

Prizreni-From settlement to independence

Antiquity The Prizren valley area was settled by Illyrians, the Dardani tribe. Prizren was first mentioned as the Roman town of Theranda in Ptolemy's Geography in the 2nd century AD, and later as Petrizen by Procopius of Caesarea in De aedificiis in the 5th century. 11th Century Prizren was mentioned as the bishopric of Prisdriana in the Charter of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II of 1018. 12th Century The northern territories of present-day Albania and parts of Kosovo were in Slavic hands, and by 1190 Kosovo became the administrative and cultural centre of the medieval Serbian state.

13th Century Immediately after the Fourth Crusade of 1204, Prizren was ruled by the Bulgarians. In 1216, Prizren was conquered by Stefan II Nemanjic, but the town was later gradually retaken by the Bulgarians. Besides trade, culture and arts flourish in this period, and the Arbër family of Balshaj became prominent.

14th Century As a free-trade town, Prizren reached the culmination of its development, looking much like a medieval town in Western Europe with sophisticated fortifications, a civitas (administrative and economic centre) and a castrum or castellum (castle town). During the first half of the 14th century, Prizren was an important trading centre for merchants from the city of Ragusa (modern-day Dubrovnik) and in order to protect their interests, Ragusans founded a consulate to represent them and established institutions such as a customs office, a mint, a church and a hospital. The town was residence for the Catholic, Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serb bishops, and numerous important churches were constructed, reconstructed and converted. Conflicts and political division dominated the second half of the 14th century. The Ottoman Empire made its first attempts to get a foothold on the Balkans, and clash with the Serbs and its allies at the famous Battle of Kosovo in 1389.

15th-18th Centuries Prizren was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1455. The city witnessed another boom period in the 16th century when it became the cultural centre of Kosovo. Marvellous Ottoman monuments such as the Mosque and the Hamam of Gazi Mehmet Pasha were built, as well as other public buildings such as madrasah schools and inns. Prizren was briefly conquered by the Austrians and their allies in the late 17th century, but the Ottomans quickly retook the town. Gradually many locals converted to Islam, and by 1857 over 70% of Prizren's population was Muslim. Under Ottoman rule, large number of merchants set up shops and bazaars in Prizren, capitalizing on the strong economical relations across the empire. Consulates of Austro-Hungary, England, France and Russia were opened in Prizren during this period. Since Prizren was one of the administrative centres of Kosovo vilayet (province), Turkish, besides other languages, remains widely spoken and understood.

19th Century Prizren took centre stage in the Albanian national revival when the League of Prizren was created on June 10, 1878, attended by some 300 delegates from what is now Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, joined by Muslim leaders from Bosnia - Herzegovina and the Sandzak. The aim of the League was to achieve autonomy for the

vilayets (provinces) of Shkodra, Janina, Manastir and Kosovo within the framework of the Ottoman Empire. On June 13, 1878, the 60-member League led by Ymer Prizreni sent a letter to the Great Powers at the Congress of Berlin, asking to settle the issue. The memorandum was ignored and the territories were given to Serbia and Montenegro.

20th Century to 1990 After the first Balkan War of 1912, the Conference of Ambassadors in London allowed the creation of the state of Albania and handed Kosovo to Serbia, even though the population of Kosovo remained mostly Albanian. The peace treaties after the First World War established the Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs of which Kosovo was a part. In 1946, the Yugoslav constitution failed to grant territorial autonomy to Kosovo or recognize Albanians as a distinct nation, but the new constitution of 1974 made Kosovo an autonomous province and it became one of eight federal units of the Yugoslavian Federation with veto right. But in 1989 the Serbian government proposed to take away Kosovo's autonomy, with Milosevic giving his now famous speech at Fushë Kosovo (Kosovo Polje), promising to return the two autonomous provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo to Serbian authority. In Prizren, vital elements of the historic city centre such as old bazaars, religious buildings, public fountains, traditional houses and inns were lost during modernisation campaigns in the socialist

Yugoslav years. 1990-1999 After Kosovo's autonomy was unilaterally abolished in 1989, civil disturbances erupted throughout Kosovo. Political pluralism began creating conditions for the first political parties which sought for independence through a non-violent solution. These efforts did not end the crisis and in 1997 the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) made its first public appearance. With fighting the KLA as a pretext, Serbia caused thousands of civilian casualties and a million refugees with fierce fighting during the 1998-1999 Kosovo War. Prizren's urban area did not sustain much damage, though Serbian forces destroyed the Albanian League of Prizren complex. Surrounding villages suffered many civilian losses and material damage, and many residents fled across the border to Albania, Macedonia and Turkey. NATO's 73-day bombing campaign against Serbia led to a peace deal agreeing on the withdrawal of all Serbian forces from Kosovo, the return of all refugees, and an international peacekeeping security presence of NATO troops, with Kosovo under UN administration. 2004 Unrest throughout Kosovo on 17-18 March caused damage to Orthodox monuments and Prizren's Nënkalaja/Podkalaja neighbourhood. In 2005, the Reconstruction and Implementation Commission (RIC) initiated and implemented damage assessment projects and reconstruction work for these damaged monuments. 2008 On February 17 Kosovo's parliament declared independence. In June, Kosovo's new constitution entered into force, granting specific rights to Kosovo's minority groups. 2009 The Municipality of Prizren adopted the landmark Conservation and Development Plan for the Historic Zone of Prizren, the first concrete step towards the planning and protection of the Prizren's historical centre, and the very first of its kind in Kosovo. 2010 In June, Kosovo's first Balkan presidential summit took place near Prizren in Prevala, as the leaders of Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia discussed closer cooperation. In July the International Court of Justice,

responding to Serbia's request, gave its advisory opinion that Kosovo's independence did not violate international law.