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Interviewee: Ilir Gjoni

Interviewer: Tumi Makgetla

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Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA
www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties

MAKGETLA: My name is Tumi Makgetla; it is the 16TH of June, 2010. I am in Tirana, Albania, with Ilir Gjoni, who was the minister of defense and also the minister of interior in Albania under Prime Minister Ilir Meta. He also worked as the chief of staff under Prime Minister Pandeli Majko. Thank you very much for consenting to this interview and joining us.

GJONI: *Thank you for giving me this opportunity.*

MAKGETLA: Excellent. Before we begin, can I just confirm that this is a voluntary discussion?

GJONI: *Absolutely, yes.*

MAKGETLA: Can we begin with your giving us a brief overview of your career, and if you could describe how you came to be involved as a minister in the cabinet under Prime Minister Meta?

GJONI: *I will give you a very brief bird's-eye view of my career. I graduated in '85 at Tirana University in philology, specializing in the English language. Afterwards, I was recruited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I worked until '94 in the ministry, my last position being U.S.A. (United States of America) desk officer when we established relations after a long period of time of not having such relations with the United States. Then I did a master's degree in diplomacy and later on I did a master's degree in national-security studies at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. I worked for some time as a journalist, an international news editor at the then only independent newspaper, Koha Jone. After that, I worked as liaison officer for the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) office in Tirana during the period of which we managed two refugee crises, the '98 refugee Kosovo crisis and the '99 one.*

In '99, I was summoned by Prime Minister Majko to become his chief of staff, and I worked for a couple of months with him. Then the government was changed and the Prime Minister Meta came, who reconfirmed me in the same position. I worked with him as chief of staff until July 2000. During that month, he appointed me as minister of defense. I worked for some four or five months as minister of defense and then I was elected minister of public order until February 2002. In short, this is my career.

MAKGETLA: It is quite extensive. You've had several roles that we are interested in during this time period. So maybe I can ask, because, as you describe your involvement in both the government under Prime Minister Majko and also Prime Minister Meta, starting with your time under Prime Minister Majko, what were the key challenges at the time that you regarded as priorities for you in your position?

GJONI: *Well, as I told you, under Prime Minister Majko I worked for a very short period of time, less than two months. The challenges of the country at that time were to recuperate in general from the '97-'98 crisis. Ninety-seven refers to the pyramid schemes, and '98 the attempted coup of the then leader of the opposition—now Prime Minister—(Sali) Berisha, plus the economic situation and setting up the solid democratic institutions.*

We also had to face the problem of repatriation of Kosovar refugees. You remember, at that time there were over half a million Kosovars who came and were sheltered in Albania. So the government had to face a very serious economic and security burden then. Obviously, we were greatly helped by the international community. But in general these were the main challenges.

Security-wise, the country was still unstable and there were parts of the territory of the country that were not fully controlled by the security forces, especially the north, the region of Tropoje as we call it. So, in short, that was what we were facing. That was obviously transferred to Mr. Meta when he became prime minister. We as a country had always cherished becoming a member of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and E.U. (European Union). These were the two main objectives of our foreign policy. We were working hard, but due to what occurred in '96 with the election fraud at that time, the '97 pyramid-scheme crisis and the '98 attempted coup, all these accumulated a series of problems and delayed the process of integration of the country, both into NATO and the EU.

We were one of the first countries of the region to have applied to become members of the Partnership for Peace, but as I told you, because of these developments, these processes were delayed. Now, if you want me to go through the period when I was minister of defense, obviously that was my priority target, taking the necessary steps to advance this objective of our military, our country being part of NATO. But to achieve that goal, we had to work in several areas. NATO integration was not just a matter of having an efficient army; it is coupled with other political elements, such as developing the economy, strengthening democratic institutions, having a political climate that would favor reforms, and the shares of other issues that we as a government had to tackle.

When I became a minister, it was a time of reform. We had to overhaul and change all the structures of the Ministry of Defense and the military per se. We restructured the general staff of the army, all the structure of the army. We had to work a lot on the ammunition stockpiles that we had. That was a major threat to the security of the country—not only to the country but also for the region. We had inherited enormous quantities of ammunition and weapons from the previous regime. Part of that was looted during the '97 crisis.

