



Trans-European Exchange Platform on History and Remembrance

9th annual studytrip/workshop, Albania, 22-28/29 September, 2019:
“Unbunkering the past: How is Albania dealing with its (communist) history?”

Organized by

Crossborder factory, Youth Initiative for Human Rights Bosnia and Herzegovina,
Franco-German Youth Office, Forum ZFD Bosnia and Herzegovina,
History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with:
Cultural Heritage Without Borders Albania, Regional Youth Cooperation Office,
Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture, House of Leaves – Museum of Secret
Surveillance, Justice & Peace Association, Center for Historical and Anthropological
Research, National Museum for Contemporary History of Slovenia

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FINAL REPORT



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I. Aims of Memory Lab and the 9th workshop and study trip

General aim of the platform:

The trans-European exchange platform “Memory Lab” brings together organizations, institutions and persons working on memory sites and remembrance education in the Western Balkans and in Western/Central Europe, and promotes thereby exchange, cooperation and critical understanding of remembrance and history in Europe. The platform is mainly organized around annual study trips / workshops that are particularly important occasions for mutual learning through the sharing of experiences and practices. The platform and the annual meetings aim to overcome existing gaps of knowledge, to strengthen constructive dealing-with-the-past-approaches as means for sustainable peace- and democracy-building, and to contribute to cooperation and understanding processes within South Eastern Europe and Europe in general and to the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into a shared European civil society and memory space. The project was launched, under the name “Dealing with difficult pasts in the Western Balkans and Western Europe” in 2010 with the first gathering in Sarajevo; since then, seven more annual workshops/study trips have taken place, in Prijedor, Jasenovac and Vukovar (2011), Paris, Péronne and Oradour (2012), Berlin, Frankfurt/Oder and Ravensbrück (2013), Pristina, Skopje and Tetovo (2014), Brussels, Dinant and Ypres (2015), Belgrade, Novi Sad and Kragujevac (2016), and Madrid, Barcelona, La Jonquera and Rivesaltes (2017). More than 70 bilateral and multilateral activities have been developed until today by partner organizations which met through the *Memory Lab* platform.¹

Specific aims of the 9th annual study trip / workshop:

The specific aims of the study trip/workshop were:

- To explore and discuss the history of Albania in the 20th century, and especially the communist period (1946-1991)
- To explore and discuss how the Albanian society is dealing with its communist past, from the transition to democracy in the 1990s until today, with a specific focus on memory sites and the educational field
- To compare and connect the experiences from Albania with the memory-politics and memory-work in other parts of Europe, and especially with the question how the Communist past is dealt with in different European societies
- To deepen contacts and cooperation and to provide a space to work concretely on topics of common interest and to develop future activities between the participants of the *Memory Lab* platform

II. Background

Dealing with the past (DwP) is a very sensitive issue in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, as the wounds of the wars of the 1990s are still fresh and linked with often-conflicting memories. In Western and Central Europe, although there has been no war in the last sixty years, memory questions often also remain sensitive, for example concerning the Second World War and the crimes linked to communism or colonialism. Even if each country has its specific situation and if the distance of war differs in Western/Central Europe and the

¹More information about the annual studytrips/workshops and the joint activities can be found on the website www.memorylab-europe.eu

Western Balkans, a lot of questions are nevertheless similar: How to deal with difficult past(s)? How to face the reluctance of people to deal with the past? What are the place and the role of memory sites in DwP-processes? What are possibilities and challenges of pedagogical and educational approaches at and around this kind of places, especially for young people? To what extent can memory sites bring conflicting memories together? If international cooperation in the field of DwP is quite well developed within the EU, exchanges in this field within South Eastern Europe (SEE) and also between SEE and the EU-countries are still quite rare. This mutual absence of relations and knowledge is reflecting the still existing gaps between the countries of former Yugoslavia and between these countries and the rest of Europe. Also in the perspective of the European integration of the countries of former Yugoslavia, it appears to be urgent to create regular opportunities for initiatives committed to a constructive DwP to meet, to learn from each other and to develop common activities. In this framework the general purpose of the Memory Lab-platform is to bring together initiatives in the field of dealing with difficult pasts (wars and dictatorships during different periods of the 20th century) from different countries of Western/Central Europe and the Western Balkans and to establish a long-term process of exchange and cooperation between them in order to facilitate contact, exchange experiences, overcome gaps of knowledge, learn from each other, mutually build capacities and carry out common projects and activities.

For the 9th annual studytrip/workshop, Albania was chosen mainly for two reasons:

1) Albania belongs to the Western Balkans, but since it is not part of the post-Yugoslav area, it has so far been less in the focus of actors of international memory work. This also applies to Memory Lab, which had so far concentrated its work on the post-Yugoslav space with regard to South Eastern Europe. The program in Albania was meant to allow to actors from different parts of Europe to discover and explore Albania's history and culture of remembrance, and to include actors from Albania in the Memory Lab-platform and in the development of future joint activities.

2) An examination of Albania's recent history and current culture of remembrance appears particularly interesting for two reasons: On one hand because of Albania's particular communist history within Southeastern and Eastern Europe, which raises the question of its specificity or non-specificity compared to other communist regimes. On the other hand, because after the transition to democracy the communist past was for a long time not critically dealt with, while in recent years several initiatives have developed to change this situation, in order to critically examine the communist past, and to tackle dominating attitudes of silence, nostalgia, or minimization of committed crimes.

III. Participants

Participants of Memory Lab are representatives of memorial centres, historical museums, NGOs and other organizations/initiatives/individuals from the Western Balkans and from Western/Central Europe, acting practically in the field of dealing with the past, especially around memory sites and in the educational field. The involved persons and organizations are working on different "difficult pasts" related to the history of Europe in the 20th century (First World War, Second World War, communist dictatorships, Yugoslav break-up wars of the 1990s): this diversity reflects the complexity of European history and has also proven to be very stimulating and enriching for the working process. 39 persons have participated at the workshop and study trip in 2019: 8 persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4 from Croatia, 1 from Kosovo, 3 from Serbia, 2 from Belgium, 5 from France, 6 from Germany, 6 from Albania, 1 from Spain, 1 from Slovenia, 1 from Montenegro, and 1 from the UK. Out of the

39 persons participating in the program this year, 15 persons have participated in the Memory Lab program for the first time. The combination of “old” and “new” participants guarantees on the one hand a continuation and deepening of the existing contacts and work, and on the other hand the integration of new participants in a group which aims to be open for new persons, contacts and ideas. Concerning the choice of the participants in 2019, for the fourth time, it was not done by direct invitation, but by open call for applications for interested persons to apply by filling in and sending an application. The organization team received a large number of applications, but unfortunately could not accept all those who applied, the selection of candidates was based on the following criteria:

a) General criteria for the constitution of the group:

- Practitioners who are dealing with history and memory work in Europe, especially in memorials, museums, and civil society organizations
- The group should be constituted by approx. 2/3 of “old” participants (who have participated at one or several of the former annual Memory Lab study trips/workshops) and of 1/3 of “new” participants
- Different countries need to be represented in the group
- The total number of participants should not exceed 40 persons

b) Individual criteria for the applicants:

- Concrete / practical link to memory work
- For “old” participants: Own commitment to Memory Lab (for example organization of joint activities with other Memory Lab associates), and benefit for one’s own work / For new participants: potential own commitment to Memory Lab, and potential benefit for own work.

The list with the participants can be found in the annexes at the end of this report.

