
MURDERED US ALBANIAN BROTHERS NAMED 'HEROES OF KOSOVO'

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Balkan Transnational Justice (28 September 2018)

President Hashim Thaci on Thursday awarded the Hero of Kosovo order to Yll, Agron and Mehmet Bytyqi, three Albanian-American brothers who were murdered after being detained by Serbian police in 1999.

You spared nothing for the independence and freedom of Kosovo, Thaci said at a ceremony at the Kosovo consulate in New York.

Ahmet Bytyqi, the three mens father, said that the award was not for his children alone, but to all those who fell for freedom, according to a Kosovo presidency statement.

I have been awaiting this, this was my dream. I still think I am in a dream. Thanks for the honour, each and every one of you, Ahmet Bytyqi said.

Thaci also honoured the Kosovo Liberation Armys Atlantic Battalion, whose members mainly came from the United States. The Bytyqi brothers were part of the battalion.

He awarded the battalion the Jubilee Tenth Anniversary of the Independence of Kosovo Medal, describing its members as the connecting bridges of our relations with the USA.

The medal was received by former KLA commander Gani Shehu, the president of the Atlantic Association, who said that Albanian-Americans made a lot of sacrifices for the freedom of Kosovo.

They have given a lot for freedom, they toiled, they gave their sons, who went to join the KLA, Shehu said.

The Bytyqi brothers travelled from the US to Kosovo to fight against Serbian forces during the war.

After the June 1999 peace agreement that ended the fighting, they then agreed to escort several Roma neighbours to Serbia.

But when they strayed over an unmarked boundary line between Serbia and Kosovo near Merdare, they were arrested by Serbian police for illegally entering what was then Yugoslavia.

After serving their sentences, as they were leaving the district prison in the town of Prokuplje in southern Serbia, they were re-arrested, taken to the police training centre in Petrovo Selo, and detained in a warehouse there.

During the evening of July 9, 1999, they were tied up with wire by unknown persons and driven to

a garbage disposal pit, where they were executed with shots to the back of the neck.

On 19th anniversary of the murder of the Bytyqi brothers in June, the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington adopted a resolution on the case, which remains a major bilateral problem between Serbia and the US.

The resolution said that Serbia must make it a priority to investigate and prosecute as soon as possible those current or former officials believed to be responsible for [the brothers] deaths, directly or indirectly.

Serbian officials including President Aleksandar Vucic have repeatedly insisted that Belgrade is committed to prosecuting those responsible.

But the Bytyqi family has accused Vucic of breaking promises to resolve the case and of refusing to keep the family up to date with the investigation.

The family believe that Goran Radosavljevic Guri, the former commander of a special police unit and of the Petrovo Selo training centre, is the main suspect in the case.

Radosavljevic, who is now a senior official of Vucic's ruling Progressive Party, maintains that he was on vacation at the time of the killings and denies any wrongdoing.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-gives-the-hero-order-to-bytyqi-brothers-09-28-2018>

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