OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

TRANSCRIPT

"MODERN ALBANIA: FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY"

A Conversation With Fred Abrahams

Moderator: Aryeh Neier

ANNOUNCER:

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BEKA VUCO:

Welcome to the Open Society Foundations. Tonight-- we have the pleasure of welcoming-- Fred Abrahams, the author of *Modern Albania*-- a book that we will be talking about tonight. Not only a book-- but also about the country, the modern Albania. My name is Beka Vuco. I'm the regional director for the western Balkans.

And Albania is one of the countries that I cover as well through my work. So I'm quite familiar with-- with what's-- has happened and what is happening at this moment. And I'm so glad to see you all here tonight in this great number. So-- it is my pleasure to welcome also-- Mr. Aryeh Neier-- president emeritus of Open Society Foundation, who will introduce Fred tonight and start the conversation. And then we hope that people have some questions from you as well through the question and answer session. So Aryeh, please.

ARYEH NEIER:

It's a great pleasure to-- to welcome Fred Abrahams here-- this evening-- to talk about his book-- *Modern Albania: From Dictatorship to Democracy in Europe*. I-- I think this book-- is-- one that-- belongs-- here at the-- the Open Society Foundations. We feel-- a kinship to it-- in every way.

Fred-- went to Albania in the first instance-- under the-- the auspices of the-- the Foundations. His first job in Albania, I think, was at the-- the media center-- established by the-- the Foundation-- in-- Albania. Throughout his-- work-- on Albania, we have-- kept in touch.

We've also kept in touch-- when he has veered away from Albania to deal with-- with other matters-- to deal with-- other parts of the-- the Balkans-- such as the-- the war in Kosovo or even when he-- was diverted to-- to Libya-- to-- undertake-- research-- there for-- for Human Rights Watch.

Most of-- of Fred's career has been spent-- on the-- the staff of-- of Human Rights Watch-- conducting research and-- writing reports-- for the organization. Fred has been one of the-- the emergency-- researchers-- for Human Rights Watch. Those are the-- the handful of-- of-- researchers-- who deal with the-- the most difficult-- situations and very often-- the most dangerous-- situations on behalf of Human Rights Watch.

And-- their ability to-- to get-- the facts on-- various-- human rights violations and get it out-- fast and-- and reliably-- has been-- crucial for the organization and often-- crucial for the-- the protection of-- of human rights. So as an admirer of the-- the work of Fred and-- the other-- emergency researchers for Human Rights Watch, it's also a special pleasure-- to welcome him here-- this evening.

Also for me, it's-- a very-- great opportunity to-- to refresh my own knowledge-- of Albania. In my early years-- with the Foundation-- I traveled to Albania-- very frequently-- because we-- had undertaken a particularly large project-- in Albania during that period. After that-- I stopped going to-- to Albania and-- went to-- to other parts of the world-- more frequently. So it's been a pleasure to-- to read-- Fred's book, and to get-- up to date in that way, and also to get up to date by listening to him-- to him this evening. So, Fred-- it's all yours.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

All right. Well, thank you all so much for coming. It's a bit like a wedding or something, a bar mitzvah. So many different parts of-- of my life. So thank you. I hope you'll indulge me just for a moment-- because this is the official-- the launch of the first-- public event of the book.

So-- I feel-- not just obliged but also deeply-- motivated and moved to just say a few-- thank-yous. So if you'll-- if you'll just bear with me for a moment. And-- the first goes to this-- esteemed institution. I actually-- I began the research for this-- book with a fellowship-- Open Society-- fellowship-- many, many-- years ago.

And, of course, the money's good. You know, it helped. And it allowed me to take trips-- go to Albania and begin the research. And that's important. But beyond that, you know, it's-- the motivational-- push. When you start a project like this-- by nature-- a lonely endeavor to write a book, it's critical to know that someone thinks it's a good idea.

And so that for me was far more important. So thank you-- Aryeh-- for that. And-- Garol Lamarsh (PH) was the head of the-- fellowship program at the time. No longer with the institute. And then the Balkans-- team. Beka-- Vuco, who you met tonight, Marina Pravdich (PH)-- who's helped a great deal tonight, Jonas Rolette (PH)-- and l-- Laura Silber (PH), who-- hi Peter (PH). Great to see you.

Who I don't think is here tonight. And another person not here is Anette Laborey (PH)-- who was in-- Albania for-- many, many years for the Foundation. So-- I'm deeply grateful-- for that support. And then-- there are a couple-- individuals here. Tani (PH) Puto, you may rise.

Artan-- flew in from-- from Tirana. He's a professor-- of history at the university and-- really by far was-- the closest collaborator-- for this book. I don't know how many hours we spent in the bowels of-- the national library going through-- dog-eared copies of *Zeri i Popullit*, *The Voice of the People* newspaper from 1989 and-- and even before and-- talking to all the characters.

And it's that kind of sounding board. You know, the person-- after you've just interviewed-- a ex-politburo member of the head of the party for Tirana. You need somebody to s-- look next to say, "All right. What'd you think? Let's-- let's hash this out." And-- you know, Tani, thank you.

15 years. Sorry. Yeah. (LAUGHTER) It's-- it's like a third child. (LAUGHTER) Then-- I don't know if he's here. He was supposed to come today. If he is, he doesn't have to stand up. But that's-- a dear f-- old friend, Fran Nozy (PH). Is Fran in the house? (BACKGROUND VOICE) Where is the Noz? He doesn't have to stand.

But-- actually Fran has-- a connection to this institution. For those of you who don't know, he was the first-- director of the Soros Foundation-- in Tirana. Worked there when I first went in '93. I think '91 to '93-- and-- was the-- was his-- his-- tenure. And really I think n-- no one-- more sort of lifted the curtain-- for me to peek behind-- and introduced me to a lot of people.

If we spent many hours in the library-- I don't know how many crates of wine, and beer, and probably cigarettes-- we went through just hashing through-- you know, the events, and the people-- our mistakes-- and trying to understand-- what went on. Mi broma shenessee (PH). And-- well, I'm grateful for that.

And-- and Fran always said-- "Please just hold a mirror. Hold a mirror to us as a people, as a country and-- help us-- to-- to understand-- to analyze and appreciate what we've gone through." So-- I hope I-- I've succeeded-- to do that. And when-- he was one of the first people to read the book and the finished the copy.

And then he told me, "It's good. You know, I like it." And for me, whatever reviews may or may not come-- for me, that was-- by far the most important. So Noz, respect. And then lastly-- and I'll get onto topics of-- of-- greater interest, are my two lovely parents. I can't say any more without m-- making-- (APPLAUSE) and all of their friends.

Probably half-- half the room are probably from your-- from your various-- school life

or friends. But thank you. Yeah. Okay. But with that, I-- I managed to-- to hur-- to hurtle that-- the difficult part now becomes the-- the easier part, to talk about this-- this topic-- I feel dear-- dearly about.