IV. The program

1. The preparation

The preparation meeting “Albania and its place in international memory work” took place from October 29 to November 3, 2018 in Tirana and brought together representatives of Memory Lab from Southeast Europe and West/Central Europe. The following activities took place as part of the Memory Lab preparation meeting in Tirana:

- Participation at the “Presentation of young researchers in the field of Dealing with the Past”, organized by OSCE Presence in Albania
- Meeting with Ardita Repishti, Authority on access to information on the Former State Security Service
- Meeting with Lori E. Amy, professor at Georgia Southern University, researching on the Communist past in Albania
- Participation at the award-ceremony of the youth competition “Ask your grandparents” on the Albanian past 1944-1997, organized by the Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture (IDMC) in the framework of the “Memory Days 2018”
- Meeting with Jonila Godole, director of IDMC
- Meeting with representatives of Site of Witness and Memory Shkodra, Peace & Justice-Association, Culture Heritage without Borders, Albanian Center for Rehabilitation of Trauma & Torture, and House of Leaves. Organized in cooperation with IDMC
- Meeting with Enriketa Pandelejmoni, University of Tirana, History Department

- Visit of the House of Leaves, Museum of Secret Surveillance during the Communist Dictatorship in Albania, and meeting with Etleva Demollari, museum director
- Visit of the National Museum of History in Tirana, especially the Pavilion of the Communist Terror
- Visit to the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), and meeting with Djuro Blanusa, General Secretary of RYCO, and other representatives of RYCO
- Participation at the public discussion “Who cares about History? Connecting young people from Albania and the post-Yugoslav space through dealing with the past”, organized in cooperation with RYCO

Memory Lab partners who attended the preparation meeting included: Elma Hašimbegović (director of the History Museum Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo), Frank Morawietz (in charge of the Franco-German Youth Office for South Eastern Europe, Berlin/Germany), Judith Brand (director of the Forum ZFD- program Bosnia and Herzegovina), Kaja Širok (director of the National Museum for Contemporary History of Slovenia, Ljubljana), Nicolas Moll (freelance historian, Sarajevo / Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Paris/France), Tamara Banjevlav (freelance researcher, Zagreb / Croatia).

2. Structure and content of the program

The annual study trip/workshop in Albania was dedicated to the exploration and discussion of the history of Albania in the 20th century, and especially to the period of the Communist dictatorship established by Enver Hoxha and the dealing with its legacies.

The program consisted of a combination of visits to memory sites, feedback-sessions after visits, presentations by/discussions with experts, and working sessions within the group. Tirana was the main location, with trips to other towns during the program.

a) Monday 23rd September 2019

The first day of the program was mainly dedicated to the general introduction into Albanian history in the 20th century. The program started with the presentation of the program and an interactive exercise so participants could get to know each other. An info market with the represented organizations was held with the same aim later in the morning: The participants had been asked in advance to bring info material about their work ; in a first step we constituted groups according the professional background of the participants (Memorials and Museums ; NGOs; Schools ; Film ; Academia and Institutions), and in a second step the participants were invited to meet and exchange with persons from the other groups. In the afternoon, Enriketa Pandelejmoni, historian from the Centre for Historical and Anthropological Research, gave a general overview first of the history of Albania in the 20th century, and then about the memorialization of the communist past in Albania today. The day continued with a visit to the *Albanian National History Museum*: First, Dorian Koci, the director of the Museum, received us and told about the history of the Museum and the communist period, and then we had a guided visit with a curator through the main departments of the Museum, with a focus on the departments related to the 20th century. The day finished with an informal walk through the city centre to different memory sites, led by Mirian Bllaci and Elian Stefa, starting from Skanderbeg Square and passing at “Bunk Art 2”, but unfortunately the tour had to be interrupted because of a heavy thunderstorm.

b) Tuesday 24th September

The second day of the program was dedicated to the exploration how Albania is dealing with the communist period. After a reflection about the previous day, we had a guided visit of the “House of Leaves – Museum of Secret Surveillance”, which had been for several decades the headquarters of the notorious *Sigurimi*, the Albanian State Security during the Communist time, and which in 2017 was opened as a state-funded “Museum of Secret Surveillance” and is dedicated to illustrate and explain the repression system during the Communist dictatorship. After the visit, we met with Etleva Demollari, director of the Museum, who talked about the educational activities of the Museum, and then with a time-witness, Uran Kostreci, who had been political prisoner for many years and told us about his experiences of living under communist regime in Albania. In the afternoon, a panel discussion was organized on the topic of “Dealing with the communist past in Albania: The role of state actors, civil society and the international community”, with panellists Jonila Godole, director of Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture, Claudia Vollmer, head of Democratization Department of the OSCE Presence in Albania, and Ardiana Topi from the Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents. The day continued with a presentation by Matilda Karcenaj, program coordinator IDMC, on the topic of “Activities with young people about the communist past in Albania”. The afternoon ended with a reflection about the day, and in the evening our group was invited to the Residence of the German Ambassador in Tirana, where Ambassador Peter Zingraf and her French colleague, Ambassador Christina Vasak, organized a common Franco-German reception for our Memory Lab-group, and during which they underlined the importance of organizing and supporting such initiatives as Memory Lab.

c) Wednesday 25th September

The third day of the program was dedicated to visiting two places in Northern Albania connected to the communist past. We first visited the former communist prison in Spaç, located on a steep slope in the northern Albanian mountains, and where from 1968 to 1991 the inmates, many of them political prisoners, were used as forced labour in the nearby copper and pyrite mines. After the fall of communism the prisoners camp was closed, and the abandoned buildings have since then fallen in ruins. Zenel Drangu, former political prisoner, gave us a tour of the site of the Spaç prison and talked about his experiences as a prisoner there. The site visit continued with a presentation by Mirian Bllaci from the organization *Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania* on a memorialization proposal for the abandoned prison: “Unlocking Dialogue & Action. A Concept for Spac Prison”. In the afternoon we travelled to Shkodra, where we visited the “Museum Site of Witness and Memory”: Originally used by Albanian Franciscan monks as a dormitory and educational institution, during communist rule the building was used as headquarters of the local department of the Ministry of Interior and as a prison. In 2014 was opened there the « Site of Witness and Memory »-Memorial, to commemorate the victims of Communist repression. The visit was followed by a discussion with Pjerin Mirdita, director of the Museum, about the Museum’s concept and the repression in Shkodra during the Communist period. After the museum visit, participants could chose between three options: one part went on a Memory Walk in the city centre related to daily life during the communist period, with Etljana Shkreli, from “Go2 – Sustainable Urban Planning Organization”; another part of the group visited the Rozafa Castle, a symbol of Albania’s rich cultural-historical heritage, with Helidon Sokoli and Sabrina Kuci from the Regional Directory of Cultural Heritage, who were also participants in our program ; and the other participants could explore the town by their own. After a dinner on the lake of Shkodra, we returned to Tirana.

d) Thursday 26th September

On the fourth day, we first had a feedback session on the afternoon in Shkodra, and then worked on the question about what to do with the former prison in Spac by discussing about the project “Unlocking Dialogue & Action. A Concept for Spac Prison” from Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania, which had been presented by Mirian Bllaci the day before. Later in the day we had the opportunity to think about future joint activities among Memory Lab members, which resulted in participants’ proposals for 18 possible future joint activities (see the list in the annexes). In the afternoon, we visited the town Kruja near Tirana, where we explored the role of Skanderbeg as national Albanian hero in the communist time and today: first by a visit of the Skanderbeg-Museum which had been inaugurated in 1982, and which is situated in the Kruja castle, a historical citadel which was the strongpoint of Skanderbegs defense against Ottoman invasion in the 1450s/1460s. And secondly by a lecture by anthropologist Armanda Kodra-Hysa about the importance of Skanderbeg in Albanian historical narratives during the Communist period and today.

e) Friday 27th September

The fifth and last day of the official program was mainly dedicated to wrap up the impressions and findings of the week and to put them into a larger context. We first had to reschedule the foreseen program: The planned meeting with Minister of Culture, Elva Margariti, could finally not take place, as the Minister had to cancel her visit on short term due to other obligations. We therefore used the entire morning for reflecting the experiences and impressions of the week: First we asked the participants, in an individual way, to write down a) how Albania is in their opinion dealing with the communist past, and b) one question which this week had raised for them. (The answers to these two questions can be found in the annexes of this report.) Then we constituted small groups where the participants exchanged about similarities and differences of the communist period in Albania and in other European countries and about dealing with the communist past in Albania in comparison with other European countries. Finally, in the afternoon, we organized a public event, to which we had invited interested persons from civil society, academia, international organizations and Embassies, in order to present and discuss with them some of the main questions which had emerged from the week’s study trip/workshop.

f) Saturday 28th September

For those who were interested, we had proposed an optional program on the following day, the 28th September 2019, with a trip to Gjirokastra in Southern Albania. More than half of the participants registered for this additional day. Gjirokastra has been declared UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005. The town contains architecture typical for the Ottoman period, and it is also the birthplace of former Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha and of the writer Ismail Kadare. In Gjirokastra we had a guided visit at the old bazaar, the castle which is overlooking the city, and the Ottoman-era Skenduli house, through which we could explore the role of this city in Albanian history, including the Communist period.

