

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH SRETEN ĐUROVIĆ

Belgrade | Date: July 4, 2017

Duration: 136 minutes

Present:

1. Sreten Đurović (Speaker)
2. Marijana Toma (Interviewer)
3. Boris Šebez (Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() – emotional communication

{ } – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:

[] – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Marijana Toma: We are starting with the interview. Today it is July 4, 2017. Can you introduce yourself, tell me your name, where were you born?

Sreten Đurović: I can introduce myself. I am Đurović Sreten, born in '52 in the village of Slatina, back then it was part of the municipality of Pristina, now it is part of the municipality of Kosovo Polje.

Marijana Toma: This is a village near?

Sreten Đurović: Near the airport, near the Airport of Pristina.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, can you tell me something about your childhood, family, where is your family from?

Sreten Đurović: My family...My brother was two when he came here in 1914, they moved from Toplica. While my mother, she is...they came in 1918, not in '18 but in '22, in the village of Old Gracko. My mother is Drašković, while my father is Đurović.

Marijana Toma: Where did your mother's family come from?

Sreten Đurović: Same, from Montenegro, same. My parents' fathers both are from Montenegro, but they lived here on the border with Toplica.

Marijana Toma: What did your parents do?

Sreten Đurović: My father was a clerk, he worked for the municipality. He was very active as a member of a post-war staff. My mother was a housewife. We were nine children, but three of them died during the war and only six of us remained, and when we fled as refugees, my other brother and two other sisters died. Now we are only three children.

Marijana Toma: Tell me something about how you grew up? When was this?

Sreten Đurović: A happy and beautiful childhood. This is something that one cannot put into words, it has to be felt, but it was very beautiful. We grew up in a normal setting where everybody knew

everybody, with mutual respect, we spoke similar languages. We spoke a little Albanian and a little Serbian, it was beautiful, it was really beautiful. We had good neighbors. We grew up, I am telling you, in that big setting with a lot of children and it was very good. I mean, all the Serbian and *šiptarske*¹ families had a lot of children and it was very good for everyone. It was a simple but healthy, beautiful and happy life. Every morning we woke up happy, pleased that we would meet and hang out with each other.

Marijana Toma: Was the village you lived in a mixed one?

Sreten Đurović: There were more Albanians than Serbs, but there were quite some Serbs. Around twenty-thirty percent of the population were Serbs.

Marijana Toma: You told me that you were born in '54? Are you?

Sreten Đurović: That's true.

Marijana Toma: So you went to school in '61?

Sreten Đurović: That's true. I went to school in the village of Velika Slatina. It was a four-years school, with mixed classes until the fourth grade, the first, second, third, fourth. After that, we went to Kosovo Polje from Slatina, for the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade, so we would travel to school. For some time, we went there by foot, later when the bus line from Slatina to Vrella started working, we would take the bus. So, in the morning, we all travelled with that bus.

Marijana Toma: So you went to high school in Pristina?

Sreten Đurović: In Pristina.

Marijana Toma: Which high school did you go to?

Sreten Đurović: The High School of Economics.

Marijana Toma: And, did you plan to work after that?

Sreten Đurović: Well...

Marijana Toma: To continue working in the village?

Sreten Đurović: There were many plans, but I got employed very soon. I went into the military and after that I got employed and started working in freight forwarding, international freight forwarding company Jugošped. Then in '77 together with the director Kisić Nedeljko we founded Kosovašped, we were a very successful firm. And in the '90s, I left it and founded my own firm, which dealt with freight forwarding as well. I had forty employees, half of them were Albanians, and this was during a very difficult time, during '91- '92.

¹ Derogatory term referring to Albanians from Kosovo aiming to make a difference between them and those from Albania.

Those who worked for me, I know that there were words being said to them like, “You are working for the Serb, this and that...” I say, “Look, are your children living well? Doesn’t matter whether you work for the Romani, Chinese, if your children are living well, don’t let yourself on the street.” They understood that life goes on, this is existence and they never had any problem. We got along very well, we understood each other. What do I say, when one is happy in his own home, it is easier for them to face things. And so, life continued like this until ‘99, then in ‘99 what was very bad arrived and we all went wherever we could.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, when did you get married?

Sreten Đurović: I got married in ‘82.

Marijana Toma: And where was this?

Sreten Đurović: In my village. My wife was studying medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, she was in the fourth year in stomatology and then she came to the village where our oldest son, Luka was born. My father died in ‘82 and Luka is... my father’s name was Luka and my son’s name is Luka, my son was born in April 1983 earlier than a full year after my father’s death. It is coincidental that my father was buried on May 4, on the same day as Tito. This was almost... more than a thousand people attended my late father’s funeral, and among them, there were many Albanians, even the *hodža*² of our village was there.

Then the cousins came, cousins from my mother’s side came from Vrbas, and, when they came here, there were big demonstrations on May 4, ‘92, there were big demonstrations in Pristina. They faced many difficulties on their way to our village. When they saw how many people were gathered, our neighbors said, “What is this?”

And now, those who came [and were] on the side could not understand, they couldn’t understand that Albanians were attending my father’s funeral. Miftar, who worked with my late father at the municipality, gave a speech and cried. And this seemed very unclear to people. But it was obvious that in that environment, people didn’t care about political issues. They worked, some in the village, some in the fields, at the Obilić Power Plant, in the village of Belaćevac. People were rather afraid, and the situation got worse.

But it happened, it happened that it began to boil over during the ‘90s and the following years, the devil took things into his own hands, and we started hating each other without reason. I don’t hate anyone in this world, but they had some ideas, they were stupid. Everything was stupid because people must live with each other, they must help each other, work and benefit together, do business, everything that comes with living has to... I say, we have a saying in our village, even the animals caress each other, we have to help each other and meet just like we do here in Belgrade.

Marijana Toma: In fact, I wanted to ask, since I didn’t have the chance to talk with many people of your age who remember things so well. About the ‘80s, when you talk about your father’s funeral, this speaks about a community?

Sreten Đurović: Yes.

