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COMMUNITY

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A Celebration of Unity and Commitment to Freedom

Albanian American Civic League commemorates 12th anniversary of the historic 1990 Sheraton Dinner

By Sokol Rama

NEW YORK

More than 700 Albanian Americans gathered on Sunday evening of April 28 to commemorate the twelve anniversary of the historic 1990 Sheraton Dinner organized by the Albanian American Civic League (AACL). The meeting "A Salute to Albanian Freedom" was unquestionably a successful event not only for the message it carried, and serving as a frank exchange between Albanian Americans and high ranking U.S. lawmakers, but also for bringing together Albanians from all parts of the country.

People had traveled from states as far as Alaska, California, Texas, Wisconsin, Illinois, Florida, and as near as New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Most were first or second generation Albanian Americans, who came in this blessed country with a dream of freedom from Kosova, Montenegro, Presheve, Macedonia and Albania. People who now strive to help bring freedom and democracy back to their homelands.

As AACL president Joseph DioGuardi said in his opening remarks, Albanians live in six different areas side by side, but are united by one thing besides blood and origin- by love for the United States.

The list of honored guests was long and included Albanian politicians from all the countries where Albanians live in the Balkans. Pjetër Arbnori, Member of Parliament and former Speaker of Albanian parliament had traveled from Tirana. Others were Ramush Haradinaj, Member of Parliament and president of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova; Iliaz Halimi, deputy Speaker of Macedonian parliament; Rudi Osmani former Mayor of Gostivar; Ferhat Dinosha, Albanian Member of Montenegrin Parliament; Nikolla Camaj, assistant secretary in the Montenegrin government; Riza Halimi, Mayor of Presheve; Mero Baze, noted publicist from Albania, etc.

The list of honored guest from the United States included U.S. Senator Joseph R. Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; U.S. Senator Charles Schumer from New York, New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, U.S. Congressmen Benjamin Gilman with his wife, Tom Lantos and Congressman Jerrold Nadler. Senator Hillary



Over 700 Albanian Americans gathered at Sheraton Hotel in midtown Manhattan on Sunday, April 28 to celebrate freedom

Clinton, Congressman Henry Hyde, Edward Cardinal Egan, Archbishop of New York, etc., had sent greeting messages to the gathering.

Amid thunderous applause, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer from New York told the participants in the meeting that the cooperation between America and the Albanians in the Balkans and here need strengthening.

"We must keep our American-Albanian partnership," Senator Schumer said, adding that the U.S. must keep the troops in the Balkans for the protection of the Albanians there.

"You always did what you thought is right. What you stand for is right," the senator from New York added.

He concluded his remarks by calling for closer cooperation between him and the New York Albanian American community. "I look for a very close relationship between the Albanian American community and the senator from New York," Senator Schumer said amid enthusiastic ovations, which grew when he thanked in Albanian "Faleminderit".

After Senator Schumer's departure, many joined Kara DioGuardi in singing the American anthem, and later Rajmonda Dabulla, who sang the Albanian National Anthem.

Imam Isuf Balaj blessed the event. "All together we must build upon the foundation of our nation," he said. He concluded by saying, "May God bless the true democracy".

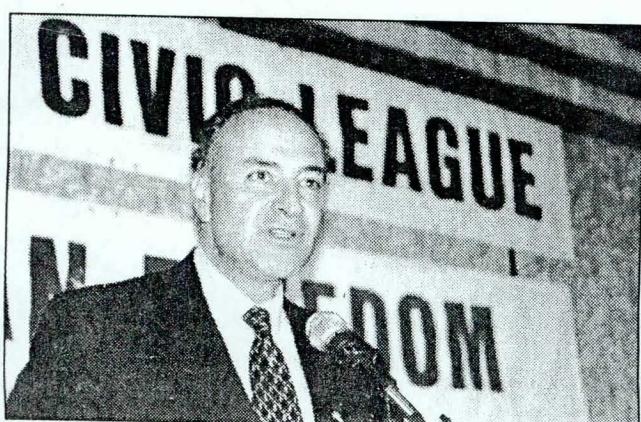
Pajazit Murtishi, an AACL board member from Chicago recited an emotional ballad dedicated to the Jashari family. It invoked the heroism of one of the founders of the Kosova Liberation Army and the sacrifice of his extended family, forty-eight of who were killed by Serb troops in March 1998.

