



By PETER TASE

A Malaise in South East Europe

The Republic of Albania, the poorest nation in South East Europe, has earned an infamous reputation for its corrupt and wealthy political elite, incompetent government leaders and for lacking a pragmatic strategy in its foreign policy implementation and defense of its regional economic interests. As a Balkan country with the size of Maryland, Albania's agrarian society with an underdeveloped and grey economy has missed a number of opportunities, over the last three decades that could have sparked Tirana's industrial ambitions and secured a constant economic growth. While there are many obstacles contributing to the nation's stagnation, over the last twenty two years in his various capacities in public service, President Ilir Meta has demonstrated a poor leadership in the implementation of Albania's Foreign Policy, and its relations with Azerbaijan, as a statesman has shown a horrible incompetency to strengthen presidential diplomacy and above all brace his nation's democratic institutions. His predecessor, President Bujar NISHANI, has worked hard to build a presidential diplomacy, a young tradition that is not uplifted by Mr. Meta, whose constitutional legitimacy is eroding while his cronies and

Russophiles are harming the Tirana-Baku strategic partnership. As the world is facing new disruptive forces and the European Union institutions are constantly evolving, Mr. Meta and his team of diplomatic advisors are slow to adapt accordingly, Albania's head of state conducts expensive trips to Washington, London and Munich engaged in a diplomacy of hallways, without any predetermined agenda nor any tangible economic benefits for his country, as the Albanian people are victims of rising income inequality that is delaying their – full European Integration - aspirations, progressive dreams and dimming their hopes.

On March 7th, 2019, President Meta traveled all the way to London to meet with Sir Alan James Carter Duncan, the British Minister of State for Europe and the Americas and also met with George Robertson, Former Secretary General of NATO. Furthermore Mr. Meta went to visit his son and daughter studying in a prestigious private school in London's exclusive suburbs, where Albania's head of state and his wife Monika Kryemadhi [1] are spending a significant portion of their wealth accumulated through illegal bribes, exploitation of the country's natural resources and from openly stealing large quantities of gold reserves from the National Treasury over twenty years ago. [2]

While Mr. Meta is openly against the massive migration of Albanian families towards Europe and has condemned the colossal brain drain that has plunged the country into social chaos, economic stagnation - making Albania into one of European countries with a low knowledge and human capital performance (becoming one of the least smart countries) in the world – has no moral authority to address these matters for as long as his family, sons and daughters of his close diplomatic advisers are abroad and ripping the fruits of industrialized world, therefore are simply not leading by example.

Nonetheless, Tirana's poorest levels of 'knowledge capital' are reflected within Mr. Meta's close circle of advisers and throughout his luxurious trips abroad, as his decrepitude fails to embrace the unbridled pace of global connectivity and recognize the vulnerabilities of multilateral diplomacy. Over the last thirty years, Albanians have suffered from a highly corrupt political elite and their potential is marginalized from securing the benefits that flow from global engagement and effective foreign policy.

On February 19th, 2019, Mr. Meta had a meeting in Berlin with his German counterpart, President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, their discussion was focused on the excellent economic bilateral cooperation and Berlin's assistance towards strengthening Tirana's democratic institutions. However Mr. Meta failed to mention Albania's interest to host in its territory the development of a new giant auto plant for Volkswagen brands; the latter is considering to open a new factory in the Balkans and Albania is one of the feasible options. [3]

Furthermore, during his visit in Germany, Mr. Meta delivered a keynote address to the Annual Conference of Small and Medium Size Enterprises of Germany, where again he failed to engage in direct contact with key leaders of German Automotive Industry. [4]

On February 15th, 2019, Mr. Meta requested and held a meeting with the President of Armenia, Mr. Armen Sarkissian, on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference. This meeting takes place exactly one month before Mr. Meta's March 15th visit to Baku, as the Albanian head of state he was invited by the Government of Azerbaijan to deliver an opening statement in the VII Global Baku Forum. Currently Albania enjoys a strong economic cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan; the continental energy project of Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) has developed the national economy of Albania and strengthened its labor competitiveness. In turn, Tirana has