I just wanted to do two things and to do it fairly briefly so that we could have some conversation. One is to-- the process of writing this book and then the takeaways. A couple of the-- the nuggets that I-- I feel maybe-- I can-- can conclude. First, on the process. For me, wr-- writing this book had two very distinct parts.

There was heaven. And there was hell. Heaven was s-- sitting in the coffee shops of Tirana talking to all the protagonists, actors, and actresses, the facteurs (?), the assets-- who played a role from the ex-politburo members to the Democratic Party founders, to the journalists, the lawyers, the gangsters, and the spies. What a pleasure.

And-- for me, a particular joy-- because I witnessed many of these events. I went there, as Aryeh said, in '93, covered it for Human Rights Watch, and was an observer of many of these moments. So I had the good fortune to return, sit down with characters, and ask them, "What were you thinking when you did this?

"Why did you make this move? Where were you at that time? Why did this all happen?" And to piece to together this-- jigsaw puzzle. And, you know, of course, people spun their tales. Everybody had-- had a line. But people were also sincere. They also took their time. And the book would've never happened without their-- their contributions to it.

So I'm-- I'm-- I'm deeply-- grateful for that. And then there's the source material. The library, the archives. I collected hundreds of f-- Freedom of Information Act or submitted hundreds of-- Freedom of Information Act requests and got a lot (NOISE) of documents back from the State Department and-- even some of the C.I.A.

And-- you know, going through all of that was a real joy. As a side note-- all of that material-- posted on a website th-- that we made for the book. The key documents and the rest of the material is going to the Open Society-- archives in Budapest and also the National Security Archives in Washington so that students, and scholars, and journalists, and others can benefit from this material and may it be used.

All of that-- was-- was a pleasure. Horrible was putting it together into some coherent narrative. You know, I-- I knew I had pearls. Albania produces pearls if you didn't know m-- metaphorically speaking. But how to-- connect them all on a string and tell a story. And, you know, what's-- what are the key points we wanna take away from this-- from this period of transition?

Who were the main characters-- that played a role? And why is it important to talk about them? And making this all into something that's v-- you know, marginally interesting. You know, the best story poorly told-- vanishes. So-- that was a huge-- a huge challenge for me. And in-- in the end, it-- it took 15 years.

And thank you for your patience. (LAUGHTER) And-- that's entirely my fault. But I will very gladly spin it into a few positives here tonight. And there were a f-- a f--

three benefits I can think of for taking so long. One is all of those Freedom of Information Act requests came through. That was a benefit.

But the second and more-- more substantive is that I was able to grab people over time. So sometimes-- every time I visited Tirana, someone-- another party was in power. Well, it's always two parties. But one or the other. And so-- at that moment, I could grab the people who were in opposition.

And, of course, they were more willing to speak, took time, definitely had time, and could give me their perspective. And secondly was to watch the transition or watch people's positions-- evolve over time. And, you know, here there's something strong to be said. Because people's positions changed a great deal not because the issue changed.

But they were positioning themselves around that issue. And the most classic example I can think of-- is-- all of the people who turned around and criticized the-- the-- the s-- the main political actor of this era, Sali Berisha-- former president and prime minister-- criticized him after they had been expelled from the party.

You know, so all of a sudden they discovered-- democ-- dem-- you know, democratic values. Or all of a sudden they realized that maybe Berisha was not the great democrat that-- that-- they themselves had claimed him to be when they were a minister or otherwise a senior party official. And it's-- you know, for those of you who-- who do read this book, there is a number of characters who have-- gone back and forth over-- over time-- mostly based on opportunism.

And-- that's an important comment-- I think about the-- the transition. And-- foreigners were not immune. And the best example I can think of this are the pyramid schemes. So in 1997, Albania suffered the-- the collapse of massive pyramid schemes and pushed the country into-- chaos and-- and-- real violence.

And, you know, it's pretty easy to dismiss-- the pyramid schemes today. But there were a lotta people who stayed silent about those schemes. I'm talking about foreigners. There are foreigners and diplomats-- diplomats in Tirana, serving in Tirana who did not speak a word about these pyramid schemes although it was clear what they were.

There were foreigners who invested-- in these pyramid schemes-- as well. So, you know, again, it's-- it's easy to look back-- afterwards and-- and comment on it. Henry (PH) is in the house. And-- so that was the benefit of time. And the third thing is I f-- you know, we're at 25 years. It's been 1990 since this process began in Albania.

And-- it's-- the transition is not finished. But we are, I believe, at the end of the first phase. So-- it is-- a good moment to stop, and look back and analyze-- critique, you know, what-- what took place. So th-- that's my spin for taking so long. With that said, I just-- I wanted to just mention three-- takeaways-- if I could call it that or-- or conclusions.

One is that-- Albania didn't have a revolution. I think that's not so shocking to most Albanians. But-- maybe to others who haven't foll-- there wasn't a revolution. Th--

what there was was a series of gradual reforms. Mostly from above. The communist leader at that time, the man who succee-- succeeded Enver Hoxha-- is called Ramiz Alia.

And Ramiz Alia understood very well that-- Albania couldn't stand along in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism and the Soviet bloc and he had to change. His safety and the safety of his-- cohorts-- r-- required that. So he began, you know? It was a sort of Gorbachev model to initiate reform.

And to do it, he looked to the trusted intellectuals and elites of th-- of Tirana mostly but of the country. And the best phrase to c-- to-- capture this-- strategy came from-- one of Alia's-- probably his-- most senior behind-the-scenes advisor-- which is a guy named Sofokli Lazary (PH).

And Lazary, I got to interview him before he passed away. And he called it the transfer of influence. Not the transfer of power but the transfer of influence. That Alia identified senior-- officials who were connected to the party and transferred his influence to them. And some were party members.

And others were just in the-- in the warm embrace of the party, if not being formally members. And they were trusted. And what Alia feared the most were the rabble rousers in places like Shkoder-- Kavaje. There were little protests popping up, mostly frustrated young men-- who wanted to travel abroad, and wear jeans, and listen to Western music.

And he feared th-- them. Because that was an uncontrollable force. But the-- elite could be very well controlled. So we had this sort of-- managed transition. And I have to say that in the end of the day, maybe that wasn't such a bad thing. Because if you think how extreme, violent, and repressive Albania was for four decades, a rupture could have been very bloody.

So-- this sorta reform instead of rupture quite possibly-- saved a lot of lives. It brought problems-- without a clean break. But it-- it's possible it also saved lives. The second-- takeaway is the-- the creation-- although there was no revolution, the creation of a revolution myth.

And that meant that right after the communist regime fell, the new party came to power. It was the Democratic Party. Almost immediately, there were good guys and bad guys. They all came from the same mass, the same society. But all of a sudden, some of them were-- enlightened Democrats and some of them were-- recalcitrant communists, which is a completely artificial division.