"We all are KLA," Murtishi exclaimed after the participants welcomed his poem with thunderous applause and shouts "KLA, KLA".

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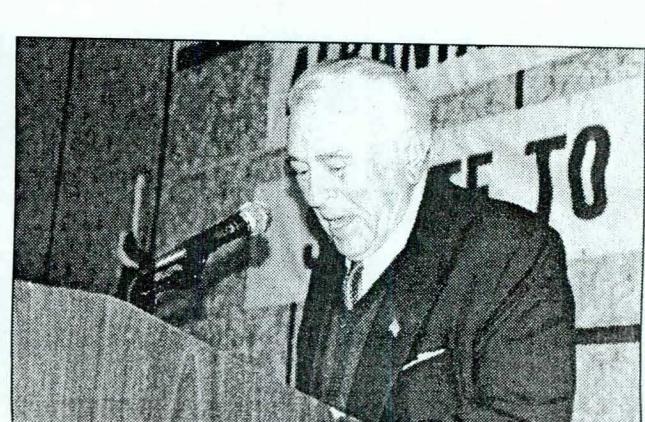
AACL President Joseph DioGuardi, MC, with keynote speaker, Senator Joseph R. Biden, chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Congressman Benjamin Gilman



New York Mayor, Michael Bloomberg



Senator Charles Schumer

A Celebration of Unity and Commitment to Freedom

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One of the honored guests to greet the event was New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The Master of Ceremony, Joseph DioGuardi, introduced Mayor Bloomberg as the man who came in city hall at a historic time. "We are confident that Mayor Bloomberg will turn downtown Manhattan from Ground Zero to Perfection," he said.

The New York Mayor with a soft and familiar tone told the meeting that he had come in from visiting his two daughters. His aide Shpresa Sukaj, an Albanian American, accompanied him. He said that enjoys eating "byrek" and than with a more serious tone told the audience that New York is an exceptional city.

"The one and most wonderful thing for America is that all of us have been here for a short time," he said. According to him 40 percent of the city inhabitants are immigrants, and if we count second generation immigrants, that figure goes up to 70 percent.

There is a reason we have our freedom," Bloomberg said, adding that with the privilege comes the responsibility.

The New York Mayor was often interrupted by approving cheers "USA, USA", "Bloomberg, Bloomberg".

U.S. Congressman Tom Lantos, who took part in the now historic dinner organized by AACL 12 years ago, told the meeting, via phone, that the countries in Eastern Europe can not achieve real freedom without achieving first true human rights.

"As you know, I was the first U.S. government official in 45 years to visit Albania in 1990, and I have a long and intimate interest in stability

and progress in the Balkans, where some seven million Albanians live under six different governments," he said in his greeting.

The stability of this region is vital to European peace and security, but it cannot be achieved unless the peoples of this region fully enjoy human rights and democratic governmental institutions."

"Active American involvement in bringing democracy, market economies, and respect for human rights to this part of the world is in our nation's interest," Congressman Lantos said, adding: "I look forward to working with you together to achieve this noble goal."

U.S. Congressman from New York, former chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, Benjamin Gilman, who attended the meeting together with his wife Georgia, opened his remarks by greeting in Albanian "Mirembrema".

"It's like being here with a family," Congressman Gilman told the gathering, adding that this 12th anniversary dinner of AACL is an auspicious gathering that will have significant impact on peace and stability for many people for many years to come.

The Congressman from New York said that turning Milosevic to the Tribunal was a success, but said that it was not enough. Belgrade has to fully cooperate with The Hague, he added.

"We applaud Europeans for stepping in to respond to the crisis in Macedonia," he said, adding that it's high time to take this political process to the end and bring peace and democracy in that country.

Then, Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, the AACL's Balkans Adviser, intro-

duced the keynote speaker, Senator Joseph R. Biden, chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

All people in attendance greeted Senator Biden with ovations.

"It is a real pleasure for me to be with you at your 12th anniversary dinner," Senator Biden said. Saluting the members of the League for their patriotic involvement, he urged them to continue to remain politically involved, because as he said, "the basis of our American democracy is an informed, engaged citizenry."