maintained a biblical silence when it comes to denouncing the crimes against humanity perpetrated by Armenian Armed Forces in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan (including Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan). TAP Project has improved the infrastructure sector of Albania and the Balkan region. According to TAP Representative and CFO Yalchin Aliyev; “TAP’s Social and Environmental Investment (SEI) Program amounts to more than €14 million. Projects focus on four areas: Quality of life of local communities, with an emphasis on school rehabilitation; Capacity building in sectors relevant to the communities crossed by TAP; Livelihoods, with an emphasis on initiatives in agriculture; Donations and emergency response.” Moreover, the development of Gjon Mili Museum in the city of Korça is an investment of approximately 425,000 Euros and is part of TAP’s social and environmental investment (SEI) program. President Meta’s meeting with his Armenian counterpart is testimony to a chaotic Foreign Policy and obscure interests that only his close associates might know. The Albanian president should have focused all his energies to arrange a bilateral meeting with the U. S. Vice President Mike Pence or Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, knowing Tirana’s redundant supportive rhetoric towards Washington and Brussels. Notwithstanding his predecessor’s genuine leadership in strengthening the Tirana – Baku strategic dialogue, Mr. Meta initiated top-level bilateral contacts with Yerevan for the first time in almost three decades of democratic transition in Albania. As the top leader of Albania, Mr. Meta should have been more cautious in meeting with Armenia’s representatives knowing that Yerevan has occupied, for over thirty years the twenty percent of the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan and refrains from respecting the International rule of law and has repeatedly violated four UN Security Council Resolutions. A close partnership with Armenia would be a heavy blow to Albania’s strategic interests as a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, knowing that Yerevan is deeply

connected to Teheran and Moscow. However time will reveal what lies beneath the first Meta-Sarkissian Summit and the real intentions of Albania's head of state. As former Vice President Joe Biden once said: "In a globalized world, there is no bright line between foreign and domestic policy. What happens at home impacts on our capacity to remain engaged in the world." Notwithstanding geographic proximity the two countries, Albania and Armenia share only a handful of cultural, economic and political affinities. Former President Bujar Nishani has maturely and legitimately harnessed a close dialogue and strategic cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, hosting in Tirana the Speaker of Azerbaijani Parliament Mr. Ogtay Asadov, (September 2012), a visit followed by Vice-speaker of Azerbaijani Parliament the Hon. Bahar Muradova, who arrived to Albania [5] in October 5th, 2012, to attend the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Session. It appears that Mr. Meta may have concealed interests in Yerevan or is a share holder of a diamond polishing company of Armenian capital with operations in Africa, knowing that Albanian president enjoys luscious vacations in his South African mansion, in addition to his massive wealth hidden in the banks of Great Britain and Europe. As Albanian people can hastily ascertain, rotten domestic politics encouraged by Europe's worst kakistocracy, is dramatically influencing Tirana's shortsighted foreign policy and jeopardizing Albania's cooperation with its historic partners, even more so now that the Meta-Kryemadhi couple have ding dongs on their right hands and gold sponge cakes at their left. Hope remains high that Ilir Meta's second half of his presidential term in office would not betray the close Tirana-Baku partnership, avoid the evil influence of presidential imprudent diplomatic advisors and certainly refrain leaving Albania in a lurch. [6]

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin*

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[1] Deputy Chief of Albania's Political opposition movement and Chairwoman of Socialist Movement for Integration Party, Albania's third largest political movement. Monika Kryemadhi is a fierce opponent of the current Government of Edi Rama and over the last two months has led four violent protests against the Prime Minister's office in Tirana, Albania. She was heavily engaged in plagiarism while preparing her dissertation for a Doctorate Degree, an academic degree of dubious origins.

[2] <http://president.al/presidenti-meta-pritet-nga-ministri-per-europen-britanise-se-madhe-sir-alan-duncan/>

[3] <https://europe.autonews.com/article/20181114/ANE/181119882/vw-mulls-moving-passat-production-to-skoda-plant-in-czech-republic-report-says> | <http://president.al/presidenti-meta-pritet-nga-presidenti-federal-gjerman-frank-walter-steinmeier/>

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[4] <http://president.al/presidenti-meta-ftuar-nderi-ne-konferencen-vjetore-te-ndermarrjeve-te-vogla-dhe-te-mesme-gjermane-shpresojme-se-edhe-mbeshitetjen-e-pacmuar-te-gjermanise-dhe-vullnetin-e-te-gjithe-vendeve-ane/>

[5] https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijan_Albania_prospects_of_relations_discussed-226999

[6] <http://president.al/presidenti-meta-takon-presidentin-e-armenise-armen-sarkissian/>

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