo by writing articles about the terrorist violence of the Milošević regime.

Sefa: Another moment in the history of Kosovo in which you were a famous face was the nationwide blood feud reconciliation movement that I believe occurred in the eighties and nineties.

Qosja: The blood feud reconciliation movement, which was hugely important, was organised then, and I was a supporter, but not a participant.

Sefa: We know that blood feuds still exist in various countries. Blood feuds were a sickness among the Albanian people. Why was this step taken toward reconciliation?

Qosja: Much is being written now about the blood feud reconciliation movement, what it was and what it wasn't. The movement began with some young people. I'll mention two of them: Ethem Çeku, now a teacher in one of our universities, and Myrvete Dreshaj-Baliu, also a teacher in one of our universities. They initiated the blood feud reconciliation movement.

Sefa: A woman [referring to Myrvete Dreshaj-Baliu]?

Qosja: Yes. Myrvete and Ethem and two other young people had been in prison at some point. They made the idea of blood feud reconciliation popular. They came to me at the start for advice about this crucial issue and very important effort: to reconcile those who were in a feud. It is these boys and girls, who were the first to create this idea, this initiative, who deserve the credit for the blood feud reconciliation movement and for achieving a series of reconciliations. Now, rather unfairly, their names are rarely mentioned, only those who actually did the reconciling. And then, others got involved in the movement, especially those who participated in collecting popular literature and culture, and they also played an important role in blood feud reconciliation.

Sefa: And this movement was important for the state of Kosovo before the war?

Qosja: Kosovo was still not a state, and Serbia had destroyed its autonomy. But reconciliation was important for the people, and thus also for the state that it would become.

Sefa: But in the war against the Serbs, a people cannot win a war if they are divided.

Qosja: The Albanian people of Kosovo were not divided. The blood feuds had always existed among families: one family would demand revenge from another family, but the people, as a people, were never divided—no, they were never divided.

Sefa: Okay. The next question is about political identity. Back then, you felt like an Albanian. Do you think that today you also feel like a European? What is your political identity?

Qosja: I can say that I'm an Albanian who wants Albanians to join Europe. I am an Albanian who wants Albanians, Albanian politicians, who endlessly repeat *Europe, Europe, European Union*, to actually bring European values into our lives. To introduce the best socio-political, legal, cultural, economic, educational, and moral European values into our lives, and not to deceive our people with rhetoric, with words like *Europe, Europe, European Union*, and so on.

Sefa: Has this been achieved yet?

Qosja: No.

Sefa: Politically no? Why hasn't it been achieved?

Qosja: Without values, the existence of a people, society, and the state cannot be upheld. Naturally, in our lifetime, we have both inherited and constructed values, but I am talking about the new, modern, political, social, state, and European values that we lack.

Thus, for example, democracy is a value, a value that our renaissance took from Europe. Democracy in our lifetime has not stabilised. It has not been adequately institutionalised. There are two reasons. First: It is not easy to instill European values in people when they already were and are in Europe, with regard to land and geography, but not with heart and soul; and second, it is not easy to equip people with European values when they are engaged for the first time in democratic elections, as both procedure and reality, after declaring Kosovo a free and independent state.

Sefa: Also these questions that we are posing were intended for someone who has grown up in a state that is part of the European Union. Kosovo is not.

Qosja: No, it is not. Nor is Albania part of the European Union.

Sefa: Still, I'd like to ask you, do you trust European institutions? Are they trustworthy? Now, seen from a Kosovar context, as a candidate for EU membership?

Qosja: I am familiar, more or less, with the history of the peoples of Europe. Some I know better, or extremely well. The continent of Europe has made a great contribution to the development of humanity. In particular, Europe developed the science that has improved people's lives. Europe developed the arts, all arts. Europe developed philosophy. Europe has advanced civilisation to some degree, I think, across the world. But there are also negative things about Europe. Europe was a colonial power, which exploited other countries and got rich by exploiting them. Europe produced and created very significant democratic models, but Europe also introduced fascism to the world, and Nazism, and Stalinism, and the Inquisition. As you can see, Europe has two faces, but the good face,

the kind face, the human face, the progressive face, the beautiful face of Europe is more visible, more substantial, more long-lasting. Thankfully.

Sefa: More so than that which brought the negatives you mentioned?