So my first objective was to concentrate, to bring the army depots in more concentrated areas, to minimize the number of the depots of the ammunition from 167 places, where we had them all over the country—we managed to minimize it to 50, 54. Plus we initiated a process of the demolition of weapons, and the destruction of small arms and light weapons, which we had managed to collect from the population after the '97 crisis. At that time, I remember, it was September when myself, the assistant undersecretary of state, Mr. (Eric) Newsom, a representative from Germany and Denmark, we signed an agreement in which Albania pledged to destroy some 120,000 small arms and light weapons. Now it seems a simple thing, but at that time we had to face many problems, especially psychological ones, because we had to convince people that this was necessary. These weapons were a threat to the security of the country, to the security of the region because they might fall into the hands of traffickers and they were also in the hands of the population.

So we initiated—it was the first country in the region, in the Balkans, to start such a process. That was replicated afterwards in the framework of stability pact and with the assistance of OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) and UNDP (United Nations Development Program) wherever they were present in the region.

MAKGETLA: Can you tell me more about that? What exactly was the process or the tradeoff involved in getting back arms—you said September, is that September—?

GJONI: *Yes, September 7, 2000. It was just less than two months after I started work as minister of defense. The idea was for these weapons, the country as a whole, I think, that is—during all the period of the communist regime and afterwards. So there were financial terms involved. We had to find a way to minimize losses from the destruction of these weapons. Secondly, there was a security consideration, which was very important, and confidence building, because it resonated in the other countries of the region. Our step was the first step taken in the Balkans, and it was an example showing to the other countries that we were not the country which needed any more such stockpiles of weapons—now we are entering into a phase where we want peace, stability and prosperity for the region. So that was also symbolic in a sense.*

Obviously this process started and it grew up, and now we are in a phase where the government and the country has pledged by the year 2012 or 2013—I'm not sure of the exact year—we're going to eliminate all the excessive military stockpiles which we inherited from the communist regime. So it was a very good and efficient step that we took.

Financially speaking, obviously, we destroyed them, but we tried to keep the revenues coming from the metal used or from the powder, which we collected from the dismantling of the ammunition, to use it for civilian purposes or to sell it as scrap. The revenues coming were entered into the budget of the Ministry of Defense and were used for infrastructure, mainly for infrastructure building within the military.

We used our local capacities. There was some assistance from OSCE and UNDP with regard to that. I remember once there was the famous Hollywood actor, Michael Douglas, who came over here. He was U.N. ambassador for peace, and he came on purpose just to give some publicity to this project. It was very interesting and appreciated by the public. So in a way, that was one of the things which I personally, but I'm sure the government, was proud of initiating a process of the demilitarization of the country, and of the region as such.

MAKGETLA: *Can you perhaps go a bit more into detail, just to sort of set the scene so that we get a better picture of what the security threat was? What was the situation on the ground? Who were the sorts of groups or actors that you had to contend with in this environment?*

GJONI: *Well, you have to remember that the Balkans from the early '90s was a battleground. It started with the dismemberment of the former Yugoslavia. The republics, the constituent republics seceded from Yugoslavia starting with Slovenia, Croatia and then Macedonia, other countries—Montenegro later on and coming with the NATO intervention in Kosovo. So it has been—we have been almost surrounded by conflicts. We in Albania didn't have any conflict with any of the neighboring countries, but because of being in an environment of conflict, the weapons which were circulating in the hands of the Albanians here—because of the '97 crisis where the army depots were looted by the population because the army disintegrated totally. Just for your information, probably you know that in '97, after the fall of the pyramid schemes, there was a massive revolt, which then was expressed in total chaos and anarchy. The army disintegrated and people started looting the army depots.*

All these hands—it is estimated that some 500,000 small arms and light weapons and ammunition were in the hands of the civilian population. So it was a country with civilians full of weapons, and a poor country facing very, very tough economic challenges, and they were prone to earning easy money by selling

these weapons. Most interested in that were the belligerent parts in the different areas in the Balkans and the organized-crime groups, both in the region or from Europe. We're just 68 nautical miles from Italy. At that time, the trafficking of human beings was a major problem for Albania and especially for the E.U. countries because the country was in anarchy and the criminal groups were organizing speedboats where they used to take people from the Albanian coast mainly to Italy and Greece. With the people weapons and drugs moved too.

So these were the challenges, the real challenges which we were facing. Plus, it created a situation of insecurity in the country. For a couple of years, there was no tourism at all, not even internal tourism. We're not speaking about foreigners coming to Albania; there were some areas, as I mentioned before, that were out of control, particularly in the north of the country bordering Kosovo. Obviously, there was, after the NATO intervention in Kosovo and the deployment of KFOR (Kosovo Force) troops there, there was a problem of security in Kosovo itself. But because the borders were too porous, the risk of infiltration of weapons and ammunition into Kosovo territory, which was under the control of NATO, was also a threat and posed a danger for the KFOR troops. So in general, these were the challenges that we were facing at that time.

