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The Gorans are an ethnic minority living in the Gora region of the Shar Mountains, located on the border between Kosovo, Albania and North Macedonia. A characteristic feature of this minority is the use of a Slavic language and adherence to Islam, as well as a strong sense of cultural distinctiveness. The Goran community numbers about 30,000 people, most of whom live outside the Goran area. After 1999, following the Kosovo-Serbian conflict, some of the region's residents emigrated for economic reasons. Nevertheless, Gora is still the poorest region in Kosovo today, and despite the falling unemployment rate, many Goran choose to leave the country to improve their financial situation.

The history of Goran dates back to the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, when the Balkan Peninsula was undergoing Islamization. Slavs embraced Islam (15th-19th centuries), taking advantage of the financial benefits, which allowed new identities to emerge. In later years, especially during the Yugoslav period, nationalism intensified, fostering the construction of a separate identity while avoiding affiliation with the region's major nations. Goran's high mountainous terrain, with its natural barriers to access, favored the preservation of cultural distinctiveness and less influence from central centers that promoted cultural homogenization.

One of the key elements of Goran identity is the language, or more precisely the Slavic ethnolect, which is most similar to Western Macedonian. However, this is a claim often made by objective, non-Balkan, linguists and ethnologists. In Albanian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Bosnian or Macedonian literature relating to this problem, we encounter different opinions, often in line with the political narrative of the country in question. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that it is an ethnolect spoken by an ethnic minority, containing numerous features in common with Macedonian, without, however, identifying it with any South Slavic language *sensu stricto*.

The same is true of the Goran affiliation itself. They are recognized as a community in Kosovo, forming, among other things, a political party called Partia Unike Gorane, which represents Goran interests in the Kosovo government. Serbian parties, on the other hand, describe Goran as a Serbian enclave in Kosovo. Bulgarians have also spoken out on the issue of the community's membership, demanding that the Goran be recognized as a Bulgarian minority in Kosovo's constitution. A key element in this issue is that the minority

does not clearly identify with any state and primarily defines itself by the ethnonym Goran/Goran.