The two main points Senator Biden made were: a stable Europe is fundamental to the security of the United States of America, and restoring stability with justice to all of the Balkans is fundamental to the stability of Europe as a whole. His second point was that United States must always have a moral component to its foreign policy, in this case, with regards to the Balkans, and more specifically to Albanians.

"These are difficult times, but there are points in history when we can, you can make history. You are at the hinge of history. You and the ethnic heritage you represent are at this moment, when you will decide whether the door will be open," Senator Biden said, referring to the current situation in Kosova.

"You have been used as pawns for 400 years, arguably for 700 years. People have benefited from your divisions, your strives. Now you are at a moment you have to decide." He appealed to show forgiveness and break the cycle of violence. "Otherwise, you're doomed," he said.

"I come to make no promises, but one. I come to tell you, and you know that deep down in your hearts,



Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi, AACL Balkans Adviser

that somebody has to break the cycle of violence, to break the tradition of revenge."

Then, to make his point more clear, Senator Biden invoked an old Chinese proverb, "He who seeks revenge should dig two graves."

"I'm with you, with all my heart and soul, until you become like your oppressors," he told the gathering, repeating his message for ending any violence.

Turning to Ramush Haradinaj, a former KLA commander and current chairman of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova, Senator Biden said that many people are great warriors, but few become politicians.

"I'll continue to keep America involved to protect Albanians in the Balkans," Senator Biden continued. "Although I have many European friends, I do not trust their resolve, their will or their moral commitment. I'm fearful about pulling the U.S. forces out. Although I support the president fully, I'm not with the president [and the administration] if they conclude we have finished our job in the Balkans."

"The world should and must recognize the suffering and loss of the Albanians in the region. U.S. has an obligation to make sure that all sacrifices resolve into something better," Senator Biden concluded his speech.

Pjeter Arbnori told the gathering that with help from God in Heavens and America on Earth, Albanians in the Balkans have changed their course of history.

"There is no Great Albania, but real Albania," he told the gathering, adding that the war for independence of Kosova was just and was fought for the rights of a people, who values peace. He added that the free vote in Albania was manipulated. "Only free vote could bring democracy to Albania," concluded the former Speaker of Albanian Parliament.

"If we do not work for ourselves, nobody will lend a helping hand," said Ramush Haradinaj, chairman of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova. He thanked the United States in achieving freedom for Kosova, and stressed the unconditional support Albanians have given

to the United States, especially after September 11 terrorist attacks.

"Kosova is ready to continue on the road of peace and multi-ethnic integration, in the unification of Mitrovica and its thorough democratization. A free and independent Kosova will integrate into Europe more easily," Haradinaj stressed.

Albanian Deputy Speaker of Macedonia Iliaz Halimi called for the U.S. presence in the Balkans. He argued that the U.S. is the only guarantor of peace there.

Ferhat Dinosha, Albanian MP in the Montenegrin parliament said that Albanians in Montenegro have never considered themselves abandoned by the nation. "Since Kosova won its freedom, we feel much better in Malesia," he said, referring to one of the areas inhabited mostly by Albanians. Then he read a poem he had written for Kosova.

Riza Halimi, Albanian Mayor of Presheve, said that Albanians are for democracy and equality. He thanked the Civic League for its contribution in defense of Presheve Albanians.

Nikolla Camaj, Assistant Secretary for Information in Montenegro, said that while the country respects the rights of Albanians it still should do more, because as he put "Albanians are not a minority but an autochthon group" who have lived for centuries in our lands. He also called on Albanians in Montenegro not to migrate but stay in their lands in Malesia.

Rufi Osmani, former Mayor of Gostivar who was imprisoned by the Macedonian regime for raising the Albanian and American flags in his office, spoke in the name of Tetovo University, still unrecognized by Shkup government.