MAKGETLA: Can I ask you, you've done a great job of describing this picture, but I understand the people were also organized, at least out of the '97 crisis, into salvation committees and people's committees. Were people organized? In some cases it may have just been a criminal gang that was organized? Can you sort of give me a picture of what the groups were like or the individuals who came to the fore of those groups? How did you regard them, as the state?

GJONI: *Initially, the sparks of the revolt were the pyramid schemes, but the problems were deeper. There were problems of democracy, of malfunction of the institutions. Basically, it was the personal role of the president at that time, Mr. Berisha, who wanted to control everything. Probably this came because they were not acquainted with democracy. I mean, people at the beginning misunderstood democracy with anarchy, total freedom, absolute freedom. Plus the need for control and the lack of education with democratic culture and also the lack of democratic culture in general in our society. Our country is relatively young. We proclaimed independence in 1912. We never had the opportunity or never reached the level of social-economic development in which the population created the classes or layers that would run the country in a democracy or even in an initial capitalist way of relations among the people. It was more like a feudal society from 1912 until 1944.*

In 1944 the communists took over. They led the war, the anti-fascist war. They did good things, especially in terms of education, health, and some infrastructure, but still because of the communist mentality, which wanted to control everything, there was no sense of dissidence at all. Plus there was total lack of knowledge of democracy, how democracy functioned. So in '97, all these elements, which were pent up and did not explode in '91-'92, started to find their way out. Then '97 was a combination, a cocktail, of elements, poverty, chaos, lack of understanding, lack of democratic culture, political culture and a difficult economic situation.

The revolt was massive because almost all Albanians were involved in the pyramid schemes. They blamed the government because the government or government officials were sort of supporting the pyramid schemes as a model of capitalist development, which obviously was wrong and was proven wrong. So all that hatred was directed towards the government. The government reacted in a very, very primitive way I'd say. They used the intelligence and the military to

quell the revolt, but they forgot that the military and the intelligence—partially the intelligence—were also victims of the pyramid scheme. So a soldier who was ordered to go and suppress a revolt in south Albania, let's say, could not understand why, because these people they were protesting for the money they had lost. They had relatives who had lost money and they themselves had lost money. Plus the military in our country has always been democratic, not military, such as, let's say, in South America.

This is so for many reasons, but one of them is because they have been always suppressed and under the control of the politicians—whoever was in power, either communist or now after the communist regime has been overthrown. So they never acted as a separate body from the side, which is a good thing in a way. That was the reason why people then started getting organized. It was total chaos; there were gangs looting left and right. So these so-called salvation committees, they were a group of people but they were mainly ex-military or military, but even normal citizens with some reputation in the area, who sat together and established some form of government to keep order in the area, to avoid looting, to keep under control these gangs which were acting in that specific area. They were spread all over the country, these salvation committees.

Obviously, that had some political connotations, because they were against Mr. Berisha and the government of Mr. Berisha. Following that, the government resigned. Mr. Berisha tried to impose a curfew, which lasted for a couple of months, but nobody respected it. Then a political solution was found. That was mainly due to the intervention of the international community, mainly OSCE, but also E.U. member countries who sent their military here to assist the provisional government in establishing law and order in the country. That period lasted from '97 until 2001.

In '98, after Berisha lost the election, the '97 election, he tried to organize a coup but it was unsuccessful. They attacked the prime minister's office, the central TV station and the Ministry of Public Order. But because they didn't find support among the people and the reaction of the international community was very, very tough, Berisha was forced to withdraw from that scheme.

Then came a period of the refugee crisis. The Kosovar refugee crisis brought some kind of political consensus among both the main political parties, the Socialist Party, which was in power, and the Democratic Party, which had lost the elections in '97. There was some kind of consensus in facing the refugee crisis as a country, as a political class, as a whole. Afterwards, Mr. Majko accomplished his duty quite successfully I'd say, and he bore the brunt of the '99 refugee crisis due to some internal developments in the Socialist Party, which was governing at that time. Mr. Meta, who was the deputy prime minister to Mr. Majko, was elected prime minister.