Qosja: Those bad elements are part of the history of Europe that we remember and that we study in order to ensure they are never repeated again. Albanians, Albania and Kosovo, want to become Europe, to enter into Europe. And this desire is sincere, and they are working hard, with great commitment. But today in Europe, some right-wing forces, regressive right-wing forces, are appearing, emerging here and there, and they could harm Europe. We have to hope those forces will not dominate Europe, that Europe will be dominated by the forces that move it forwards, forces that are committed to a democratic Europe. I listen with concern to some interviews, for example, with the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, with some Polish politicians, some Czechs, and some politicians from former Communist countries.

Sefa: There are currents that are anti-Europe, against deeper integration.

Qosja: That's where we hear ideas that are not welcomed or accepted about Europe. Ideas about a Europe that is anti-Europe! I think of Europe as a multicultural Europe. I think of Europe as pluralist in cultural, faith, and ethnic identities. I want our planet to preserve the autochthonous culture of peoples. Diversity of culture is the richness of our world.

Sefa: So that not everything becomes homogenous, not the same.

Qosja: The cultures, faiths, and autochthonous values of different peoples are a great value that a united Europe must tolerate, accept, develop, and enrich.

Sefa: Are these in danger in Europe?

Qosja: There are individuals, politicians, organisations, parties that want to put them at risk. Let's hope that the number of politicians who tolerate and accept a multicultural, multi-faith Europe is greater than the number of those who don't.

Sefa: Let's also talk about Europe a bit later, at the end of our conversation. For now, I have a question about culture. There is a saying: "Politicians destroy bridges and artists rebuild them", after the politicians have destroyed them (smiles). What do you think about this [saying]? Since you held two roles simultaneously: for a brief time you were a politician of a political party, but you are also a writer?

Qosja: Politicians can also be different. But those who created a vision of a united Europe were people of knowledge, people of culture. Let's take Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher. Approximately two hundred years ago, Immanuel Kant thought that it would be good for humanity to have a joint government. His philosophy was the foundation for the idea of creating the United Nations. It was a very, very important idea. It was a brilliant

vision, immeasurably important. Erasmus of Rotterdam also wanted a united Europe, a Europe of free peoples. Artistic people create great visions, they love freedom, freedom realised despite the various obstacles that politicians know how to put up and create time and time again!

Sefa: Western Europe and Eastern Europe were separated for a long time. How did this influence European culture?

Qosja: I already mentioned Hungary, I mentioned Poland, and I mentioned the Czech Republic, they are three formerly Communist countries, and some of their officials are presenting the idea that they don't need Europe, presenting some ideas that obstruct the development of a multicultural and multi-faith Europe. The European Union is an extraordinary project, very big, very important; I call it magnificent. The Europe that once upon a time was a colonial power, Europe with its great peoples, the same Europe that has produced, as I said, some dangerous ideologies and practices, today is a united Europe. This is this powerful ideal of the peoples of Europe. I want this Europe to develop, grow stronger, to become even more humane, even more cultured, to develop its civilisation further, and this must be achieved, it will be achieved. I really want that Europe, because that Europe is a great promise to the peoples of Europe. Europe has had two bloody world wars that have caused a lot of bloodshed, many "mountains of bones and valleys of blood"! And a united Europe liberates its peoples from such wars. A united Europe will be a Europe of freedom, not war. This makes the united Europe project truly magnificent. I regret the UK's exit from the European Union. This has upset and disappointed me. I absolutely would not want anyone else in Europe to follow in the footsteps of the United Kingdom. No.

Sefa: Let's talk a little about freedom. I believe that "freedom" for you is a very important word.

Qosja: Of course.

Sefa: Maybe all your work has been for freedom (smiles). Do you believe it has been achieved? Has freedom been achieved in Kosovo? Are the people free now?

Qosja: In one respect, we are already free: we have been liberated from occupation by Serbia. And by Yugoslavia. From 1912 onwards, Kosovo was occupied by Serbia. We have been liberated from that occupation, but! Freedom is a word full of meaning, it is an idea full of content, with many desires, much effort, a lot of realised and unrealised rights.

Sefa: Rights that still have not been realised in Kosovo today?