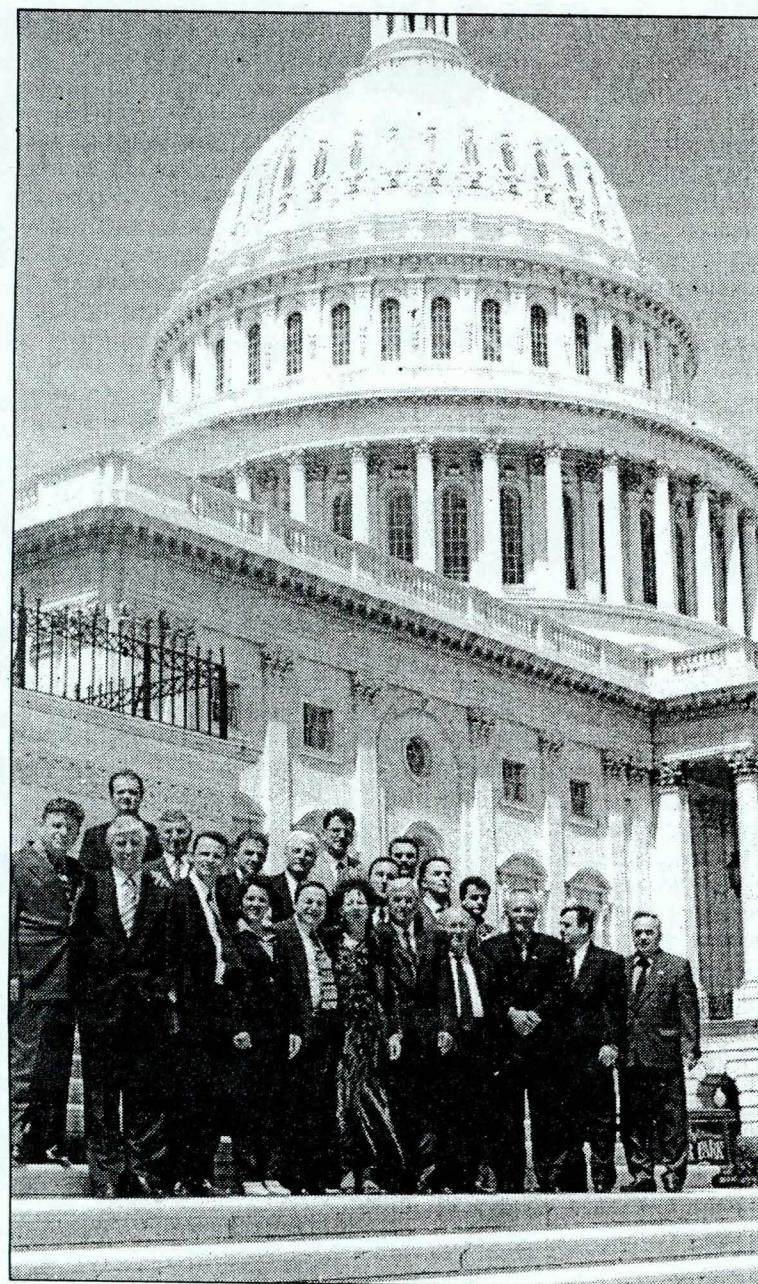
"Shkup should recognize our University," he said of the institution where he now teaches economics. He warned that the old mentality that still prevails in politics is one of the reasons for the recent wars in the region.

The meeting ended past midnight in the early hours of Monday, April 29. It will be followed by a session of hearing on Albanians in Washington.

The Albanian Nation Is Recognized in Washington

A delegation of seven prominent Albanian leaders representing the Albanian nation of seven million people from Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Presheve, came to New York and Washington, from April 28 to May 2, at the invitation of the Albanian American Civic League. They included Pjeter Arbnori, former Speaker and current Member of Parliament in Albania; Nikolla Camaj, former First Secretary of the Democratic Alliance of Albanians in Montenegro and current Assistant Secretary of Information in the Montenegrin government; Ferhat Dinosha, Member of Parliament and Spokesman for the Democratic Union of Albanians in Montenegro; Iliaz Halimi, Vice-Chairman of the Democratic Party of Albanians in Macedonia and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament; Riza Halimi, Mayor of Presheve and Chairman of the Coordinating Council of Presheve, Medvegje, and Bujanoc; Ramush Haradinaj, Member of Parliament and President of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova; and Rufi Osmani, former Mayor of Gostivar, Macedonia.

On April 28, in New York, the delegation participated in a "Salute to Albanian Freedom" at the Sheraton Hotel, exactly twelve years after the Civic League brought a delegation from Kosova to salute democracy and freedom and to focus international attention on the plight of Kosovar Albanians living under the Serbian occupation. At the Sheraton dinner event, they were joined by Senator Joseph Biden, Congressmen Ben Gilman and Tom Lantos, Senator Charles Schumer, and NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg, along with seven hundred members of the Albanian American community.