You know, because there were people who-- joined the communist party. They renamed themselves the Socialist Party. Joined the Socialist party after '92. So new members. And there were lots of people, Sali Berisha among them, and other Democratic Party founders, not just Berisha, Gramos Pashko (PH) and many others, who were party members and then founded the Democratic Party.

So there was a crossover. There was a crossover and an artificial division between-- blue and red, good and bad, old and new. I understand why that ha-- why the

Albanians did that. And the new party in power played the revolution myth for their own-- their own political support. But what shocked me was how the international community bought into that-- into that game.

And-- and not just bought into it but fed it. And that includes the U.S. government. And the U.S. government-- well, first and foremost the U.S. government, who viewed Sali Berisha-- and, again, it's not just about him. But viewed them-- the party as-- the force of future-- the force for the future and the force for good.

And, you know, to me, that-- that has caused problems-- that Albania-- are still suffering from today. And, you know, I-- if you look at the-- the cables, some of the diplomatic cables that-- I got from the Freedom of Information Act, you see it. You know, you see the ambassador in '92 and '93 writing that, "Well, these are just the games of the former communists."

Well, you know, who are these people? I mean, wha-- how-- how can you label one group that title? They were certainly playing games. I'm not defending what they did. But to label them as such was to me-- feeding into this-- this artificial division. And the clearest manifestation of this is-- is Berisha.

You know, he became the hero of democracy, the Democrat with a big-- with a big D. And the problem is-- my feeling was, you know, it's not about having supported the Democratic Party fully and having supported Sali Berisha with enthusiasm. Berisha was by far the most-- talented politician of that era. By far.

I get why he led the movement, became the party head, became the first post-communist president, earned support from Washington and European capitals. I get it. But the problem was s-- not supporting him. It was supporting him uncritically. So when Berisha harassed a journalist, silence.

When he arrested a journalist, silence. When he arrested an opposition member or-- beat up an opposition member, not himself, silence. And, you know, those were all interpreted as green light. Every time it wasn't challenged, he was able to take it a step-- a step further.

And-- the issue was the-- the failure or the-- the mistake of U.S. policy I'll say specifically, but the Europeans were-- were no different on this, is-- it fed into Albania's tra-- political tradition of-- dominance and revenge. And it supported an individual or that party over the institutions.

And that's what-- Albania is still suffering from today. You know, I-- I think-- a lotta the people I-- I interviewed some of these individuals who played roles back then. The ambassador I mentioned-- some other diplomats-- who-- were very involved-- at that time. And some of them defended it by saying, "Well, you know, this is Albania.

"It was coming from-- the darkest past. And bumps are expected." No. BS. I-- I call BS on that. I don't believe it. I don't buy it. Because, you know, yes, we're not going to expect a immediate jump. We're not going to expect institutions-- independent institutions to be created overnight.

But they could have spoken out. It would have made a difference. And those moves I

mentioned, the harassment of the journalists, the arrests of the journalists, and so on, those were calculated moves. They were even, I think, testing the water. If it wasn't maybe so premeditated, that's in effect how it played out.

In the end of the day, they could have still supported Berisha and the Democratic Party at that time-- and called some-- drawn some lines in the sand. The third thing, and I'm gonna end here, is-- is why. You know, why-- why did that happen? And I think there-- there are a couple of reasons. One is actually that-- Washington didn't know Albania very well at that time.

There's a great anecdote. When diplomatic relations were reestablished in 1991 between Washington and-- and-- between Albania and the United States-- they had a ceremony-- in the State Department. They didn't have a flag. They didn't have an Albanian flag. And someone had to run home.

And-- they had gotten it as a gift and managed to put it on the table. Okay, that tells you the extent of the-- the relationship-- back in nineteen-- 1991. So in some ways, they just didn't know. They didn't know the players. They didn't know the country. The second is that I think-- a lot of diplomats just got carried away.

And I'll admit it was an emotional story. You know, the best example was-- the visit in-- June 1991 of Secretary of State James Baker. Came to Tirana and they literally tried to carry his limousine or his car in from the airport. Literally, all right? The s-- Secret Service had nightmares.

And he was greeted in Skanderbeg Square, the main square of Tirana, by hundreds of thousands of people. And, you know, that enthusiasm is contagious. But it also ended up, I think, warping-- policy, you know? Because they viewed-- they viewed Albania s-- incredibly pro-American. But-- you know, w-- maybe-- thinking that this was the-- this was the force to-- to-- to accept uncritically.

And the third-- and-- and-- and the-- and then there's also this mistaken belief. And I-- I hope this comes through in the book a little bit, that democracy means free elections and market economy. A very naïve belief. And Albania had both. I mean, had free elections and had-- v-- I would say--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

What's that? Well, ha-- well, in the beginning. '92 I'm thinking. '92. Later, no. And market reform. And clearly-- that wasn't enough. But the main reason-- and I'm gonna wrap it up here. The-- the k-- a key factor in this-- was the region. And just to-- bring this a l-- a little bit wider. And you have to remember the context at the time.

That 1990, ninety-- '91, '92, we're looking at the disintegration of-- ex-Yugoslavia. We're looking at serious tension in neighboring Kosovo and Macedonia, which have large ethnic Albanian populations. And U.S. government was concerned, and I

believe rightly concerned, about avoiding an Albanian nationalist movement.

They didn't want nationalism to replace communism. They did not want a spread of this war. They wanted to contain it. And they saw Berisha and the Democratic Party as a force for that. And in effect, there was-- a Faustian deal was struck where in essence he was allowed t-- to rule and do what he wanted inside Albania but was not allowed to mess around outside his borders.

And, you know, I-- I get the regional approach. That's a logical-- attitude. But-- but I think they could have drawn those lines and still gotten what they wanted-- still managed to-- to keep the-- the regional issue-- under-- under control. And in the end, it failed. And it failed miserably.

Because the 1997 pyramid schemes that I mentioned, those were not an economic debacle or an economic scandal. They were in essence. But-- b-- I mean, they were-- I mean, economically-- the economic-- Ponzi schemes. But it was political. It was a p-- political-- deceit.

Because everybody knew the government was supporting those pyramid schemes. It was like the F.D.I.C. You know, a kind of a insurance. Like a state insurance. When you advertise a pyramid scheme on the state television, that is an endorsement. So-- it was a result of-- this-- this pent-up frustration, economic loss, but also political.

And it had a direct impact on the political stability that they were trying to-- maintain. Because when al-- when the schemes melted away and the depots were looted, and al-- Albanian arms in the hundreds of thousands-- were distributed across the country, then those arms ended up across the border in Kosovo.

And the nascent Kosovo liberation army saw it as a historic opportunity. They-- that's a quote actually from the book. "We-- we would miss a historical opportunity if we didn't go there and scoop up arms," which is exactly what they did. So-- and the goal of-- s-- of regional stability in the end was-- was harmed-- very greatly. So-- I think that's-- that's all I wrote. (LAUGHTER) Aryeh, what do you think?