² Serb: *hodža*, local Muslim clergy, mullah, muezzin.

Marijana Toma: On the other hand, we know about the existing tensions of that time. How did this look, since you were very active, you worked?

Sreten Đurović: How did it look? I will tell you how it looked. It looked strange and indescribable. How do people rationalize something that might not exist, let's say it exist, so what? Do we have to take to the streets and tell them that this is a problem? No, we could sit on a table just as they do today. After each disagreement they come and find a solution, but I believe it is good to talk and find solutions before the disagreement happens. A longer dialogue would be better. But us, not us, but it was somebody's interest to cause this disagreement that wasn't good for anyone, to go to the streets and destroy everything as a sign of revolt. Destroying things is not an expression of revolt.

Marijana Toma: What was the demand back then?

Sreten Đurović: The demand was that the food of students is not good,³ this and that, some unreasonable stuff that wasn't true. For the students who lived in the dormitories, it was better than their own houses. However, they would live in the dormitory for free and they had everything there.

What do you want now? I don't know, I don't understand this. But I believe that this was like that, because then I moved just across the street in front of the dormitories, and I looked at them. From the '80s these demonstrations started taking place more often and they were initiated by someone, I don't know who that someone is. Those who are looking for democracy. I don't know whether I am right or not, but I know that it is not going well. It does not go well if we push someone to demand justice on the street, this is the greatest stupidity in my eyes. You go to the relevant institutions, send the request for them to find a solution, but going on the streets and destroying something then saying, "I don't like that you have white hair." This is stupidity, but this has an effect.

Marijana Toma: Tell me, now this is about your life. Do you only have one son, or how many children do you have?

Sreten Đurović: No, I have two sons, Luka and Lazar, they were born there. It was a misfortune that I had to take them from Pristina to be born in Kruševac. These tensions, this and that, children here, these stupidities, but because of my patience, I said that I wouldn't try to convince anyone, let's go to Kruševac, and they were born there but they returned and we lived in Pristina. We lived in the Bregu i Diellit and then my children went to school there. I worked, I told you I was successful.

My company was ranked 127th among 66.000 enterprises in the former Yugoslavia. We worked. I wasn't biased. When parties came to me, I didn't allow them to involve me in stuff, but I invited them inside and finished it during the conversation. As they were drinking coffee, we finished their work and this was my biggest advertisement, the parties themselves. I have, for example, among one hundred percent of parties, eighty percent of them were Albanians.

Marijana Toma: They used the services of your company?

³ This refers to the protests that began in 1981 to demand the status of republic for Kosovo and to the subsequent state repression. The protests first began as a sign of revolt against the low quality food served to the students in the canteen.

Sreten Đurović: My freight forwarding services. I had Albanian friends who had freight forwarding companies and they would ask me, “What do you do to make them to come to you?” I don’t do anything, I just tell them the truth. Truth is painful but healthy.

Marijana Toma: Why did you abandon the state job, this is...?

Sreten Đurović: Let me tell you, I have...The time began, how is it called, the time when companies started opening... And I always was very dynamic and I wanted to see whether I can find myself doing this job and I was very successful because there was no job that couldn’t be done by me. Everything had to be finished and it takes a lot of effort for this to be made possible. And when you define a line, then it moves smoothly. People think that it is easy. It is not easy, it is very difficult, but when you have a good team, a listening team, when people listen to you, things move more smoothly.

Marijana Toma: And how was it for you? You told me that your company was very successful. Where did you work, all over Yugoslavia, in Kosovo, right?

Sreten Đurović: Back then, I worked mostly in Kosovo, then in near Leskovc, because at that time we didn’t have such... Then the torments begun and everything else, then there was no, how to say, good moments to expand all over Yugoslavia. It was our goal, but our goals were small.

Marijana Toma: Did you talk, I mean, did you have Albanian friends at that time, did you speak to each other when the tensions of the middle ‘80s started?

Sreten Đurović: We understood each other very well with ordinary people, but nobody asks the ordinary people. I mean, a people is a, how to say, a package...Because my nationality...not to express myself this way, but what can the people do? When the flows come, you have to go with the people, where else would you go, what else would you do? We talked a lot about what we were going to do, so it was on television and everywhere else.

Those were difficult times, I mean, unfortunate times, I don’t even know. I talk to my friends and my relatives now and we talk about how beautifully we got along. But however, we allowed to be led by those that had nothing good on their minds, they only created tensions, and we all are those who supported those tensions. This turned out to be very bad for everyone, not only for us. I am not separating Serbs from Albanians here, it was very difficult for everyone.

One has to imagine their life in a setting where these... When I tell people in Belgrade and Serbia that even our dogs respected each other there and didn’t want to bark at each other, and this harmony is destroyed then, what else am I supposed to say? I mean, even the animals respected each other, imagine the people. My young sister, my youngest sister who had died, she worked as a nurse. She would dress in Albanian traditional clothes and drive the car, everybody would ask her, “Whose is this? Our first neighbor’s name was Fejza, and she would say, “I am the daughter of uncle Fejza.”

Marijana Toma: When you talk about the tensions, how difficult was it to have a normal life and then have all this?

Sreten Đurović: Let me tell you something, only one thing, it is very difficult. You talk normally to ordinary people, but somebody comes who feels disturbed by it, I am telling you, somebody is disturbed by the fact that you walk on your slippers? These are things that I don’t know how to

explain. Because when one wants, two parties are needed for a disagreement, I say, “Leave me alone, I don’t have time for this.” And so on.

I didn’t want to get hurt or hurt anyone because I know that this is not good and we, the ordinary people cannot find a solution for the situation. What can I improve? To say that this one is right and the other is not? This was led by the politics in a higher level, so that we, the ordinary people, the mortals, could choose. And so, I don’t know, we spoke, but our voice had no effect. It was easier for us not to talk about this but talk about easier everyday things, help each other on what we could and so on.

Marijana Toma: And when everything began...You founded your company in the ‘90s, right?

Sreten Đurović: That’s true.