Now, coming to Mr. Meta and my impression why he was successful during his mandate. First, I'd say, the time was right and the country was fed up with these riots and unrest and slow economic development. So objectively speaking, Mr. Meta had all the cards in his hand to play. And he played them in a very smart way. He was very young, 29, when he became prime minister, but with a long experience in the leadership of the Socialist Party, starting as a youth leader and then gradually going to the top of the leadership. My impression is that he had been a very careful observer of how the party worked and what the society needed at that time. This time my impression is that people were fed up—as they are now, unfortunately—with politicians talking, but doing nothing.

So one of the first moves Mr. Meta did was to reshuffle the cabinet and bring in people who were not directly related with the party or who were not party members at all. This ran a very high risk for him, but he used, or he took advantage of the clashes, which were between groups within the Socialist Party. Since the Socialist Party needed to keep power and to have some successes and not fail after Berisha had failed, there was no immediate reaction for what Meta did.

For example, he brought Mr. (Edi) Rama in the government, who was one of the founders of the Democratic Party and a very open opponent of the Socialist Party at the beginning of the '90s, when the system was changed. He brought in Mr. (Sokol) Nako as minister of transport, with no relations to the party, who was not a member of the Socialist Party at all; myself, who was not a member of the Socialist Party at all; Mr. (Arben) Imami, who had been one of the founders of the Democratic Party but who split in the way from Berisha. He founded a new party, the Democratic Alliance Party and then after '97 he joined the Socialist Party, not as a member but as a coalition. Mr. [Indecipherable] as well, who was one of the founders of the Democratic Party who had nothing to do with the Socialist Party; and some other young guys who were not directly involved with the Socialist Party. They had family relations or were inclined towards the left but they were not in the structures of the party, which, at that time, in my opinion were sort of like a tight jacket for new initiatives and a new spirit in running the government.

Obviously that brought results. He had very clear objectives in mind. First was infrastructure. Integration into NATO and the E.U. were also major targets, and security as well. We managed during that period to have enormous achievements in terms of infrastructure, which were felt immediately among the population. Security was established. The trafficking of human beings was minimized at that time for the first time. Both the Italian prime minister at that time, Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, and the Greek prime minister, (Costas) Simitis, declared that the issue of trafficking of human beings from Albania was over. It was at that time we managed to present to the president of the E.U. then, Mr. Romano Prodi, the status report, which was the initial phase in starting the process of E.U. integration, which we hope that this government will finalize by getting the status of candidate member this year. That was in 2000.

Plus security-wise, we managed to create an environment of security, which was felt and everybody appreciated at that period. It was a clear-cut distinction between that period and the previous period, or even later periods. At that time, we also managed to come from the third tier of the U.S. State Department categories of human trafficking to the second one, which was also a major development for Albania. Unfortunately, last year, this government went from the second tier to the same tier but under the watch list. I haven't seen this year's report. Probably they managed to go again to the second tier, but that was also a major development.

In terms of political consent, we managed to run relatively calmly, although Berisha was trying to boycott the Parliament with a series of other elements, but people were feeling that things were changing. So he did not find real support among the population until 2001, 2002, when we, as the Socialist Party, started our internal problems, and there were problems between Mr. Meta and Mr. (Fatos) Nano, then chairman of the Socialist Party.

MAKGETLA: This is extremely helpful in understanding what happened. I'd like to ask you a few questions about that. Firstly, starting with your initial comments about the fact that the unrest in '97 was also about the legacy of the democratic transition and

the fact that there was a response to democracy, anarchy—there was a loss of confidence in the government driving some of this organized mobilization, where people were just trying to take control of the situation and restore some sort of government. How did the state then, how did the government after '97 and also leading up—if it was a continued problem under Prime Ministers Meta and Majko—how did they deal with those groups who were not just criminal, who also maybe had aspirations to change the political cultures?

GJONI: Most of them, they were dissolved by themselves. Those who were not and who took a criminal, let's say, coloring and started criminal activities, they were fought very toughly. At that time we managed to eliminate some 40 to 50 criminal gangs. Some of the most prominent criminals of that time, who became very notorious figures like Robin Hoods of that period or in that area—they were arrested, detained and imprisoned. And they're still imprisoned. So there was a very tough fight with them. In the process, some 130 policemen lost their lives in fighting with the organized crime groups.