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. Well-- I think I'd like to ask you a few questions-- and then-- open it up-- generally. But I-- I'm gonna start-- from the standpoint of someone who-- went t-- to Albania. And I think I went either in late 1993 or early 1994 for the-- for the first time. And-- in-- in going there-- I-- remember feeling-- I didn't know much about the country.

But I remember feeling extremely skeptical about the possibility that one could develop a democracy in Albania or develop an open society in Albania. Because it had been the-- the most isolated-- country in Europe-- one of the most isolated-- countries in the world. Only North Korea-- seemed-- comparable in the degree to which it had been-- cut off-- from the-- from the rest of the world.

A country of-- where there had been extreme-- repression. No-- civil society had--

existed-- during the-- the communist-- regime. How could one-- build-- a democracy or an open society-- when-- there was so little-- that-- one could-- build upon? If you thought of other-- communist countries-- in Europe, if you thought of Poland-- for example, a substantial-- civil society had-- developed in-- in Poland during the-- the communist-- era.

When-- solidarity was crushed, an underground solidarity-- movement emerged which among other things-- published-- literally hundreds of underground-- periodicals. And that seemed to-- to give the basis-- for trying to-- to promote-- and-- am I not getting this on?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

You wanna try this one?

FEMALE VOICE:

Yeah.

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. That seemed to provide the basis-- for building-- an open-- society. And-- your-- your book is-- *From-- Dictatorship to Democracy* in Europe. Do you-- do you think we've accomplished-- this goal of-- of building a democracy? Is it-- a democracy today?

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Does-- does anyone wanna talk that? (LAUGHTER) That's-- that's-- that's--

ARYEH NEIER:

Emerging.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

That's a good word. Emerging says Alma (PH). I-- I d-- I don't think I could answer that yes or no. You know-- anyone who knows-- has-- has been in Albania, certainly grew up during communism or was there in the early-- transition years know that the place is far more livable today than it was before. Th-- there's no question about that.

And even at times quite decent. But is it a democratic country? I-- would have a hard time-- using that-- adjective. You know, is it more democratic today than it was before? Y-- you know, there's no question about that. And for me, I guess the-- the issue is not so much-- you know, is it better or worse.

You're not asking that, Aryeh. But-- you know, is it as good as it could be? And, you know, the measure of-- of success isn't necessarily-- where people are at the top but where they are as a whole. And in that case-- there's-- you know, deep divisions in that society. Economic, of course.

I mean, just flat out poverty rates that are unacceptably high. Not to mention all kinds of, you know, medical-- I mean, health-- indicators that are well below-- European standards or what-- what are-- what should be normal standards. So, you know, in that sense-- no. You know, there's a long, long-- way to go.

And for me, I-- I-- I guess just to come back to that-- individuals over institutions, that-- to me, you know, institutions, let's just be clear, means, you know, independent courts. It means police that just serve the law and not-- an interest. You know, it means a media that's free and independent, gonna actually probe and report.

And-- none of those the-- three things are-- institutions are very strong-- in Albania today. And so-- you know, it doesn't leave citizens with-- sort of honest arbiters of disputes, you know? And-- and those disputes are many. You know, there's many layers of disputes going back Lord knows how many generations. So in that sense-- you know, well, maybe don't know if I've answered the question. But--

ARYEH NEIER:

Thank you. Let-- let me then ask you about-- a passage in your book-- which-- I found somewhat-- surprising. You're-- you're writing about the-- the period-- at the-- the end of the-- the pyramid scheme-- collapse. And-- you-- you have this paragraph. You say-- "Above all, I viewed 1997--" which is the-- the period of the pyramid-- scheme collapse, "not as a crisis in the country but a crisis of the country.

"Albania had an entry in the atlas, a national hem and a flag. It sat in the United Nations. But the country lacked a collective identity to hold it together." Wha-- what do you mean by that, that it lacked-- a collective identity? I-- I-- I woulda thought it did have a collective identity.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

You know, there's a collective identity-- in the notion of flags, and-- and songs, and hymns, and all the rest. But the-- the result of four decades of enforced t-- totalitarianism was extreme individualism. And the-- the best example-- is the-- the physical-- ripping apart in 1991 and '92 of the-- of community centers, and schools, and any-- state structure where people literally ripped out the windows, and the electric wires, and the el-- electricity plugs and p-- plundered these institutions because, well, if they didn't do it, the-- the person next door would.

And that's a reaction. That's a reaction to the enforced collectivization-- violently enforced collectivization. But it meant democracy for them-- at that time. Democracy meant the right to do whatever you want. And that's what I meant by the collective identity. And-- that-- that means that, you know, there are interests-- that dominate politics and-- and society.

You know, I mean business interests, economic interests, political interests. And-- they have not yet-- th-- there is room to go to have a national interest where we say, you know-- we-- we need a mol-- monetary policy, and a health policy, and an education policy that's in our common good.

And-- if I may, just-- one other example of that-- is the environment. You know, anyone who's been to Albania in 1990, '91, the-- the beach in Durres was paradise. I mean-- you know, beautiful beach, pristine. The-- I remember these wonderful pine trees. You could sit in the shade.

By '92, '93, there was garbage everywhere, you know? Because people didn't care. They didn't think about-- you know, "If I toss my garbage, it's going to affect my neighbor." It's that simple. And I think that's changed. Where now there is discussion about national policy for tourism or for, you know-- developing the natural resources of a coun-- these are normal conversations that-- that states have as-- when states are communities. And the country in-- in my view is-- is heading more in that direction. But-- a l-- a lot of this period was dominated by that-- by the lack of community.

ARYEH NEIER:

The-- then-- a question based on-- my-- my own experience-- going to-- to Albania in the 1990's. The reason that-- I went-- to Albania quite a lot-- during that period-- is that the-- the Open Society Foundations undertook a-- particularly large-- project in Albania. Fred-- just mentioned the-- the way that-- buildings were vandalized-- at the-- the time of the-- end of the-- the communist-- rule of the-- the country.

And among other things-- the-- the schools-- were vandalized-- during that period. And-- we wanted to-- to launch-- an education project-- in Albania. We focused on-- an education project because-- we thought-- this country has had such-- a deep-- such a deep totalitarian rule that it's going to take-- a long time to-- to build a

democracy or an open society-- and that-- what we have to do is-- invest in-- the long term-- of the-- the country.

And so focusing on-- the-- the primary schools and, to a lesser extent, on the-- the the secondary schools-- would be the-- the the way for us to try to-- to shape the-- the country-- for the-- the long term. And at one stage-- the-- the education project was-- the largest-- single project we undertook in the Foundations-- worldwide.

We spent-- I don't know how much. But more than $25 million-- on the education project in Albania. And I can remember-- a budget for a particular year in which-- the-- the education project-- just in that year's budget-- cost-- more than-- than $8 million. But we couldn't deal with education-- the way we did-- in other countries where-- we supported-- teacher training, we supported the-- the publication of-- new textbooks-- matters of that sort.