Marijana Toma: And how is this, however, the bad times had begun? Was this still the period in Yugoslavia where people lived well more or less?

Sreten Đurović: We lived well. I lived, I mean, I would never change my life “down⁴” there with any other country around the globe. I mean, we had harmony, it was good, we all knew each other, things would get done in time. I call Fehmi “My dear,” but it doesn’t matter who I call, “One has to come ‘down’ there for some work.” They say, “Let them come, we will get everything done. We will get everything done before he even comes.”

These are the benefits we had because of knowing each other. I mean, it was the same with those working in the municipality, hospital, faculty. People still call me today, “Do you know anyone there?” To enroll their daughters or son in the faculty.

Marijana Toma: And this is, we are returning to this again. You worked in Kosovo and the south of Serbia?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, mostly. Even though I had parties from central Serbia, from Belgrade, I had a high number of parties. I mean, there was no problem until ‘98-’99, when the problems, when the noises began.

Marijana Toma: How was it at that time? At the time when the tensions of the ‘90s begin, this is the time when the thing with employment and education happened?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, the expulsions. Let me say something, it would be stupid if I tried to come to conclusions because I wasn’t involved in this. Now, some quit their jobs and some were fired, but this started to be done in an orchestral way. You know how, one might have been fired, the other one quit and referred to the constitution of ‘74. And I don’t know, such things. I was never involved in any political group, not that I didn’t want, but if you want the truth, these things were not good for both sides. This is the problem and I, you know, I always looked at it, I wanted to work and not get involved in empty tales, because demagoguery is one very harmful thing. I don’t know anything about that, I only knew how to work well and I was very successful at that. The problem was that I couldn’t say that

⁴ Down is a derogatory term referring to Kosovo, meaning that Belgrade is the center.

something was black, if something was black to me, it couldn't be white at the same time, because you have to look the truth in the eyes.

If only everybody told the truth, we wouldn't have reached this point, but we all lied saying that it is better that way, how come it was better? It will be beautiful only if you work. Empty tales never brought anything good to anyone, and they never gave anything good to anyone. This gift that I have given to you, I expect you to give me something in return. Whether you are going to return it in the same size or even greater, the great requires something greater, a greater service from you. These are the problems.

Marijana Toma: Tell us how did your life look back then, were there problems, tensions? You lived in Bregu i Diellit, this is one of the best neighborhoods in Pristina?

Sreten Đurović: That's true. Let me tell you something, there were no tensions until it began in '98-'99, I didn't have problems, I didn't feel them, maybe because I was very busy with work, but my people didn't have problems either. The noises, divisions and curfews began in '98, this and that, and it started feeling insecure, then people started getting home earlier.

Marijana Toma: What does this look like?

Sreten Đurović: This was terrible. What does it look like? It looks terrible. Until yesterday, you could hug, kiss and work together, I speak Albanian fluently. There are no chances for somebody to notice that I am Serbian by my speech, for me it was a pleasure to speak Albanian, to be able to help, the other party maybe didn't speak it well, but they noticed that I spoke well and then they felt comfortable so it was a lot easier to get work done.

How to say, for me it didn't represent a big problem, but it caused a lot of problems to most of the people, terrible problems, especially when rape, beatings and other things that are not beautiful began. And then people, imagine if it happens to you... and then all the people of the neighborhood say why should we let something like that happen to us, so they go back to their shells and go silent, they watched what was happening, every day it got worse and the pressure on people to commit crimes got more powerful everyday.

Then there were various stories, he killed this, this happened between those, then this would turn into euphoria and big trouble would take place, people had to wait for the next morning to come and decide whether to escape or stay. I stayed there until June 12 or 18, '99. What after that... it was a difficult moment when I had to decide whether to escape or not...

When I left Pristina, I had a Golf and I put some English sneakers on, I had a pair of sneakers of Zastava, English Zastava, I removed the car tables and I drove towards the border, I thought even if they stop me in the border, I will tell them that I am driving the journalists, I also had the computer in my car, but nobody stopped me and I passed, but it was very intense. Everything was intense and I would never want to remember those days again, do you understand? It was terrible, terrible.

Marijana Toma: You were in Kosovo all the time during '98-'99?

Sreten Đurović: I was here until June, '99. On June 18, '99, I came here. My wife and my children came here earlier, in May 24 and I bought the house here. Also my mother died, but I forgot to tell you about

this, my mother died on the second day of bombings. It was terrible, I don't know how to describe this. I mean, I wouldn't wish that experience to anyone in the world, when the parents die and you don't even know how to bury them. You cannot dig a grave, not because of my neighbors in the village, I know for sure that they would help.

The bombings were ongoing, and people were in a kind of, I don't know how to explain this, a kind of fear. Then there were stories that if you go to the village they will shoot you. But what? I had decided to bury my mother near my father's grave.

Marijana Toma: In the cemetery?

Sreten Đurović: In the Slatina cemetery. I could bury her in Pristina as well, but I said no, I will bury her in the village. Poor her, she died because of fear. She got hypertension on the second day because there were a lot of children around and she got hypertension and died before we arrived at the hospital and then we buried her in the village. These are terrible things. After that, I go every year on her death anniversary.

I went to the village every year on my mother's death anniversary since the very first year. One year, I got blocked in the village because there was a lot of snow and when my neighbors saw me...First, I am very close to them and I swore on them. What they did was that the whole village came to help me get the car out of the snow. One year, in my mother's seventh death anniversary, I went there with one of my friends, Ramadan from Vučitrn, they are eighteen children. Bora Čorba has a song for them, "Serbs and Croats threaten us, the Krasniqi family wait for the eighteenth child." They are eleven brothers, and Ramadan is a great chess player and he came with me to my mother's grave to light a candle.

A strange thing happened then. Where our graves are, a bad thing has happened that I don't like, they have demolished our graves. Who is disturbed by the dead? They removed the graves, now this cemetery is like a bush, I don't justify this, this is not good. If you cannot agree with someone, don't do stupid things, this is a holy setting, do you understand? The dead are here, should you do this to them? I don't like that.

