

# Kosovo Smart Card



**Welcome to Kosovo-Mire se vini ne Kosove!** (*Meer seh vee-nee nuh Koh-sov*)

My name is Ilir and I am an ethnic Albanian. I will be your cultural guide during your deployment in Kosovo. You are in a friendly country among friendly people. Before you commence your duty, you should know few important things about the culture of Kosovo. The majority of us (92%) are ethnic Albanians. The largest minority group is ethnic Serbs. You should be familiar with both groups.

There are three important things that you should know about Albanians:

- 1.) Our national identity rests on our language.
- 2.) Our beliefs, values, norms, behaviors, and actions rest on the concept of Besa and the Code of Leke Dukagjini (The Kanun).
- 3.) Being an Albanian is our faith and our religion.

## Albanian Entitlement

Our dispute with the Kosovo-Serbs dates back centuries ago, and at the heart of it is the belief that both of us are entitled to claim Kosovo as our land. We have always been in Kosovo. We never came from another place, which means we didn't migrate to Kosovo from somewhere else. We are descendants of the prehistoric Balkan tribes of Albanoi and Dardanian (Illyrians). Unlike us, South Slavs to include the ethnic Serbs migrated in the territories governed by Byzantine Empire during the 6th century AD. We refer to Serbs as "Shkajt" (*Sh-kite*).



## Language

The most important thing you should know about our language is that it embodies our common denominator of national unity and identity expressed in our celebrated saying of **"the faith of Albanians is Albanianism."** Our official language is **Shqip** (*sh-keep*). The two primary dialects are **Tosk** (*tohsk*) and **Gheg** (*geg*). In Kosovo we speak the Gheg dialect. Our linguistic division corresponds to anthropological differences between Ghegs and Tosks who differ markedly in outlook and social behavior with us, Ghegs, having better preserved our national characteristics of fierce independence and resistance to any external authority.

## The Kanun (Code) of Leke Dukagjini

Our culture, its values and belief system, rest on the Kanun of Leke Dukagjini, a collection of 15th century customary laws written in the early 20th century by Father Shtjefen Gjecovi an Albanian Catholic priest.

- Kanun is mostly used among Ghegs in northern Albania and Kosovo. Like many other codes of conduct used in patriarchal-tribal societies, **honor** rules all aspects of our lives, and helps understand our mindset, attitudes, behaviors and actions.
- Kanun reflects the understanding of ourselves, our society, and our role within the society. It provides an enforceable legal mechanism that ensures a relatively normal evolution of our society. For us, the Kanun demands far more obedience than the religious teachings of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

The key to Kanun is our **"Besa"** (*Bay-sah*, faith/word of honor) or the significance of honor, which means a man's promises go beyond the grave. If you want to know us, "Besa" is the key to understanding who we are. If we give you our "Besa" pledge, you can count on it.

Regretfully, in a less honorable note, Besa is used as a membership test within Albanian organized crime. Most of the Albanian mafias, operating in Kosovo, Albania, the Balkans, and Western European countries, are difficult to be penetrated by law enforcement agencies because of Besa.



## Albanian Religion

The majority of us are Muslims however there is a community of Christian Catholics concentrated in Gjakove, Prizren, and Peje. Most of us are followers of the Bektashi order (branch of Sufi Islam), whose teachings are basically Shi'a, but in a very early form with both Christian and pagan elements.

We are particularly known for high acceptance of anyone who accepts our beliefs, and we confess our sins to spiritual advisors.

- We do not veil our women
- We are not forbidden from drinking alcohol
- We attach little significance to formal prayers
- Our religious practices are a mixture of rituals and folk beliefs
- Religious status is a fluid concept and is best captured by the saying "ku eshte shpata eshte feja (*koo ursht shpa-tah ursht fay-ah*)- where the sword is, there lies religion"
- Most of us are outspoken supporters of the United States and strong opponents of any indication of Islamist designs

## Facts and Figures

Albanians whether from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, or Diaspora are considered ethnic Albanians. We call ourselves Shqiptare (*sh-keep-tar*): Albanians or short Shqipe (*sh-keep-eh*) although we, from Kosovo, are also known as Kosovars. For the purpose of this smart card we are going to refer to ourselves as Shqiptare except minorities.