Because the schools had been-- destroyed in the-- the aftermath of the-- the communist period. And-- we don't ordinarily undertake-- construction projects-- anywhere in the world. But we felt-- we had to do it-- in Albania. We had to-- physically rehabilitate-- the schools.

And so-- we did that with-- with more than 150 schools-- in-- the-- the country. And we also-- organized-- parent-teacher-- associations and undertook the-- the sort of teacher training programs and the-- the textbook-- publication which we-- we thought was-- was necessary.

In a way, that turned out to be-- an extremely satisfying-- project. And the-- the particularly satisfying-- aspect of it was that after the-- the pyram-- or when the pyramid schemes collapsed-- there was, again-- a period of vandalism-- of that sort-- in Albania. And, again, public buildings were trashed-- by people who were extremely angry about-- the loss of all their savings in the-- the collapse of the-- the pyramid schools.

But what-- what made us-- quite happy about-- our-- our own experience-- was that none of the schools that we had re-- rehabilitated was-- was trashed. What we thought made th-- the-- the difference is that-- one of the-- the people working on-- the project, an-- an engineer of-- part Kosovar, part-- Bosnian background who had-- also played an important role for us in-- in Sarajevo-- during the siege there and we-- who we had relocated-- to-- Albania had insisted on-- enlisting local-- people-- on a volunteer basis to help reconstruct the schools and also to donate something to the schools.

So in a number of cases, local people who had-- very little in the way of resources donated the gravel that-- that surrounded-- the school. And-- we thought that because those people had put their own labor into the schools and their own resources-- into the schools-- they insisted on preserving them against-- the-- the vandalism.

And there were cases in which-- the people who did that came out at night and guarded the schools-- to make sure that nobody else-- would-- would vandalize them. It s-- it seemed to be a kind of-- object lesson-- in-- the way that-- if you could enlist--

people to-- to feel a stake-- in-- in rebuilding the country-- that they would-- do important things, the totally would do-- good things-- for the-- the country.

So that-- particular experience-- was-- especially satisfying-- in dealing with the-- the schools project. But, you know-- an-- a larger question is-- were we making the right choice? If we were going to spend that kind of money-- on Albania-- should we have focused on-- on educating-- children who weren't going to be-- active in doing anything about the country for another 20, 25-- 30 years?

Should-- should we have-- focused larger resources on-- shorter term efforts to have-- an impact on the country rather than-- think that the cause of that-- sad history of the country? We-- we really ought to concentrate-- on long-term efforts.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Yeah. I mean, I-- I-- I certainly-- you know-- it's hard to analyze what-- what would be the most effective use-- of an in-- such an investment. But I would say that long-term approach to me-- is the way to go because it-- it returns to the notion of institutions and education, you know, being one of them not an independent political institution but certainly-- you know, building up for the longer-term-- capacity-- of the country.

And, you know, I-- I think-- just to re-- to return to-- to use the anecdote-- that-- that you-- gave-- you know, I-- I-- that's about-- ownership to me. People didn't loot those schools because they felt-- it-- they had a piece in it-- piece of it and it-- it was-- you know, serving their interests.

And maybe that's a good way to understand the-- the transition. Or we can use that as a lens a little bit. That, you know, during communism in Albania, they viewed the state as not serving their interests at all. And they had no participation in the state. And today, I think people have m-- much more participation in the state not just through this example but in general.

They might not loot any schools. You know, even not-- ones-- that they had personally been involved in. There is-- they feel, more-- able to influence-- policy makers and dec-- decision makers. But nowhere near enough. Because to m-- to my-- in my view, m-- many people still feel that decisions are made-- whether in education or in-- in-- the economy and so on-- without consideration for their wellbeing. But it's an interesting way to-- to analyze the transition. Maybe a bit abstract. But how-- how people feel, how much they feel like they can contribute or influence their government.

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. And le-- let me open it up-- to others right now. I-- I s-- there's-- a microphone standing over there. And Beka has a microphone on-- on this side. So we have a man-- here in the front in the-- third row right there.

ALBERTO TOSCANA:

All right. My name is Alberto Toscana (PH). I'm a retired Italian diplomat. From everything that was said, I think that two concepts stand out although they were not mentioned explicitly. A concept that identify the basic deficits of the Albanian system today. One is rule of law. And the second one is the citizen.

But if you don't have the rule of law and if you don't have the citizen-- if you-- Fred, were the advisor to the present-- Albanian government or to Albanian democrats who do exist, what would you say? How to go about it? Because organizing an election is definitely not enough. And secondly, you know, blaming communism reminds me of-- what-- I was in the Soviet Union in the '70s. And they were still blaming the czar for all their shortcomings. It's about time to leave that aside. (LAUGHTER)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Yeah. Should we take a few? Or maybe--

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. Let's take a couple-- let's take a couple of other questions. And then Fred will-- respond.

IVOR LIMS:

Ivor Lims (PH). I was at the time-- with the Institute for World Peace Reporting, which I think was one of your projects. And I was in the Balkans. But, Fred-- having read your book assiduously-- one of the things is the dog that didn't bark. Where were the military in all of this?

This is one of the most militarized societies in the world. And yet the armed forces played very little part in the transition except I suppose in a sort of positively negative way. They stepped aside and let things happen. So I-- I-- it's just s-- only since reading the book that's-- you know, in Romania, Poland-- Yugoslavia-- the military played a prominent role in the changes. Not positive necessarily. But in Albania, they just seemed to have disappeared. What happened?

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. So we got the military and the law. We got-- one-- one more question. And then Fred-- will respond.

KITTY KAYANA:

Hi. My name is Kitty Kayana (PH). I actually work here at O.S.F. I grew up in Albania and moved-- '97. So I had, I guess, the privilege of growing up through those years. Just to comment, I think-- I was fascinated-- by the discussion around community and citizenship. And I think there is lots of negative points there.

But at the same time-- we are a country of a deep sense of community. And it can be demonstrated by sheltering-- the Kosovar refugees, by-- hel-- sheltering even the-- all the Jews that escaped during Nazi times. And no one was killed or nothing. And so I think there's this great sense of community that somehow is-- maybe hidden around-- around the margins of this discussion.

And, yeah, may-- a lot of the mistrust that was created during communism-- by the Secret Service, et cetera where you never trusted your neighbors, et cetera. And underlied with a big poverty and-- and extreme poverty in those times did create a lot of looting. And-- and-- that lingered for many years. But there's still a lot-- a very strong sense of community that can be felt by Albanians all around. So maybe highlight some of those points as well.