Let's say, our cemetery there is full of trash, they throw garbage, it is destroyed, a catastrophe. Maybe someone will think about it that it needs maintenance and it needs to be beautiful, so that we prove to the world that we care about the dead, I mean, we are not talking about the living. And I was telling you, on that anniversary with Ramadan, I entered the cemetery and it was demolished, the tombstones were demolished, he stopped some steps further and I lit the candle, you know, it was lighting. I lit one for my father and one for my mother and they blew out simultaneously.

I told Ramadan, "They blew out, can you give me the lighter?" Because I don't smoke. He came to me and when I turned back, the candles were lit. I thought I was hallucinating, I thought it just seemed to me that they were blown out but when we finished, I made the cross and left for home. There is a pear tree after us, just where the graves of my parents are and the tree, only that pear tree started shaking and making a noise.

Marijana Toma: On its own?

Sreten Đurović: On its own. And Ramadan asked me, he was all pale like a paper, “Hey *bre*,”⁵ he asked, “what is this?” I said, “Ramadan, I don’t know, but there is a greater power.” That is why I feel bad that somebody who has no idea about normal life, forced us to become like them, instead of respecting and loving each other.

I went to Ramadan to express my condolences when his mother died and everybody knew that I was a Serb. His mother died after the event that I told you about. Everybody knew that I was a Serb and everybody respected me. These are, let me tell you something, for some moment I felt good and for some other of course I felt bad because his mother had died. I expressed him my condolences but I felt good about the fact that people were respecting me. This is something very valuable. When I go to my village, I go there once a month and my wife says, “It costs you more to do your hair than it costed Ceca.”⁶ I go there to cut my hair every month and above all, I go by car, then we sit and drink and we spend two hundred to three hundred euros.

Marijana Toma: You go to Kosovo to the hairdresser?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, to the hairdresser. I go to the village. There are eight hotels in my village. It is mostly difficult for me when I see, it is very difficult when I see that the youth world is used so little, and they have nothing to make a living from. Suffering, suffering, five euros, seven euros, there are no jobs. The worst thing is that there are no jobs, while they have been promised trucks, millions, nothing, very bad. What did the international community do? They didn’t build any factory “down” there. They sold *Elektroprivreda* [Electro-Economy] in order to make a street there and only ten families live there. Everything is a catastrophe, I don’t know how everything will turn out to be but it is not good, not good.

Part Two

Marijana Toma: I would like to go back a little, you mentioned that your mother died on the second day of the bombings and didn’t finish telling about how you buried her?

Sreten Đurović: We hardly managed to bury her, we struggled to find people to dig the grave. The bombings were ongoing, the airport was near, two kilometers from us. And there were bombs being launched every minute and poor her, the first day when the bombs were being thrown from the Skopje direction, it seemed like they were being launched in our direction and this created fear and animosity. She died because of fear. She told me, “I went through one war,” and that forced me to buy this house. I bought this house in five minutes.

Marijana Toma: You bought it before the war?

Sreten Đurović: No, I bought this house in February, ’99 and she forced me to do it one month before.

Marijana Toma: How did she force you, what did she say?

⁵ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English *bro*, brother.

⁶ The speaker is talking about Svetlana Ražnatović Ceca, a famous folk singer in Serbia. She is also the widow of Arkan, known for his war crimes around former Yugoslavia.

Sreten Đurović: She said... I didn't even think about moving, at all. Even if I was crazy, I wouldn't think about moving, not even my children or my wife would think about it. And she told me, "My son..." Nobody from us bought anything, my sisters and my brothers didn't buy anything. My sister still lives in Gračanica. She told me, "Buy something so that we won't have to suffer like in the last war. I lived for a long time in train wagons and we didn't have a shelter. Buy a house somewhere where we can shelter if something happens." I told her, "Don't worry, mother. Don't think about the worst." "My son, please, I know. I have been through all that, I have seen everything.

And what was I supposed to do, I listened to her and bought this house in two minutes. I gave the owner as much as he asked for. I didn't have time, the shootings would begin as soon as it would get dark and nobody was on the streets. They killed Donka, a driver of Tourist Kosovo, as soon as they noticed...because he knew who was on the mountains after 20.00, they knew that nobody drives at that time, except somebody who is a Serb, because Albanians wouldn't go out. And then I bought the house here and we came here. They came in March 24, on the bombings day and I came in June 18 and my mother...

Marijana Toma: And you stayed there alone?

Sreten Đurović: Alone, alone.

Marijana Toma: Were you in touch with anyone? The company didn't work, right?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, it worked until 15-20 days before June, the company worked, we worked. The products were shipped, you know, however...

Marijana Toma: How was life in Pristina back then, this is...?

Sreten Đurović: Very bad.

Marijana Toma: Pristina was bombed that much...?

Sreten Đurović: It was very bad, let me tell you. When Albanians started fleeing, I felt very bad. A neighbor came and asked me, "Drive me to Zamoka." I said, "I cannot drive you anywhere." "Why?" "Because they will kill both of us. How do I know who is on the streets. Stay here. If you need food, this or that, everything is here, I can bring you food to the entrance of the house, I can even do this by car."

I felt very bad because I couldn't help him or drive him there, mainly because we both were exposed to problems. If somebody stopped us on the street, "See, you are driving for money," or something like that. I asked them to stay here, as far as food goes, I could provide that for them. It was difficult, it was very difficult.

Marijana Toma: What about the streets, everyday life?

Sreten Đurović: On the streets there were, people would go, it was obvious, you know, they were cold, the relations were cold. It was difficult, it was difficult.

Marijana Toma: So, when you bought this house, you bought it with the aim of moving here or just to have it?

Sreten Đurović: I bought it just to have it. Just to fulfill my mother's wish, but she was right. Had I not bought it back then, I would remain on the streets now. I mean, or in a collective building. It was very difficult at that time, whatever you would do "down" there. I had problems later, my office was in the center of Pristina, two hundred meters square right in the city center, in front of Grand Hotel, and I gave it to a man, I exchanged it with Avala, but the man cannot use it, some people came, I mean, from the international community.