Following the dinner, the delegation traveled to Washington, where they were recognized, for the first time on Capitol Hill, as representing the Albanian nation. The Albanian leaders were given a number of

high-profile opportunities to present the problems affecting the Albanian people in the areas that they represent.

The Albanian American Civic League delegation poses in front of the Capitol before meeting with Congressman Henry Hyde, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, at the official reception and briefing that he hosted with Congressman Ben Gilman, the Committee's former chairman, and Congressman Tom Lantos, the Committee's ranking Democrat. Front row (from left to right): Pajazit Murtishi, AACL Board member, Chicago; Iliaz Halimi, MP, Macedonia; Lavderim Hysa, AACL Board member, Detroit, and his wife, Laresha; Joe and Shirley DioGuardi; Faik Ajroja, AACL, Chicago; Pjeter Arbnori, MP, Albania; Ferhat Dinosha, MP, Montenegro; Ajrla and Murtezan Jonuzi, AACL Board members, Atlantic City. Back row (from left to right): Sedat Sadiku, AACL, Chicago; Riza Halimi, Mayor of Presheve; Marash Nuculaj, AACL, Detroit; Zef Balaj, AACL Board member, New York; Nikola Camaj, Democratic Alliance, Montenegro; Ramush Haradinaj, MP, Kosova; Luan Bukolla Rexhepi, AACL Board member, New York; Rufi Osmani, Macedonia; and Sami Jonuzi, AACL Board member, Atlantic City

The Albanian Nation Is Recognized in Washington

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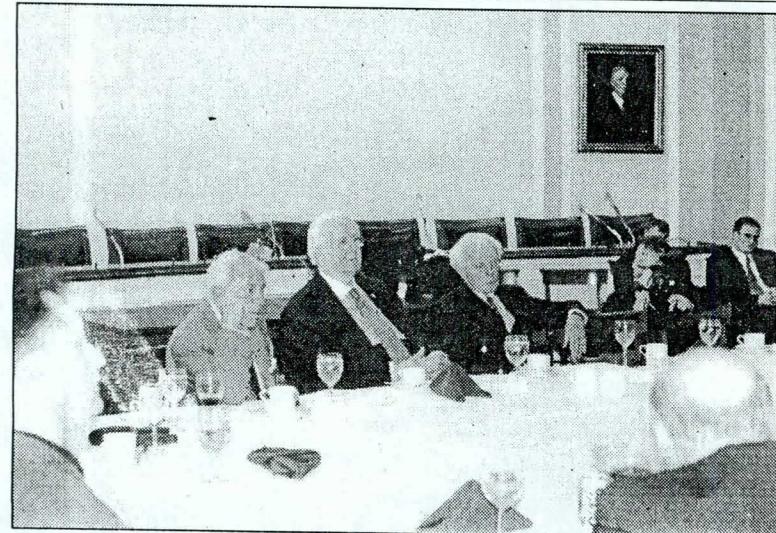
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The Civic League delegation poses outside the State Department following high-level, individual meetings with U.S. government officials responsible for Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, Presheve, and Albania. The Albanian Americans in the delegation participated in a group meeting with Janet Bogue, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. Ramush Haradinaj and Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi are not pictured here because they were in a meeting



The Civic League delegation meets with Senator Joseph Biden in the Capitol before an official briefing with his Senior Adviser for Foreign Policy, Dr. Mike Haltzel



From left, Congressmen Ben Gilman, Henry Hyde, and Tom Lantos listen to testimony from Iliaz Halimi, vice chairman of the Democratic Party of Albanians in Macedonia and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament (unpictured)



Ferhat Dinosha, Member of Parliament and Spokesman for the Democratic Union of Albanians in Montenegro, addresses the Congressional Human Rights Caucus hearing

The Albanian Nation Is Recognized in Washington

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Congressman Henry Hyde, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, held an official reception and briefing for the group, together with Congressman Ben Gilman, the Committee's former Chairman, and Congressman Tom Lantos, the Committee's ranking Democrat. Congressman Tom Lantos, chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, held a hearing focusing on the violation of the human and civil rights of Albanians, especially in Presheve and Macedonia. Senator Joseph Biden, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, met with the Civic League delegation on Capitol Hill and hosted a two-hour briefing and strategy session in his Senate conference room with his Senior Foreign Affairs Adviser, Dr. Mike Haltzel.