ARYEH NEIER:

Sure. Okay, I-- I think you've got--

FRED ABRAHAMS:

All right--

ARYEH NEIER:

--a rich--

FRED ABRAHAMS:

More than rich--

(OVERTALK)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Yeah. I mean, you know, on-- on that, I-- I-- I feel a little bit sometimes Albanians are-- are nicer to outsiders than they are to each other. (LAUGHTER) And-- yeah, I know s-- some of the divisions are very, very-- harsh. But, of course, I mean, you know-- there's-- I-- I don't want to take it to the extreme where there-- there's, you

know, very-- very-- powerful and moving examples of strong community.

And-- there's, you know-- no intent here to suggest that that doesn't exist. Far from it. On the-- on the military, that's-- it's a great question. And the answer's-- quite-- it's a great question 'cause the answer's simple and I know it-- which is-- (LAUGHTER) that the-- the-- the military-- was subservient to the party.

There was never an independent military in Albania. Enver Hoxha made that absolutely-- you know, clear. The best-- phrase to-- explain this was that he-- the purges through the-- you were swept away with an iron broom, which is how he purged a number of officers that he thought were-- were getting a little too-- uppity.

And-- so the military was always subservient. Even the Sigurimi, the intelligence agency, the feared-- even the Sigurimi was-- subservient to the party. Tani, am I right? My historian friend agrees. (LAUGHTER) And-- that's how this book was written. Am I right, Artan? Am I right?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Am I right? And-- so-- so th-- you know, so there was never-- the one-- one-- section was-- was-- cut out of the book just for space. The publisher-- wanted l-- you know, s-- made me-- wanted to trim it down. There was an attempted coup. When Enver Hoxha's monument fell in February of nineteen-- nine-- '90-- now, I'm losing-- '91-- '91-- then-- the day after, a group of officers and military cadets tried to-- basically put it back.

You know, they wanted to reinstall the monument. And they-- then they were furious that-- the leadership had allowed this mob to topple the statue of the great leader. And they did mobilize and-- holed up in one of the-- not a barracks. But-- I think it was the-- the school, the officers training-- academy in Tirana and-- and tried.

And it quick-- quickly fizzled out. So that, you know, it was a very weak attempt. And that's because the military just didn't have the-- that capacity. And the third question is, you know, rule of law. I mean, I didn't use those three words. But that is what I was talking about this entire time.

I mean, having independent courts and, you know-- when a crime is committed, then someone is punished based on the law, not because of who they know or who they pay. And so-- you know, that happens more today than it did in the past. But very often it doesn't happen. And someone asked me-- like, "When is-- when is-- Albania going to join the European Union?" or, "How are the prospects for Albania joining the European Union?" which they want to.

And my answer is pretty simple. Albania will join the European Union, and it deserves to join the European Union, when a senior government official, minister and abo-- is put in prison for a serious crime. I mean corruption mostly, right? And it's

not about putting aside any single individual.

But when the court systems are strong enough to say, "No, you broke the law. And it doesn't matter what position you hold, then they've reached a level where I say-- the courts have-- you know, and they deserve-- you know, that integration. So--

ARYEH NEIER:

If-- if I could also-- respond-- briefly to the-- to the rule of law question-- I-- I can tell you that-- in-- the-- 20 years or so that I spend as president-- of this foundation-- one of the things-- I found most difficult-- was to find-- ways to promote the rule of law through-- external-- efforts to-- to transform the-- the system within-- a country.

That is-- you couldn't-- say, you know, "Replace all-- the judges." That itself would be a political act. And who are you going to-- put in their place-- as the-- the judges? It would be-- extremely difficult t-- to-- to deal with something like that. You-- you almost had to-- approach rule of law issues-- on-- a bottom-up-- basis.

George Soros has-- a sorta favorite story-- that I will steal from him. He tells about-- a visit to-- to Georgia. The country, not the-- the-- the state. And that he had-- made a speech. And he had talked about-- corruption-- in-- the judiciary. And after that, he got-- a letter from-- one of the judges.

And the judge said he was very taken-- with George Soros' remarks. And-- he-- said that they would have-- a big influence-- on him. But he said there was a difficulty. And that is that he was required to pay a portion of the bribes he received to the appellate judges who would review-- his-- decisions.

And could George give him a grant-- to cover (LAUGHTER) the-- the bribes that he would have to pay to the-- to the appellate judges? And it-- it does seem to me indicative of the-- the difficulty-- for an external-- actor in-- in trying to-- to cope with the problem of-- of the rule of law.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Thank you. Thank you for your talk. And I look forward to reading the book. I haven't read it as yet. I'm a-- former director of the U.N. mission in Kosovo, your neighbor. And-- and our issues with respect to rule of law, development, institutional development in general were slightly different because of the ethnic-- the ethnic factors.

But what I wanted to know from you, seeing that our country isn't exactly a model these days of rule of (LAUGHTER) law. I have not seen anybody go to jail for the mortgage crisis. How as an American writing this book did you get challenged by, you know, the knowledge that you have of your country and how it may or may not apply to democratization in Albania? Democratization's a very long process. We're still dealing with it 200 years later. (LAUGHTER) I think they can be forgiven for

many of their growing pains. But-- how did you navigate those questions? It must have come up.

ARYEH NEIER:

Avni (PH)?

AVNI BASAFI:

Thank you. I'm Avni Basafi (PH). I was also at the Soros Foundation with Fred and-- and-- Frans. So Fred, thank you very much and congratulations. In answer to your question, Aryeh, it was '94 that you first came to Albania.

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay, thank you. (LAUGHTER)

AVNI BASAFI:

Fred, my question is that-- you know, you were there very early on when we saw really there was nothing going on. And-- and, you know, from my standpoint, I always begin with the notion that it was the isolation and the poverty that impacted everything. You know, Albanian culture has a sway.

But if you look at how the Albanians in (UNINTEL PHRASE) Montenegro have come out from the old system to a new system, I think they were a little bit more prepared. But I think the isolation in Albania. 'Cause not only were Albanians isolated from the rest of the world, but they were isolated within Albania.

So I think that when they attacked the schools and when they attack everything, it was because they owned nothing. I mean, even a barber-- even the scissors that he owned were owned by the state. So (MIC CUTS) (UNINTEL) the way society was struc-- (UNINTEL) not only were people not allowed to associ-- (MIC CUTS) (UNINTEL PHRASE) from having a God. You know, from that notion.

So-- my question to you is (MIC CUTS) having gone through this process now for so many years, what (UNINTEL) you the most? What has been the biggest surprise from you given that you were there so early on and where we are today? (UNINTEL PHRASE) the book.

ARYEH NEIER:

'Kay. Do you-- you wanna take one more question? Or--

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Sure--

ARYEH NEIER:

Or-- or--

FRED ABRAHAMS:

We can do one more. Yeah.

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. Let's get one-- one more. Over here.