Marijana Toma: How come he cannot use it?

Sreten Đurović: He cannot enter the office space, they don't allow him.

Marijana Toma: Did you give it to him? Does he have the papers?

Sreten Đurović: I have the papers and he is the authorized person. He has the papers, he is signed in the cadaster in Pristina but he cannot use it. I led a battle with the international community for eleven years, with the director of the agency who returns the property, Scott Boven, Scott Boven. I told him, "Man, I am in an unjust position, unjust. I have all the papers that prove that this property is mine, this property is mine. Now you have allowed a person who occupied it to live there. Now I have to prove it, but he shouldn't stay there."

When I went there for the first time, the number of the lawsuit is 101, 101 is the number of the lawsuit. I went there to identify the office space, I said, "This is the door." He photographed it, then I returned after one year and they said, "Are you crazy?" I asked, "Why?" "You told us the wrong door." "Do you think I am crazy?" And I saw that they were playing with me and I said, "Let's go then. This is the same door as the last time." He acted surprised, these are unlimited games. This is not right.

To me this is an ugly photograph, when somebody tries to fool you, to me it is an ugly photograph. You are the legitimate owner of a space, you prove it and the one who is not its owner uses it. I mean, it seems stupid for me to go there, the Albanian who bought it from me was together with me, I went to the municipality and paid ten thousand euros last year, ten thousand euros for something that I don't use. I went to the fourth floor to the Director of Finances and I complained because why did I have to pay and I told him everything in Albanian and he told me, "Why are you insisting so much for that Serb?" I said, "Do you know what they did to us during the war? They did it to all of us." I started telling him how what they did, they did to all of us, not only to them. "Let's not talk about it anymore." I told him, "My neighbor, I am that person."

These are things that...I went to Drenas, I drove to Drenas with Belgrade car tables while I was working for Feronikel, it happened that somebody in Prizren threatened me pointing towards me, {shows with hands}, as I was driving there with Belgrade car tables. I stopped and said, "Why are you threatening me?" I spoke Albanian and he was like, "I am sorry, I thought you were a Serb." "Yes, I am a Serb, so what?" And then he left. These are things that...

Marijana Toma: Tell me when you came here, did you open...What did you do?

Sreten Đurović: No, for one month, I...

Marijana Toma: What did you do?

Sreten Đurović: I dealt with freight forwarding and the company still exists. But for one month I was in a kind of depression, I was mentally blocked, I felt nausea, I don't know. People would call me from up there, here and there, I don't know. The worst thing is getting lost in your own garden, you look all around and don't see a road, you only walk around the same circle like a crazy puppy.

And then I started working here in this basement, this and that, I calmed down and things started...You know when you are imposed something you don't like. Just as if I pushed you to become a surgeon when you don't like it.

I was so lost that I took a mill and I changed it and then everything happened. I wouldn't wish it to anyone, I mean, to be imposed something they don't like, I have no willingness, but you are imposed and you have to take it. These are things that happen after those crazy years, do you understand? Now they say that they will return my property, but what? Who returned, who will return? Nobody will return?

They come and tell me, "Come run for minister." People, I will only have personal benefit from that, only personal benefit, somebody will offend me for that and then my children and my deceased parents will tell me, "Wait, you only came here for the money?" I never wanted this, there is no money which I would do that for.

Marijana Toma: They offered you to be politically active?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, yes.

Marijana Toma: When?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, right after the plural system began "down" there and I say, "No, this is not a job for me." I cannot look someone in the eye and lie to them, these are things that require a stomach to digest.

Marijana Toma: Can you talk, can you tell me something about your life here. How did you start here, how did you create your life in Avala?

Sreten Đurović: Let me tell you, my life here is suffering. As far as it concerns me, personally. It is good for my children. If we look at it this way, I had a good time in eighty percent of the cases, I bought the house in Avala there, there are good people whom I worked with, whom I was close to, to swear at, to go to them in the middle of the night and say, "Wake up!" Here there are no such relations, because the people are...

You know how, they are right because most of us are not from here, and eighty percent of the people have lost and want to return what they have lost all at once and look for various ways to come to that, but you can't. Then those who are *starobeograđani*,⁷ they are right, what now, somebody who has just

⁷ Serb: *Starobeograđani*, old Belgraders.

come here tries to rob you, it is not right. That is why people keep the distance, but my children are well.

Marijana Toma: How old were they when they came here?

Sreten Đurović: Luka was born in '83 so he was 16 in '99, while Lazar, the younger one was eleven years old. They adapted immediately, however...It was more difficult for the older one, but the younger one was a child, on the fourth grade.

Marijana Toma: They enrolled in school right away?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, yes, right away here.

Marijana Toma: What do they do now?

Sreten Đurović: They both work with me. We worked with freight forwarding for some other people and two years ago we were fifty thousand euros minus, because of the custom, I paid for it and when I went to ask people for money, they were like, "Wait, did this cost you five thousand euros?" "Yes, it cost me five thousand euros, but that is my money." Five here, five there, and so we went bankrupt. Now we keep the coffee bar, the restaurant in Avala, *Stari Majdan*.

Marijana Toma: And who works in the restaurant, you?

Sreten Đurović: My younger son and I work there, and the older one comes to help time after time. There are waiters and cooks there as well.

Marijana Toma: What is the total number of people working for you?

Sreten Đurović: There are many people working for me, who are employed but don't work much. There are tens of people, twelve, thirteen people, here there are two, three, four, six. There are around fifteen-twenty people working.

Marijana Toma: And tell me, I wanted to ask you... in fact when we talked today you mentioned it, before this interview, you told me that you speak a fluent Albanian. You mentioned this. Where did you learn Albanian?

Sreten Đurović: It seems to me that I don't only speak Albanian, I dream in Albanian. I learned it there together with my neighbors and my friends, when you learn something so well, it means that you love it. Nothing can be done by force, nothing.