We fought toughly with them, and we continued on the other side by trying to bring the economy into the right track, by trying to give the population the idea that this country is not hopeless, this country has a future, this country is rich in minerals, it is very well-situated geopolitically, and we should take stock of our comparative advantages. We managed to do that because we worked as a team. We had no prejudices towards each other, we had no political prejudices because of what I told you. Mr. Meta, obviously, was the one who was running all the show. He was very ambitious to do something; young, energetic and—.

MAKGETLA: The reason I asked about that was because I think, you know, this is something that could be of great interest to people in other countries, where it may be necessary to undermine individuals who were, perhaps, involved in organized crime, but it might be difficult politically if, as you say, they are regarded as Robin Hoods and they're regarded as local heroes. So how was that managed, because that can be quite difficult politically?

GJONI: First of all, in all this history, in the 20 years of democracy we have had, one thing is sure: if these criminals do not have political support, they are nothing. And that is the key issue. Probably, I am not a competent person to give that answer, it needs a very thorough analysis. But probably because we had the determination to fight them, we had the drive to do something good for the country and we were not related, or deeply related, with the party structures in the country. Plus, we were a mixture of individuals; we were not with the same ideological composition, let's say. This brought some kind of hope in the people, plus the results—you have to bring results to be convincing to the people.

So we managed to somehow cut this link between politics and organized crime groups or criminals in general, which are mainly used during the election campaigns. Normally the criminal groups are opportunistic. We don't have left or right criminals; they gravitate wherever they see power and interest they can benefit from. So we, I think, came at the right moment. The population was fed up with words. The population was fed up with anarchy. The population needed some action and some results. I don't know if Mr. Meta thought through these things in a thorough way and did an analysis and then decided that he would have such a composition, but in the end, when I do my analysis, I give a lot of credit to the composition of the government, to the fact that we were not very strongly linked at that period of time, with the party as such—although this is necessary because to be in the government and not to represent your political force, it's—. But I think we were all very conscious that our ideology was to bring

some development to the country, to bring the country out of this feeling of desperation and disillusionment with democracy.

There were people and voices saying that we were better off during communism—at least there was no anarchy, at least the work was guaranteed. Even if we used to get very low salaries, at least everybody used to work. There were no rich people and very poor people; we were all mostly at the same level. So these were all elements that were sort of undermining the democracy as such, with very, very bad long-term repercussions. So we felt the need—we had to change this mentality. We had to bring some results. We had to show the people that democracy is functional. It is a system where people can live freely and enjoy the benefits of a free life.

Obviously, free initiative—it is for all, but not everybody is equally smart to navigate the system. Plus, we were a nascent democracy and the difficulties were very tough. But we felt that we had to give a message to the country that this country could be made, that this country was full of potential and, to use the words of your president, we can, we could—and we managed somehow.

MAKGETLA: So what was unique about the situation was that there were individuals in the cabinet who did not have ties to—or who were not part of the Socialist Party, who had a different perspective and they weren't as hamstrung by that affiliation? How did you then work with other groups in the party or build support for what you were trying to do? Did they regard you as outsiders? Was there any difficulty that you encountered?

GJONI: *Initially, yes, we had that feeling, but, as I told you, we were very conscious about—. I mean, we were not apolitical people. We knew that the party was necessary to gain support. But at that time our impression was that we needed the support of the people directly more than that of the party structures, which would only frame us and put us on frames and limitations to be cautious not to displease one group of people and to please another group of people. We were trying to focus on the entire population, not just the Socialist electorate, let's say, or the left electorate.*

We were trying to give a message to the entire population. We did that by undertaking very crucial reforms, like the public-administration reform, introducing the principle of meritocracy and translating it into a law vis-à-vis the public administration. We imposed limits on ourselves in terms of moving people just because of political affiliations. We tried to bring in experts and specialists in respective areas. I managed to do that in the Ministry of Public Order and Defense. Minister Nako managed to do that in the Ministry of Transport. Mr. (Mustafa) Muci, the minister of energy, did the same thing. The prime minister himself, in his staff, brought people who now belonged to the Democratic Party, very prominent figures in the Democratic Party.

So we gave to the country and to the people an image of relatively young guys who wanted to do something for the country. This was done by actions, both legal, introducing new laws, establishing sound foundations for the institutions we were working—and by also delivering results. Obviously in our work we worked very closely with the E.U., with the United States—they had been very helpful, especially for me, the minister of defense and Interior. I had enormous support from the United States government. We have worked very closely with them especially in training the military, both here and in the United States—training the police forces here and in the United States. They have programs that still continue for training and assisting the leadership of both ministries and adjusting

the structures and making them—adapting them to the new situation where we are now.