V. Evaluation by the participants

For the evaluation of the study trip/workshop, a questionnaire with five questions was sent to the participants via email after the program.² 36 (out of 39) participants completed and sent back their evaluation sheets, and the main results can be summarized as follows³:

1. The overall opinion about the Memory Lab-program in Albania is very positive. All participants without exception provided a positive or excellent feedback, and it often concerned different aspects of the trip: the preparation, the content and the structure of the program, the choice of locations and interlocutors, the balance between the various activities, the learning effects, the diversity of the group, the group atmosphere, as well as the logistics. Several of the « old » participants estimated that this was one of the best Memory Lab-editions ever, and also the new participants expressed very positive opinions, what appears for example in the following quote : *« Taking part in the Memory Lab study/workshop trip in Albania was an amazing experience and I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to participate. I thought it was extremely well organised, and structured in a way that maximized my learning and understanding of the issues relating not only to Albania, but also to memory politics in general. I also really liked the mixture of ways in which we learnt about Albania's past and present – presentations, discussions, site visits, witness testimonies, reflection sessions, informal discussions over lunch, dinners and bus journeys! It was fantastic meeting people from so many countries and backgrounds. I learnt so much from the group. The group was also extremely friendly, welcoming, knowledgeable and fun to be with, which as a newcomer made it so much easier to get involved. »*

2. Within the positive general opinions there have been some more critical remarks (for example: *“The only thing that might have been missing is the voice of those inheriting the heritage of the former system; those who look back at the communist rule in Albania with nostalgia”* ; *“I would prefer breaks longer than 15 minutes”* or *“Maybe, minor drawback was inability to visit some of original bunkers that made Albania renown for all over the world.”*), but they were most of the time expressed by only one person. Only one aspect was mentioned by three participants: the wish that there should have been more time for the mutual presentations at the beginning of the program (for example, *“The first round of presentations within a smaller group of people coming from the same field was really good! We would have needed more time though, for us and then for sharing with „externs“”*).

3. When it comes to the choice of “two moments/ places/ encounters/ sentences... from this week which you found particularly interesting”, many different aspects of the program were mentioned, but two moments appear particularly often: On the one hand the visit of the former prison in Spac (mentioned by half of participants), and on the other hand the visit of

² The questions were: 1. *Your general opinion on the study trip/workshop (content, structure, organisation, group)* 2. *Please chose two moments/ places/ encounters/ sentences... from this week which you found particularly interesting, and explain why.* 3. *What are your reflections after this week / what did you learn this week ... a) ... about dealing with the past/ memory culture in Albania, b) ... about dealing with communist past in your own society / other European societies? , c) ... about yourself, d) otherwise.* 4. *From what you have done/seen/heard this week, what will be useful for your own work?* 5. *Suggestions/ideas/plans for the future concerning ... a) Annual Memory Lab study trips/workshops (locations, content, ...), b) Memory Lab in general, c) Your activities with other partners from Memory Lab.)*

³ The complete answers have been gathered in a separate document which is also available on the Memory Lab-website.

the “House of Leaves” (mentioned by 2/5 of the participants) (for example *“For me the most impressive were the former prison in Spac and the House of Leaves, because I believe that both places have great potential for work with youth in a context of dealing with difficult past, overcoming consequences of difficult past and work towards building better society”*). As important parts of these two visits were often mentioned the encounters with the former political prisoners at these places and the testimonies provided by them (for example, *“I was tremendously touched and informed by our two witnesses, Uran and Zenel who were presenting different faces of experiences of their sufferings and analysis of their life and the meanings of their actions today”*), and regarding Spac also the presentation and discussion about the Memorial-project from Cultural Heritage Witout Borders Albania (for example, *“For me, the absolute highlight of the workshop was the discussion on the concept of Spac prison museum and memorial proposed by CHWB. I found the discussion to be substantially critical and yet very constructive. I appreciated respectful communication throughout this session as well as honesty of participants.”*) Other moments which were mentioned by several persons are the visit of the House of Witness and Memory in Shkodra (*“for the potential it has - especially because of place it is located in- and a bit strange relation towards own activities”*) and the visit of the Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja and the presentation by Armanda Kodra-Hysa about the role of Skanderbeg in Albania’s memory culture (for example, *“the Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja: such a surrealistic place, it provides an idea about the over-dimensional importance of Skanderbeg for the communist regime, and also the current one, which was then greatly analyzed by the presentation of Armanda Kodra-Hysa”*). Except visits and other official activities, several persons mentioned also more personal encounters, discussions, experiences and observations as important moments (for example, *“Beyond the fascinating discovery of the country and its history, what impressed me the most were the human encounters. The discussions I shared with Mirian, Eni and Elian, the insights they gave me into their personal history and connections with the historical past of their country (and the story of their family) were very enlightening and therefore particularly interesting.”*)

4. The learning effects can be mainly seen in two fields: On the one hand concerning Albania, and more specifically its communist history and how Albania is dealing with this past (for example, *“Since I had no previous knowledge, everything I saw and learned was something new” “I learned to what extent the history of communism in Albania is sensitive historical period with very visible consequences nowadays and how challenging is to speak about this phase of history.” “All together, thanks to this Memory Lab, I learnt a lot about the communist period in Albania, how it is dealt with today, and about Albanian history more generally. I was not really interested in Albania’s history and didn’t know much about it before this Memory Lab – now my knowledge and especially my interest is a totally different one.”*). Thanks to this Memory Lab the participants could learn about the difficulties in dealing with the Communist past in Albania and also about initiatives which are existing in this field. On the other hand there have been more general learning effects, for example through the comparison with other countries and experiences which helped also to raise new questions (for example, *“Although people from France, Belgium and partially Germany didn’t have a communist past, their vision on what was/is communism and anti-communism raised questions others didn’t ask themselves before.” “It was extremely useful to hear participants from other countries who told about their experiences in processes of marking of memorialization sites.” “I am asking myself if we are dealing enough with the socialist past in Germany.” “In BiH, while dealing with the past we focus on other periods, that were more cruel and violent, so often we forget to talk about communism period. Although very different from Albanian, it should be addressed, discovered and discussed.” “For me, it was*

interesting to draw parallels between Albania and Yugoslavia and between their regimes. I think that, since it was extremely isolated, Albania is much more traumatized by its communist past and that this trauma is today reflected in people's reluctance to talk about the past. I think that in countries of former Yugoslavia, there are more discussions going on, but these discussions are not very constructive and usually not based on historical facts, but in people's personal memories and experiences and are, thus, very passionate. Both countries still have a long way to go in order to be able to talk about the communist past in a more constructive, objective and fact-based manner.")

5. Regarding the question "From what you have done/seen/heard this week, what will be useful for your own work?", the answers can be summarized in four groups: contacts, knowledge, ideas, and tools (for example: *"Everything! I came back from Albania with new knowledge and potential partnerships."* *"I bring a lot of intellectual nourishment back with me, many things to read and watch. It enriches me also for the short movies I am doing with pupils in secondary schools on another context (how do we use pictures, how do we collect individual memories and do we confront them or not to the collective history)."* *"The contacts I renewed and new people I met, both Memory Lab participants and hosts open new possibilities for cooperation."* *"I got useful contacts for further projects and the great work with little money in Albania inspired me for my work. I also got good ideas for working with contemporary witnesses."* *"The different realities I discovered and the contacts I made during this stay in Albania inspired me for my work of programming of the festival Les Rendez-vous de l'histoire: ideas of workshops, persons to invite, films to be screened..."*)

6. Regarding possible future destinations for the annual Memory Lab-studytrips/workshops, many suggestions were expressed. The Croatian/Slovenian/Italian border region, which is foreseen as destination for the next study trip, was mentioned by 8 participants, after this was mentioned 5 times a combined visit to Greece and Turkey, then respectively 4 x Poland and Turkey, 3x Ukraine, respectively 2x Cyprus, Netherlands, Romania and South of Albania, and once respectively Hungary, Poland / Ukraine, former Soviet Union, Austria/Hungary, Greece, Montenegro, East-Germany, Algeria, South of France, Slovenia, Portugal, Switzerland, Spain, Moldova and Kosovo. - Concerning joint activities with other Memory Lab partners, the big majority of the participants mentioned one or more projects, which are already ongoing, or which they plan to realize in the future.