The delegation also met, in private, individual meetings, with senior government officials in the State Department responsible for Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Presheve. The Albanian American Civic League members participated in a group meeting with Janet Bogue, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs.

The Civic League delegation's trip to Washington coincided with Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic's official visit to Washington. The delegation attended the forum hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace on the future of Montenegro,

at which President Milo Djukanovic was the featured speaker.

Following his speech, Civic League President Joe DioGuardi and delegation members Ferhat Dinosha and Nikola Camaj, both Albanian members of the Montenegrin government, asked questions that shifted the focus of the meeting to the status of Albanian

rights in Montenegro.

The primary message of the Civic League delegation in Washington was that, because the United States is the only country with universal credibility in the Balkans, continued American involvement is essential to ensuring stability in the Balkans and bringing lasting peace to the region.



Congressman Henry Hyde, chairman of the House International Relations Committee, hosts an official reception and briefing for the Albanian American Civic League delegation, together with Congressman Ben Gilman, the Committee's former chairman and Congressman Tom Lantos, the Committee's ranking Democrat. Hyde is pictured here greeting the delegation



Pjeter Arbnori, former Speaker and current Member of the Albanian Parliament, signs the official book of the House Committee on International Relations for visiting dignitaries. The other Albanian political figures in the Civic League's delegation—representing Kosova, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Presheve—already signed the book.



Biden: "Bota duhet të njohtë vuajtjet dhe humbjet e shqiptarëve"

Liga Qytetare Shqiptaro-Amerikane kremton 12 vjetorin e takimit historik të 1990-ës



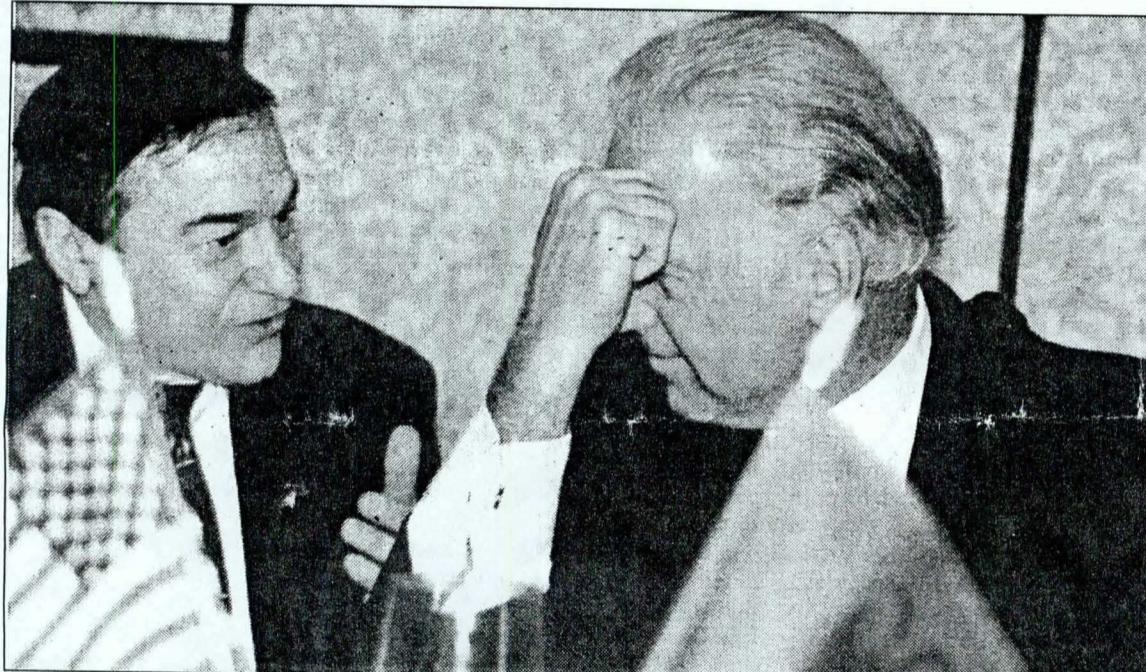
Charles Schumer



Pjetër Arbnori



Nga e majta: Michael Bloomberg, Joseph Biden dhe Benjamin Gilman



Joseph Biden dhe Joseph DioGuardi



Shirley Cloyes DioGuardi



Ramush Haradinaj

Biden: "Bota duhet të njohtë vuajtjet dhe humbjet e shqiptarëve"