Qosja: There is a French writer, André Gide, who received the Nobel Prize. He wrote a very significant sentence that I used to end a book of my own. He says, "To know how to free oneself is nothing; the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom." We

won our freedom through war, the war of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and through the intervention of NATO, in fact of the US, and they deserve great credit, they were pivotal to the liberation of Kosovo, but in my opinion, we are not using that freedom which we gained properly, no. Today, the political class of Kosovo has not passed the democratic test of how Kosovo should be if its existence is to be in the interest of all the people. There is injustice in Kosovo; there is the theft of common, collective assets; there is corruption; there is nepotism, employing family and supporters; there is poverty, there are many families who survive on two dollars a day, you know, with just two dollars a day—there is a lot of injustice! And it should not be like this. Some of those in power have taken advantage of their political and official roles, used them to get rich and become millionaires. The poor became millionaires! So, only when Kosovo is freed from all these evils will it be free in the full sense of the word. Then it will be genuinely democratic. Genuinely free.

Sefa: I also want to talk about another topic, about Kosovo's borders with surrounding countries, but also borders in Europe. Have these borders limited you from travelling to other countries? Visa liberalisation has not yet been achieved for Kosovo. What does this mean for you?

Qosja: I used to travel a lot to meetings with our compatriots in Europe and America. But for a while now I've tired of travelling. Visa liberalisation should be implemented for Kosovo, they should liberalise visas for us, like all the others. It is not good for Europe to discriminate against Kosovo with regard to visa liberalisation. This limits the free movement of the people of Kosovo, of Kosovars, and this is not positive. Also, they did not agree to start membership negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia! This was not a good decision on Europe's part. Someone has come up with the geographical notion of the Western Balkans! I don't know what this geographical notion means! The Western Balkans!

Sefa: It is very political.

Qosja: It was just the Balkans. Now there's the Western Balkans too! It includes Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia. And Serbia too, you say. All these states have inhabitants of the Muslim faith. There are many in Albania, many more in Macedonia, and in Kosovo they are 95 percent of the population. Montenegro also has a Muslim population, and Bosnia too has a large number of Muslims. Perhaps Europe, or someone in Europe, came up with this term of the Western Balkans because there are so many inhabitants of the Islamic faith in these countries? It is not good to think like this. And it is not good to think so in a united Europe.

Sefa: Because it divides them from...

Qosja: The so-called Western Balkans are being separated out from the Balkans as a whole.

Sefa: From the parts of the Balkans that are more Catholic or Orthodox?

Qosja: Croatia and Slovenia are completely Christian, with some refugees here and there who are Muslim. Look, it's not good. Albanians are a people with three religions: Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim. And Albanians are a people with unusual religious tolerance. Albanians have not experienced the religious conflict that Europe once did. Europe is familiar with the concept of a Thirty Years' War for religion, or perhaps longer than thirty years. There are certainly people in Europe who view us with prejudice, but I hope that the number of those who do not have these prejudices is greater. I followed with great sympathy the visit of the prime minister of Italy to Tirana, immediately after Albania was refused the opportunity to enter into negotiations to join the European Union. The behaviour of the prime minister of Italy was very thoughtful, very appropriate. Greece, too, behaved very, very nicely to Albania when they were refused negotiations.

I think that Europe should agree on an approach; that Albanians have a historical mission and that they will not accept prejudice against Albanians. The great Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis, in his novel *Report to Greco*, which is of great philosophical, ethical, and artistic value, writes that Greece, sitting between East and West, as “the geographical and spiritual crossroads of the world, has a duty to reconcile these two great opponents by achieving their synthesis.” I think that the Albanians, as a people of three faiths, and given their particular geographic location, are predestined by this geography and by their three faiths not to divide and fracture West and East, but to build bridges between West and East. In the Balkans, the East and the West have confronted one another for centuries, they have fought for domination, to exploit the Balkans, to use the Balkans. But in the Balkans, at the same time, Western and Eastern cultures have met, intertwined, influenced each other, and fallen in love. Cultures and civilisations do not fight each other. Civilisations and cultures meet, learn from each other. They are enriched, and they grow, when they meet.

I think that popular Albanian music, or *Melos*, is one of the richest forms of music in Europe and the most beautiful. Popular *Melos*, folk songs, Albanian folk dances—a great and beautiful treasure. Why? How? Because they express the skill of the Albanians, but also reflect historical influences, from the Greeks, Italians, Turks, and Arabs. So lovely. Albanian culture has been enriched and Albanian civilisation has been enriched. Thus, Albanians are geographically, religiously, culturally, and historically destined, not to divide, but to bring the West and the East closer together, to build bridges between them, bridges of peace, bridges of understanding, bridges of cooperation, bridges of coexistence. The best bridge for a better present and future of the West and the East!

Sefa: So you believe that Albanians could be a type of bridge also within the European Union?

Qosja: Yes, yes, why not.