JESSE HAWKES:

Thank you. My name is Jesse Hawkes. And I'm from Global Youth Connect. We have programs in Bosnia and Rwanda. So I really know very little about Albania. I was curious to know a little bit more about-- how active are youth today in Albania? And t-- to what extent are they-- active in-- political mobilization and social change efforts? And does social media play a role in this as well? And-- curious about any thoughts on that.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Okay, wow. Well, first-- on being challenged as an American-- look, you know, I-- I've been all around-- the world for Human Rights Watch. And I get that question-- every single time. "What about Guantanamo? What about Iraq?" I mean, th-- that-- that-- that-- but not in Albania. (LAUGHTER) No. The sort of g-- you know, they didn't-- they still don't carry people's cars in from the airport. But the--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Yeah, the-- well, they-- they're all here in New York. But the-- the pro-Americanism is still, you know, very, very strong. And so-- but I-- and it didn't come up once. I mean, no one ever turned around and said, you know, "How can you be asking these questions when there's, you know, this and that problem?"

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

No, I'm not saying it's anti-Americanism. But-- I d-- I never-- I never had it-- you know? I mean, the youth-- I mean, other people are better situated. Beka probably could answer this question more. She's, you know, running projects-- in Albania. Avni certainly-- as well.

I mean, definitely there's, you know, very dynamic youth-- movement. I mean, the-- the age-- I don't know the demographics, right? But-- you know, the percentage of people under 30 or under 25 is very, very high. Also in-- in-- in Kosovo. And-- so, you know, there's a lot going on. Certainly social media is-- is growing-- and pl-- you know, plays-- plays a role.

Some of the-- one of the major youth movements-- the most influential youth movement of this period was a group called Miaft (PH) which-- means "enough." And-- they have-- the senior leadership of that group has all gone into politics. So, you know, in that sense-- Miaft still exists, I think-- but-- is not as prominent-- as it was-- before.

And then the-- the la-- Avni, that's a tough question. What-- what-- what surprised me? I think part of it I said already. You know, I-- I-- I was-- it was-- a eye-opening experien-- I mean-- to-- to see how U.S. policy was formulated on Albania was for me, you know, an experience-- an education-- well beyond anything I got in my university.

Because, you know, I was in Albania in '93 and '94, and saw this stuff up close, and came back to New York and-- and-- and Washington. And-- you know, everyone was still praising-- Albania, as this shining star of the east economically even though pyramid schemes were beginning to grow at that time, and politically.

And-- I-- I was s-- stunned. And it-- and it-- it's not that I had any great analysis. It was clear, you know-- what was happening-- on the ground. And then, you know, just as an aside, n-- now, it seems obvious and probably clear to everybody here. But I got to know, you know, how U.S. policy-- how there are competing institutions within the U.S. government.

So, you know, State Department had one line in Albania. In particular-- you know, there were some individuals. And then it spread to institutions that took different views. And there was a competition within those institutions about what line-- would-- would hold. So, you know, all of that was for me a huge-- you know, an amazing--

ARYEH NEIER:

There was also a congressional caucus on Albania.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Still is. That's right. Yeah, Eliot Engel is the-- the head of the-- Albanian caucus. And they played a role as well. So-- you know, that for me-- yeah, that was my education-- in terms of politics and-- and international-- relations. You know, I guess-- regarding-- you know, Albania itself, I mean-- you know, I d-- there-- there's a tendency in a lot of writing-- I mean, especially foreigners, to head in one of two directions.

You know, either they-- mock-- mock is too strong. I don't mean to make fun of. But there's this distanced amusement with this quirky country. Or they glorify. And I wanted to avoid those two extremes and f-- follow some middle path where, yeah, we can ap-- appreciate-- acknowledge and appreciate the quirky and at times bizarre-- characters and events but also explain it.

You know, why is it so-- quirky? You know, what's the reason? It's not-- a g-- it's not genetic-- you know? And-- that's what I t-- I tried. I guess I'm-- I don't know if I'm answering your question. But the reason I-- I go to it is because I-- I didn't want to-- I just wanted to-- explain it. And-- yeah, I don't know. Was that a surprise or not? But-- that's my answer. And I'm sticking to it. (LAUGHTER)

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay, so let's-- let's take one more round of questions. In the back over there.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Hi. My name is--

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Hello--

(OVERTALK)

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I'm part of the Albania Roots. We do the parade every year. And-- one thing that I wanted to say is I've-- I came here when I was 16. And I've been in a lot of places in Europe. And I think one thing that I realized why we have these problems in Albania is because our parents, our grandparents taught us that we are communist.

We sticking on that. And we stuck on that idea that just because we are communist, we voting for them regardless who is in powers or regardless what they do. And I think a lot of people here in United State have more education on that. Like, it's not

about communist or democrat. It's about what those people do for us.

But people in Albania still on that little box that whatever parents did, we doing it. So unless they get out of that box, it's gonna still go on and on. And they'll always do the same thing. And I think that we who are here, like, outside United State are more educated. And if someone from here goes there and do something, I think we can progress in a big time. I don't know. Maybe it's just my opinion. And I'm young. I don't know much about politics. (LAUGHTER) But I--

FRED ABRAHAMS:

That's nice--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

--think we here, the young generation are more open minded. And we do more things. We have a lot of organization here that I know. And we do a lot of things. If we can take all those things and go back there, I think we can do wonders.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Thanks Marina (PH).

ARYEH NEIER:

Over here on the center.

CHARLES WALSH:

My name's Charles Walsh. I was-- I'm a retired diplomat. American. Not Italian. (LAUGHTER) first of all, I'd like to say that-- Kindle tells me that I've read f-- 5% of your book. (LAUGHTER) And I wanted to say that based on the majority of your book that I'm familiar with, it's a great book.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Thanks.

CHARLES WALSH:

And it-- deserves to be up there with *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and some of

the books I mentioned to you earlier. *Tropical Gangsters* and-- because it depicts-- it depicts a country and a process in-- in a just beautiful way. I was there for just a few of those years.

But-- it really nails it, the part that I was there. And-- my question is: When is this going to be translated into Albanian? (LAUGHTER) And the second question is: I think based on years at the O.S.C.E. (PH)-- and working in, you know, Belarus, and Turkmenistan, and all the other countries out there that there are a lot of countries that can learn from the template that you describe-- in this process of moving from a totalitarian regime to what we have now. So is there a thought that O.S.I. would support translation of this book into (LAUGHTER) some of the other languages?

FRED ABRAHAMS:

I did not plant that question. (LAUGHTER)

ARYEH NEIER:

No, he did not.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

All right.

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. Let's get one more. Over here.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

Two more.

ARYEH NEIER:

Two more. Two more. All right. (LAUGHTER)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

All right.

ARYEH NEIER:

We'll get two more. Then it starts.

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

So I guess we're here 25 years later. And my question, I suppose, is for both of you. What would you describe the legacy of the Foundation in Albania? I think--

ARYEH NEIER:

What would you describe--

FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER:

What would you describe the legacy of the Foundation in Albania these 25 years? That figure you cited was astonishing. I'm still sort of reeling back from it. And I think a lot of what you described, Fred, in your remarks could have probably been the subtitle of the book, is the influence of foreign interests in Albania and how they shaped modern Albania. So I guess maybe some-- some of that legacy.