Liga Qytetare Shqiptaro-Amerikane kremton 12 vjetorin e takimit historik të 1990-ës

NEW YORK

Më shumë se 700 shqiptaro-amerikanë u mblodhën të dielen në darkë për të përkujtuar 12 vjetorin e mbrëmjes historike të para dymbëdhjetë viteve, organizuar nga Liga Qytetare Shqiptaro-Amerikane. Takimi i titulluar "Një Përvjetori" ishte padyshim një sukses i plotë jo vetëm përmesazhin që përcoll, por edhe përfaktin që shërbeu si një këmbim i singertë mendimesh dhe idesh ndërmjet shqiptarëve të Amerikës, miqve nga atdheut, dhe zyrtarëve të lartë amerikanë. Njëkohësisht ai shërbeu si një pikë takimi për qindra shqiptarë që kishin udhëtuar edhe nga viset e largëta të Amerikës. Disa bashkatdhetarë kishin udhëtuar që nga Alaska, California, Texasi, Florida, Illinois, Wisconsin, për të mos përmendur ata që kishin ardhur nga shtete më të afërtë si New York-



Senatori Joseph Biden me kongresin Ben Gilman

u, New Jersey dhe Connecticut. Shumica e tyre, emigrantë të brezit të parë ose të dytë, që janë shpërndarë ar këtu kryesish në kërkim të lirisë dhe respektit njerëzor, kishin ardhur kryesish për të ndihmuar që

bashkatdhetarët tanë në vendlindje të gjëzojnë të njëjtat të drejta, liri dhe demokraci kudo ku jetojnë, nga Presheva në Sarandë, nga Ulqini në Gostivar.

(VJON NGA FAQJA 1)

A shtu siç e theksoi edhe presidenti i Ligës, Joseph DioGuardi, shqiptarët aktualisht jetojnë në gjashtë vende të ndryshme me qeveri të ndryshme, por janë të bashkuar nga gjaku dhe origjina si dhe nga respekti dhe dashuria për Amerikën.

Lista e mysafirëve nga vendlindja ishte e gjatë dhe përfshinte, ish kryetarin e parlamentit shqiptar, z. Pjetër Arbnori, Ramush Haradinaj, kryetar Aleancës për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës (AAK) dhe deputet në parlamentin e Kosovës, Iliaz Halimin, nënkyetarët e parlamentit maqedonas, Rudi Osmanin, ish kryetarin e Bashkisë së Gostivaris, Riza Halimin, kryetarin e Bashkisë së Preshevës, Ferhat Dinoštin, anëtarin e parlamentit malazez, Nikolla Camajn, ndihmiës sekretar për informim në qeverinë malazeze, Mero Bazen, publicist dhe botues të gazetës "Tema" në Shqipëri etj.

Ndërsa miqtë e nderuar amerikanë ishin folësi kryesor i mbrëmjes, miku i shquar i shqiptarëve, senatori

Joseph Biden, kryetar i Komitetit për Marrëdhëniet me Jashtë në Senatin e Amerikës, senatori Charles Schumer nga New York-u, kryetari i Bashkisë së New York-ut, Michael Bloomberg, kongresisti Ben Gilman etj. Kishin dërguar mesazhe senatorja nga New York-u, Hillary R. Clinton, kongresistët Tom Lantos, Jarrold Nadler, kardinali i New York-ut Edward Egan, etj.

Ndërmjet duartrokiteve entuziastë e mori fjalën senatori Schumer, i cili theksoi se bashkëpunimi ndërmjet Amerikës dhe shqiptarëve duhet thelluar më tej.

"Ne duhet të mbajmë trupat tonë në Ballkan për të mbrojtur shqiptarët", theksoi ai.

"Ju gjithmonë zgjodhët çfarë ishte e drejtë", tha ai mes duartrokiteve dhe thirrjeve "Schumer-Schumer".

Në fund ai bëri thirrje për një bashkëpunim më të ngushtë midis komunitetit shqiptar dhe senatorit demokrat nga New York-u dhe e mbylli fjalën e tij duke falenderuar në shqip "Faleminderit".