Sefa: Kosovo, Bosnia, and Albania, among several other countries, are all waiting to join the European Union—the first countries with a Muslim population, as you mentioned. I would actually like to talk about religion later, but let me ask this question now. Is the Muslim religion, in your opinion, part of Europe or something foreign that does not work in Europe?

Qosja: Why should it not work? Aren't the Albanians in Europe? Of course we are. Albanians have practiced the Muslim religion for five hundred years. It is also practiced in Bosnia. It works everywhere else in the Western Balkans, so why not in Europe? Why not? In the European Union, one cannot say, as the Hungarian Prime Minister put it: "Europe must be Christian." Orbán did not bring Christianity to Europe, no. He found Christianity in Europe. Orbán is not responsible for Christianity, no. If the European Union is a united Europe, a Europe of good will, a Europe of humanity, a Europe of tolerance, a Europe of humanism, then it will tolerate all religions alike, it will be a Europe of the faithful practicing different religions, and also of atheists.

Sefa: And for you, personally, what does religion mean? In your daily life, at home, at festivals?

Qosja: What does religion mean to me? I am a scientific researcher and writer. I will also say openly: I am not a believer, I am not religious; I believe in science. Science has advanced humanity—it has brought us all the good, extraordinary achievements of thought, imagination, and technology. The material well-being of humanity is due to science, not religion. I value religion and I understand all those who believe, who are religious. Religion has played a very significant moral role for humanity, but it has also played a negative role. Religion has caused many wars on our planet. For religious reasons, many wars have been fought. Terrible, terrible. But religion can make people better, religion can make people better—if they are sincere, if they believe sincerely, if they do not misuse religion for other purposes. Religious morals can and do play an important role today, but they can also be negative.

Sefa: But in post-war Kosovo, has religion changed somewhat, perhaps even in a negative way?

Qosja: Today in Kosovo, religions are far more influential than before.

Sefa: Yes, they are more prevalent. In your opinion, is this dangerous, or is it temporary, or how did religion become more entrenched in Kosovo after the war?

Qosja: The constitution defines the right to religion, but also the place of religion in society.

Sefa: You didn't have it before?

Qosja: How?

Sefa: Before you did not have the right to religion?

Qosja: Religion was not prohibited by law in the former Yugoslavia. But, in practice, a restriction existed. Communism is essentially anti-religious, and religions are now more prominent. I do not think it is necessary for religion to be so prominent in our lives. The right to religion must be accepted and respected without hindrance, but I do not think it is necessary or acceptable for religion to be political, as even some religions are content to support servile politicians!

Sefa: Speaking of restrictions: Have you, as a writer, as an author, ever felt restricted in what you could write about? Have you ever self-censored your texts, were you ever afraid to publish the articles you had written?

Qosja: Yes, in the first book, in the first novel I wrote, *Death Comes from Such Eyes*, I censored myself a little bit. I published that work under a pseudonym.

Sefa: That novel was published in 19—

Qosja: I first published that novel in 1972, in *Jeta e Re* magazine, and the then editor-in-chief, Esad Mekuli, was the only person who knew who was writing it. My pseudonym was Luan Dukagjini. The novel was published as a book in 1974.

Sefa: Was it published by Rilindja [Kosovo Albanian newspaper], or another outlet?

Qosja: *Jeta e Re* was a magazine.

Sefa: And the whole novel was published in that magazine?

Qosja: Yes, in instalments, appearing over the course of about a year or so. I published it under a pseudonym because I was worried I might be held politically or legally accountable, as it dealt with the evils of the UDBA in Kosovo, the violence of the UDBA in Kosovo. It was not unexpected that the play based on the novel and rehearsed at the National Theatre was banned!

Sefa: Here in Kosovo?

Qosja: Yes, in Pristina. Later that novel became a film, too, which was received well at the Pula Film Festival in Croatia, but it received harsh criticism from Belgrade, and the director received many threats.

Sefa: Did you like that film?

Qosja: Not that much.

Sefa: This is something that happens often today.

Qosja: Yes, it happens, but it is not so often that authors despair when their novels or plays become films (smiles).

Sefa: Just recently, a well-known theatre director in Kosovo, Blerta Rustemi-Neziraj, staged one of your plays.

Qosja: Yes, the play *Sfinga e Gjalle* ["Living Sphinx"].

Sefa: Did you like it, did you see it?

Qosja: I didn't know Blerta before, I met her just once before they started rehearsing the show. I think she is a very talented director. I wish her a lot of success. Achieving success in the conditions we have today is not easy. There are always expected and unexpected obstacles that arise.