I mean, I have always been here, there in the village, mixed with other children. They built the minaret in our village and there was a *hodža* there, Mulla Rashid, he told me, "They will take the material from you in order to build it there in the end of the neighborhood." "You just take it, we write it down and then you give me the money." And when everything was finished, he came to me and said, "Let's make the accounting." "Let's do it," I said. He said, "How much does this cost?" I said, "Nothing, this is free of charge, pray for me as well when you go there."

Marijana Toma: In fact you, with your own material?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, I helped them as much as I could, as much as I had the chance to. But, I am telling you that I learned Albanian when we were looking after the cows, with my people, when we played soccer, we got along, we swore at each other, we fought, we did everything, we did everything when we were children.

Marijana Toma: When did you go to Kosovo for the first time after '99?

Sreten Đurović: I went immediately, around five-six months later, one year.

Marijana Toma: You weren't afraid?

Sreten Đurović: No, I wasn't afraid, why was I not afraid? Because I had done no harm to anyone. Many people told me, "Don't go!" This or that. I said, "I am going, let them kill me." There were a lot of problems, you know what? Some friends with false excuses would get away from me. Don't get away from me, I didn't get away from you when they were here, I didn't get away from you.

I went and so many people said unpleasant things about me. I went to one's office, I don't want to mention his name, "How are you, what's going on?" And he lowered his head, "I am the one who killed Albanian children, I am the one. Where are you to kill me? Don't say something like that!" There are many people who are pure. And then he started speaking and I said, "Give me the reason, the reason. I will say their names individually, Marko, Janko, this and that, have done this to me. I will say them individually, but you? Don't say such things!"

When you are not present, there are unfair things coming from both sides. Our Serbs caused problems there, only a few people thought that life has to continue in that place even tomorrow. The moment came, euphoria, you collect everything that you can, you mock the others. There are such things coming from them too, I am saying from them because of the cemetery, there is nothing else we need to say. Nothing else. Shame on them! Now the same people when I go "down" there, "Can you do this for me?" "I can do everything, I can do everything."

They come here to the hospital. I have them here in hospitals every day, I drive them, I drive them back, they come. There is not a single day that somebody doesn't come here, I mean, not even a single day. They ask me, "How much do I owe you?" I say, "Direct that to God, God will help me, and you look how things are going to turn out between you and God. Would you do the same thing for me "down" there?" You wouldn't. I mean, there are some things. They want me to help them but then the next day they are called by other people who tell them, "Why are you working for him? Are you connected with Serbs again? *bashkëpunëtor i shkive*.⁸ Do you understand? These are terrible things.

Marijana Toma: What happened to your property "down" there? Did you have to sell anything or have you taken it back already?

Sreten Đurović: No, I couldn't sell it. I couldn't sell it. The brother of the national hero, their national hero is still in my property.

⁸ Alb: *bashkëpunëtor i shkive*, literally, a collaborator of Serbs, *shkive* (pl.) being a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

Marijana Toma: Did he get there by force?

Sreten Đurović: He got it by force even though I had a two meters square property right in front of Grand Hotel. He got it by force and is settled there, his family lives there, he even threatened me by saying he is going to kill me, “Here, I am in Pristina, kill me.” He says that I have killed his father. That is not true. Everybody knows who killed his brother.

Marijana Toma: He said that you killed his brother?

Sreten Đurović: Yes. Ilir Konushevci is a national hero, Saimir Konushevci is his brother. And he illegally uses the spaces of my offices, he built upon the office spaces without my consent, that property is mine. He built upon it and the state is defending him, the state is supporting him. Shame on them, shame!

It’s been 19 years that I tell the truth, but the truth is known. Let’s ask him, “Do you have papers for this?” “No.” “Come, get out!” I have to prove that I am the owner, but he doesn’t. This is absurd. But somebody is helping them in this, even the international community. If we were equal in giving our testimonies, it would be solved already. It is absurd that he is inside and I am outside. The person whom I have sold it to cannot use it, he is an Albanian too and they don’t let him move there. They don’t let him use his property. I use his property here, while he isn’t allowed to use it there, they simply don’t let him get in there.

Marijana Toma: You exchanged it with this one?

Sreten Đurović: Yes, I made an exchange with Agim Ukiqi, he went “down” there and poor him, he has to prove all the time and I went there one thousand times, I tell the, last time I paid ten thousand euros, the taxes on property which I don’t use, such a shame! And nothing, this is a problem, a problem. It is not only me, there are a lot of people dealing with similar problems.

If one wanted to be just and real, they would simply sit on the table. You give your papers, give the papers to the other person and this would be solved in one day, it would be solved in one day. Who is supposed to know this better than the legal person? Do you have your ID or are you an inhabitant here? How? If you don’t have the extract or are not registered in the register book or you are not registered in the cadaster, how else are you going to prove it? How do you prove it? How? You have to prove it through papers and this is the truth. The way we are doing it is not right, I am proving while he is enjoying the stay inside my property. He doesn’t pay for the electricity, water, nothing. Such a shame!

Marijana Toma: What about the apartment you had in Pristina, did you sell that?

Sreten Đurović: I sold my apartment in Pristina with installment. He will finish paying tomorrow, imagine he turned it to his property without me knowing about it. If I was crazy I would have to go and prove that it is not my sign. How did you turn it into your property? I can be crazy and say, “Wait, I haven’t sold this.”

Because now there is only his wife, he died, and what if I become like, “I haven’t sold this to you. Let’s go to the graphologist and see whose the signature is?” This is something I cannot explain. Sometimes I don’t know how to explain how things happen “down” there. I mean these people, if you want to buy

something or have something, you have to make sure that when you leave something tomorrow, now the man has died, I can become cruel just like he was and go and say, “Eh, I haven’t sold this to him.” Which is true, I have no papers, I have no proof. He made an agreement that is not valid. This is a problem, but one moves on.

Marijana Toma: Are you still in touch with your friends?

Sreten Đurović: Every day, every day.