7. Concerning Memory Lab in general, many of the participants highlighted what a valuable platform it is (for example: *"The structure of Memory Lab and its partners are very specific and in a way unique."* ; *"A fantastic network! Bringing together very interesting persons and stimulating new approaches and questions, new encounters, new insights, new reflections. The heterogeneity of the group is an important key."*) and that it should continue in this direction (for example: *"I hope Memory Lab continues this important mission of connecting people from different parts of Europe that research, promote and create work concerning divided but also shared memory of Europe."* *"I wouldn't change a thing."* *"Memory Lab is fantastic! Keep it going in style!"*). Others also suggested some evolutions (for example: *"Maybe it would be interesting to have sectors within the project (museologists, historians, pedagogues, artists...)"* Furthermore, *Memory Lab can be interesting as a platform to people who are not direct participants in the program. Maybe it would be interesting to develop some educational materials that would be available to wider network of potential users."* ; *"Memory Lab is a very important idea that should be used as a "template" for other topics. It would be particularly good to adjust Memory Lab to pupils."* ; *"I think the most pressing concern is financing and think we would need to find some stable funding source soon."* ;

“Would we be able to show our ecological concerns/efforts during our study-trips?”) Several participants underlined also their will to contribute actively (*“I also would like to help-out in any other regional activities that Memory Lab might have.”*, *“I would like to give testimony of the work of Memory Lab, for instance in the review of the History teachers in France, or during the festival I am involved in.”*). Some of the participants also suggested to organize some specific activity in 2020, for the 10th anniversary of Memory Lab. (*“After the 10th study trip general evaluation of the format and re-thinking of the potential, need, necessity for adaptation (or not).”* *“My idea is that along with 10th Jubilee, Memory Lab study trip /workshop a big conference should be organised, in order to gather as many people who previously participated as possible. Something like a retrospective, reminiscence of previous ten years. Maybe in city in which you started – Sarajevo.”*)

VI. Conclusions and perspectives

The program in Albania can be considered as another successful edition of the annual Memory Lab study trip and workshop, and it can be stated that the four goals defined before the program have been met. All participants regarded this year’s program very positively, and several of the “old” participants said this was one of the most successful Memory Lab programs so far. Thanks to this year’s study trip/workshop, Albania is now part of the Memory Lab-platform, and many new contacts have been established and existing contacts deepened. Memory Lab will hopefully continue with its work in the coming years and see the development of our platform not only in terms of the number of members/ participants, but also in terms of implemented joint activities, future cooperation projects, and shared knowledge and experiences. Memory Lab is not a formal organization, but an informal platform gathering different organizations and individuals, and the future of the initiative depends very much of the commitment of these organizations and individuals on the one hand, and on the continuous support by dedicated donors on the other hand.

The plan for the future, budget-permitting, is to organize the 10th Memory Lab studytrip/workshop in the border-region between Slovenia, Croatia and Italy: these neighbouring countries share many historical events and their histories are inextricably linked, and this border region is connecting South East Europe and Western Europe what perfectly symbolizes the trans-European character of Memory Lab. It is not sure yet if we will be able to organize this 10th studytrip/workshop in 2020 or in 2021 ; in case it should be in 2021, we plan nevertheless to organize some smaller activity in 2020 in order to mark the 10th anniversary of our platform.

VII. Annexes:

1. Program
2. List of participants
3. Answers to the question “How is Albania is dealing with its communist past?”
4. Answers to the question “What questions did this Memory Lab raise for me ?”
5. List of proposed joint activities
6. Basic information regarding the contemporary history of Albania and the topics of our program [document sent to the participants before the studytrip/workshop]

1. Program

Sunday, 22 September, 2019:

Arrival of participants in Tirana

Accommodation (for persons who do not have accommodation in Tirana) and working venue:

Hotel Tirana International, <https://www.tiranainternational.com/>

20h: Informal welcome dinner in Hotel Tirana International

Monday, 23 September, 2019

7h-8h45: Breakfast

9h-10h30: Introduction and making acquaintance among the participants/interactive exercise

10h30-10h45: Coffee break

10h45- 12h15: Info-market with the represented organizations

12h30: Lunch

14h-15h15: Overview of the history of Albania in the 20th century. Lecture followed by discussion, with Enriketa Pandelejmoni, historian / *Center for Historical and Anthropological Research*

15h45-17h45: Visit of the *Albanian National History Museum*, with Ledio Xhoxhi, historian and museologist, followed by discussion with Dorian Koci, director of the Museum

18h30: Informal walk through the city center to different memory sites

20h: Dinner in restaurant “Vila Ferdinand” (Rruga Nikolla Tupe nr 1)

Tuesday, 24 September, 2019:

7h-8h45: Breakfast

9h-9h30: Reflection about the previous day

10h-12h30: Visit of the *House of Leaves – Museum of Secret Surveillance*, followed by meeting with time-witness Uran Kostreci and discussion about educational activities of the Museum, with Etleva Demollari, director of the Museum

12h45: Lunch

14h15-15h45: Dealing with the communist past in Albania: The role of state actors, civil society and the international community. Panel discussion with and Ardiana Topi, Archives director of the *Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents*, Jonila Godole, director of *Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture*, and Claudia Vollmer, head of Democratization Department of the *OSCE Presence in Albania*.

15h45-16h: Coffee break

16h-17h15: Activities with young people about the communist past in Albania: Presentation by Matilda Karcenaj, program coordinator *IDMC*, and discussion.

17h20-18h: Reflection about the day

19h: Reception by the German and French Embassy in Albania, with Ambassador Peter Zingraf and Ambassador Christina Vasak, at the Residence of the German Ambassador (Rruga Skenderbej 8)

Wednesday, 25 September, 2019:

7h-7h45: Breakfast

8h: Travel by bus to Spaç

10h – 12h30: Visit of the former communist prison in Spaç, with Zenel Drangu, former political prisoner, followed by presentation of a memorialization proposal for Spaç “Unlocking Dialogue & Action. A Concept for Spac Prison” from Mirian Bllaci (*Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania*).

12h30: Travel to Shkodra (with lunch bags)

15h-17h: Shkodra during the communist period and in the transition: Visit of the Museum *Site of Witness and Memory*, followed by discussion with Pjerin Mirdita, director of the Museum, and Luig Milaj, president of *Peace & Justice Association*

17h-18h30: Parallel options:

- Memory Walk related to the communist past in the city center, with *Go2 – Sustainable Urban Planning Organization*

- Visit of the Rozafa Castle, with *Regional Directory of Cultural Heritage*

- Individual exploration of the city

19h: Diner in the restaurant “Zum Rappen” in Shkodra

21h: Travel back to Tirana

Thursday, 26 September, 2019:

7h-8h45: Breakfast

9h-9h30: Reflection about the previous day

9h30-10h45: What to do with the former Spac-prison? Discussion about the project “Unlocking Dialogue & Action. A Concept for Spac Prison” from *Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania*.

10h45-11h: Coffee break

11h-12h30: Discussion and work about possible future joint activities among Memory Lab-partners

12h45: Lunch

13h45: Travel to Kruja

15h-17h30: Visit of the *Skanderbeg Museum* in the fortress in Kruja, followed by presentation and discussion about the importance of Skanderbeg in Albanian historical narratives during the Communist period and today, with Armanda Kodra-Hysa, anthropologist / *Center for Historical and Anthropological Research*

18h: Return to Tirana / Free evening

Friday, 27 September, 2019:

7h-8h45: Breakfast

9h-9h30: Reflection about the previous day

9h30-10h30: Meeting and discussion with the Minister of Culture, Elva Margariti, about current and planned activities of the government in the field of memory politics in Albania

10h30-10h45: Coffee break

10h45-12h45: Group work

- An unique case? Similarities and differences of the communist period in Albania and in other European countries

- Nothing else but crimes? Dealing with the communist past in Albania in comparison with other European countries.

13h: Lunch

15h-16h30: Final event, open for the public: Presentation of findings, conclusions and questions at the end of the Memory Lab-study trip/workshop in Albania. Possible topics:

- What should be taken into consideration when developing joint activities dealing with communist history?

- Suggestions regarding the future of the former prison in Spac

- How to work about the communist past with young people?