Sefa: And did you see the show here at the National Theatre?

Qosja: Yes, yes, why not. My text, my play, was enriched in that production, it was meaningfully and figuratively complemented by a director with unusual creative talent.

Sefa: Let's talk a little bit about the future. When you were young, let's say twenty years old, were you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

Qosja: I have a passion for the lessons of history, I love history and geography. I learn a lot from history and geography. I want to see where and how different people live and what they look like. And I want to see how history has changed in different lands and different places, in different centuries and among different peoples. Let's see how history develops, what disappears and what emerges. History has shown me that things will get better. The situation is good, it can get better. It will get even better. And Europe will inevitably improve, in every respect.

Sefa: Has something happened recently that you believed would not happen, for example, the liberation of Kosovo?

Qosja: I have been in Pristina for sixty-six years. I think I know how the earth breathes in Pristina, in Kosovo. I finished school here, got married, started a family, achieved everything I wanted here. I did not expect that after achieving a free and independent Kosovo, some evil phenomena, behaviours, actions, deeds, would emerge so fast and so quickly in our lives. I know a lot of people; I grew up with them. Now some of them have turned into different people. They have changed for the worse, and I did not anticipate this.

Sefa: You mean after the war?

Qosja: Yes, now, in this reality, in this democracy of ours. Those great ideals that we had have been put inside the pockets of suits and coats! The good will we felt and the

sacrifices we made for one another have been replaced by selfishness. Those sincere feelings have been replaced by lies and deception!

Sefa: Who and what influenced this?

Qosja: The great Winston Churchill once said that democracy is not perfect, but we have nothing better. You gain freedom, but it is difficult to know how to use it. We are abusing both freedom and democracy. And, as a result of this abuse, these phenomena have emerged to darken our lives and our reputation in front of others. The people in power, a number of them, think of employing only their own people, their relations, their kin, their party members, their friends, whether they deserve it or not. Ability, talent, knowledge - these don't matter. They are not the criteria for finding a job, for being employed. The criteria that matter are how closely connected you are, your affiliation, party connection, friendly relations, blood relations with those in power. The rulers of Kosovo have failed the moral, political, democratic, national exam today.

Sefa: Are you optimistic about this government currently being formed?

Qosja: Europe and America have embassies here. The ambassadors know the people in power. They say few words to them about the situation in Kosovo. But they must play their part for Kosovo to be liberated from the corrupt, from the sultans of corruption and nepotism. Without Kosovo's liberation from them, there can be no democracy here, no justice, no human rights, no equal treatment of human dignity, but the diplomatic representatives of the European Union and the United States are not playing this part. They should and can play their part and achieve the impact expected by the citizens.

Sefa: But I have the impression, especially with regard to Lëvizja Vetëvendosje [Self-Determination Movement, a Kosovar political party], which includes “self-determination” in its name, that it does not want them to play this role?

Qosja: They have an obligation to play this role. Lëvizja Vetëvendosje is bound by the changes it promised, set out in its manifesto and interviews, in the election campaign. But, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje faces many obstacles, including obstacles posed by its own ally, the Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës [Democratic League of Kosovo—LDK]!

Sefa: You are a serious critic of the LDK?

Qosja: The Democratic League is a party with a history full of flaws, distortions, injustice, and servility that is kept quiet, as they do not want others to know about it all. They don't want others to know, as they don't want it to be dealt with. One day, it will come out into the open, and things will be examined. It is all part of a history that does them no honour. All those weaknesses and evils are being expressed right now.

Sefa: Now, in the formation of the government, in the coalition negotiations?

Qosja: Yes, in the coalition negotiations. You see, the LDK didn't win the election. Lëvizja Vetëvendosje won the election. LDK was the second party, but it is behaving like the winner with its attitude and demands!

Sefa: Is a government by these two parties together acceptable to you?

Qosja: As I heard last night, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje and the LDK are promising to form the government soon, but I do not think that government will survive. No. They are opposites in everything, in political biography, ideas, programs, ethics, etc.

Sefa: What is the weakness of this government?

Qosja: The LDK is the weakness, the evil, the downfall of this government.

Sefa: So that government will not survive because of the LDK?

Qosja: Of course.

Sefa: Are there some old structures in the LDK that ...