So we fought a lot against terrorism with the specialized U.S. agencies and European agencies. We initially had very serious problems with Islamic fundamentalists who tried to infiltrate the country because of poverty, through various philanthropic NGOs (nongovernment organizations), let's call them.

MAKGETLA: When was this?

GJONI: *It was '98, '99, 2000. But we managed to eliminate all these groups. When I say eliminate, I mean to prosecute them legally according to the laws of the country.*

MAKGETLA: You mentioned some of the key reforms that you were engaged in as the minister of defense and minister of the interior as removing small weapons in reference to the population, consolidating depots, reducing human trafficking. What would you also say were some of the important changes that you were involved in in those positions?

GJONI: *As the minister of defense I'm also proud of myself for following a personnel policy that was based on merit. This—not because I'm selfish, but as I told you, when I went, when I started work as minister of defense, it was a time of reforming all the systems of the Ministry of Defense and of the armed forces. So we designed a structure that proved to be the most solid during the last 20 years of democracy. The chief of staff whom I appointed and the commanders of the three forces—land forces, air and sea—they were the persons who stayed in their positions longest. The chief of staff was the only one who stayed for two mandates. The commanders of the forces, two of them were—just one of them was replaced recently, one year or two years. The other two, the commanders of the sea forces, the naval forces, and the air forces—they are still in place. So that proved that we, as government, had managed to find people who managed to do reforms, because these people brought the country into NATO.*

MAKGETLA: How did you do that, because that is a real challenge?

GJONI: *That's a big challenge, but that's very simple. I mean, if you follow the principle of meritocracy, if you are very careful to see not only the professional buildup of this person but also the personal relations they have with other people, how they manage these relations, and also how they manage those areas which they had been running—there were a series of elements which made me decide and propose to the prime minister and the president of the republic (who is the commander-in-chief) to propose these persons as candidates.*

MAKGETLA: What were the qualities that stood out for you in there?

GJONI: *Sorry?*

MAKGETLA: What were the qualities in their interpersonal relations or other factors, facets of how they worked that were important for you?

GJONI: *The first thing that was important was that they should have followed a normal career. By normal career, I mean a career starting from foot soldier to general, plus extra educational training. I mean, the chief of staff I appointed was still graduating from the British War College I think, if I'm not mistaken. So I called him. He was in London; he was getting his diploma, a master's in security affairs. He was a colonel and then he was appointed a general, but he had started as a*

foot soldier. He had made very good impression among the military—very easy-going with them, professionally speaking, very talented. Obviously, I also got this impression from our partners, who were monitoring and assisting us in the process reforming the army.

So these were basically the elements. But mostly, it was meritocracy and following the normal career path. I mention this because after the change of the system, there was an enormous mistake, I'd say, of the democratic government that came. They changed the public administration entirely because they thought that everybody was involved in one way or another with the communist system. That was true for each and everyone here. The thing is that they replaced them with people who had absolutely no knowledge of how to run works, the administration, management, how to write a letter, a memo. It is very curious, my first order as minister of public order was how to write a memo; that was my first order as minister of public order.

When I went there, I remember the first day: they brought me a memo which was written in Font 18 Germanic style, without all those elements which a normal memo requests. I was astonished, because I hadn't worked in the administration since '92, '94, when I left the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since I had some experience with the U.N., working with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, I had all these samples, models, of how the U.N. used memos and correspondence and all that stuff. I remembered that I had them on a diskette. So I checked and I found one, which was, according to me, more propitious for that.

I translated that and I attached it to the minister's order. I said, from now on, the correspondence in the Ministry of Defense and all the structures of the ministry will be in this way. And today, it is still that same order which is being applied. Unfortunately, I had to do the same thing when I went to the Ministry of Public Order. I tell you this just to show that the public administration was damaged so much with the change of the system that, even after 10 years, you could feel the damages, the repercussions. The lack of professionalism, lack of knowledge of how to run a sector in the public administration.

What else? I mean, one of the other things that I'm proud of during the period is establishing a foreign language center at the Ministry of Defense. Coming from a language school and being very fond of English I was—but that was not the key reason. Knowing that one day we would be part of NATO, it was crucial that all our military, and especially the general staff, be fluent in English, to secure the interoperability of the forces.