16h30-17h15: Reception following the event

17h15-18h15: Evaluation of the 2019- Memory Lab - study trip/workshop

20h: Farewell dinner in restaurant “Villa Vechai” (Rr. Q. Srafa Nr. 262)

Saturday, 28 September, 2019:

Breakfast and departure of the participants who did not register for the optional trip to Gjirokastra

Additional program:

7h-7h30: Breakfast

7h45: Travel by bus to Gjirokastra

13h: Check in at the hotel in Gjirokastra and lunch

15h: Visit of the castle, the old bazaar, and the Skendulli house: exploration of the role of Gjirokastra in Albanian history, including the Communist period, followed by free time

20h: Common dinner in restaurant Kodra (Lagjia 11 Janari Rruga Zejtareve)

Accommodation : Hotel Lulishte (Rruga Rauf Fico) and Hotel Bleta (Rruga Rauf Fico),

<http://hotel-bleta.gjirokaster.hotels-al.com/en/>

Sunday, 29 September, 2019:

7h30: Travel back by bus from Gjirokastra to Tirana

12h/13h: Arrival at Tirana airport and then Tirana city center

2. List of Participants

* = Memory Lab-coordination team

** = Cooperation partner

Name	Organization	Activity / Function	Town
Gilian Akthar	St. George's School for Girls + Balkans Peace Park Project	History Teacher + Project Coordinator	Edinburgh
Gruia Badescu	University of Konstanz + Centre for Advanced Studies- Southeastern Europe, University of Rijeka	Research fellow	Konstanz
Tamara Banjeglav*		Freelance researcher	Zagreb
Kenan Beqiri	Community Building Mitrovica	Project Officer	Mitrovica
Julie Biro		Documentary film-maker	Paris
Ervin Blažević	Optimisti 2004 Kozarac	President	Prijedor
Mirian Bllaci**	Cultural Heritage Without Borders Albania	Program Manager	Tirana
Bojana Bulatović**	Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)	Program Officer	Tirana
Stephanie Boutaud	Memorial Centar Oradour	Head of Educational Department	Oradour
Judith Brand*	Forum ZFD Bosnia and Herzegovina	Program Manager	Sarajevo
Katarina Bulajić		Film-director	Podgorica / Budapest
Eni Daka	Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs	Media Advisor	Tirana
Etleva Detmollari**	House of Leaves – Museum of Secret Surveillance	Director	Tirana
Daniel Eror	Youth for Peace	President	Sarajevo
Lejla Gačanica	Faculty of Law, University of Mostar	Freelance researcher; PhD candidate	Sarajevo
Magdalena Geier	Max Mannheimer Studienzentrum Dachau	Educational assistant	Dachau

Jean-Marie Genard	Les rendez vous de l'Histoire	Coordinator of the pedagogical activities and the film program	Blois
Jonila Godole**	Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture	Director	Tirana
Elma Hodžić	Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Curator	Sarajevo
Maximilian Lütgens	Dachau Memorial Centar	Educational assistant	Dachau
Dea Marić	Department for History, Zagreb; Croatian Association of History Teachers	Teaching associate; president	Zagreb
Ružica Marjanović	Festival "Na pola puta"	Program editor and festival founder	Užice
Alma Mašić*		Freelance Trainer	Barcelona
Anja Medved		Documentary film-maker	Nova Goriza
Christian Melka	Foundation and Memorial Camp des Milles	Special Advisor	Aix-en-Provence
Luigj Mila**	Peace and Justice Association	Director	Shkodra
Djordje Mihovilović	Jasenovac Memorial Centar	Curator	Jasenovac
Nicolas Moll*	Crossborder factory	Researcher and trainer	Sarajevo
Frank Morawietz*	Franco-German Youth Office	Special coordinator for the activities of FGYO in SEE	Berlin
Enriketa Pandeljemoni**	Centre for Historical and Anthropological Research	Director	Tirana
Edin Ramulić	Association of citizens of Prijedor "Izvor"	Vice president	Prijedor
Christian Savary	Les sentiers de la mémoire / The paths of memory	President	Coutances
Zorica Šćepanović	Elementary School Petar Nikolić	History Teacher	Kraljevo
Saša Šimpraga	Virtual Museum Dotrščina	Founder, curator, activist	Zagreb
Günter Schlusche	Berlin Wall Foundation	Architect, Planner	Berlin

Kaja Širok**	National Museum of Contemporary History	Director	Ljubljana
Helidon Sokoli / Sabrina Kuci / Petrit Bilali	Regional Directory of Cultural Heritage	Chief of archeological sector / architect / sculptor	Shkodra
Aleksandra Stamenković	C31 – Centre for the development of childrens rights culture	Deputy-president	Belgrade
Elian Stefa	Center for Landscapes in Change	Architect, author, curator	Tirana
Ulvija Tanović		Interpreter B/C/S/M - English	Sarajevo
Christel Trouvé	Denkort Bunker Valentin	Scientific director	Bremen
Hannes Vanvymelbeke	Belgium War Heritage Institute	Head of Remembrance Service	Brussels
Marjan Verplancke	Kazerne Dossin, Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights	Head of Education and Outreach	Mechelen
Dorina Xheraj-Subashi	University Aleksander Moisiu, Durres	Lecturer of Museology and Cultural Heritage	Durres
Xhemal Xherri	Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania	Project manager / Interpretive guide	Tirana

3. «Please describe in some words how in your opinion Albania is dealing with its communist past? » : Individual answers on the last day of the Memory Lab program in Tirana

Still struggling to deal with it ! Those suffering from the communist period are still unsure about what tomorrow will bring. Uncertainty, struggle, sympathy vs. empathy

Resistances. Continuities. Different speeds. Denial and disinterest vs. engagement. Fear of confrontation with the complexity.

Making a polarized narration. Not putting the perpetrators on trials. Suppressing the pain instead of dealing with it.

Confused, BUT : a lot of energy from young teachers and activists.

No indication of serious dealing with the past.

Impunity and continuity of actors. Some state initiatives (museums, institutions), more on level of civil society. Largely out of international circuits of funding and cooperation.

Struggling. Reluctance to open a wound that needs to be opened if it is to heal.

« We need teachers, we need programs, we need textbooks. »

The society and the political parties are still controversial about this. There is no lack of political will, but a lack of capacities and resources to implement the projects.

New emerging attempts for interpretation of crimes, new memorials and museums built. Still lack of critical debates (especially from emerging historians)

No real dealing with this past. Showing it as the devil and enlightening the opponents as « anti-communist ».

Traumatized. Avoiding. Courageous (for some people).

Not dealing with the past. Silence and fragmented (personal) memories. Confusing, stuck in between localized narratives.

« We are just at the beginning. » Individual initiatives to tackle the past, with support of international actors, in a society dominated by non-interest, nostalgia and denial. Lack of political will to change this situation.

Barely dealing with it. Most people are in denial or poorly informed.

Strong anticommunism is enhanced with nationalism, thus dealing with the past is not necessarily effective but instrumentalized.

Most of the Albanian people are not interested in the history of the Communist period and don't talk about that. But luckily there are some people who are very motivated to change this.

Non-systemic, partially, black and white and white and black, non-critically, non-balanced, like it fell from Mars (de-contextualized)

1. Difficult. 2. No real process of dealing with the past.

Divided (communists – anticommunists). Problems. Black-white.

Glossing over. Sweeping under the rug.

Memory workers and NGOs : doing great work, plenty of good intentions. The government and broader society : are they dealing with it ? I doubt it. People seem to have more important issues like lack of employment or of drinking water.

There is no differentiation between totalitarianism, dictatorship and communism, what in my opinion is dangerous.

Black / white, evil / nostalgic. But mainly not dealing with it. Turbo-consumerism like to make up for the past.

Just one perspective. Not very objective. Hard to be widely understood.

United, omnipresent narrative that condemns period of communism ?

In progress. Under construction. I do not feel that there is a clear politics in terms of memory and history. Just individual approaches.

1. Sometimes silence is harder than talking. 2. Dictatorship of the lunatic. 3. Must come from the state level (in the future)

Talking about the communist regime but not really dealing with it (black and white picture of the period).

Albania does not have a unified approach with a clear vision towards the communist heritage. Different individual initiatives have different approaches.

4. Individual answers to the question « What questions did this Memory Lab raise for me ? » on the last day of the Memory Lab program in Tirana :

How do you get governmental organisations to take memory politics more seriously and engage in it ?

