



Deepening Democracy:  
An Intellectual, Activist, and former Political Prisoner Who Is Now a Prime Minister

Michael D. Kennedy

May 31, 2022

Albin Kurti, the Prime Minister of Kosova, [visited the Watson Institute and Brown University](#) on May 20, 2022, and it was as I had hoped. Even better. And my expectations were already quite high.

I first met Albin Kurti ten years ago in Prishtina. At the time, I was gathering research material, but I could hardly have anticipated then he would become Prime Minister.

He was ten years ago, as he is now, the leader of Lëvizja Vetëvendosje, translated into English as the Movement for Self-Determination. As I elaborated in [Globalizing Knowledge](#), this movement was then positioned as a force for “truth” against what it declared the “institutional lie” of the international protectorate in which Kosova’s move toward sovereignty was embedded.

Looking back, such a movement becomes even more exemplary in a global era when epistemic security is itself at risk. We know, now, that appealing to facts hardly dislodges those whose identities and political projects are woven together with systematic lies. If we ever needed evidence of delusion’s dangers we need only look at the catastrophe Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has wrought, and not only in Ukraine but on a global scale.

The world needs a new kind of politics that secures democracies in a truthfulness and capacity for reflexivity that goes beyond politics as usual. Albin Kurti and his movement promise that kind of transformation.

He must, of course, represent Kosova in a world of diplomacy as any political leader might. Indeed, before his most subsequent arrival at Davos to attend the World Economic Forum, his visit to Brown was part of a national tour of the United States, from California to New York City, where he met political and business leaders alongside those of his people’s diaspora. The range of meetings in the USA [exceeds even this substantial list](#). On that site you also can find the prepared remarks the Prime Minister delivered in Watson. [In those remarks](#), you can appreciate the distinctive biography and considerable intellectuality animating his own political sense.

Organized around freedom, action, and self-criticism, the Prime Minister spoke as an activist recalling those struggles. Now, however, he defines his leadership in terms of being a “good servant” of the people, His is not a representation based on alienation of the people’s power, but

an agency expressed as the people's delegate, one who listens, engages, and leads by example, he explained. This of course stands in stark contrast to the narcissistic authoritarians driving their nations to war and violence. That concern animated his final remarks. They reflect contemporary developments in Kosova's international engagements.

Mr. Kurti was quite frank in expressing concerns about stability in the Western Balkans, especially if the outcomes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine appear to be rewarded in any way. On May 29, 2022 [the Prime Minister referenced on Twitter](#) the close ties between Putin and Serbia's President Vučić. In our Watson discussion, he elaborated in much greater detail the dangers those Russian/Serbian ties pose for peace. International alliances deterring such aggression are especially important for Kosova.

Following Prime Minister Kurti's lecture in Watson, US Ambassador to NATO Julianne Smith announced that the USA would support Kosova's entrance into NATO's Partnership for Peace. Preceding the lecture, Kosova's Foreign Minister, Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, delivered her country's application to join the Council of Europe. Although these developments have their opponents on the global stage, they also appear to be cementing a sense of democracy's value not only in domestic affairs but in global futures too.

Following his lecture, I thought how appropriate it would have been for my class on Power, Knowledge and Justice in Global Social Change (#PKJ) to have heard him; but most of them had already left campus for summer break. However, #PKJ23 will begin with his lecture's recording, for it inspires the kind of critical thinking and transformative practice the course encourages, even if Albin Kurti, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje, and Kosova have not been the most common references at Brown. But that, I believe, is about to change.