I managed to raise the center, to equip it with teachers and lecturers, and the necessary technology, and also to bring in professors from abroad or send military abroad to study English. We managed, in a very short period of time, to have all the general staff become fluent in English. So I didn't have any of the general staff, which was composed of some 150 persons—the entire staff, who could not speak in English and who could not deliver a lecture in PowerPoint, in English, the same they do it in NATO, in SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) in Brussels or wherever. Obviously, that was an investment that bore fruit, because now, we have almost all the military that are in senior positions in the ministry, without discussion, that everybody should know English and they are interoperable with their colleagues in NATO.

But, as I told you, I stayed for less than five months in the Ministry of Defense. The Ministry of Public Order was more challenging. As I told you, my first challenge was to establish control over the entire territory, to fight these criminal

gangs and most importantly, to fight the trafficking of human beings. I managed at that time to convince the German minister of interior, the Greek minister, and the Italian minister to set up an international anti-trafficking center in Vlora. Vlora is the key town in the Ionian coast of Albania in the south from where, mostly, these rubber boats would go with people to Italy. I chose it on purpose just to show that this trafficking center would become an anti-trafficking center. My idea was not only to establish an operative center where we would coordinate efforts among Greeks, Albanians, Italians, from where the trafficking networks come. But I also managed to involve the German minister of interior, who was the most powerful minister in the E.U. member countries.

They helped me a lot in establishing—they gave me political support. We managed to set up the center. Unfortunately, after the Meta government resigned, nobody was able to understand the importance of this center, and unfortunately, this center with this government is now closed; it is nonexistent. The idea was not to have just an operative center, as I told you, but also a center of training and a center of education and conferences for the entire region. We started with the Greeks and with the Italians and with the Germans who are E.U. member countries, but then we could have enlarged it to Macedonians, Montenegrins. We could have brought them in this center. We could have coordinated efforts in the fight against trafficking groups, both weapons or drugs, or all sorts of trafficking. We could have trained our teams to have a common way of operation and to coordinate the joint effort with them.

That was one of the major things that we managed—.

MAKGETLA: Can you just tell me a bit more about that operation center? How many people were involved? Was it primarily Albanian forces with the cooperation of others? What were the exact activities they were involved in?

GJONI: *We held a conference here in Tirana in which the other three ministers, the ministers of Germany, Italy and Greece participated. We formalized the establishment of the center. We agreed that initially, they would send a representative from each ministry, something which they did and we did. We set up a very nice place in Vlora as a center. We equipped it with all the necessary technological equipment needed. The idea was to start working on files of criminal groups who had activities in Greece, Albania and Italy mainly. Germany was more like support, because we don't have a border with Germany, but Germany is affected indirectly because these people would cross to Italy or to Greece and then go to Germany or Switzerland or other countries.*

My idea started because we had an operation with the FBI (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation) in which some eight countries were involved. This group of drug traffickers had activity in some eight countries, starting from Colombia to Spain, Italy, Albania, Greece, and obviously, the United States. We coordinated efforts with the FBI and with the Italians. We attacked this group the same day in all these countries. It was very well coordinated. We managed to neutralize the group in Albania and in the other countries. There were some 28 people who were arrested. The entire group was dismantled. So it rang a bell.

Then I had this idea, why should we wait for the Americans to give us this idea? We knew that this group of people, Kurds mainly, were coming through Greece, Turkey, Greece and then Albania, and they would cross Greece, come to Albania, go to Italy. My ministry was working independently only within its territory. The Greek ministry only within their territory. Why shouldn't we join efforts, following the example which I had in mind, and then we could dismantle

the entire group from the very source to the very end. So that was the idea, how it started. It was very successful initially, but afterwards, unfortunately, nobody followed up.

MAKGETLA: When did you start that?

GJONI: *That was in 2001.*

MAKGETLA: What were some of the—? One second.

One of the things that comes up from this discussion is that your work involved a lot of managerial work to improve the functioning of the departments. Were there any particular incentives or strategies that you employed to motivate the people under you to deliver in terms of the key emphasis of this period?