Is there only bad and good when we talk about communism ?

What is behind the word « anticommunism » ?

Is communist heritage erased in other countries ?

How does Albania's treatment of communist heritage differ from our neighbours ? Is Albania ahead or behind ?

How do you create a greater interest within the population for the importance of remembering difficult pasts ?

Is this the right way of dealing with the past ? How we do it in the region ? How does the left wing look like in this country ?

How to deal with the challenge of imposing familiar reading frames on different places / different experiences ? (for example WW2 – Yugoslav frame or Albanian frame ; Yugoslav perceptions of communism and anticommunism in Albania ; colonialism of Italian period, etc

How can Albania internalize these events, in order to re-awake memory in order to get closure, without causing pain ?

Why is the occupation-period between 1941 and 1944 so less present to explain (maybe) the transition from monarchy to communist dictatorship ?

Why do some museums not talk about the first trials in the 1940s ?

Why do some museums use the word « anticommunism » all the time ?

Is there Albanian anti-communism ?

What happened in the 1990s in Albania ?

How was the narrative of Skenderbeg as a positive figure appropriated for each political system until now ? And what is its influence on the national identity ?

How did everyday life look like during communism ?

Were those who were persecuted in communism associated with crimes during World War Two ?

Is there transitional justice in Albania ?

Is it possible to deal with the past in modern Albania ?

Silence in society : how can we « work » the people to talk about the past ?

What about the memory of the Italian and the German occupation ?

How will school children manage to get a clear idea of the atrocities of the communist dictatorship ? How to avoid that the Albanian past remains in a black-and-white-narrative ?

How can I be an actor in digesting the effects communism has up to this day ?

Why is there such a need to say that communism in Albania was « worse than Auschwitz » ?

Why is Albania not taking any responsibility in regard of victims ?

Should we bring Tirana to Spac, or Spac to Tirana ? Is it necessary to renovate the road to Spac ?

When talking about a criminal system is it possible to talk about anything else than the criminal dimension of this system ?

Does Memory Lab in near or distant future plan to involve media/journalists' perspective regarding the Spac prison ?

How can we tell the objective stories ?

How can we be more attentive to use the right words in formulating the objectives of memorialization ? For example : « anti-communist », « anti-totalitarian », ... - what do we need to confront ?

Could we say that a process of memorialization is successful when it leads to history-writing ?

How do we turn memory into history ?

How to discuss / learn / teach about communist past without a black and white division → keeping multiperspectivity, complexity, different layers

How to deal with the traumatism of a dictatorship over generations? How to encourage a culture to face difficult history with curiosity ?

Is memory just something individual ? Can one nation have the same general memory ?

How can you achieve reconciliation in a community when victims and perpetrators of the communist past live side by side, but no one wants to talk about it – at a governmental or a local level ?

Can there be a (critical) dealing with history without having trials ?

What happened to antifa-movments in terms of memory today ?

How to mitigate silence for healing and looking at the future with impunity and troubling continuities ?

What is the role of civil society in the transition process ?

Questions about the after-use of symbols / buildings / military devices from communist times

When can we estimate that a memorial site is successful or is reaching its goal ?

How to contribute to the transmission of experiences of the tragic past to young generations in order to build democracy and peace ?

What are preconditions for a critical dealing with the past that helps society to heal ??

How to make clear for everyone, with our differences (history, language, culture, experiences, etc.) that we try to address common questions and common goals (peace, understanding, freedom, justice) ?

How (to what extent) should sites of former political violence (prisons) be preserved ?

How to narrate the past regarding the historical facts that prove the injustice and at the same time promote the dialogue and overcome the conflicting past ?

5. Overview about future project-ideas which were proposed during the session on 26th September 2019

Topic : School trips

Proposed by : Max

Interested to cooperate : Christian S., Gillian, Elma, Ruzica, Stephanie, Kenan, Hannes, Zorica, Ervin

Topic : Study trips to Belgium from the Balkans / associating E.U.

Proposed by : Marjan

Interested to cooperate : Eni, Dea, Elma, Xherri, Kenan, Christian M., Mirian, Ervin, Hannes, Edin, Ruzica, Elian

Topic : Border cities photo albums

Proposed by : Anja

Interested to cooperate : Hannes, Ruzica, Gruia, Katarina, Max, Julie, Gillian, Sabrina, Xherri, Elian

Topic : Research project on representations of violence in museums

Proposed by : Tamara

Interested to cooperate : Gruia, Christian M., Gillian, Eni, Djordje, Elma, Anja, Dea, Edin, Mirian, Elian

Topic : Youth projects with Catalonia

Proposed by : Alma

Interested to cooperate : Kenan, Hannes, Ruzica, Max, Stephanie, Marjan, Gruia, Daniel, Gillian, Eni, Christian M.

Topic : Political prisons

Proposed by : Gruia

Interested to cooperate : Anja, Mirian, Max, Elian

Topic : Memory walks

Proposed by : Dorina

Interested to cooperate : Mirian, Kenan, Xherri, Sabrina, Ruzica, Christel (examples), Elian

Topic : Convergences of memory / responsibility of democracy

Proposed by : Christian M.

Interested to cooperate : Zorica, Judith, Mirian, Gillian

Topic : Student exchange linked with Scotland

Proposed by : Gillian

Interested to cooperate : Christian S., Ruzica, Mirian, Max, Hannes, Eni, Elma, Kenan

Topic : Broader stories

Proposed by : Judith

Interested to cooperate : Daniel, Elma, Edin, Mirian, Lejla, Elian

Topic : Poetry of memory / textuality of remembrance

Proposed by : Sasa

Interested to cooperate : Tamara, Anja, Christel, Sabrina, Ruzica, Christian S., Mirian, Marjan, Gillian, Hannes, Dea, Lejla, Max, Elian

Topic : Conservation of memory sites / Spac

Proposed by : Mirian

Interested to cooperate : Christian M., Katarina, Ervin, Gruia, Christel, Eni, Stephanie, Günter, Marjan, Sabrina, Elian

Topic : Documentation centar Prijedor

Proposed by : Edin

Interested to cooperate : Djordje, Elma, Ervin, Judith, Christel

Topic : Women in situations of suffering

Proposed by : Kenan

Interested to cooperate : Katarina, Max, Zorica, Eni, Christian M., Lejla

Topic : Propaganda

Proposed by : Hannes

Interested to cooperate : Daniel, Eni, Mirian, Sabrina, Ruzica, Dorina, Elma, Gruia, Katarina, Christian M., Elian

Topic : Design visitor experiences focused on individual responsibility and optimism/hope

Proposed by : Mirian

Interested to cooperate : Gruia, Anja, Julie, Gillian, Eni, Elian

Topic : Transgenerational transmission of trauma

Proposed by : Christel

Interested to cooperate : Tamara, Gillian, Anja, Julie, Xherri, Ruzica, Stephanie, Lejla, Max, Mirian, Daniel, Eni, Elian

Topic : How to promote / find financial support for Memory Lab

Proposed by : Christian M.

Interested to cooperate : Gillian, Sabrina, Zorica, Mirian, Eni, Stephanie



Trans-European Exchange Platform on History and Remembrance

9th annual Memory Lab study trip/workshop -Albania, 22-28/29.9.2019:
“Unbunkering the past: How is Albania dealing with its (communist) history?”

Basic information regarding the contemporary history of Albania and the topics of our program

1. Brief chronology of Albania’s contemporary history
2. Short information about the sites we will visit
3. Some key names and terms
4. Further reading

1. Brief chronology of Albania’s contemporary history:

Since 15th century: the territory of today’s Albania under Ottoman occupation

1878: Creation of the political organization “League of Prizren” by Albanian intellectuals and noblemen, with two main aims: to unify all Albanian territories—at the time divided among four provinces within the Ottoman Empire -, into one autonomous administration within the Ottoman Empire, and to develop Albanian language, literature, education and culture. Even if the League of Prizren did not achieve its political goal to unify all Albanian territories, it is considered as a crucial moment of the *Albanian National Awakening* (Albanian: *Rilindja Kombëtare*) during the 19th century, also known as *National Revival* or *National Renaissance*.