Qosja: Yes, there are old structures—fossils, actually. The League of Communists of Kosovo [Lidhja e Komunistëve e Kosovës—LKK] became the Democratic League of Kosovo. Of course, the LKK changed its name, changed some activities and actions, but the LDK still has the mentality of the League of Communists, a violent mentality toward society and democracy. In fact, the LDK lacks the capacity to understand that Kosovo needs young people, young boys and girls with knowledge, hard work, new behaviour, a new political ethic, and new patriotism.

Sefa: Does Lëvizja Vetëvendosje have this?

Qosja: Yes, of course, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje has this content. It is a unique party, with a unique program, unique views, unique goals, and unique concepts, all of which Kosovo needs for political and institutional construction.

Sefa: Now we've reached the present. An important question for us is, how did you imagine 2020, the current year? Did you imagine it as it is today?

Qosja: I thought that Kosovo would have stable institutions, but it is no way near having stable institutions. Nor has it democratized. It has become a privatised state run by a few despots! Primitive!

Sefa: It is not yet in Europe - did you think that Kosovo would be in Europe by this time?

Qosja: No, I didn't think Kosovo could be in Europe before Albania. I knew that Albania and Kosovo would receive Europeanising requests in order to be admitted into the European Union. That's understandable.

Sefa: As for your work, your own work, are you happy with what you have done so far, or are you still writing something?

Qosja: It is not good for a writer to be happy with his creative work.

Sefa: Very well.

Qosja: I will publish a new novel.

Sefa: It's been a long time since you wrote a novel, I think. When was the last?

Qosja: I'll give you the last novel that I wrote, *Bijtë e askujt* ["The Sons of Nobody"].

Sefa: What year was it published?

Qosja: 2010.

Sefa: Were you obstructed a little by politics, perhaps? (Laughs)

Qosja: No, but I've been dealing with some other articles as well. And also I am older and I can't work with the same will and enthusiasm that I used to have (smiles).

Sefa: Let's move on to the last topic. It's about Europe: how do you imagine it in fifty years' time, that is, we're talking about 2070? Where will the European project be? Will it have integrated more deeply, or not?

Qosja: A little while ago I talked about Europe, and I said briefly what I wanted to say. Yes, I read some authors who write about Europe. There are pessimists, pessimists who write desperately about the future of Europe. Me? I believe in the future of Europe; I believe and I want to believe. Europe has always had wise people, clever people, who have done a lot, not only for Europe, but also for humanity. Those people will not let Europe decline. I think that Europe will be rebuilt, developed, enriched, institutionalised—better than it is today. We see that in Europe there are corrupt people, there is a corrupt bureaucracy today in Europe. I hope that Europe will be liberated from them and will become a cleaner Europe in the political, democratic, social, moral, and ethical sense, so I believe in the future of a better Europe. The world needs a united Europe.

Sefa: Are you afraid that mistakes made in the past will be repeated in Europe? Wars, nationalism, Brexit?

Qosja: Unexpected things, it is said, can rule the world. You can't exclude the unexpected, but I think the European Union, the EU, will be preserved as a whole, with some institutions that will improve the organisation of Europe. Some reforms are necessary to improve its organisation. A reformed, united Europe can confront unexpected challenges.

Sefa: Do you trust in the younger generations, including my age group, who are between twenty and thirty years old? Will they take this project forward?

Qosja: I think they are the future we want for Europe, of course, with some experienced old hands, too.

Sefa: Those who, maybe even today, actually we haven't started yet, but I believe it will happen someday, that when we are asked, "What are you," we will say, "European," maybe, and will no longer say German or Albanian (laughs).

Qosja: I . . . I would like, I want, I ask to be called Albanian-European (smiles).

Sefa: I call myself that too: Albanian-European. What advice do you have for young people, with all your experience and work?

Qosja: Here is one piece of advice. Montesquieu, one of the founders of the philosophy of democracy, has an opinion that I would like to be remembered, and repeated often. He said that the tyranny of the prince—of the prince, of the ruler—is less harmful to the general interest than the apathy of the people. I want you, the younger generation, not to be apathetic. To be active, to be hard workers, to have demands, because only in this manner, with your active, hardworking behaviour, with your demands, your ideas, your desires, your rights, will you drive Europe forward, as we wish.

So that's all I wanted to say at this time about the great ideal called the European Union, which is invaluable not only to Europeans, but to the entire planet, called Earth. This most beautiful and significant planet in the universe.

Sefa: Thank you, Professor, for finding time for this conversation. I know it took a little longer than planned, but it was very important.

Qosja: I also thank you.