Marijana Toma: Not only those whom you do favors to, but the others as well?

Sreten Đurović: No, no, with ordinary people, friends whom I grew up with, I am in touch with them every day. I use Albanian language in Belgrade more than when I was “down” there, because I call them to talk to them. I have contacts with many people there and in Albania, I also go there pretty often. That nation is interesting for me, you know what, that nation is very interesting to me because we are very similar. I ask them, “Who hates each other mostly? Two brothers when they fight with each other.” I believe we have the same roots and that is why we have each other. It is easy to throw a bone between brothers and for them to use it, these world architects have used our anger and then they threw a bone in the wrong direction, this is catastrophic.

Marijana Toma: I wanted to ask you something for the end, would you return to Kosovo?

Sreten Đurović: I would go there by foot, right now. I would walk there. But how am I to return? I want to know that when I go to the municipality, Clinique, hospital, faculty, they won’t say, *ky shka është*⁹, he is a Serbian. Imagine the children who were born in ’99 and are twenty now, none of them speak Serbian, they all speak English. Even the older ones who back then were three, four, five years old, now are 25 and hold official positions, how do you deal with them?

During the whole time that the international community was trying to build an interethnic society, they built obstacles. They live in an enclave, everything happens in the enclave, isolating people like that is not a solution, that is not a help. In the south of Ibar, in the north of Ibar, what now, what is this all supposed to mean? These are stupidities which...they put some borders intentionally and now we say, I came here because they offered me to represent my people. How am I supposed to represent them? What if tomorrow I have to go to Drenas, nobody speaks Serbian there. What if you have to work in the cadaster that was...in Drenica there are many Serbs, how are you going to do it? You will need an interpreter, this and that.

This is not, I am saying this because I am the one who has no problem at all. I speak Albanian, I know many people who used to live there in those settings, in the enclaves who didn’t know Albanian and still don’t know, how will they make it through? What is that camp? They have to call their neighbors, their friends whom they worked with, “Please come and send me to Pristina to do something.” This is not the solution, this is a problem, this is a problem.

When they hear you speaking Serbian, there is usually somebody who wants to help you but there are some others who look at you and say, “*Çka ki?*” [Albanian: What’s up?] You are still helping them? You know, this is a problem. People want, there are people who want to help you, but then somebody

⁹ Alb: *ky shka është*, he is a *shka*, the latter being a derogatory term in Albanian used for Serbs.

shows up saying what is going on? I mean, this is not healthy. For even the slightest thing, I have to call somebody from Pristina to go and help my sister in Gračanica.

Even for the slightest thing, for a simple examination, they have to go to Mitrovica which is eighty kilometers from there, or go to Nis, or come here to Belgrade. These are unacceptable things, it is unacceptable the division that was created by the international community. You are here, but don't save me, get me closer to them. It's been twenty years since we are getting more distant from each other every day, this is a problem, this is a problem.

A project? What kind of project? We don't need projects, we need jobs, pay us, built factories, this is the project. They haven't built any factories. The international community hasn't built any factories in Kosovo. Make it a project and employ Serbs, *šiptare*, *cigani*,¹⁰ and Turks, let them work and find a common language. The Romani, it doesn't matter, romani, *cigani*, I love *cigani*. I speak *ciganski*.

These are those things. The international community should build factories "down" there, let them employ people and this is the end of the story. I will work there, I will deal with that, I will deal with that. I don't want to deal with politics, only with work. Let's create a factory in Kosovo Polje and one in Slatina, another one in Drenas, one somewhere else and let's employ people, Serbs, *šiptare*, *cigani* and everyone, and you will see how things will get better. They will never even mention that there was a war, never!

What, but he has to mention it, he bites his own nails during the whole day thinking about what happened to him, he thinks about how to escape. Ninety percent of them have passports, they took Serbian passports so that they can travel abroad. What did the international community give to them? They isolated them, they isolated their passports. They cannot make use of their passports, such a shame, such a shame!

We have one occasion with one of our friends there. His daughter got married to a guy from Kosovo who lives in Germany and she cannot live with her husband now, she needs to learn German in order to go there because this is democracy. She will learn it. She cannot learn the language here but she is forced to. She will learn German only when she gets to go to the shop, no they ask her to at least learn the basic level of German. I don't live with a German, I live with an Albanian and when I go there, the child is one year and some days old, and the girl cannot go to live in Germany, but I don't want to interfere here because they have their own rules, but this is not okay, this is not okay.

Marijana Toma: Would you like to add something for the end?

Sreten Đurović: What am I supposed to say, there is never an end. What do I say when there is never an end, there will be an end when it becomes beautiful and when those who are bringing democracy leave us space to create democracy on our own, so that we can communicate with each other, without a supervisor. It is always difficult when there is a mediator. Let us do it on our own, let us talk to each other. I would make a big change to these affairs, but without a mediator, I would talk directly to them, I don't need an interpreter, my wife is an interpreter. I would interpret from Serbian to

¹⁰ Serb: *cigani*, gypsy, derogatory term for Romani.

Serbian. Here we have the same problem, she translates to me what my sons say, the international community is doing the same thing, translating us what we have to do. We are stupid. These are the problems, here is where the problem stands.

Twenty days ago, I have a Turkish friend who lives up there in Prizren. It's been three hundred years that they keep sheep and we talk to each other on the phone and he says, "Becko, look whether there is a Romane sheep breed." I find it on the internet and buy two for him, I take them in my Peugeot car and bring them to Gnjilane. And he says, "You could never do anything better for me." "Why?" "There is no chance you can make me happier than you did by bringing me these two rams." You always have to go through the custom, one asks you why you are bringing it on this side, the other one asks you why are you taking it on that side. These are all things that aren't supposed to be happening.

It is good that Vučić wants to remove the borders, this is a good thing, unity is a good thing. So the people, the economy will get closer. Stimulation is good, one is happy when one has money, this is the best stimulation, the best remedy. As long as we don't have money, those are just empty tales, then they all get sick, aggressive and everything else. This is the problem. Give people jobs, economy and let them work. We will work, I will create jobs. I am telling you, if somebody wants to use me and my friends in order to do something there, you will see how quickly I will work there. But things move forward only through work, not through empty tales. You employ twenty people.