1912: First Balkan War - the Balkan League (the kingdoms of Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro) against the Ottoman Empire. While the majority of the territory of today’s Albania is occupied by Greek, Serbia and Montenegrin troops, on 28 November 1912 an Albanian National Congress in Valona proclaims the independence of the country. - The 28 November is in today’s Albania celebrated as official national holiday.

1913: After the peace of London (May 1913) which confirms the loss of majority of European territories by Ottoman Empire, an international Ambassadors conference of the Great Powers is negotiating the borders and status of the new Albanian state. The borders of Albania drawn during these conference are those which are mostly also today’s Albania’s borders. Some Albanian and mixed population areas, as Kosovo and Chameria, are included in Albania’s neighboring countries, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece.

1914-1918: During World War One, Albania is invaded and occupied by Austrian-Hungarian, Italian and French troops, and after the end of the World War mainly by Serb-Yugoslav, Greek and Italian troops.

1918-1920: Opposition in Albania against plans to carve up the country between Yugoslavia, Italy and Greece, which are finally averted mainly thanks to the support by the USA. Albanian National Assembly held in Lushnje in 1920 lays the foundations for a new government ; the new Albanian government moves to Tirana which becomes Albania's capital instead of Durres.

1920/1: Albania becomes member of League of Nations in December 1920 and in November 1921 is recognized as sovereign state with the borders of 1913.

1920/1930s: Dominating political figure is Ahmed Bey Zogolli (Zogu). 1925 the Albanian National Assembly transforms Albania from a monarchy to a republic, Zogu is elected president. 1928 Albania becomes again a monarchy, with Zogu as king. Development of strong connections to Italy, also throughout the 1930s where Italy seeks to extend its influence on Albania.

April 1939: Italian troops invade and occupy Albania, King Zog leaves the country, Albania is attached in "personal union" to Italy.

1941: After the fall of Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941, Italy adds to the territory of Albania most of the Albanian-inhabited areas that had been previously part of the neighboring countries («Greater Albania»).

1943: After capitulation of Italy, Albania is occupied by German troops. New Albanian government under Rexhep Mitrovica declares neutrality, but de facto collaborates with Germany.

During Italian and German occupation development of various resistance groups: national-conservative groups as "Balli Kombetar"(National Front) – switching between resistance and collaboration with Germany after 1943 - and "Legaliteti" (created in 1943), and communist partisans which become the dominant resistance group, also thanks to the support of the Allies and Yugoslav partisans.

1944: The communist partisans form a provisional government in Berat in October 1944, led by Enver Hoxha, the general secretary of central committee of the Communist Party Albania (which had been created in November 1941). Total liberation of Albania from German occupation on 29 November 1944. During Communist time the 29th November became the main state holiday. While in post-communist Albania, the 28th November (see above 1912) became the official state holiday, the 29th November continues today to be officially commemorated as "Liberation Day."

The communist period / The People's (Socialist) Republic of Albania (1945-1991):

In January 1946 the country, within the borders of 1913, officially becomes the People's Republic of Albania and in 1976 the People's Socialist Republic of Albania.

Internal development:

From 1944 on, establishment of Communist dictatorship on Stalinist model. Harsh political repression against all those who are seen as "enemies of the people", regular purges within the Communist party against those who are not considered on party-line, establishment of forced

labor camps and of other repression measures. Radical economic and social reforms, collectivization of agriculture and rapid industrialization of the country. Travel abroad is forbidden to all but those on official business. In 1967, the country is declared the first atheist state and all Christian and Muslim houses of worship are closed.

External relations:

1945-1948: Close relations with socialist Yugoslavia under Tito: friendship- and support pact as well as treaty on economic cooperation with Yugoslavia, until break with Yugoslavia in 1948.

1950s: Development of tight political and economical relations to Soviet Union, until break with Moscow in 1961.

1961 to 1978: Maoist China as ally and protective power of Albania.

1978: Albanian government declares policy of total non-alignment = period of total self-isolation

11.4.1985: Death of Enver Hoxha, his successor becomes Ramiz Alia.

Since the end of the communist period:

1990/1991: After protests which started in 1989, new political parties are legalized in December 1990 and the first multiparty elections are organized in March/April 1991, won by the Socialist party, successor of the former Communist Party. With a new constitution, the People's Socialist Republic Albania becomes the Republic of Albania. - 1990/1991 is also known for the "Albanian exodus": after the long isolation from the rest of the world, combined with a context of harsh economic, social and political crisis, at least 200.000 Albanians leave the country between July 1990 and December 1991.

1992: New elections, and victory of the anticommunist "Democratic Party". Sali Berisha from Democratic Party becomes State president.

1997: The collapse of the pyramid investment schemes costs many Albanians their savings and leads to wide-spread social unrest. UN peacekeeping troops are finally brought in to quell the disorder. This period is sometimes also referred to as the "Albanian civil war".

1997: Preliminary elections lead to victory of the Socialist Party, Berisha resigns one month later. Socialist Party wins also the elections of 2001.

2005: The coalition led by the Democratic Party wins the elections, Sali Berisha becomes Prime Minister. They win also the elections in 2009.

2009: Albania becomes member of NATO and applies for EU membership

2013: The Socialist Party led by Edi Rama wins the parliamentary elections, Edi Rama becomes Prime Minister.

2014: Albania becomes official candidate for accession to the European Union.

2017: Presidential election is won by Ilir Meta, supported by Democratic Party, and parliamentary elections are won by Socialist Party, Edi Rama is reconducted as Prime Minister.

2. Short information about the sites we will visit:

Albanian National History Museum: The National History Museum of Albania was opened in 1981, under the communist regime, and has conserved various parts from this time while others have been added (especially the “Pavilion of Communist Terror”). It is the largest museum in Albania and its exhibition covers Albanian history from prehistoric culture and the Middle Ages to the 20th century. In 2018, the Ministry of Culture announced that the Museum would undergo a “deep reconstruction” in the near future.

Website: <http://www.mhk.gov.al/?lang=en>

House of Leaves – Museum of Secret Surveillance: The “House of Leaves”, situated in the very center of Tirana, has been for several decades the headquarters of the notorious *Sigurimi*, the Albanian State Security during the Communist time, and was then left widely abandoned after 1991. It was transformed in 2017 into a state-funded “Museum of Secret Surveillance”.

Website: <http://muzeugjethi.gov.al/?lang=en>

See also: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/26/new-sigurimi-museum-recalls-albania-s-sinister-past-05-25-2017/>

Former communist prison in Spac: Known during the communist rule as « Unit for Re-education 303 », located on a steep slope in the northern Albanian mountains, the Spac prison was established in 1968. The inmates, many of them political prisoners, were used as forced labour in the nearby copper and pyrite mines. The prison in Spac is also known for a revolt from 21st to 23rd May 1973, where the prisoners managed to take control of the camp, until the revolt was suppressed and their leaders executed. After the fall of communism the prisoners camp was closed, and the abandoned buildings have since then fallen in ruins. Several initiatives have been launched to convert Spac into a museum complex, but nothing was realized so far. In 2018, *Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania* has developed a Memorial-concept for the abandoned site which we will have the occasion to discuss during our program.

More info: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/28/albanians-hope-to-turn-political-prison-into-museum-05-25-2018/>

Site of Witness and Memory – Memorial in Shkodra: Originally used by Albanian Franciscan monks as a dormitory and educational institution, during communist rule the building was used as headquarters of the local department of the Ministry of Interior and as a prison. In 2014 was opened there the « Site of Witness and Memory »-Memorial, to commemorate the victims of Communist repression which was in Shkodra even harsher than elsewhere, as Shkodra was considered as a Catholic and anticommunist stronghold.

<http://www.vdkshkoder.com/>

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/31/albanian-museum-keeps-memories-of-communist-terror-alive/>

In Shkodra, after the visit of the «Site of Witness and Memory», we will also have the opportunity to make a memory walk related to the communist past through the city center, with *Go2 – Sustainable Urban Planning Organization*, or to visit the Rozafa Castle, a symbol of Albania’s rich cultural-historical heritage, with the *Regional Directory of Cultural Heritage*.

Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja: It was designed in the 1970s and inaugurated in 1982, and aims to honor the Albanian national hero Skanderbeg. The museum is situated in the Kruja

castle, a historical citadel which was the strongpoint of Skanderbegs defense against Ottoman invasion in the 1450s/1460s.