GJONI: *Our resources were very limited at that time. Financial resources and other resources. But the spirit and the wish and the will of specialists, of senior officers, and also normal people who were working, was such that it sort of gave us a kind of enthusiasm to work. It is not just because I had that enthusiasm. It was also that I found an environment that was supportive of me. I'd do whatever I could within my limited resources to assist and help these people. They would know that this government knew how to praise their work, within the limits of what they did. This was spread all over the government, not only in my department, but also in Mr. Nako's, in Mr. Muci's or Imami's. If you give them an example that you treat them equally, that you treat them in a way which promotes their achievements without following party lines or party affiliation, but just because they do their work and they do it well, you give them a lot of—I mean, those incentives, which were available at that time—you give them extra salary. You give a party for them. You promote them from one rank to another. There were limited resources, but still very efficient. People would appreciate and they would know that this management of the ministry does not make distinctions between this or that. Somebody who does not deserve would never get a promotion just because he is a friend of this or that politician. That was the spirit and the atmosphere that we tried to create at that time in the government.*

MAKGETLA: You know, I'd like to ask you a bit more about how you were able to implement this meritocratic ideal, because in many of the countries we look at, people come under pressures to hire people or to work with people that come from either difficult factions within the party, or from outside groups. Did you come under those pressures and what would you say are good ways to manage that?

GJONI: *Absolutely. That will be the epilogue of the story. One of the reasons why Mr. Meta's government was forced to resign was because of that. That's why I mentioned it at the beginning. When Mr. Meta started, the climate was such—and the conditions were very propitious to follow the track, which we followed. But once the party, or the elements within the party—not only in the left party but also in the right party—sort of pulled together and felt that they were threatened in their power, then the problem started.*

That was coupled also, probably, with the disease all politicians have, a disease from which no politician wants to get cured, which is power. I mean, we know that it is a disease, but we don't want to get cured of it. I think Mr. Meta was a victim of that, probably. But also, within the party, there was this power struggle and turf fighting, which obviously made many people jealous.

We didn't have the support of the party structures, as such, because we were not involved with the party structures. We did not have any control on them. It was just Prime Minister Meta who knew the ropes, and he knew how to navigate with that. But apparently, he didn't know very well, and that's how we—.

MAKGETLA: But when it came to making staffing decisions for example, or whatever work that you were doing, whether it was building a building in Vlora or this—if you came under pressure, how did you manage those sorts of—?

GJONI: *I had the full trust of Mr. Meta and I trusted him fully. He never, ever, told me what to do. We knew the principles and the guidelines, the intentions of the government, but he never ever told me what to do, whom to take into a certain position or another. All the propositions that I made, which were under his authority for approval, he approved to me. He had full trust in me. I mean, even with the Vlora Center, the international center for anti-trafficking, I told him just one day before I'd arranged almost everything. Obviously, I mean, he was surprised, but he was nicely surprised, because it was a very powerful PR (public relations) activity for the government. It was not a small thing to bring here the most powerful minister of Europe, the minister of interior of Germany, and that of Italy and Greece, and organize a very nice event and initiate a major project, which would have been a regional project, not just an Albanian project.*

So in that sense, I think Mr. Meta was very, very clever in choosing people. He had this in-built wiseness where he could identify people and trust in people, obviously to a certain degree, because everybody could get out of control, willingly or unwillingly. When you stay for a long period of time in a government position or in politics, you start stinking. They say politicians are like diapers, they have to be changed frequently. So I don't know, but I know for sure that once Mr. Meta became a threat to the party structures, to the party itself, to the leadership of the party, because he was overshadowing the leader of the party at the time, Mr. Nano, then the problems started and then our government collapsed.

MAKGETLA: OK, well, this has been a fascinating discussion. As I mentioned earlier, the purpose of this interview is to allow other new reformers in similar circumstances to learn from your experiences, learn from the challenges that you've encountered. Is there anything that you'd like to add in that context that we haven't had a chance to discuss so far?

GJONI: *I don't know. The problem of running a country in a new democracy is very complex, and it differs from country to country. Most important is finding the right people in the right place first. Second is building strong institutions based on very clear laws, not ambiguous laws. And approving laws in Parliament that you are sure are going to be implemented. You can pass many laws, all the laws of the Acquis Communautaire, they say, which are needed to be a member of EU. But when it comes to implementation, and you do not implement them, then they have the reverse effect. Like, let's say, the tobacco law. Tobacco is prohibited by law in Albania. Obviously, as you see, nobody respects that. Just to give you an example.*

And invest a lot on public administration and meritocracy, that's the key. If you invest and try to preserve it as a national richness, consider it as a richness that the nation will inherit for a long period of time, invest in public administration a lot. Try to avoid as much as one can the influence of politicians into appointments in the public administration; stick to professionals and invest a lot in upgrading their professionalism.

In a few words that's what I can say.

MAKGETLA: Thank you very much; it has been a fascinating discussion.

GJONI: *Thank you.*