Let's say, there is wine in Orahovac. People are making high quality wine, let me show you the big case of high quality wine and they sell this, if it was well packed, they would sell it for ten euros, but now they sell it for two euros, poor them. Back then, up to five million liters of this Kosovo wine were sold in Belgrade. Now, they cannot even sell five liters, so, this is something that could be improved.

These are things that make us forget everything we had. And everything good will come when there is money to educate your children, to renovate your vineyards, to make progress on these things that guarantee you your future, that guarantee you a better life. None of us need anything else. The Balkans are a place where everybody writes projects on our disfavor, this is a problem. This is a big problem. There are many more problems.

Let's say, I am sorry that I cannot show it to you, exactly my Turkish friend Nehar Skender, he gave me the recipe how to make Sharri cheese, but I will make it for you next time you come and you will see what a product it is. It melts in your mouth once you taste it. There are many similar things, there are many things "down" there that are interesting for life, work, business. There are many people who worked here around Serbia, there are a lot of bakers who are still here. There are a lot of construction workers in Neimar and Ratko Mitrović, in Trudbenik, in all these companies. All these people would come here to work while "down" there, there is no work, they bite their own nails, children are unsatisfied, the family breaks apart, this and that.

My friend Ramadan from Vushtrri who has eleven brothers and seven sisters told me, fifteen years ago he had beaten his wife, he has slapped her. This is not alright, I don't support this. And then the German policeman, the American policeman who lives one floor under him had called the police, the

police had come and taken him to the police station. He told me, “I didn’t have a problem with the state, but with non-governmental organizations, Women in Black, Women in White.¹¹” Women are like three hundred evils. They had asked him, “Why did you hit her, what is your disagreement?” He said, “If we agreed, I wouldn’t hit her. You know? While my biggest problem is that you don’t invest in economy, so that we won’t have disagreements.” This was his response. “Poverty makes us have disagreements.” And then the non-governmental organizations that deal with rumours...

Let us deal with work. This is the solution to our problems. Only work and business make everything better. The whole Balkans starting from Slovenia, alright Slovenia...From Croatia down to Greece, just give us jobs, don’t lock the money and give them to us with a spoon just as they give the pills to the ill who are near death. Let us work, give us jobs. Don’t force us to deal with politics, because we are not interested in politics. We really just want to work.

Even this that you are shooting, I am not sure it will have any effect. Who will watch this and where is it going to be published? I am telling you that there are people who will listen to it and if somebody wants the success of this show, let them contact us, let them give us jobs. Just give that to us and you will see the results. You will see what kind of people we are when our pockets are full of money. We also know to wear Boss jackets and wear nice ties. Now we walk barefoot and naked and our children deal with unnatural things, our daughters and our sons. I am not against anything that is contemporary.

However, I look at all these gay parades, this is stupid. They tell me what they do, why do I have to care about what they do? I do my own stuff to but I don’t tell people about it. They live and work for 364 days and on the 365th day they say that they love this or that. Love whoever you want, nobody is stopping you from that. Which one of them had problems because they were attacked? Let them come downstairs to my coffee bar, I see them while they kiss each other, I don’t care, that’s their life. But those who want to forcibly show us what they are, yes, I am myself too. We, the other 99 percent who live a normal life, we don’t tell that we make love to our wives.

You are saying that you are blessed, are you kidding me? You have to give birth. What if [addresses the interviewer] you would do it with a woman, would you have been able to give birth? Never! They try to impose on us some unnecessary things, unnecessary. Not valuable, not valuable. There were such people even before, homosexuals, nobody did anything to them, they weren’t even noticed. It was obvious, I know that they say about *Đakovčani*,¹² they say that they are homosexuals. We lived for five hundred years {explain with hands}, I am sorry but we never had AIDS. They brought AIDS and we are afraid of it, they produced an illness.

These things are stupid. Terrible things are happening. I don’t know if this will be good for anyone. I tell my son, who is 34 and isn’t getting married, “Can it be that you have a boyfriend, bring him.” What now? I think that it is really unnatural to impose on us some things. They impose stuff. I am telling you

¹¹ Serb: *Žene u crnom*, Women in Black are a well known feminist and anti-war non-governmental group. Women in White don’t exist.

¹² Serb: *Đakovčani*, refers to people coming from Gjakova.

that my wife translates for me, it is unnatural. I don't know what to do with my children, they don't work. We only need work, work!

In '73, I drove a Morris Mini, in '73! Even when it was produced in England, people barely drove it. I had a new one. I earned, my salary was 2000 Deutsch Marks. My paternal uncle's son worked in Germany and his salary was 1500 Deutsch Marks. He worked for Mercedes, two hands and two bolts, he screwed bolts in an automatic way during the whole day. I was paid 3000 Deutsch Marks, I had a Morris Mini, money and I traveled.

I was in Greece for the first time in '74, I went there to take the Morris Mini to the car service. Do you know what we were to Greeks? We were Americans. They didn't have bananas or anything else. I would take one thousand and something dollars with me and this is a lot. But I hope that God will help us and things will change, or somebody will listen to our conversation and say, "Wait, let's see and start working, let's not deal with politics but work and see whether those 'down' thee will get calm." I guarantee that it will happen. I guarantee that it will happen.

Marijana Toma: Super. Thank you very much!

Sreten Đurović: Thank you for coming and I hope this will be an invitation to a better life, and I hope God wants somebody listen to us and helps us make this come true.

Marijana Toma: I hope so.

Sreten Đurović: If it wasn't for the hope. The most beautiful day of the life is...do you know which one is?

Marijana Toma: No.

Sreten Đurović: Tomorrow. The most beautiful day of the life is tomorrow. Every day, tomorrow, tomorrow.

Marijana Toma: Thank you very much!

Sreten Đurović: Thank you!