Gjirokastra: Gjirokastra in southern Albania is on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2005. The towns contains architecture typical for the Ottoman period, and is overlooked by the Gjirokastra Fortress which we will visit, as well as the old bazaar and the Ottoman-era Skenduli house. Gjirokastra is also the birthplace of former Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha and of the writer Ismail Kadare.

More info : <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/gjirokaster-albania-travel-holiday-what-to-do-unesco-city-beach-corfu-ionian-sea-a9000731.html>

3. Some key names and terms

Skanderbeg, byname of George (Albanian : Gjergj) Kastrioti, was the main military and political leader who led in the 15th century Albanian resistance against the Ottoman Empire's invasion and occupation of Albanian principalities. From the 1440s to the 1460s, operating out of his stronghold in the mountain town of Kruja, he resisted successfully several attempts of Ottoman Empire to occupy Albanian territories, what gained him also esteem and support by the Vatican and other Western European powers. After his death in 1468, the Albanian resistance against Ottoman Empire gradually collapsed and Albanian-populated territories came for several centuries under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Skanderbeg is considered as Albania's main national hero and a symbol for national unity, freedom, and independence.

Enver Hoxha: Albania's communist leader for forty years, until his death in April 1985. After his death he was buried next to the Mother Albania statue in the Martyr's Cemetery overlooking Tirana, but in April 1992 he was reburied in the main public cemetery of the city. In 1988, in the city center of Tirana was constructed the « Enver Hoxha Museum » within a pyramid-like structure. The museum was closed in 1991, and the building used as a conference venue. The Tirana Pyramid, sometimes also called the « Enver Hoxha Mausoleum », is today abandoned; there have been plans to demolish it, but at latest news it is planned to renovate it and to turn it into an IT center.

Bunkers: During the Communist period, between the 1960s and the 1980s, more than 170.000 concrete bunkers were built, as protection against a possible invasion of foreign powers, all over Albania, from the mountains to the coastline, sprouting up in neighborhoods, fields, playgrounds, cemeteries, and on beaches. Since the end of communism, most of these bunkers are now derelict, though some have been reused for a variety of purposes including residential accommodation, cafés, storehouses, and shelters for animals or the homeless. Sometimes compared to gray mushrooms, they are considered one of the main symbols of Enver Hoxha's paranoid, all-enveloping policymaking.

More info: Documentary "Concrete Mushrooms", by Elian Stefa and Gyler Mydyti: <https://vimeo.com/50002382>

Sigurimi: The Directorate of State Security (Albanian: *Drejtoria e Sigurimit të Shtetit*), commonly called the *Sigurimi*, was the state security, intelligence and secret police service during the Communist period, and was the key institution for controlling the population and to suppress any political and ideological opposition. It was dissolved in 1991. After long discussions, the government created in 2017 the *Authority on access to information on the Former State Security Service*, with similar tasks as the Stasi Records Agency in Germany, allowing victims of the Communist repression to access the files which concern them.

More info: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/03/01/digging-for-truth-in-communist-albania-s-secret-files-02-28-2018/>
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/communist-era-secret-police-files-reopen-old-wounds-albania-n884946>

Besides the *Authority on access to information on the Former State Security Service*, opened in 2017, two other institutions have been created by the Albanian State since the end of the dictatorship in order to address criminal legacies from the communist past: the *Institute for the integration of politically persecuted persons* (end of the 1990s) and the *Institute for the study of communist crimes and its consequences in Albania* (in 2010).

More info: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/16/albania-to-ban-the-study-of-wwii-as-part-of-communist-period/>

Political parties: In the nearly three decades since the end of communism, the political life in Albania has been mainly dominated by two opposing political parties: the Socialist Party of Albania, which succeeded in 1991 to the Communist Party, and the center-right Democratic Party of Albania. Since 1991, the governmental power has regularly shifted between the two parties.

Sali Berisha: Born in 1944, leading Albanian cardiologist in the 1970s/1980s, he became the longtime leader of the new center-right “Democratic Party” in post-communist Albania (from 1991 to 1992 and 1997 to 2013). He was President of Albania from 1992 to 1997 and Prime Minister from 2005 to 2013. Today he is still active as Member of the Parliament.

Edi Rama: Born in 1964, Edi Rama studied and worked at the Academy of Arts in Tirana in the 1980s, lived several years in Paris as painter in the 1990s, he was mayor of Tirana from 2000 to 2011, is the Chairman of the Socialist Party since 2005, and is the Prime Minister of Albania since 2013.

4. Further reading

Two reviews about a biography written on Enver Hoxha:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/30/enver-hoxha-iron-fist-of-albania-blendi-fevziu-review>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/enver-hoxha-lunatic-who-took-over-asylum/>

How Albania Became the World’s First Atheist Country, *Balkan Insight* 28.8.2019

Albania’s communist regime outlawed religion and waged a decades-long campaign of repression against Christian and Muslim believers, jailing and executing clerics and persecuting their families - but some continued to practice their faith in secret.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/28/how-albania-became-the-worlds-first-atheist-country/>

Search Begins for Missing Victims of Albanian Communism, *Balkan Insight*, 16.11.2018

The International Commission on Missing Persons has started the long-delayed process of searching for the remains of several thousand Albanians who went missing under Communism.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2018/11/16/icmp-starts-collection-of-dna-samples-for-victims-of-communism-identification-process-11-16-2018/>

Past Villains Live on in Albania's Present Politics, *Balkan Insight* 29.6.2018
As Prime Minister Edi Rama calls the opposition leader an 'Esadist' – and is in turn called a 'Hamza' – terms that mean nothing to outsiders are still finding a place in Albania's political battles <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/29/past-villains-live-on-in-albania-s-present-politics-06-29-2018/>

Albania's Communist Pyramid to Enter the Digital Age, *Balkan Insight* 21.7.2018
An iconic pyramid building constructed 30 years ago to house a museum celebrating Communist leader Enver Hoxha has fallen into disrepair, but plans are under way to transform it into a digital technology hub. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/06/21/albania-s-communist-pyramid-enters-the-digital-age-06-18-2018/>

Albania Celebrates 105th Anniversary of Independence, *Balkan Insight* 28.11.2017
Albania is celebrating 105 years since it declared independence from the Ottoman Empire on November 28, 1912, with a large ceremony held in the southern city of Vlora – where the declaration was officially made – and in the capital, Tirana. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/11/28/albania-celebrates-105th-anniversary-of-independence-11-28-2017/>

Historic Tirana Square: A Shrine to Change, *Balkan Insight* 9.6.2017
Albanians have gathered at Tirana's Skenderbej Square to protest and celebrate for 100 years, will its latest makeover be a hit with the public? <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/06/09/historic-tirana-square-a-shrine-to-change-06-08-2017/>

The house that Hoxha built: dictator's villa to become public space, *The Guardian* 28.6.2019
Enver Hoxha's villa in central Tirana, once sealed off by the Albanian secret service and home to party elites, is to be opened to the public. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/28/the-house-that-hoxha-built-dictators-villa-to-become-public-space-albania>

As Albania Reckons With Its Communist Past, Critics Say It's Too Late, *New York Times*, 26.2.2017: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/26/world/europe/as-albania-reckons-with-its-communist-past-critics-say-its-too-late.html>

“Citizens understanding and perceptions of the Communist past in Albania and expectations for the future” - Results of a survey conducted by the OSCE Presence in Albania in 2016: <https://www.osce.org/albania/286821>

See also: <https://albaniandailynews.com/index.php?idm=11887&mod=2>

On the activities of the *Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture* (IDMC) related to the Communist past, also in the educational field, see their website: <https://idmc.al/en/>

“Unlocking Dialogue & Action. A Concept for Spac Prison”, developed by *Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania* in 2018 on the basis of site visits, focus group sessions, on-site and archival research, as well as interviews with former prisoners and staff of Spaç Prison: See separate pdf-document

For more information about *Cultural Heritage without Borders Albania*, in general and more specifically on their memory-work related to Spaç:

<http://chwb.org/albania/>

[Heritage-making and Democratic Ideals in Albania: Spaç Prison as a Site of Dialogue](#) (as pdf)

A perspective from France (Patrimoine Sans Frontières) on memory policies in Albania : [Quel devenir pour le patrimoine moderne ? L'héritage datant de l'époque communiste en Albanie, le cas de la prison de Spaç.](#)(as pdf)



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