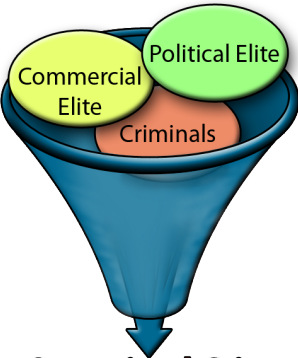
Government: Republic  
Flag: Six white stars-six major Ethnic groups: Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Gorani, Roma, and Bosniaks.  
Capital: Pristina  
Languages: Albanian and Serbian (official), Bosnian, Turkish, Roma  
Literacy: 91.9% (male 96.6%, female 87.5%)

## Facts and Figures cont.

Ethnic Groups: Albanians 92%, Other 8%(Serb, Bosniak, Gorani, Roma, Turk, Ashkali, and Egyptian).



## Organized Crime



**Organized Crime**

Organized crime is a prominent feature in our society, which threatens the legitimacy of our independence and the fragile democracy we are trying to build. The geographic proximity to Western Europe makes Kosovo a major transit point of Afghan heroin. Organized crime is associated with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the post-communist transition. Criminal organizations do not fit the profile of a conventional crime of rape, murder, assault, and burglary. Instead corruption, privatization fraud, and money laundering are more prevalent as a result of disoriented law enforcement institutions, rapid changes of social & economic norms, and policy uncertainty. Kosovo is a corridor for drug trafficking, human smuggling, cigarette smuggling, weapons trafficking, and prostitution.

**Post-Communist Transition** + **Break up of Yugoslavia** = **Blurred & hazy criminal enterprise and legitimate commerce**

## Communication Tips

- When we shake the head from left to right this means "yes," and a nod means "no".
- You should be very careful when using derogatory language. It is absolutely offensive to use expressions such as "f...you," or "mother f...".
- It is extremely dangerous if you say derogatory things about someone's sister or wife. Women represent the family honor; the societal pressure on men is tremendous. Therefore, when you curse, we feel obligated to "stand up" for ourselves. You may get punched in a face or possibly even killed.
- For those of us who speak English, we would curse without being bothered, but we rarely curse in Shqip because in our



Freedom & Democracy (ethnic Albanians)



Not a chance



Unity



Serbian Orthodoxism



Yes



Respectful Bow



## Albanian Cuisine

Our cuisine is deeply influenced from Greek/Byzantine and Turkish/Ottoman cuisines. Due to our pastoral background, most of our cuisine is meat and dairy based.

Our main meal is lunch, and usually consists of **Meze (appetizer)**, **Gjellë (main course)**, and **Buke (bread)**. Gjella is typically a slowly cooked meat while the Meze could be a salad of fresh vegetables, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, green peppers, and olives, or feta cheese, qofte (meatballs), gjize (savory dairy curd), tarator (cold savory dairy soup), or turshi (pickled vegetables). The salad is dressed with olive oil, balsamic vinegar and salt.

- Usually only our children eat breakfast.
- Men usually start the day by going to the local bars (klub, qebaptore) to drink Turkish coffee and cognac or **Raki** (made with grapes and anise).
- It is customary that before and after the meal we say **"Ju befte mire"** (*you-buff-tuh-meer*, enjoy).
- Traditionally, when we drink alcohol especially **"Raki,"** we say **"Gezuar"** (*guh-zoo-ar*: cheers).
- We eat dinner very late at night around 0800 pm and even later when we go to restaurants. We like to hang out around local restaurants, bars (**klub**), or other establishments for several hours after we have eaten or drank. This usually goes on for hours after midnight.



Photo by David Bailey



## Serb Identity

My name is Danilo and I will be your cultural guide during your deployment in Kosovo.

**Who are we?** Our history is inextricably tied to that of the Balkans, the region we share with our neighbors. We are part of a larger group of people called South Slavs, which includes Croats, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Slovenes, Macedonians, and Bulgarians. Although we, the South Slavs, divide along linguistic, religious, and cultural lines,



at times, we have shared the same homeland under foreign domination or as a unified state (Yugoslavia). Turks, Albanians, Hungarians, and Austrians have also played important roles in the construction of our identity—who we are as a people. Unfortunately, you tend to identify us and other Balkan people without understanding our unique characteristics. As St. Sava once famously wrote: "At first we were confused. The East thought we were West, while the West considered us to be East. Some

## Serb Identity cont.

of us misunderstood our place in this clash of currents, so [we] cried that we belong to neither side, and others that we belong exclusively to one side or the other. But I tell you..., we are doomed by fate to be the East on the West, and the West on the East, to acknowledge only the heavenly Jerusalem beyond us, and here on earth-no one."

We are very self confident people, even though coming to terms with the recent past is difficult because history in the Balkans is a very controversial and debatable issue due to distorted and misinterpreted facts. Yet, we have managed to survive as a nation thanks to the creator and the protector of our identity and culture- the Serb Orthodox Church.

For us, Kosovo is the center of our old Serbia. We call it Metohija because the word means a land owned and governed by monasteries, and most of our Orthodox churches that predate the 500 hundred years of Ottoman invasion are located there.

Also you should know about the epic Battle of Kosovo (1389) because it is the core of our collective identity. We fought against the Ottomans to protect Serbia and the Christian Europe. Our Prince Lazar and his entire army fought heroically against the massive army of the Ottomans that included Albanians.

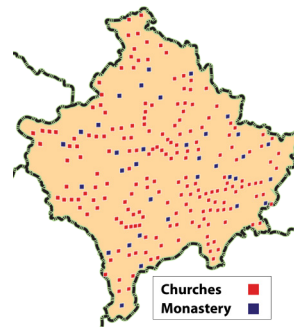
For generations we have celebrated the death of Prince Lazar and the slaughter of his entire army. However, it's not the defeat that we celebrate; rather it is our Serb epic resistance as a nation. After we were forced to leave our land, Kosovo, religious and ethnic balance changed forever in favor of Muslim Albanians. Today, our communities are concentrated in Zubin Potok, Zvečan, Leposavić, Novo Brdo, Stripçe, and Mitrovica, a city divided between us and Albanians by the Ibar River.

## Serb Religion

For us the Serb Orthodox Church is the central place where we celebrate our holidays and preserve our faith, customs, and traditions. We owe our resistance to Islamic conversion of 14th century to the activities of the Orthodox Church whose center during the Nemanjić Dynasty was in Kosovo. If you look at the map of the religious sites in Kosovo, you will immediately notice how many Serb Orthodox churches and monasteries exist there.

- **"Vidovdan"** (St. Vitus's Day June 28, 1389) is our most important national holiday, which holds all the content of our history, and has preserved our past, present and future.
- In our culture we don't necessarily celebrate personal birthdays. Instead, we celebrate **"Krsno Ime"** (*krzno eeme*, Christian Name).

- **"Krsna Slava"** (*krzناه slava*, Christian Slava). Krsna Slava is the celebration of the home Patron Saint, and is the greatest characteristic of our national and religious life. It is a unique expression of our Orthodox faith that is deeply implanted in our Christian soul.



## Serb Language

- Our language is classified as an Eastern South Slavic language.
- The main dialect is Shtokavian and is written in Cyrillic.
- Our language follows the rule of "write as you speak, and read as you write," and the orthography is very consistent with the approximation of the principle "one letter per sound."
- Although many linguistic scholars classify Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian as a single language, after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, a reaffirmation of the differences among the languages has become part of our separate national identities.



## Serb Cuisine

- Our cuisine is an assorted cuisine, sharing characteristics of the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Turkish, Austrian and Hungarian cuisines
- We take great pride in producing and preparing most of our own food such as sausage, jellies, and assorted pickled foods at home.

- Almost every dish contains meat.
- The main meal is lunch and consists of three courses. The traditional Serbian foods are cevapčići (heavy grilled ground meat patties with a lot of spicy condiments, and is our national dish), pljeskavica (hamburger), sarma (stuffed cabbage rolls), burek, Gibanica (pastry dish made with white cheese), and ajvar (roasted eggplant-sweet-pepper mixture).
- Our national drink is Slijovica (a strong alcoholic beverage primarily made from distilled fermented plum juice).

Our food traditions are closely related to religious celebrations, especially Christmas. For Christmas morning we prepare Česnica (loaf bread), and we place a silver coin inside of it. Whoever finds the coin is considered to be the most fortunate one for the following year. The greeting on Christmas day, January 7, is **"Mir Bozji! Hristos se Rodi!"** (*meer boh-zee! wreesto seh rah-dee!*, Peace of God! Christ is born!)



Photo by David Bailey

