**Leart Kola** (Antonio Gramsci Institute/GAZETA, Tirana, Albania):

I just wanted to take 2-3 minutes to explain a bit the context of Albania. Because I think that the problem with the Balkans is that we don’t know about the political context of each country. In 1992 we had this changing system, so we switched from totalitarian Enver Hohxa regime into a pure capitalist society. During 1992 and until 1997 the right wing party that was in power at that time had strong policies of privatisation. They had no control over the market, so the state was in a way ran by the president at the time, who was using more and more the police and the army to control the population. From the organised crime that was part of the state. This strong privatisation created something at the time called pyramid schemes, so because there were no banks, people acted like banks. And this system collapsed. In 1997 people were protesting in the streets for a couple of months and after that they took the guns from the military and we were on the verge of a civil war. This situation of total collapse lasted for four of five moments. A situation where we had no state at all. In the right wing history this is called the communist revolution. The right wingers say that the communists organized these attacks and everything. The socialist party, the ex-communist party that was in opposition from 1992 to 1997, was really weak. They did not have the legitimacy to be in front of these protests. After six or seven months without a state, they were elected. But in a way nothing changed in substance. This is really weird because from 1992 till 1997 they had strong left-wing policies, they were very much in the left. And after they came to power, they started to act with neoliberal policies. We learn that a desperate group of people without any theoretical idea what they are doing, find themselves in the situation where they are governed by the same people with a different color on their logo.
From 1998 till 2005 the socialist party was in power and then most of the state companies were privatized. They started the whole process of privatisation. They promoted very strong neoliberal policies. In 2005 we have again the right wing party in power. The SP still had this attitude that we should not stick in ideological debate, we should be more pragmatic, we should see case by case. The ideological debate between right and left doesn’t exist. This was going on till 2011. Now we have very interesting political situation. The SP is more and more on the left, still not as seriously as we would like. But we at least have a debate. The crisis helped to open this debate and now we more and more have the right-wingers going into nationalism, claiming for the unification. But from my point of view this is good, because these parties differentiate. This is the situation in the last 18 years in Albania. So me and Andi [Kananaj] were a part of the Mjaft! Movement from 2003 till 2008. This was, most of the people say, the most influential organisation at the time. Some say that we were the actors who brought the right-wing paradox into power, because we were protesting against the prime minister at the time. We saw that in this situation there was no ideological debate. The left wing was losing itself, people from the left were not represented by any organisation or political party. So we started the Antonio Gramsci Institute in 2008. We wanted to be called “Antonio Gramsci” not because we are specifically connected to him in some way, but because we wanted to put a communist’s name. Some communist that would leave no ambiguity at all. Because it was this situation with the left in Albania: “yes, we are left, but not as left as…”. So this way people would not ask “Are you in the Left?” or something like that. A lot of organisations in Albania are promoting these neoliberal ideas and they are very strong at the university. So we thought that we did not like that and that we should open a debate in Albanian society, so people can understand what is the left alternative. So we started this newspaper in 2008 and we were very active. People knew us from the Mjaft! Movement, so we had spaces in newspapers and in public TV and we decided to be very active there too. Some radical friends said to us: “You should not go to mainsteam media”, but we think it is important to be part of the debate and go into their field. And so we were very active and we are very active now also.
The Antonio Gramsci Institute deals mostly with translation, publishing, so it has this duty to open the debate and be part of it. Thus it could attack the right-wingers in the university and in the public sphere. And it is very hard nowadays, because we have all these money that are spent mostly to translate and write books and make them part of the curriculum. So we wanted to enter into this field.
**Our other structure is [called] “Political Organisation”.** This is an organisation that deals with workers so we are involved in these workers’ strikes for four years now. What we do is try to organise by going to the factories around Tirana and in most of the cities of Albania. We try to create a difference between the traditional syndicates that are mostly kidnapped by the state. We want to help workers organize horizontally, but in general to have some kind of organisation, because the situation of the workers is more and more difficult, specifically this of women. Most of the exploited workers are women. They work for 16 hours in textile factories, and this is the biggest industrial branch in Albania. Apparently, Italy uses Albanian workers as second-hand human beings, so to say. We have a lot of problems, but we spend most of the time in the villages.
The third structure is like a legal aid studio that mostly offers help to people who cannot pay for a lawyer for political trials. For instance, now we represent the families of the four people that were killed by the police last year during this big demonstration. Also, in 2008, there was this huge explosion when 26 people were killed. We represent their families too. We help people start syndicates in their working places.