ARYEH NEIER:

Okay. Was there one more? Yes, one more over there on the side.

MARY LAGGEKRIFTE:

Thank you.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Who is talking?

MARY LAGGEKRIFTE:

I have a rather boring question. And-- I love definitions. I-- oh, I'm sorry. My name is Mary Laggekrifte (PH). And-- back to my boring question. I love definitions. And-- I would love to hear your definition of the very title of it. And I haven't read the book, *Modern Albania*, which is so lovely. And I would love to hear what that means.

And how is Albania-- when was it modern? Or is it modern yet? And-- I get the

picture of the-- of the looters. And, by the way, you know, there were looters all over, you know, the-- the Katrina-- episode here in the States. So, anyway, that's a different question. And-- yeah, so definitions. I would love hear to a little bit on that. Thank you.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Should I go?

ARYEH NEIER:

Sure.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

No? Well-- (UNINTEL), good to see you first of all. Thank you for that question. I-- I-- I wish I'd had-- I really wish I had a deep-- answer for you. The-- the crates of wine and beer that Fran, and Artan, and I went through trying to come up with a title would fill this room.

And in the end-- you know-- this was-- chosen in consultation with N.Y.U.-- Press and-- without, you know-- without deep vision. So I'm sorry to disappoint you. And-- you know, I mean, it's sort of-- the country today. We-- we actually had a discussion how would we translate this into Albanian. 'Cause-- *Shipuria Moderne* (PH) is not quite-- right. Maybe we can talk about that in the-- in the--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

FRED ABRAHAMS:

I thought *Shipuria Sut* (PH), which also-- plays on the-- on a nice-- Tirana story. But-- in any case-- but-- I wanted to come to-- to your question. I mean, I thought that was very beautiful-- what you said. And I agree. There's a real contribution-- for young people in general but especially those who have, you know, been educated and grown up-- abroad-- to make.

And-- and it's true. Many people vote for the party because it's what they've always done. And the amazing thing-- I-- I said this before. You know, the political class, they all came from the same tree. And if you looked at the policies, the policy differences between the parties is al-- almost non-recognizable.

You know, this is not about policy, you know? And so it's about-- individuals and interests. And that's why people keep voting for the same party. Because they know that if they do, they'll keep their job. So-- you know, it's a very-- I mean, it's an emotional thing, a personal thing. But it's also a practical thing, right? And-- what

was the last question? Oh, well-- Charles--

ARYEH NEIER:

And also the legacy.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

The legacy. I was gonna c-- leave that till last so we both-- which is-- first of all, one of the diplomats and-- it's amazing to say, one of the few, not the only one-- who got it-- when Charles was in-- Albania and in a difficult time. '95, '96, '97 especially-- got-- and is in the book, by the way.

As-- as-- and-- as are a few other people here, too. 'Cause I saw Stacy Sullivan (PH) sneak in the back. (LAUGHTER) So-- yes, it's being translated. We have-- a Albanian publisher. And will come out hopefully-- in the fall. And I couldn't be more excited about that. You know, we were discussing it before.

Has there been a reaction in Albania yet? And not yet because it's still-- well, this is the launch. But, you know, if there isn't a reaction-- I'll be deeply, deeply disappointed. And I don't mean embracing the book. Far from it. You know, I mean, I hope that there is fierce and thoughtful criticism-- as lo-- as long as it's thoughtful. And-- that it stirs up-- a conversation. You know, that's the-- that's the point. That is the point. That's the mirror-- that I referenced before. So-- I sure hope-- that it-- that it-- inspires that, provokes that. The legacy.

ARYEH NEIER:

Well-- I-- I'm out of date in terms of my own-- visits to Albania. So I-- I really have to-- respond to that-- more in terms of the-- the-- the general standard-- for-- the legacy one-- tries to-- to achieve in-- in any-- country. And that is-- part of the legacy is-- in individuals.

And part of the legacy is-- in institutions. The-- the individuals are those who-- may-- benefit from-- the-- the educational programs-- that we have supported. And the educational programs-- have included the-- the programs as I mentioned at the primary and-- secondary school level.

But they've also included-- substantial scholarship-- programs-- over the years at the-- the university level. They also include the people who may have benefited-- from-- the-- the book publishing programs-- that we-- supported and were able to-- to read-- books in Albanian that they could not have obtained-- in any other-- fashion.

So-- helping-- to-- to-- have an effect-- on those individuals through programs of that sort is important. And then as far as institutions are concerned-- institutions can-- include the-- the newspapers or the-- the press-- that we have helped to-- to make

possible-- within the country, the-- the civil society organizations-- that exist within the country which have-- primarily been supported-- by the-- the Foundation, and-- a range of other-- institutions in the country that have-- benefited from the-- the work of the Foundation over the course of the years.

The-- the theory is that-- if you're going to have an open society-- you need to have-- the citizenry that is-- educated and engaged. And-- the-- the programs of the Foundation-- contribute to both education and engagement. And you have to have-- diverse and credible-- institutions with-- within the country which can have an effect-- upon the-- the way in which the-- the country develops.

We can't-- introduce democracy int-- to Albania. We can't introduce the rule of law into-- Albania. W-- there are a lotta things-- we can't do. But the individuals-- and the civil society actors may be able to do that. And by empowering-- people in that fashion, our hope is that they will-- help to-- to create an open society within the country.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Yeah. Maybe I'll just say one-- word on that. I mean, I always thought O.S.I.'s role and other-- you know-- foundations and institutions' w-- work-- it's incredibly challenging to work in Albania. I mean, and-- and-- th-- there's this real balance. You know, how do you move a tree?

You know, you can take a shovel and move a little dirt so that the long-term programs Aryeh was-- was referencing. Maybe you can hack off a limb or uproot, you know, a tree. And-- and then where do you challenge or where do you accommodate a system-- where the change is gonna be long term?

I-- I always thought that was incredibly difficult. On the one hand, there are-- the-- the list of projects-- that wouldn't have happened in Albania-- without outside support from foundations such as this one, well, the list is very, very long. How many students went abroad?

How many papers were supported? How many Columbia student-- grad students got to go to Albania? You know, the list is endless, right? But, you know, at-- at the same time, if we stop and say, "Have we succeeded?" You know, well-- you know, I think we should be honest and say we're far, far from where we, you know, want to be. We in the abstract collective sense. So, you know-- was it-- you know, there's more to be done. Maybe that's the-- the best way to put it.

BEKA VUCO:

Thank you. Thank you, Aryeh. (APPLAUSE) Thank you, Fred. I know that many of you bought the book. And I know that Fred will be very glad to sign the book here. But there are some more books out there for those who have not bought. And please join us for a glass of wine to celebrate the book launch. Thank you. Thank you for

coming.

FRED ABRAHAMS:

Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *