

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF ALBANIA



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ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF ALBANIA

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# ECONOMY



ANASTAS ANGJELI

ADRIAN CIVICI

## ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE AND PROSPECTS OF ECONOMIC SCIENCES IN ALBANIA

### **Abstract**

In the third decade of the 21st century, economic sciences are facing a "storm of systemic transformations". The convergence of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the global imperative for the decarbonization of production systems and the unpredictable reconfiguration of the geopolitical order are radically reshaping the basic premises of traditional economic theory.

Through a rigorous methodology of research triangulation, this study does not stop at a simple observation, but interweaves three complementary dimensions to ensure maximum accuracy of the findings:

1. Quantitative analysis of the academic market. This pillar focuses on measuring the scientific "output" of Albanian universities. Through it, the volume of papers, the dominant topics and the compatibility of curricula with the real needs of the labor market are analyzed. This allows us to see whether the academy is producing knowledge that serves the economy or is simply generating diplomas.

2. Empirical measurement of financial competencies. Through surveys and statistical methods, the level of financial literacy of the population is studied. This indicator shows the ability of citizens to make rational decisions, to save and to understand market risks, highlighting the vulnerability of Albanian society to financial phenomena or speculative schemes.

3. Deconstruction of media discourse. This dimension analyzes how economic information is "translated" to the general public.

Through the analysis of media content, the degree of politicization of economic news and the gap that exists between scientific expertise and what the public consumes in daily media debates are identified.

Why triangulation? The use of this technique serves to validate the data: if all three of these sources (academia, citizens and media) converge on the same conclusion, then the results of the study have a high degree of reliability and objectivity.

The paper identifies the existence of a worrying "structural disconnect". This phenomenon manifests itself in a deep asymmetry between the often inertial and theoretical academic production, and the dynamic demands of the labor market, as well as in a communication gap between scientific research and the political decision-making process. The main findings of the study show that Albania, with a financial literacy index of 53%, is positioned significantly below the regional and OECD average, reflecting a high vulnerability of citizens to market risks.

In parallel, the massification of higher education has generated a variety of degrees, where the high volume of graduates has come at the cost of sacrificing methodological rigor.

The study notes that the Albanian academic and university world exhibits a delayed reactivity to the digital economy and Artificial Intelligence, risking remaining on the periphery of global developments.

In conclusion, the paper proposes a framework of recommendations for a new ecosystem of economic thought, aiming to integrate science with practice, increase the financial immunity of society, and modernize analytical instruments in the function of sustainable national development.

**Key words:** Economic thinking, Financial education, Scientific research, Revolution 4.0, Public policy, Digital economy, Structural disconnection, AI in Economics.

## **I. The new economic paradigm and the Albanian context**

### **1.1. Global challenges and the imperative for a theoretical reconceptualization**

In recent years, economic sciences have been facing a "paradigm crossroads", being forced to re-dimension basic principles under the pressure of radical global transformations. The evolution of economic thought today is no longer simply a linear process of academic growth, but a reaction to complex and often asymmetric phenomena such as: hyper-globalization, extreme volatility of financial markets, geopolitical reconfigurations and, above all, the climate and energy emergency that has brought to the forefront the need for an inevitable energy transition.

At the international level, a shift is observed from neoclassical orthodoxy towards more heterodox models, where the digital economy (Revolution 4.0) and the "green" economy are no longer treated as peripheral branches, but as the epicenter of the new doctrine of sustainable development.

While the academic and university environments at the international level are rapidly integrating Artificial Intelligence and Big Data analytics into econometric modeling, in the Albanian context this modernization process is reflected at a rather lukewarm level.

The development of economic thought in Albania often appears as an "inert" process, characterized by a time lag in the absorption of contemporary concepts.

This study undertakes to analyze with scientific rigor the degree of synchronization of local academic production with global avant-garde trends, arguing that universities and research centers must cease to be simply passive transmitters of knowledge and become catalysts for the country's structural modernization.

## **1.2. Research Thesis: Structural Discontinuity and the Crisis of Relevance**

The central thesis of this paper is based on the identification of a "structural disconnect", a phenomenon where academic research and theoretical production run on parallel tracks with political decision-making and practical applications in public policies, without almost ever meeting at points of convergence.

Although Albania witnesses an "inflation" of the presence of economic terminology in public discourse, where the media and politics regularly use concepts such as GDP, public debt, structural reform or inflation, this phenomenon remains at the level of superficial rhetoric. There is a significant paradox: economics is omnipresent in public debate, but remains a hermetic science for the mass of the population and often under-utilized by executive government structures.

This study defends the idea that without a deep reform aimed at:

- Increasing methodological rigor in scientific research by moving from description to propositional modeling;
- Building a solid financial education as a civic competence to create a public opinion immune to economic populism;
- The contribution of economic sciences to the trajectory of Albania's economic and social development will remain truncated and fragmented.

The study aims to prove that strengthening scientific research and mass education are not simply academic aspirations, but existential prerequisites for the sustainability of the Albanian economic model in the face of future crises.

## **II. Research methodology and structure**

### **2.1. Multidimensional approach and methodological triangulation**

To ensure scientific objectivity and to unravel the complexity of the relationship between economic thought and socio-economic reality in Albania, this study relies on a multidimensional approach.

The selected methodology is based on the principle of triangulation (combination of quantitative and qualitative methods), which allows for the verification of findings from different sources and the minimization of research bias. This methodological instrument is structured in four main pillars:

#### **A. Quantitative analysis and inductive statistics**

This pillar focuses on the collection and processing of aggregate data provided by official institutions such as INSTAT, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MAS) and the Ministry of Finance.

- Focus: Analysis of the market for university education services, the dynamics of student flows in Bachelor and Master cycles, as well as the distribution of human resources according to economic profiles.

- Purpose: Identification of academic demographic trends and the correlation between university supply and labor market demands, using ISCED-F 2013 indicators for the classification of fields of study. The International Standard Classification of Education - Fields of Education and Training - is an international system standardized by UNESCO for the categorization of fields of education and training. This classification serves as a "universal language" to compare degrees and study programs between different countries, regardless of the specific titles that degrees may have at the local level.

## **B. Qualitative analysis of scientific production**

To assess the "health" of scientific research, the study applied the content analysis method to a significant amount of academic papers from the last 10-15 years.

- Scope: Doctoral dissertations and Master's theses in public and private universities.

- Analysis: Identification of thematic priorities, the rigor of the applied methodologies (use of econometrics versus descriptive analysis) and assessment of the originality of the conclusions.

This analysis aims to identify whether domestic scientific research responds to contemporary challenges such as digitalization and sustainable development or remains within the framework of traditional theories.

## **C. Empirical observation and measurement of financial education**

This pillar represents the social dimension of the research, using survey and semi-structured interview techniques.

- Survey: A representative sample of 500 citizens was conducted nationwide, applying the standardized OECD methodology for measuring financial literacy.

- In-depth Interviews: To complement the empirical data, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including economic experts, financial market analysts, and senior business sector executives. This process serves to gauge elite perceptions of the role of the economist in strategic decision-making.

## **D. Media monitoring and analysis of the publishing system**

The last pillar examines the channels of economic knowledge dissemination and their impact on the formation of public opinion.

- **Media Analysis:** Monitoring television time and editorial space in the printed press, with a focus on the quality of debate and the profile of the guests (experts vs. politicians).

- **Publishing Market Analysis:** Examining the volume and quality of publications from university and commercial publishing houses. Here, the ratio between didactic texts (textbooks) and original scientific monographs is analyzed, as well as the rate of translation of contemporary world economic literature.

Through this integrated methodology, the study aims to build a holistic panorama of economic sciences in Albania, providing a solid basis for the policy recommendations at the end of the paper.

### **III. Analysis of financial education: a structural barrier to development**

#### **3.1. The paradox of interest and knowledge asymmetry**

The analysis of consumer behavior in Albania reveals a phenomenon known in economic theory as "asymmetry of perceptual information". There is a strong positive correlation between macroeconomic fluctuations (inflation, exchange rate, fiscal policies, budget policies) and the degree of public attention, but this interest does not translate into a deep understanding of the mechanisms that cause these fluctuations.

- *"Survival" Economy vs. Rational Analysis:* Albanians show a high interest in economic indicators, but this interest is mainly reactive and dictated by the need to protect purchasing power. Phenomena such as consumer price increases (CPI), changes in taxation schemes or wage levels are monitored rigorously, as they directly affect immediate well-being.

- *Self-Assessment of Capacities:* The study highlights a crisis of financial self-confidence; over 50% of the surveyed sample categorize their knowledge as ranging from "average" to "very poor". This

perception reflects a psychological barrier that prevents the individual from interacting with complex financial markets.

- *Inertia towards Innovation:* A worrying finding is the low level of curiosity about new financial instruments (FinTech, digital currencies, investment products), with only 6% of the population showing a propensity for exploration. Meanwhile, a critical mass of 21% declares a total disregard for financial education, which creates an inert terrain that makes it difficult for modern financial reforms to penetrate the country.

### **3.2. Comparative analysis of results according to OECD standards**

Measuring financial literacy in Albania, based on the standardized OECD/INFE methodology, provides a clear picture of "financial illiteracy" as an obstacle to individual and national economic stability. (International Network on Financial Education), is not simply an opinion poll, but a scientific instrument that breaks down the individual's relationship with money into three main dimensions. This process allows for the comparability of Albania with other countries in the region and those of the OECD, identifying weak points that require intervention through public policies.

- *Below-average performance:* With an aggregate score of 53%, Albania is positioned significantly below the average of the countries of the Western Balkans region and even further away from the countries of the European Union (where the average fluctuates above 65-70%). This gap shows that domestic economic agents find it difficult to apply basic concepts such as "compound interest" or "risk diversification".

- *Socio-Demographic Segmentation and Knowledge Fragmentation:* Financial literacy in Albania is not uniformly distributed, but follows demographic fault lines:

- **Gender and Education Gap:** A slight dominance of men and a clear advantage of people with higher education are observed, which confirms that cultural capital is closely related to financial capital.

- *Age Group Vulnerability*: The extreme age groups (16-25 years old and 55-75 years old) show the lowest performance. Young people lack experience in asset management, while the elderly remain hostage to traditional saving methods, isolating themselves from the developments of the contemporary banking system.

- *Rural-Urban Difference*: The rural population suffers from a double isolation: the lack of financial infrastructure and the lack of information, keeping this sector out of the mainstream investment flows.

### **3.3. The implications of financial illiteracy on the stability of the system**

From a scientific and macro-prudential point of view, the insufficient level of financial education is not simply a social problem, but carries systemic risks that can undermine the stability of the entire financial sector. When a significant part of the population operates with knowledge gaps, an inefficient environment is created where capital is misallocated and risk is miscalculated.

- *Exposure to Fraud Schemes (Information Asymmetry)*: The lack of understanding of the basic "risk-reward" ratio makes citizens easy prey for new fraud schemes. In the digital age, this has been escalated through "pyramid schemes 2.0" (investment apps, speculative cryptocurrencies with high suspicious returns). A financially illiterate population tends to follow the euphoria of the market without understanding the fundamentals of value, which can lead to massive losses of national wealth and social unrest, as our bitter history of 1997 proves.

- *Suboptimal Savings Management and "Money Under the Pillow"*: Inefficiency in the allocation of financial assets remains a critical challenge. Keeping savings outside the banking system (cash) not only exposes the individual to depreciation from inflation, but also reduces liquidity in the market. This phenomenon hinders the process of financial intermediation; banks have fewer resources to lend to

businesses, which increases borrowing costs and hinders the growth of private investment and innovation.

- *Bad debt cycle and rising NPLs:* Misunderstanding of contractual terms (effective interest rates, hidden commissions, exchange rate risks) inevitably leads to over-indebtedness. When individuals borrow beyond their repayment capacity, a chain reaction is created that culminates in an increase in the level of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs). An increase in NPLs forces banks to increase provisions and tighten lending criteria, creating a credit crunch that kills economic growth.

Financial education should no longer be seen as an optional learning process or as a modest corporate social responsibility initiative. It constitutes a strategic national asset and an "immune shield" for the economy.

- *Consumer Protection:* An informed citizen is less dependent on the regulator, as he can protect himself through rational product selection.

- *Resilience to shocks:* A financially literate society is more resilient to external shocks (such as rising inflation or interest rate fluctuations), as individuals know how to adjust their consumption and saving behavior in times of crisis.

Building this culture is the best long-term investment to ensure that the Albanian economy moves from a consumption-driven growth model to one based on smart investment and sustainability.

#### **IV. The university market and the profiling of economic sciences: a structural analysis**

##### **4.1. The paradox of massification**

The Higher Education market in Albania has witnessed a large quantitative expansion of economic disciplines, creating what is known in the literature as "sectoral overeducation". With around 30,713

students in the academic year 2023, economic sciences constitute 25% of the student body, an indicator that testifies to a high preference, but also to a high risk of oversaturation of the labor market with generalist profiles.

- *Institutional Architecture:* Of the 40 Higher Education Institutions operating in the country, the presence of economic sciences is capillary. The fact that 50% of public universities and 65% of private ones have integrated economics departments indicates an academic business model based on high demand, but not necessarily on value-added specialization.

- *Public-Private Duality:* The division of 56% (Public) and 44% (Private) reflects an interesting balance, where the public sector remains the guarantor of massification, while the private sector tends to absorb the segment that requires flexibility, although not always offering a qualitative differentiation in its curricula.

- *Curricular complexity and lack of Niches:* Analysis of the academic offer reveals an "oligopolistic" concentration in traditional branches such as *Business Management and Finance-Accounting*. This academic conservatism has created a pronounced deficit in new interdisciplinary disciplines.

- The lack of specific programs such as *Innovation Economics, Advanced Econometrics or Data Science for Economics* leaves the student unprepared for the global job market, which today requires quantitative analytical skills and knowledge of the knowledge economy.

## **4.2. The need for a strategic reorientation**

To increase relevance, economic sciences in Albania need to move from a model of "transmission of basic knowledge" to a model of "production of solutions". This requires:

- *Curricular Innovation:* Integrating coding and data analysis (Big Data) as a core subject.

- *Interdisciplinarity*: Connecting economics with engineering, informatics, environment and social sciences to address the complexity of sustainable development.

- *International Standardization*: Encouraging research aimed at publication in journals with impact factor (Scopus/Web of Science), to overcome local research isolation.

## **V. Economic discourse in media and publications**

### **5.1. The politicization of economic analysis and the deformation of the public sphere**

The media, as an organic intermediary between economic science and the general public, plays a critical role in shaping the "economic literacy" of society. However, the study highlights that in the Albanian context, this function is compromised by an excessive process of politicization. Technical and evidence-based analysis is regularly sacrificed for the sake of electoral narratives.

### **5.2. Quantitative marginalization: economics as an "appendix" to politics**

The analysis of the content of the main media in the country shows a worrying asymmetry:

- *Editorial Space*: Only a modest figure of 7-9% of the editorial space in the printed press and information portals is dedicated to specific economic topics.

- *Periphery of the News*: The economy is not treated as a priority sector of in-depth information, but often appears only when related to corruption scandals, black chronicles, debates in Parliament or official announcements of the government and international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, etc. This creates a perception among the public that the economy is something that "happens" in state offices, and not a dynamic process that affects every cell of social life.

### **5.3. Quality Degradation: "Talk-Show Syndrome" and the 'Multi-talented' Analyst**

In the audiovisual media, especially during prime time, complex issues such as economic growth, public debt, fiscal and budgetary reforms or monetary policy are alienated into political spectacle.

- *The dominance of "omniscience"*: The economic debate has been taken over by "multi-talented analysts", figures who, in the course of an evening, move from geopolitical analyses to sports tactics and end up with inflation forecasts. This leads to a devaluation of the academic expert, who often refuses to be part of debates where more is shouted than argued.

- *Rhetoric vs. Facts*: As a result, economic fact (figures, trends, models) is alienated into party rhetoric. The general public finds it impossible to receive an analysis stripped of ideologies, leaving them with an information "fog" that fuels uncertainty and skepticism towards institutions.

Despite the general picture, there are efforts to preserve the dignity of economic research on screen.

- *Dedicated Models*: Platforms such as RTSH (with thematic shows on finance) or Vizion Plus, Abc news, Scan Tv, have maintained formats where priority is given to authoritative voices: academics, bank executives, financiers and independent experts.

- *Unaddressed Demand*: These cases prove that in Albanian society there is an elite (entrepreneurs, students, professionals) that has a "hunger" for quality information and in-depth economic analysis. However, these remain exceptions that confirm the rule; they are isolated islands that struggle with the logic of clicks that favor conflict over competence.

This state of the public sphere produces a dangerous "information asymmetry". When the public does not understand the mechanisms of the market or the real causes of a crisis, it becomes easy prey to populist promises. Consequently, this makes it difficult to implement structural

reforms, as there is a lack of a broad, well-informed citizen base that supports science-based decision-making.

#### **5.4. The Crisis of Scientific Publishing and the Erosion of Theoretical Knowledge**

The economic book market in Albania reflects a chronic crisis of supply and demand for qualified knowledge, creating a bibliographical "desert" that penalizes the development of contemporary thought. This phenomenon is not simply a commercial failure, but a structural obstacle to the formation of new intellectual elites.

##### **1. Publishing Market Analysis**

Statistical analysis of national publications reveals a discouraging reality: only a modest 4-5% of the total volume of publications in the country is dedicated to economic sciences.

- *Modest circulations:* The commercial logic of publishing houses is based on the argument that "the economic book is not a commercial product". This has led to publications with circulations ranging between 400-500 copies, often intended only for a narrow academic circle or for university libraries.

- *Cycle of Inefficiency:* This low circulation increases the cost per unit, making the scientific book expensive and less accessible. As a result, the circulation of new ideas remains paralyzed, keeping local academic debate in suspense and discouraging new authors from investing time in serious research.

##### **2. Theoretical vacuum and lack of "Schools of Thought"**

There is an alarming lack of translations and publications on the currents that are reshaping the world economy today.

- *Isolation from the Global Debate:* While the world discusses Behavioral Economics, New Institutionalism, or Complexity

Economics, Albanian students and scholars often operate with an outdated theoretical corpus.

- *Vicious Circle of Repetition*: Without access to the works of authors who have won Nobel Prizes in the last two decades, Albanian academic thought remains imprisoned in a vicious circle of repetition of basic neoclassical concepts. This vacuum prevents the creation of genuine local schools of thought that could analyze Albanian reality through modern theoretical lenses.

### **3. The Dominance of Didactic Textbooks**

A specific feature of the domestic market is that about 50-60% of economic publications come from university publishing houses. Although this remains a valuable contribution, it suffers from a functional imbalance:

- *Inertia of Manuals*: Publications lean almost entirely towards didactic texts (manuals) that serve as auxiliary tools. These texts are mainly descriptive and rarely contain critical or original research elements.

- *Lack of Research Platform*: Scientific monographs, which should serve as a platform for new theses and in-depth analyses on the structural problems of the Albanian economy, are almost non-existent. This lack of "genuine scientific production" strips the academy of its role as a producer of knowledge, reducing it to a mere transmitter of ready-made information.

*Assessment*: The erosion of theoretical knowledge in Albania is producing a generation of economists who master the "technique" of calculation, but lack the "philosophy" and critical capacity to understand and guide the major economic changes of the time.

## **5.5. The need for a "Communication Bridge" between science and the public**

To bridge the gap between academic hermeticism and populist simplification, it is necessary to build a new infrastructure for the dissemination of knowledge. This requires that economic science not remain an isolated "island", but become a guiding compass for society through three main pillars:

### **1. Professionalization of economic journalism**

Today, economic information is often reduced to superficial news on exchange rates or market prices, bypassing the analysis of structural causes.

- *Decoding Complexity*: Journalists are needed who are not simply reporters, but "translators" of econometric models and reports of international institutions (IMF, World Bank) into a language understandable to citizens and entrepreneurs.

- *Creation of Specialized Networks*: Promoting regular cooperation between editorial offices and economics departments in universities, to ensure that public debate is based on data and analysis and not on political rhetoric.

### **2. Subsidizing Quality Publications**

The Albanian academic library suffers from a significant lack of high-level contemporary literature in the Albanian language.

- *Translation of elite works*: The state and academic foundations should finance the translation of authors who have reformatted world economic thought (such as Nobel Prize winners or digital economy researchers). This prevents "scientific provincialism" and gives students and researchers access to the most modern theoretical tools.

- *Enrichment of terminology*: Quality translation also serves as a means of standardizing and enriching economic terminology in the Albanian language, creating a solid corpus for future generations.

### **3. Encouraging Scientific Monographs**

There is a tendency to focus on textbooks (didactic manuals), which are often repetitions of basic principles, neglecting original research.

- *From theory to solution:* The publication of monographs that analyze specifics of the national economy, such as the demographic transition, the labor market in the era of artificial intelligence, or the challenges of monetary sovereignty, should be encouraged.

- *Policy-making impact:* These publications should aim to serve as a guide for decision-makers. A scientific monograph should not be seen only as an obligation for an academic degree, but as a contribution to addressing structural problems that hinder the long-term growth of the country.

Building this bridge is not simply a technical process, but a cultural mission. It aims to increase the "economic literacy" of society, making it less vulnerable to populism and better prepared for the challenges of the global economy.

## **VI. New challenges: Revolution 4.0 and European integration as vectors of transformation**

### **6.1. Digital Economy and Artificial Intelligence**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution does not simply represent a technological evolution, but an ontological change in the way economic value is created, distributed and measured.

In this context, economic sciences in Albania are faced with the challenge of Schumpeter's "creative destruction", where traditional analytical tools are becoming insufficient to decipher new markets.

- *The Imperative of Digital Transition Management:* The contemporary economy operates on intangible assets and massive data networks (Big Data).

- *The study emphasizes* that the possession of instruments for managing this transition is no longer a competitive advantage, but an existential condition for the sustainability of businesses and the efficiency of public policies.

- *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* is re-modeling production functions, optimizing the allocation of resources through machine learning algorithms.

- *Curricular Gap and Algorithmic Marginalization:* Despite its critical importance, this issue remains marginal in Albanian academic discourse. Analysis of university curricula demonstrates a mismatch between educational offerings and the demands of the digital economy and AI.

- *The lack of courses that combine economics with coding, data analysis, and AI ethics* leaves domestic scientific research in an "analog" state, while economic reality is becoming increasingly "biometric and algorithmic."

## **6.2. Green economy and sustainable finance**

As part of the process of integration into the European Union and alignment with the "European Green Deal", Albania must move towards an economic model that internalizes environmental costs, which have traditionally been treated as negative externalities.

This stance represents a fundamental change in the country's economic growth philosophy, moving from a model based on resource exploitation to a Green Economy model. Internalizing environmental costs means that businesses and consumers do not "offload" the consequences of pollution or environmental degradation to society (as externalities), but include them in the price of their products and services.

- *Convergence with EU Standards:* The transition to a low-carbon economy requires a re-conceptualization of the entire economic accountability system. This includes adopting circular economy

principles and evaluating investments according to ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) criteria, which represents a fundamental change in the world of finance, where the success of a project or company is no longer measured solely through monetary profit, but also through the footprint it leaves on society and the planet.

- *Embryogenesis of ecological thinking in academia:* The study finds that the concepts of "green finance" and "blue economy" are still in their initial steps, in the embryonic phase of academic treatment in Albania.

- *There is a significant lack of cost-benefit studies* on investments in renewable energy and on the impact of carbon taxation on the competitiveness of Albanian SMEs. Without a strong research base, business and government will find it difficult to absorb the funds made available by the EU for the green transition.

### **6.3. Synergy between digitalization and the green economy**

The final challenge of economic sciences in the country is to address what is known as the "Twin Transition". This requires Albanian economic thought not to see digitalization and environmental sustainability as separate processes, but as a single transformative force.

- *Data Economy for the Environment:* The Use of Digital Technologies (IoT, Smart Grids). The integration of IoT and Smart Grids in the Albanian economy is not simply a technical modernization, but a structural reform: Ecological Footprint Transparency: For the first time, the consumer and the regulator can see the "true" environmental cost of a product in real time; Efficiency as a Source of Profit: Businesses are not motivated only by ethics, but by the monetary savings that digital optimization of resources brings; Energy Decentralization: These technologies allow families to become producers and consumers through photovoltaic panels, increasing the country's energy security.

- *Institutional Innovation*: The need for regulators that foster technological innovation while ensuring the protection of natural assets. Institutional innovation in this context means transforming the role of the state from a “passive controller” to an “active architect” of sustainable growth. The goal is to create a regulatory environment where technological progress and the preservation of natural capital are not seen as exclusive forces, but as cooperative ones.

In conclusion, European integration should not be considered simply as an administrative process, but as a catalyst that forces Albanian economic science to abandon outdated growth models based on resource consumption, and to embrace a model based on knowledge, innovation and responsibility towards future generations.

## **VII. Conclusions and recommendations**

### **7.1. Analytical conclusions**

The study confirms that economic sciences in Albania are at a critical stage of transition, characterized by a "paradigm crossroads" between quantitative massification (the simple increase in numbers) and the urgent need for substantial quality. This paradox appears in three main dimensions:

- *Lack of applied relevance and "Research Isolation"*: The analysis shows that, despite the increase in the number of students and academic titles, this corpus remains mainly "science for science's sake". Doctoral theses and scientific papers often end up in archives without ever becoming part of public policy laboratories. There is a gap between academic production and the state's needs for executive instruments that solve real problems such as informality or inequality.

- *Asymmetry between theory and global reality*: Current curricula suffer from an "academic inertia". While the world is going through epochal transformations, Albanian auditors often remain captive to the theoretical descriptions of the last century. This gap produces graduates who possess definitions but not the analytical skills to operate in the

Data Economy, where artificial intelligence and environmental sustainability are no longer options but prerequisites.

- *The Crisis of Distribution and the “Expertise Vacuum”*: The public sphere has been infected by a politicized discourse where economics is treated with emotions rather than numbers. This failure to filter scientific knowledge to the masses has created a fertile ground for financial illiteracy, leaving the average citizen defenseless in the face of market crises or speculative schemes.

## **7.2. Strategic Recommendations for Action**

To break out of this vicious circle, an intervention in four pillars is proposed:

### **A. Restructuring Higher Education and Curricular Innovation**

- *Universities should stop being “graduation centers”* and become centers of competence formation.

- *Quantification and Data Science*: There can be no economy without numbers. The mandatory integration of econometric modeling and Data Science is proposed. The economics student must be able to code and interpret algorithms, moving from description to prediction.

- *Specialization in “Twin Transition” (Green & Digital)*: Curricula should be updated with the EU agenda. Focusing on FinTech, Blockchain, and the circular economy is the only way for Albanian graduates to have value in the European single market.

### **B. National Strategy for Financial Education and Inclusion**

Financial culture should be considered a national asset and social protection.

- *Institutional Triangulation*: A framework agreement is proposed between the Bank of Albania, the Ministry of Education and

the Ministry of Finance to harmonize educational messages and resources.

- *Personal finance should be a core subject in schools.* In parallel, specific programs are needed for rural areas and the elderly, who are most at risk from the rapid digitalization of banking services.

### **C. Building bridges between scientific research and public administration**

A symbiosis should be created where academia thinks and the state implements.

- *Think-Tank Ecosystem:* Universities should function as strategic consultants to the government. Any important fiscal or social reform should be preceded by a cost-benefit analysis carried out by university research centers.

- *Targeted Funding and "Applied PhDs":* Scientific grants should not be awarded on a voluntary basis, but as a request for solutions.

- *Doctorates should be funded with priority* if they address specific challenges of the Albanian economy, making the degree conditional on the real impact that the work has on the public or private sector.

### **D. Revitalizing scientific communication and the book market**

Knowledge should be "open" and attractive to the public.

- *Supportive policy for publications:* The state should subsidize the "infrastructure of thought", the translation of quality contemporary works and the publication of quality Albanian monographs, making them accessible to every student.

- *Expertise filter in the Media:* A "democratization of expertise" is needed. The media should build their panel of experts based on criteria of scientific merit and not political proximity, serving as a barrier to populism and disinformation.

## **Final Conclusion: Towards a New Architecture of Economic Thought**

The modernization of economic sciences in Albania should not be seen as an isolated reform within the walls of the academy, but as an existential prerequisite for the success of the European integration process and real convergence with EU standards.

In an era where intellectual capital and the speed of information processing determine the wealth of nations, Albania can no longer afford the luxury of "analog" scientific research and intuitive decision-making.

This study proves that the sustainability of our economic growth depends on a trilateral balance, which currently shows structural fractures:

- *Academia as an engine of knowledge:* Without a solid academy, which abandons descriptive manuals to focus on applied research, econometric modeling and AI, the country will remain a consumer of foreign ideas and unable to generate solutions to its own specific problems such as demographic decline, informality or digital transition.

- *Society as a rational decision-maker:* A financially educated population is the best defense against economic populism and systemic crises. Financial literacy is not simply knowledge about money, but a tool of civic empowerment that transforms the passive consumer into a rational market actor.

- *Science-based governance:* The modernization of the state requires that public policies are not the product of political rhetoric, but of rigorous cost-benefit analyses and scientific simulations. Institutions must see the scientific researcher as the main partner in the design of national strategies.

- *If these pillars are not synchronized,* Albania's economic growth will remain a fragile and uneven process, exposed to cycles of global uncertainty and chronic local inefficiency.

• *The path to Brussels inevitably passes through the path of knowledge: only by building an ecosystem where science leads, citizens understand and governance implements, can we ensure that the Albania of the coming decades is a competitive, resilient and fully integrated economy into the European family.*

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# HISTORY



EDMOND MALAJ

## RECONSTRUCTING BALEZO: THE HISTORY OF A FORGOTTEN MEDIEVAL TOWN

### **Abstract**

This article reconstructs the historical profile of the medieval town of Balezo, a largely neglected urban center located near Shkodra in northern Albania. Based on a critical reading of fragmentary documentary evidence – primarily Ragusan archival records, Venetian cadaster, papal correspondence, and historiographical references – the study examines both the secular and ecclesiastical dimensions of the town between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first part analyzes Balezo's urban structure, economic activity, and regional integration. Despite its modest size, the town functioned as a local administrative and economic node within the Rrjolli Valley, with dependent villages, artisanal production (shoemaking and carpentry), and active participation in Adriatic trade networks, particularly with Ragusa. Evidence of craftsmen, contracts, and tax obligations illustrates a developed, though small-scale, urban economy embedded in both rural hinterlands and broader exchange systems. The second part focuses on the diocese of Balezo, highlighting its institutional organization, episcopal succession, and clerical networks. The existence of a bishopric subordinated to the Archbishopric of Antivari, a cathedral chapter, and multiple churches indicates that Balezo also functioned as a local ecclesiastical center. However, the diocese was structurally fragile due to limited revenues, the strong presence of an Orthodox population in the surrounding area, and ongoing political and religious pressures. The study further traces the gradual decline of

Balezo from the mid-fourteenth century onward, culminating in its transformation into a small rural settlement by the early fifteenth century. Although briefly reactivated in a strategic military context – particularly during the conflicts involving Skanderbeg and the Venetians – the town failed to recover its earlier urban functions. By situating Balezo within the wider Adriatic–Balkan context, the paper demonstrates the analytical value of microhistorical approaches to small medieval towns and underscores the importance of integrating sparse and indirect sources. It also points to the need for further archaeological and documentary research to clarify the role of such centers in the historical landscape of northern Albania.

**Key words:** Balezo, medieval Albania, Shkodra region, urban history, ecclesiastical history, bishopric of Balezo, Adriatic networks, medieval economy, Ottoman–Venetian frontier, Skanderbeg, microhistory.



Fig. 1: The summit of Balezo, where the town once stood. Photo: Edmond Malaj 2012.

## Introduction

One of the old medieval towns located near Shkodra is the small town of Balezo, which appears in documents under several names as well, including *Balecium*, *Baleç*, *Balezo* or *Baleço*, *Ballegio*, *Ballesio*, and *Baleçio*<sup>1</sup>, and which seems to have experienced its period of greatest flourishing in the fourteenth century<sup>2</sup>. We find some information on this town in the works of Ippen, Farlati, Jireček, Šufflay, Schmitt, and others. The earliest medieval source in which the name of the town appears is the work of the Priest of Dioclea, around 1200, although the form of the name there is corrupted, being recorded as “iupa Barizi,” that is, “the *zhupa* of Balezo.”<sup>3</sup> He lists Balezo among the ten *zhupas* belonging to the region of Zeta, and besides Balezo (Barizi), within this group we also find the *zhupas* of Koplik (*Kupêlnik*) and Oblika (*Obliquus*)<sup>4</sup>, in which the town’s name also appears. What is written in the works of these authors is very limited, and nearly all of them repeat the same information, apart from some minor detail.

Through this article, based both on the above-mentioned authors and on documentary sources, an attempt is made to go beyond what has been written so far about this town and to shed at least some light on the very obscure and enigmatic history of this medieval settlement, for which, to this day, we find almost no information in Albanian historiography as a whole. The main problem for research on Balezo is

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<sup>1</sup> *Dokumente për Historinë e Shqipërisë të shek. XV. I (1400-1405)*. Përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi dhe Luan Malltezi. Redaktor përgjegjës Aleks Buda. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave (Instituti i Historisë) 1987, nr. 18, 28, 35, 37, 108, 204, 223, 302, 306, 310, 364, 415, 436, 480, 459, 570.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien (1392-1479)*. München: Oldenburg 2001, 96.

<sup>3</sup> Milan von Šufflay, *Städte und Burgen Albaniens hauptsächlich während des Mittelalters*. Wien/Leipzig: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky A.-G. 1924, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Constantin Jireček, *Handelstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien während des Mittelalters*. Prag: K. Böhmisches Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften 1879, 22.

the extreme scarcity of documents related to the history of this town. The article is divided into two parts dealing with two different aspects of it: the secular world (data on the town, its population, and its economy), which constitutes the first part, and the religious world, which forms the second part of the article, where the history of the diocese, the bishopric, and the clergy of medieval Balezo is examined

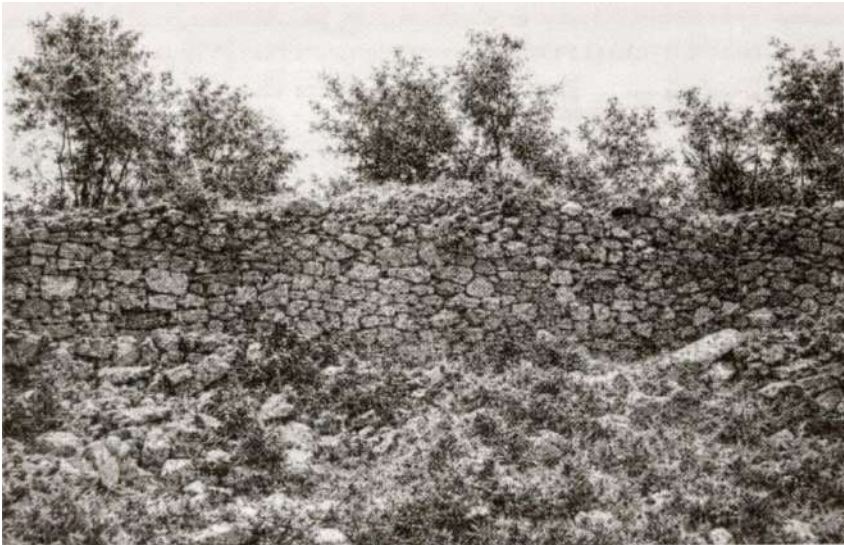


Fig. 2: Ruins of walls at Balezo. Photo: Th. Ippen, "Denkmäler",<sup>8</sup>.

## I. Historical data on the Town

The name of Balezo appears to be of Illyrian origin and recalls the word *ballë*<sup>5</sup> ("forehead" or "front"). Balezo is mentioned as early as the time of the "Migration of Peoples," more precisely during the passage of the Avars and Slavs through our territory, mainly in the sixth century, when they destroyed the town.<sup>6</sup> During these attacks on the

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<sup>5</sup> M. Šufflay, *Städte*, 25.

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Ippen, "Denkmäler verschiedener Altersstufen in Albanien.", in: *Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen aus Bosnien und Herzegovina*. Zehnter Band. Wien: Adolf Holzhausen 1907, 6.

Province of Prevalis, the town of Dioclea was also destroyed, and its inhabitants subsequently moved to Antibari, whereas other towns belonging to this province, such as Scodra (Shkodra), Budua (Budva), Dulcigno (Ulcinj), and Lissus (Lezha), were able to withstand these assaults.<sup>7</sup> After this destruction, however, Balezo was rebuilt, since after the period of the Avar incursions the bishops of the diocese of Balezo (*Palachiensis* or *Balleacensis*)<sup>8</sup> are mentioned. Even so, its history during the Early Middle Ages remains obscure, since we find no further information about it.

This site, of which today not even the ruins survive, lies a few kilometers from Shkodra, near the village of Kurte (Kurtaj), about one hour away from the city, bearing in mind that even today a considerable part of the route, because of its difficulty, must be covered on foot. Barleti gives its distance from other towns as 12,000 paces from Shkodra, 5,000 paces from Drivasto, and 15,000 paces from the city of Dagno.<sup>9</sup>

The town lay on a hill, below which flow the Rrjolli River and the Stream of Kurte (or *Gurra e Kurtit*<sup>10</sup>). The hill is located precisely at the point where the Rrjolli River, descending from the Alps of Paruni, meets this stream, which rises somewhere in the mountains of Bishkashi.<sup>11</sup> According to Šufflay, the perimeter of the castle walls was about 1,000 paces, corresponding to roughly half the perimeter of the fortress of Shkodra; it may therefore be regarded as a small town.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Historia e Popullit Shqiptar. Vëllimi i parë. Tiranë: Toena 2002, 205-206.

<sup>8</sup> Th. Ippen, "Denkmäler...", 6.

<sup>9</sup> Marin Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut*. Përkthyer nga Stefan J. Prifti. Tiranë: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës 1964, 152.

<sup>10</sup> Th. Ippen, "Denkmäler...", 6.

<sup>11</sup> Theodor A. Ippen, *Die Gebirge des Nordwestlichen Albaniens*. Abhandlungen der K. K. Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien. VII. Band, 1908, N° 1. Wien: Lechner/Müller 1908, 18.

<sup>12</sup> M. Šufflay, *Städte*, 25.

Thus, even in the Middle Ages, the area did not lack water, since the Rrjolti has sufficient flow even in summer. Etymologically, *Rrjolti* derives from the Latin word *rivulus*, meaning “stream,” whereas *Gurra e Kurtit* appears to have taken its name from the village of Kurte, near which this watercourse runs.<sup>13</sup> During my visit to this hill, I was unable to identify any ruins apart from a few traces of old walls, now level with the ground surface. The top of the hill is covered with dense, impenetrable shrubs and thorn-bushes, and it is precisely within this thicket that some remains of medieval Balezo may still lie hidden.

In earlier times, however, around a hundred years ago, these ruins were more clearly visible, and various authors reported on them. Jastrebov, for example, states in his description that the perimeter of the area covered by these ruins is about half that of the Castle of Shkodra, and that these remains, among which the vestiges of one large church and another smaller one can be distinguished, are covered by brushwood.<sup>14</sup> According to Ippen, the perimeter of the hilltop measures 1,000 paces; among the shrubs one can discern the ruins of this town’s walls and the remains of a church, though these ruins are in a more miserable condition than those of Saucium, Sarda, or Drivasto.<sup>15</sup>

Although small in size<sup>16</sup>, Balezo must have had a fairly developed urban life. In the records of the Ragusan archives, craftsmen from this town are mentioned, including woodworkers (*marangoni*) and shoemakers (*cerdoni*).<sup>17</sup> One of them was Dobroslav of Balezo (*Dubroslaus de Ballegio, cerdo castaldio fratilie sancti domani*), who was a leatherworker and agent of the “*Confraternity of Saint Domani*

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<sup>13</sup> Th. Ippen, *Die Gebirge*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Konstantin Jireček, “Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter”, in: *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*. Unter Mitwirkung von Professor Dr. Konstantin Jireček [u. a.]. Zusammengestellt von Dr. Ludwig von Thallóczy. I. Band. Mit einer Landkarte. München/Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot 1916, 100.

<sup>15</sup> Th. Ippen, “Denkmäler...”, 9.

<sup>16</sup> M. Šufflay, *Städte*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> K. Jireček, “Skutari ...”, 101.

[Damian – E.M.]” He is documented in Ragusa on 20 March 1402 in connection with a testamentary distribution, from which he had received two perpers on behalf of the aforementioned confraternity.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 3: Walls of old buildings beneath the hill of Balezo. Photo: E. Malaj 2012.

Alongside don Pellegrino, Dobroslav is the best-documented person from Balezo, since his name appears in several documents. He was the brother of don Benchu<sup>19</sup>, a Dominican cleric. Dobroslav of Balezo also appears in a document concerning the settlement of an obligation for certain goods received from two noblemen of Shkodra, Stefan and Peter de Roza.<sup>20</sup> Since this concerns professional and commercial relations between inhabitants of Balezo and Shkodra, two towns situated only a few kilometers from one another, it seems appropriate to reproduce the document in full:

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<sup>18</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 204.

<sup>19</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 306.

<sup>20</sup> *Acta et Diplomata res Albaniae Mediae Aetatis illustrantia*. Collegerunt et digesserunt Dr. Ludovigus de Thallóczy, Dr. Constantinus Jireček ed Dr. Emilianus de Sufflay. Volumen II (Annos 1344-1406 continens Vindobonae MXMXVIII. Typis Adophi Holzhausen, nr. 716.

“[Day of 22 February 1403]. Stefan de Roza, noble citizen of Shkodra, procurator and acting in the name of the procuratorship of his brother, lord Jacob de Roza, as this procuration appears from the letters patent of the judges and councillors of the city of Shkodra, issued under the impression of their visible seal in red wax, according to the custom of the city, on 23 January 1403, and presented and read by me, the undersigned notary Jacob. [Stefan], in the name of the said procuratorship, declared that, in that same capacity, payment had been made to him and that he was fully satisfied in all things and for everything that Dobroslav of Balezo, shoemaker in Ragusa, owed to lord Stefan and to that procurator Jacob for certain goods received from them in Shkodra; and, both in his own name and in that of [his brother], he granted to the said Dobroslav full acquittance and legal assurance that everything had been concluded, paid, and discharged, on condition that henceforth they would demand nothing further from the said Dobroslav or from his heirs.”<sup>21</sup>

Dobroslav appears to have been a well-known master in the craft of shoemaking, as documents also mention apprentices who went to work with him and learn the trade. One such case is that of Radoslav, son of the late Dobrosh Obradović from Montenegro (*Radoslaus condam Dobrosii Hobradouich de Cernagora*), who, at the age of fourteen, entered into an agreement as an apprentice with the master from Balezo, in order to learn the craft of shoemaking and to serve him faithfully and honestly, working for the following six years.<sup>22</sup>

For his part, the master promised the fourteen-year-old that he would cover the costs of food and clothing appropriately, both when the boy was in good health and in times of illness, and that he would teach him the craft of shoemaking within the agreed period. At the end of this term, the master would equip his apprentice with the tools necessary for practicing the profession.<sup>23</sup> This document, dated 30 December 1404<sup>24</sup>,

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<sup>21</sup>*Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 302.

<sup>22</sup>*Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 480.

<sup>23</sup>*Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 446, ref. 3, p. 510.

<sup>24</sup>*Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 480.

constitutes a contract between a master and his apprentice and is of considerable importance, as it provides insight into the world of medieval guilds and corporations, particularly regarding the relationships between masters and apprentices and their mutual obligations.

As for carpenters, we have documented evidence of Paul of Balezo (*Paulus de Ballegio marangono*), who appears several times in the records. In 1388 he is mentioned together with his assistant Jurglio Brajković of Koruzi in Albania (*Jurglio Braychovich de Choruçi Albanie*)<sup>25</sup>; he also appears in a document from 1398<sup>26</sup> and is finally mentioned in a Ragusan testament dated 10 June 1402.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the economy, the Rrjolli River, which flows below the town, must have been of particular importance. This river has long been rich in fish, especially trout, and the valley it forms (the Rrjolli Valley), being sheltered by surrounding mountains, enjoys a mild climate conducive to agriculture, fruit cultivation, viticulture, and livestock breeding.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, given its proximity to the region of Koplik—known in the Middle Ages as a land of vineyards—and to the tribe of Shkreli, recognized as a semi-nomadic pastoral community that summered its livestock in the highlands and wintered them in the plains near Shkodra and along the coast, especially in Velipoja, using the bed of the *Prroni i Thatë* (Dry Stream) as a route, Balezo must certainly have functioned as a collection point for wine, wool, hides, and other pastoral products.

The Rrjolli River had another important function for Balezo and the surrounding regions. It hosted numerous mills, one of which belonged to the bishop of this town, while another, according to a Venetian document dated 27 March 1417, belonged to the mason John

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<sup>25</sup> AAlb II, nr. 434.

<sup>26</sup> (*Paulus Marangonus de Balezio Ragusii memoratus 1398, 1. Aprilis [Div. Canc. 1396-1399]*). AAlb II, nr. 434.

<sup>27</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 223.

<sup>28</sup> O. Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien...*, 97.

(Johannes *murarius*) from Shkodra; his mill was located below that of the bishop.<sup>29</sup> The existence of many mills attests to the considerable volume of grain in this area during the Middle Ages.

As for cultural and religious development, in addition to the town's churches, an important role must also have been played by the Monastery of Saint John in the Field of Shtoj, which at one time belonged to the Bishopric of Balezo.

The town began to decline and loses its importance around the middle of the fourteenth century, or even earlier<sup>30</sup>. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the territory of this town had been transformed into a *pronia*, and in 1404 one of the holders of Balezo is mentioned as *Raducius Homoy*.<sup>31</sup> According to the cadastre of 1416–1417, the “city of Balezo” (*Cità di Balezo*) had at that time about 25 households<sup>32</sup> and had thus effectively been reduced to a village. From this cadastre we learn the names of several inhabitants of this settlement, including its heads and the owners of lands and surrounding villages. The head of this “town” at the time when the cadastre was compiled appears to have been Andrea Humoj, while the owner is mentioned as Kojachini, son of the late *Raducius*. The inhabitants recorded in the cadastre are listed below, in their original forms: *Domenego Molasirj, comandadore* (commander), who was exempt from all payments, *Martin Cauhaliero, Zuane Yuan, Martin Felipo, Zuan Tusi, Stefano Molasire, Prozano*

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<sup>29</sup>*Acta Albaniae Veneta Saeculorum XIV et XV. Josephi Valentini S. J. Labore reperta et Transcripta Ac Typis Mandata. Tomi (Vol.) 1-25. Palermo/ Napoli/ Roma/ Venezia/ München: Archivio di Stato di Venezia 1967-1972 (më tej: AAV, vol., dok.): “[...]secundum antiquam consuetudinem patriae Insuper concedimus Jpsi Johannj et eius heredibus quod ipse Johannes et eius heredes fabricare et construere possit unum molendium in flumaria riole subtus molendinum domini epsicopi de Balezo”.* AAV VIII, nr. 2156.

<sup>30</sup> Th. Ippen, “Denkmäler...”, 6.

<sup>31</sup> AAlb II, nr. 752.

<sup>32</sup> Regjistri i Kadastrës dhe i Koncesioneve për rrethin e Shkodrës 1416-1417. Përgatitur për botim nga Injac Zamputi. Tiranë: Instituti i Historisë i Akademisë së Shkencave 1977, 69-70; 293-294 (57a).

*paruci, Benco Albuci, don Petro Yuan, Petro Precalj, Dimitrij Cacharichi, don Pedro Andrea, don Lazaro Salamon, Pedro Madossi, Zorzi Madossi, Domenego felipo, don Andria Gregolo, don Zane Sergano, Martin Rayco, Zane zocho, Mastro Polusso muraro, Andrea Leporonsi, don Petro Catozi, don Domenego Ungresse, don Prozano Proganj.*<sup>33</sup>

These inhabitants were required to pay one ducat each, and most of them also one *mod* (a measure of grain), as well as the *orok* tax of four *gros*h per household, paid twice a year, at Christmas and Easter. In addition, they were obliged to perform military service, either as infantry or cavalry, whenever ordered by the rectors of Shkodra.<sup>34</sup> The family names here are also found in many other localities of the Shkodra region, as well as in Drivasto, and the majority of these surnames are Albanian. Alongside these inhabitants of Balezo, we also encounter individuals from this town in other areas of Shkodra, such as, for example, *don Piero da Balezo*, who had leased a plot of land in the *Casene* area of Shkodra.<sup>35</sup> However, shortly thereafter, the town appears to have fallen into a state of complete desolation.<sup>36</sup>

The town also had a number of dependent villages, which in the cadastre are listed under the designation “under Balezo,” and which in the middle Ages must have had Balezo as their administrative and ecclesiastical center.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the town must once have been a central locality with numerous surrounding estates and villages, serving as the principal center in the Rrjollj Valley. These villages were: *Zacholi* under Balezo (*Zacholj soto Balezo*) with three households<sup>38</sup>; *Braza* under Balezo (*Braza soto Balezo*)<sup>39</sup> with five households; *Dari* under Balezo

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<sup>33</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/48; Rregjistri i Kadastrës, 69-70; 293-294 (57a).

<sup>34</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/48; Rregjistri i Kadastrës, 70. (57a)

<sup>35</sup> Rregjistri i Kadastrës, 26.(6 ab)

<sup>36</sup> K.Jireček, “Skutari ...”, 101.

<sup>37</sup> O. Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien...*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/49.

<sup>39</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/51.

(*darj soto Balezo*) with eleven households<sup>40</sup>; *Leporonsi* under Balezo (*Leporonsi soto Balezo*) with seven households<sup>41</sup>; Saint Alexander under Balezo (*sancto Alexandro soto Balezo*), which at that time was abandoned and uninhabited<sup>42</sup>; Zamaraki under Balezo (*zamarachi soto Balezo*) with three households<sup>43</sup>; and the abandoned village of *Brochulcho* (*villa clamada Brochulcho e desabitada*)<sup>44</sup>.



Fig. 4: Fragments of the walls of Balezo today. Photo: E. Malaj 2012.

As noted above, these villages, like the town itself, were sparsely populated at the time (ranging from three to ten households), and among them there were even some that were completely deserted, such as Brokulko and Saint Alexander under Balezo, the latter of which must have been located directly beneath the hill of the town.<sup>45</sup>

In 1474, Ivan Crnojević, the prince of Montenegro, informed the Venetians that the Turks intended to fortify this town once again<sup>46</sup>, but

<sup>40</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/52.

<sup>41</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/53.

<sup>42</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/54.

<sup>43</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/57.

<sup>44</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107/50.

<sup>45</sup> Rregjistri i Kadastrës, 70-71.(57b, 58a,58b, 59a).

<sup>46</sup> K.Jireček, “Skutari ...”, 101.

this aim remained unrealized.<sup>47</sup> Barleti, who was from Shkodra and who clearly seems to have known well the region surrounding his native city, mentions this site as a ruin located 12 Roman miles from Shkodra and 5 Roman miles from Drivasto.<sup>48</sup>

In Balezo stood the cathedral of Saint Mary, and nearby was the monastery of Saint John, with a very tall bell tower built of carved stone. This ancient monastery, which was originally Benedictine, later became attached to the bishopric of Drivasto, from which, in later times, the abbot of this monastery was also to be appointed (1442) (*Semper in futurum abbas sit Drivastinus*)<sup>49</sup>. In addition to these, another church dedicated to Saint Alexander is also documented, described as being below Balezo (*Sancto Alexandro sotto Balezo*)<sup>50</sup>

Skanderbeg himself was present in this town with his warriors, and he appears to have carried out some reconstruction of the fortress around the years 1447–1448, when he had disagreements with the Venetians over possession of the town of Dagno<sup>51</sup>. After the death of Leka Zaharia, Skanderbeg had entrusted the administration of Dagno to Pal Dukagjini<sup>52</sup>, who, like Leka Zaharia himself, was a member of the League of Alessio (Lezhë) founded by Skanderbeg on 2 March

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<sup>47</sup> M. Šufflay, *Städte*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> K. Jireček, “Skutari ...”, 101.

<sup>49</sup> *Statuta et Ordinationes Capituli Ecclesiae Cathedralis Drivastensis*. Edit. Dr. Musa Ahmeti dhe Dr. Etleva Lala. Tiranë: OMBRA GVG 2009, 55-56.

<sup>50</sup> *Acta et Diplomata res Albaniae Mediae Aetatis illustrantia*. Collegerunt et digesserunt Dr. Ludovigus de Thallóczy, Dr. Constantinus Jireček ed Dr. Emilianus de Sufflay. Volumen I (Annos 344-1343 tabelamque geographicam continens) Vindobonae MXMXVIII. Typis Adophi Holzhausen, nr. 653, shën.1. See also: Konstandin Jireček, “Das christliche Element in der topographischen Nomenclatur der Balkanländer”, in: *Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historische Classe*, nr. CXXXVI (1897), 20.

<sup>51</sup> Th. Ippen, “Denkmäler...”, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Branislav Millutinoviç, “Drishti nën sundimin e Venedikut”, in: *Gjurmime Albanologjike, Seria e Shkencave Historike*, 15-1985, Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, Prishtinë: 1986, 59.

1444.<sup>53</sup> Among those who also took part in this league, were Pjetër Spani with his four sons—Alex, Bozhdari, Vruo, and Mirko—as well as Lekë Dushmani<sup>54</sup>, who held lands around Drivasto, Balezo, and in Zadrima<sup>55</sup>. The Venetians were opposed to the League of Alessio, which threatened their possessions in the north, and during this period the disagreements between Skanderbeg and Venice deepened to such an extent that in December 1447 a conflict broke out between them.<sup>56</sup>

The noblemen Petrus Spani from Drivasto and his sons, together with Lekë Dushmani, who were unwilling to accept and take part in Skanderbeg's hostile actions against Venice, withdrew from the League<sup>57</sup>. This move may have been an additional reason why, after defeating the forces of the governor of Shkodra, Daniele Lurichi, on 23 July 1448<sup>58</sup>, Skanderbeg also threatened the capture of Drivasto<sup>59</sup>. Thus, a considerable army of Skanderbeg had arrived in the Shkodra region, and during this time he also rebuilt the fortress of Balezo in order to use it as a supporting base for these attacks.<sup>60</sup>

Today, we can not determine at which exact location on the hill of Balezo Skanderbeg carried out his fortifications. Likewise, Ippen—who, more than a century ago, observed more extensive remains than are visible today—was also unable to identify the precise location of Skanderbeg's fortress at Balezo.<sup>61</sup> Later, during the first siege of Shkodra, the Ottomans also made use of this small fortified site against

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<sup>53</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut ...*, 93; see also: Kristo Frashëri, *Skënderbeu. Jeta dhe Vepra (1405-1468)*, Tiranë: Toena<sup>2002</sup>, 136.

<sup>54</sup> M. Barleti, *Historia e Skënderbeut ...*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Edmond Malaj, *Historia dhe fizionomia e një qyteti mesjetar shqiptar – Drishti*. Tiranë: QSA 2016, 96.

<sup>56</sup> B. Millutinoviç, “Drishti nën sundimin ...”, 59.

<sup>57</sup> E. Malaj, *Historia ...*, 96; V. Kule, *Gjergj Kastrioti ...*, 100.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>59</sup> B. Millutinoviç, “Drishti nën sundimin ...”, 59.

<sup>60</sup> E. Malaj, *Historia ...*, 96.

<sup>61</sup> Th. Ippen, “Denkmäler...”, 6.

the city.<sup>62</sup> As for any reconstruction of the fortress of Balezo by the Ottomans during this period, we currently have no evidence.

## II. Information on the Medieval Diocese of Balezo

This town had its own bishopric (*Ecclesia Balleacensis* or *Palachiensis*), and its bishop (*Episcopus Balleacensis*) was under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Antipari<sup>63</sup>. As early as 1356, however, the bishop of this town complained that he had no income, since the territory of his diocese was largely inhabited by schismatics (i.e., Orthodox Christians).<sup>64</sup>

The concentration of an Orthodox population in this area may be explained, among other factors, by the proximity of the village of Cupelnich, known today as Koplik and recorded in the Venetian cadastre of 1416 as *Kopeniko*. According to this cadastre, the village was inhabited predominantly by a Slavic population and constituted a center with a notable presence of clergy of the Slavic Church, such as Jura the Protopope, priest Andrea, priest Nikašin, priest Miliza, priest Stanko, priest Bogdan, priest Radoslav Tribov, priest Radovan, and others.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, as noted above, the same cadastre also mentions Catholic priests, which indicates a structured coexistence of Catholic clergy alongside the Orthodox. Among them were *don Petro Catozi*, *don Domenego Ungresse*, *don Prozano Proganj*, *don Pedro Andrea*,

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<sup>62</sup> ASV Senato Secreta Reg. 26. 189r “*quendam alium locum inter Ciuitates nostras Scutari et driuastum nomine Bales*” dokumenti i cituar nga O. Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien...*, 97.

<sup>63</sup> *Illyrici Sacri. Tomus Septimus, Ecclesia Diocletiana, Antibarensis, Dyrrhachiensis et Sirmiensis, cum eorum suffraganeis*. Auctore Daniele Farlato, Presbytero Societatis Jesu, et Jacobo Coletto olim ejusdem Societatis alumno. Venetiis, MDCCCXVII. Aput Sebastianum Coleti. Superiorem permissu ac privilegio. (Botim i dytë. Prishtinë: Arbi 2004.), 206. K. Jireček, “Skutari ...”, 100.

<sup>64</sup> K. Jireček, “Skutari ...”, 100.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

donLazaro Salamon, don Andria Gregolo, don Zane Sergano, and don Petro Yuan.<sup>66</sup>

The bishop of Balezo is mentioned for the first time in a letter of Pope Alexander II from the year 1062, addressed to Peter, Archbishop of Antipari, of whom the diocese of Balezo was a suffragan.<sup>67</sup> However, bishops of Balezo begin to be attested by name only from the fourteenth century onward:

**I.** Gulielmus (*Gullielmus Episcopus Balleacensis*) represents the first bishop of Balezo documented by name. He is mentioned in a letter of Pope Clement VI, dated March 1347, addressed to the Franciscan priest Gervicus, whom the Pope appoints bishop of Balezo, noting that Gulielmus had died.<sup>68</sup> His affiliation to a religious order is not directly documented, though, given that most bishops of Balezo in this period were Franciscans, it is reasonable to assume that he too belonged to the Franciscan Order.

**II.** In 1347, Gervicus (*Gervicus Episcopus Balleacensis*), a member of the Franciscan Order, was appointed bishop of Balezo. He held this office until his death in 1351.<sup>69</sup>

**III.** In 1351, after the death of Gervicus, *Andreas Citer*—also a Franciscan—became bishop of Drivasto.<sup>70</sup>

**IV.** An anonymous bishop follows Andreas; his name is not preserved in the sources. He is attested in a document of 1363, specifically in the testament of a cleric named don Pellegrinus, likely of Balezo origin. In this testament, don Pellegrinus bequeaths twelve

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<sup>66</sup> AAV VIII, nr. 2107; Rregjistri i Kadastrës, 69-70; 293-294 (57a); O. Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien...*, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Th. Ippen, “Denkmäler...”, 7.

<sup>68</sup> D. Farlati, *Illyricum Sacrum VII*, 207.

<sup>69</sup> AAlb II, nr. 85.

<sup>70</sup>“(1351), 1 iunii. Apud Villam novam. Clemens VI. Papa Andream Citer electum Balazensem ordinis Minoris eidem ecclesie “per obitum Gervoco, qui nuper extra Romanam curiam diem clausit extremum”, vacant episcopum praefecit.” AAlb II, nr. 85.

*braccia* of fine cloth to the Church of Saint Mary in Balezo and a copper vessel to the bishop of Balezo.<sup>71</sup>

**V.** John (*Johannes, Episcopus Baleazencis*) is mentioned as bishop of Balezo in a document dated 4 June 1383 concerning a surety.<sup>72</sup>

**VI.** In 1391, the bishop of Balezo is mentioned indirectly in a decree of Pope Boniface IX directed against the mendicant orders (*fratres ordinis mendicantium*), though without naming him.<sup>73</sup> It is possible—though not certain—that this refers to the same John mentioned above.<sup>74</sup> The bishop is again mentioned anonymously in 1404 in a document concerning properties in Balezo owned by the noble Radicus Humoi.<sup>75</sup>

**VII.** In 1420, *Alfonso da Cáceres* (or Cavres), a Franciscan Minor (*O.F.M.*), became bishop of Balezo, attested from 7 April 1420.<sup>76</sup> The duration of his tenure remains unknown.

**VIII.** In 1422, *Domenico Godani* is recorded as bishop of Balezo (from 6 April 1422; end date unknown).

**IX.** In 1424, *Mikel Paoli* (*Paulluz or de Paolis*), from Villa in the diocese of Treviso and a Franciscan, served as bishop of Balezo from 1 September 1424 to 11 October 1428. He later became bishop of Drivasto (1428–1445?)<sup>77</sup>, and died in 1445.

**X.** In 1428, *Bernardi de Ivanis* (or de Vivanis; Bernardo da Viviers, *O.F.M.*), from Drivasto, served as bishop of Balezo from 11 March 1428 until approximately 1459, when he died.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> AAlb II, nr. 188.

<sup>72</sup> AAlb II, nr. 383.

<sup>73</sup> AAlb II, nr. 470.

<sup>74</sup> AAlb II, nr. 752.

<sup>75</sup> AAlb II, nr. 752.

<sup>76</sup> D. Farlati, *Illyricum Sacrum VII*, 207.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

**XI.** In 1459, *Leonardo da Napoli*, of Neapolitan origin and a member of the Dominican Order (*O.P.*), is recorded as bishop of Balezo from 31 August 1459 onward (end date unknown).<sup>79</sup>

**XII.** From 1478 onward, the bishopric of Balezo was held by titular bishops, beginning with the Franciscan cleric *Daniel Zahender*.<sup>80</sup>

**XIII.** Leonardo (?–30 July 1488) served as titular bishop of Balezo until 30 July 1488, after which he became bishop of Lesina.

Taking into account certain inaccuracies, according to F. Cordignano a total of thirteen bishops of Balezo can be identified, all belonging to the medieval period.<sup>81</sup> In the list above, we were able to present only eleven of them by name, along with two additional anonymous bishops. Today, the Bishopric of Balezo is titular and has counted seven titular bishops from the first half of the twentieth century to the present day.<sup>82</sup>

Alongside the bishops, various documents also mention other clerics originating from this town. Among them we may first mention

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>80</sup> Th. Ippen, “Denkmäler...”, 9. See also: D. Farlati, *Illyricum Sacrum VII*, 207.

<sup>81</sup> Fulvio Kordinjano, *Shqipëria. Përmes veprës dhe shkrimeve të misionarit të madh italian At Domeniko Pazi (1847-1914)* Vëllimi II: Betejat e trekëndëshit gjigant katolik të veriut Shkodra-Pulati-Shkupi. Përktheu nga origjinali: Ilirjana Angoni. Tiranë: Almera 2008, 33.

<sup>82</sup> Titular bishop (24 January 2014–present): Herwig Gössl (49), at the same time Auxiliary Bishop of Bamberg (Germany); Franz Lackner, O.F.M. (60), later archbishop, titular bishop of Balezo during the period 23 October 2002–18 November 2013; Peter Kang U-il (70), titular bishop of Balezo during the period 21 December 1985–20 July 2002; Claude Feidt (80), titular bishop of Balezo during the period 5 July 1980–16 February 1985, later archbishop; Amaury Castanho, titular bishop of Balezo during the period 19 July 1976–30 November 1979; Agostino Baroni, M.C.C.J., later archbishop, titular bishop of Balezo during the period 29 June 1953–12 December 1974; Johannes Theodor Suhr, O.S.B., titular bishop of Balezo during the period 13 December 1938–29 April 1953. Titular Episcopal See of Balezoium Albania. URL: <http://www.gcatholic.org/dioceses/former/t0266.htm> (8. 11. 2016) tek kjo faqe see also në lidhje meipeshkvinjte e përmendur më sipër *Alfonso da Cáceres* ose *Cavres*, *Domenico Godani*, *Mikel Paoli* dhe *Leonardo*.

don Andrea and the deacon Stefan, both from Balezo, who were active in the first half of the fourteenth century and are documented in Ragusa in March 1349.<sup>83</sup> In 1363, don Zorzi (don Çorço) is mentioned as living in Balezo, somewhere near the gate of the Church of Saint Nicholas of Balezo<sup>84</sup>; to him, don Pellegrini bequeathed several objects in his testament. Don Pellegrini of Balezo also appears in a document from 1349. He was one of those priests who undertook pilgrimages on behalf of the souls of deceased believers, being paid for this service by the relatives of the deceased.

On 23 May 1349, after the great plague that had struck the territories of the Republic of Ragusa and other parts of the Balkans, dom Pellegrini of Balezo declared that he had received ten hyperpera from Pashka de Sorgo (*Pascha de Sorgo*), in order to travel to Saint Francis of Assisi for the soul of Stepe, Pashka's father.<sup>85</sup>

Dom Pellegrini is also mentioned in a document dated 9 February 1350, this time under the name Dom Pelegrini Albanian (*Dompnus Pelegrinus Albanensis*), in connection with another sacred pilgrimage to Rome, together with another Albanian cleric, dom Pal of the Monastery of Saint Nicholas of Buna (*Dompnus Paulus Sancti Nicolay de Oldrino*), on behalf of the nobleman Laure Nicolo de Lucchari and of Mark Jun Mençio and Marin Nikole de Mençio.<sup>86</sup> From this document we learn that dom Pellegrini was the nephew of another important cleric, dom Nicola, chaplain of the important Church of Saint Blaise in Ragusa (*dompnus Pelegrinus nepos domini Nicole capelani sancti Blaxii*).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> AAlb II, nr. 50.

<sup>84</sup> AAlb II, nr. 188.

<sup>85</sup> "(23. Maii 1349). *Ex distribution testamentser Stepe de Sorco. Dompnus Pelegrinus de Balleça fuit confessus habuisse a Pascha de Sorgo yperperos X propter ire ad Sanctum Franciscum de Asisio pro anima Stepe patris sui*". AAlb II, nr. 47.

<sup>86</sup> AAlb II, nr. 66.

<sup>87</sup> AAlb II, nr. 66.

Dom Pellegrinus of Balezo appears to have died in 1363, since on 30 May of that year his testament was opened in order to distribute the belongings as he himself had prescribed in writing. Although he had lived for a long time away from his native place, the testament clearly reveals his strong attachment to Balezo, the town where he had been born and raised. The text reads as follows: “Ragusa, 30 May 1363. Testament of don Pellegrini: And the *tabarro* [cloak; uncertain reading – E.M.] is to be given to don Georgius [who lives] above the gate of Saint Nicholas of Balezo. To my niece Kuta are to be given two sacks (?) and three mantles, while the staff and the copper cup are to be given to the bishop of Balezo, and to Saint Mary of Balezo are to be given twelve *braccia* of cloth for covering. Let the other matters concerning the ‘bishopric of Saint Mary of Balezo’ also be remembered.”<sup>88</sup> This testament is of additional importance, as it provides information about the churches located in Balezo, which will be discussed below.

Among the clergy of Balezo we also find the priest Benedict of Balezo (*presbiter Benedictus de Ballegio*), who is mentioned as a witness in a testament drawn up in Ragusa between 18 and 21 March 1400 by Boglina, the wife of Bogdan Kovačić (*Boglina uxor Bogdanj Chouvačich*).<sup>89</sup> In Ragusan documents we also encounter other clerics from Balezo. One such figure was don Paul of Balezo (*dompnus Paulus de Ballegio*), who is mentioned as a legal witness in the testament of don Paul of Pult, drawn up in Ragusa on 3 May 1400.<sup>90</sup>

Another cleric was don Bencho of Balezo (*Dompnus Benchus de Ballegio*), who in Ragusa was engaged in collecting tithes and first

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<sup>88</sup> “1363, 30 maii. Ragusii. Testamentum don Pellegrini: «Et lo taboro sia dato a don Çorçode sopra de Santo Nichola di Baleç et a la mia neça Cutha sia dadi sachi II et mantili III, et lo baçile et lo bocale di rame sia dato alo ueschouo di Baleç et ala Santa Maria di Baleç sia dato braça XII di tela sutile per planeta». Memorantur etiam alia legata «alo uescouado di Santa Maria de Baleç»”. AAlb. II, nr. 188.

<sup>89</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 18.

<sup>90</sup> AAlb II, nr. 640.

fruits (*primiciae*) for the Church of Saint Mary.<sup>91</sup> He was a well-known figure in Ragusa: in 1372 he became sacristan of the Ragusan Cathedral; later he is documented as chaplain of the župa of Brenno, known as “don Bencho de Breno,” and subsequently, due to his advanced age, as don Bencho the Elder (*don Bencho Vechio*).<sup>92</sup>

The aforementioned don Bencho also left a testament in Ragusa. This testament appears to have been drawn up by two other clerics, presumably fellow members of the Dominican Order (the Order of Preachers), Don Bosiamiloste and don Jon Longo from Durrës. Among the beneficiaries of his bequests were, in addition to others, his own biological brothers—Dobroslav\*, the late lord Pal Markosi, and Mark—as well as fellow members of the order, such as don Petrus Vendermin from Drivasto and Fra Johannes, Prior of the Preachers (Dominicans)<sup>93</sup>. A few years later, on 19 May 1404, *don Bencho de Balleza* appears again in the testament of the Albanian cleric *don Marco Caputapis*, this time as one of the beneficiaries of the goods left behind.<sup>94</sup>

In Ragusan documents, in 1401, we find don Dominic from Balezo in the regions of Albania (*dompnus Dominichus de Balizio parcium Albanie*). Apart from some references to the settlement of debts, the document provides no further information about him, nor does it indicate to which order he belonged.<sup>95</sup> Don Domenic of Balezo

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<sup>91</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 35.

<sup>92</sup> AAlb II, nr. 635, shën. 3.

\* For Dobroslav, the shoemaker from Balezo, see page 2 of this article.

<sup>93</sup> “1400, 18 mai, Dubrovnik. «*Distributio testamenti dompni Benchi de Ballegio facta per dompnum Johannembosiamiloste don Jonlongo de durachio, dobroslaum, ser paulum fraters dicti condam dompni Benchi, Radinum medauich, et Stephanum de dulcineum*». Parmi les testataires qui conferment d’avoir reçu ce qui figurait sur le testament sont également: «*Dompnus Petrus vendermin de driuasto*», «*dompnus frater Johanes prior predicatorum*», «*Marcus frater suprascripti dompni Benchi*», «*Marchozius condam frater dicti dom benchi*»”. *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 37.

<sup>94</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 436.

<sup>95</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 108.

(*Dompnus Dominichus de Ballegio*) appears in other documents as well. From a document dated 1403, we learn that he undertook pilgrimages on behalf of various believers. One such pilgrimage was commissioned by a certain lady Nuce, for which he received 50 peppers and four candles specifically designated for this purpose in her testament. This Ragusan document is dated 19 March 1403.<sup>96</sup> The destination of the pilgrimage is not specified.

The practice of journeys and pilgrimages carried out by various clerics—especially lower clergy—on behalf of the souls of the faithful is a well-known phenomenon in the Middle Ages. In this regard, we have numerous records of Albanian clerics from Shkodra, Drivasto, Pult, and elsewhere, who performed such journeys, particularly in Ragusa and Venice, in exchange for a certain sum of money, which also covered their travel expenses. This phenomenon became more frequent especially during times of epidemics or other crises. For example, from the second half of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the fifteenth century, there are repeated cases of deaths caused by epidemics, particularly the plague (the Black Death), both in Ragusa<sup>97</sup> and in Shkodra<sup>98</sup> and its surrounding regions, including the area where Balezo was located.

The above-mentioned *presbiter Dominichus de Ballegio*, whom we learn was serving as a chaplain in Ragusa, also appears in another document dated 26 February 1404, in connection with the testament of another Albanian cleric, *dompnus Georgius Fisso de Pullat* (from Pulti).<sup>99</sup> Dominic of Balezo, together with another Albanian chaplain in Ragusa, *presbiter Dymitrius de Dagno, capellanus in Ragusio*, acted as witnesses to this testament, which had been drawn up on 3 November

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<sup>96</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 310.

<sup>97</sup> Klaus Bergdolt, *Der Schwarze Tod: Die Große Pest und das Ende des Mittelalters*. 3. Auflage. München: C. H. Beck 2011, 47.

<sup>98</sup> AAlb II, nr. 672; AAV III, nr. 893.

<sup>99</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 415.

1403.<sup>100</sup> Don Dominic also appears in the testament of Marin Gondola, dated 1 December 1405, as a beneficiary of the goods left behind.<sup>101</sup>

As for ecclesiastical buildings, Balezo must have had at least three churches.<sup>102</sup> The remains of one of them were recorded by Theodor Ippen in 1907. He notes that the ruins of a church were located at the top of the hill of Balezo and were surrounded by dense vegetation. From these remains, about 20 paces in length and 10 paces in width were still visible, together with part of the apse.<sup>103</sup> The walls of this church were very simple and devoid of ornamentation.<sup>104</sup> This church, situated on the hilltop, must have been the Cathedral of Saint Mary of Balezo, where the bishop of Balezo exercised his functions (*vescovado di Santa Maria de Baleç*)<sup>105</sup>. This cathedral church also had its own cathedral chapter, indicating that it was organized in a structured and institutional manner.<sup>106</sup>

In 1363, don Pellegrinibequeathed to this church several objects in his testament, among them a copper cup.<sup>107</sup> The cathedral of Balezo also possessed its own chapter (*capitulo et clero ecclesie Balezencis*)<sup>108</sup>, which must have been similar to that of Drivasto, since, as in Drivasto, the clergy in Balezo largely belonged to the Franciscan Order. This is particularly evident from the bishops of Balezo (excluding the later titular ones), who were members of this order.<sup>109</sup> The chapter may also have had its own statutes, although no such regulations are mentioned in the limited documentation available. The chapter of the Cathedral of Balezo is mentioned in two documents. The first, dated 5 March 1347,

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<sup>100</sup> AAII, nr. 743.

<sup>101</sup> *Dokumente I (1400-1405)*, nr. 571.

<sup>102</sup> K. Jireček, "Skutari ...", 100.

<sup>103</sup> Th. Ippen, "Denkmäler...", 9.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> AAII, nr. 188.

<sup>106</sup> Kordinjano, *Shqipëria ... II*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> AAII, nr. 188.

<sup>108</sup> AAII, nr. 30.

<sup>109</sup> D. Farlati, *Illyricum Sacrum VII*, 207; AAII, nr. 85.

is a letter of Pope Clement VI sent from Avignon to John, Archbishop of Antibar, and to the chapter and clergy of the Church of Balezo (*capitulum et clero ecclesie Balezencis*), on the occasion of the death of Gervicus, bishop of this diocese.<sup>110</sup>

The second document was written a few years later, on 1 June 1351, also by Pope Clement VI, on the occasion of the consecration of the Franciscan Andreas Citer as the new bishop of Balezo. In this letter, the Pope addresses the clerics of the chapter as “beloved sons of the chapter of the Church of Balezo” (*dilectis filiis capitulum ecclesie Balazencis*).<sup>111</sup> Another church may have been the one located in the village of Saint Alexander, beneath the hill of Balezo, along the banks of the Rrjollë River.<sup>112</sup> The third church is mentioned in 1363 as the Church of Saint Nicholas of Balezo (*Sancto Nichola de Baleç*), also referred to in the testament of don Pellegrini<sup>113</sup>.

With regard to the clergy, the presence of the Dominican Order cannot be excluded, nor earlier that of the Benedictines, especially given the proximity of the Benedictin Monastery of Saint John in Shtoj. Furthermore, as is evident from the documents, the use of the title *Don* (*dompnus, dominus*) by many clerics from Balezo does not exclude the presence of diocesan clergy in the town and its surrounding villages.

For a certain period, this diocese also included the Benedictine Monastery of Saint John of Shtoj (*monasterium S. Johannis Ordinis S. Benedicti Drivastensis diocesis*<sup>114</sup> or *abbatia S. Johannis de Strilalio districtu Drivasti*<sup>115</sup>), the ruins of which still exist today in the plain of Shtoj, about five miles from Balezo. As indicated by its name, the

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<sup>110</sup> AAII, nr. 30.

<sup>111</sup> AAII, nr. 85.

<sup>112</sup> “*Sancto Alexandro sotto Balezo*”, hodie “*Kisha e Balezoi*” super fluvio Rioli ex orientale plaga lacës Scutarensis”, AAII, nr. 653.

<sup>113</sup> AAII, nr. 188.

<sup>114</sup> AA I, nr. 93, ref. 3.

<sup>115</sup> AA I, nr. 93, ref. 3.



Paraskevi, and among the Slavs as Sveti Petka)—was also widespread, particularly among the highland tribes living around the Rrjolli Valley<sup>119</sup>. This cult appears to have persisted at least until the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **Conclusion**

The medieval history of Balezo today appears as a fragmented mosaic, constructed on the basis of a limited, dispersed, and often indirect body of sources. Nevertheless, even these scarce data have allowed us to reconstruct the profile of a small but functional urban center that played a role in the wider Shkodra region, particularly during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Balezo emerges as an administrative, economic, and ecclesiastical node in the Rrjolli Valley, with a structured territory, dependent villages, and an organized diocese—features that attest to a more developed urban life than its modest size might suggest.

The available documentation indicates that Balezo's economy was closely tied to natural resources and regional exchange networks: agriculture, livestock breeding, mills, and crafts (such as shoemaking and carpentry) connected the town both to its rural hinterland and to larger centers such as Shkodra and Ragusa. The presence of inhabitants from Balezo in Raguzan records points to a degree of social and professional mobility, as well as to its integration into a broader Adriatic–Balkan economic sphere.

At the same time, the ecclesiastical history of Balezo constitutes one of its best-documented and most significant aspects. The existence of an independent bishopric and a network of local clergy indicate that Balezo functioned as a spiritual center of regional importance. However, the economic weakness of the diocese, the concentration of an Orthodox (Slavic) population in the area, and ongoing political and religious pressures placed this bishopric in a structurally fragile

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<sup>119</sup> Th. Ippen, *Die Gebirge...*, 19.

position—reflected also in the lack of clear documentary continuity regarding its bishops.

The decline of Balezo as an urban center appears to have begun relatively early, perhaps already in the mid-fourteenth century, and accelerated in the early fifteenth century, when its territory was transformed into a *pronia* and the town was reduced to a small settlement with only a few households. The final episodes of its history are linked to the strategic use of the site during Venetian–Albanian and Ottoman conflicts, including interventions by Skanderbeg; however, these efforts failed to restore Balezo as a stable urban center.

In conclusion, Balezo represents a typical case of small medieval Albanian towns whose importance cannot be measured by their longevity, but rather by the functions they fulfilled within a given historical context. Its study highlights not only the interpretative potential of fragmentary sources but also the need for further archaeological and documentary research, which may shed additional light on a center that, although physically vanished today, occupies an significant place in the medieval history of the Shkodra region and of northern Albania.

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SALI KADRIA\*

POPULATION CENSUS IN 1918 IN THE ALBANIAN  
TERRITORIES UNDER THE OCCUPATION  
OF THE XIX CORPS COMMAND  
OF THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN ARMY

**Abstract**

This scholarly article aims to shed light on the efforts undertaken by the authorities of the administration established in the Albanian zones occupied by Austro-Hungarian troops to conduct a population census during 1918. Driven by political, military, and socio-economic motives and interests, following the occupation of most Albanian territories by Austro-Hungarian forces, the Viennese government showed a keen interest in obtaining accurate data on Albania's total population, as well as more detailed information on specific issues and regions inhabited by Albanians.

Drawing on archival data and other sources presented in the article, the study outlines the initial stages of the first efforts made to identify and calculate the number of households, livestock, and means of subsistence of the population in various regions of Albania. The analysis emphasizes that the Austro-Hungarian military authorities of the XIX Corps Command in Albania entrusted this task to the Military Logistics Office, headquartered in Shkodër. Since the first attempt to register the population's property in 1916 failed to produce accurate results, in

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\* Associate Professor, Researcher at the Academy of Sciences of Albania, Institute of History, Department of the History of Albanian Independence and State Consolidation, Tirana, Albania.

March 1917 this responsibility was assigned to Franz Seiner, a well-known Austro-Hungarian expert and public figure, who at that time was appointed as a referent in the Albanian Statistical Office.

Furthermore, this scholarly article presents data of particular interest regarding the commencement and completion of the population census process in Albania, the territory covered by this census, the total number and population density in the Albanian territories that were predominantly under the command of the XIX Corps of the Austro-Hungarian occupying forces, as well as the main challenges encountered during the population census process in 1918.

**Key words:** Population census, Albania, Austro-Hungary, Franz Seiner, XIX Corps Command, First World War.

After the entry of Austro-Hungarian troops into Albania in January 1916, they occupied its territory as far south as the Vjosa River–Lake Ohrid line, thus controlling more than two thirds of the territory of the Albanian state.<sup>1</sup> The governing authorities of the Habsburg Monarchy decided to undertake the process of registering the population in the areas of Albania under their control. For the Austro-Hungarian authorities, the population census of Albania was required not only for military purposes, but also for the strengthening of the civil administration.

In 2001, a group of scholars published the results of the research project entitled “The Population Census of Albania of 1918: Data Entry and Main Analyses”.<sup>2</sup> The researchers involved in this project aimed to make the 1918 population census of Albania available for further

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Bartl, *Shqiptarët: Nga Mesjeta deri në ditët tona* [From the Middle Ages to the present], përkthyer nga [translated by] Afrim Koçi, Tiranë: Instituti i Dialogut & Komunikimit, 2017, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www-gewi.uni-graz.at/seiner/albanisch/index.html> (Accessed on 15 July 2020).

scholarly research\*. This study of considerable academic importance focused primarily on the analysis of the socio-demographic, economic, and cultural conditions of the Albanian population of that period. Therefore, in this scholarly article, we will mainly concentrate on the historical circumstances, the problems encountered before, during, and after the census process, as well as on the analysis of some of the results derived from this census that are of particular interest for the history of Albania in the years 1916–1918.

According to the data available to the Austro-Hungarian civil authorities, it was claimed that prior to the deployment of Habsburg Monarchy troops in Albania, there were no accurate statistical records regarding the population of this country. Until 1912, the Ottoman administration made several attempts to conduct population counts in some cities and kazas of the country, but these efforts proved unsuccessful. From the very outset of this project, various problems emerged that hindered the implementation of a population census in the Albanian territories. Subsequently, the Ottoman administration attempted in some Albanian regions at least to register households, in order to estimate approximately the number of inhabitants in the areas populated by Albanians. However, these efforts also failed, as Ottoman officials lacked the necessary skills to carry out a project of this nature. Prior to the outbreak of the First Balkan War, the Ottoman state attempted to determine the number of individuals fit for military service and other military duties. The Ottoman government sought to

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\* This research project was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung). The project leaders were: Helmut Eberhart, Professor in the Department of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Graz, Austria; and Karl Kaser, Professor in the Department of Southeast European History at the University of Graz, Austria. Research and data collection assistance was provided by: Siegfried Gruber, research fellow in the Department of Southeast European History at the University of Graz, Austria; Gentiana Kera, research fellow in the Department of Southeast European History at the University of Graz, Austria; and Enriketa Papa, research fellow in the Department of Southeast European History at the University of Graz, Austria.

strengthen the nüfus offices (the term nüfus derives from Arabic–Persian languages and denotes influence, authority, power, and penetration), yet it became evident that the records kept by these offices could not be used for statistical purposes.<sup>3</sup>

The consulates of the European Great Powers in Shkodër, Durrës, Vlorë, Manastir, and several other cities possessed fragmentary statistical data on the population of the Albanian regions; however, these data remained limited to the territories covered by the respective consular offices. The Catholic clergy also held population-related data concerning certain Albanian regions inhabited by followers of this faith. Likewise, some European travelers kept records on the Albanian population, yet these accounts were not always based on reliable data.<sup>4</sup>

Based on data collected from foreign sources, it was estimated that on the eve of the Proclamation of Albania’s Independence, the ethnic Albanian population in the four Ottoman vilayets predominantly inhabited by Albanians amounted to approximately 1.5 to 1.6 million inhabitants. The population of the Shkodër Vilayet was estimated at around 237,000 inhabitants, while that of the Janina Vilayet reached approximately 552,000 inhabitants. Population figures by city were presented as follows: the largest Albanian city was Shkodër, with a population of about 32,000. The second largest Albanian city was Prizren, with 30,000 inhabitants. The third largest was Janina, described as the “capital of Southern Albania,” with 22,000 inhabitants. Other cities followed in terms of population size: Korça with 20,000 inhabitants; Dibra, Peja, and Berat with approximately 15,000 inhabitants each; Gjakova and Tirana with about 12,000 inhabitants each; Prishtina, Ohri, and Gjirokastra with around 11,000 inhabitants each. Elbasan had about 8,000 inhabitants, Mitrovica 7,500, Preveza

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<sup>3</sup> Franz Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni* [The first population census in Albania], nxjerrë prej *Hyllit të Dritës të vjetës 1922-1923* [Published by the Albanian journal *Hylli i Dritës* in the years 1922–1923], Shkodër: Shtypshkroja Franciskane, 1922, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

6,500, Vlora 6,000, while Durrës, Parga, and Kruja each had approximately 5,000 inhabitants. By contrast, Butrint [Saranda or Delvina – S. Kadria] had a population of around 2,000 inhabitants.<sup>5</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian government was interested in obtaining accurate data regarding the total population of Albania and the other ethnically Albanian territories. Based on the Ottoman statistics of 1902, Alfred von Rappaport, who served as the Consul General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, wrote that in all the regions east of the Albanian state over which Bulgaria claimed sovereignty, approximately 75 percent of the total population consisted of Muslim Albanians, while 3 percent were Catholic Albanians. Among the other populations residing in these territories, it was stated that 17 percent were Serbs, and 5 percent were Turks, Roma, emigrants, and Vlachs.<sup>6</sup>

In March 1916, the Austro-Hungarian military authorities in Albania issued a notice aimed at facilitating the process of population registration. According to this announcement, certain Albanian localities that were known by Italian names were required to be given Albanian names, such as “Skutari – Shkodër, Bojana – Bunë, San Giovanni di Medua – Shënjin, Alessio – Lesh, Durazzo – Durrës, Valona – Vlorë”.<sup>7</sup>

On 19 March 1916, the Austro-Hungarian military authorities in Albania instructed the Military Rear Office attached to the XIX Corps Command, based in Shkodër, to produce a count of the number of

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<sup>5</sup> “Shenime te Shkurtera mi Shqiperine” [Brief Notes on Albania], përkthyer prej [translated by] P. V. Kolonia in *Përparimi*, No. 1, New York, qershor – korrik [June-July] 1918, pp. 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Haus – Hof und Staats Archiv, Wien Politisches Archiv Albanien, (hereafter: *HHSIA*, *PA*, A.) in the Archive of the Institute of History, Tirana (hereafter: *AIH*), Vj. 26-16-1668, Draft Law No. 62 by the Austro-Hungarian Consul General Alfred von Rappaport to the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vienna, 22 January 1916.

<sup>7</sup> “Për Shqypëni e Shqypëtarë - Emna shqyp për vënde të Shqypënisë” [For Albania and Albanians – Albanian names for places in Albania], in *Vëllazënija*, No. 6, Vienna, 27 March 1916, p. 2.

houses, livestock, and means of livelihood of the inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> In May 1916, the provisional process of registering the population and livestock, as well as studying the food reserves in the city of Shkodër, was initiated. At the end of May 1916, the planned census was carried out, while in August and September of that year another trial was conducted with several additions to the registration forms, in order to count the population and determine the number of livestock in Shkodër and the other occupied districts of Albania.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of October 1916, the Austro-Hungarian Civil Commissioner August Ritter von Kral informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna that the planned population registration in several districts of Albania had just been completed. According to this report, the Dibër district had joined the population counting process, as it had been excluded until that point. Upon completion of the census, it was found that this district had 72,618 inhabitants.<sup>10</sup>

So what result did the process of counting the population and wealth of Albanians in 1916 produce? The conclusion of the census did not yield accurate figures. The main reasons for this failure were, *firstly*, that the logistical means for carrying out this project were insufficient; *secondly*, the completion of the project demonstrated that the Austro-

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<sup>8</sup> Eugen M. Oberhummer, “Die erste Volkszählung in Albanien”, in: *Anzeiger der Akademi der Wissenschaften in Wien*, philosophisch-historische Klasse, 21/ 1920, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Enriketa Pandelejmoni (Papa), “Franz Seiner dhe regjistrimi i popullsisë në Shqipëri gjatë Luftës së Parë Botërore 1916-1918” [Franz Seiner and the Population Census in Albania during the First World War 1916–1918] in: *Austro-Hungaria dhe Shqipëria 1916-1918* [Austria-Hungary and Albania 1916–1918], proceedings of the scientific conference “Austro-Hungaria dhe Shqipëria në vitet 1916-1918” [Austria-Hungary and Albania in the Years 1916–1918], held in Tirana on 26–27 January 2018, published by the National Historical Museum of Tirana, Tirana: KRISTALINA-KH, 2019, p. 134.

<sup>10</sup> *HHSIA*, PA, A, in *AIH*, Vj. 26-15-1596, Reserve Letter No. 1064 P., from the Austro-Hungarian Consul General A. Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 25 October 1916.

Hungarian authorities had not made the necessary preparations for registering the population of the occupied territories of Albania; and *thirdly*, the right people had not been selected to carry out this difficult process, as they lacked the knowledge and competencies required to fulfil the assigned tasks. For the reasons mentioned above, the population and wealth census in Albania in 1916 was accompanied by omissions and errors.

After reviewing the data collected in the field during 1916, the renowned Austro-Hungarian expert in topography, registration and statistics, Franz Seiner, concluded that the statistical material gathered during that year was inaccurate. According to him, the main problems were: (1) the field data had not been properly verified and checked; (2) the presented statistics did not reflect place names, or if some of them did contain place names, they could not be used because they contained errors; and (3) due to the difficulty of writing the Albanian language by the officials, the names of people and places were recorded with mistakes. Despite the above problems, F. Seiner wrote that this census provided significant assistance to the Austro-Hungarian authorities in administering the country in the subsequent period. Moreover, the material collected in 1916 served as a basis for further statistical research on the population of Albania.

In the spring of 1917, the Austro-Hungarian authorities considered carrying out a new population registration process in the territory of Albania occupied by them. In March 1917, Franz Seiner, who held the position of referent at the Office of Country Statistics (Albania), was assigned to lead this task. F. Seiner had first been in Albania in 1914, contracted by the Commission for Albania at the Academy of Sciences in Vienna, for a research expedition to carry out cartographic measurements and to represent on maps the area from the coast of Durrës to the rivers Drin i Zi, Mat and Shkumbin. This expedition aimed to pave the way for further research of a geographical,

botanical, zoological, ethnographic and anthropological nature.<sup>11</sup> Despite the difficulties encountered in Albania due to the events of 1914, he successfully completed this task.

In April 1917, the Austro-Hungarian military authorities issued another order according to which Albanian localities were to be given names in the Albanian language, such as “Skutari – Shkodër, Dulcigno – Ulqin, Klementi – Kelmend, Ipek – Pejë, San Giovanni di Medua – Shënjjin, Alessio – Lesh, Bojana – Bunë, Durazzo – Durrës, Sasso Bianco – Shkambi i Kavajës, Valona – Vlorë and Saseno – Sazan”.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of May 1917, the Austro-Hungarian Civil Commissioner A. Kral reported to Vienna on the preparations made for the commencement of the population registration process in the territory of Albania under Austro-Hungarian occupation. The Statistics Department attached to the Military Rear Office, headed by Franz Seiner and operating under the authority of the Austro-Hungarian XIX Corps Command, had established clear criteria for conducting the population registration. This office would consider the nationality of registered inhabitants valid based on what each person declared when questioned by the officials engaged in the registration campaign. The Austro-Hungarian specialists considered that the greatest difficulty would arise in cases where the registrars encountered the problem of identifying Albanian inhabitants and Slavic Muslim inhabitants. According to them, there were cases in which these two population groups could not clearly distinguish between nationality and religious affiliation, and consequently simply referred to themselves as “Turks”. In the case of foreign minorities, the registration authorities were tasked with determining the language spoken by the inhabitants and making accurate notes as to whether they spoke Serbian, Bulgarian or

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<sup>11</sup> E. Pandelejmoni (Papa), “Franz Seiner dhe regjistrimi i popullsisë në Shqipëri gjatë Luftës së Parë Botërore 1916-1918” në *Austro-Hungaria dhe Shqipëria 1916-1918*, p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> “Perdorimi i êmrave t’perparshem n’Shqypnië” [The Use of Earlier Place Names in Albania], in *Posta e Shqypnies*, No. 34, Shkodër, 4 April 1917, p. 2.

Macedonian Bulgarian. The registrars were required to determine the nationality of these inhabitants based on the criterion of the language they spoke. The officials responsible for the registration process were instructed by the superior authorities to pay special attention to the accurate registration of the Vlach and Roma populations in the territory of Albania under Austro-Hungarian control. The Dual Monarchy authorities emphasized that during the registration the fact had to be taken into account that the Vlach population was also known by Albanians by other names, such as zinzars (xinxarë – in Albanian language) and Aromanians. Meanwhile, Roma people were to be classified as such in all cases, even if their spoken language was Albanian.<sup>13</sup>

On 21 June 1917, the XIX Corps Command of the Austro-Hungarian military forces, through an official letter signed by Lieutenant Colonel Jucha, ordered the Bezirks Commands and the Albanian administrative offices subordinate to them to begin preparations for the registration of inhabitants' houses in all regions of Albania under their jurisdiction. According to this order, each military-administrative unit was required to provide the total number of houses in the district it covered, and to complete the count for those localities where registration had already been carried out earlier. In addition to the house-counting process, an accurate registration of each inhabited house was to be carried out. The Austro-Hungarian authorities demanded that this process also extend to the huts, seasonal dwellings and tents of nomadic minority populations, such as the Roma people who temporarily resided in a particular location. The count was to continue throughout the entire territory, even in the mountains, where clusters of shepherds' huts and seasonal shelters were located.

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<sup>13</sup> *HHSStA, PA, A, in AIH, Vj. 28-6-690, Report No. 127/P. 6062 from the Austro-Hungarian Consul General, A. Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 27 May 1917; Ibid., Vj. 28-8-826, Report from the Austro-Hungarian Consul General, A. Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 27 May 1917.*

One issue that required resolution was the method of recording family names and given names. Until that period, the majority of inhabitants in Albanian regions used only given names, but in order to distinguish one person from another, they added their father's and grandfather's names in a patrilineal line. Heads of households were left free to choose their own names. Only in special cases was the name chosen by the Austro-Hungarian and Albanian administrations. The guidelines for implementing this process were developed by the Albanian language linguist Maximilian Lambertz.<sup>14</sup>

Another issue was the determination of settlements and the delineation of village boundaries, as well as the manner in which village names should be written and recorded. Moreover, only the quarters (mahallas) of villages had names, while many villages did not have a specific designation. To resolve this problem, the "Literary Commission" in Shkodër was established, which drafted the necessary guidelines on how the names of places in Albania should be assigned.<sup>15</sup>

For this purpose, an index of villages and towns, including around 1,800 entries, was created. At the entrances to roads, registrars placed signs bearing their names. On 26 May 1917, the Austro-Hungarian authorities issued an order aimed at familiarizing the population with the registration procedure and at persuading people to report the number of their children (usually daughters), since the distribution of necessary food supplies would be based on the population registration data.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Franz Seiner, *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete*, (Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Schriften der Balkankommission, Linguistische Abteilung XIII). Wien und Leipzig: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky A.-G., 1922, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> F. Seiner, *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*; Lef Nosi, *Dokumenta historike për t'i shërbye historiës tonë kombëtare* [Historical documents to serve our national history], botim i dytë [Second edition], përgatitja për botim dhe redaktimi shkencor nga [prepared for publication and scientifically edited by] Prof. dr. Marenglen Verli dhe Prof. dr. Ferit Duka, botim i

Using the data collected by the officials assigned to this task, the enumeration lists were compiled in two copies and sent to the respective Bezirk Command (military command of a given district, which also performed administrative functions – S. Kadria). While completing the statistics, the registrars were instructed to check carefully whether a house or property had one or more owners. All owners and co-owners of a given property had to be included in the registration. The same procedure was intended to be applied to *çifçinj* [peasants] who had purchased a plot of land (in a fictitious manner – S. Kadria) from the owners. It appears that in following this procedure, the Austro-Hungarian authorities took into account the fact that regardless of the “games” with the title of land ownership played by the owners, they continued to retain *de facto* ownership and remained in control of their properties. Austro-Hungarian experts emphasized that according to the definition provided by the science of statistics, the term “head of household” was to be understood as a person who was able to support himself and his family. Members of the family were considered to be those who were unable to support themselves. The Austro-Hungarian authorities required that in the column titled “Destroyed houses,” it should be recorded whether the houses had been destroyed by Serbian forces, Esadists, Epirotes, or others.

At the end of this process, Austro-Hungarian officers and the officials of the local Albanian administration attached to each Bezirk Command involved in the process had to review all the registration lists received from the subordinate offices. They had to determine whether these statistics were accurate and legible. The compiled lists had to be corrected for errors and completed where they were incomplete. According to the procedure previously prepared, the lists were to be

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Akademisë së Shkencave të Republikës së Shqipërisë [Published by the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania], Proclamation of the Royal and Imperial Command of the XIX Army Corps, E. V. No. 2485, signed on behalf of the commander by Jucha, Obstlt m.p., Shkodër, 21 June 1917, Tiranë: Nënë Tereza, 2007, pp. 264-266.

organized by *mydyri* [müdür] (communes), which would then be consolidated into an overview for the sub-prefectures. This overview summarized the total number of communes and was to be submitted to the Bezirk Command within a short deadline. The latter carefully reviewed the statistics and, if it found errors or gaps in the lists, it had to correct them. The Bezirk Command then prepared a provisional consolidated overview, based on the sub-prefecture overviews, which covered the entire district. It presented the full overview to the XIX Corps Command, along with a copy of the compiled lists.<sup>17</sup>

With the help of the lists kept at the Bezirks Commands, it was believed that over time the enumeration process would become increasingly accurate. The figures concerning houses and the road signs were to be carefully maintained. If new buildings were erected, they would be reflected in the statistics, thus further completing and improving the census. In order to successfully carry out this task, the Austro-Hungarian command required that suitable and knowledgeable people be selected. The house enumeration and registration was to begin on 15 July 1917, with the aim of completing it within a short period.<sup>18</sup>

Franz Seiner believed that during the 1916 registration process in Albania, the meaning of the Albanian word “vend” [settlement] had been used incorrectly. According to him, there were several cases in which the district of a municipality was mistakenly taken to represent the settlement itself. For this reason, the population figures for some places in Albania were excessively high. During the 1917 registration, the Austro-Hungarian command in Albania required that the registration authorities be informed that the term “vend” was to be understood as a specific territory comprising a group of houses, known

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<sup>17</sup> L. Nosi, *Dokumenta historike për t'i shërbye historiës tonë kombëtare*, Proclamation of the Royal and Imperial Command of the XIX Army Corps, E. V. No. 2485, signed on behalf of the commander by Jucha, Obstlt m.p., Shkodër, 21 June 1917, pp. 264–266.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

as a settlement with a particular name. Considering the conditions in Albania at that time, there were cases in which these settlements consisted of houses and huts or clusters of dispersed houses (neighbourhoods of the settlement, mahallas, etc.), which, in most cases, had their own distinct names. The Austro-Hungarian authorities emphasized that the term “lagje” (mahalla) [neighbourhood – S. Kadria] of a settlement should refer to and be recorded as those groups of houses or inhabited centres located at a distance from the centre of a settlement and having topographic designations, as well as all the regions and mahallas of that settlement that, over time, acquired specific names.<sup>19</sup>

In a secret research report prepared during the First World War by the Intelligence Service of the British Admiralty, the meaning of the word *mëhallë* was clarified. According to this study, a tribe was divided into *mëhalla* and these, in turn, into houses. A *mëhallë* was a group of houses, sometimes clustered together with a common enclosure, but there were also cases where they were dispersed, yet inhabited by members of the same family.<sup>20</sup>

In almost all major settlements, their central areas bore a specific name that distinguished them from the clusters of houses located in a given area. The names of other parts of a settlement were usually assigned according to the inhabitants' religion, the tribe to which they belonged, the main occupation for which the population was known, the geographical conditions, as well as the names of their most prominent residents. For those settlements whose houses were dispersed and where the boundary between the settlement and its

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Personazhet kryesore të Shqipërisë – Vendet, Fiset, Populli gjatë Luftës së Parë Botërore* [The Main Characters of Albania – Places, Tribes, People during the First World War], Raport sekret i Shërbimit të Zbulimit të Admiraliatit të Marinës Ushtarake Angleze [Secret Report of the Intelligence Service of the British Admiralty], përkthyer nga [translated by] Piro Misha, Tiranë: Botimet IDK, 2016, p. 28.

neighbourhood was not clearly defined, the delineation of the dividing line between them was temporarily left to the authorities responsible for this task. Meanwhile, in doubtful cases, it was decided that further investigations should be conducted. The Austro-Hungarian authorities instructed the registration bodies to bear in mind that there were several Albanian municipalities composed of several parts that, in many cases, did not have common or unique links. This situation was related to two causes: *firstly*, their composition had developed since early periods; *secondly*, they had been formed as a result of legislation and reforms undertaken by the Ottoman state at different times. The lists of names of these settlements were to be kept according to the orthography determined by the Corps Command of the Austro-Hungarian forces in Albania, and this would remain in force until it established a different orthography for the Albanian language.<sup>21</sup> During 1917, the Austro-Hungarian military administration in Albania succeeded in completing the registration of a significant portion of the population's property. However, this registration was not regarded as complete or accurate.

On 10 January 1918, the XIX Corps Command of the Austro-Hungarian forces in Albania ordered that the necessary measures be taken so that, by 1 March 1918, the process of registering the population in the territory under its control would commence.<sup>22</sup>

The task was assigned to Franz Seiner, the head of the Country's (Albania's) Statistical Office. The decision to initiate an accurate population registration process in Albania led to the establishment of a statistical office within the rear administration, comprising two branches: one branch provided services for military purposes, while the other was responsible for compiling statistics for the country. From that period onwards, prefects and sub-prefects were entrusted with

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<sup>21</sup> L. Nosi, *Dokumenta historike për t'i shërbye historiës tonë kombëtare*, Proclamation of the Royal and Imperial Command of the XIX Army Corps, E. V. No. 2485, signed on behalf of the commander by Jucha, Obstlt m.p., Shkodër, 21 June 1917, pp. 264–266.

<sup>22</sup> F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, p. 9.

maintaining records primarily concerning births, deaths, and marriages within the administrative units they governed. Meanwhile, clergy members were tasked with recording and submitting, on a monthly basis, data on births and deaths in the areas they oversaw to the heads of communes, villages, and city neighborhoods. Additionally, the chairmen of communes and neighborhood leaders were required to forward these data each month to the municipal office of their respective cities.<sup>23</sup>

The date of 1 March 1918 was deliberately chosen to begin the population registration process, because at the end of March or the beginning of April many Albanian families left their villages for the summer mountain pastures, where they would spend at least half of the year. In each locality, a “registration commissioner” was appointed. The registration commissioner could be a member of the occupying forces or an Albanian military officer. They were supervised by the district (Bezirk) and county commissioners. Most of the commissioners were personally trained by F. Seiner. The registration forms, with their 24 columns, were drafted in both German and Albanian to make the data collection as easy as possible. Village leaders were obliged to correct any false information provided by household heads.<sup>24</sup>

In the spring of 1918, the researcher Dr. Eugen Oberhammer conducted a study expedition in the Albanian regions.<sup>25</sup> In order to carry out an accurate census of the population of Albania under Austro-Hungarian occupation, care was taken to record not only residents present in their settlements at the time of registration but also those who had temporarily left them. During the implementation of this task, the

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<sup>23</sup> *HHStA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 28-3-396, Annex to report no. 137/P, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 9 June 1918.

<sup>24</sup> F. Seiner, *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete*, pp. 2-5.

<sup>25</sup> Fitim Rifati, *Kosova gjatë Luftës së Parë Botërore 1914-1918* [Kosova during the First World War 1914–1918], botim i Institutit të Historisë “Ali Hadri”, Prishtinë [Published by the “Ali Hadri” Institute of History], Prishtinë: 2019, pp. 221-222.

officials involved encountered two major problems: *first*, Albanian men were reluctant to undergo the registration process, as they believed it aimed to facilitate a full military conscription of Albanians by the Austro-Hungarian authorities; *second*, due to the persistent influence of fanaticism among Albanians, many were unwilling to present the women in their families for registration. Consequently, the Austro-Hungarian officers assigned to this task launched an extensive propaganda campaign among the uninformed Albanian population.<sup>26</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian authorities managed to carry out the population registration of Albania even in the country's mountainous regions, where such a census had never been conducted before. This represented a significant advancement for Albania.<sup>27</sup> This significant project was completed at the end of September 1918, after the data and conclusions had been reviewed. At the end of September 1918, the Statistical Office in Shkodër halted the data processing, as the General Staff of the Austro-Hungarian army ordered the commencement of the withdrawal of Austro-Hungarian troops along the Shkodër–Pejë line, whose defense was entrusted to Colonel-General von Pfancer Baltin. The text of this order stated that, given the general situation, the following measures were necessary: the destruction of documents of lesser importance within a short period of time, the reduction of the military rear administration in Albania, the removal of auxiliary forces, the wives of military personnel, clergy and Austro-Hungarian officials, and the immediate removal from Albania of Austro-Hungarian archival materials.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> *HHStA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 26-16-1601, Report of the Austro-Hungarian Consul General, A. Kral to Baron Burian, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 16 November 1916.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Vj. 28-2-223, Cipher Telegram no. 102 P from the Austro-Hungarian Consul Lejhanec to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 27 September 1918; *Ibid.*, Vj. 28-2-222, Cipher Telegram no. 74 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in Vienna to the Austro-Hungarian Consul Lejhanec in Shkodër, and another

In order to preserve the Austro-Hungarian divisions as organized units after their defeat on the Macedonian front, Colonel-General von Pflancer-Baltin ordered the gradual withdrawal of Habsburg troops from Albania. Although transporting the population registration materials from Albania to Vienna was extremely difficult, the Austro-Hungarian military authorities agreed to hand over all the material to the Austrian Academy of Sciences, along with authorization to work with it and publish its results. On 5 November 1918, shortly before the armistice was signed, the Austro-Hungarian army evacuated Shkodër, the last city in Albania.<sup>29</sup>

The process of counting and registering the population in the Albanian regions under Austro-Hungarian occupation was carried out in an orderly manner, considering the difficult conditions of that wartime period. The greatest problems during the registration process emerged in the district (Bezirk) of Berat. Upon completion of the population registration of Albania, material was missing for the Berat Bezirk, which included the Kreis (Counties) of Berat, Fier, Lushnjë and Skrapar, with a population of 89,142 inhabitants.<sup>30</sup> At that time, the prevailing view was that, among all the districts (Bezirks) of the country, only the material from Berat had been neglected. In fact, the failure to register the population belonging to the Berat Bezirk, with its population of 89,142 inhabitants, was due to the irresponsible actions of a Slavic officer who burned all the statistical material collected for the Berat Bezirk.<sup>31</sup>

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MFA telegram no. 335 addressed to Count Trauttmansdorff in Baden, Vienna, 29 September 1918.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Swire, *Shqipëria. Ngritja e një mbretërie* [Albania: The Rise of a Kingdom], përkthyer nga [translated by] Kujtim Ymeri, Tiranë: Dituria, 2005, p. 229; P. Bartl, *Shqiptarët: Nga Mesjeta deri në ditët tona*, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> F. Seiner, *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete*, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, p. 12.

The military leaders tried to shift the responsibility for the failure to carry out the population registration in this district onto the Civil Commissioner August Ritter von Kral. Civil Commissioner A. Kral informed the commander of the XIX Corps of the Austro-Hungarian forces, based in Shkodër, that these problems had occurred due to the lack of Austro-Hungarian officers in this Bezirk. Kral reported that the Austro-Hungarian Army's Rear Office had been informed on 10 March 1918 about the shortage of officers in the Berat Bezirk. He believed that the causes of the failure to complete the counting and registration process in the Berat Bezirk were: 1. The lack of suitable personnel appointed as census commissioners; 2. The long delay in appointing a new civil commissioner; 3. The excessive workload of the Berat Bezirk staff during the population counting period.<sup>32</sup>

The Academy of Sciences in Vienna requested that Franz Seiner, the head of the population registration, process the main statistics. Alongside F. Seiner, the collected material was also processed by the researcher Dr. Eugen Oberhummer, who served as the head of the Balkan Commission at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. In 1921, Dr. E. Oberhummer published the preliminary statistical data related to the registration carried out in 1918.<sup>33</sup> The tables presenting the results of Albania's population registration process were published in 1922, with financial support from the Albanian government.

According to the data collected during 1918, the population registration of the territory of Albania under their control covered an area of 20,096 km<sup>2</sup> — approximately 70 percent of the surface area of the Albanian state as defined by the borders set at the London Conference of Ambassadors in 1913. On 9 June 1918, Civil

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<sup>32</sup> *HHSStA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 28-8-828, Report no. 127/P. 6062 of the Civil Commissioner and Austro-Hungarian Consul General A. Kral to the Commander of the XIX Corps, Shkodër, 27 May 1918.

<sup>33</sup> Eugen Oberhummer, "Mitteilung über die erste Volkszählung in Albanien" in: *Anzeiger der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, philosophisch-historische Klasse 57/1920, Wien, 1921, pp. 7-8.

Commissioner A. Kral sent a rapid report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, stating that the population of Albania reached 515,124 inhabitants.<sup>34</sup> According to the report of Civil Commissioner A. Kral, the population of Kosovo was estimated at around 220,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom were Albanian.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike what was stated in the aforementioned document sent by diplomat A. Kral, in Franz Seiner's brochure titled: *The First Census of the Population in Albania*, which was also published in Albanian in 1922, the expert wrote that, according to the census conducted in 1918, Albania had a total population of 524,217 inhabitants, with a density of 26 inhabitants per square kilometre. The 1918 registration process showed that in the part of Albania controlled by the Austro-Hungarians, a total of 435,075 inhabitants had been counted and calculated, and to this figure were added the 89,142 inhabitants of the Berat Bezirk, which had emerged from earlier registrations after its materials had been damaged.<sup>36</sup>

Civil Commissioner A. Kral informed the Austro-Hungarian government that, from the total number of the registered population of Albania, approximately 357,000 inhabitants were Muslim Albanians; 70,000 were Catholic Albanians; 38,800 inhabitants belonged to the Greek Orthodox rite; and 760 inhabitants belonged to the Orthodox Serbian and Bulgarian rites. The city with the largest population in the part of Albania under Austro-Hungarian occupation was Shkodër, with

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<sup>34</sup> *HHStA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 28-3-397, Annex 5 to the report of the Austro-Hungarian Consul General in Shkodër, "On the Number of the Population", 9 June 1918.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Vj. 28-3-396, Annex to Report No. 137/P, addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 9 June 1918; Beqir Meta, *Minoritetet dhe ndërtimi kombëtar në Shqipëri (1912-1924)* [Minorities and Nation-Building in Albania (1912–1924)], botim i Institutit të Historisë pranë Qendrës së Studimeve Albanologjike, Tiranë [Published by the Institute of History at the Albanian Studies Center], Tiranë: Kristalina- KH, 2013, p. 45; F. Rifati, *Kosova gjatë Luftës së Parë Botërore 1914-1918*, p. 215.

<sup>36</sup> F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, p. 4.

28,000 inhabitants, followed by the city of Tirana with 10,600 inhabitants.<sup>37</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian military administration did not include a significant portion of Albanian territories in the north and south of the country. Nevertheless, according to the 1918 census, it resulted that in Upper Albania\*, with an area of 14,015 km<sup>2</sup>, it had 379,078 inhabitants and a population density of 37 inhabitants per square kilometre. In Lower Albania, an area of 6,081 km<sup>2</sup> had 145,139 inhabitants, with a population density of 24 inhabitants per square kilometre.<sup>38</sup> The Bezirk with the largest area was Berat, covering 4,480 km<sup>2</sup>, while the Bezirk with the largest population was Tirana, with 142,676 inhabitants. The Bezirk of Tirana also had the highest population density, with 32 inhabitants per square kilometre.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the Kreis (the county) of Elbasan had the largest area, covering 1,325 km<sup>2</sup>. The Kreises (the counties) with the lowest population density were Kir (in Shkodër) with 12 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, Malësia e Gjakovës and Puka with 14 inhabitants each per km<sup>2</sup>. The counties with the highest population density were Shkodër with 85 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, Durrës with 56 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, and Kavajë with 49 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>40</sup>

From F. Seiner's publication, several data points of interest should be taken into consideration. The 1918 population registration included 6 Bezirks (districts), 28 Kreises (counties/subdistricts) and

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<sup>37</sup> *HHSStA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 28-3-397, Annex 5 to the report of the Austro-Hungarian Consul General in Shkodër, "On the Number of the Population", 9 June 1918.

\* In the document that August Ritter von Kral sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, the extent and boundaries of the geographic notions "Upper Albania" and "Lower Albania" were not defined. In Franz Seiner's publication, it was generally outlined that the territories from the Bezirk (district) of Elbasan in the south up to the Bezirk of Zhur [Žur] (Prizren) were designated as Upper Albania, while the Berat Bezirk and the southern part of the Tirana Bezirk were considered Lower Albania.

<sup>38</sup> F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

114 Gemeinde (municipalities).<sup>41</sup> Among the Kreises (counties) included in the registration process were Kruja, Mati, Ohrid, Oroshi (Mirdita), Puka, Kiri, Lezha (Leshi), Malësia e Madhe, Shkodër, Durrës, Elbasan, Kavaja, Peqin, Tirana, Lower Dibra, Gora, Hasi, Luma, Malësia e Gjakovës, Berat, Fier, Lushnja, Mallakastër, Skrapar, Lower Elbasan, Gramsh, Lower Peqin, and Shënaprendja (The last name is Shënepremte, or Lenie – a village in the Gramsh region). The population by Bezirks was as follows: Kruja had 51,786 inhabitants, of whom 51,311 were Albanian, 40 were Vlachs, 435 were Roma people, and 4 belonged to other groups. Puka had 32,504 inhabitants, of whom 32,486 were Albanian and 18 were Roma. Shkodër had 84,509 inhabitants, of whom 81,997 were Albanian, 2 were Vlachs, 1,675 were Serbo-Croatian, 5 were Bulgarian, 15 were Greek, 673 were Roma, and 142 belonged to other groups. Western Tirana had 111,088 inhabitants, of whom 106,737 were Albanian, 1 was Vlach, 562 were Serbo-Croatian, 2 were Bulgarian, 14 were Greek, 3,724 were Roma, and 48 belonged to other groups. Zhur (Prizren) had 99,187 inhabitants, of whom 90,833 were Albanian, 109 were Vlachs, 26 were Serbo-Croatian, 206 were Bulgarian, 1 was Greek, 718 were Roma, and 294 belonged to other groups. Southern Tirana had 31,588 inhabitants, of whom 31,367 were Albanian, 220 were Roma, and 1 belonged to other groups. Berat had 113,551 inhabitants, but since the registration documents were not preserved, no further detailed data were available. The population of the country's main cities was presented as follows: The city with the largest population in Albania was Shkodër, with 23,099 inhabitants, of whom 21,493 were Albanian, 1,049 were Serbo-Croatian, 5 were Bulgarian, 10 were Greek, 1 was Roma, and 127 belonged to other groups. Tirana ranked second with 10,251 inhabitants, of whom 9,336 were Albanian, 23 were Serbo-Croatian, 1 was Bulgarian, 876 were Roma, and 15 belonged to other groups. Elbasani ranked third with 10,102 inhabitants, of whom 9,231 were

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Albanian, 869 were Roma, and 2 belonged to other groups. Berati ranked fourth with 9,006 inhabitants. Kavaja followed with 5,453 inhabitants, of whom 5,141 were Albanian, 1 was Serbo-Croatian, 308 were Roma, and 3 belonged to other groups. Durrësi had 4,175 inhabitants, of whom 3,436 were Albanian, 75 were Vlachs, 14 were Greek, 627 were Roma, and 23 belonged to other groups. Kruja had 3,861 inhabitants, of whom 3,824 were Albanian and 37 were Roma.<sup>42</sup>

From the above data, it emerges that the majority of districts and regions, from administrative, ethnographic, and geographic perspectives, had an overwhelmingly Albanian population. The population of Albania under Austro-Hungarian occupation, categorized by religious affiliation, presented the following picture. The Bezirk (district) of Kruja had 40,506 Muslim inhabitants, 11,105 Catholics, and 179 Orthodox believers; the Bezirk of Puka had 6,963 Muslims and 25,541 Catholics; the Bezirk of Shkodër had 37,706 Muslims, 47,810 Catholics, 1,983 Orthodox believers, and 10 Jews; the Bezirk of Western Tirana had 103,863 Muslims, 514 Catholics, 6,699 Orthodox believers, 10 Roma, and 2 adherents of other religions; the Bezirk of Zhur (Prizren) had 93,792 Muslims, 4,500 Catholics, and 835 Orthodox believers; the Bezirk of Berat had 85,052 Muslims and 28,499 Orthodox believers; and the Bezirk of Southern Tirana had 27,237 Muslims and 4,351 Orthodox believers. Taken as a whole, the Albanian territories under Austro-Hungarian administration comprised a total of 392,119 Muslim inhabitants, 89,470 Catholics, 42,546 Orthodox believers, 20 Roma, and 2 individuals belonging to other religious denominations.<sup>43</sup>

With regard to the country's main cities, the distribution of the population by religious affiliation was as follows: the city of Durrës had 2,457 Muslim inhabitants, 175 Catholics, 1,539 Orthodox believers, 2 Roma, and 2 adherents of other religions; the city of Elbasan had 8,409

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Muslims, 5 Catholics, and 1,692 Orthodox believers; the city of Kavajë had 4,342 Muslims and 1,111 Orthodox believers; Kruja had 3,855 Muslims, 1 Catholic, and 5 Orthodox believers; the city of Shkodër had 15,266 Muslims, 7,091 Catholics, 732 Orthodox believers, and 10 Roma; the city of Tirana had 9,468 Muslims, 18 Catholics, 757 Orthodox believers, and 8 Roma; and the city of Berat had 5,125 Muslims and 3,881 Orthodox believers. Overall, in the cities of Albania under Austro-Hungarian administration there were 48,922 Muslim inhabitants, 7,286 Catholics, 9,717 Orthodox believers, 20 Roma, and 2 inhabitants belonging to other religious denominations.<sup>44</sup>

Of the total registered population, in the Bezirk of Kruja 48,891 inhabitants were engaged in agriculture, while 1,899 had other occupations; in the Bezirk of Puka, 32,375 inhabitants worked in agriculture, whereas 129 pursued other professions; in the Bezirk of Shkodër, 59,593 inhabitants were farmers, while 24,916 were engaged in other occupations; in the Bezirk of Western Tirana, 82,083 inhabitants were employed in agriculture, whereas 29,005 had other professions; in the Bezirk of Zhur (Prizren), 96,381 inhabitants were engaged in agriculture, while 2,806 others pursued different occupations; and in the Bezirk of Southern Tirana, 31,455 inhabitants were farmers, while 123 had other occupations.<sup>45</sup>

From the data collected, it emerged that in the Kreis (county) of Mati there were 15 Vlach merchants who lived together with 33 relatives and their servants, all of whom belonged to the Greek Orthodox rite. From this group, 13 individuals held Serbian citizenship. In the district of Shkodër there were 11 villages inhabited by 463 Serbo-Croatians. Of this group, 278 inhabitants were of the Muslim faith and 185 were Orthodox Serbs, among whom 45 were Montenegrin nationals. In addition, there were 85 Roma, one inhabitant of Turkish origin, and another person of African descent from Sudan. The Jewish

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

population consisted of 7 individuals residing in Shkodër, all of whom were of Hungarian origin. The city of Shkodër lacked surveyed material. The Kreis (county) of Gramsh had a village named Grabovë with a Christian population, of which 415 inhabitants were Vlachs belonging to the Greek Orthodox rite. The Kreis (county) of Kavajë contained six villages with 182 inhabitants who belonged to minority groups and spoke foreign languages. Of this number, 162 inhabitants were Serbo-Croatian Muslims. Among them, 13 had come to Albania from Montenegro, while another 27 had arrived from Bosnia. The total of 182 inhabitants also included 7 Turks and 5 Bulgarians. In the Kreis (county) of Peqin, there was a village named Hasmashaj, inhabited by 188 Vlachs, all of whom were tenant farmers. It was also reported that in seven villages of the Peshkopi sub-prefecture, which formed part of the Bezirk of Zhuri (Prizren), there were 864 foreign inhabitants. Of this number, 793 were Bulgarians who practiced the Orthodox rite of the Bulgarian Exarchate, of whom only 3 held Bulgarian citizenship; 36 were Vlachs, of whom 24 held Bulgarian citizenship; and 35 inhabitants were Roma.<sup>46</sup>

According to the data derived from the census, in Upper Albania the average number of members in Albanian households ranged from five to seven persons per family. In total, there were 62,226 inhabited houses, accommodating 69,172 families and 379,078 inhabitants. This means that each house contained, on average, 1.2 families and 6.1 inhabitants. The largest number of houses was recorded in the district of Lower Dibra, with 6,989 houses, 8,356 families, and 40,526 inhabitants. Only in the district of Orosh (Mirditë) was the highest average number of family members observed, namely seven persons per family, while in Malësia e Madhe the average was 6.9 persons per family. In Upper Albania, there were also households with 20 or more inhabitants living in a single house. When comparing Upper Albania

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<sup>46</sup> *HHStA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 28-7-786, Report no. 154/P from the Austro-Hungarian Consul General in Albania, A. Kral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Shkodër, 22 June 1918.

with Lower Albania, it can be stated that the phenomenon of multiple families living together in one house was more widespread in Upper Albania. Nevertheless, the figures indicated that, unlike the *zadrugas* or “*zajedna kuća*” (communal households), which were characteristic of the Slavic population, the practice of “household communization” was not as widespread in the Albanian highlands.<sup>47</sup>

Official data showed that in the territory of Albania occupied by Austro-Hungarian troops there were 252,794 males (50.1% of the population) and 251,423 females (49.9% of the population). Thus, for every 1,000 males there were 994 females, indicating an almost perfectly balanced distribution. It is noteworthy that only in the region of Tirana was the number of females significantly higher than that of males, whereas in the other regions the male population predominated.<sup>48</sup>

During the years of the First World War, it is evident that Austria-Hungary employed every possible means to pursue its interests in the Albanian territories. Nevertheless, during the short period of 1916–1918, it also carried out significant actions for the benefit of the Albanians, among which was the population registration in the majority of Albania. Regarding its contribution, representatives of the Albanian community in Romania expressed during this period that Austria-Hungary had done “more than expected” in terms of assisting the Albanians and ensuring the future Albanian state.<sup>49</sup> The Albanian national poet, publicist and Catholic priest Father Gjergj Fishta wrote that if the Albanian ideal was the organization of the Albanian nation based on the principles of Western European culture, then Austria-

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<sup>47</sup> F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> F. Seiner, *Ergebnisse der Volkszählung in Albanien in dem von den österr-ungar. Truppen 1916-1918 besetzten Gebiete*, p. 8; F. Seiner, *Numrim i parë i popullsis në Shqypni*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>49</sup> *HHSIA, PA, A*, in *AIH*, Vj. 28-4-491, Memorandum of the representatives of the Albanian community in Romania, addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Vienna, Bucharest, 26 February 1918.

Hungary was the power that worked during the years of the First World War to realize this aspiration. He added that “it [Austria-Hungary] has worked so much to bring this ideal to fruition that we have no reason to expect more from it”.<sup>50</sup>

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GAZMEND RIZAJ

## HASAN RIZA PASHA AND THE DEFENCE OF SHKODRA 1912–1913

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to highlight the role of Hasan Riza Pasha in the defence of Shkodra during the First Balkan War. During the siege of Shkodra, Hasan Riza Pasha demonstrated outstanding qualities as both a strategist and a commander. In this paper, we will present Hasan Riza Pasha's professional advancement in the Ottoman state, the origins of this historical figure, and other aspects of his biography and personality. In addition, we will present the military and strategic dimension of the siege and the successful defence of Shkodra under the command of Hasan Riza Pasha. Finally, the paper will address the diplomatic struggle for Shkodra, which unfolded until the assassination of Hasan Riza Pasha.

**Key words:** Hasan Riza Pasha, Shkodra, Ottoman Empire, Montenegro, First Balkan War.

### **Professional advancement of Hasan Riza Pasha in the Ottoman Empire**

Albanian historiography has not devoted sufficient attention to the personality and role of Hasan Riza Pasha in the defence of Shkodra during 1912–1913; consequently, to this day, we still do not have a dedicated publication on his life and activity. Hasan Riza Pasha's personality and role were not the subject of a specific study, not only in

Albanian historiography, but also in Turkish and Montenegrin historiography. This has prompted us, through the available historical sources, both published and unpublished, to make, however modest, a contribution to elucidating certain aspects of Hasan Riza Pasha's personality and his role in the defence of Shkodra. In Balkan historiography, the figure of this Ottoman army officer is mentioned chiefly in the context of the First Balkan War and the defence of Shkodra. Nevertheless, the biographical notes provided by the Turkish authors Nafiz and Kirametin in *The Balkan War and the Siege of Shkodra 1912–1913*,<sup>1</sup> to some extent, fill the historiographical gap regarding the personality of Hasan Riza Pasha. The aforementioned authors were senior Ottoman officers who served in Shkodra and were under Hasan Riza Pasha's direct command; therefore, their information is considered a primary source, although a degree of subjectivity cannot be ruled out.

Hasan Riza Pasha was born in 1871 (1287 A.H.). He originated from the kaza of Tosya in the vilayet of Kastamonu. His father, Namik Pasha, was the vali of Baghdad. From an early age, Hasan Riza Pasha displayed an ambition for a military profession; accordingly, he enrolled in the military lower secondary school (rüşdiye; *Mekâtib-iRüşdiyye*) in Beşiktaş (Istanbul). He then continued his studies at the military upper secondary school (idadiye; *Mekteb-i'l'dâdi'ye*) in the city of Bursa, which he likewise completed with high success. At the age of twenty-one, he obtained the rank of infantry lieutenant, and three years later the rank of captain. His talent led an instructor at the War Staff School to take the ambitious Hasan as an assistant. In 1897, during the Ottoman–Greek War, he was appointed to the Army Headquarters at Alasonya. Owing to his demonstrated results, Hasan was sent to Germany for military specialization. He was assigned to the city of Mec (Metz), where the XVI Army Corps was stationed under the command

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<sup>1</sup> Ferik Abdurrahman Nafiz & Mirliva Kiramettin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde İşkodra Mudafaası*, Cilt 1-2, (İstanbul: Askeri İstanbul Matbaa, 1933).

of General Gottlieb von Haeseler. There, Hasan was appointed second lieutenant in one of the infantry regiments. After a year and a half of service in the infantry, he transferred to a cavalry artillery regiment, likewise in Mec. Having earned the admiration of General Haeseler, he continued his service in the regiment of cavalry officers and later in the headquarters of a division in Metz. From there, together with several Ottoman colleagues, he was sent to the General Staff's General Bureau in Berlin. For one year, he served in various sections of the German High Command, where he learned much about the art of war. At the same time, he attended instruction at the War Academy (*Kriegsakademie*), where he also followed the final courses and sat the relevant examinations. He continued his studies in Thuringia, Germany.<sup>2</sup>

After serving four years in the German army, Hasan Rıza Pasha returned to Istanbul in April 1903 with the rank of colonel, which he had earned on 11 December 1901 while in Germany. On 8 April 1903, he was appointed to the General Staff of the Ottoman Empire, and on 6 August 1903, he attained the rank of *mirliva* (brigadier general). On 31 January 1904, he was appointed as an instructor at the War Staff School; in September of that year, he was appointed a member of the Military Inspectorate. On 10 December 1906, he was promoted to the rank of *ferik* (major-general). At the beginning of the Young Turk Revolution (1908), Hasan Rıza Pasha was appointed commander of the Second Army in Edirne. However, under the Law on Purge in the Army, on 19 August 1909, Hasan Rıza Pasha—like many others—was reduced to the rank of *kaymakam* (lieutenant-colonel). On 4 November 1909, he was appointed to Branch III of the General War Staff of the Sixth Army, and when Nazım Pasha was appointed commander of that army, they went together to Baghdad.<sup>3</sup> On 22 June, Hasan Rıza Pasha was

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 359-360.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; The National Archives of the UK, London: Foreign Office (in edition: TNA:FO), 424/234, 3822, No. 820, Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey – (Received October 28.), Constantinople, October 24, 1912. Enclosure: Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrrell

appointed to the command of the 11th Division of the regular army in Baghdad. With the reorganization of the Sixth Army, it took the name “Army Inspectorate”, and Hasan Riza Pasha was chosen to head the military staff of this Inspectorate. However, before a year had elapsed—namely, on 21 April 1911—Hasan Riza Pasha, for unknown reasons, resigned from the headship of the said Inspectorate and returned to Istanbul. From 31 May 1911, he worked as an official of the Commission for the Links of the Black Sea with the Straits of the Mediterranean, that is, with Thessaloniki and Izmir. In the summer of 1911, at the outbreak of the Albanian uprising in Malësia e Madhe, Hasan Riza Pasha was appointed head of the Military Staff in Shkodra under the command of the divisional general Abdullah Pasha. Yet again, for unknown reasons, he resigned from this post on 19 July and was appointed commander of the 24th Division of the Shkodra army.<sup>4</sup> Since the authors Nafiz and Kirametin do not explain why Hasan Riza Pasha resigned from the headship of the Military Staff in Shkodra, we are left only to speculate that the reasons for this act may have been disagreements with Abdullah Pasha over the highlanders' uprising. The very appointment of Hasan Riza Pasha as commander of the 24th Division of Shkodra after the resignation in question is a fact that leads us to believe that the highest military circles of the Ottoman Empire desired Hasan Riza Pasha's presence in Albania. This supposition appears to be supported by the fact that on 16 March 1912, Hasan Riza Pasha was entrusted with the administration of Shkodra, while on 27 March 1912, after the vali of Shkodra had resigned, he was appointed vali of the Vilayet of Shkodra.<sup>5</sup>

Concerning Hasan Riza Pasha's appointment as vali and military commander of Shkodra, A. Herbert offers the following interpretation:

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to Sir G. Lowthert, Constantinople, October 22, 1912. Tyrrell, in his report, highlights: “He was for a long time chief of the staff in Adrianople, where, under the old régime, he had the rank of ferik, and was afterward Nazim Pasha's chief of the staff at Bagdad.”

<sup>4</sup> Nafiz & Kirametin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde*, 361-162

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

A commission under Hadji Adil Bey, accompanied by Mr. Robert Graves, went through Albania with a view to abolishing the grievances that were causing a ferment there. At Scutari, Hadji Adil appointed Hussein [Hasan] Riza Bey as Vali and Military Commandant of the city, which he soon began to fortify. The mission was more than once under fire in the course of its journey, and it failed to achieve success.<sup>6</sup>

In reality, this Commission—under the pretext of preparing reforms in accordance with the needs of the Ottoman administration and the local population—had as its primary aim the strengthening of the administration and the gendarmerie, but above all the conduct of an electoral campaign in favor of the Young Turks, as well as the distancing of Albanians from insurgent movements against Istanbul.<sup>7</sup> It was clear that the Sublime Porte was already aware of preparations for a major Albanian uprising, at a time highly critical for the Sublime Porte, since the outbreak of war with the Balkan Alliance was expected at any time.

The dispatch of Hasan Riza Pasha to Shkodra at the time of the outbreak of the Albanian uprising of 1911, as well as his subsequent appointments to the Military Staff in Shkodra, then as commander of the Shkodra Division, and finally as administrator of the Vilayet of Shkodra, were certainly not accidental. However, before we move to the reasons for this rapid advancement to leadership posts, we shall first pause briefly on the question of Hasan Riza Pasha's origin and the distinctive features of his personality.

### **Perspectives on the Origins and Personality of Hasan Riza Pasha**

Notes on the origins—respectively, the national affiliation—of Hasan Riza Pasha and his family are quite limited. The Turkish authors

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<sup>6</sup> Aubrey Herbert, *Ben Kendim: A Record of Eastern Travel* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1924), 159-160.

<sup>7</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, II, 319.

Nafiz and Kirametin do not address this topic at all, except to emphasise that he “originated from the kaza of Tosya in the vilayet of Kastamonu” and that “his father, Namik Pasha, was the vali of Baghdad.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, other Turkish historians writing about Hasan Riza Pasha do not address this issue. The first text to relativise Hasan Riza Pasha’s Turkish origin was by the British writer Mary Edith Durham, who, in her work *Thirty Years of Balkan Tangle*, provides a brief note which, to some extent, unsettles Hasan Riza Pasha’s fully “Turkish” affiliation. Thus, within Chapter XIX (“The Year 1912—The First Signs of the Storm”), she notes, among other things, that Hasan Riza Pasha “on his mother’s side had Albanian blood”.<sup>9</sup> Durham does not indicate where she obtained this information, yet there are indications—albeit indirect—that could substantiate such a note. Below, we highlight these reasons:

- Durham possessed an excellent knowledge of Albanian and Balkan circumstances in the period in question and, as a traveler and direct witness to many events in Albania, she had countless contacts with inhabitants across all regions she visited, from whom she gathered highly valuable information on Albanian history and culture.
- There are indications that the Sublime Porte did not send Hasan Riza Pasha to Shkodra solely because of his professional abilities; the reasons may have been deeper. In 1911, when the uprising of Malësia e Madhe broke out in Albania amid political demands for Albania’s territorial–administrative autonomy, and when the insurgents liberated Tuzi and reached the vicinity of Koplik, the danger of Shkodra falling into their hands was evident. Therefore, the Young Turk government required a figure such as Hasan Riza Pasha; perhaps, in the eyes of the Ottoman army’s leaders, this ambitious officer possessed

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 359.

<sup>9</sup> M. Edith Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle* (London: George Allen & Unwill LTD, 1920), 237.

something beyond professional competence. This, moreover, was an established practice of the Ottoman Empire: in provinces affected by unrest, to send individuals suited to the local population.

- Hasan Rıza Pasha's rapid identification with the city and inhabitants of Shkodra, as well as his plan in January 1913 to withdraw the Ottoman garrison from Shkodra to leave this town to the Albanians rather than to the Montenegrins, likewise leads us to suppose that "Albanian blood on his mother's side" may have influenced his stance and actions.
- Finally, it should be emphasised that I personally obtained a piece of information from a chance meeting with Prof. Dr. Hajrullah Koliqi, my colleague at the Faculty of Philosophy in Prishtina, who—being originally from Kraja and an excellent connoisseur of the history and traditions of those Albanian regions—told me that "the Albanian population of Shkodra and the Malësia of Shkodra to this day remembers Hasan Rıza Pasha with admiration and as one of their own", that is, not as a stranger.

Naturally, the above observations concerning Hasan Rıza Pasha's origins belong more to the sphere of supposition than to a scholarly argument grounded in primary sources and corroborated by other comparative sources. In any case, whether or not Albanian blood ran in Hasan Rıza Pasha's veins, he was first and foremost an officer and an official of the Ottoman Empire, to which he had sworn loyalty; therefore, he served it honourably, with professionalism and Prussian discipline, until his death. Yet it is also a fact that Hasan Rıza Pasha was bound to Shkodra and Albania by something even stronger than the military duty itself. This—as we shall see later—is also confirmed by the appeal Hasan Rıza Pasha addressed to the Command of the Western Army through an encrypted dispatch (military report) dated 27 December 1912, in which, among other things, he assumes the right to

call “in the name of Arnautluk and Osmanlilik”, demanding the casting off of weaknesses in the highest ranks of the Ottoman army.<sup>10</sup> This was, therefore, an appeal to save Albania from the hegemonic aims of its neighbours and to save the Ottoman Empire from complete collapse.

Information on Hasan Riza Pasha’s personality certainly helps us to form a clearer picture of the man who fought for the defence of Shkodra not merely as a soldier executing orders from above, but also as someone who, through his conduct, demonstrated the integrity of his character and, above all, a correct stance towards the Albanian cause.

During the siege of Shkodra, the authors Nafiz and Kiramettin were members of the staff of the 24th Division and, as close collaborators of Hasan Riza Pasha, had the opportunity to observe his character firsthand through various situations. Thus, in their work *The Balkan War and the Siege of Shkodra 1912–1913*, Nafiz and Kiramettin devote particular attention to Hasan Riza Pasha’s personality; accordingly, at the outset, we shall extract in concise form only those parts that speak of the biography and the personal traits of Shkodra’s commander.

Hasan Riza Pasha was brave—one of those courageous men who astonish. He spoke openly about the bravery and courage of others, as well as their mistakes and shortcomings. [...] Hasan Riza Pasha spent his free time in conversation; he greatly enjoyed long discussions. He was devout and believed in predestination [...] In battle, he was courageous, yet also rigorous in inspecting the combat zone. Those who saw him have attested to this [...] Near his own barrack, he would bring up the batteries and fire artillery against the enemy gunner facing him. The enemy’s fixed position was struck with 12 cm and 15 cm shells. The enemy’s artillery, soldiers, and officers were constantly kept under the fire of his batteries. Standing at the head of the batteries, he watched the scene of battle with relish. At times, he would watch the fire his guns delivered for hours. One day, when he was visited by the standard-bearer of Postriba, Adem Haxhiu, this Albanian standard-bearer was astonished by Hasan Riza Pasha’s bravery and courage during the

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<sup>10</sup> Nafiz & Kiramettin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde*, 349.

artillery duel. Hasan Rıza Pasha was very serious and rigorous. In private life, he loved humour, but if conversation lacked meaning, he immediately changed his tone and manner. With precision, he checked whether his orders were being carried out. Negligence and mistakes he did not forgive under any circumstances. In this respect, punishments were immediate and severe. He used to say: "In our country, if one does not adhere to orders, nothing is accomplished." The aforementioned was very clear in speech and in manner of treatment. He spoke frankly to everyone's face. Those who did not know him would be angered by this attitude. In this respect, in his heart, there was not a single point of secrecy. If someone spoke against another person to him, he would later confront them. Therefore, there was no gossip. He acted in this manner without exception and with determination. [...] In peacetime, Hasan Rıza Pasha would be in one sector in the morning and in another in the afternoon. In this way, he inspected the training in the sectors. In the sectors, he personally carried out certain procedures. He issued orders and sent assistance to the Division's War Staff. He opened no document or letter, nor did he concern himself with them. The document, unopened, was sent to the Division and opened there. Those that were dedicated were given to the addressees, whereas documents pertaining to the vilayet were handed to the *mektubçu* [the vilayet secretary]. These documents were examined by the Division's War Staff and the Vilayet Secretariat, while those requiring signature were separated out. Hasan Rıza Pasha spent most nights at his own house. Those who wished to see him had to announce their visit to his house in the evening beforehand. [...] He knew all the *çavuş-es* [sergeants] personally and by name. [...] He knew who was burdened by whom. He spoke with soldiers about the letters they had received; some read them to him, and then he advised them. He gathered information about their hometowns. He thus gained the trust and admiration of all military personnel. The Black soldiers brought from Aydın, Muğla, and the coastal regions were assigned to sharpshooter detachments. [...] In the barracks, for Jewish soldiers, Hasan Rıza Pasha set aside a room which he turned into a synagogue. On Saturdays, all the Jews gathered there and prayed. After much searching, a man was found who built them a synagogue. Orthodox soldiers were sent on Sundays to the Orthodox church. Hasan

Riza Pasha maintained a correct attitude towards soldiers. Of the young soldiers who went into the town on leave and were well dressed, he would say: "Seeing these so clean gives me pleasure as if they were my sons." In wartime [during the siege of Shkodra], Hasan Riza Pasha visited the hospital of the wounded every day. After completing the hospital inspection procedure, he visited the wounded. He stayed beside soldiers whom he knew personally. He listened attentively to the events of the battle they had experienced. He sat on their beds, ordered coffee for himself and for the wounded. He gave the soldiers cigarettes, and together they smoked and conversed. For the sick, he ensured that, outside the hospital, whatever they wished to eat and drink was available; indeed, not infrequently, he prepared these himself at home and brought them to the hospital. Soldiers, as soon as they left the hospital, went willingly to their sector. Many soldiers fought even after five successive wounds. In the room of wounded officers, he stayed for a long time, discussing with them. During fighting, when he noticed the bravery shown by lieutenants, he would go to their rooms or tents to express his admiration, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee together. Hasan Riza Pasha had a particular ability to remember soldiers' names and their places of origin with precision. He had a strong memory for retaining all the personal details of his soldiers. He also knew the names of the detachment commanders. [...] He gave officers professional books so that they might instruct their soldiers in the art of war, and he obliged them to read them. He said: "The greatest success of an army is that it be supervised; that it be trained; that in every respect it be made a faultless team; that the detachment becomes a body. If this is not achieved, then the division and the corps are of no value, for they are composed simply of these small units. Precisely here lies our mistake: that we do not recognise these phenomena."<sup>11</sup>

British diplomats likewise held Hasan Riza Pasha's personality in high regard. In a report by the military attaché (Lieutenant-Colonel) Tyrrell, among other things, it is emphasized: "The commander of the 24th division, Hassan Riza Bey, has the reputation of being one of the

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 362-365.

very best and most capable soldiers in the Turkish army. Though I have never met him personally, he is most highly thought of by Englishmen who have done so.”<sup>12</sup>

From these data—however modest they may appear—it is not difficult to conclude that Hasan Rıza Pasha was an uncommon personality, particularly in the circumstances of the time, when the Ottoman army—especially its highest military circles—had been gripped by an unstoppable degradation, a problem also emphasised in Turkish historiography. Hasan Rıza Pasha, as we observed, continually appealed for military discipline and for proper professional preparation; however, his appeals and advice could have had no practical effect at a time when it was already too late for such a restoration.

### **Outbreak of the First Balkan War and Montenegro’s Aims toward Albanian Lands**

On 8 October 1912, Montenegro—the first of the Balkan allies—declared war on the Ottoman Empire, thereby initiating the First Balkan War. Montenegro’s accession to the Balkan alliance had, as its principal objective, territorial expansion, primarily at the expense of Albanian lands. Montenegro’s expansionist ambitions with respect to the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, Northern Albania, the basin of Lake Shkodra, including the city of Shkodra, and a portion of the Vilayet of Kosovo (Dukagjini Plain), had been openly articulated since the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> On the eve of the First Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire had been militarily exhausted by the Albanian uprisings of 1909–1912, and thus found itself considerably weakened for a major war against the Balkan Alliance.

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<sup>12</sup> TNA:FO, 424/234, 3822, No. 820, Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey – (Received October 28.), Constantinople, October 24, 1912. Enclosure: Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrrell to Sir G. Lowther, Constantinople, October 22, 1912.

<sup>13</sup> Branko Babić, *Politika Crne Gore u novooslobođenim krajevima 1912-1914* (Beograd, 1984), 20.

Small Montenegro, counting on the military support of its allies and the diplomatic support of Russia, gained the confidence to be the first to declare war on an empire which, only a century earlier, had struck fear into many of Europe's great powers. The Montenegrin Government's initial objective was the seizure of Shkodra, while its ultimate objective was the "liberation" of Prizren—namely, the occupation of territories belonging to the Vilayet of Kosovo. Moreover, King Nikola of Montenegro intended to make Shkodra the capital of Montenegro and to exploit its environs as fertile agricultural land.<sup>14</sup> King Nikola was not deterred by the fact that Shkodra and its surroundings were entirely Albanian territory, inhabited by an autochthonous population since prehistory. Although we shall not dwell at length on the evolution of Montenegro's territorial claims and their justification before foreign diplomacies, we should nevertheless note a point of particular interest. Thus, with respect to the Montenegrin Government's insistent demand that Shkodra should belong to Montenegro, Russian diplomacy—despite supporting the expansionist claims of the Balkan allies—took a different view regarding Montenegro's claim to Shkodra. In fact, even before the war began, St Petersburg had advised the Montenegrin Government to abandon such a claim.<sup>15</sup> Among other things, the following is stated in the official communiqué published in the Russian press on 11 April 1913, by which the Russian Government informed its public opinion about developments concerning Shkodra:

Not many of the people who have been demanding these last few days, a solution of the Scutari question by drastic action on the part of the Government, have any clear idea what is the significance of this town and the strife that has arisen regarding it. In reality, Scutari is a purely Albanian town, and the residence of a Catholic archbishop with Catholic

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<sup>14</sup> *Prvi Balkanski Rat 1912-1913*, Prva knjiga (Beograd: Istorijski Institut JNA, 1959), 52.

<sup>15</sup> TNA: FO, 424/244, 4200, No. 338, Sir G. Buchanan to Sir Edward Grey, St. Petersburg, April 11, 1913. Enclosure: *Official Communiqué issued to the Russian Press* on April 11.

institutions. More than a year ago, when the events which have now developed were not foreshadowed, the Russian vice-consul at Scutari, Miller, who is now doing his duty in a self-sacrificing manner in the besieged town, informed the Imperial Ministry [of Russia] that, in his opinion, the desire of Montenegro to conquer this territory, inhabited by an entirely Albanian and Catholic population, should not be supported by us. For Montenegro plays, in spite of her small population, wrote Mr. Miller, a very important rôle among the Balkan States. This importance is entirely due to its fighting strength and to the national unity and moral characteristics of the Montenegrin people. The assimilation of people of foreign race and religion would exceed the power of Montenegro. In 35 years, the Montenegrins have not been able to assimilate the few thousand Catholic and Mahommedan Albanians who went over into their territory after the war of 1877-1878. The Mahommedan population of Dulcigno, for example, have continued up to quite recent years to migrate to Scutari. Also, in the spheres of trade and industry, the Montenegrins are behind their new subjects, such as the Albanians of Podgoritza. Thus, event if in its struggle towards the south, Montenegro should succeed in annexing a part of a sanjak of Scutari, this would not only bring no great advantage, but even be a real weakness for her, seeing that thereby hundreds of thousands of men alien to the Montenegrins in faith, blood, and language, would be mingled with them, people who would never imbibe Montenegrin ideals, traditions, or spirit. Even if a considerable number of these new subjects were not soon to turn against the Montenegrins, Montenegro would lose her identity and be transformed into a Montenegrin Albania.<sup>16</sup>

Since the lake separated Shkodra from Montenegro, the Montenegrin General Staff decided that all Montenegrin forces would be divided into two major operational groups: (1) the Land Army, with two brigades—Central and Eastern; and (2) the Coastal Army—the Southern Brigade. The Montenegrin army disposed of forces as follows:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

1. The Southern (Coastal) Brigade with 8,000 soldiers (15 battalions), under the command of General Martinović, and with the main part of the Montenegrin artillery at Virpazar and Bar (Tivar) (34 guns);
2. The Central (Zeta) Brigade with 13,000 soldiers (21 battalions), under the command of Prince Danilo at Podgorica; and
3. The Eastern Brigade (Auxiliary troops) with 10,000 soldiers, under the command of General Vukotić at Andrijevica.<sup>17</sup>

The Central and Southern Brigades were to advance in two operational groups, the first from Podgorica and the second from Bar (Tivar), both in the direction of Shkodra. The Eastern Brigade was to secure the rear to protect Montenegro's northern borders and, as a secondary objective, conduct an offensive into the Sanjak and the Dukagjin Plain.<sup>18</sup> The plan, therefore, was for Prince Danilo and General Martinović to converge on Shkodra, to capture the fortress by a rapid assault—difficulties were not anticipated—and then to march on Prizren, which was likewise Vukotić's objective.<sup>19</sup> In this connection, it should also be noted that the Albanian highlanders of the Shkodra region participated actively; as will be seen below, enticed by the Montenegrin king's promises, they assisted to a considerable degree in advancing Montenegrin brigades as far as Shkodra.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J. Swire, *Albania: The rise of a Kingdom*, London, 1929, 139; Babić, *Politika Crne Gore*, 23; B. Ratković, M. Đurišić, S. Skoko, *Srbijai Crna Gora u balkanskim ratovima 1912-1913* (Beograd, 1972), 176.

<sup>18</sup> Babić, *Politika Crne Gore*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 39.

<sup>20</sup> When the Montenegrin army began its march toward Albanian lands, the Albanian Catholic highlanders, swayed by Montenegrin promises, continued their struggle against the Ottoman army alongside the Montenegrin forces. The Montenegrin government skillfully exploited the highlanders' centuries-old hatred of Ottoman rule; however, they cooperated with the Montenegrins not to facilitate the realization of Montenegro's annexationist plans, but to achieve their own national freedom. Nevertheless, in light of those plans, the highlanders' cooperation with the Montenegrins constituted a danger to

The outbreak of war did not find Shkodra unprepared. Hasan Rıza Pasha, commander of the Shkodra garrison, had, in good time, organised field fortifications and wire obstacles to strengthen its outdated defensive system. The artillery was inadequate, as Shkodra possessed around 70 guns with 12 cm shells. The defensive perimeter was approximately 45 kilometres.<sup>21</sup> Under normal circumstances, the XXIV Division of the Ottoman army was stationed at Shkodra. When the war broke out, Nazım Pasha also sent a reserve division to Shkodra. Many Albanian volunteers likewise joined. Hasan Rıza Pasha's forces were reinforced by the VI Corps of the army.<sup>22</sup> The XXIV Division under Hasan Rıza Pasha comprised approximately 14,000 soldiers; moreover, Esat Pasha Toptani joined him, arriving in Shkodra on 5 October at the head of about 3,000 redifs (*redif*—reserve force).<sup>23</sup> British sources provide, in parallel, two reports on Toptani's march to Shkodra. The first comes from the report of Consul-General Lamb, with the following description:

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the National Movement in the Vilayet of Shkodra. For this reason, such cooperation alarmed Albanian patriotic circles and the Austro-Hungarian government, which perceived Albanian–Montenegrin collaboration as a threat to its own designs in Albania. Thus, efforts to detach the highlanders from cooperation with Montenegro brought together both Albanian patriots and Austro-Hungarian diplomatic representatives. In this regard, the country's most advanced patriotic organization, the "Black Society for Salvation," played a particularly active role; at its meeting of 14 October 1912, alongside other tasks, it decided to appoint a delegation to detach Malësia e Madhe from Montenegro. However, the rapid advance of the Montenegrin armies rendered the fulfilment of this task impossible. [Stefanaq Pollo, *Në gjurmë të historisë shqiptare*, I, (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë dhe Institutit Historisë, 1990), 302-304].

<sup>21</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 138-139.

<sup>22</sup> Aram Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi Tarihi 1913* (İstanbul: Sander Yayınları, 1975), 264; Fahri Balen, *20 nci Yuzyilda Osmanlı Devleti* (İstanbul: "Remzi Kitaberi, 1973), 168.

<sup>23</sup> TNA: FO, 424/234, 3822, No.805 - Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey (received, October 28), Constantinople, October 21, 1912. Enclosure: Consul General Lamb to Sir G. Lowther-it, Salonica, October 17, 1912.

Essad Pasha Topdani [Esad Pasha Toptani] had succeeded in reaching Scutari [Shkodra] at the head of a force of about 3,000 men, composed of the redifs of Tiranna and Durazzo [Durrës], together with one battalion of nizams [*Nizam-i Cedid*, regular army] from Monastir [Manastir-Bitola]. According to Mr. Summa's information, considerable difficulty had been experienced in inducing these redif battalions, composed in any case almost entirely of men without any previous training or military discipline, to respond to the call to arms. So long, indeed, as it was thought that they were to be employed merely against the Catholic Malissors [Albanian mountaineers], they positively refused to move, and it was only on being assured that the real object of the mobilisation was the imminence of war with Montenegro that they consented to be enrolled. As it was, however, Essad Pasha experienced considerable difficulty in reaching Scutari, his passage of the River Mat having been opposed by the Malissors established in Bregmatia [Bregu i Matit], supported by a contingent of 200 or 300 Mirdites under the leadership of NnuDjioni [Ndue Gjoni], brother of the acting chief, and two of his nephews, named Dod [Dodë] and Prenk Lesh Djioni [Llesh Gjoni]. He [Esad Pasha] was compelled to bring up his artillery, and the passage of the river was not affected without considerable loss on either side. As a consequence of this resistance, the Catholic Church of Bregmatia [Bregu i Matit], together with the houses of some of the more well-to-do Christians of that region, is said to have been pillaged and burned by the Mussulman redifs, who offered their plunder openly for sale in the bazaars of Alessio and Scutari. According to Mr. Summa, the consequence of Essad Pasha's conduct in this matter will be a great loss of the personal prestige which he hitherto held amongst his Albanian fellow-countrymen, who now coming to regard him as a sold to the Turks.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, the second report came through the account of the military attaché Tyrrell, with the following description:

On the 10th September, Dechich was attacked by the Albanians of the Gruda clan. The garrison apparently could not be relieved from Scutari, which was itself in a state of chronic siege, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> [September], it was reported to be hard pressed, though it finally only fell shortly before

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

the Montenegrins captured Tuzi. On the 17<sup>th</sup> September 3,000 ihtiyats[reserves units] from Durrazo were called out to reinforce Scutari, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> all classes of redifs were embodied. At the same time the command of the troops at Tirana was conferred on Essad Pasha Topdan [Esat Pashë Toptani], the well-known Albanian deputy, who is a man of great local influence. On the other side, Prishtina and Mitrovitzaredifs were called out to complete nizam units, but the Prishtina men declined to come out if it was to fight against the Malissors. Essad Pasha started from Durazzo on the 24<sup>th</sup> September with four nizam battalions (II/50, I/51, II and III/54) and a machine-gun company, four redif battalions (Durrazo, Kavaya, Tirana, and Kroya), and two battalions of volunteers, but some delay was caused by the attitude of the Mirdites, through a part of the whose country the road from Durazzo to Scutari runs. They offered to let Essad Pasha through, but would not allow his troops to go with him. However, this obstacle appears to have been surmounted, whether forcibly or otherwise there is no news, for the above force is reported to have reached Scutari on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October.<sup>25</sup>

Still, according to Tyrrell, the deployment of the Ottoman army in Albania on 10 October 1912 was as follows:

- In Lezha and Shëngjin: 2 nizam battalions and a machine-gun detachment;
- In Kruja: 1 nizam battalion and 3 redif battalions;
- In Elbasan: 1 nizam battalion and 3 redif battalions;
- In Tirana: 2 nizam battalions and 1 redif battalion;
- In Durrës: 2 redif battalions;
- In Mirdita: 3 nizam battalions and a machine-gun detachment, as well as a rapid-firing mountain battery;
- In Shkodra: 8 nizam battalions and 8 redif battalions (it is assumed that 4 local redif battalions had also been attached);
- Around Tuzi: 6 nizam battalions and a rapid-firing mountain battery.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> TNA: FO, 424/234, 3822, No. 820. Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey (received, October 28), Constantinople, October 24, 1912. Enclosure: Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrrell to Sir G. Lowther, Constantinople, October 22, 1912.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



MAP: Deployment of the Ottoman army in the Shkodra region.

Tyrrell, in the same report, also gives this note on Shkodra: “There is in Scutari a squadron of the 6th cavalry regiment, which was sent from Monastir, and a battery of the 12-centim. Howitzers. [...] there are also three battalions of fortress artillery. The place is said to be very strongly fortified, with a well-chosen perimeter of about 25 kilometers. In extent, and an armament of about seventy heavy guns.”

Shkodra's military defenses are described in considerable detail by Aram Andonyan, an Ottoman journalist (of Armenian origin) and war correspondent from besieged Shkodra. Among other things, he wrote:

At the time war was declared, the Shkodra garrison had 15,000 soldiers. Within this army, there were also nizam troops from Istanbul and Albanian bashi-bazouks ([*başıbozuk*- irregular troops], as well as redifs from Asia and Black soldiers from Africa; thus, the army included representatives from all the countries of the East. In reality, the nizam army had 6,000 soldiers. Most of them were Albanian volunteers. Later, during the war, the number of defenders of Shkodra would rise to 20,000 men. They were commanded by two energetic commanders, Hasan Rıza Pasha and Esat Pasha Toptani. Very soon, this force would become an excellent defensive force. [...] The city's natural position is magnificent for defence and extremely difficult to besiege, as it is surrounded by hills. The town itself has no particular strategic value, but the hill of Tarabosh, together with Little Tarabosh, dominates the environs of Shkodra and its marshes, as well as fortified places such as Kraja, Shiroka, Oblika, Gorica, Bërdica, Bardhanjori, Golemi, Boksi, etc. Under the supervision of the Austrian general von der Goltz, Tarabosh was fortified for two consecutive years and equipped with the most modern armaments. It has 60 siege guns, approximately 100 machine-guns, and ample ammunition. It is not known how many fortified works and wire obstacles existed on Tarabosh. All fortifications were built flush with the ground; therefore, the enemy can see nothing. The enemy is obliged to fire largely by guesswork, while wasting shells and bullets to no effect. Thus, Shkodra is in truth a fortress-city. To encircle and take this entire fortified system requires a large army, a great number of powerful guns and abundant ammunition, and—above all—the courage to undertake bloody assaults and to sacrifice men in large numbers. Montenegro can meet only a small part of these conditions.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 290.

The Serbian socialist Dimitrije Tucović, who took part in the First Balkan War as a reserve officer in the Serbian army, openly opposed in his writings Serbian and Montenegrin claims to the Albanian coast and to Shkodra. He described the fortification of Shkodra in these words:

Shkodra's fortifications are of the most modern type, because Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) made particular efforts to ensure that Shkodra—as a distinguished outpost at the Empire's most extreme and highly important point—was fortified as well as possible. The trenches are concealed underground and constructed of concrete. From the outside, nothing is visible, not even with the best field-glasses; and when the war begins, one does not know from where the fire is coming. The attacker's advance is obstructed by several rings of obstacles, especially ambush positions, to which water can be released, as well as barbed wire fixed to iron posts set into cement foundations; these have now become fortifications for defence not only by the fire of infantry concealed in trenches, but also by numerous guns, especially the fortress guns of large calibre.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Beginning of Montenegro's Campaign against Shkodra**

The campaign against Shkodra began on 9 October 1912, launched by the Central Army (of Zeta). To break through to Shkodra, it was necessary first to seize the Ottoman fortifications as far as Tuzi.<sup>29</sup> The first locality taken by the Montenegrins was Planinca. The following day, General Lazarević advanced towards Dečići.<sup>30</sup> After a swift and forceful assault by Albanian highlanders from Gruda, supported by Montenegrin artillery fire, Dečići fell on 10 October. News of Dečići's fall caused great enthusiasm among the Montenegrins, as it was the first important point on the route to Shkodra. At Dečići, the Montenegrins captured four Ottoman guns. The

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<sup>28</sup> Dimitrije Tucović, *Sërbija dhe Shqipëria* (Prishtinë, 1946), 101-102.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

next day, General Lazarević also took Rogomin, a fortification near Dečići.<sup>31</sup> By 15 October, Vrana, Shefshenik, Tuz, and Nënhelm had also fallen into Montenegrin hands. The road to Shkodra was opened. Hasan Riza Pasha described the rapid advance of the Montenegrin detachments in a telegram of 13 October 1912, in these words:

On 10 October, the Montenegrins approached the border zones of Tuzi and Kraja. Together with the highlanders, in addition to Tuzi they also captured Dečići, Planinca, and Rogom. The defensive forces of Tuzi abandoned the fortress of Shefshenik and the hills of Vranja and Nënhelm. Tuzi fell [14 October]. Tuzi might have been saved if the Montenegrins had been attacked from Gusinje. Catholic highlanders, together with the Montenegrins, completely burned the Muslim villages of Koplík and Zagora. At Tarabosh, the Montenegrins lost 100 men [...] Highlanders of the Buna region became active against the Ottoman army. The Mirdita also cooperated with the Montenegrins. [...] In Shkodra, out of four reserve battalions, 400 men deserted.<sup>32</sup>

Despite these initial successes, the Montenegrin army's advance was slow and, as the British historian J. Swire observes, "indeed it is doubtful whether there would have been any advance had it not been for the assistance of the Albanian tribesman."<sup>33</sup> British military and diplomatic reports likewise confirm this observation. These reports are dominated by the view that the Albanians greatly facilitated the Montenegrins' advance towards Shkodra.<sup>34</sup> M. E. Durham held the same view. This witness of the siege of Shkodra, among other things, expresses her conviction that, given the military incompetence they

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<sup>31</sup> William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors 1801-1927*, (London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1936), 501; Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 190; Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 270.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 142.

<sup>34</sup> TNA: FO, 424/234, 3822, No. 820. Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey (received, October 28), Constantinople, October 24, 1912. Enclosure: Lieutenant-Colonel Tyrrell to Sir G. Lowther, Constantinople, October 22, 1912.

displayed, the Montenegrin army would have been unable either to approach Shkodra or to take Tuzi without the assistance of Albanian highlanders. These highlanders, first, in August 1912, compelled the Ottomans to evacuate a large number of border posts, thereby severing Tuzi from further reinforcements; and then, when war broke out, not only allowed the Montenegrin army to pass through their territories, but also made a very substantial contribution to the capture of Deçiçi.<sup>35</sup> Based on relevant data, J. Swire emphasises: "The Montenegrin Army was a badly trained, badly disciplined, and shockingly equipped militia. Commissariat and medical arrangements were negligible. The Montenegrins thought that the war would be a 'walk-over' for them and did not expect many casualties."<sup>36</sup> However, as it transpired, the Montenegrin army would be pinned for months before the walls of Shkodra and Tarabosh, without any significant advance.

Meanwhile, Martinović's army (the Southern—Coastal detachment) advanced without major resistance from Tivar and Virpazar, capturing the outer Ottoman positions, but then became bogged down along Shkodra's main defensive line.<sup>37</sup> Along this route, Martinović's army met strong resistance from combined Albanian—Ottoman forces in Kraja, specifically in the area of the village of Zogaj in Kraja.<sup>38</sup> The decisive clash took place on 11 October 1912, between the Montenegrin brigade of Rijeka—Leshanka and the Ottoman II Battalion of the 70th Regiment, to which Albanian volunteers had also been attached. This bloody battle unfolded in the Zogaj region, with heavy losses on both sides. Fighting continued until the evening of 11 October. The defending forces left 300 dead, together with the Ottoman commander-in-chief Sadedin Bey, and withdrew towards Tarabosh and Oblika. Abdurrahman Nafiz Bey was appointed commander of these

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<sup>35</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 244.

<sup>36</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 139.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>38</sup> Hajrullah Koliqi, *Kraja ndër mote* (Prishtinë: Lidhja e Historianëve Shqiptarë, 1993), 95-99.

forces.<sup>39</sup> In this battle, the Montenegrins had 600 soldiers killed and wounded, which meant that the Leshanka Battalion was reduced by half. It took several days for Martinović's army to consolidate its ranks before ordering renewed attacks on the positions of Tarabosh and Oblika.<sup>40</sup> However, Martinović's plan proved mistaken. The witness of the siege of Shkodra, A. Andonyan, describes the Montenegrin attack as follows:

During the night, a Montenegrin force of 100 soldiers suddenly attacked the hill. But the Ottomans were prepared. The Montenegrins attacked fiercely with guns and rifles, yet the powerful fire of the Tarabosh guns struck them hard. As soon as the bombardment began, General Martinović gave the order for his army to withdraw. However, it seems that his soldiers and officers did not hear this order, and under a hail of bullets and shells, they continued the attack. Thus, as a result of Ottoman artillery fire, the outcome for the Montenegrins was tragic. Of 1,000 attacking Montenegrins, only 100 returned. Of the 900, 300 were killed, and 600 were wounded. The Ottomans also captured a Montenegrin flag. These were the first Montenegrin victims before Tarabosh, but there they would suffer many more.<sup>41</sup>

The uncoordinated attacks of the Montenegrin army are also confirmed by Dom Ndoc Nikaj, an Albanian historian and contemporary of these events.<sup>42</sup> The Serbian historian Ž. G. Pavlović stated that "the fortifications of Tarabosh and Bardhanjor would later

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

Abdurrahman Nafiz Bey, one of the authors of the work "*1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde İşkodra Mudafaası.*"

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>41</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 292.

<sup>42</sup> Ndoc Nikaj, *Shkodra e rrethume* (Prishtinë: Rilindja, 1996), 128. "The fierce confrontation in front of the thick protective walls, which had been arranged with fine military knowledge by Hasan Riza, the commander of Shkodra, did not prove to be useless, and the Montenegrins saw how difficult it was to take the city by storm. The fortress was extremely strong, and not only did it take a long time to weaken it, but with such an army, there was little hope of a victory."

become a graveyard for the allies.” This author also notes that, for the defence of Shkodra, Bardhanjor, and Tarabosh, the Ottoman Empire relied heavily on the assistance of Albanian volunteers, who, according to him, “comprised about 12 battalions with 5 special detachments, with 10 machine-guns and 48 artillery pieces.”<sup>43</sup>

On 20 October, the Central Army (of Zeta) began bombarding Shkodra fortress, sparing not even the city’s civilian quarters.<sup>44</sup> Until 22 October, the Montenegrins bombarded Shkodra and Tarabosh intermittently, but achieved no advance. This was further hindered by snowfall, which began to cover the hills and fields. On the other hand, Shkodra’s artillery fire inflicted on the Montenegrins not only casualties, but also considerable material damage. Rijeka, Cetinje, and many surrounding villages began to fill with wounded Montenegrins.<sup>45</sup> In any case, the left wing of the Southern detachment captured Kraja and Shiroka, while the right wing captured Muriqan. Emboldened by this success, the Montenegrins began firing all their guns.<sup>46</sup> As the siege of Shkodra fortress tightened further, Martinović hoped that the Ottoman commander at Tarabosh would accept the surrender and therefore sent a delegation to him. Prince Danilo addressed Hasan Riza Pasha with the same proposal, but it was categorically refused, and the bombardment continued.<sup>47</sup> The left wing of the Southern detachment went over to the attack. Fighting continued throughout the night, and by morning, Ottoman troops were compelled to abandon their positions, as the left wing of Martinović’s army captured Gorica.<sup>48</sup> On 25 October, after strong resistance, Oblika, a position of great strategic importance, also surrendered.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 293.

<sup>45</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 231; Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 293.

<sup>46</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 293.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

How slow the Montenegrin advance was is also shown by the fact that they did not reach the Kir River before 25 October and did not cross it until three days later.<sup>50</sup> The Central Army, supported by the highlanders, succeeded on 27 October in capturing Boks. Boks was of extraordinary importance and, in Montenegrin hands, represented a major threat to Shkodra. Therefore, even before the Montenegrins had established themselves there, Hasan Rıza Pasha attempted to retake it by dispatching three military units and one Albanian bashi-bazoukunit, but they failed.<sup>51</sup>

The continuous bombardment of Shkodra—especially when, towards the end of October, the city's civilian areas began to be struck increasingly often—generated insecurity, dissatisfaction, and panic among the citizens of Shkodra. A portion of Shkodra's notables, disposed towards surrendering the city, sought to exploit this situation. Concerning this, A. Andonyan notes:

A portion of the city's notables secretly went outside Shkodra's walls and offered Prince Danilo surrender, on these conditions: that after the Montenegrin armies entered the city, they should not burn it; that they should refrain from crimes and looting; and that they should not take revenge on anyone. This offer, without a doubt, was part of a plot, since the defenders of the city opposed it [...] To prove the seriousness of the offer made by the notables, a white flag was raised at a high point of the fortress by a group of more than forty men. Hasan Rıza Pasha was immediately informed of this event. Since he was not a formalistic man, without hesitation, he turned the fortress guns towards the position where the white flag had been raised and bombarded it mercilessly. The fire continued until evening. The next day, the citizens of Shkodra were informed by the town crier that if another attempt were made to surrender Shkodra, all the guns of Tarabosh and Bërdica would be turned towards the city, and thus, before the Montenegrins even entered it, it would be destroyed.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 142.

<sup>51</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 294.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 294-295.

This threat by Hasan Riza Pasha should, in any case, be viewed in the context of the moment. It was directed at defeatist elements—first and foremost, the wavering city elite, some of whom had fled to Cetinje. But it was also an indirect message to the people of Shkodra, who, up to that point, had not shown signs of approving of the actions of that segment of the local notability. Bearing in mind Hasan Riza Pasha's character, it is difficult to believe that he would have undertaken such a step, namely, the bombardment of the city of Shkodra; rather, through this threat, he sought to prevent the influence of the defeatist propaganda of Shkodra's notables.

Maintaining order and morale among Shkodra's 30,000 inhabitants<sup>53</sup> was no small challenge for Hasan Riza Pasha himself, because, on the one hand, the city faced continuous bombardment, while, on the other, food shortages greatly complicated life in the besieged city. In fact, Shkodra still managed to preserve its connection with the outside world via the Adriatic route,<sup>54</sup> through which it was supplied with food and other goods, but these were scarce, only enough to keep people alive. Nevertheless, even under these complicated circumstances, Hasan Riza Pasha succeeded in maintaining order and morale in both the army and the citizens of Shkodra.

### **Hasan Riza Pasha's Refusal to Surrender**

King Nikola of Montenegro, calculating on elements within the walls of Shkodra who were disposed to surrender, as well as on the discontent of Shkodra's inhabitants caused by the shortage of food and other vital necessities, ordered a ceasefire on 28 October, raised the white flag, and sent a delegation to Hasan Riza Pasha, to whom King Nikola's demand was delivered in the following terms: "Your resistance is admirable, but futile. You will not be able to withstand

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<sup>53</sup> Diplomatic documents mainly estimated that Shkodra at that time had around 30,000 inhabitants.

<sup>54</sup> Compare the map within the framework of the work.

hunger and the cold. Better surrender. Your brothers in Kirkilise and in Kumanovo have surrendered.”<sup>55</sup> Hasan Riza Pasha, however, replied with these words: “In these fortresses I am master. So long as I am alive, Tarabosh will not be surrendered.”<sup>56</sup> The failure of the surrender talks greatly angered the Montenegrins; yet King Nikola did not insist, and even told his close collaborators that “if he were in his place, he would act in the same manner.”<sup>57</sup>

On 29 October, on the first day of the fighting at Myselim, after sending forward a prepared regiment, Hasan Riza Pasha went out near his own battery on the summit of Mount Pusu. The adjutant-major Abdurrahman Nafiz Bey, who was under fire, recalls Hasan Riza Pasha’s stance in these words:

Facing the enemy line, the soldiers were lying down and, under the powerful fire, could not rise. In one position stood Hasan Riza Bey, while the enemy infantry fire burst from all sides. On the right flank, the positioned mountain battery continued firing. I said to Riza Bey: Sir! This place is very dangerous for you; it is not good for you to be here! Hasan Riza Pasha replied to me: Do not speak! From this position, everything can be seen. If need be, I shout to the gunner. There is no better place! Thus, his life had no importance for him compared to his duty.<sup>58</sup>

Dom Ndoc Nikaj likewise confirms that Hasan Riza Pasha spent most of his time in the most dangerous combat zone.<sup>59</sup>

Fighting continued, and on 29 October the right wing of the Montenegrin Southern detachment seized Bushat. The bombardment of Tarabosh and Shkodra continued, but Montenegrin losses increased ever more; and, as A. Andonyan observes, “Shkodra and Tarabosh were transformed into cemeteries of the Montenegrins, from where they

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<sup>55</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 297.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>57</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 233; Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 298.

<sup>58</sup> Nafiz & Kiramettin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde*, 366.

<sup>59</sup> Nikaj, *Shkodra e rrethume*, 145.

could not even carry away their wounded.” Hasan Riza Pasha planned to retake Oblika and Boksi, which had been occupied earlier by the Montenegrins, by means of rapid attacks, because the loss of these fortifications had considerably worsened the position of the Shkodra garrison.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, General Martinović marched to capture the locality of Pulaj, a small town on the right bank of the Buna, from which, via the river route, Shkodra was supplied with food. At Pulaj there were not enough Ottoman soldiers. On 30 October, a small Montenegrin unit that crossed the Buna succeeded in routing the weak Ottoman force stationed there.<sup>61</sup> On the same day, the Montenegrin Central detachment attacked the hill of Bardhanjorii Madh, which had not yet been fortified. However, this attack was launched without waiting for General Martinović, with whom they had agreed to conduct a synchronised assault on the north-western defensive frontier. The outcome was the Montenegrins’ repulse, with very heavy losses, by the counter-attack of the Ottoman army, which also included Albanian volunteers, leaving around 300 killed and wounded.<sup>62</sup> Hasan Riza Pasha, having regained Bardhanjor with Albanian volunteers, immediately fortified it, transforming it into a strategic stronghold that would play a crucial role in Shkodra’s successful resistance.<sup>63</sup> Owing to the heavy losses the Montenegrins suffered at Bardhanjor, they were unable to mount a new attack against that position until February 1913.<sup>64</sup>

In response to the defeat suffered at Bardhanjor, General Martinović ordered Tarabosh to be bombarded as strictly as possible. Fighting continued throughout the day, and Tarabosh was heavily struck by artillery.<sup>65</sup> The Montenegrin general knew that Tarabosh could not be seriously endangered without placing heavy guns on the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 142; Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 298.

<sup>63</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 228.

<sup>64</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 142.

<sup>65</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 223.

hills, a task made far from easy by snow, rain, and mud, which noticeably hindered such an operation. Nevertheless, Martinović managed to transport several batteries to elevations of 600 to 700 metres and thus began what A. Andonyan calls the “duel of the artillerymen.”<sup>66</sup>—a duel which, as we noted earlier, Hasan Rıza Pasha conducted with bravery and with the passion of a professional soldier.

### **The Serbian Army Joins the Shkodra Campaign and the Albanian Coast**

The occupation of Shkodra, “as a walk-over”, as the Montenegrins had planned at the beginning of the war, was increasingly delayed, while the enthusiasm of the besieging army declined day by day. It became evident that without the Serbian army's assistance, the Montenegrin army lacked the capacity to achieve this objective on its own. And while Shkodra continued to resist with determination, the Montenegrin Eastern Detachment, under the command of the Montenegrin *serdar* Janko Vukotić, marked out with sword and fire the line of Montenegrin claims in the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, encountering no serious opposition except from Muslim Albanians.<sup>67</sup> Having occupied Plav and Gusinje on 3 November, Vukotić captured Bijelo Polje, Berane, and Peja; and on 5 November, with combined Serbo–Montenegrin forces, also Gjakova. However, the Montenegrin objective of Prizren was pre-empted by the Serbian army, which occupied the city as early as 30 October, before the Montenegrin army.<sup>68</sup> The Serbs then turned towards the Albanian coast to reach the Adriatic. Thus, on 9 and 10 November, from two directions—Gjakova (the Drina Division) and Prizren (the Šumadija Division)—the Serbian army set out towards Shëngjin.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 299.

<sup>67</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 142.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*; Miller, *The Ottoman Empire*, 503

<sup>69</sup> St.Stanojević, *Srpsko-turski rat 1912.godine* (Beograd, 1928), 154.

Yet it was not only the Serbs who had aspirations towards the Albanian coast. For “strategic” reasons, Montenegro likewise set its sights on Shëngjin.<sup>70</sup> As mentioned earlier, the connection between the fortress of Shkodra and the Adriatic for a long time had not been severed. Through this route, Shkodra was supplied with food, but the Ottoman army was also assisted by Austria-Hungary along the same path.<sup>71</sup> To sever this connection, General Martinović, as noted above, had occupied the small town of Pulaj; however, that was not the end of the matter, as another route also existed: Shëngjin–Barbullush–Bushat. Then, in the east, a 10-kilometre stretch between Bërdica and Bardhanjor remained open until Serbian forces arrived. However, the Adriatic route was the most important.<sup>72</sup> Despite a demarche from the Austro–Hungarian Government requesting that Montenegro refrain from military operations against Lezha and Shëngjin, King Nikola nevertheless permitted Martinović’s Southern Detachment to march towards the Albanian coast. In any case, without the arrival of Serbian troops, the Montenegrin army achieved no progress. The Serbian army, passing through the Drin valley, occupied Luma, Mirditë, and Mat and, together with Montenegrin forces, on 17 November occupied Shëngjin and on 19 November also Lezha.<sup>73</sup> However, the Serbian army

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<sup>70</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 303.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 145; Durham, *Struggle for Scutari*, 231; Gjyltekin Shehu, “Shqiptarët dhe Fuqitë e Mëdha 1908-1912”, in: “Shkëndija”, nr.14, 12 korrik 1993.

<sup>73</sup> Stanojević, *Srpsko-turski rat*, 157; Swire, *Albania*, 144; Pollo, “Në gjurmë të historisë shqiptare”, 305.

“Unlike Luma, which did not submit to the new oppressor, Mirdita remained inactive. The newspaper *Besa Shqyptare* wrote that when the Serbian army reached Zadrime, it had become so exhausted by hunger that it ate handfuls of maize flour, swallowed pomegranates with their peel, and even ate grass as gruel. The leading notables of that region gave it bread to save it from death. And not only that. The highlanders of Zadrime, together with those of the Bregu i Matit, led the Serbian army in the occupation of Lezha, Kruja, Tirana, and Durrës; but it repaid this ‘good deed’ with brutality [...] Albanians were killed, hanged, and left so; and atrocities were committed against women and

immediately brought Lezha and Shëngjin under its control, despite Montenegrin dissatisfaction.<sup>74</sup>The main body of the Serbian army then proceeded towards Durrës, while several detachments moved northwards to assist the Montenegrins, who had been pinned down around Shkodra. M. E. Durham informs us that the Serbs had offered help to the Montenegrins several times, but the Montenegrins feared that this help would confirm the incompetence of their army and therefore had refused it, even arrogantly. Later, however, as Durham writes, “they were, however, allowed to help blockade the town, for the Montenegrins had not enough men to surround it efficiently.”<sup>75</sup>

Serdar Janko Vukotić, with the Eastern Detachment of 10,000 soldiers, returned to Shkodra, planning to capture the city and its fortress with a rapid assault.<sup>76</sup>Encouraged by these new reinforcements, King Nikola again began to organise a renewed manoeuvre regarding the surrender of Shkodra; however, its energetic commander would not even hear of surrender.

The Montenegrin–Serbian campaign against Shkodra was temporarily halted until 29 November owing to the rising levels of the Buna and the Drin. On 29 November, the bombardment of Shkodra and Tarabosh resumed. Hasan Rıza Pasha ordered that shells not be spared, even though their shortage had already begun to be felt.<sup>77</sup>The reply received by the Montenegrins in those days from the fortress of Shkodra and that of Tarabosh was so terrible that panic began to seize the Montenegrin army.<sup>78</sup> Tucović calls the Serbian army’s defeat at Dajç

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children [...]” Zekirja Cana, *Social demokracia serbe dhe çështja shqiptare 1903-1914* (Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, 1986), 158.

<sup>74</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 232.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>77</sup> The supply of the Shkodra and Ioannina garrisons with fresh troop reinforcements and ammunition—largely dispatched from Anatolia via the Aegean Sea—had been cut off, because the Greek fleet succeeded in taking control of several Aegean islands, thereby severing the transport route for Ottoman military reinforcements to Rumelia.

<sup>78</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 300-301.

“the place of the first catastrophe in the war against the garrison of Shkodra.”<sup>79</sup>This defeat visibly shook the morale of the Montenegrin army, which King Nikola attempted to restore by distributing money and medals.<sup>80</sup>

As shown, despite reinforcements, the besieging Montenegrin–Serbian army made no progress. The dissatisfaction that began to manifest itself in the ranks of the Montenegrin army also increasingly appeared among the broader Montenegrin population. The mistaken policy of the Montenegrin king and his government came under growing criticism. The French representative in Cetinje reported to his government that “in Montenegro there prevails great dissatisfaction; that King Nikola, not without reason, fears that Serbia is absorbing Montenegro; that everywhere in Montenegro people speak against the king and his family; that only he and his sons are blamed for the lack of success at Shkodra; that many foresee the rapid fall of the dynasty.”<sup>81</sup>

But it was not only the Montenegrins who were dissatisfied with King Nikola's policy and his government. In fact, even more dissatisfied—and indeed betrayed—were the Albanian highlanders, who, deceived by King Nikola's promises that he would respect the Albanian flag, fought alongside Montenegrin forces with great bravery and enthusiasm. Regarding this new situation, M. E. Durham writes:

So furious had the conduct of the Montenegrin troops made the Malsors that they even talked of attacking them and cutting them off from Podgoritza. I begged them not to attempt it, as it would bring down the Servian army and artillery upon them, and result in a hideous massacre, as in Kosovo vilayet. Some said even that would be better than being handed over to Montenegro by the Powers. They held a meeting in the mountains and swore they would resist this with all their strength. “King Nicola”, they said, “promised only last year to get us a European guarantee for our national rights, especially for schools and language. He betrayed us, and

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<sup>79</sup> Tucoviq, *Sërbija dhe Shqipnija*, 101.

<sup>80</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 300.

<sup>81</sup> Dimitrije Popović, *Borba za narodnoujedinjenje 1908-1914* (Beograd, 1936), 120.

now the Montenegrins talk of nothing but forcible Slavizing. We have not fought the Turks for two years on the language question in order to be forced to learn Servian. The army, which pretended to come as our allies to help us, has commandeered our hay and beasts, and not paid. We will give no more.”<sup>82</sup>

J. Swire likewise writes about the Highlanders' revolt against the Montenegrins. Among other things, he writes:

The Montenegrins behaved in the country as conquerors, not as allies. They commandeered hay and cattle, plundered poultry, and generally helped themselves without payment. They had not made the promised issue of bread and shoes, and attempted to persuade the malissori to wear Montenegrin caps. The latter had expected the Albanian, not the Montenegrin, flag to be hoisted at Tuzi and Dechich. They began to suspect that Montenegrin assurances were as worthless as those of the Turks. And at the end of October, they began to drift back to their homes. By the end of November there were no malissori in the field; indeed, the pendulum began to swing in the opposite direction. Then came news of the declaration of Independence. Still the Montenegrins continued to loot and pillage; they even looted several catholic churches. The catholic malissori leaders then met to discuss the situation, and swore to resist any further outrages upon Albanians or Albanian property. A further Montenegrin attempt to commandeer hay at Mazreku ended with a skirmish in which the Montenegrins suffered seventeen casualties; fearing a general attack they paid damages, and thereafter refrained from interfering with the malissori. But relations between them continued to be strained.<sup>83</sup>

### **Refusal of the Armistice**

On 3–4 December, an armistice was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the three Balkan allies (Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro). Hasan Rıza Pasha, however, did not trust this report; he therefore

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<sup>82</sup> Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 246.

<sup>83</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 143.

refused the armistice and continued to attack from the fortress.<sup>84</sup> A further favourable circumstance also encouraged him to continue the fighting. While the conclusion of the armistice was still expected, Hasan Riza Pasha had managed to supply himself sufficiently with provisions.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, he could count on an improvement in the morale of Shkodra's population and of the defending forces. Moreover, Hasan Riza Pasha did not even receive the Montenegrin delegate, Đerović, who was to deliver the armistice document. Thus, as soon as the Montenegrin delegation left the town, Hasan Riza Pasha ordered the Montenegrin positions to be shelled from Tarabosh. Initially, the Montenegrins restrained themselves, but when they saw that Oblika and Shiroka were under threat, they too opened fire with artillery. The largest Ottoman assault against Oblika and Shiroka took place on 10 and 11 December, but this attempt produced no result.<sup>86</sup> From a military report that Hasan Riza Pasha addressed to the General Command of the Ministry of Defence in Istanbul, dated 27 December 1912, we learn that on 14 December Serbian forces—who had come to assist the Montenegrins—attacked Ottoman outposts in Zadrima, while on the night of 17–18 December a fierce clash occurred between the Ottoman army and Serbian detachments, during which 800 Serbian soldiers lost their lives..<sup>87</sup> In the same report, Hasan Riza Pasha also informed the authorities of a Montenegrin attack carried out on the evening of 24 December, which was successfully repelled.<sup>88</sup> These successes

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<sup>84</sup> Külçe, *Osmanlı Tarihinde Arnavutluk*, 425.

<sup>85</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 142.

“Hussein Riza made two successful sorties in December, and revictualled the town with a quantity of maize from the villages of Pistulli, Plesha, and Stajka.” (Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari*, 246).

<sup>86</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 309.

<sup>87</sup> Nafiz & Kiramettin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde*, 349; This Ottoman unit launched its attack from the south and advanced 10 kilometres; after crossing the Drin, it came into contact with the Serbian army, which was defeated by the Ottoman forces, but managed to loot and burn several Albanian Catholic villages. (Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi.*, 309).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

prompted Hasan Rıza Pasha to strike the besieging Montenegrin–Serbian troops at almost every point, continuously and without interruption.

This continued until 6 January 1913, yet no concrete result was recorded. On the same day, the Montenegrins again sent a delegation to Shkodra to sign the armistice. Talat Bey, who led the Ottoman side, received the Montenegrin delegation but told them there was no official information from Istanbul on the conclusion of an armistice; he therefore demanded that they leave the town immediately.<sup>89</sup>

Although he had successfully organised the defence of Shkodra, Hasan Rıza Pasha—an experienced officer and proven strategist—had devised a preliminary plan to be used as a “last card” should the town’s food supply be completely cut off. He explained this plan as follows:

Ten days before the provisions are exhausted, we shall give the army three days in which to fill their stomachs properly; on the fourth day, we shall move out between the Buna and Tarabosh and proceed towards Bar [Tivar], reaching the harbour of Spuž, 60 kilometres from Shkodër, where the Austrian army is stationed. Then, leaving the Austrians behind us, we shall strengthen ourselves in the interior of Montenegro and hold a defensive line until our provisions are used up; and if we are compelled to abandon the position, we shall cross over to the Austrians. We shall hand the other fronts over to several battalions of reservists and volunteers. The Ottoman fleet will bring troops to Bar [Tivar] and Ulcinj, and we shall go to receive them, thereby opening the route. Afterwards, we shall mount a severe attack against the Montenegrin front at Tarabosh.<sup>90</sup>

Hasan Rıza Pasha kept this plan highly secret; however, important details of it are found in Abdurrahman Nafiz Bey, who emphasises:

He had disclosed the decision for this surprise attack to only one person. After his death, it became clear that he had revealed it only to Esat Pasha [Toptani]. Esat Pasha later related this plan to us and, in his words, he

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<sup>89</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 309.

<sup>90</sup> Nafiz & Kiramettin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde*, 366-367.

warned Hasan Riza Pasha: “The Montenegrins are extremely harsh; they take revenge severely. If we fail to reach the Austrians’ side, they will wreak havoc outside the fortress. Are you not afraid of such an end?” Hasan Riza Pasha, however, replied: “Do not worry about me. If we do not succeed in reaching the Austrians’ side, then I shall take my own life.” Esat Pasha told us that he did not doubt that Hasan Riza Pasha would have done so, solely to avoid being captured by the Montenegrins.<sup>91</sup>

In January 1913, Hasan Riza Pasha organised several attacks against Oblika and other Montenegrin positions, but without achieving any results.<sup>92</sup> During that month, the Montenegrins did not undertake any major assault on Shkodra. From notes in the diary of an anonymous author from Shkodra, we learn that from 1 January to 31 January the Montenegrins carried out sporadic attacks—“now and then a cannon, and more rarely even rifles”—chiefly against Mali iSheldisë and Tarabosh.<sup>93</sup> The same anonymous diarist writes that Hasan Riza Pasha requested a loan of 3,000 liras from the Albanian Christian notables, in all likelihood to secure essential food supplies for the army and the citizens of Shkodra.<sup>94</sup> The commander of Shkodra also ordered that all vacant houses be registered to accommodate Albanian refugees who, endangered by the Montenegrin and Serbian armies, were seeking shelter in Shkodra.<sup>95</sup>

### **The Shkodra Question on the Diplomatic Front**

In Albanian historiography, it is assessed that the Albanian factor was essential to the defence of Shkodra. Albanian resistance, as A. Puto observes, “gave a strong hand to Austria-Hungary, which at the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 310.

<sup>93</sup> "Kumtari", Ditar për rrethimin e Shkodrës (1912-1913) nga një autor anonim, nr.6, Muzeu Historik i Shkodrës, Shkodër, 1993, 293-299.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 294-296.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 297.

Conference of Ambassadors in London defended the thesis that Shkodra should be included within the borders of Albania. In fact, one of the arguments advanced by Vienna to oppose Russia's thesis was not only the principle of nationality, but also the will of the city's inhabitants, manifested beyond any doubt even in the most severe circumstances of the long siege." <sup>96</sup>Thus, in the instruction which the Foreign Minister, Berchtold, forwarded on 25 December 1912 to the Austro-Hungarian ambassador Thurn in St Petersburg, he requested that the Russian Foreign Minister, Sazonov, be reminded that the "invincible resistance in the defence of Shkodra was not so much a success of Turkey's [the Ottoman Empire's] arms as proof of the determination with which the Albanians are fighting to keep this city inhabited solely by their compatriots." <sup>97</sup>

Accordingly, the struggle for Shkodra unfolded on two fronts: the military and the diplomatic. It was unclear which front was more difficult. The role played by Hasan Rıza Pasha, together with the inhabitants of Shkodra, on the military front was played by Vienna on the diplomatic front. From its very first meeting on 17 December 1912, the Conference of Ambassadors in London had, in principle, decided upon the creation of the Albanian state (principality), whereas the question of determining the northern and north-eastern borders—namely, the borders with Serbia and Montenegro—as well as the southern border with Greece, was to be resolved successively, in accordance with diplomatic negotiations among the governments of the Great Powers, above all between Austria-Hungary and Russia. It is self-evident that, within the framework of the question of Albania's northern and north-eastern border, the Shkodra question stood at the centre of attention.

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<sup>96</sup> Arben Puto, *Pavarësia shqiptare dhe diplomacia e Fuqive të Mëdha 1912-1914* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1978), 206.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

Edward Grey, Britain's Foreign Secretary and chairman of the Conference of Ambassadors, was interested above all in achieving as soon as possible a rapprochement of views between Austria-Hungary and Russia. He was driven by the conviction that only after resolving the Shkodra question could the ambassadors continue the discussion on Albania's north-eastern border. Along that border, the most debatable points were Peja, Prizren, Gjakova, and Dibra. In the course of the territorial transactions it was conducting with Russia, as early as 4 January 1912 Austria-Hungary expressed its willingness to yield about Peja and Prizren, on the condition that Russia would accept that Shkodra should remain with Albania.<sup>98</sup> However, the concessions proposed by Vienna were categorically opposed by Russia. At that time, the Russian government demanded of its ambassador in London that under no circumstances should he yield on Shkodra unless the line of the eastern border were accepted according to the Serbo-Montenegrin project<sup>99</sup>, —which would have meant that, in addition to Peja, Prizren, Struga, and Ohrid, Gjakova and Dibra (together with their districts) would also remain outside Albania. The Foreign Office did not oppose the possibility that Shkodra might be left to Albania; however, in harmony with a policy of compromise, it sought that Austria-Hungary and Italy should satisfy Montenegrin demands,<sup>100</sup> because, as it stressed, “only in that way could one hope for a long-term solution of the question at hand.”<sup>101</sup> On 7 January 1913, the Austro-Hungarian government informed Grey that it was prepared—by way of compensation for Shkodra—to grant Montenegro fertile land through the draining of Lake Shkodra (the regulation of the Buna: lowering the level of Lake Shkodra), and likewise to cede fertile fields in the Plain

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<sup>98</sup> Puto, *Pavarësia shqiptare*, 178 (Cit.: Österreich-Ungarns Aussenpolitik d. nr. 5062 dhe 5085—telegrame nga Berchtold).

<sup>99</sup> Mihajlo Vojvodić, *Skadarska kriza 1913.godine* (Beograd, 1970), 50-51.

<sup>100</sup> TNA: FO, 424/241, 4032, No. 44, Sir Edward Grey to F. Bertie, Foreign Office, January 3, 1913.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

of Peja.<sup>102</sup> Grey called this proposal insufficient and expressed doubt that Russia would be satisfied with so little, given that Russian public opinion was already dissatisfied with its government's policy, which had yielded on the question of Serbia's access to the Adriatic via Albania.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, Grey described the Buna regulation project as an "unrealizable idea."<sup>104</sup>

Since the Ambassadors' meeting of 9 January 1913 did not register any concrete progress on the disputable questions, diplomatic negotiations continued at the level of foreign ministers. Among the most interesting encounters was Grey's meeting with the Russian ambassador (Benkendorf) and the French ambassador (Cambon) on 14 January 1913. The essence of this meeting was a warning from the Russian Government that it was ready to relinquish Shkodra, but only on the condition that Vienna yield to Serbian demands.<sup>105</sup> Although a swift concession by Vienna was not to be expected in this regard, the official Russian indication of relinquishing Shkodra was, in any case, a step forward on the Shkodra question.

Regarding Shkodra and Albania's other borders, Germany gave open support to the Austro-Hungarian border projects, whereas the Italian government was still in talks with Vienna to reach a common position. The Austro-Italian negotiations did not end without result. This was indirectly confirmed by a diplomatic-level meeting between Serbia's representative in Rome, Mihajlović, and Italy's Foreign Minister, San Giuliano, on 21 January 1913. In accordance with instructions from Belgrade, the Serbian representative sought the Italian government's help regarding Shkodra and Albania's other borders, urging the Italian minister to engage on behalf of the "just demands of the Serbs". On that occasion, the Italian minister asked the Serbian

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<sup>102</sup> Vojvodić, *Skadarskakriza*, 48-49.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 50-51.

<sup>105</sup> TNA:FO, 424/241, 4032, No. 254, Sir Edward Grey to Sir. G. Buchanan, Foreign Office, January 14, 1913.

representative: “How can you demand Shkodra when small Montenegro will have major troubles with 50,000 Albanians disposed in hostility!”, whereas the Serbian representative replied: “That would indeed happen, but Serbia is, in any case, nearby, and together we can resolve any problem.”<sup>106</sup>

In January, the divergent viewpoints between Austria-Hungary and Russia—between the Triple Alliance and the Entente—were merely reaffirmed. This was also the epilogue of the Ambassadors’ meeting in London on 22 January. The ambassadors of the Entente powers defended the thesis concerning Shkodra’s importance for Montenegro’s economic development, whereas the ambassadors of the Triple Alliance defended the thesis concerning Shkodra’s importance as Albania’s political and spiritual centre. The Russian ambassador once again demanded Shkodra for Montenegro, stressing King Nikola’s “argument” that the fate of his royal throne supposedly depended on this question.<sup>107</sup> By contrast, the Austro-Hungarian ambassador replied with the following arguments: Shkodra is a fundamentally Albanian city; from political, economic, and spiritual perspectives Shkodra is regarded by northern Albanians as their capital; the entire Shkodra region is Albanian and Catholic; the protectorate exercised for a century and a half by Austria-Hungary over this Catholic population creates for it an obligation to insist that Albania should not lose so important a point; if we wish to create an autonomous Albania capable of living (viable), we must not cut off its head; the Austro-Hungarian government certainly does not desire the fall of the Montenegrin dynasty, but King Nikola’s claims over Shkodra do not seem justified

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<sup>106</sup> Xheladin Shala, *Marrëdhëniet shqiptaro-serbe 1912-1918*, Prishtinë, 1990, f. 128 AS MID (Cit.: Arhiv Srbije – Ministar stvo Inostranih Dela, PO 1913, F.XV-D.I.- br. 224, Raporti Mihajloviqit nga Roma dërguar Pashiqit, 21 janar 1913).

<sup>107</sup> Arben Puto, *Çështja shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare të periudhës së imperializmit*, vëll. II, (Tiranë, 1987), 217-219 (Cit.: Documents diplomatiques français, 3 emeserie, t.V.d.n 243, pp. 309-310 - Raporti P. Cambon-it, 22 janar 1913).

either by legal titles, or by military successes, or by the will of the Albanian population.<sup>108</sup>

Despite reciprocal intransigence, the meeting of 22 January did not end without any result. Russia announced a conditional (semi-official) acceptance of Shkodra remaining with Albania, but the Lake and the surrounding region were still demanded by Montenegro.<sup>109</sup> Vienna did not accept this solution and, once again, at the 25 January meeting, it reaffirmed its proposal for the Buna regulation.<sup>110</sup>

In this context, it is also of interest to say something about the essential reasons for Serbia's engagement that Shkodra should be given to Montenegro. Shkodra's importance for Serbia was manifold. Upon this question, directly or indirectly, depended the Powers' decision regarding Albanian territories occupied by the Serbian armies. With the creation of the Albanian state, Serbia was compelled to abandon its claim to territorial access to the Adriatic through Albania. Yet for Serbia, the matters in which it was deeply interested were not thereby closed; these were: the question of commercial access to the Adriatic and the question of determining Albania's borders. Because of the Shkodra question, the latter assumed a dramatic course. By fighting over Shkodra, in the Serbian Government's view, gains could be more easily extracted on the eastern border, where Serbian claims were anchored. On the other hand, if Shkodra had not fallen into Montenegrin hands, there was the possibility that Montenegro might be granted, as compensation, territories claimed by Serbia.<sup>111</sup> This was, in fact, Vienna's proposal: as compensation for Shkodra, Montenegro should be given the provinces occupied by Serbia. The Serbian Government received this new proposal with concern; therefore, Prime Minister

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Vojvodić, *Skadarska kriza*, 57.

<sup>110</sup> Puto, *Çështja shqiptare*, II, 222-224. (Cit.: DDF, 3 eme serie, t.V, d.n 262, pp.330-331- Raport i Cambon-it, 25 janar 1913).

<sup>111</sup> Vojvodić, *Skadarska kriza*, 53

Nikola Pašić urgently sent new instructions to Serbia's representatives in London, instructing them to fight energetically and to support only Montenegrin demands for Shkodra.<sup>112</sup> The Serbian press of the time (except Serbian social democracy) immediately increased the intensity of propaganda, giving excessive publicity to the struggle for the conquest of Shkodra. The writings of Serbian publicists, politicians, and scholars appeared in the pages of European newspapers as well: *Novoye Vremya* and *Russkoe Slovo* in Russia; *Echo de Paris*, *Le Journal*, and *Le Figaro* in France; *Corriere della Sera* and *Corriere d'Italia* in Italy; the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* in Great Britain; *Berliner Tageblatt* in Germany; *Die Zeit* in Austria; etc. There, to a greater or lesser extent, the war of the Balkan allies and their territorial claims—especially the struggle for Shkodra—were justified.<sup>113</sup> Serbian diplomatic representatives received special instructions from Belgrade to contest the Austrian thesis of the absolute predominance of the Albanian population in the Shkodra region.<sup>114</sup> An attempt in this respect was made through the Serbian Government's memorandum, which was delivered to Grey on 21 January.<sup>115</sup> However, this memorandum made no impression on the British minister, who had learned the historical, ethnographic (ethnic), cultural, and demographic circumstances of Albania much earlier from the Foreign Office's informational sources, without waiting for them to be presented in Serbian memoranda. Therefore, Serbia's contestation and denial of the Austrian thesis of the absolute predominance of the Albanian population in the Shkodra region did not yield the expected results. In this respect, the memoranda

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>113</sup> Cana, *Socialdemokracia serbe*, 160-161.

<sup>114</sup> TNA: FO, 424/241, 4032, No. 366, Sir Edward Grey to Sir R. Paget, Foreign Office, January 21, 1913. Enclosure: Paper communicated by Servian Delegate to Peace Conference.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Provisional Government of Vlora,<sup>116</sup> sent to Grey during January 1913, also played an important role; these were a direct response to the Serbian and Montenegrin memoranda.

These, then, were—in brief—the diplomatic circumstances in January 1913 of which Hasan Rıza Pasha knew. Therefore, in these circumstances, when the Great Powers had unanimously decided upon the creation of the Albanian state, when Istanbul had also given its consent to this, and when no military assistance from Istanbul could any longer be expected<sup>117</sup>—Hasan Rıza Pasha judged the continued presence of the Ottoman garrison in Shkodra to be nonsensical, conscious that Shkodra could be successfully defended by the Albanians of Shkodra themselves and of its Malësia.

### **The Final Days of Hasan Rıza Pasha**

In the circumstances that had arisen, Hasan Rıza Pasha increasingly contemplated withdrawing the Ottoman garrison from Shkodra and leaving the town to be defended by the Albanians themselves, so that it would not fall into Montenegrin hands.<sup>118</sup> In relation to Hasan Rıza Pasha's plan, M. E. Durham writes:

His plan was to communicate with all the tribesmen and to arrange that they should fall on the besieging army in the rear while he and his army made a simultaneous sortie. He hoped thus to cut up the Montenegrin army and save the town. One of the Franciscan fathers and another man were to steal through the lines at night and arrange that the tribesmen

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës, dok. nr. 165, 117; Puto, *Çështja shqiptare në aktet ndërkombëtare*, II, dok. nr.7, 219-222.

<sup>117</sup> According to Article 2 of the Armistice Agreement concluded between the Ottoman Empire on the one side and Serbia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro on the other, the supply of the besieged cities (Edirne, Ioannina, and Shkodra) with food and arms was prohibited. (Popović, *Borba za narodnoujedinjenje*, 87).

<sup>118</sup> Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, 237.

should attack when Hussein Riza hoisted the Albanian flag on the citadel.<sup>119</sup>

To implement this plan, Hasan Riza Pasha sought the assistance of Shkodra's leading notables. The representatives of Shkodra's notables, who maintained continuous contacts with the Government of Vlora, accepted this plan on the condition that the resistance would continue in the name of independent Albania.<sup>120</sup> Hasan Riza Pasha, who had initiated such a plan himself, agreed to it without reservation. It appears that M. E. Durham did not, by chance, emphasize the information that Hasan Riza Pasha "had Albanian blood" when she speaks of his plan to remove the Ottoman division from Shkodra and leave it in Albanian hands. For the Provisional Government of Vlora, the primary importance now lay in the stance Esat Pasha Toptani would take after Hasan Riza Pasha left Shkodra. Hoping that Esat Pasha Toptani would continue the resistance against the besieging armies not as an Ottoman but as an Albanian—and thus facilitate the unification of Albanian lands—the Provisional Government of Vlora addressed him, at the beginning of January 1913, with a telegram approved and signed also by thirty representatives of the Albanian notables.<sup>121</sup> By this telegram, Esat Pasha Toptani was asked to take national interests into account and to raise the Albanian flag on the fortress of Shkodra. However, Esat Pasha's calculations were entirely different. He neither recognised Albania's Independence nor the Government of Vlora, nor approved Hasan Riza Pasha's plan; rather, he acted in the opposite direction. Thus, on the evening of 30–31 January 1913, when Hasan Riza Pasha left the house of Esat Pasha Toptani after they had dined together, he was assassinated in an attack carried out by two agents of

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, II, 370.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid; *Qeveria e Përkohëshme e Vlorës*, dok. nr. 137, 102.

Esat Pasha.<sup>122</sup> Later, the two assassins, Osman Bali and Mehmet Kavaja, boasted of this deed.<sup>123</sup> It is an irony that on 30 January 1913—on the very day of his killing—Hasan Rıza Pasha, for his merits in the defence of Shkodra, had been promoted to the rank of *mirliva* (Mîr-ilivâ—major general). Thus, that same day, around midnight, Hasan Rıza Pasha was assassinated and therefore never learned of the promotion.<sup>124</sup> The direct witness of the siege of Shkodra, A. Andonyan, based on information received in those days from eyewitnesses of the killing, writes that “Hasan Rıza Pasha passed away seven hours after being wounded, and before he died, he begged Esat Pasha and the other officers not to surrender Shkodra until the last drop of blood.” According to the same account, Andonyan announced that, “Mahmut Qamil Bey, a close associate of Hasan Rıza Pasha and the very spirit of the defence of Tarabosh, was also killed.”<sup>125</sup>

Dom Ndoc Nikaj describes the killing of Hasan Rıza Pasha in these words:

On Thursday, the thirtieth of January, at dusk, [Hasan Rıza Pasha] had come to his own house in Fushëtë Druve. As soon as he had been allowed to enter his room, Esat Pasha [Toptani] sent word that he wished to speak with him. He, being as obliging as he always was, replied that he would go in person to meet him shortly. The two houses were separated by only one road, and the gates were guarded by sentries. Hasan Rıza [Pasha], thus alone and unarmed, crossed into Esat [Pasha]’s house, where he remained for a brief time, speaking about duties and giving the necessary instructions. Then, still alone, about an hour and a half after darkness had fallen, he went out to return to his own house. He had not even reached halfway along the road when two shots brought him to the ground. No alarm was raised. Nor did the

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<sup>122</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 154; Nikaj, *Historija e Shqypniës ç'me kohë t'vjetra e deri m'tashmet* (Shkodër: Shtypshkronja Nikaj, 1917), 204; Ismail Hami Danişmend, *Izahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi*, Cilt: 4 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1972), 394.

<sup>123</sup> Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, 236-237; Swire, *Albania*, 154.

<sup>124</sup> Nafiz & Kiramettin, *1912-1913 Balkan Harbinde*, 362.

<sup>125</sup> Andonyan, *Balkan Harbi*, 310.

armed guards act, while the assailants departed by the way they had come without any disturbance. Hasan Riza [Pasha] lived until morning and, as is said, left word [as a final injunction] that the soldiers should not be withdrawn from their ambush positions because of his killing, and likewise that no military honours should be paid to his body at the funeral. The news of the killing spread like lightning through the city. At first, it was spoken of fearfully and in secret, but when his death became known, it caused many hearts to mourn.<sup>126</sup>

In the diary of Shkodra's anonymous author, it is stated that Hasan Riza Pasha's killing occurred an hour and a half after midnight. Meanwhile, besides the inhabitants of Shkodra, officers who had fought alongside him, the consuls of the Great Powers, the Muslim clergy, and the Catholic clergy also took part in his funeral. It is also reported that an officer read a letter on the life and work of Hasan Riza Pasha before his body was buried. It was said that the Muslim clergy and others who attended the funeral wept bitterly from sorrow at the death of Shkodra's commander. The burial took place in the cemetery of Paruca.<sup>127</sup>

Regarding the murder of the commander of Shkodra, J. Swire writes: "By the Albanian laws of hospitality, Essad was in honour bound to avenge this deed, but as he was undoubtedly the instigator, he naturally

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<sup>126</sup> Nikaj, *Historija e Shqypniës*, 145-146.

"Të enjten, me tridhetë t'kallnorit, njaty për t'errun, [Hasan Riza Pasha] kishte ardhë në shtëpi të vet në Fushë të Druve. Porsa ishte lirue me hy në odë të vet, Esat Pasha i kishte çue fjalë se donte me folë me te. Ai, sikur i papritueshëm që ishte gjithëherë i kishte dhënë të gjegjun, se mbas pak do të shkonte ai vetë m'u pa me te. Dy shtëpiat s'kishin veçse rrugën ndërmjet e dyert ishin të ruejtuna me rojtarë. Hasan Rizai vetëm e pa armë, kaloi në shtëpi të Esatit ku ndej një copë herë, tue ndreqë disa punë e tue dhanë leçimet e nevojshme. Mrapa, ashtu i vetëm, njaty më një e gjysëm mbas të errunit, duel me kalue në shtëpi të vet. Nuk pat kalue as në gjysëm të udhës e dy pushkë e rrëzuen përdhe. Farë kushtrimi s'u dha. As rojtarët e armatisun nuk luejtën e gjaksit u larguen pa farë trazimi andej kah kishin ardhë. Hasan Rizai jetoj deri në mëngjes dhe, thonë, se la fjalë mos me i luejtë ushtarët prej pritave për punë të tij e mos me i ba nderime ushtarake trupit të tij në vorrim. Fjala e vrasjes u hap pors i rufe nëpër qytet. Me frigë e mshehtas flitej n'e parë, por, kur u dijt njimend, bani shumë zemra me msha."

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

did not do so, thereby irretrievably compromising his honour in the eyes of his compatriots."<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, A. Herbert describes Hasan Riza Pasha's killing in these words:

In the Balkans, it was customary for a host to send one or two armed men with lanterns to conduct a guest home after dinner. Hussein Riza Bey left the house of Essad Pasha alone. He was carried in again with three minutes, dying. *Bounoukimyapdi* – “who did this?” asked Essad Pasha. *Sen bendenübilirsın* - “you knowest better than I,” said Hussein Riza, and died.<sup>129</sup>

After Hasan Riza Pasha's killing—a killing which for a time was not officially announced—the command of Shkodra's garrison was assumed by Esat Pasha Toptani, as the second-in-command, and he soon began negotiations with the Montenegrins.<sup>130</sup> The recognition of Albania's autonomy by the Conference of Ambassadors in London opened the prospect that Esat Pasha Toptani would seize control of the Albanian state. To secure the support of the Ottoman soldiers of Shkodra's garrison in his struggle for power, Esat Pasha continued the resistance under the Ottoman flag.<sup>131</sup> However, as Swire notes, “he planned to use Scutari as such, defending the town only until he could obtain the most advantageous terms for himself.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 154.

<sup>129</sup> Herbert, *Ben Kendim*, 161.

<sup>130</sup> Puto, *Pavarësia shqiptare*, 207; Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, 237; *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, II, 370-371 Herbert, *Ben Kendim*, 162.

<sup>131</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, II, 371.

<sup>132</sup> Swire, *Albania*, 155.

The Prince of Egypt, Ahmed Fuad Pasha, from the dynasty of Mehmet Ali Pasha of Egypt, in a meeting with the British Deputy Foreign Minister, Sir. A. Nicolson, on February 13, 1913, had expressed the hope that “in delimiting Albania the Powers would not think alone of Servia or Montenegro, or of Russia or Austria, but also of the Albanians.” During the conversation, he also emphasized that ‘Scutari was not fully invested. People could pass in and out, and it could hold the 40,000 troops in the town, 35,000 were Albanian.’ Prince Fuad had also informed the Foreign Office that “he had sent an emissary to the commander-in-chief [Esad Pasha Toptani] to recommend the latter to hoist the Albanian in place of the Turkish flag. If this were done, all the Albanians

The defence of Shkodra continued until 22 April, until Esat Pasha and the Montenegrins agreed on the terms for Shkodra's surrender. Thus, on 23 April 1913, by Esat Pasha's own hand, and without regard for the will of Shkodra's population,<sup>133</sup> Shkodra was handed over to the Montenegrins (to Prince Danilo). Yet since the Great Powers had already agreed that Shkodra should remain within Albania's borders, they compelled Montenegro to evacuate Shkodra on 14 May 1913. That history often repeats itself was also evident in this case, in which the Montenegrins were compelled to relinquish Shkodra. Only thirty-three years earlier, in the same manner, the international fleet compelled the Albanian League to accept that the Sublime Porte hand over Ulcinj to the Montenegrins; the difference between these two historical moments, however, is that in 1880 Albanian Ulcinj was given to the Montenegrins in exchange for Plav and Gusinje, respectively, Hoti and Gruda—whereas in 1913 Albanian Shkodra remained with Albania in exchange for Albanian territories of the vilayets of Kosovo and Monastir. The analogy between these two moments is that, in both cases, territorial transactions in Great Power diplomacy were conducted with Albanian lands—namely, Albanian lands for Albanian lands. On the very day the Montenegrins left Shkodra, detachments of the international forces entered, establishing their administration, under which Shkodra would remain for a considerable time.

Regarding Montenegro's war for Shkodra, it is necessary to highlight the assessment of the Montenegrin historian B. Babić: "Her further warfare around Shkodra and for the conquest of part of the Albanian coast was a failure."<sup>134</sup>

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in the vicinity would rally to its relief." (TNA: FO, 424/242, No.222, Sir Edward Grey to Sir G. Lowther, Foreign Office, February 13, 1913).

<sup>133</sup> After the assassination of Hasan Riza Pasha, the people of Shkodra gathered in the Assembly at the Shkodra Customs House and decided to resist until the last drop of their blood so as not to lose Shkodra to Montenegro. (Nikaj, *Historija e Shqypniës*, 204).

<sup>134</sup> Babić, *Politika Crne Gore.*, 39.

## Conclusion

Shkodra (1912–1913) was the decisive node where the battlefield and European diplomacy intersected, with direct consequences for the stability of the newly created Albanian state. As the principal centre of Northern Albania and an irreplaceable strategic point, its loss would have gravely weakened Albania’s territorial and political cohesion at the very moment when its borders and viability were being determined. Shkodra’s prolonged resistance denied Montenegro the “fait accompli” that would have strengthened its claim at the international negotiating table. In this context, Austria-Hungary consistently upheld the thesis that Shkodra must remain within Albania, while Britain—through the Foreign Office and the chairmanship of the London Conference—played the key mediating role in pursuing a durable settlement. Militarily, Hasan Rıza Pasha was the central figure in the defence: his determination not to surrender and his disciplined leadership sustained Shkodra precisely at the moment when Albania’s diplomatic fate was being decided.

The defence of Shkodra was carried out with forces half the size of the besieging Montenegrin–Serbian army. The Turkish historian S. Kocabaş considers Hasan Rıza Pasha a “Hero of the First Balkan War”,<sup>135</sup> whereas H. Ertürk calls him the “King of Albania”.<sup>136</sup> There is no doubt that, through his stance, Hasan Rıza Pasha deserved many exalted epithets. Hasan Rizaja, as the people of Shkodra called him, was not experienced by the Albanians as a foreigner; indeed, the Shkodrans called him neither “Pasha” nor “Bey”, but only by his name, because in that way he seemed closer to them. Hasan Rıza Pasha left deep traces in popular memory; therefore, this historical figure is remembered to this day with reverence.

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<sup>135</sup> Süleyman Kocabaş, *Avrupa Türkiyesi'nin kaybı ve Balkanlarda Panislawizm* (İstanbul: Vatan Yayınevi, 1986), 289.

<sup>136</sup> Hüsamettin Ertürk, *İki Devrin Perde Arkası* (İstanbul: Pinar Y.evi, 1964), 104.



JORINA VERLI

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL BANK  
OF ALBANIA AND OF THE SVEA  
LOAN – INDICATORS OF THE GROWING  
ITALIAN INFLUENCE IN ALBANIA

**Abstract**

The establishment of the National Bank of Albania and the management of the SVEA loan as key indicators of the growing Italian influence in Albania during the mid-1920s are the focus of this article. In the aftermath of World War I, Albania faced severe economic and political instability, monetary fragmentation and weak state institutions, which made the creation of a national bank and of a unified currency a strategic necessity.

Despite several projects proposed under the auspices of the League of Nations and by various international financial groups, most initiatives failed due to political instability and rivalries between the Great Powers. Italy ultimately succeeded in securing control over the National Bank of Albania, using it as a mechanism to expand its financial dominance. The article highlights how the bank's structure, governance and lending policies favored the Italian interests, marginalizing the local Albanian capital. Furthermore, the SVEA loan bound Albania's public finances to Italy through burdensome conditions and long-term customs guarantees. Together, these developments transformed financial dependence into a broader instrument of political influence, shaping Albania's economic and diplomatic trajectory in the interwar period.

**Key words:** National Bank of Albania, SVEA loan, Italian influence, Albanian economy, foreign capital, foreign investments, 1920s

The end of World War I and the withdrawal of the occupying armies from the Albanian territory left behind miserable economic and financial conditions. The very existence of the Albanian state and the integrity of the territory, approved by the Great Powers in 1913, were called into question. The majority of the population lived in extreme poverty and the country had been devastated by the battles of the warring powers. The retreating foreign armies left behind a variety of coins and banknotes of their countries, which were devalued at the end of the war.

In the Congress of Lushnja (21–31 January 1920), the idea that the country urgently needed a national currency was particularly emphasized. It would enable the standardization of the type of money used in transactions within the country, while also replacing the multitude of currencies left behind by foreign soldiers. At that time, the participants in the conference agreed that without a unified national currency, a state could have neither political stability nor economic development.

The matter of defining and then issuing the national currency could only be resolved through the establishment of a national bank with sufficient capital to operate throughout the territory of Albania. The Albanian government decided on 25 June 1920, in support of the decision taken in 1912, that the Albanian national currency would be the gold franc of the Latin monetary union.

However, despite the political will, from 1912 to 1925 it was impossible to create in Albania (through a national bank) a financial and credit system with Western parameters.

In September 1922, the Luxembourg professor Albert Calmes<sup>1</sup> (sent by the League of Nations to Albania) presented to the League a project that was never implemented. It was one of the best projects, which envisaged the establishment of a bank of issue, mainly with foreign capital, which would also have sections of the Commercial

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Calmes, *La situation économique et financière de l'Albanie*, Genève, 1922.

Bank and the Savings Bank. This bank would have the exclusive right to issue currency and grant loans with a capital of 10-15 million gold francs. According to Calmes, half of the shares would be held by foreigners, but they should belong to countries that did not have political and economic interests in Albania, or held by many different countries, so that the influences would neutralize each other.<sup>2</sup>

Another project was that of J. D. Hunger, the Dutch financial advisor, sent by the League of Nations to the Albanian government in 1923.<sup>3</sup> According to the project presented by him in August, an emission bank was to be established in Albania with a capital of 15 million gold francs, which would be granted on a concession basis for 15 years.<sup>4</sup> The bank would have a general character of emission, of investment, of lending, and also serve as a treasury register to collect the savings of the state and the population. The capital would be international in the vast majority, while domestic capital would occupy only 1/15 of the total capital.<sup>5</sup> The bodies of the League of Nations where the project was examined, among other things, opposed it, arguing that the capital proposed for the establishment of the Bank was excessive, considering that Albania was a country with small population and insignificant economic activity.

In August 1923, another project was presented to the League of Nations by the Economic and Financial Commission of the Financial Committee of the organization. The project was named "Project of the Statutes of the Bank of Albania".<sup>6</sup> The bank was to have a capital of 5 million gold francs and, as a joint-stock company with exclusivity in its

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<sup>2</sup> A. Calmes, *La situation...*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Monetary Policy in Albania: From the Past to the Present*, Bank of Albania's 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference, 26 October 2012, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Dhimitri Pasko, *Tri problema në lidhje me Bankën Kombëtare (me disa aneksa)*, Konstancë: Shtypshkronja "Albania", 1932, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> *Projet de loi pour la nouvelle Banque d'émission d'Albanie*, Société des Nations, Genève, août, 1923.

<sup>6</sup> *Projet de statuts de la Banque d'Albanie*, Genève, le 21 août 1923.

field, would belong to six states. Specialists of the time estimated that this project would create a bank similar to the model of the Bank of Morocco, founded at the beginning of the century.<sup>7</sup>

A fourth project was presented on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1923, by the Financial Subcommittee of the League of Nations. According to it, the Bank would be built in a concession form with a term of 25 years.<sup>8</sup> It would have an initial capital of 5 million gold francs divided into 10,000 shares with a value of 500 gold francs each. The gold reserve for the bank bonds should have been at least 40%.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to these projects, which were drafted upon the request of the League of Nations, there were also a number of projects and offers from various capitalist groups in several countries. The most important of them was the project of an English group, operating under the name of “The Albanian Economic Development Corporation”, which envisaged starting the bank with a capital of 500,000 pounds, of which 49% would be in the hands of the Albanian shareholders. The bank of this financial group would function on behalf of the Albanian state in all the ways that a national bank can, and would also carry out on behalf of private individuals other routines. For this offer, the British capital requested priority in Albania over all state concessions, monopolies, public works, etc.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dh. Pasko, *Tri problema...*, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup> *Projet de loi organique pour la Banque d'Albanie*, Genève, le 3 septembre 1923, Société des Nations, texte du Sous-Comité.

<sup>9</sup> Dh. Pasko, *Tri problema...*, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror* (hereinafter *AQSH*), Fondi (hereinafter *F.*) Legata Italiane, Year (hereinafter *V.*) 1924. Announcements from the Italian Legation to Rome regarding the action of an English group for the creation of the National Bank and of a syndicate for the economic development of Albania; *Ibid.*, Announcement of the Italian Legation to Rome, 22.02.1925.

Another project was that of a Belgian group, which was presented under the name “Belgian Proposals for the Establishment of a National Bank of Albania” (“Propositions belges en vue de la constitution d’une Banque Nationale d’Albanie”).<sup>11</sup> According to this project, the Bank would be granted a concession for 30 years and its capital would be 26 million gold francs. The quota that could have been owned by Albanian citizens would have been 50% of the total amount, but the proposal was already considered adventurous at that time and was not finalized. For statistics, it can be said that offers and proposals were also made by other capitalist groups from France, the USA, Switzerland, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Greece, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Among all the projects or proposals presented, those with the most favorable conditions were those drafted within the framework of the League of Nations, but both those and other projects remained mere attempts due to several internal and external political and economic factors. On one hand, the first half of the 1920s was characterized by the lack of political stability in Albania, by frequent government crises and by an economy that was still far from the parameters that could support serious investments. On the other hand, the projects coming from the League of Nations were sabotaged by the rivalry of the Great Powers trying to obtain a monopolistic placement over the Albanian finances.

However, unlike others, the project of an Italian financial group found concrete realization. Specifically, in the Financial Committee of the League of Nations, Italy was represented by Mario Alberti, who was also the director of the “Credito Italiano” bank. He is the exact person who in January 1925 would conclude negotiations with the government of Ahmet Zogu for the establishment of the National Bank of Albania.

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<sup>11</sup> *Société des Nations*, Commission économique et financière, Comité financier, Albanie, Genève, 2 septembre 1922.

<sup>12</sup> Veniamin Toçi, *Ndërrhyrja e kapitalit të huaj në Shqipëri dhe qëndrimi i qarqeve demokratike: 1921-1925*, Akademia e Shkencave e RPSH, Instituti i Historisë, Tiranë, 1974, p. 78.

Mario Alberti's actions in the bodies of the League of Nations to avoid other contenders and to pave the way for Italian capital are well known and accepted. The Financial Committee of the League of Nations was unable to smooth out the contradictions and reconcile the interests of the various financial groups that aimed to establish the Bank in Albania. This committee accepted that the initiative for the establishment of the Bank could be taken by the Italian financial group.<sup>13</sup>

In Albanian historiography has emerged the opinion that A. Jansen, chairman of the Financial Committee in the League of Nations, as a reward for his pro-Italian stance, may have received the promise that in the Italian concession of the bank a quota for Belgian capital would have been reserved, as indeed happened.<sup>14</sup> After ensuring the support of the League of Nations, Rome found itself without rivals in front of the Albanian government of the time.

In Italy, the control over the National Bank of Albania was considered a lever that would ensure the Italian dominance in the Albanian economy.<sup>15</sup> Some of the major Italian banks that had begun to operate in Albania at this time were "Credito Italiano", "Banca Commerciale Italiana", "Banca Nazionale del Credito" and "Banco di Roma". The activities of these banks, headed by "Credito Italiano", were coordinated by the Italian government itself, which specifically created a financial group with representatives from each bank. Not coincidentally, Mario Alberti, an influential man in the Italian financial and political circles, but also in international economic circles, was appointed as head of the group. Practically, the group was led by the government of Rome itself, under the special care of Mussolini.

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<sup>13</sup> *AQSH*, F. Legata Italiana. Letter from A. Jansen (chairman of the Financial Committee of the League of Nations) to M. Alberti, dated 27.03.1924.

<sup>14</sup> V. Toçi, *Ndërrhyrja e kapitalit...*, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> *AQSH*, F. Legata Italiana. Memorandum of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Legation in Durrës, regarding political and economic actions towards Albania. [The document is thought to be dated around early January 1925.]

The preparation of the “landscape” intensified during the second half of 1924, when A. Zog, as a political immigrant, was preparing to regain his power in Albania. According to a well-known personality of the Italian politics at the time, Lieutenant Alessandro Lessona, secret talks had been held in Rome by A. Zog's envoys with representatives of the Italian government.<sup>16</sup> In December 1924, after Ahmet Zog's returned to power, the talks were transferred to Tirana.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note that, as in the case of the international competition to seize the Albanian petroleum, Italy was faced with a British action targeting the Bank and other concessions in Albania. Upon being informed of an initiative of intervention from a British financial group, the Italian diplomacy and its financial circles were set in motion to obtain information what it was all about, who were the members of the British financial group and how far the British Legation in Albania would reach to support the British financial group's attempt. When representatives of this group arrived in Tirana in mid-December 1924, the Italian Legation in Durrës increased the frequency of correspondence and information towards the authorities in Rome. This practice was grouped under the subtitle “English Economic Initiatives in Albania” (Iniziativa Economiche Inglesi in Albania). It suggested that Rome should offer a loan to the Tirana government and seal with this “minimum sacrifice” the priority for a number of concessions in the future. The Legation, insisting on the loan approval, wrote to the government (and to Mussolini himself): “...I do not hide from your Excellency that this may perhaps be the last chance that is presented to us...”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Alessandro Lessona, *Memorie*, Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1958; Francesco Iacomoni di San Savino, *La politica dell' Italia in Albania*, Bologna: Capelli Editore, 1965.

<sup>17</sup> A. Lessona, *Memorie...*, passim.

<sup>18</sup> *AQSH*, F. Legata Italiane. Announcement of the Italian Legation in Albania towards Rome, dated 22.02.1925.

The British capital, feeling itself in a privileged position, due to the promise made to it since the beginning of the 1920s for the concession to explore and exploit Albanian oil, also feeling the continuous support of some Albanian government circles and influential personalities, showed itself to be very active in the matter of winning the concession for the bank.

In the last quarter of 1924, the British had compiled a detailed plan for the creation of the Bank of Albania and for gaining other concessions in the country. Lobbying “pro-London” in Tirana was done by Mehmet Konica, head of the Albanian Legation in Britain.<sup>19</sup>

In December 1924, before the fall of the F. Noli government, the British bankers A. Godwin, Mahmud bey and Bernard Mets showed up in Tirana for direct talks concerning the creation of the bank. The Italian agents, including the diplomatic staff, as in previous cases, immediately notified Rome. Mussolini was informed that the British promised a loan of 2 million pounds, of which 100 thousand would be given immediately and in advance at the time of signing the agreement.<sup>20</sup> The situations created in those days, due to the fighting that accompanied the crossing of the border by A. Zog's forces, stopped the talks on this matter and caused the British to leave Albania. In fact, to return again after A. Zog took power.<sup>21</sup>

At the end of consecutive collisions, the political situation in Albania and the obligations that A. Zog had for the help received to regain power dictated that the agreement concerning the creation of the bank would be finalized with the Italian financial group. Important concessions were thus granted to the Italian capital for the creation of the National Bank in January 1925. Immediately afterwards, on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1925, the “Society for the Economic Development of Albania” (Società per lo Sviluppo Economico dell’Albania – SVEA) was also

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Message of the Italian Legation to Rome, dated 16.11.1924.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Iniziative economiche inglesi in Albania (massage to Rome), dated 20.12.1924.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Telegram of the Italian Legation to Rome, dated 06.02.1925.

created.<sup>22</sup> Its headquarters would be in Rome. SVEA would administrate the loan granted, for the construction of public works, for the development of the agriculture and so on.<sup>23</sup>

The agreement for the creation of the National Bank of Albania was signed on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1925 by the Minister of Finances, Myfit Libohova, and by Mario Alberti, for the Italian financial group. According to the convention, in the formation of the bank's founding capital, Albanian citizens could hold up to 49% of the shares, while foreign citizens could have no less than 50%.<sup>24</sup> Given that, in this group (in the 50% of the shares) in addition to the Italian capital, the Belgian, Yugoslav, Swiss capital, etc. would also participate. So, the majority of the shares would still be in the hands of Albanians, a full 49%. But events unfolded differently.

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<sup>22</sup> *Fletorja Zyrtare*, no. 40, date 31.07.1925. Konvencion mbi krijimin e Bankës dhe huasë SVEA, in: *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar: (Periudha e Pavarësisë – 28 Nëntor 1912 – 7 Prill 1939)*, Volume III, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, Tiranë: Toena, 2007, p. 258; also in: *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, Volume III, (1925-1939), Tiranë: Botimet Albanologjike, 2020, (reference: *Gazeta e Korçës*, no. 179, 25.04.1925); *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (hereinafter: *DDI*), Settima Serie, 1922-1935, V. III, 23 febbraio – 14 maggio 1925, Roma: La Libreria dello Stato, 1959, Document no. 763, p. 475-476. The telegram of the Italian Minister Durazzo addressed from Durrës to Mussolini, dated March 16, 1925, gives January 1925 as the date of signing the agreement for the National Bank of Albania, and April-May 1925 for the creation of the SVEA company.; Meanwhile, the well-known researchers Iljaz Fishta and Veniamin Toçi, in the publications often cited in their work, refer to the date of March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1925 for the creation of the Bank.; Also according to the Bank of Albania website ([https://www.bankofalbania.org/Rreth\\_Bankes/Historiku\\_i\\_shkurter\\_i\\_Bankes/](https://www.bankofalbania.org/Rreth_Bankes/Historiku_i_shkurter_i_Bankes/)) the date of creation of this institution is September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1925.

<sup>23</sup> Kristo Frashëri, *Monedha, krediti dhe Banka në Shqipëri gjatë shekujve, (Vështrim i shkurtër), Me një shtojcë dokumentare*, Tiranë: UMSH Press; Botimet Toena, 2011, p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Due to the corrupt actions of Myfit Libohova, Albanian citizens were prevented from taking possession of the percentage of shares that belonged to them. A good part of them passed directly into the hands of the Italians. Another part of the Albanian shares (25%) was initially fictitiously controlled by three beys (Ajet Libohova, Eqerem bey Vlora and Neshat pasha Vlora)<sup>25</sup> and then resold to the Italians. In total, only a small part of the total shares of the Bank remained uncontrolled by the Italians and was purchased by Swiss, Yugoslav and Belgian financial institutions.<sup>26</sup> According to the agreement, the bank was established with a capital of 12.5 million gold francs (Article 1), with a duration of 50 years (Article 4) and as a concession with absolute and irrevocable exclusivity (Article 13). The capital was divided into 595,000 shares, of which 495,000 were regular shares worth 25 gold francs each and 100,000 were nominal (basic) shares worth 1.25 gold francs each.<sup>27</sup>

To calm the reaction of the partners, the Italian financial group also included Belgian, Swiss and Yugoslav capitals as shareowners in the Bank, although in minimal proportions. It is interesting to mention in this case that in the past, in the early 1920s, Italy had followed the same policy on the matter of the bank, which was also on the agenda then. The Italians had put pressure on the Serbo-Albanian Bank (Srpsko-Arbanaška Banka) in Cetinje, represented by the Zuber brothers (Lale N. Zuber & Nicola N. Zuber), to agree on the creation of the Bank of Albania. The Montenegrin bank was also partially formed by British capital. According to British sources, in their bank in Belgrade the Zuber brothers also had shares of the British company "British Trade

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<sup>25</sup> Iljaz Fishta, *Sistemi monetar dhe i kreditit në Shqipëri (1925-1944)*, Tiranë: "Mihal Duri", 1971, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup> Iljaz Fishta, Veniamin Toçi, *Gjendja ekonomike e Shqipërisë në vitet 1912-1944, prapambetja e saj, shkaqet dhe pasojat*, Tiranë: "8 Nëntori", 1983, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Fletorja Zyrtare*, no. 40. Convention on the establishment of the Bank and on the SVEA loan, date 31.07.1925.

Corporation".<sup>28</sup> The same bank was also putting pressure during the beginning of 1925.<sup>29</sup>

However, at the end of multidimensional negotiations, the Belgian, Swiss and Yugoslav capital could not obtain more than 25% of the total of the shares of the National Bank of Albania. Obviously, in the case of the Italian and Yugoslav capital, political interests stood in the background making victories or losses in the economic field go parallel with governmental stances. At the time of the establishment of the National Bank of Albania, the Italian financial group signed to get hold of 45% of the total shares of the bank, but as a result of speculative schemes it also obtained the amount of shares that were supposed to be owned by the Albanian capital, summarizing up to 75% of the total shares.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the basic agreement with the Italian financial group, other agreements were achieved on the modalities of its implementation. Executive agreement number 13 determined the amount of shares of the Albanian party, the criteria and the time within which the signing proces had to be made. The extremely near deadline,

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<sup>28</sup> *The National Archives* (hereinafter: *TNA*), FO 371/7331 C8760/1537/90. A. Young for the Foreign Office, 15 June 1922, p. 336.; According to Armend Mehmeti in *Diplomacia e Britanisë së Madhe në marrëdhëniet shqiptaro-jugosllave 1919-1939*, Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike – Insituti i Historisë, Tiranë: Kristalina-KH, 2020 (who cites: M. Milošević, L. Dimić, *Međudržavni ugovori između Jugoslavije i Albanije 1918-1939...*) in the request of the Zuber brothers to open a branch in Albania, it was stated that the goal was to establish the strongest commercial, credit and transformational ties possible with neighboring Albania and especially with its northern regions. In fact, Belgrade planned through this bank to “diminish as much as possible the Italian economic influence in Albania”. To achieve this goal, the Yugoslav government granted to the bank the status of a privileged organization for the cities of Shkodra and Durrës.

<sup>29</sup> Saša Mišić, “Serbo-Albanian Bank in Albania 1925-1927”, in *Balkanica – Annual of the Institute for Balkan Studies (No. XXXVII)*, 2006, p. 255; Alessandro Roselli, *Italia e Albania: relazioni finanziarie nel ventennio fascista*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> V. Toçi, *Ndërrhyrja e kapitalit...*, p. 93.

kept secret by Myfit Libohova, put Albanian entrepreneurs offside to become widely active in the purchase of shares. However, even more important is that intentionally the content of the agreement was not announced. As a result, the Albanian stakeholders could not even get fully informed about the matter.

The Minister of Finances, Myfit Libohova, who had also represented the Albanian side in the negotiations, had in fact agreed with the Italian financial group that this would happen. There are researchers who believe that even though M. Libohova was later politically eliminated by A. Zog, he would have had it impossible to act without his chief's awareness and therefore Libohova's "sacrifice" in the Parliament was done simply to avoid a possible scandal.<sup>31</sup>

Owning only 25% of the bank's share capital, the Belgian, Swiss and Yugoslav investors were able to act only as dictated by the main shareholder, namely the Italian financial capital, in drafting the policies for the National Bank of Albania. It should also be noted that the concession period of 50 years, with the possibility of an indefinite extension, was not favorable for Albania. In the administrative committee of the National Bank with headquarters in Rome, in its central directorate in Albania (initially in Durrës and later in Tirana), also in the directorates of the branches that were opened in various cities, all the managers appointed were Italian citizens. Mario Alberti was appointed President of the Bank, while the Bank's first advisor was Amedeo Gambino, both Italian citizens.

By controlling the National Bank of Albania (which was established as a bank of monetary emission and lending, whose headquarters were in Rome), the Italian capital avoided as much as possible its contractual obligations towards the Albanian state regarding the profit made and the transparency. In fact, through a deflationary policy for the banknotes, the Italians managed to extract gold and

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<sup>31</sup> Mentar Belegu, "Politika zogiste e dyerve të hapura 1925-1926", in *Studime Historike*, 1964, No. 3, p. 33.

precious metal coins from the hands of the population and accumulating them in Rome, where the directorate of the Bank was located. Even in the credit sector, the Bank followed a policy that harmed the interests of the country. The loans were mainly accorded to companies with Italian capital, while in the sphere of agriculture, the support towards local farmers was completely absent.

It seemed that Italy had won the battle to seize the National Bank of Albania, not only against Yugoslavia and other small powers, but also against Great Britain. In fact, within the framework of its geostrategy in the Mediterranean region, it turns out that Great Britain, interested first in getting its hands on the Albanian oil and irritated with Italy on this matter, tolerated the latter to dominate in the battle for the bank. Apparently, this was also an indirect blow to Yugoslavia and its first ally, France, whose strengthening in Europe disrupted the balances desired by Britain.

In the British Archives, inside the correspondence of F. M. Voules with H. Nicolson during 1927, it becomes clear that the British company “Ethelburg Syndicate Limited”, which aimed to obtain the concession of the Bank of Albania and which represented several British financial groups, withdrew from the scene, because it had understood, amongst other things, the hesitation of the British government to support this company in front of the Italian opposition. As a result, this serious competitor withdrew from its initiative.<sup>32</sup>

The same Italian financial group that undertook the creation of the National Bank of Albania simultaneously concluded, in March 1925, with the government of Tirana, a contract to find a loan for the Albanian state. In fact, behind this group stood the Italian government itself and the credit was granted by it. It was precisely the “Society for the Economic Development of Albania” (SVEA), mentioned above,

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<sup>32</sup> TNA, FO 371/10658 C7537/1768/90. F. M. Voules directed to H. Nicolson, 03.06.1927, p. 121; On the British stance, more broadly: Armend Mehmeti, *Diplomacia e Britanisë së Madhe...*, passim.

that was created by the government of Rome to grant and financially administer the loan. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1925, the Albanian government signed the relevant convention with it.

The loan was issued for a nominal amount of 70.5 million gold francs, of which 50 million would be disbursed to the Albanian government (which, with the exchange rate of 1927, amounted to 65.7 million gold francs). Its annual interest was 7.5% on the nominal amount and not on the effective amount made available. The loan would have to be repaid over a 40-year period.<sup>33</sup>

To guarantee the repayment of the loan installments (principal plus annual interest), the Italian state would hold “pledge” of Albania’s customs revenues for the value of 8.5 million gold francs per year. To understand the importance of this amount, it is sufficient to note that it equaled 44% of Albania’s budget revenues for the financial year 1925-1926.<sup>34</sup> In this way, the Albanian government was deprived of the right to intervene in its customs’ tariffs for 40 years. Of course, the one who benefited from these conditions was the Italian state, which supplied about 60% of the Albanian imports.<sup>35</sup>

M. Libohova made disappear the document that compelled SVEA to hand out the first installment of 7.5 million gold francs, giving to the company the chance to disburse the installments according to its own interests. Without dwelling too long on the problems that arose between the two countries as a result of this loan, which worsened further due to the criminal actions of corrupt government officials from the very signing of the agreement, it is worth noting that as early as 1927 this arrangement put the Albanian government in a difficult position.

In 1926, Albania's inability to liquidate to SVEA the first year's installment brought the Italian government into play. As it was planned,

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<sup>33</sup> I. Fishta, V. Toçi, *Gjendja ekonomike e Shqipërisë...*, p. 77; *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar...*, Vol. III, p. 259.

<sup>34</sup> Giuseppe di Nardi, “Le finanze pubbliche dell’Albania”, in *Principi di Economia Albanese*, Padova: 1941, p. 245.

<sup>35</sup> *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shek. XX...*, Vol. III, p. 39.

the Italian government undertook Albania's obligations and itself repaid the SVEA company. A. Zogu's government was forced to accept the Italian intervention, turning the obligation that the Albanian state had towards the SVEA company into an obligation of the Albanian state towards the Italian one.<sup>36</sup> The sliding of the Albanian state into direct debt with Mussolini's government put A. Zogu in front of a lot of pressure and the need to make political tolerations.<sup>37</sup>

After this action, Mussolini imposed himself to A. Zog, obtaining successive concessions. The Italian leader broke the resistance of A. Zog, who up to that moment insisted for the funds to be used according to the project. According to the data, the agriculture was almost completely left unattended. where out of the 31.2 million gold francs that the agreement stipulated for land reclamation, construction of sewerage, irrigation networks, etc., only 2.5 million were invested in this direction. The entire remaining part of the fund, of about 28.7 million gold francs, was passed on by the SVEA for the construction of roads, bridges, scaffolding, fortifications and several government buildings. The from-east-to-west direction of many of the roads built was certainly valuable for the development of the country, but it also carried within itself the Italian aim of penetrating further into the Balkans in the future. Also, through the loan, Italian companies were enriched, especially those functioning in the construction sector. They

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<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, during the years 1926-1933, the SVEA loan was disbursed to Albania in the following amounts: 0.6 million gold francs in 1926, 1.4 million gold francs in 1927, 2.4 million in 1928, 9.6 million in 1929, 11.8 million in 1930, 15.8 million in 1931, 7 million in 1932, and 4 million in 1933. Thus, a total of about 52.6 million gold francs was provided over 8 years. Another loan offered in 1931, which was granted for a period of 3 years, reached 4.2 million gold francs. According to Italian sources, in the years 1926-1933, Albania received from Italy, through the SVEA loan, the loan of year 1931, as well as other short-term and long-term loans, about 141.3 million gold francs. For more information on the above, see also: A. Rosselli, *Italia e Albania...*, passim.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

signed several contracts for carrying out the works and benefited the major part of the money.<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, the Italian capital dominated, over any other domestic or foreign capital, in crucial sectors of the economy, such as: in the construction sector, in maritime transport, in passenger and mail transport, in air transport, in the finance and credit sectors, etc.<sup>39</sup>

During this period, the space created intentionally for accommodating the Italian capital in Albania becomes more evident if the agricultural economy is taken into observation. In Sukth in 1925, in Llakatund in 1926, in Yrshek in 1928, etc., several Italian agricultural enterprises were established. The Italian Institute for Agrarian Activities (“Ente Italiano Attività Agraria” – EIAA) in Sukth, the Joint Stock Company for Agricultural Industry Products (“Società Anonima Prodotti d’Industria Agraria” – SAPIA) in Yrshek, etc. were established on the lands of the villagers, who were displaced by expropriation and compensation by the state.<sup>40</sup>

Also, Italian companies bought land from Albanian landlords (although the law prohibited the purchase of land by foreigners), hiding behind an abusive formal concession, which gave them the opportunity to use the land for 99 years. During the signing of the contracts, Italian companies were notably favoured: they were excluded from customs’ payments, they were charged with a very low tax (5-6%) and they paid insignificant land rent (AIPA, for instance, paid 1.5 gold francs per hectare). Italian companies were also excluded from the Albanian state's control over their activities.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar...*, Vol. III, p. 259.

<sup>39</sup> *Shqipëria më 1937: Veprimi Shtetnor gjatë njëzet e pesë vjetëve të parë të vetqeverimit*, Vol. I, Tiranë: Shtyp. “Kristo Luarasi”, 1937, passim.; Likurg Roshi, *Zhvillimi i transportit në Shqipëri*, Tiranë: 1970, passim.; *Statistika e tregtisë së jashtme 1929*, Tiranë: 1930, passim; etj.

<sup>40</sup> I. Fishta, V. Toçi, *Gjendja ekonomike e Shqipërisë...*, p. 84, 85.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84, 85.

Concessions towards Italy got also extended in the field of culture. Within the framework of the right they gained to conduct archaeological excavations in Albania, the Italian archaeologist Ugolini (Luigi Maria Ugolini) directed the works in the ancient city of Butrint.<sup>42</sup>

Under these conditions, in the period 1925-1928, while the Italian intervention was spreading and expanding in Albania, A. Zogu sought to secure his power by trying as much as possible to maneuver between Italy and Yugoslavia and by relying as much as circumstances allowed on Great Britain. In this context, in the internal politics, are also to be noted the liquidations of powerful individuals, his collaborators, who clearly served Italy or Yugoslavia. Without stopping too long on this aspect, worth of being recalled are the political annihilation of Myfit Libohova, a close friend of Rome, in 1925, and later of Ceno Beg Kryeziu, a man of Belgrade. They had gained a lot of power and posed danger to the President of the Republic.<sup>43</sup> Under these political circumstances were signed, between Albania and Italy, the First Pact of Tirana in 1926 and a year later, in 1927, the Second Pact of Tirana.

This was the spirit that prevailed in those years in Albania. It is important to objectively evaluate every step taken. A. Zog was forced to accept the SVEA loan and other agreements in exchange of financial resources to cover the expenses for the Albanian economy, defense, education and other aspects of the country's life. The repeated rejections from the League of Nations of the Albanian requests for assistance (initially to the government of Fan Noli) showed to A. Zog that Albania would not receive any kind of substantial aid.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri d'Italia (ASDMAEI)*, F. Affari Politici 1931-1945, Albania, Year 1934, Envelope 48, Archeologia in Albania, Ugolini.

<sup>43</sup> Ilir Ushtelenca, *Diplomacia e Mbretit Zogu i I-rë (1912-1939)*, Tiranë, 1995, p. 192-193; *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar...*, Vol. III, p. 261; Paskal Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927*, Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese Enciklopedike, 1992, p. 437-444.

<sup>44</sup> I. Ushtelenca, *Diplomacia e Mbretit...*, p. 193-194

Of course, Rome was taking calculated steps towards Albania, which were highlighted year after year by Italian-Albanian bilateral relations. Italian demands would become the subject of continuous negotiations and would build the framework of bilateral efforts for the achievement of economic and political agreements between the two countries, with Italy's tendency to always be in advantage and Albania's aim to maintain its dignity and a position from which being able to choose and to decide. Without discussing the advantages and disadvantages of each agreement, what is worth emphasizing is that in those areas where the Italians aimed to succeed, the first agreements were reached, namely in the sectors of oil, mining, electricity, forests, the food industry, etc.<sup>45</sup>

Although the Italian capital dominated or was allowed to dominate in Albania, as emphasized in the “*Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*” and in other outstanding publications, there was no shortage of investments from other European countries. However, from the analysis, the size of these investments results to be significantly smaller than those of Italy.

Regarding the structure, the origin of the financial capital, etc., during the second half of the 1920s, it is possible to conclude that the European powers with interests in Albania recognized the advantage of the Italian state. However, they tried to keep an eye on the strategic sectors of the Albanian economy, on the extreme goals of Rome's government, as well as on its political and territorial intentions related to the Eastern coast of the Adriatic.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *AQSH*, F. BKSh, V. 1927, 1933; *Ibid.*, F. Legata Italiane, V. 1926, 1928; also: Zhivko Avramovski, Italijanska ekonomska penetracija u Albaniji, 1925-1939, in *Istorija XX veka*, Zbornik radova V, Institut Drushtvenih Nauka, Beograd: 1963; *Fletorja Zyrtare*, no. 66, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1926; *Ibid.*, no. 50, June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1927.

<sup>46</sup> Arben Puto, *Shqipëria Politike (1912-1939)*, Tiranë: Toena, 2009, p. 416; Galeazzo Ciano, *Ditari i Kontit Çiano (1937-1943) Shqipëria*, Tiranë: ALBINFORM, 1994, p. 23; Živko Avramovski, “Kontribut studimit të çështjes së marrëdhënieve shqiptaro-jugosllave në periudhën midis dy luftërave botërore”, in *Gjurmime Albanologjike*, no. 2, Prishtinë: 1968, passim.

ARMEND MEHMETI

BETWEEN EXPULSION AND ASSIMILATION -  
ATTEMPTS TO DISPLACE ALBANIANS FROM  
KOSOVO - THE TURKISH-YUGOSLAV  
CONVENTION OF 1938

**Abstract**

The emergence and consolidation of the Serbian state during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the execution of expansionist initiatives and policies, which would become more pronounced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ambitions for a homogenous ethnic Serbian state and access to the Aegean or Adriatic Sea were marked by the occupation of territories populated by Albanians and the implementation of policies aimed at expulsion or denationalization of the local populace. To achieve this objective, Serbian political and academic circles formulated various justifications, citing the “historical right” of the medieval Serbian state. The forced displacements and the Serbian strategy of ethnic cleansing in Albanian regions is a subject extensively elaborated by Albanian historiography; however, the core and innovative aspect of this paper lies in its interdisciplinary approach to the elaboration and analyses of this issue, encompassing four interrelated dimensions: the Serbian government’s efforts for the mass displacement of Albanians, the public discourse within Serbia, Turkish immigration policies, and the initiative of the Albanian state to stop mass displacement. This paper is structured chronologically, employing analytical methods, and is grounded in archival materials and literature from Albanian, Yugoslav, and Turkish sources.

**Key words:** displacement, colonization, assimilation, Albanian, Myslim, Yugoslavia, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

## Introduction

The development and consolidation of the Serbian state during the early 19th century coincided with the execution of ambitious and expansionist initiatives. Ilija Garašanin, the Minister of the Interior at the time, formulated a plan in 1844 called "Načertanije," which aimed to assert Serbia's "historical right" and revive the medieval Serbian kingdom of Stefan Dušan, whose ascendance was interrupted by the Battle of Kosovo in 1389.<sup>1</sup> The plan suggested that Serbia should prepare to take advantage of the anticipated decline of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. In light of these circumstances, the document proposed the annexation of territories viewed as "Serbian and Orthodox," including Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Vojvodina, Kosovo, and northern Albania,<sup>2</sup> to establish a larger Serbian state.

However, the failure of various peoples' movements to free themselves from Austria-Hungary made Garašanin realize that Austria-Hungary was a powerful state for small Serbia, so he directed the "Načertanije" project against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, in a situation where Serbia could not expand eastward, the focus shifted to the south. It was during this period that Serbia began an expansionist policy toward Albanian lands, which was accompanied by a policy of ethnic cleansing.\* Thus, during the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (1877-1878), in which Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro,

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<sup>1</sup> Hakif Bajrami, "Ilija Garašanin dhe politika e tij shtetërore 1844-1874," *Vjetari-Godišnjak*, nr. XXIV (1988), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Jelavich, *Historia e Ballkanit, Shekulli tetëmbëdhjetë-nëntëmbëdhjetë* (Tiranë: Botimet Përpjekja, 1999), 231–32; *Enciklopedija Jugoslavije* (Zagreb: Izd. I Naklada Leksikografskog Zavoda, 1958), 429.

<sup>3</sup> George Castellan, *Histori e Ballkanit* (Tiranë: Çabej, 1997), 326.

\* According to a United Nations definition, "Ethnic cleansing" means actions taken to establish ethnically uniform areas by expelling or forcibly transferring members of specific ethnic groups..., see further: Ethnic cleansing, viewed July 5, 2023, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml>

and Romania were allies of Russia, Serbian military and political circles forcibly displaced about 200,000 Albanians from the Sandžak of Niš.<sup>4</sup>

Territorial expansion to the south did not fulfill the Serbian aspirations for dominance. Consequently, the repression of the Albanian League of Prizren heightened the interest of the Serbian government in Albanian lands.<sup>5</sup> Jovan Cvijić, a key proponent of Serbia's territorial ambitions, argued that the Berlin Congress of 1878 had rendered Serbia a "besieged country," necessitating its access to the sea. Under Cvijić's guidance, the Serbian government prepared a comprehensive analysis of the "territory of Old Serbia."<sup>6</sup> The term 'Old Serbia,' which emerged in the 19th century as a geographical label, referred to an area covering 40,000 km<sup>2</sup> that includes parts of present-day North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Sandžak, all of which were asserted as historical lands of medieval Serbia.<sup>7</sup>

According to Serbian politician Ristić, Kosovo's geographic location was especially significant, as its position in the heart of the Balkans allowed for the quickest routes to both the Adriatic and Aegean seas.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Serbia took the lead in forming a Balkan alliance of Orthodox Christian nations, which was established in 1912; this alliance justified its territorial claims on the Ottoman Empire,

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<sup>4</sup> Sabit Uka, "Planet antishqiptare të shteteve fqinje në shekullin XIX," në *Shqiptarët në rrjedhat ballkanike*, përgatit dhe redaktor Sadri Feti, et. al. (Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 1996), 162.

<sup>5</sup> Shukri Rahimi, *Vilajeti i Kosovës* (Prishtinë: Enti i teksteve dhe mjeteve mësimore i Krahinës Socialiste të Kosovës, 1969), 75.

<sup>6</sup> Михаило Војводић, *Србија и Албанс копита њекрајем XIX Века*, vol. Књига 15 (Београд: Српска Академија Наука и Уметности, Одељење Историјских Наука, 1990), 94–95.

<sup>7</sup> Јевто Дедијер, "Стара Србија географска и етнографска слика (1912.)", Београд, 2000, shikuar më 10 prill 2023, <https://dokumen.tips/download/link/dr-jevto-dedijer-stara-srbija-geografska-i-etnografska-slika.html>

<sup>8</sup> Ali Hadri, "Pozita dhe gjendja e Kosovës në Mbretërinë e Jugosllavisë (1919-1941)," në *E vërteta për Kosovën dhe shqiptarët në Jugosllavi*, përgati dhe redaktoi Kristaq Prifti, et. al. (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 1990), 234.

particularly regarding Albanian lands, based on various cultural, historical, and linguistic factors.<sup>9</sup> The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) led to the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from the Balkans and resulted in the displacement of a significant number of Muslims.\* The London Conference of Ambassadors (1913) decided that a portion of the Albanian population and its lands would not be included in the newly independent Albania. Within the domains of Serbia and Montenegro, approximately 900,000 Albanians were left behind, occupying an area of 22,000 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>10</sup> Albanians remaining under the Serbian and Montenegrin regimes were subjected to physical violence and psychological pressure, the destruction of settlements, and the looting of food and livestock.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the murders, the Serbian-Montenegrin government also implemented the forcible conversion of Albanian residents of the Catholic and Muslim faith to Slavic Orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> The purpose of the conversion was the denationalization and assimilation of those people who would accept changing their religion, and to displace those who would not accept it. Thus, the ethnic cleansing and creation of a pure Slavic and Orthodox Kosovo were intended.<sup>13</sup> As a result of the violence, about 120,000 Albanians were

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<sup>9</sup> R. C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913* (London & New York, 2000), 4–5.

\*In 1911, the areas in the Ottoman Empire that were taken over by Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria had around 2,315,293 people who followed Islam. However, following the Balkan Wars, only 870,114 individuals of Muslims remained in those territories, indicating that about 1,445,179 Muslims had been forced to leave their homes. This figure also encompasses Albanians, as the population censuses in the Ottoman Empire were conducted on a theocratic basis... see further: Justin McCarthy, *Vdekje&dëbim – Spastrimi etnik i myslimanëve osmanë* (Tiranë: Alsar, 2017), 171.

<sup>10</sup>Marenglen Verli, *Reforma agrare kolonizuese në Kosovë* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës së Shqipërisë, 1992), 9.

<sup>11</sup> J. McCarthy, *Vdekje&dëbim...*, 155; Zekeria Cana, *Shpalime Historike*, vol. II (Prishtinë: Libri Shkollor, 1988), 165.

<sup>12</sup> Mikel Ndreca, *87 vjet terror the gjenocid shtetëror (1912-1999)* (Prishtinë, 2001), 29.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

displaced to Anatolia and partly to Albania during the years 1913-1915.<sup>14</sup>

After the conclusion of World War I, Kosovo, along with various northern and north-eastern Albanian areas, continued to be part of the Serb-Croat-Slovene Kingdom. The suppression and anti-Albanian policies that had been briefly halted with the Serbian army's exit from Kosovo during the war resumed.\* This policy aimed to fully assimilate the Albanian-populated regions into the Serb-Croat-Slovene state, which could only be accomplished by altering the ethnic makeup of Kosovo, specifically by decreasing the Albanian population and boosting the Slavic presence.<sup>15</sup>

The first measures in the realization of such a goal included actions to disarm the Albanian locals, which were also used as a mechanism for the implementation of systematic violence to force them to move. In the first years after the end of the war, they were organized on an annual basis and were accompanied by mass killings, burning, and destruction of settlements, etc. Among the bloodiest disarmament actions was that of the winter of 1920-1921, which began in the region of Llapi and Gallapi, and which then continued in other regions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> H. Bajrami, "Konventa jugosllave-turke e vitit 1938 për shpërnguljen e shqiptarëve," në *Shpërnguljet e shqiptarëve gjatë shekujve*, për. dhe red. Hakif Bajrami, et. al. (Prishtinë: Shoqatapërkthimin e shqiptarëve të shpërngulur nga Kosova, 1992), 177.

\* During October 1918, Serbian aircraft had dropped warning proclamations in various parts of Kosovo. These proclamations, with threatening tones and written in Turkish, in addition to informing the Albanian people about the penetration of the Serbian army into Kosovo, demanded that the Albanians remain calm, warning them about the "crimes of the autumn of 1915, and that their future fate would depend on their attitude"... see further: Bogumil Hrabak, "Reokupacija oblast isrpske i crnogorske državes arbanaš komveći nomstanov ništva u jesen 1918. godine i držanje arbanasa premaus postavljenoj vlasti", *Gjurmime Albanologjike*, nr. 1, (1969), 255-257.

<sup>15</sup> Sabri Rexha, *Raportet shqiptaro-serbe në Kosovë* (Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik, 2011), 160.

<sup>16</sup> Zamir Shtylla, "Shpërnguljet me dhunë të shqiptarëve në vitet 1912-1941," në *E vërteta për Kosovën dhe shqiptarët në Jugosllavi*, 262-63.

According to data that the Kosovo National Defense Committee\* had addressed to the League of Nations in Geneva, during the years 1918-1921, the Serb-Croat-Slovene government had committed the following atrocities in Kosovo: killed – 12,346 individuals, imprisoned – 23,060, beaten – 1,635, houses burned – 6,025, and houses looted – 10,515.<sup>17</sup>

Alongside the systematic violence of 1919, the settlement of Slavic inhabitants in Kosovo began, supported by the necessary legal framework.<sup>18</sup> The Agrarian Reform Implementation Regulation, enacted on February 27, 1919, and the Regulation for the Colonization of the Southern Regions, established on September 24, 1920, which were subsequently transformed into laws, aimed to create ample opportunities for Slavic settlers while simultaneously reducing the living space for Albanians.<sup>19</sup> By January 1, 1928, the government of Serb-Croat-Slovene had allocated approximately 225,397 hectares of land for these settlers and the formation of their communities.<sup>20</sup> By 1928, several Slavic colonies had been established within Kosovo. The colonization provisions allowed for the use of state-owned lands, peasant lands, abandoned properties, assets of fugitives, and any form of property under the associated regulations.<sup>21</sup>

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\* The "Kosovo National Defense" Committee (1918-1924) was a political-military organization that aimed to restore the Albanian state, liberate Kosovo and unify it with Albania...see further *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, Vëllimi III, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë (Tiranë: Toena, 2002), 125.

<sup>17</sup> *Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Republikës së Shqipërisë*, Fondi (më tej F): Komiteti i Kosovës, Dosja (më tej D): 31/21, Viti 1922; H. Bajrami, *Politika e shfarosjes së shqiptarëve dhe kolonizimi serb (1844-1995)*, (Prishtinë: QIK, 1995), 96; Paskal Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927* (Tiranë: Shtypshkronja "Enciklopedike", 1992), 133.

<sup>18</sup> Ђорђо Крстић, *Колонизација Јужне Србије* (Сарајево, 1928), 6.

<sup>19</sup> S. Rexha, *Raportet shqiptaro-serbe në Kosovë*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> H. Bajrami, *Rrethanat shoqërore dhe politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941* (Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë së Kosovës, 1981), 66.

<sup>21</sup> Milan Obradović, *Reforma agrare dhe kolonizimi në Kosovë (1918-1941)* (Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2005), 169.

The seizure of land and the inability to sustain livelihoods, given that agriculture was the sole economic sector in Kosovo, coupled with the repression of Kachak resistance,<sup>22</sup> led to a notable exodus of people towards Albania or Turkey. As per Yugoslav diplomatic reports, around July 1925, approximately 750 Muslim Albanian families from Kosovo, Macedonia, and the Sandžak were in Thessaloniki awaiting their migration to Turkey.<sup>23</sup> To facilitate their departure, the Serb-Croat-Slovene government provided various assistance measures, including the formal issuance of passports for emigration, exemptions from military service for men, and waivers from assorted administrative and financial obligations. Concurrently, the Serb-Croat-Slovene government took steps to hinder the return of emigrants by denying visa issuance or by imposing administrative and technical hurdles.<sup>24</sup>

The difficult position of the Albanians in Kosovo was documented in the memorandum “The Situation of the Albanian Minority in Yugoslavia,” submitted to the League of Nations on May 5, 1930, by Albanian Catholic priests Don Gjon Bisaku, Don Shtjefen Kurti, and Don Luigj Gashi.<sup>25</sup> Through this document, the state repression against Albanians was elaborated in three main dimensions: (a). persecution of all kinds, to make their departure mandatory; (b). use of violence for the forced denationalization of the population; and (c). exile and extermination of elements who refuse to leave the country or submit to Serbization.<sup>26</sup> Further, through special annexes, the document provides specific details on forced displacement, restriction of

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<sup>22</sup> Liman Rushiti, *Kujtime për Lëvizjen Kaçake* (Prishtinë, 2003), 5–6.

<sup>23</sup> Qerim Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)* (Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë, 2019), 90–91.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Hivzi Islami, *Spastrimet etnike – politika gjenocidiale serbe ndaj shqiptarëve (Shqyrtime, komente, elaborate, dokumente)* (Pejë: Dukagjini, 2003), 190.

<sup>26</sup> *Gjendja e shqiptarëve në Jugosllavi, Prememorie e paraqitur në Lidhje të Kombeve (1930) nga Dom Gj. Bisak, Dom Sh. Kurti, Dom L. Gashi*, red. Briseida Mema, Marenglen Verli (Tiranë: Koha, 1995), 25.

individual freedom, denial of civil and property rights, confiscation of landed properties, denial of education and use of the native language,<sup>27</sup> etc., even though Albanians constituted about 70% of the population in Kosovo,<sup>28</sup> and even though the Serbian-Croatian-Slovene Kingdom had signed the Treaty of Saint-Germain for the protection of minorities in September 1919.<sup>29</sup>

Due to the deprivation of fundamental human and ethnic rights, many Albanians found refuge by leaving Kosovo, with Albania and Turkey perceived as viable destinations for emigration because of shared language or faith. Consequently, during the interwar period, approximately 90,000 to 150,000 Albanians emigrated. Conversely, as a result of implemented agrarian reforms and colonization efforts, around 53,000 Slavic individuals were resettled in Kosovo.<sup>30</sup>

### **The mass displacement efforts**

The pressure from the state began to evolve in the mid-1930s as political circles in Yugoslavia recognized that agrarian reform and colonization had not produced the anticipated outcomes. As a result, they started to formulate new plans aimed at the denationalization of regions populated by Albanians through a systematic and large-scale expulsion. The initiative for organized expulsion of Albanians began in 1930, when efforts to establish a coalition of Balkan nations to withstand the influence of the Great Powers and address the economic

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> According to available data there were 461.970 inhabitants in Kosovo in the year 1921, 552.352 in the year 1931 and 660.276 in March 1941. See further: A. Hadri, "Pozita dhe gjendja e Kosovës në Mbretërinë e Jugosllavisë (1918-1941)," *Gjurmime Albanologjike*, nr. 2, (1968), 164.

<sup>29</sup> *Agjencia Shtetërore e Arkivave të Kosovës* (më tej: *ASHAK*), F: Arkivi Diplomatik i MPJ në Beograd, D: Lidhja e Kombeve, 1-4.

<sup>30</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Kosova – Histori e shkurtër e një treve qendrore ballkanike* (Prishtinë: Koha, 2012), 158; M. Obradović, *Reforma agrare...*, 261.

downturn that started in 1929<sup>31</sup> led to improved relations between Turkey and Yugoslavia.\* The Yugoslav government regarded with favour Ankara's attempts to resettle Muslim populations from Balkan countries such as Romania and Bulgaria into the expansive regions of Anatolia, viewing this as a chance to carry out the expulsion of Albanians. The concept was initially brought up in 1930 during discussions between Turkish and Yugoslav diplomatic officials, aiming to reach a preliminary agreement on moving the Turkish and Muslim residents from Yugoslavia. In September 1931, Turkish diplomat RuzduAras informed his Yugoslav counterpart at the League of Nations that Turkey was willing to accept around 200,000 individuals who *"share a mentality similar to that of the Turkish population, indicating that they would be easily assimilated in Turkey, akin to certain segments of the Albanian population present in the region"*.<sup>32</sup>The expulsion of the Albanians emerged as a secondary topic during a meeting held on February 28, 1933, in Belgrade between the foreign ministers of Turkey and Yugoslavia, with the main focus being the establishment of a friendship pact between the two countries.<sup>33</sup>

In June 1935 commenced the intensive discussions regarding the project commenced with the appointment of Milan Stojadinović as the leader of the Yugoslav government. His rise to power signaled the end of the Yugoslavization concept,\* which coincided with King

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<sup>31</sup> L.S. Stavrianos, *Balkans since 1453* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 736.

\*Since 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes has been identified as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

<sup>32</sup> A. Hadri, "Pozita dhe gjendja e Kosovës në Mbretërinë e Jugosllavisë (1918-1941)," 179.

<sup>33</sup> H. Bajrami, "Konventa jugosllave-turke e vitit 1938 për shpërnguljen e shqiptarëve," 176.

\*Just prior to his assassination in Marseille in September 1934, King Alexander started to realize that the Yugoslavism initiative he had passionately supported was likely doomed. He was getting ready to implement some political reforms in Yugoslavia, but his assassination led to the demise of the concept he had championed... see further: *Споменица Лјубомира Давидовића*, Београд: 1940, 22.

Alexander's reign, and as a member of the Radical Party, he focused more on Serbian nationalist perspectives. Within the initial days of his administration, his alignment with fascist regimes became apparent. As stated by the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano, "Stojadinović exhibited fascist tendencies. Even if not explicitly, certainly regarding his views on authority and political parties."<sup>34</sup> In July, an intergovernmental commission was established within the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs under his direction, tasked with developing a plan for the resettlement of Albanians to Turkey. This commission was made up of delegates from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Finance, Communications, and the Military and Navy. The commission convened multiple times to evaluate the strategies for the large-scale resettlement of the Albanian population from Kosovo and other Albanian regions to Yugoslavia, as it was determined that the colonization efforts had not produced the expected results. Additionally, it was noted that the Albanian population grew by 66,000 individuals between 1931 and 1935.<sup>35</sup> To compel the Albanian population to relocate to Turkey, several strategies were suggested: enforcing tax payments for everyone; expelling emigrants residing in Yugoslavia back to Albania; mandating that Albanian children enroll in Serbian educational institutions; dismissing administrative personnel who opposed relocation; establishing a region populated by Slavs near the Albanian border; and perpetuating the colonization process, among others.<sup>36</sup> From this discussion, several conclusions came to light, which were ratified in the subsequent meetings of this Commission: (1) The topic of relocation should be addressed with the Turkish government, and it should be facilitated through a convention similar to the one with Romania; (2) travel documents should be issued to individuals wishing

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<sup>34</sup> Ferdo Čulinović, *Jugoslavija između dva rata*, Knjiga II (Zagreb: Jugoslovenska Akademija Znanosti i Umijetnosti, 1961), 114.

<sup>35</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje Dokumentesh)*, 169.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

to relocate; (3) individuals who choose to relocate should be exempt from taxes; (4) those opting for relocation should be excused from military duties, and (5) financial assistance should be offered for free transportation to the less fortunate, while those who have sold their assets should receive a 75% tax exemption.<sup>37</sup>

During the discussions of this Commission, a topic was raised: what if Albanians reject moving away? At the gathering on September 24, 1935, it was concluded that if Albanian citizens residing in Yugoslavia chose not to vacate the border regions adjacent to Albania, legal measures should be invoked to facilitate their relocation to the interior of Yugoslavia, where they would be assimilated by the prevailing Slavic population,<sup>38</sup> while their former settlements would be occupied by Slavic inhabitants. This highlights that the relocation of the Albanian population from border areas with Albania was particularly prioritized. To carry out these conclusions, the Yugoslav authorities initiated the confiscation of properties. Land was classified as state property, and private ownership registrations were barred. The land seized from Albanians was redistributed to settlers.<sup>39</sup> These actions laid the groundwork for the displacement of Albanians, initially by severing their connections with their compatriots or the homeland.

The findings from the conference mentioned above were introduced by an assessment from the consul of the Yugoslav Consulate General in Istanbul regarding the potential for an agreement to facilitate the resettlement of the “Muslim” population to Turkey, which was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia on May 3, 1935. After discussing the expulsion of the non-Slavic population from the region of “Southern Serbia” as a critical national-political matter, it was emphasized that the Turkish government aimed to eliminate foreign elements from its territory, intending to replace them with Turkish or

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>38</sup> H. Bajrami, “Konventa jugosllave-turke”, 179.

<sup>39</sup> Branko Horvat, *Kosovsko pitanje* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988), 67.

Muslim populations from the Balkan regions. Given that Turkey's territories were inhabited by Muslims from Romania and Bulgaria, the consul believed that the time was right to engage in negotiations with the Turkish government for the mass resettlement of the "Muslims" under a specific plan with financial support from Yugoslavia. He proposed that *"every Muslim wishing to depart from Southern Serbia should have the opportunity to sell their property, and the Thessaloniki-Istanbul sea route or the Thessaloniki-Edirne railway would facilitate their migration."*<sup>40</sup> The analysis focused on the goal of eliminating the Albanian population from Kosovo and other regions in Yugoslavia. This is supported by a section of the analysis where it explicitly stated that migration to Albania would bolster the Albanian demographic and invigorate the irredentist movement, whereas migration to Turkey would effectively erase this element and offer a favourable resolution for the Yugoslav state.<sup>41</sup>

### **Public discourse-Serbian Cultural Society and the essay of Vasa Čubrilović**

The conclusions made by the Yugoslav government regarding the expulsion of Albanians received backing from the Serbian academic and cultural elite, which at that time was focused around the Serbian Cultural Club. The Serbian Cultural Club was an organization dedicated to promoting Serbian literary and cultural awareness based on national history, functioning from 1937 to 1941. Its membership primarily consisted of individuals from university, academic, and cultural backgrounds, but also included members from the political, business, financial, industrial, and military sectors. The club was led by Slobodan Jovanović, a prominent diplomat, while Vasa Čubrilović served as the

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<sup>40</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)*, 146–147.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

secretary.<sup>42</sup> The philosophy of this club embraced fundamental aspects of Serbian ethnic, cultural, political, and class nationalism in relation to other nations or ethnic groups within Yugoslavia. The ethnic principle was particularly prominent, as it communicated and published ideas about the pure Serbian ethnos, especially in regions with diverse populations. A well-known slogan of the Serbian cultural club was, "Wherever Serbs are present, there is Serbia."<sup>43</sup>

The Serbian Cultural Club engaged in vigorous promotional efforts through presentations primarily conducted in Belgrade. These presentations focused on themes related to the Serbian national identity, as well as educational, cultural, and economic matters. Particular emphasis was placed on areas where Serbs were not the majority, specifically "Southern Serbia", which refers to present-day Kosovo and Macedonia. The Serbian Cultural Club monitored the colonization efforts by Serbs in these territories.<sup>44</sup> The spotlight was on the supremacy of the Serbian presence over the indigenous communities. Special attention was given to Albanians. Since the national identity of Albanians could not be overlooked, unlike that of the Macedonians, they were denied the rights to their own territory. Firstly, there was discontent regarding the outcomes of the colonization that occurred between 1921 and 1936. It was concluded that the population of Serbs in Kosovo had not changed, while Albanians had been placed as a barrier that disrupted the link between Northern and Southern Serbia.<sup>45</sup>

Within this organization, a variety of presentations and debates were conducted, including some focused on political issues. Among the many discussions, the essay by Serbian scholar Vasa Čubrilović, titled

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<sup>42</sup> Политика, "Српски културни клуб билабораче синоћ своју управу", 5.2.1937, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Nebojša A. Popović, "Srpski kulturni klub (1937-1941)," *Istorija 20. Veka*, nr. 1–2 (1989), 112–21.

<sup>44</sup> Љубодраг Димић, "Слободан Јовановић и Српски културни клуб (1937-1941)," нџ *Слободан Јовановић, поводом 150 година од рођења*, ред. Марко Анђелковић (Београд: Српска Академија Наука и Уметности, 2020), 194.

<sup>45</sup> N. A. Popović, "Srpski Kulturni Klub (1937-1941)," 130.

“The Expulsion of Albanians,” presented on March 7, 1937, deserves special mention. From the start of the presentation, Čubrilović rejected the claim of the Albanians to the land they inhabited. He pointed out that the Albanians had descended from the mountains and claimed the areas that the Serbs had vacated in the 17th century when they migrated north, thereby forming a dividing triangle between Macedonia, Raška, and Zeta, which he regarded as Serbian territory.<sup>46</sup> Reflecting on the rationale from the time of the Balkan Wars, he maintained that the land occupied by the Albanians held strategic significance, as it included the primary routes to both the Adriatic and Aegean Seas. He also discussed the necessity for the large-scale expulsion of Albanians, asserting that this should occur extensively.

The essay written by Serbian scholar Vasa Čubrilović was essentially a plan that considered all potential elements related to the displacement process while also providing guidance on how to put this plan into action. He primarily highlighted the role of the international element, stating that he did not anticipate a strong response, apart from that of Albania. *"If Germany was able to deport tens of thousands of Jews, and Russia could send millions of individuals away, then it is reasonable to think that a conflict could lead to the deportation of several hundred thousand Albanians. Italy would pose challenges, but it is already dealing with Abyssinia and Austria, while France and England needed to be convinced that ensuring the Morava-Vardar line was also in their best interest—a fact that was validated by the great war. This line would remain secure for both us and them if we achieved complete ethnic dominance in the areas surrounding Mount Sharr and Kosovo,"*<sup>47</sup> Čubrilović claimed.

Čubrilović argued that the slow oppression of Albanians via colonization had not been successful, viewing Turkey and Albania as

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<sup>46</sup> ASHAK, F: Arkivi Institutit Historik Ushtarak në Beograd (më tej: AIHU), D: Referati i parë i Vasa Čubrilovićit për shpërnguljen e shqiptarëve i paraqitur më 7 mars 1937, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Bože Čović, *Izvorive likosrpske agresije, Rasprave/Dokumenti* (Zagreb: 1991), 112.

potential locations for the mass displacement of Albanians. He argued that Albania, due to its dispersed population, unregulated areas, and river valleys, could accommodate hundreds of thousands of displaced individuals. In contrast, he believed that modern Turkey, which has an extensive territory in Asia Minor and Kurdistan, contained uninhabited regions and genuine potential for colonization. He suggested that Turkey could welcome as many as 200,000 displaced persons from Yugoslavia, stressing that these individuals should be Albanians.<sup>48</sup> During this time, more than 85% of the people in Kosovo and other areas inhabited by Albanians worked in agriculture and resided in rural areas. This circumstance prompted him to suggest that relocation should begin in the villages and subsequently progress to the cities, as he noted in his report that "the villages" are dense and therefore represent a potential danger.<sup>49</sup>

Čubrilović contemplated two methods to execute his plan: (1) by generating a suitable psychosis, enhanced by religious propaganda from Muslim clerics and different agitators, who would be either compensated or coerced, and (2) through coercion from the state machinery targeting the Albanians. This involved the strict enforcement of regulations aimed at making life exceedingly challenging for Albanians through fines, arrests, penalties, deforestation, and persecution, among other measures. Economically, he proposed rejecting Albanian land ownership claims from the cadastral authorities, leading to the relentless collection of taxes and public debts, including the seizure of agricultural produce by government entities. All of this was intended to be accompanied by arming Serbian population in Kosovo to incite large-scale clashes with the Albanians.<sup>50</sup> Simultaneously, he suggested administrative support for those wishing

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Z. Shtylla, "Aspekte të politikës së shpërnguljes me dhunë të shqiptarëve nga Kosova në vitet 1936-1941," in *Shpërnguljet e shqiptarëve gjatë shekujve* (Prishtinë: Shoqata për kthimin e shqiptarëve të shpërngulur nga Kosova, 1992), 188.

<sup>50</sup> M. Ndreca, *87 vjet terror...*, 81.

to migrate, including the provision of travel passports, transportation to railway stations, or even complimentary train travel. Settlement of populations from areas such as Herzegovina, Lika, Montenegro, and others would take place in the vacated lands.<sup>51</sup>

To carry out this project, Čubrilović considered the financial implications as well. He estimated that relocating 40,000 Albanian families, with an average of five members per family, would incur an average cost of 15,000 dinars for each family, reaching a maximum of 600,000 dinars. The displaced Albanians would not only leave their residences but also their tools for work. The newcomers who would occupy these homes might receive minimal support in the form of food and livestock.<sup>52</sup>

The views expressed by Serbian academicians were soon reflected in political actions. During this period, the Yugoslav side was concluding its efforts to negotiate a resettlement agreement with Turkey, aimed at facilitating the forced removal of hundreds of thousands of Albanians within a few years. The appropriated land was designated as state property and opened up for colonization. The government authorities completely disregarded land titles and ownership documents.<sup>53</sup>

### **The immigration policies in Turkey**

Throughout history, various groups of people have migrated to the territories of the Ottoman Empire. These migrations shaped the approach and policies regarding displaced individuals. The Ottoman authorities believed that having a large population was essential for economic growth and safeguarding against external threats.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> ASHAK, F: AIHU, D: Referati i parë i Vasa Çubriloviqit..., 10-11.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> M. Verli, *Kosova në fokusin e historisë*, vol. I (Tiranë: Botimpex, 2002), 292–93.

<sup>54</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (London: The University Winsconsin Press, 1985), 62.

Motivated by this belief, as well as humanitarian concerns, the Ottoman sultans allowed Jews fleeing Christian countries in Europe, particularly from Spain, to settle within the empire's lands. By the close of the 15th century, it is believed that approximately 250,000 Jews had migrated to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>55</sup> The Ottoman Empire's acceptance of outsiders persisted in the years that followed, and in 1857, a decree was enacted that permitted any individual who adhered to the sultan and the Empire's laws to settle in its territories. These individuals were assured of their rights to practice their religion freely and to own a property.<sup>56</sup>

The conflicts that arose from the Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878 played a significant role in the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, leading to the expulsion of many individuals of Islamic faith from their homes towards Anatolia. The Balkan Wars from 1912 to 1913 caused the Ottoman Empire to lose nearly all of its European territories, covering an area of over 60,000 square miles. It's important to recognize that the regions lost, including Macedonia, Albania, and Thrace, previously controlled by the Ottoman Empire for five centuries, were areas rich in economic resources.<sup>57</sup> Due to the conflicts that occurred from 1912 to 1920, it is estimated that around 413,922 individuals of Islamic faith from the Balkans relocated to various cities within present-day Turkey.<sup>58</sup> Certainly, this estimate also encompasses Albanians, as the population census during the Ottoman Empire was based on religious affiliation rather than ethnic identity.

The relocation of the populace across various regions of the Empire created significant challenges, encompassing not just logistical issues, but also financial and cultural ones. Consequently, Ottoman political authorities were compelled to integrate the new arrivals into

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<sup>55</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (London: MacMillan, 1991), 33–34.

<sup>56</sup> Dilek Latif, "Refugee Policy of the Turkish Republic," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, vol. XXXIII, (2002), 4.

<sup>57</sup> Eric J. Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern History* (London: IB Tauris, 2004), 108–109.

<sup>58</sup> J. McCarthy, *Vdekiye & dëbim...*, 168.

the current frameworks of the Ottoman Empire, despite the financial strain. Although the refugees faced hardship by having to leave their homes and possessions, the Ottoman government viewed their arrival favourably regarding demographic and economic aspects. Following the second half of the 19th century, the Ottoman population had significantly declined due to conflicts, illnesses, and natural calamities. This decline was evident in the insufficient use of agricultural land and a decrease in tax income. The relocation of refugees to farmland provided a quick fix as they served as a crucial labour source for agriculture. The housed refugees were also utilized as a protective measure for the railway and telegraph infrastructure, and after a few years, they were converted into tax contributors.<sup>59</sup> The placement of refugees in specific areas was aligned with the Empire's economic, social, and military objectives, leading to the implementation of three primary principles in their settlement: (1) Muslim refugees were placed in border or peripheral regions; (2) Refugees were allocated to areas resembling their native countries; and (3) Measures were taken to avoid the predominance of a single ethnic group in any given region.<sup>60</sup>

The consequences of the Ottoman Empire's territorial losses led to the ethnic Turks becoming the largest populace within the Empire for the first time in its history. Concurrently, the political transformations occurring in Europe and subsequently in the Ottoman Empire were paralleled by the rise of Turkish nationalism,<sup>61</sup> which would influence the efforts to establish the Turkish state and nation. During the interwar period, the history of the Turkish state is characterized by two primary

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<sup>59</sup> Şevin Gülfer Sagniç, *Refugee reception in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish response to Syrian refugees*, 2020, 5, shikuar më 5 prill 2023, [https://www.unhcr.org/people-forced-to-flee-book/wp-content/uploads/sites/137/2022/02/S%CC%A7evin-Sag%CC%86nic%CC%A7\\_Refugee-Reception-in-the-Ottoman-Empire-and-the-Turkish-Response-to-Syrian-Refugees-002.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/people-forced-to-flee-book/wp-content/uploads/sites/137/2022/02/S%CC%A7evin-Sag%CC%86nic%CC%A7_Refugee-Reception-in-the-Ottoman-Empire-and-the-Turkish-Response-to-Syrian-Refugees-002.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 112–13.

<sup>61</sup> E. J. Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern History*, 117.

objectives of Turkish policy: strengthening the state and creating a uniform Turkish society, which involved forming a singular nation capable of assimilating non-Turkish minorities. According to the founders' vision, the newly established state was intended to embody a homogeneous nation, whose citizens would be devoted Muslims, fluent in Turkish, and immersed in Turkish culture.<sup>62</sup> However, Anatolia could not be easily uniform, as it was populated by Kurds, Bosnians, Albanians, Circassians, and Arabs, groups that spoke languages distinct from Turkish. Consequently, to achieve the stated goals, the Turkish parliament enacted the Colonization Law in 1934, known as Law No. 2510, which established two explicit criteria: (a) promoting the migration and assimilation of individuals with “Turkish origin and culture” and (b) obstructing and restricting the entry of those who did not fulfill the aforementioned criteria into Turkey. The same law also outlined the procedure for the assimilation of citizens residing in Turkey who lacked “Turkish origin or culture.”<sup>63</sup>

The creation of this legislation was heavily influenced by the prevailing nationalist ideology of the era. Turkish politicians of that period openly showcased strong inclinations towards establishing a homogenous society and assimilating national minorities. In the parliamentary debates regarding the colonization law, dominant nationalist and unifying perspectives emerged prominently. Deputy Sadri Maksud stated, *"The Turkization of language is among the most effective tools for securing the future of the Turkish people and allowing Turks to identify as such. This is our objective."* At the same time, Şukru Kaya, the Minister of Interior, articulated the government's perspective during the parliamentary discussions, saying, *"This legislation will establish a nation that communicates in a single language, shares*

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<sup>62</sup> Ahmet İçduygu, Damla B. Aksel, “Turkish Migration Policies: A Critical Historical Retrospective,” *Perceptions*, vol. XVIII, no. 3, (2013), 171.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

*uniform thoughts, and experiences the same emotions.*"<sup>64</sup> According to Law No. 2510, individuals identified as Turks were defined as "*those of the Turkish race or those who speak the Turkish language and have no knowledge of any other language.*" Consequently, non-Muslim groups or Muslims who did not communicate in Turkish were marginalized from the official narrative of Turkish culture.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, all others possessing similar characteristics were required to assimilate into this culture. A key aspect of achieving this objective was the approach to resettling refugees. Article 2 further identified the colonization areas, which were classified into three distinct categories and created specific connections to Turkish culture: areas where the relocation of people with Turkish cultural backgrounds was permitted; areas set aside for the transfer and settlement of populations deemed appropriate for assimilation into Turkish culture; and areas that would be emptied of residents where settlement would be barred for reasons related to space, culture, sanitation, politics, military concerns, and security.<sup>66</sup>

The Law No. 2510 granted the Turkish government a set of tools to assimilate not only immigrant groups but also numerous other Muslims whose native language was not Turkish, a decade following the establishment of the Republic. The first article of this law empowered the Ministry of Interior to oversee the allocation of the population throughout the country. Article 11 included significant provisions aimed at "*maintaining the unity of language, culture, and ethnicity.*" This meant that the creation of neighbourhoods or villages where Turkish was not the primary language was forbidden. The actions that the Ministry of Interior might take could include relocating and redistributing the population to internal regions of the country,

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<sup>64</sup> Ulker Erol, "Assimilation, Security and Geographical Nationalism in Interwar Turkey: The Settlement Law of 1934," *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 7 (2008), Thematic issue, shikuar më 20 mars 2023, <http://ejls.org/document2123.html>

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> "Kanun Nu: 2510" (T. C. Resmi Gazete, 1934), 4004.

potentially stripping them of state rights. Additionally, the number of refugees residing in any city or town should not exceed 10% of that city's or town overall population.<sup>67</sup>

The Colonization Law of 1934 was designed to encourage the settlement and integration of immigrants from Balkan nations into Turkish society, and this tradition of accepting refugees persisted throughout the Republic of Turkey. Numerous individuals from Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia sought refuge in Turkey due to political, economic, religious, and ethnic pressures.<sup>68</sup> This wave of emigration, which began in 1923 and lasted until the late 1930s, resulted in an immigrant population ranging from 800,000 to 850,000. The highest number of immigrants were Muslims fleeing from Greece, due to the Population Exchange Agreement of 1923. They made up about 384,000 individuals, representing 61% of the total 800,000 immigrants. In this period from 1923 to 1939, Turkey also welcomed roughly 198,688 immigrants from Bulgaria, 117,095 from Romania, and 115,210 from Yugoslavia.<sup>69</sup> At this juncture, the religious aspect of immigration within Turkish society is also emphasized. The phenomenon of dual migration—where non-Muslims left while Muslims arrived in Turkey—led to a significant decrease in the non-Muslim population, reducing it from 19% in 1914 to 3% in 1927, and further down to 1% in subsequent years.<sup>70</sup> The vision of a nation characterized by a unified language, culture, and sentiments was being steadily achieved by the Turkish political elite.

In order to achieve this objective, Turkish diplomacy vigorously spread propaganda among the Muslim communities in the Balkan states

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> D. Latif, "Refugee Policy of the Turkish Republic," 6.

<sup>69</sup> E. Ulker, "Assimilation of the Muslim Communities in the first decade of the Turkish Republic (1923-1934)," *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 7, (2008), shikuar më 22 mars 2023, <https://journals.openedition.org/ejts/822>

<sup>70</sup> A. İçduygu, D. A. Aksel, "Turkish Migration Policies: A Critical Historical Retrospective," 172.

to persuade them to relocate to Turkey. Turkey aimed to address its demographic issues. The population of Anatolia had suffered significant losses due to the conflicts that occurred prior to the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. Data from Justin McCarthy indicates that between 1912 and 1922, the population of Western Anatolia fell by 1,246,068 individuals.<sup>71</sup> Nationalists viewed the influx of immigrants as a means to boost the population, while the Muslims of the Balkans were regarded as *“our blood brothers, who have been left outside the borders of their true homeland, Turkey.”*<sup>72</sup> Hamdullah Sufi, a nationalist advocate, stated in the Turkish parliament that the unpopulated areas of Anatolia should accommodate a population of two and a half million, and that bringing the members of the Turkish community from various Balkan states to Turkey could resolve the demographic issues in that region.<sup>73</sup> Besides the aforementioned national and military factors, the Turkish government sought to boost the population, believing that a larger demographic would enhance its international influence.<sup>74</sup> To impact demographic objectives, the Turkish government had discreetly instructed its consuls in Yugoslavia to promote the migration of the Muslim populace to Turkey. The Turkish consul in Skopje had confidentially conveyed to the translator of the Italian consulate in the city that: *“My government has an urgent need for people, and I have been given clandestine orders to facilitate the departure of the Muslim population.”*<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> J. McCarthy, *Vdekje & dëbim...*, 303.

<sup>72</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)*, 248.

<sup>73</sup> E. Ulker, “Assimilation of the Muslim Communities in the first decade of the Turkish Republic (1923-1934).”

<sup>74</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)*, 146.

<sup>75</sup> Hasan Bello, “Politika e Mbretërisë Shqiptare për parandalimin e shpërnguljes së kosovarëve drejt Turqisë dhe mosratifikimin e konventës jugosllavo-turke të vitit 1938,” *Studime Historike*, nr. 1-2, (2014), 189.

## **Conclusion of the Agreement**

Substantial efforts to establish a convention between Yugoslavia and Turkey commenced in the late part of 1935. During the session of the Yugoslav Inter-Ministerial Commission on October 1, 1935, the attendees were updated about a meeting where the Yugoslav Foreign Minister had reached an agreement with his Turkish counterpart, which was akin to the Turkish-Romanian agreement, in which Turkey would accept 200,000 residents from "Southern Serbia" over a timeframe of 2 to 3 years. In May 1936, the Turkish representative in Belgrade was given the go-ahead to start discussions aimed at establishing a Turkish-Yugoslav accord for the transfer of, as noted by a Yugoslav diplomat, "the Muslim population from our southern regions,"<sup>76</sup> even though what was actually meant by the terms "Turkish or Muslim population" referred to Albanians.

Efforts to reach an agreement were renewed in January 1938 when Stojadinović visited Ankara, where the plan to facilitate the displacement of the "Turkish population" from Yugoslavia to Turkey was reaffirmed.<sup>77</sup> Following this agreement, Turkey proposed in February 1938 to hold a conference aimed at addressing the matter of displacing the "Turkish" population. This initiative was met with approval from Yugoslavia, as the topic had been a significant issue on its political agenda for several years. In June 1938, a conference took place in Istanbul involving delegates from Yugoslavia and Turkey, with representatives from Greece and Romania observing the proceedings. During this gathering, the Yugoslav government aimed to portray migration from Yugoslavia as not only a matter of national politics but primarily as a significant social issue – as the emigration of the

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<sup>76</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)*, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> P. Milo, *Politika e jashtme e Shqipërisë 1912-1939*, vol. I (Tiranë: Toena, 2013), 251.

“Muslims” would create opportunities for settling a large number of Montenegrin, Dalmatian, and Herzegovinian populations on the extensive fertile lands that would become available.<sup>78</sup> Turkish diplomats conveyed their compassion regarding the migration of Muslims from southern Yugoslavia to Turkey, but they indicated that financial support would be essential since they would be settled in Anatolia rather than Thrace, resulting in higher expenses. The agreement between Turkey and Romania concerning the migration of Muslims from Romania served as a reference point. Following extensive discussions, the conference concluded with a Turkish-Yugoslav accord that was formalized into a convention. The essential elements included: 1 – The displacement of 40,000 Muslim families from Southern Serbia, specifically from the areas taken by Serbia and Montenegro following the conflicts of 1912-1913, from Yugoslavia to Turkey. 2 - The displacement process would take place over a period of six years, from 1939 to 1944, with an option to extend for an additional year if needed; 3 - Yugoslavia would compensate Turkey with 500 Turkish liras for each family that is relocated, with 30% paid in international currency and the remaining 70% deposited in dinars into the Turkish government's account at the national bank. This deposited amount would enable the Turkish government to buy goods in Yugoslavia; 4 - Payments in advance would occur biannually, in April and October; 5 - this agreement was exclusively for residents of rural areas; for those living in urban areas, relocation was voluntary, contingent on their desire to move; 6 - the permanent property of the displaced villagers transferred to the state's ownership. In addition to the payment required by the Turkish authorities for every displaced family, the Yugoslav government would not compensate the displaced individuals for their belongings, including fields, meadows, houses, and so on; 7 - Those who were displaced were allowed to bring movable

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<sup>78</sup> A. Hadri, “Pozita dhe gjendja e Kosovës në Mbretërinë e Jugosllavisë (1918-1941),”, 178–79.

possessions and some of their livestock; 8 - The Yugoslav government financed railway transport to Thessaloniki, while the Turkish government took care of the journey from Thessaloniki onwards, etc.<sup>79</sup>

The convention was formulated to encompass all Muslims, explicitly including Albanians of that faith. In reality, the underlying intent of this convention was the displacement of Albanians. In their analysis of this convention, Yugoslav officials conveyed their approval that it allowed for the displacement of Albanians along with Turks, as the focus was clearly on “Muslims residing in the areas that were annexed to Serbia and Montenegro in 1912-1913,” who were, in fact, Albanians. Additionally, the property of those who were displaced would be transferred into the ownership of the Yugoslav government.<sup>80</sup> The agreement outlined the subsequent schedule for payments and displacement:

Year	Number of families to be displaced	Payment in Turkish Lira
1939	4.000	2.000.000
1940	6.000	3.000.000
1941	7.000	3.500.000
1942	7.000	3.500.000
1943	8.000	4.000.000
1944	8.000	4.000.000
Total	40.000	20.000.000

Table no. 1: Displacement schedule <sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> ASHAK, F: Arkivi Diplomati MPJ në Beograd, D: Ambasada jugosllave në Turqi, Viti: 1939, 65-66.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

The convention finalized Turkey's obligations to move the entire Turkish community from the Balkan regions to its own territory. The newspaper "Balkan Herald" reported that approximately two million Turks from Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia, or from former territories that separated from the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, are heading to Turkey. Turkey had set up accommodations in Anatolia and other regions within its borders for their resettlement. However, the newspaper emphasized that the migrating population would need to alter their clothing and way of life, as Turkish laws prohibited these and many other traditions.<sup>82</sup> This suggests that it primarily concerned Albanians, who would be migrating to Turkey under the designation "Muslim residents."

### **Albania's actions to hinder the implementation of the Convention**

The Albanian government's concern for its compatriots living beyond the nation's borders has been constant and has evolved according to the political context and the strength of the Albanian government. This concern became more evident starting in the 1930s, as the state had begun to solidify its foundations. The goal of safeguarding Albanian Kosovo, while anticipating more favorable international circumstances that could rectify the injustices recognized in international forums before and after World War I, also shaped the political and diplomatic actions of the Albanian state, particularly during the years 1925-1939. To deter the displacement of Albanians, particular focus was placed on Albanian diplomatic missions, notably in Skopje, Monastir, Belgrade, Thessaloniki, and Istanbul.<sup>83</sup> In

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<sup>82</sup> *Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë Tiranë (më tej: AIH)*, F: A-105, Dosja: Legata britanike, Viti: 1938, 440.

<sup>83</sup> M. Verli, "Interesimi i shtetit shqiptar për shqiptarët në Jugosllavi në vitet 20-30 të shek. XX," *Kosova*, nr. 31-32 (2009), 41-42.

November 1932, Albanian diplomat Nezir Leskoviku was granted permission to meet with Turkish Foreign Minister RuzduAras to ask that Turkish consulates cease issuing visas to Kosovars, a request that was honored for only a brief period. In 1934, King Zog took direct action with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to halt the migration, and in response, he created the Directorate of Agrarian Reform in 1935, which intended to settle Kosovar emigrants in Albanian land.<sup>84</sup>

Proves for engaging Albanian diplomacy in efforts to prevent displacement and provide assistance to displaced individuals was also evidenced by Yugoslavia sources. In July 1936, the Yugoslav Consulate in Istanbul notified the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the Albanian Consulate there had initiated an extensive campaign to avert displacement. For Albanians who had migrated to the Ottoman Empire/Turkey prior to and following World War I and wished to return to their homeland, but faced denial from the Yugoslav Consulate in Istanbul, the Albanian Consulate offered support for their return to Albania, issuing free travel visas to those of Albanian descent holding Turkish passports who were deemed Turkish citizens.<sup>85</sup>

In response to the interest in its neighbours, the Albanian government established a special commission in January 1937, chaired by Foreign Minister Ekrem Libohova. The commission included Rauf Fico, who served as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Belgrade, Eqrem Vlora, the Secretary General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Hamdi Karazi, the Deputy Director at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for League of Nations Affairs. The commission, upon evaluating the Yugoslav policy of denationalization in Kosovo and the plan to move residents to Turkey, found it appropriate to persist in efforts to safeguard the Albanian population in Yugoslavia, resisting their emigration in any context, by mobilizing the

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<sup>84</sup> H. Bello, "Politika e Mbretërisë Shqiptare për parandalimin e shpërnguljes...", 192–194.

<sup>85</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)*, 217–218.

nationalist factions of Kosovo. The commission proposed requesting support from the Italian government to halt the displacement and to negotiate with the Yugoslav government the establishment of a border zone where the Albanian population would have minority rights,<sup>86</sup> among other matters. Concerning the assistance from the Italian government, Italian Foreign Minister Count Ciano pledged to discuss the issue with his Yugoslav and Turkish counterparts. Turkish diplomacy stated that it would not accept "Muslims of different ethnicities," specifically referring to any Albanians from Kosovo. In response to Tirana's protests, Stojadinović and other Yugoslav officials reiterated the long-standing claim that "*the Yugoslav authorities have not compelled even a single Albanian to leave for Turkey,*" while discussions with the Turkish government persisted regarding the emigration of Albanians.<sup>87</sup>

The Albanian government's actions to prevent displacement became more pronounced upon learning of the Turkish-Yugoslav agreement, as its execution would likely lead to a significant exodus of Albanians from Kosovo. Despite the Yugoslav Prime Minister stating in Skopje that the agreement was intended only for Yugoslav citizens of Turkish descent wishing to emigrate, the Albanian government feared that this could also result in the migration of Albanian Muslims.<sup>88</sup> Officially, Tirana remained unsettled, even after the Turkish ambassador to Albania assured the Albanian Foreign Minister that only individuals of Turkish origin would be permitted to immigrate. A British diplomat in Albania noted that these assurances held little weight with the Albanian authorities, who predominantly believed that all Muslims in Kosovo were Albanians, with a minimal presence of Slavic or Turkish inhabitants in the region.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> H. Bello, "Politika e Mbretërisë Shqiptare për parandalimin e shpërnguljes...", 200.

<sup>87</sup> P. Milo, *Politika e jashtme e Shqipërisë 1912-1939*, 862–63.

<sup>88</sup> Živko Avramovski, *Britanci o Kraljevini Jugoslaviji (1931-1938)* (Zagreb: Globus, 1986), 651.

<sup>89</sup> *AIH*, F: A-105, Dosja: Legata britanike, Viti: 1938, 436.

In order to halt the displacement of the Albanian population from Kosovo, the Albanian government began diplomatic efforts, viewing this as the sole viable option for achieving results. In this context, Foreign Minister Libohova, alongside lodging protests in Belgrade and Ankara regarding the enforcement of the displacement agreement, urged the British minister in Durrës to persuade the British government to intervene and cease the relocation of Albanians from Kosovo.<sup>90</sup> In reply to this request, the British minister in Durrës cautioned Libohova that the Albanian government should not anticipate British backing.<sup>91</sup> This statement was honest and reflected the realities of the time. Given that Britain was contending with German and Italian attempts to assert control over the Balkans, it was not inclined to involve itself in a matter that held no relevance for it, particularly when it relied on Yugoslavia and Turkey to establish a barrier against German expansion.

Even though the agreement was established in July 1938, it still required approval from the legislatures of both nations. The primary challenges stemmed from the significant number of individuals to be displaced. In February 1937, the Albanian consul in Skopje had already forecasted that Turkey would not be able to accommodate the 100,000 “Muslims” that Yugoslavia intended to displace within the following three years.<sup>92</sup> The lack of ratification of the Convention allowed the Albanian government to pursue its goals of delaying its acceptance and enforcement. It took two approaches: in the latter half of 1938, it directed its diplomatic representatives in Yugoslavia regarding the strategy to assist the Albanian community there, while simultaneously, it sent a delegation led by Ferhat Draga to Istanbul and Ankara in early August 1938, aiming to persuade the Turkish government not to endorse the convention concerning the relocation of Albanians to

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>92</sup> Mile Bjelajac, “Migrations of Ethnic Albanians in Kosovo 1938-1950,” *Balkanica*, no. XXXVII/2007 (2007), 226.

Yugoslavia, or at least to advocate for the exclusion of the Albanians from the affected regions in the agreement.<sup>93</sup>

In the initial phase, King Zog had taken charge of the Kosovo Committee, restructuring it in 1936 and establishing cells (action groups) near the boundary with Yugoslavia. Through these cells, all efforts to organize Albanians in Yugoslavia were executed, while also fostering strong relationships with them. The primary base of the covert Kosovar cells was located in Gjakova.<sup>94</sup> This way, by following directives from Albania, the leadership of the Albanian community in Kosovo, led by landowners, imams, and dervishes, endeavoured in various ways to persuade the Albanian populace to remain on their lands.<sup>95</sup> The mentioned leadership aimed to educate the Albanians about the objectives of Yugoslav policies, to help them sidestep the schemes of Belgrade that sought to displace them to Turkey, and to reassure them that Albania was making every effort on their behalf.<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, Albanian diplomatic efforts intensified in Turkey as they sought to halt displacement. Diplomatic sources from Yugoslavia speculated that Ferhat Draga may have delivered a memorandum to Turkish lawmakers outlining his perspective on the matter.<sup>97</sup> Following Ferhat Draga's mission, the Albanian diplomat Mehmet Konica visited both Athens and Istanbul in mid-September, aiming to strengthen ties between Albania and these nations to engage with Balkan initiatives while also persuading the Turkish government to curb Albanian migration.<sup>98</sup> The endeavors of Albanian diplomacy

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<sup>93</sup> M. Verli, *Shqipëria dhe Kosova historia e një aspirate (Studime historike, kumtesa, dokumente dhe ilustrime)* (Tiranë: Botimpex, 2007), 294.

<sup>94</sup> Halim Puelku, “Veprimtaria e Komitetit të Kosovës në Mbretërinë Shqiptare në vitet 1934-1939,” *Studime Historike*, nr. 3–4 (2009), 172.

<sup>95</sup> *ASHAK*, F: AIHU, D: Elaborat 20/Popisnik 17; Viti: 1920-1941, 54.

<sup>96</sup> *Historia e shqiptarëve gjatë shekullit XX*, vol. III (Tiranë: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike, Instituti i Historisë, 2020), 614–615.

<sup>97</sup> Q. Lita, *Shpërngulja e shqiptarëve në Republikën e Turqisë 1922-1941 (Përmbledhje dokumentesh)*, 282–283.

<sup>98</sup> *ASHAK*, F: P. Millovnoviq, D: Konsullatanë Turqi, Viti: 1938, 1.

were effective. On July 10, 1938, Tahir Shtylla, representing the Albanian legate in Belgrade, had notified the Albanian government about the commitments made by Atatürk to Ferhat Draga regarding the prevention of Albanians displacement to Turkey.<sup>99</sup> Atatürk's commitment was confirmed by a report that the Yugoslav consul sent to Belgrade on May 4, 1939, informing the Yugoslav government that: *"The Turkish government is willing to sign the convention, but in the current situation it is obliged to discontinue any project that does not relate to national defence. Therefore, since Turkey is unable to implement the convention, its signing must be postponed. Further talks can only be held if Yugoslavia is willing to increase its contribution to the financing of the resettlement"*. But, at the same time, in the same report the Yugoslav consul stated that: *"... I would like to add that Turkey has not discontinued the numerous projects that do not fall within the scope of national defence"*.<sup>100</sup>

Despite efforts to put the agreement into action, the outbreak of World War II ultimately confirmed the collapse of the implementation of the 1938 Turkish-Yugoslav Convention regarding the displacement of Albanians to Turkey.

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<sup>99</sup> M. Verli, *Nga Kosova për Kosovën*, vol. I (Tiranë: Botimpex, 1006), 220.

<sup>100</sup>ASHAK, F: Arkivi Diplomati i MPJ në Beograd, D: Ambasada jugosllave në Turqi, Viti: 1939, 78.



BEQIR META

GREECE'S POLICY OF ETHNIC CLEANSING  
AGAINST ALBANIANS DURING 1912-1939\*

**Abstract**

The Greek policy towards the Albanian population in Greece was typical Balkan's policy of violence repression, denial of freedom and human and national rights. In this paper I'm based on a wide gamma of documents and historic sources, to present a synthesized history of this policy and the consequences it had for the Albanians of Greece. This violence started with the slaughter of 72 heads of Çamëria in 1913, followed with other repressive measures like that of agrarian reform of 1920, the massive trial against Albanians in 1921 under the false charge that they were trying to organize a big Albanian plot and reaching its peak with the beginning of the massive campaign of ethnic cleansing after the signature of Lausanne Treaty in 1923 for exchanging the Turkish-Greek populations. The Greek government exercised multiple violence and pressure to force Albanians declare themselves as Turks and succeeded to evict some tens of thousands Albanian by ethnically cleansing the villages and the cities of Macedonia and hitting hard the compact population of Çamëria. Even after this harsh campaign that took place during 1923-1926, the situation in Çamëria remained very hard and the Albanian minority was not enjoying the rights that the Greek minority was enjoying in Albania, previewed from the League of Nations treaties.

**Key words:** Çamëria, ethnic cleansing, Greek policy, the Mix Commission, Albanian minority, Greek bands.

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\* Paper translated in English from the Albanian language by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gjon Boriçi.

### **The beginnings of the Greek repressive policies**

In the vortex of the Balkan War, Çamëria was occupied from the Greek forces in March 1913. The Albanian population tried to resist the aggression, but failed. Immediately, the Greek administration began to force the representatives of the Albanian population to sign declarations where allegedly the Albanians were stating their desire to be included within the Greek state. In these circumstances, Çam patriots presented before the foreign representatives the demand that their territories to be incorporated within the new Albanian state. These demands were exposed even in the meetings that were held in the Albanian state and in diaspora. The Albanians also sent letters and memorandums to the Great Powers chancelleries and to the London Conference where they expressed their will to remain within the borders of the Albanian state.

The Albanian territories of Çamëria and other Albanian territories occupied by Greece during the Balkan Wars, were given to her by decision of the London's Conference of August 11<sup>th</sup> 1913. The definitive border line was established in the Treaty of Florence on December 17<sup>th</sup> 1913. With these acts, the Greek state reclaimed a big part of Lower Albania and especially Çamëria, in the southwestern part of Lower Albania, from the river of Pavla to the Bay of Preveza, with the districts of Filat, Gumenica, Margëlliç, Paramithia, Parga and Preveza, of a surface 4 000 km<sup>2</sup>, with a coastal line of 100 km and a population of 75 000 Orthodox and Moslem Albanians. Except these, were detached other territories living a big number of Albanians like in Ioannina that has been the epicenter of the Lower (Southern) Albania, Voshtina, Konica, the districts of Follorina and Kostur and other villages south of Gramoz mountain where also was living Albanian populations. Calculating the Albanians of these kaza, the number of the Albanian population that were incorporated to Greece reached more than 120 000 souls. Within the Albanian border remained only a small

part of Çamëria, the region of Konispol with overall seven Çam villages.

After Greece won both Balkan Wars, she nearly doubled her territory and population, but also became less ethnically homogenous. According to the registration of the population made in the newly reclaimed territories, Greece's population increased with 2 103 038 inhabitants, and the total population of the country was 4 734 990 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for example, according to the census of 1913, Greek Macedonia had 528 000 Greeks, 104 000 Bulgarians, 465 000 Moslems (a part of them were Albanians) and 98 000 Israelis. The Greeks in this region were only 44,1% of the population.<sup>2</sup>

Greece started the ethnic cleansing of the national minorities in her territory. During the period November 1912 - March 1914 it banned from the province of Macedonia 243 807 Moslems, violating the Athens' Treaty.<sup>3</sup> While only during the period from March 10 until the end of May 1914, from Thessaloniki were evicted 34 570 Moslems from which 8 712 were Albanians.<sup>4</sup> The article 11 of Athens' Treaty signed on November 14<sup>th</sup> 1913 between Greece and Turkey previewed that "the life, the honor, the religion and the customs of the inhabitants of the annexed regions that would remain under the Greek administration would be scrupulously respected. They would enjoy the same political and civil rights as the subjects of Greek origin".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andre Michael Andreades, *Les Effets Economiques et Sociaux de la Guerre en Grèce*. Publications de la Dotation Carnegie pour la Paix Internationale, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1928, 134.

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Pallis, "Racial Migrations in the Balkans during the years 1912-1924", in *The Geographical Journal*, vol. LXVI, nr. 4, Oct 1923, 330.

<sup>3</sup> The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereinafter: *TNA*), Foreign Office (hereinafter: *FO*) 371/1996. Sir F. Elliot to the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey, Athens, 27 April 1914. Elliot referred to the statements of the Turkish minister in Athens, Galib Bey.

<sup>4</sup> *TNA*, FO 286/584. List of displaced Moslems from 24 April to 15 May 1914.

<sup>5</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/2110. Sir F. Elliot to the Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, 9 May 1914.

This treaty would legally refer to different times the Albanian government, citing the obligations of the Greek government for respecting the rights of the Albanian population as Greek citizens, based on the Greek constitution and in respecting the national minorities rights. It's already known that these rights were never respected.

The heterogeneous elements of the population, nevertheless could be considered as an obstacle for the fulfilment of "Megali Idea", indeed strengthened it and gave it a new shade of meaning. The Greek scholar, Dimitri Pentzopoulos, emphasized that after 1913 "the national ideal was not that of creating a pure Hellenic Greece, but the establishment of the great Hellenic state, in which many foreign elements would coexist with the Hellenic element, of course by preserving their national conscience under the Hellenic element sovereignty and using as connected line the Greek language - as the official language of the state".<sup>6</sup> However, time didn't prove this definition. "Megali Idea" succeeded in creating a Great Greece and at the same time succeeded in making it a homogenous state from the ethnic point of view.

Since the beginnings of this period, Greece was engaged in alienating the ethnic composure of Çamëria and other Albanian territories. The Çam population and other Albanian populations within Greece protested their detachment from the new Albanian state and against the policy of ethnic cleansing. These protests from Albanian in the conditions of great terror, were impossible to be better organized and also to become efficacious. In the main centers of Çamëria and in other Albanian territories were concentrated a lot of Greek military units, accompanied from the gendarmerie units (Korofillaqia). The occupation was accompanied with many atrocities of the mercenary bands, the so-called Greek volunteers, that were connected to the military forces and with the civilian administration.<sup>7</sup> The Austro-

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<sup>6</sup> Dimitri Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact Upon Greece* (Paris: Mouton, 1962), 26-27.

<sup>7</sup> Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Republikës së Shqipërisë/Central Archive of the Republic of Albania (hereinafter: *AQSh*), Fund (hereinafter: f.) 245, Year (hereinafter: Y.)

Hungarian diplomat K. Buchberger, wrote that "in the vicinities of Ioannina were found dead Moslems in the streets and their eyes gouged out from their faces and these atrocities were committed from the Greek Andarts".<sup>8</sup>

To definitively subdue the Albanian territories, the Greek administration undertook the action of forcing Albanians to give up their weapons, established the curfew and stopped the moving of Albanians outside the jurisdiction of their village or city. Were violated the civil and the national rights, Albanians were forbidden to gather, to establish their organizations etc. The central authorities were ordered by all means to obstruct the contacts of Albanians with the foreign consulates in Ioannina, Preveza and Corfu.<sup>9</sup>

The military authorities and the civil administration, started the process of expropriation of the Albanian Moslem population and exercised the violence to force to displace. For example, in Grikohor, October 1913, allegedly seeking weapons, all the inhabitants of the village were beaten. The maltreatments towards Albanians were exercised everywhere, accompanied with humiliation of the national symbols and of the Moslem religion, with deportations and imprisonments. Meanwhile the Albanian Christian population was forced to deny national belonging and to proclaim itself as Greek. To crush the resistance of Albanians, they undertook wide measures of terror, and destroyed hundreds of homes in the villages of Çamëria. During 1913-1914 in the kaza of Paramithia were destroyed the villages in Gardhiq with 300 homes, Dhragomia with 200, Petrovica with 75,

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1912, File (hereinafter: F.) II-60, page (hereinafter: p.) 6-8. Letter of the Çamëria representatives sent to the Vlora Provisional Government, 28 December 1912.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Buchberger, "Vjetët e mia në Shqipëri" (Kujtime), in *Studime historike*, nr. 4, Tiranë: 1972, 147.

<sup>9</sup> H. Isufi, *Musa Demi dhe qëndresa çame ...*, 148-149, quoted after *HHSTA.PA.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 23-40-4000. Report of the Austro-Hungarian consul in Ioannina, 11 August 1913.

Minina with 65; in the kaza of Filat were destroyed among others also Ninat with 120 homes, Markat with 120, Janjari with 150 etc.<sup>10</sup>

An ugly crime was the one that was organized at the Livar's stream near the village of Selan in Paramithia, where the Greek bands on March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1913, gathered and massacred 72 persons from the pariah of the Çam villages of Nikolicanj, Minina, Petrovica, Shëmëriza, Vratila, Bedeleni, Dramësi, Rreganji etc. One of the Çamëria chieftains, Masar Dino, has left a complete and appalling evidence on these events.<sup>11</sup> Also later, when the Çamëria region was occupied from the Italian forces, the Italian military authorities investigated thoroughly on this crime. In September 1917, the sub lieutenant Giovanni Stamadiadi informed his superiors that as a result of the Albanian Moslem population resistance in the districts of Margariti, Filat, Gumenica, Paramithia towards the Greek propaganda, the Greek government organized the massacre of the main leaders of the most prominent families, aiming to facilitate the Hellenization of the above mentioned territories. "The massacre was organized by the military and religious

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>11</sup> *HHS.A.P.A.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 23-12-1226. The Austro-Hungarian consul in Ioannina for count Berthold, Ioannina, 11 August 1913. The above-mentioned consul informed that Masar Dino secretly went in the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Ioannina and described the event as it follows: "Few days after the fall of Ioannina (6 March 1913) was kept in Ajdonat, under the chairmanship of the Metropolitan of that place a secret meeting with the participation of the president of "Ethniki Hetairia" for Ajdonat, Themistokles Ringas, his brothers Demostene and Dr. Petro Ringas, and also the commander of the Ajdonat center, Dimitriades. In this meeting was assigned the list of the beys that should be annihilated. Their assassination was assigned to the gang's leader from Crete, Delijanis, who was in Ajdonat. Then, Themistokle Ringas chose 140 Christian peasants from the district of Ajdonat, which were at the disposal of Delijanis. The latter with his band went into the beys' villages and before executing them, invited them to go to Ajdonat where allegedly they would regain the properties that were taken from the Andarts during the war. When they arrived near the village of Skrystica (near Ajdonat) the beys were tied and thrown in the abyss near Liveri, in the vicinity of Selani (village near to Ajdonat), leaving them unburied. The Greek authorities tried to hide this heinous crime".

authorities, to eliminate their influence in the illiterate population and to impose to her by terror the denationalization by fighting the Albanian propaganda".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Archivio Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore Esercito*, Roma (hereinafter: *AUSSME*), in *AIH*, B-38, year 1917, Busta 8, Relation of the XVI Army-Corps Command sent to the Superior Command. Second lieutenant Stamadiadi Giovanni to Signor Maggiore Vicenzi Cav. Bartolemeo, Capo Ufficio Politico Militare, Ioannina, Parga, 3 September 1917. From the received information he described the event as the following:

"From March 19-21 1913, there was an enormous gathering in the Episcopal palace of Paramithia, with the participation of the bishop, the head of police and other chieftains of the region. The militia commander was captain Dimitriades of the autonomous regiment of colonel Ipitis, meanwhile the bishop was Neofitos. In this meeting also participated many other Greek chiefs among which the four brothers Ringas (Demostene, Petro, Themistokle and Dr. Ringas), Georgio Pakos from Gliqia, Demetro Caci from Paramithia and two officers of Paramithia. These demanded to the band chiefs Delijanaqis from Crete and Spiro Fotis from Popovo to form the band that would fulfill the arrest and the execution of the Çamëria chiefs. This band, on Sunday, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1913, armed from the militia command of Paramithia, went to execute the order. Divided in two groups, had the duty to go to the villages of Nikoliq, Grika, Skupika, Meskori, Minina, Petronika, Simnerika, Vrotila, Bedeleni, Zranesi and Rizani and gather the chiefs. They selected some of them, which they were told would present before the militia commander, following an urgent and secret information. The band roamed four days in the villages and arrested the chiefs. Wednesday night, both groups met in Skupicë for the night. Tomorrow morning, after the victims were secured, they continued to Selani and arrived in Laka or in Limofaula approximately 15 minutes from Selani, torturing and truly barbarously killing them. The victims which were tied passed before their butchers and were shot. Those who did not die from the bullets were hit with the rifles shoulder rests. The bodies were covered with stones and today can still be photographed the bones assembled in that place, if it would be necessary to conduct an exhumation. What draws the attention because the responsibility falls on the Greek authorities, is the fact that the villages of Minina and Nestor in Skupika existed as stations of the Greek soldiers depending on Paramithia's militia. Among her commanders was also Vasiliaki from Ciepela who was commander of the Skupika station. These military not only had free hand to act, but joined the band and participated in the massacre".

The Italian military authorities pointed out in 1917 that the above mentioned massacre was not the only. The elimination of the Albanian element had been a systemic policy. Few months after that massacre, had been slaughtered Subi Bey Dino from Preveza and Fuat Bey Pronja from Pronja, which were executed after being called from the Epirus governor. Their bodies were given back to their families two days after the killing. Their relatives were told that they died from surprising epilepsy along the way. These enormous crimes made life impossible for the Albanian element that during 1913-1916 nearly 10 000 persons left the homeland, going to Turkey.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless such massacres, immediately after the occupation of Çamëria, the Greek authorities willingly began to apply the typical Balkan administrative and economic policies of ethnic cleansing. Masar Dino denounced this rude and oppressive policy to the Austro-Hungarian consul in Ioannina. He described as miserable the situation of Moslem Albanians in Çamëria, which were totally powerless in front of the Greeks' terror. The Christian peasants didn't recognize their lords anymore and refused to pay them. The livestock belonging to Albanians was being grabbed from the Christians and the homes of the beys were also plundered. Every complaint from the Moslem beys was *a priori* rejected from the Greek authorities and thus they lack any legal protection. The free communication between the Moslem villages was forbidden from the Greek authorities. In Ajdonat there were violent conversions of the Moslem families. In the summer of 1913, in the prison of Ioannina were kept 60 Albanian from Çamëria. "Ethniki Hetairia" was performing as a secret service in Ajdonat in favor of the Greek government by proposing the persons that should be arrested, and in general they were the most influential people. This activity was extended in many other centers of Çamëria. The very same organization was deceiving Albanians and was taking money from them by promising that would serve as protection in the Greek courts. Both the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

arrest and the release was arbitrarily made after the peasants were forced to pay a huge amount of money.<sup>14</sup>

This situation was described even in a protest letter that the Austro-Hungarian representatives sent on June 8<sup>th</sup> 1913 about the situation of the Albanian prisoners.<sup>15</sup> Because of the severe surveillance from the Greek authorities, this petition was not signed from a large number of Albanians, but only the main three initiators: Stefan Tedoraki, as member of Leskovik pariah, Pertef Vehib Pasha and Haki Filati which signed on behalf of all Albanians of Epirus. They sought the support of Austria-Hungary to protect the Albanians from Greek violence.

In this memorandum was written that the first measure of the Greek government after occupying the Albanian territories, has been the prohibition of the Albanian language which had remained as the sole national comfort of Albanians. Any person who spoke Albanian, was spit on, beaten and finally arrested. Those who fought against the Ottoman regime for their nation were being persecuted, convicted without trial and being killed. The most notorious case was the killing of 78 Çam leaders. The Greek soldiers were plundering the homes of Albanians, were raping the women and the young girls, forcing Albanians to leave in horror from their villages. The Greek governmental bodies were forcing all Albanians to participate in meetings to prove that these territories were Greek. The nonparticipation was punished with imprisonment and eviction until five years. All the mosques were turned into arsenals, warehouses and garages. Some Albanians were arrested because they kept head fez. Others were arrested because they refused to sign the memorandum in which was written "the call" to liberate Vlora and to be annexed to

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<sup>14</sup> *HHSSt.A.PA.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 23-12-1226. The Austro-Hungarian consul in Ioannina for count Berthold, Ioannina, 11 August 1913.

<sup>15</sup> *HHSSt.A.PA.A.* in *AIH*, Vj. 23-36-3654. Buchberger to Markgraf Pallavicini, Ioannina, 8 June 1913.

Greece. The peasants were forced to pay heavy taxes, previously unknown under the Turkish regime.

The memorandum ended with the call addressed to the Austro-Hungarian government: "We have nobody where to complain and to present our problem, and we are only hoping in the powerful support of the Monarchy".<sup>16</sup>

Musa Demi became the initiator of a powerful manifestation in Vlora, by sending a memorandum to the Austro-Hungarian emperor, signed from the representatives of the Çam population, where after describing the oppressive measures from the Greeks, was asked the help of the monarchy for the unification of Çamëria with Albania.<sup>17</sup>

The provisional Government of Vlora from the end of June 1913, sent a delegation in Rome and Vienna, composed by some of the most renowned personalities from Çamëria, Gjirokastra and Vlora to protect Çamëria, by presenting evidence proving the pure Albanian character of that province inhabited from 50 thousand Albanian Moslems and 14 thousand Albanian Orthodox.<sup>18</sup>

The Greek crimes in Çamëria were also discussed in the Ambassadors' Conference in London. Being presented with undeniable facts, the Greek representative tried to deceive by stating that those acts done from the Andart bands were not the responsibility of his government. The foreign diplomats affirmed that these bands were recruited from the Greek government under the command of the Greek army officers.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> The newspaper *Atdheu*, Constanța, 10 June 1913.

<sup>18</sup> Eqrem Vlora, *Kujtime*, vol. II (1912-1925) (Tiranë: Shtëpia e librit dhe e komunikimit, 2001), 26.

<sup>19</sup> *HHSSt.A.P.A.A.* në *AIH*, Vj. 23-1-189. Report of the Austro-Hungarian consul in Ioannina for the Foreign Minister, 13 March 1913; *ibid*, Vj. 23-9-964. Report from Bilinski to count Berchtold, 27 October 1913.

The campaign for the collection of the arms continued during all 1913 and continued uninterruptedly until 1915, accompanied with maltreatments against the Albanian population, reaching its peak during the time when the Greeks proclaimed the autonomy for Southern Albania. At the eve of the First World War, on June 15<sup>th</sup> 1914, were killed in Konispol, Filat, Margëlliç etc., tens of other Çam pariah leaders.

In parallel with these actions, was also undertaken the robbing of Albanian wealth, the confiscation of the Albanians' properties from the Greek state etc. The Greek government seized the so-called abandoned lands from Albanian which were left under the circumstances of the Balkan War and the occupation of Çamëria. This pressure urged the sporadic but continues emigration of the Çam population to Albanian and in the Ottoman empire.

These actions were in contradiction with the Turkish-Greek Peace Treaty of November 14<sup>th</sup> 1913, according to which the Turkish Moslems, the Çam and other Albanians living in Greece, former citizens of the Ottoman empire, would be treated as Greek nationals with the all the rights and honors. It foresaw the right of every Moslem inhabitant to declare by writing to what ethnicity it belongs (Turkish, Albanian etc.) and would define the obligations of the Greek state to respect the human, religious and ownership rights of these nationals.

The Greek violence against the Albanian population was condemned by other personalities and foreign organizations. Noticing that the Albanian population annexed by Greece was very threatened, Edith Durham demanded the British government to take the necessary measures for the protection of that population and to impose to the Balkan states the same obligations that were imposed to Albania concerning the minorities. But the British government and the governments of the other powers were pursuing differential criteria in this direction. The high official of the Foreign Office, Robert Vansittart replied to Durham that in a meeting of the ambassadors on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1913, a resolution was adopted affirming that the latest annexed

territories would become a subject of full guarantee of the equal rights of religion and of national minorities. These rights would be guaranteed as were defined in the Berlin's Treaty, about the annexed territories from Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia.<sup>20</sup>

However, the guarantee of the rights based on the Berlin's Treaty had totally failed and Durham had carefully analyzed the rude policy of assimilation and of the ethnic cleansing pursued from the Balkan states after this Treaty. Therefore she sent a strong answer to the above-mentioned British official: "What are these rapacious and hopeless treaties? These rights guaranteed from the Treaty of Berlin simply do not exist..."<sup>21</sup>.

In the British archives are found facts that against this violent ethnic cleansing and against the indifference shown from the Great Powers erupted many protests and complaints from the evicted populations and also from the Pan-Indian Moslem League in London. The latest sent tens of protest notes to the British government denouncing the maltreatment and the eviction of the Moslems from the provinces granted to Greece. This treatment against the Muslims was seen by her as "the worst shift from the standards of European civilization". The League demanded from the British government to intervene and to force the Greek government and the Balkan countries to respect all the obligations following from the Treaty of Berlin which guaranteed the complete religious and civil freedoms, and also the equity of all the peoples and the maintenance of the institutions in the newly and the old territories.<sup>22</sup> In one of its protests it was said: "We have hoped that acting in front of the eyes of civilized Europe and before the powers that have signed the Treaty of Berlin, the Balkan countries would treat their Moslem citizens with normal humanism. But it seems that aiming to populate the newly acquired provinces with

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<sup>20</sup> TNA, FO 371/1892. Robert Vansittart to Miss Durham, FO, 31 January 1914.

<sup>21</sup> TNA, FO 371/1892. Miss Durham to Robert Vansittart, 1 February 1914.

<sup>22</sup> TNA, FO 371/1996. The Moslem Pan-Indian League in London (The London All-India Moslem League) for the British State undersecretary, 7 May 1914.

people of their kind and religion, the Greeks have applied against the Moslems a wild annihilation system".<sup>23</sup>

Distinguished British personalities of the time stigmatized with force the violent policy of ethnic cleansing that Greece was applying in the regions of Macedonia annexed from her. They explained that in every case that the Greeks had been the first initiators for these persecutions and evictions and that the emigration of 240 000 Moslems of Macedonia in the Asia Minor and in the Ottoman Thrace, caused a complete system of oppression and terror. They referred to the report of the Carnegie Commission, which asserted that: "Nonetheless all the Balkan states have violated the laws of civilized humanity, the graves and the most sophisticated and systemic crimes are those committed by the Greeks".<sup>24</sup>

Mostly of these Moslems living in Macedonia were Albanians which were completely innocent and had nothing to do with the Turkish-Greek conflict. The above-mentioned personalities chaired by lord Lamington demanded the British government to intervene for the parties to accept an international commission to realize the exchange of the respective populations, "which now seems to be inevitable. The intervention in time of the Powers could stop the hostilities that Greece has already begun".<sup>25</sup>

In general, the Çam population during 1913-1916, declared its Albanian nationality. Hence, they were not lacking special persons or groupings in order to escape the persecutions were forced to choose Turkish nationality and the Ottoman Empire as the place to immigrate. Hundreds of others emigrated within Greece, in Albania and in different Balkan countries, in Northern Africa, USA etc. Among thousands of refugees from Southern Albania which in the summer of 1914 were forced to escape the violent "northern Epirus" bands and to establish in

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> TNA, FO 371/1998. Telegram from a group of British personalities chaired by lord Lamington addressed to E. Grey, 17 June 1914.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Vlora's olive-yards, nearly 20 000 Albanians were from Ioannina, Voshtina, Konica etc.

### **Çamëria under the Italian control during 1917-1918**

With the explosion of the First World War, Athens tried to avert the possible resistance of Albanians in the annexed territories in case Greece entered war. Under the pretext of gathering weapons in Çamëria, Kostur and in other regions, Albanian men and women were assembled in public squares and were openly maltreated, while many others were deported in the islands of Aegean. The Albanians opposed this policy of terror. In the spring of 1917, 400 Albanian families would protest in front of national bodies and proclaim that they didn't recognize the Greek government.

Meanwhile in June 1916, the Italian army started to enter the Greek lands, which at the end of August 1917 conquered Ioannina and entire Çamëria, until the bay of Preveza. The Greek troops withdrew without posing resistance.

The Italian authorities noticed the persecution of the Albanian population from the Greek government. General Ferrero informed the foreign minister Sonnino: "last weeks have been presented to me strong complaints about the persecution of Pindus Romanians and Albanians of Çamëria from the Greeks. In Çamëria these persecutions have taken the shape of true political assassinations. The executors were some known chief bands which during the Epirote movements turned into political bands. Even in normal times they turned out to be vulgar bands. These bands served the Greek authorities to rule the country... The persecution against the Albanians of Çamëria has a strong repercussion in Albanian and perhaps for this reason, we cannot be disinterested".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *AUSSME*, in *AIH*, B-38, Documents of the Army Corp XVI Command, Busta 10, years 1917-1918. General Commander of the XVI Command XVI, Ferrero, for the Foreign Minister, Sonnino, 1 March 1918.

The General commissar on Civilian Questions, Francesco Fazi, reported to Rome that the methods used by the Greeks to denationalize the Upper Epirus, were known to Europe from the crimes committed against the Kurds in Armenia. However, she continued to ignore these actions committed by the Cretans bands in Epirus. As a consequence of their actions occurred the destruction of hundreds of villages, mass merciless executions and many other atrocities committed against the inhabitants of this area. "It's important to remember from the past the expression of Attila "flagellum Dei" (God's lashing) to have an idea for what has happened in these regions", wrote the Italian commissar.<sup>27</sup> He emphasized that these bands, after robbing everything from the inhabitants of these areas, raised to the ground the villages of Gardhiq, Dragumi, Petronicë, Mininë, Ninat, Arcat, Janjar, Dalesikon, inhabited from nearly 1 200 inhabitants, by committing merciless acts of violence against men and women.<sup>28</sup>

Also, a person with a high authority and morality, which had done great services to the Hellenic cause, declared to Fazi that these four years of Athens rule in this region had overthrown and overpassed all what the Ottoman rule and oppression had done against this population in four centuries. Nonetheless there is a sort of exaggeration in this assertion, Fazi informed Rome that the Greek government didn't spend a penny in public works and had not taken any measure favoring the improvement of the bad living conditions of these rural populations. On the contrary, it has applied a fiscal regime, which has been much more heavier than the previous applied from the Ottoman occupation administration. The taxes for import has been very high, while the taxes for consumption increased tenfold, by applying high taxation in the level of 12,5% towards all the agricultural productions, were imposed

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<sup>27</sup> ASD MAE, AP, Serie Ordinario e di Gabineto (1915-1919), Albania, Pacco 14, posiz. 34/3. Report of the General Commissar for the Civil Questions, Francesco Fazi, about the situation in the occupied territories south of the border assigned from the Conference of London, Ioannina, 30 July 1917.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

taxes on livestock, on forests, on registration, on army, on freelance, on tobacco and other small productions. This heavy system of taxation was applied in a region having one of the most backward economic structures.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the Italian officials in the ground put into evidence with such precision the Greek crimes and also they were realistic and affirmed that still these policies were not escalated in a genocide and massive ethnic cleansing as has happened in Southern Albania. The Italian Consul General in Ioannina, Nuvolari noticed: "has also been a favorable circumstance that Çamëria escaped the horrors and atrocities committed by the Greeks in the Northern Epirus, especially in Kurvelesh, Leskovik and Kolonja, which suffered as consequence a depopulation of this area and the decrease of the Moslem element that still is predominant, but of course has been greater in numbers in 1912 compared to now."<sup>30</sup>

Rome followed in Çamëria an approaching policy with Albanians. The Italian military command declared that it would protect the linguistic, cultural and religious rights of Albanians. In the cities of Filat, Paramithia, Gumenica with its districts etc., was allowed to raise the Albanian flag. Many Albanians were released from the prisons and return from the deportation a considerable part of the Çams. In every region controlled by the Italians were appointed regional commissars, established councils composed from civilian and religious chiefs from the local population.<sup>31</sup> A Consultative Commission close to the Italian General Commissar was established, composed of Albanians with the duty to fix the administrative services in the city of Ioannina and surroundings. On August 30<sup>th</sup> 1917, was manifested the circular of the Italian General Commissar allowing the opening of the Albanian schools. The first schools opened in Filat and in the village of Galloq,

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> G. A. Colonna De Cesaro, *L'Italia nelle Albania Meridionale. Note e documenti (1917-1918)*, Foligno: 1922, 103.

accompanied with enthusiastic manifestation from the people in the streets of the city.<sup>32</sup>

This policy nourished high hopes among the Albanian population waiting to escape the Greek persecution. The representatives of the Çamëria inhabitants expressed to the Italian military command the desire to reconnect with Albania under the Italian protectorate. The French thought that from some time the Italians had prepared these manifestations, by appointing as governor of Çamëria, Ahmet Bey Dino, who had been an immigrant in Corfu.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, there was no need for any kind of preparation because the Albanian population of that area was ready to seek Italian support in the face of the Greek danger.

Also, even the Moslem pariah of Ioannina demanded from the Italian troops protection from the danger of the Greek persecution and expressed the desire for the Italian to stay forever in this territory.<sup>34</sup>

Fasi affirmed that the land property was the only wealth of this region and was concentrated in few hands. In approximately 200 villages around the old Ioannina district, only 40 of them were landowners in the village. The others, or 160 villages were estates (large landed properties) possessed by private owners, under the possession of a small number of people.<sup>35</sup> The Italian High Commissioner informed Rome that as soon as the news was spread that the Greeks might return

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<sup>32</sup> H. Isufi, *Musa Demi dhe qëndresa çame ...*, 153-154.

<sup>33</sup> *AMAE*, Paris, in *AIH*, F-127, Guerre 1914-1918, Balkans-Albanie, XIII et XIV, Volume 18, Septembre-December 1917. France's Legation to the Albanian government in Thessaloniki (the government of Esat Toptani) for the Foreign Ministry, Thessaloniki, 6 September 1917.

<sup>34</sup> *ASD MAE*, AP, Serie Ordinario e di Gabinetto (1915-1919), Albania, Pacco 14, posiz. 34/3. Rapporto sulla situazione politica di Argirocastro. Memories of the General Commissar for the civil questions in Ioannina on the meeting between Ioannina's mufti, Fuat Efendi, chairman of the Moslem Community of Ioannina province with other representatives of this population as Sadik Pasha, Jahja Bey, Haxhi Fuat Efendi, Hajri Pashianda, Sheh Rasih, Irfan Bey, Kadri Efendi Hoxha and Hasan Pashianda, 26 July 1917.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

to rule that territory, the Albanians of Çamëria and the Romanians of Pindus organized spontaneous demonstrations demanding for the Italian occupation to be forever. The Albanian muftis together with many other inhabitants of that region on behalf of their believers "told me that their life and destiny was the hands of Italy and were confident that Italy would not abandon them anymore". Also the Jewish community of Ioannina of nearly 3 thousand Jews, through their rabbi, expressed the desire to be protected from the Italian troops. They prayed for the success of the Italian army and the greatness of Italy and its king.<sup>36</sup>

The Italians also investigated the ethnic composition of the occupied territory reaching realistic conclusions. According the Italian Consul General in Ioannina, Nuvolari, in southwest of Pogon district, on the line of Kalamas river, existed the kaza of Filat on which the Turkish statistics of 1895 presented a population of 23 291 inhabitants divided in 67 villages (including Filat) and 4 784 homes. Nuvolari asserted that the majority of the population was Albanian and almost exclusively spoke Albanian. He also added that in many villages the Greek was not known at all.<sup>37</sup> As it is seen, the kaza of Filat, which under the Greek regime was promoted at the level of sub prefecture and formed the northern part of Çamëria.

At the closest border point, south of the above-mentioned region, lay the kaza (that also was a Greek sub prefecture) of Paramithia (Ajdonati). The Turkish statistics of 1895 for this kaza, forming the central part of Çamëria, presented the following data: 14 474 inhabitants: 65 villages (including Paramithia): 2 661 homes. Nuvolari affirmed that the most of the population was Albanian and the spoken language with few exceptions was Albanian.

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ASD MAE, AP, Serie Ordinario e di Gabinetto (1915-1918), Albania, Pacco 37. The Italian Consul General in Ioannina, Nuvolari, for the Foreign Minister in Rome, Ioannina, 29 June 1917.*

The southern part of Çamëria was composed from the kaza (the Greek sub prefecture) of Margariti, for which the Turkish above mentioned statistics of 1895 presented: 23 955 inhabitants: 74 villages (including Margariti): 5 224 homes. From these, nearly 16 000 were all Moslem Albanians. Nuvolari emphasized that the spoken language in this kaza was in general Albanian. In most of the villages the Greek language was not known. The fact that the kaza of Margariti had such an ethnic physiognomy (75% of the population was Moslem Albanian), was considered from Nuvolari a favorable circumstance because having in mind its geographic position in connection with the other part of Çamëria and if would be applied the principle of nationality in the Peace Conference, this would unavoidably lead in the inclusion of all Central (Paramithia), Northern (Filat) and Southern (Margariti) Çamëria in Albania.

Nuvolari reexamined once again the statistics data of the Austro-Hungarian Consulate of Ioannina. From their examination, he emphasized that Albanians of Filat, Paramithia and Margariti were in total 54 430 persons, from which 33 330 Moslems and 21 100 Orthodox, all speaking Albanian. While the Greeks were in total 11 200 persons or 1/5 of the population. Nuvolari also emphasized that even they [the Greeks] spoke Albanian. "That is so true that even in the Christian villages of Çarkovista (Ioannina prefecture), bordering Çamëria, is spoken Albanian". These circumstances were considered by him as extremely important because they would constitute in the Peace Conference the most convincing arguments to show that by applying the nationality principle, Çamëria should not join Greece, but included within Albania or in any case at least enjoy a special regime.

Nuvolari emphasized that it would have not been possible for the district of Margariti to be geographically included within the Albanian state, without also including the two other above-mentioned districts, that of Paramithia and Filat, both Albanian. However, he added that in those regions existed an Orthodox element that nevertheless was ethnically Albanian, would be qualified by Greece and other powers

supporting her as Hellenized. He assessed that: "the Hellenic four years rule, viz from 1913 until the half of 1917, fortunately has not succeeded to change the ethnic character of Çamëria, which remained in its major part Albanian".<sup>38</sup>

Nuvolari also affirmed that deportations of Moslem families from that region to Istanbul and Minor Asia. The Ottoman government through its consulate in Ioannina provided the means to travel to these families, but their number remained limited.

The Italian consul observed that the above mentioned circumstances added the profound hate that the Moslem felt against the Greek rule, which had exercised arbitrary action at their detriment. Nuvolari asserted that being free from the restrictions, and fear from the Greek reappraisals, if asked the Moslem inhabitants of Çamëria during the Italian military occupation, would express by general suffrage their wish for the future political order of Çamëria. "It would be absolutely a certain fact that they would never ask to join again with Greece, an idea that terrifies them", informed the Italian consul.<sup>39</sup> He suggested the support of their aspirations and rights from Italy which "by occupying their country, has taken the hard moral duty to protect their ethnic, linguistic and national rights and also guaranteeing their personal safety in the Peace Conference".

Interesting and realistic data are given from the Italian officials about the composition of the population in the cities and villages of Çamëria. By observing the examination of the Austro-Hungarian consulate in Ioannina for the kaza of Pogon, Nuvolari wrote that the 21 900 inhabitants of that district were divided the following: 3 000 Albanians, from which 1 000 Moslems and 2 000 Orthodox; 16 000 Orthodox Greeks; 2 500 Vlachs and 400 gypsies. Also according to these statistics, the kaza of Konica encountered a general population of 18 000 inhabitants divided as the following: 1 200 Moslem Albanians;

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

12 600 Orthodox Greeks; 4 000 Vlach; 200 gypsies. "Most of the population is Greek-Orthodox and the spoken language is in general beyond any doubt Greek. The feelings of the population are by no doubt oriented towards Athens", writes Nuvolari. While for the kaza of Ioannina he observes that in 1903 were living 450 Albanian Moslems, 800 Orthodox Albanians, 77 700 Orthodox Greeks, 6 400 Vlachs, 1 000 gypsies, 3 600 Jews. In the above mentioned statistics of the Austro-Hungarian consulate for this city it results that even 6 000 Moslems living there were called as Moslem Greeks. Nuvolari thought that it was likely that whoever drafted these statistics, these 6 000 Moslems were considered of Greek origin, but none of them was living anymore there because after the Greek occupation of the city, nearly 5 000 Moslems had emigrated. That was so true because "the Turkish" neighborhoods of Luca fortress remained depopulated and a majority of Moslem homes during the time this report was drafted, were empty and closed. The Greek statistics of 1913-1914 presented for Ioannina and the districts of Malakash and of Çarkovica 55 275 inhabitants. The Italian consul thought that should be removed from this data 6 400 Vlachs and 1 703 Moslems, resulting that 47 172 inhabitants were Greek-Orthodox. Therefore, the physiognomy of Ioannina district was clearly Greek at 85%.

He thought that Greece would seek to apply the principle of nationality in the Peace Conference or would try to urge others to seek its application. Therefore she could not insist to possess some ethnic-linguistic right on Zagoria, on Pindus or on Çamëria. The data presented in this report exhaustively argued the lack of such a right for Greece. The consul Nuvolari asserted that if left free the populations of these three above mentioned regions to express their feelings and aspirations, would made known to the Great Powers Commissions that would gather one day in Peace Congress that their true desire was to unite with Albania, under the shadow of the Italian flag and never again to return under the Greek rule.

With the entrance of Greece at the side of Entente (from the end of 1917) and with the withdrawal of the Italian forces from Çamëria, the Albanian population was again returned under Greek rule. On July 28<sup>th</sup> 1917, representatives of Çamëria pariah, chaired by Masar Dino, demanded to the Italian representative in Ioannina, Fasi, to not abandon them by leaving Albanians at the mercy of the Greeks and said that "would better like to jump to the sea..., if the Italian army would leave".<sup>40</sup>

During the First World War, the Albanians of Çamëria and other Albanian regions in Greece supported the program of the national movement for the foundation of an Albanian state within the ethnic borders. Despite the difficulties to be in touch with the foreign world, they sent petitions and memorandums to the European governments, demanding the protection of the human and national rights which were violated from the Greek authorities, and also the unification with the Albanian state. However, in Çamëria the condition for an activity of organized societies with national and cultural character didn't exist. In these circumstances were organized Çam groupings in the Albanian state and in diaspora as in Switzerland, Turkey, USA etc., which cooperated with the societies of the Albanian colonies there.

### **The demands of Albanians for freedom and the resume of the Greek violence (1919-1922)**

With the end of the First World War and the call of the Peace Conference in Paris, the movement for the unification of Çamëria with the Albanian state got bigger. The Albanian people and government never came to terms with the dismemberment of the Albanian territories. At the Versailles Conference, the Albanian government demanded the return of the annexed territories from Greece after the

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<sup>40</sup> Agron Alibali, "Administrimi Italian në Çamëri në vitin 1917", in *Studime historike*, nr. 3-4, (Tiranë: 2001), 76.

London Conference.<sup>41</sup> To solve the problem of the claimed territories between Greece and Albania, the Albanian government demanded to be organized a referendum both in the territories annexed by Greece and also in the regions of Southern Albania claimed by the Greeks, after these regions for a period from one to two years to be conquered and administered from US.<sup>42</sup> The same demand was also presented by the representatives of Çamëria at the Peace Conference.<sup>43</sup> Also, the Albanian government complained at the Peace Conference that Greece was forcing Epirus Albanians to emigrate to Turkey and from the other side, had forbidden the sales or the alienation of their real estates.<sup>44</sup> Among of the many demands presented from the Albanians of Çamëria, catches the eye the letter of the Women Albanian Committee, Lejla Dino, the daughter of Rasih Dino, addressed to the wife of president Wilson<sup>45</sup>, the memorandum of Vehip Demi, Galip Xhaferi (respectively the chairman and the secretary of the Albanian Association "Çamëria" in US), which has been signed from many other Çam emigrants living in that country, addressed to the Chairman of the Peace Conference, George Clemanceau<sup>46</sup>, the memorandum of the 25 representatives of Çamëria, which among the signatories were Assaf Çami, Masar Dino sent to the Peace Conference on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1919<sup>47</sup> etc.

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<sup>41</sup> *AQSh*, f. 251, Y. 1919, F. 10, p. 22-25. Memorandum of Durrës' delegation government addressed to the Peace Conference in Paris. Paris, 12 February 1919.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, f. 251, Y. 1919, F. 14, 22. Supplement Note of the Albanian delegation concerning the Albanian claims, Paris, 7 mars 1919.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, f. 30, Y. 1919, F. 7, 18. Telegram of Çamëria representatives, Arif Çami, Ahmed Çamëria, Qemo Preveza, Xhevit Ajdonati, sent to the Peace Conference Chairman, 25 July 1919.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, f. 251, Y. 1919, F. 14, p. 44-45. Letter of the Albanian delegation chairman, Luigi Bumçi, sent to the Peace Conference Chairman, Paris, 25 July 1919.

<sup>45</sup> Hajredin Isufi, *Çamëria nëpërmjet kronikave të kohës (1902-1940)* (Tiranë: Pegi, 2007), 259-260. The letter is published in the newspaper *Albania*, Worcester Mass., 20 November 1919.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 260-261.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p. 262-266.

At this time were established other genuine Çam associations. In Albania, mainly in Delvina and Saranda, developed their activities the societies "Çam Brotherhood", chaired by dr. Hasaf Ajdonatin (Çami), the society "For the Salvation of Çamëria", chaired by Met Duçe Sejko and the society "Memory of Çamëria", chaired by Xhelil Dami, Mete and Qamil Izet Çami. In the US were founded the societies "Çamëria", in Worcester and "Brotherhood", in Hartford, chaired by Gazali Dino and Beqo Izeti (Kushi). In these societies participated Albanians from Çamëria, from the prefectures of Ioannina, Preveza and Gumenica, and also other emigrants from the other Albanian territories.

These societies worked to make known to the international opinion the violence that was exercised in Çamëria and in other Albanian regions in Greece, and also to secure its support for the solution of the Çamëria question in the Peace Conference in Paris. The Çam societies organized in Albania, in US and in other countries a series of meetings and protests and from there were addressed petitions and memorandums to the chancelleries of the Great Powers and the Peace Conference in Paris. Often these groups and societies worked in cooperation with the Kosovar groups and societies with the common aim to solve the question of Kosova and Çamëria through the creation of an Albanian state within its ethnic borders.

In Switzerland starting from 1919, began to act "The Albanians Joint Committee", with representatives of Albanians national committees from USA, Canada and Switzerland; in 1921 was established in Boston "The Joint Committee of Çamëria and Kosova". The same year in Albania, in the city of Vlora, the society "The Joint Committees of Irredentist Albanians" was formed. The representatives of these committees as R. Dino, H. Klisura, S. Kolea, B. Pejani, A. Çami, K. Batzi etc., during 1919-1921, coordinated their activity for the information of the international factor for the solution of the Albanian question in general and the Çam and Kosovar issue in particular.

In these regions, the Çam societies in Albania, supported from the local public opinion organized rallies in some cities as in Lezha, Fier, Berat, Elbasan, Vlora etc., raising their protest against the ethnic pressure and the growing expropriation against the Çam and Kosovar population. In the protests and in the sent telegrams to the League of Nations and the Ambassadors Conference in Paris, was required the unification of Çamëria with the Albanian state.

The Treaty of Sèvres signed on August 10<sup>th</sup> 1920 between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire, forced Greece to secure the complete protection of life and freedom of the minorities, including the Albanians, which were residents in the territories granted to her since January 1<sup>st</sup> 1913.<sup>48</sup> But, the Treaty of Sèvres was not ratified from the parliaments of Turkey and Greece<sup>49</sup> and this influenced negatively in the protection of the Albanian population which subdued a lot of pressure exercised against her to force it to depart.

The Albanian population was exploited by the application of the agrarian reform that was proclaimed in 1920. According to that and after the later legal acts, would enjoy compensation only on the surfaces of over 30 ha of land. But, in contradiction with the agrarian law, were expropriated the owners that possessed smaller surfaces of land. Was applied the form of "the hidden" expropriation, when the Greek state took under its control "the abandoned lands" etc. With these measures, the Greek peasants and refugees coming from the Minor Asia or other territories and also Christian Albanians were granted many agricultural properties belonging to the Moslem Albanians.

In 1921, in Çamëria was organized a massive violent campaign by the Greek authorities, which loudly propagated that they had discovered a big Albanian "conspiracy". On the basis of a document that the Greek court later estimated as totally false, the military authorities arrested 130 persons that were kept in prison for two months and were cruelly

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<sup>48</sup> AMPJ, Y. 1920, F. 73. The full text of the Treaty of Sèvres.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Clogg, *Historia e përmbledhur e Greqisë* (Tiranë: Toena, 2004), 94.

beaten.<sup>50</sup> This resulted in a false trap and the Italian legation informed Rome that this was a shameful comedy.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of 1922, the pressure on Albanians increased. Yet their homes were forcefully occupied from Greek refugees coming from Minor Asia. The Albanian government complained in London to stop this systemic violence,<sup>52</sup> but her claims were considered not true.<sup>53</sup>

### **The intensification of the ethnic cleansing policy (1923-1926)**

In January 1923 was reached a Greek-Turkish agreement on the exchange of populations and on July 23<sup>rd</sup> was signed the Treaty of Lausanne for the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations. The most innocent and defenseless victim of drama would be the Albanians of Greece. In the first article of Lausanne's Convention was written that the exchange would be compulsory for the Turkish citizens of Greek Orthodox religion settled in the Turkish territory with Greek citizens of Islamic religion settled in the Greek territory.<sup>54</sup> The Moslem Albanians of Greece were directly affected and those Orthodox Albanians in Turkey. The Greek government was the sole responsible for not making that distinction in the agreement with Turkey.

The Albanian government sensed the danger coming from the Treaty of Lausanne, and swiftly intervened by asking the Greek citizens of Albanian nationality to not be included in the exchange. Further, the representative of Italy presented this matter in the Conference of Lausanne and demanded that Albanians should not be exchanged.<sup>55</sup> The

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<sup>50</sup> *AMAE*, Affari Politici, Serie Politica, 1919-1930, Albania, Pacco 701. The Consulate in Ioannina for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17.8.1921.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* The legate in Athens for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30.8.1921.

<sup>52</sup> *TNA*, FO 286/817. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Legation in London, 9.12.1922; *Ibid.* M. Konica to Curzon, 11.12.1922.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, FO 371/8532. C. H. Bentinck to Curzon, Athens, 26.1.1923; *Ibid.*, FO 371/8532. Eyres to Curzon, Durrës, 16.3.1923.

<sup>54</sup> D. Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities...*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> Dhimitër Berati, *Shënime historike mbi marrëdhëniet e Shqipërisë me Lidhjen e Kombeve* (Tiranë: Husi Borshi, 2007), 43.

Greek representative in the League of Nations was forced to declare that was not the intention of Greece to exchange the Moslems of "Albanian origin", and that Albanians lived in a region that was clearly defined, "in Epirus", that they had the same religion with the Turks "but not at all their nationals".<sup>56</sup> This statement of the Greek representative contained two restrictions, which would later harm the Albanian population. First, here was mentioned only the Epirus and not the other regions where Albanians were living, and the secondly, the expression "of Albanian origin" was doubtful and was later misused.<sup>57</sup> The Turkish-Greek statement of January 19<sup>th</sup> 1923, affirmed that the Albanian minorities of Greece and Turkey "were in truth legally ruled out" from the exchange of populations. However, this statement was not expressed in a special disposition in the signed agreement for the exchange of populations. In the Treaty of Lausanne was not mentioned at all the Albanian element in Greece or Turkey and nor the Albanian part. Nevertheless, the January 19<sup>th</sup> statement was marked in the conference proceedings, being like this an official statement. It became officially known to the chairman of the Albanian delegation at the Conference of Lausanne, Mehdi Frashëri, and to the Albanian government on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1923, from the Secretary General of the League of Nations.<sup>58</sup>

In the following months after the Conference of Lausanne, the concerns of Albanians towards the Greek government would grow, because the latter was firm to seize the moment to evict Albanians from their territories. The ethnic Moslem Albanians would pass a lot of hard and long tests to prove their Albanian origin, but was very difficult; The Albanian population nevertheless autochthonous in these territories, didn't lived within the territories of the Albanian state, founded in 1912,

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<sup>56</sup> *Dokumente për Çamërinë 1912-1939*, prepared by Kaliopi Naska (Tiranë: Dituria, 1999), 90-91. B. Blinishti-Ministry of Foreign Affairs, January 1923.

<sup>57</sup> Sami Repishti, "Hyrje në problemin e Çamërisë", in the publication *Mbi Çamërinë* (proceedings of the first cultural seminary papers), (Shkodër: Phoenix, 2002), 26.

<sup>58</sup> *Dokumente për Çamërinë 1912-1939...*, 90, 91.

and this fact would be exploited from the Greek administration to deny them the nationality. Except that, Albania just exited the long rule from the Ottoman Empire, who never recognized the Albanian nationality, therefore lacked the necessary documents. In practice, to prove the nationality, the Moslem Albanians should pass from the local offices to the central offices in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the Mix Sub-Commissions in Macedonia and Çamëria, where they would become subject of necessary investigations on language, traditions and on their statements concerning the nationality etc. Even in those cases when the nationality was recognized by the Greek authorities, a conclusive certificate from the Mix Commission was required. In the case when Albanians were considered exchangeable, they were not allowed to sell their real estates. In this way, Albanians were forced to displace, and were in miserable financial conditions, and those who managed to stay, should face infinite difficulties about the necessary action of the local and judicial authorities to retake their properties and goods, but in most of the cases they could not. Their properties remained at the hands of the Greek refugees, of the Greek state and of the Greek National Bank.

The campaign of ethnic cleansing concerning the Albanian population was done in parallel in both regions; Macedonia and Çamëria. In front of this studied and cold blooded policy of ethnic cleansing, the Albanian population tried to react. Representatives from Filat complained in April 1923 to the local Greek authorities.<sup>59</sup> While the representatives of Albanians living in the villages of the province of Macedonia, complained to the chief of the Investigation Commission of the League of Nations in Albania, Sederholm.<sup>60</sup> Even the Çam Albanian diaspora reacted through the society "Çam Brotherhood" in

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<sup>59</sup> *AMAE*, Affari Politici, Serie Politica, 1919-1930, Albania, Pacco 712. The Consulate in Ioannina for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1.5.1923.

<sup>60</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1923, F. 211, p. 3. Report of the League of Nations Investigative Commission about the activity in Albania during 19 December 1922 - 1 February 1923.

Worcester, sent a protest telegram to lord Curzon against the exchange of populations.<sup>61</sup>

The Albanian government, facing the determination of the Greek government to evict Greece's Albanians and the impossibility to stop this policy, proposed the exchange of the respective minorities. The Greek government tried cunningly to avoid this proposal, aiming to gain time to deport Albanians. From the other side, the Greek authorities started to exercise violence against Albanians: some innocent Albanians of Kavalla were sent before the military court because they were spreading propaganda in favor of the Albanian population to get the certificate.<sup>62</sup> The Greek administration putting in motion the classic scenario of pressure for abandoning the territory and using the criminal bands against the defenseless Albanian population. The Italian consul of Ioannina informed that "All kind of crimes have been masterfully committed and what is more grave, occurred mysterious kidnapping of persons"<sup>63</sup>. Against the population were exercised a lot of pressure and threats to not declare Albanian nationality, because otherwise the Greek will burn them and if they [Albanians] would leave for Turkey, would become rich.<sup>64</sup>

The Albanian government and her representative in Athens decisively supported the desire of Albanians to stay in their country.<sup>65</sup> She demanded many times the intervention of the British government for Greece to respect the commitments taken in the Conference of

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<sup>61</sup> TNA, FO 286/817. "Vëllazëra Çame" to Curzon, Worcester Mass, 3.4.1923.

<sup>62</sup> AQSH, f. 251, Y. 1923, F. 141, p. 1-4. M. Konica to P. Evangjeli, Lausanne, 13.6.1923.

<sup>63</sup> AMAE, Affari Politici, Serie Politica, 1919-1930, Albania, Pacco 712. The Consulate in Ioannina for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3.7.1923.

<sup>64</sup> *Mit'hat Frashëri, Ministër Fuqplotë në Athinë (1923-1926)* (përmbledhje me dokumente), prepared for publication from Luan Malltezi and Sherif Delvina (Tiranë: Lumo Skëndo, 2002), 63-65.

<sup>65</sup> AMAE, Affari Politici, Serie Politica, 1919-1930, Albania, Pacco 712. The Consulate in Ioannina for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18.7.1923.

Lausanne concerning the Albanian minority.<sup>66</sup> London didn't intervene to stop the deportation of Albanians, but tried to stop a counteraction of the Albanian government against the Greek minority in Albania.<sup>67</sup>

The Greek authorities established as criteria for exclusion from deportation the possession of the Albanian nationality aiming to classify the Albanians of Greece as Greek and to include them in the exchange.<sup>68</sup>

The campaign of Albanians' deportation was taking place with great proportions in the province of Macedonia. Taking advantage of the fact that the Albanian population in that region lived in separate cities and villages and was not so much compact as in Çamëria, the Greek government had decided to fulfill the complete ethnic cleansing of this province from the Moslem Albanians. The Albanian minister complained about this situation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, but was rudely welcomed, his effort was considered illegitimate and as interference in the internal affairs of Greece.<sup>69</sup> During 1923, the majority of Albanians living in the province of Macedonia were evicted.<sup>70</sup> The Albanian government was forced to present the case in the League of Nations session in December 1923, where between the Greek and Albanian representatives was held a fierce debate. The Albanian representative B. Blinishti demanded to the Council to be appointed a Mix Commission under the authority of the League of Nations to survey the application of decision taking in Lausanne concerning the Albanian Moslems, which had to be excluded from the exchange and their properties of those who wanted to be exchanged to be valued from this Commission and paid in gold. The Greek representative Caclamano, tried to justify his country about the beginning of the compulsory exchange of the populations, and denied

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, FO 286/841. M. Konica to Curzon, 12.11.1923.

<sup>67</sup> TNA, FO 371/8532. W. Selby to M. Konica, London, 21.11.1923.

<sup>68</sup> AQSH, f. 251, Y. 1923, F. 203, p. 365. M. Frashëri to M. Konica, Athens, 9.11.1923.

<sup>69</sup> *Mit'hat Frashëri, Ministër Fuqplotë...*, 71-72.

<sup>70</sup> AQSH, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 81, p. 24. The Albanian Legation in Athens for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, 15.1.1924.

the persecution of the Albanian Moslems justifying that allegedly "the difficulties" to make the distinction between the Turkish Moslems and the Albanians Moslems. He rejected all the propositions of the Albanian party and demanded that this issue had to be dealt with by the Greek-Turkish mix Commission. The Albanian demand didn't find support in the League of Nations Council. The discussions held there didn't help to stop the Greek campaign of ethnic cleansing, but on the contrary, established a nebulous situation in order to hide the actions of the Greek government to continue the deportation of Albanians.<sup>71</sup> In any case, the Council approved a Resolution which emphasized the respect of the January 19<sup>th</sup> 1923 Declaration, for "not exchanging the Albanian population living in Greece". The Mix Commission was urged to take care about the application of this declaration and the Albanian government was granted the right to directly express before the Commission her views.<sup>72</sup>

The violence and the process of eviction of the remaining part of Macedonia's inhabitants continued during 1924. In May, at the rail station in Follorina, nearly 8 000 Albanians were prepared to be displaced.<sup>73</sup> The pressure against the Albanians of Çamëria increased. After being tortured for several months, 173 inhabitants of Karbunara hit the streets towards Turkey. Until the beginning of 1924, the Albanians legate in Athens, presented more than 150 notes addressed to the Greek government concerning the maltreatment and the eviction of Albanians, and at this legate were presented the complaints of six commissions from the Çamëria population, which did the same to the Greek government, but the outcome of these actions didn't brought

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<sup>71</sup> TNA, FO 286/869. Extract from the notes of the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the League of Nations , 17 December 1923.

<sup>72</sup> Fatmira Rama, "Lidhja e Kombeve dhe problemi çam, 1923-1926", in *Studime historike*, nr. 3-4 (Tiranë: 2006); TNA, FO 286/869. Extract from the notes of the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the League of Nations , 17 December 1923.

<sup>73</sup> AQSH, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 86, 71. M. Frashëri for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 23.6.1924.

anything. Therefore the Albanian minister in Athens, Mit'hat Frashëri, suggested to Tirana to start the registration of the properties of the Greek minority in Albania and to forbid their selling with the aim that their properties to be settled the evicted Albanians from Greece, but these measures should not leak as reprisals.<sup>74</sup> To break the stand of Çam Albanians, the Greek government at the end of March 1924 imprisoned the main chieftains of Çamëria, Musa Demi, Haki Musai and Mehmet Zeqirjai with the charge that were the protagonists of the Albanian propaganda.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, the Albanian legation aiming to stop the eviction, presented to the Mix Commission the list of villages of Albanian population of Filat, Gumenica, Margelliç, Ajdonat and Kostur sub-prefectures.<sup>76</sup>

The Mix Commission went to Preveza where they asked many Albanians and questioned some of other sub-prefectures of Çamëria. Precisely in this moment started to work the Greek strategy. The muftis declared that they were Turks and should go to Anatolia having fear that if refused would be evicted by the Greeks and would not be accepted from Turkey, and would roam in the streets. While many other inhabitants declared that they were Albanians, by sending telegrams to the Commission from Filat. The Albanian minister remained shocked when learned that the chairman of the Mix Commission, Ekstrand, have said the all the Çam people that were presented before this Commission, only 3 or 5% declared their Albanian nationality, while the others said that were Turks. He drew the attention that the Commission was taking into consideration only the will of those who were asked and not their language, customs etc, and the League of Nations had assigned to him the duty to investigate the race not on the people's will. Mit'hat explained that that part of the Çam people that had expressed the will

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<sup>74</sup> *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 81, p. 94-95. M. Frashëri for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 26.3.1924.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163. M. Frashëri for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 7.4.1924.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 85, p. 4-6. The Albanian legate in Athens for the Mix Commission, 9.4.1924.

to go in Anatolia, has been under the violent pressure of the Greek authorities, and by acting in this way, the Mix Commission developed a kind of plebiscite, which in order to be impartial, should have taken place free of all coercion, while in Çamëria reigned the terror and the homes of Albanians were taken from the Greek refugees.<sup>77</sup>

The conclusion reached from the Mix Commission was very wrong and biased. The complaints of the Albanian population and the information presented from the Albanian Legate were ignored, and even anathematized. The Commission informed the League's Council that Albanians have not presented any complaint and for this reason was irrelevant to make any intervention to the Greek government.<sup>78</sup> He qualified as untrue and baseless the complaints of the Albanian government to the League of Nations Council, nullifying this way the efforts of Tirana.<sup>79</sup> The principles and the reports of the Mix Commission were officially rejected from the Albanian government in letter sent to the League of Nations Secretary on 11 August 1924<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless the terror exercised against Albanians, the representatives of Filat, Gumenica, Margariti, sent a letter to the Mix Commission writing that the Moslems of Çamëria were all Albanians.<sup>81</sup> In the same way acted the representatives of the villages of Spatar, Shqefar, Smartë, Koskë, Lopës, Vrisela, Galbaq and Picar.<sup>82</sup>

The Albanians presented their protest in the League of Nations that the Greek authorities were using sophisticated methods and were committing systematic persecutions of all forms to force Albanians to

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 239. M. Frashëri for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 15.5.1924.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, FO 286/898. Report of the Mix Commission, Athens, 2.6.1924.

<sup>79</sup> AQSH, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 86, p. 69-70. M. Frashëri for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 23.6.1924.

<sup>80</sup> TNA, FO 371/9885. The Albanian Delegation in the League of Nations for E. Drummond, Geneva, 11.8.1924.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, FO 371/9885. Çamëria representatives for the Mix Commission, 13.5.1924.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, FO 371/9885. Letter sent to the President of the Mix Commission, Filat, 9.5.1924.

abandon their lands. Thus, the inhabitants of Filat and Preveza were being beaten and robbed every day from criminals before the eyes of gendarmerie and the Greek civil authorities. The gang chiefs as Cile Mastora and Niko Qamo, were specialized for this kind of exercising prosecution in the districts of Paramithia, by forcing the peasants to pay them high ransoms. The second lieutenant, Papas, terrorized the population of Filat. Those Albanians that dared to complain against the criminals, were ravaged. These men were officially appointed as oppressors of Albanian peasants and the destiny of those who opposed the submission was very bitter. The inhabitants of Margariti and Gumenica complained about the rude measures that were taken against them from the authorities and for the violations committed from the authorities and the Greek bands.<sup>83</sup> The prefect of Preveza was openly threatening the Çam representatives to force them to declare as Greeks.<sup>84</sup> In Ioannina, since the exchange began, a group of criminals such as Kollovoj with his friends had committed violations and a lot of robberies. They have been appointed officers and have increased the reprisals against Albanians. Many Albanians had openly declared their nationality and for this were still kept in prisons and the interventions of the Albanian legate to the Greek government had not softened their situation.<sup>85</sup> The Greek authorities had confiscated the homes of Albanians and installed instead by force Greek emigrants, throwing into the streets the Albanians, while the homes of the Christians were never confiscated. The villages of Karbunarë, Gardhiq and Dragum were cleaned from their inhabitants which found shelter in Parga and

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, FO 371/9885. Memorandum addressed to the Mix Commission, (no date); *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 81, p. 217. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 5.5.1924; *Ibid*, p. 222. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 8.5.1924.

<sup>84</sup> *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 81, p. 217. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 5.5.1924; *Ibid*, p. 222. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 8.5.1924.

<sup>85</sup> *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 86, p. 71. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23.6.1924.

Margariti, in the most complete misery. The persecutions Albanians in the prefectures of Follorina and Kostur were suffering were at such a level that could deeply move every human conscience. In this region, Albanians have already taken everything they possessed.<sup>86</sup> On the pressure and violence that the Greek government was exercising, the League of Nations was also informed from the British official Kennedy that was watching the settlement of the Greek refugees.<sup>87</sup>

Even Albanians that the Mix Commission has qualified as non-exchangeable, faced many difficulties.<sup>88</sup> The Greek government continued to ignore the application of the Commission decisions to remove all the restrictive measures that had previously undertaken towards the persons that were excluded from the obligatory exchange.<sup>89</sup>

Greek politics was aiming to fulfill other long term goals during the process of exchange between Turkish-Greek populations. Athens preferred that in the process of exchange to be included nearly 100 000 Orthodox Albanians of Istanbul which would be granted land and properties and further through them to embolden the pressure towards Korça and Gjirokastra.<sup>90</sup>

The process of exchange was promoted even by the Turkish delegates in the Mix Commission which had convinced the muftis to be declared as Turks.<sup>91</sup> The promises made by the Turkish government to the Albanian government for the non exchange of the Moslem Albanians were not kept. From the other side, the Turkish government

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, FO 371/9885. Memorandum sent to the League of Nations (no date).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>88</sup> *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 212, p. 106-107. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 22.8.1924.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece to the Albania's Legation in Athens, 24.10.1924.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 85, p. 152. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1.9.1924.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 237. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 13.5.1924.

took measures to evict the Orthodox Albanians from Istanbul.<sup>92</sup> The latter in December 1924 protested before the British legations that were forced to be exchanged against their will.<sup>93</sup>

In December 1924, the Council of the League of Nations decided to abolish the exchange of Çamëria Albanians; this problem had to be treated as a matter of the Greek Treaty for the protection of minorities; to ask to the Greek government to avoid the *fait accompli* situation; the decisions of the sub-commission should be considered definitive and the Council should demand to the Greek government to give back to the Moslem Albanians their properties which had been declared from the Mix Commission and non-exchangeable.<sup>94</sup>

1924, which was a year of turmoil for Albania, the curtain was falling for a very difficult period for the Albanian population in Greece. During the period, the Greek government succeeded in evicting all the Albanians of Macedonia and gave a serious blow to the ethnic structure of Çamëria Albanians. According to Dhimitër Berati, the displaced population from the regions of Kostur and Follorina was 33 000 persons.<sup>95</sup> While the Albanian minister in Athens, Mit'hat Frashëri, wrote that "are 38 villages, 24 in Kostur and 14 in Follorina, nearly 30 000 souls. These were forcefully evicted from their homes and today are dying in Anatolia. They are begging us to take them from Turkey and to bring them to Albania, because these poor people have left all their properties in Greece".<sup>96</sup>

However, the process of evicting Albanians didn't finish here. The partial cleansing of the Albanian regions didn't soften nor moderated the Greek pressure. Also, as was predicted from the Albanian

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<sup>92</sup> *Mit'hat Frashëri, Ministër Fuqplotë...* , 134; *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1924, F. 212, p. 119-120. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Istanbul, 13.11.1924.

<sup>93</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/10185. R. Lindsey to Chamberlain, Istanbul, 15.12.1924.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, FO 286/898. Report of the Spanish representative, Rome, 10.12.1924.

<sup>95</sup> Dh. Berati, *Shënime historike...*, 45.

<sup>96</sup> Nuri Dragoj, *Shqiptarët dhe grekët, realitete historike* (Tiranë: Vesso, 2009), 303-304. (The author quotes a document from *AQSH*, f. 251, Y. 1923, F. 203, p. 88).

politicians, the outcome that Greece had reached during the ethnic cleansing of Albanians would embolden and make more perseverant the Greek politics for the empowerment of Hellenism in Southern Albania. The Greek government, as confirmed from the Mix Commission, followed the strategy of protraction and non applying the decision of the Commission to give back the properties that had been confiscated to Albanians.<sup>97</sup> The Albanian government asked the League of Nations Council to establish a commission to evaluate the amount of the properties belonging to Albanians which were displaced with the recommendation to force the Greek government to pay for them.<sup>98</sup> In the summer of 1925, a new danger was in the air for Albanians when the Greek government demanded the Turkish government to accept 10 thousand Muslims of Çamëria. Ankara, after the interventions of the Albanian government, accepted to take only half of them.<sup>99</sup>

The Albanian government was under pressure because of the Greek campaign for the ethnic cleansing of Albanians from Greece and was taking into consideration different forms of reaction. Mit'hat Frashëri, hoping in the good understanding of the Arvanite general Theodoros Pangallos, who has taken the power in 25 June 1925, after organized a *coup d'état* and replacing the government of Mihalakopulos,<sup>100</sup> proposed to him the exchange of minorities if Greece was still aiming the eviction of Albanians. Pangallos didn't reply, but the Greek foreign minister didn't accept this proposal.<sup>101</sup> In November

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, FO 286/928. K. M. Widding to E. Drummond, Constantinople, 28.5.1925; *Ibid*, FO 286/928. E. Ekstrand to E. Drummond, Constantinople, 12.8.1925.

<sup>98</sup> *The Cham Albanians of Greece. A Documentary History*, edited by Robert Elsie and Bejtullah Destani, In association with The Centre for Albanian Studies, London: I. B. TAURIS, 2012, 181-191. Report of viscount Ishii; the expressed views from the Albanian representative, Mehdi Frashëri, and the chairman of the Mix Commission, Manuel Manrique de Lara, November 1925.

<sup>99</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 40.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, p. 42.

<sup>101</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1925, F. 80, p. 27-29. M. Frashëri to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17.10.1925.

1925, the Albanian government informed the League of Nations that 5 000 Çam Albanians by a decision of the Turkish and Greek delegates in the Mix Commission would be exchanged with Orthodox Albanians of Istanbul. It demanded that their eviction should not be a *fait accompli*.<sup>102</sup> Sensing the difficulties, Tirana tried to engage the Ambassadors' Conference but instead received the reply that was not in the competence of this conference to examine this matter.<sup>103</sup>

Until the spring of 1926, the Moslem Çam Albanians suffered a lot because of the policy of forced exchange and persecution organized from the Greek government. Other lists of inhabitants composed which were forced to leave and their homes and possessions were seized to the advantage of the Greek refugees. In 1925 and in the beginning of 1926, from 3 419 Moslem homes and 535 Christian homes that existed in Çamëria, the Greek refugees seized 1 943 homes belonging to Moslems and in no home belonging to the Greeks or Albanian Christians. The owners of the seized homes were forced to live in the corners of their own houses, in stables, in fields etc, in unacceptable living conditions. Also the arable lands, the vineyards, the olive-yards and the productions fell at the hands of the Greek refugees. The Çam population protested in every instance of the Greek state. Nevertheless these measures were presented from the Greek authorities as temporary, in many cases they were definitive.<sup>104</sup>

### **The temporary halt of ethnic cleansing and the situation in Çamëria during 1926-1939**

The pressure of the Albanian government had a certain success and in March 1926 the commissioners informed the Secretary General

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<sup>102</sup> TNA, FO 286/928. The Albanian government to the League of Nations Council, 12.11.1925.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, FO 286/928. Report of the British embassy in Paris, 10.12.1925.

<sup>104</sup> *Dokumente për Çamërinë (1912-1939) ...*, dok. nr. 261, 495-501. Qenan Mesare to De Lara, Corfu, 2.2.1926.

of the League of Nations that in general the Çam Moslem population of Çamëria was of Albanian origin and consequently non-exchangeable, save some isolated cases which the Albanian origin was in doubt. Even the Greek government declared in the League of Nations Council that already the exchange has finished and the population of Çamëria, that was still living in Greece, would enjoy the same legal treatment as the other Greek citizens; and all the special measures that had been applied towards this population as exchangeable would be abolished.<sup>105</sup>

Already the main problem remained the question of returning the seized properties to Albanians, now Greek citizens which after 1926 were not exchangeable, and their compensation. The Greek government respected none of the engagement taken before the League of Nations and delayed for many years the compensation or didn't compensate at all the Albanians. She also silently and insistently pressured the eviction of Albanians remaining in Greece. The painful drama of 800 peasants of Dragumi and Gardhiq, which were threatened with eviction, continued because they had nothing, because all what they possessed was taken from the Greek refugees and therefore were forced to take shelter in caves or in straw cabins.<sup>106</sup> The forced displacement of the population continued, but with slow rhythms until the '30ies.<sup>107</sup> The Greek scholar Georgios Margaritis emphasized that "some thousand of exchangeable emigrants from Minor Asia, sent there from the Greek governmental services, aiming to intensify the pressure against the Çam people with the intention to force them to leave" created a difficult situation and "this close cohabitation, obligatory with the emigrants, was especially painful for the Çam people".<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *TNA*, FO 286/948. Report of viscount Ishii, Geneva, 15.3.1926.

<sup>106</sup> *TNA*, FO 371/12924. Petition from Ali Dino, 28.8.1927, and the note of E. Drummond for the members of the League of Nations Council, 29.12.1927.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, FO 371/12924. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Albania to E. Drummond, Tirana, 1.3.1928.

<sup>108</sup> J. Margaritis, *Bashkëpatriotë të padëshiruar ...*, 119.

The Albanian minority didn't enjoy the right to elect or to be elected, there was no Albanian in the communal or municipal councils. No person from this minority was a deputy in the parliament. The new recruits of Albanian origin were engaged only in road construction. In Çamëria no school in the Albanian language existed.

The Albanian government in March 1928, politely presented to the Greek counterpart the improvement of the Albanian population situation, but Athens reacted rudely to this demand, increasing like this the tension between the two countries.<sup>109</sup> In the summer of 1928, the Albanian-Greek debate on minorities was concentrated in Geneva. The representative of Albania, Mehdi Frashëri, demanded the League's protection for the Albanian minority in Greece. The Greek representative Politis, opposed Albania's right to present before the League's Council such demands, qualified by him as intervention in the internal affairs of Greece.<sup>110</sup> The Greek part considered the demands of the Albanian inhabitants for the opening of schools in Albanian as a result of the Albanian propaganda and not a right of this population, and above all was calling them as harmful, because "would turn into anti Greek centers and influential on the Epirus Albanians" and would obstruct the Hellenization of this population that even today some Greek scholars consider useful because was the main tool for their integration into the Greek society and this population should not fall prey to the Albanian propaganda.<sup>111</sup> From the other side, Çam children were accepted in the Greek schools and also allowed the opening of some illegal religious schools chaired by Moslem clerics, as in the words of a Greek scholars, "having the double advantage that from one side could be shut anytime as illegal education and from the other side could be used as a counterweight against the demands of Albanians for the opening of new schools".<sup>112</sup> The League of Nations Council decided

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<sup>109</sup> TNA, FO 371/ 12844. W. Seeds to Chamberlain, Durrës, 13.3.1928.

<sup>110</sup> "Çështjet shqiptaro-greke në Gjenevë", in *Shekulli i Ri*, Durrës, 9.6.1928.

<sup>111</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 54.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54-55.

to not take into consideration the demand of the Albanian government, but the requests addressed to League by the inhabitants of Çamëria which should be considered as usual procedure.<sup>113</sup> Nonetheless the inhabitants of many villages of Çamëria complained in the League that they were being maltreated by the Greek government, the League's Council didn't take any measure, but considered as true the explanation of the Greek government and decided to close these matters.<sup>114</sup>

At the end of the '20ies and during the '30-ies, following the information presented from the British diplomats, the Greek government tolerated and encouraged the criminal bands to terrorize Çamëria.<sup>115</sup> Also Greek scholars have argued that "the plundering and the robbing continued to be a true torture for the rural areas, creating a feeling of general insecurity on Çamëria inhabitants".<sup>116</sup>

In July 1931 was voted the law previewing the direct compensation of the Greek citizens who possessed properties, by granting a respective number of bonds and the immediate restitution of real estate urban properties.<sup>117</sup> This step paved the way for a partial solution of the Çam possessions and created some space for their return or for the respective compensation. However, in practice the law was difficult to be applied and was not fully applied. The governments which came to power after 1935, capsized many of the positive approaches towards this matter and the problem of Çamëria Albanians

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<sup>113</sup> "Çështjet shqiptaro-greke në Gjenevë", in *Shekulli i Ri*, Durrës, 5.7.1928.

<sup>114</sup> TNA, FO 371/14391. Petition of Paramithia inhabitants sent to E. Drummond, 28.2.1930; *Ibid*, Petition from Dragumi's inhabitants sent to the League of Nations, and the note of Drummond, Geneva, 15.9.1930; *Ibid*, FO 371/15970. E. Drummond to the members of the League of Nations Council, on the demand of the Parga inhabitants, Geneva, 17.5.1932; E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 76-77.

<sup>115</sup> TNA, FO 286/1044. the British consul in Corfu, Keane to FO, 30.9.1929.

<sup>116</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 59, 71; J. Margaritis, *Bashkëpatriotë të padëshiruar...*, 117-118.

<sup>117</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 75-76. The author refers to the Law 5136, "On fixing and fulfilling the dispositions of the Law 4816", "On specifying the compensation of expropriations in Margariti and Paramithia", 18 July 1931.

possessions and of Albanian nationals was not solved in most of the cases until the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>118</sup> This has been the main cause of the economic ruin and of the excessive poverty of the Albanian families, a phenomenon that is widely accepted even from the Greek scholars.<sup>119</sup>

From 1934 the Greek policy against Çam Albanians was constant and more rude.<sup>120</sup> The Greek scholars affirm that a cause for this became the nationalization of the Greek minority schools in Albania and the increase of demands of the Albanian population addressed to the League of Nations for the opening of schools in Albanian.<sup>121</sup> A rude and oppressive policy was established in Epirus from the dictatorial regime on August 4<sup>th</sup> 1936.<sup>122</sup> Çamëria was defined as one of "areas under surveillance that sanctioned the establishment of the military regime in that territory. The Albanian population suffered the open violations of privacies and oppression from that regime".<sup>123</sup> The Çam people, as the communist and the Slavs of Macedonia, were treated as "internal potential enemies" and were "targets of different frightening and oppression measures".<sup>124</sup>

The arbitrary arrests and imprisonments increased and above all was forbidden the use of the mother tongue at homes or public. The punishments for the violators of these laws started from a simple remark

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

<sup>119</sup> J. Margaritis, *Bashkëpatriotë të padëshiruar...*, 120. This author writes that "the pressures affected all, not excluding rich and poor", and these measures "turned upside down the social hierarchy of the Çam minority" and that "overturn not only didn't favor the poorest strata of the Çam community, but on the contrary led to their eschewing and ignoring".

<sup>120</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 82.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 80-81.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 86

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*.

to heavy fines and imprisonments.<sup>125</sup> In this way, the Greek government followed a double standard: from one side she signed agreements and allowed the opening of some schools in Albanian, which very soon would sabotage and obstruct, and from the other side didn't allow the use of the Albanian language.

The increased pressure from the August 4<sup>th</sup> regime against the minorities, especially against those considered as "strategic threat", promoted the expropriation and aggravated the local tensions.<sup>126</sup> In this course of events, was drafted the law of 1937, which reviewed the forced expropriation of other properties possessed by Albanians, because of land redistribution.<sup>127</sup> This was followed "by provoking delays concerning the compensation previewed by the law itself, added to what already existed."<sup>128</sup> Thus, the systemic policy followed from the Greek state concerning the expropriation and eviction of Albanians, caused deep discontent of the Çam population towards the Greek government. At the same time, encouraged the greed and the enmity of the local Christians against their Moslem neighbors. "For now, their old neighbors - the Çam, were foreigners that the caprices of the international diplomacy kept them in the lands the in essence were national (Greek) and didn't belonged to them".<sup>129</sup>

This campaign of oppression was accompanied with the enforcement of systemic propaganda in Çamëria concerning the displacement of this population and the establishment of many facilities

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 87. This researcher affirms that one of the most notorious forms of punishment was "to force those who were caught speaking Albanian to drink castor-oil plant" or the internment in the Greek islands, even though she affirms that has not found any data that these punishments were used against Albanians. Also the Albanian sources confirm these measures. (See *Dokumente për Çamërinë 1912-1939...*, 666.).

<sup>126</sup> J. Margaritis, *Bashkëpatriotë të padëshiruar...*, 122-123.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 123. The author refers to the Compulsory Law 735, dated 8/15 June 1937, "On the Moslems called of Albanian origin and granting them the claimed properties", published in the *Official Gazette*, nr. 228, Tirana: 1937.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

to displace.<sup>130</sup> Also, the Greek government through its banks, started to buy herself the lands and the properties of the Çam, paying a considerable amounts and creating like this facilities to the Çam people to sell and to displace.<sup>131</sup> The campaign for promoting the emigration of Albanians reached a new peak in 1938, powerfully encouraged even from the Turkish-Yugoslav agreement for the exchange of populations.<sup>132</sup> The Greek historian J. Margaritis has written that "The (Albanian) minority was destroyed within a framework of systemic evictions from the Greek government and other national authorities of that time and from the terrible savageness of the Greek nationalists at their expense until the end of the [German] occupation".<sup>133</sup>

Tirana demanded the Greek counterpart to stop this new campaign that promoted the emigration of Albanians, but didn't receive any reply. Therefore, she tried to convince by all means at her disposal the Çam population to not leave the place of birth.<sup>134</sup>

The Greek authorities also tried to push further the process of Hellenization towards the Christian Albanians which were not few, through using religion, school, culture and forbidding the use of the Albanian language, but also luring them with opportunities for employment, granting properties etc. Therefore, a big number of them didn't declare their Albanian nationality.

In Çamëria until the of 1936, didn't exist any Albanian school and the Albanian language was also not taught in the Greek schools. Also, the situation of the Greek national schools in this region was almost

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<sup>130</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1938, F. 106, p. 21. From the Consulate in Ioannina to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17.3.1938.

<sup>131</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 91; *AMPJ*, Y. 1938, F. 106, p. 28. From Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4.4.1938; *Ibid*, p. 43. From the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19.4.1938.

<sup>132</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 91-92.

<sup>133</sup> J. Margaritis, *Bashkëpatriotë të padëshiruar...*, , 113.

<sup>134</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1938, F. 106, p. 30, 35. From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Consulate in Ioannina , 4.4.1938 and 9.4.1938; *ibid*, p. 41. From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Legate in Athens, 7.5.1938.

inexistent.<sup>135</sup> At the beginning of 1936, after the agreement was reached between the two governments, a modest step forward was achieved in the direction of learning the Albanian language in Çamëria. The Greek authorities accepted the assignment of five Albanian teachers of the Albanian language in the Greek schools of Çamëria and promised that they would introduce the learning of Albanian in approximately 20 national Greek schools, but with only a few hours of lessons per week. For the teaching of the Albanian language, were appointed some Greek chauvinists from Southern Albania which were qualified as "credible persons, starting from their activity in Northern Epirus in the past".<sup>136</sup> The Albanian population was not pleased with this minimal solution and demanded the opening of the Albanian schools in Çamëria, separately from the Greek schools and the teachers should be assigned from Albanians themselves.<sup>137</sup> To challenge these efforts, the authorities started a new campaign of persecution, under the pretext of gathering arms that were said to have been deposited in Margëlliç and somewhere else to organize a rebellion against Greece.<sup>138</sup> They tried to force the Albanian inhabitants to sign petitions against the opening of the schools in Albanian, but failed in reaching this goal.<sup>139</sup> Some months later was established the dictatorial regime of Metaxas which officially didn't withdrew from the previous agreement, but decided to sabotage it. Metaxas previewed to solve in the final way the Çam issue, by forcing the Moslem Albanians to leave their homes.

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<sup>135</sup> E. Manda, *Çamët myslimanë të Epirit...*, 80-81.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>137</sup> *AQSH*, f. MPB, Y. 1936, F. 125, p. 6. From the Prefecture of Gjirokastra to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 7.3.1936.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17-18. From the Sub-prefecture of Saranda for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 15.4.1936.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30. From the Counsel in Ioannina for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10.10.1936; *Ibid*, p. 33. From the Prefecture of Gjirokastra to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 5.12.1936.

As we have mentioned above, in August 1937 a compromise was reached between the two governments for the teaching of the Albanian language in 10 national Greek schools of Çamëria, in return of opening three private schools of the minority in Himara. The Albanian language would be taught in the Greek schools in Filat, Gurrës, Lopës, Sallopi, Smartë, Vrohone, Faskomilja, Mazrek, Grikohor and Karbunar with Çam Albanian teachers chosen from the local inhabitants themselves and approved from the Albanian legation in Athens.<sup>140</sup> But during 1938, was systematically increased the pressure and the obstructions from the Greek authorities against the teaching of the Albanian language, through intimidation, incrimination and beating the Albanian teachers.<sup>141</sup> They postponed the assignment of teachers for several months and the schools remained out of function. Was pursued the policy of opening the schools in small villages of 15-20 homes, leaving aside the big villages of 200-300 homes,<sup>142</sup> aiming to fulfill the number of 10 schools where Albanian was taught, and from the other side to diminish at the maximum the number of the pupils learning this language. Because of the Greek pressure and other difficulties, the progress achieved for the teaching of the Albanian language in Çamëria was modest. In total, there were 8 teachers for this language and 397 pupils learning Albanian.<sup>143</sup> These figures were too small in comparison with the number of the Albanian population in Greece.

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<sup>140</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1937, F. 261, p. 75. From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Legate in Athens, Tirana, 7.8.1937.

<sup>141</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1938, F. 106, p. 9. From the counsel in Ioannina to the legate in Athens, 16.2.1938; *Ibid*, p. 15. From the Consulate in Ioannina for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24.2.1938.

<sup>142</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1939, F. 125, p. 23. From the Consulate in Ioannina for the Legate in Athens, 27.2.1939.

<sup>143</sup> *AMPJ*, Y. 1938, F. 106, p. 49-54. Report of the consulate in Ioannina on the teaching of the Albanian language in Çamëria in the school year 1937-1938.

# LINGUISTICS & LITERATURE



ALJULA JUBANI

## CODE-SWITCHING AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITY IN THE ALBANIAN DIASPORA

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the relationship between code-switching practices and linguistic identity among members of the Albanian diaspora. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from 422 respondents across Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the United States, etc., the research explores how Albanian as a native or heritage language speakers interacts with host-country languages in various communicative domains. The results reveal that while the use of Albanian remains dominant in familial and emotional contexts, host languages prevail in educational, professional, and digital settings. Code-switching emerges as a dynamic resource for emotional expression, identity negotiation, and cultural signaling. The study also highlights the absence of the concept of “heritage speakers” in Albanian linguistic policy and proposes recommendations for aligning national strategies with European frameworks on plurilingualism and heritage language maintenance.

**Key words:** Code-switching, bilingualism, Albanian diaspora, linguistic identity, heritage language, sociolinguistics

### **Introduction**

Language constitutes not only a means of communication but also a fundamental marker of cultural identity and collective memory. Within diaspora communities, language becomes a living repository of

heritage, a symbolic link that connects individuals to their ancestral homeland and to shared histories of migration, displacement, and resilience. At the same time, it performs pragmatic and adaptive functions in multilingual environments, mediating social integration, mobility, and cross-cultural interaction. The linguistic behavior of diaspora members is therefore shaped by a dynamic interplay between preservation and adaptation, between the need to maintain the ancestral tongue as a core of ethnic identity and the pressure to conform linguistically to the dominant society.

In this regard, the Albanian diaspora—spread across Southern and Western Europe, North America, and beyond—offers an interesting case for examining how code-switching operates as a linguistic and socio-cultural strategy. The alternation between Albanian and the host-country languages serves not only as a communicative convenience but as an expressive mechanism for negotiating identity, asserting belonging, and managing dual cultural affiliations. Through code-switching, Albanian speakers navigate complex social realities, balancing the emotional weight of heritage with the pragmatic demands of transnational life.

Code-switching as the alternation between two or more linguistic codes within a single discourse or even a single utterance, has been extensively examined within sociolinguistics as a marker of both linguistic flexibility and social positioning. “The phenomenon of code-switching has been a point of contention in assessing community identity.” (Poplack, 1980:588). Far from being a random or deficient linguistic behavior, code-switching reflects a speaker’s sophisticated communicative competence across linguistic systems and their ability to navigate diverse social, cultural, and emotional contexts. Early studies emphasized the structural aspects of code-switching, identifying grammatical and syntactic constraints governing the alternation between languages. Subsequent approaches, however, have shifted toward the interactional and identity-oriented dimensions, highlighting how speakers employ code-switching as a resource for constructing

meaning, signaling group membership, or negotiating power relations within multilingual encounters (Auer, 1998).

In recent decades, the understanding of code-switching has developed beyond a purely structural or functional view. Research shows that speakers switch between languages not only to make communication clearer, but also to express emotions, create a sense of closeness, and signal their social or cultural position. In this way, code-switching is understood as a meaningful practice that reflects both personal feelings and social relationships. (Pavlenko, 2005). In this sense, code-switching operates as a semiotic bridge between linguistic repertoires, reflecting the cognitive and emotional complexity of bilingual experience.

Within the broader field of bilingualism and heritage language studies, scholars such as Fishman (1991) and Montrul (2016) have underlined the crucial role of intergenerational transmission in sustaining minority languages in diasporic contexts. Their linguistic behavior of heritage speakers provides key insights into how heritage languages are maintained, transformed, or gradually eroded across generations.

In the Albanian context, however, academic attention to code-switching and heritage language maintenance has been comparatively scarce. During the communist period, linguistic research in Albania was heavily shaped by Marxist-Stalinist ideological constraints, which framed language primarily as a unifying national symbol rather than as a dynamic socio-cultural system. Dialectal and diasporic varieties were systematically marginalized, and even the notion of a “heritage speaker” was absent from the national linguistic discourse. As a result, the linguistic practices of Albanians living abroad—particularly their bilingualism and code-switching—were excluded from scholarly inquiry and state policy (Stalin, 1951:11).

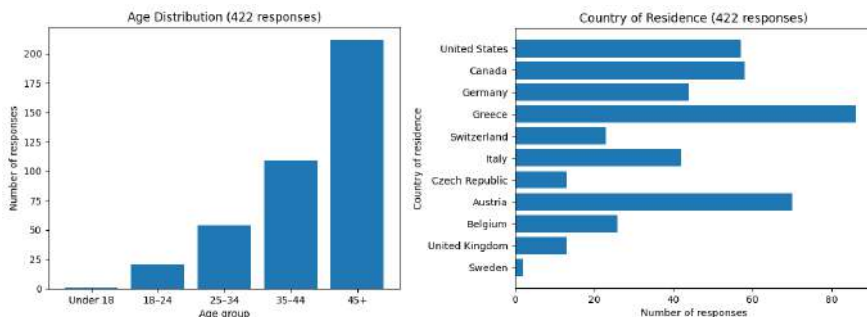
Recent sociolinguistic research has begun to challenge this monolithic view of the Albanian language by recognizing its polycentric character. Albanian today has several legitimate centers of

use and development, located not only in Albania but also in Kosovo, North Macedonia, and in diaspora communities around the world. Within this framework, code-switching becomes an important way to understand how Albanians abroad manage belonging and continuity in multilingual societies. It becomes a form cultural resilience, allowing diaspora speakers to maintain their linguistic identity in spaces where linguistic hierarchies and assimilation pressures persist.

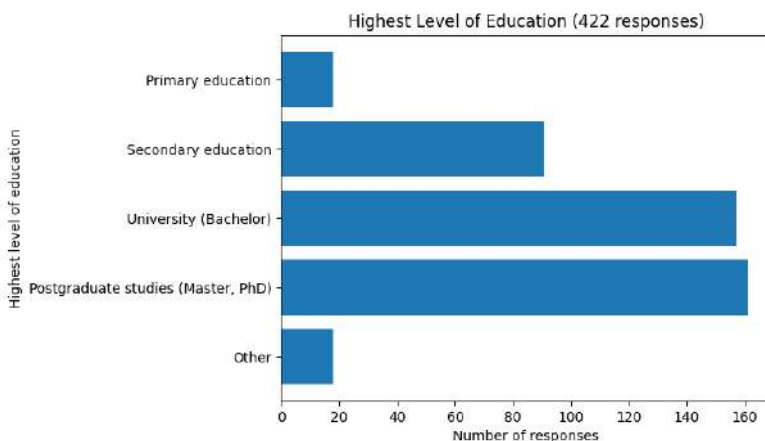
### **Methodology**

This study used a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both the measurable patterns and the interpretive dimensions of language use within Albanian diasporic communities. The main research tool was an online socio-linguistic questionnaire, chosen because it allowed access to participants living in different countries and made data collection possible across various host-language contexts. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of established socio-linguistic frameworks related to bilingualism, heritage language maintenance, and code-switching practices. (Fishman, 1991).

The final data set consisted of 422 respondents drawn from major Albanian diaspora communities in Greece, Italy, Austria, Germany, and the United States. The sample exhibited a broad representation of regional backgrounds, generational cohorts, and migratory histories. Approximately 66% of participants were women and 34% men, with the majority aged 45 years and above and an average residence abroad of 22 years. A notable feature of the sample was its high educational attainment, with 71% holding university or postgraduate degrees, suggesting that many respondents possess significant cultural capital and are active contributors to host-country societies.



Although the sample is not statistically representative of the entire Albanian diaspora, it offers a solid overview of experiences and attitudes in different sociolinguistic settings. This makes it possible to identify key patterns and differences, especially between Southern European and transatlantic contexts.



Quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify frequency distributions, percentages, and correlations between demographic factors and patterns of language use. This facilitated the visualization of trends in bilingual practices and the prevalence of code-switching across contexts.

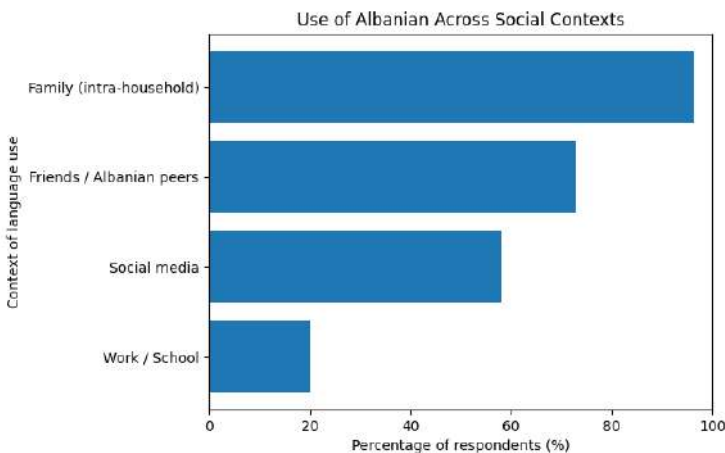
Open-ended responses were examined through thematic coding, employing an inductive approach to identify recurrent motifs related to emotional expression, linguistic insecurity, and symbolic attachment to the Albanian language.

## Findings

The findings of this study offer an in-depth picture of how members of the Albanian diaspora navigate between their heritage language and the host-country language in various communicative domains. The data reveal the persistence of Albanian as a language of intimacy and identity, while also documenting shifting patterns of usage, emotional attachment, and intergenerational competence.

Across all communities surveyed, Albanian remains the dominant language in the familial sphere, functioning as a primary vehicle of intra-house hold communication and emotional connection. 96.3% of respondents reported using Albanian within their families, particularly in exchanges with parents, siblings, and close relatives. 73% indicated that they use Albanian when interacting with Albanian peers or friends in informal contexts, reinforcing in-group solidarity and shared cultural values.

In contrast, the use of Albanian declines sharply in public and professional settings. Only 20% of participants reported using Albanian regularly at work or school, where the host-country language is dominant and often required for functional or institutional reasons. Social media occupies an intermediate position: 58% of respondents write posts or comments in Albanian, often alternating with the host language depending on topic and audience.



These results illustrate a functional use of languages, where by bilinguals used instinct languages indistinct contexts. Albanian is associated with affective and identity-laden domains, while the host language serves instrumental and integrative purposes. This doesn't indicate a loss of Albanian, but a form of balanced bilingualism that reflects adaptation to transnational life.

### **Code-Switching dynamics**

75% of participants reported engaging in code-switching frequently or occasionally. The dominant direction of alternation involves the insertion of host-language lexical or phrasal elements into predominantly Albanian discourse, reflecting the less sharpened linguistic boundaries in everyday communication.

Respondents described code-switching as an intentional and meaningful practice rather than an unconscious habit. Many emphasized using it to achieve semantic precision, to express concepts lacking direct equivalents in Albanian, or to express humor and irony more effectively. Others associated switching with cultural signaling, demonstrating familiarity with both languages and projecting a cosmopolitan identity. In several narratives, code-switching was portrayed as an act of social alignment, allowing speakers to move fluidly between the linguistic repertoires of family, peers, and professional networks.

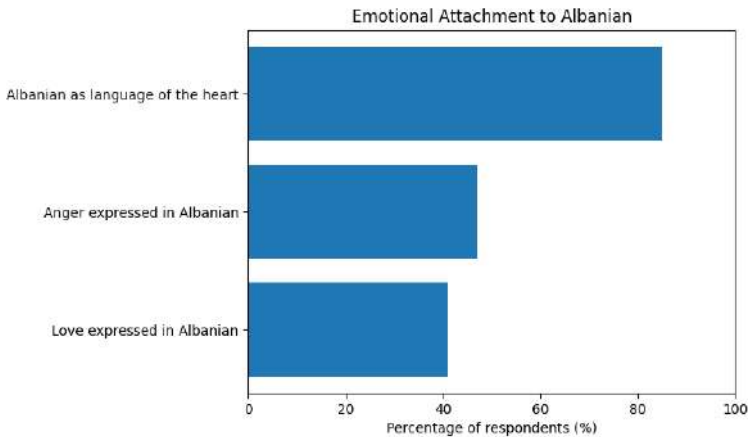
Overall, the data confirm that code-switching functions as a strategic and affective resource through which Albanian diaspora speakers manage complex cultural affiliations and perform hybrid identities. It is simultaneously a sign of linguistic adaptability and a marker of belonging to a transnational community.

### **Emotional attachment and identity**

85% of respondents identified Albanian as their *language of the heart*. Participants reported that they tend to revert to Albanian when expressing strong emotions, particularly anger (47%) and love (41%).

The language is perceived as more intimate, sincere, and emotionally charged, confirming that emotional resonance is closely tied to the language of early socialization.

Furthermore, 96% of respondents considered speaking Albanian an essential component of their cultural and personal identity, while 59% identified primarily as Albanian, 20% as global citizens, 11% as members of their host country, and 10% as holders of mixed or dual identities.



These results suggest that, despite long-term migration, Albanian identity remains linguistically anchored, and code-switching serves as a way to reconcile inherited and adopted identities.

### **Generational variation**

Clear intergenerational differences emerged in linguistic competence and usage patterns. Older participants (aged 45 and above) reported high levels of fluency and daily use of Albanian, whereas only 67% of younger respondents (18–24) described their Albanian as fluent. In many cases, the younger cohort reported understanding Albanian passively but preferring to speak in the host language, particularly in peer-to-peer communication.

**Intergenerational differences in Albanian Language competence and use**

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Self-reported fluency in Albanian</b>	<b>Typical usage pattern</b>	<b>Dominant Language in peer communication</b>
<b>45+ years</b>	Very high (near-universal fluency)	Daily, active use in most domains	Albanian
<b>18–24 years</b>	67% report fluent Albanian	Often passive understanding; selective active use	Host-country language

This trend reflects a gradual language shift common among heritage communities, where linguistic transmission weakens in the absence of formal support systems such as heritage language schools or extracurricular programs. Respondents frequently noted that while their children understand Albanian, they often lack confidence or motivation to use it actively. Without targeted educational interventions, these findings suggest the potential erosion of Albanian proficiency across generations.

**Public perception and linguistic discrimination**

86% of respondents reported feeling comfortable speaking Albanian in public, yet nearly 30% indicated experiences of linguistic prejudice or discrimination in their host countries. Such incidents included being mocked for their accent, advised to “speak the local language,” or stigmatized for using Albanian in public spaces.

Nevertheless, the data also show strong linguistic confidence and pride: participants described Albanian as a *beautiful*, *ancient*, and *dignified* language whose public use affirms cultural visibility. Many respondents expressed the belief that maintaining Albanian does not hinder integration but rather enriches their identity as bilingual citizens.

This finding challenges assimilation views that link the maintenance of a heritage language to social isolation. Instead, it supports the European approach to plurilingualism, where different linguistic identities can exist together as complementary resources rather than as competing loyalties.

### **Analysis and interpretation of the findings**

The findings of this study reveal a complex sociolinguistic reality in which the Albanian language continues to function as a vital marker of identity and emotional expression among members of the diaspora, while simultaneously coexisting with the host-country language as a mean of integration and social mobility. The coexistence of these two linguistic systems does not reflect conflict or competition, but rather a functional bilingualism, in which each language fulfills distinct communicative and symbolic functions within the speaker's repertoire.

The data show that Albanian remains strongly anchored in intimate and affective domains-family interactions, expressions of emotion, and community bonding-whereas the host-country language dominates institutional and public spheres such as education, work, and administration. This functional differentiation echoes Fishman's (1967) notion of 'domain-based language allocation' and supports Grosjean's model of bilingualism as a 'context-dependent continuum' rather than a 'binary state'. As Grosjean (2014) explains, bilingual speakers do not function as two monolinguals in one person. "Sociolinguists have concentrated on when and why switching takes place in the social context. Reasons that have been put forward are to fill a linguistic need, to continue the last language used, to quote someone, to specify the addresses, to exclude someone from the conversation, to qualify a message, to specify speaker involvement, to mark group identity, to convey emotion, to change the role of the speaker, etc. Linguists, on the other hand, have sought to study the types of code-switches that occur (single words, phrases, clauses, sentences, etc.) as well as the linguistic constraints that govern their appearance." (Grosjean, 2014: 580) Their

language use and competence depending the social and communicative context, such that bilinguals may activate and use one or both of their languages, depending on interlocutors, purposes, and settings. The participants' selective use of Albanian and the host language demonstrates a high degree of communicative adaptability that enables them to maintain cultural continuity while navigating the practical demands of migration.

Equally significant is the role of code-switching as an expressive and identity-forming mechanism. The tendency to alternate between Albanian and the host language reflects not linguistic deficiency but linguistic creativity and social awareness. Code-switching allows speakers to perform subtle acts of identity negotiation, aligning themselves with different audiences and situational contexts. Through linguistic alternation, speakers construct flexible selves that integrate both the emotional depth of their heritage and the pragmatic fluency of their adopted environment. This aligns with the perspective of Auer (1998), who view code-switching as a discursive strategy of meaning-making, solidarity, and symbolic positioning.

The emotional role of language is another key finding. For most respondents, Albanian remains the "language of the heart," supporting the idea of emotional bilingualism. This means that the first language keeps a strong emotional value because it is learned early in life. Many participants prefer Albanian when expressing strong feelings such as anger, love, or during prayer. This shows that emotional attachment helps maintain the language even after long periods of migration. In this way, emotions support language continuity and prevent the complete loss of Albanian, despite strong pressure from the dominant language.

At the same time, the data reveal clear generational differences that point to growing challenges. Younger members of the diaspora show lower fluency and use Albanian less often, a trend also found in other heritage language communities (Montrul, 2016). This change does not reflect a lack of interest, but rather the lack of organized educational support. When there are no heritage language schools,

digital learning tools, or state-supported programs, language transmission depends only on the family. In these conditions, Albanian competes with the dominant language of school and peer interaction. These findings underline the need for stronger institutional support for Albanian as a heritage language, both in Albania and in the diaspora. The issue is particularly relevant given Albania's historical relationship with linguistic diversity. During the second half of the twentieth century, Albanian linguistic thought was shaped by a monistic, state-centered ideology that privileged uniformity over variation. The 'notion of polycentric Albanian' embracing diasporic and regional varieties was largely absent, and the term 'heritage speaker' had no place in the national linguistic discourse. This intellectual and ideological gap contrasts sharply with contemporary European frameworks, such as the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008) and the CEFR Companion Volume (2020), both of which emphasize plurilingualism and the recognition of diverse linguistic repertoires as a societal resource.

In the light of these frameworks, the experience of the Albanian diaspora demonstrates that linguistic maintenance and social integration are not mutually exclusive goals. Rather, bilingualism represents a pathway to intercultural competence and civic participation. By switching codes and maintaining emotional loyalty to their heritage language, Albanian speakers abroad embody the very principles of 'plurilingual citizenship' envisioned in European educational policy. Their practices illustrate how multilingualism enriches both individual identity and collective belonging, transforming migration from a process of linguistic loss into one of linguistic expansion.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that code-switching among Albanians in the diaspora constitutes a sophisticated communicative practice through which individuals articulate, negotiate, and sustain

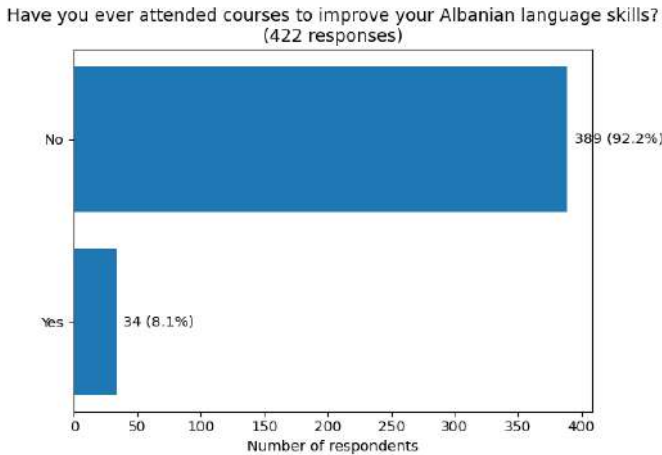
their multilingual and multicultural identities. Far from representing linguistic erosion or confusion, code-switching emerges as a creative and adaptive strategy that reflects both linguistic competence and social intelligence. It enables diaspora speakers to maintain symbolic and emotional ties to their heritage while effectively integrating into the linguistic and cultural frameworks of their host societies.

The findings indicate that Albanian retains a strong affective and identity-related presence within the diaspora. It continues to dominate the domains of family interaction, intimacy, and emotion, functioning as a linguistic space of belonging and authenticity. However, the decreasing fluency and usage among younger generations underline the fragility of intergenerational transmission when not supported by structured educational initiatives. This dynamic underscores the urgent need to move beyond family-based transmission toward institutionalized forms of heritage language support, including weekend schools, bilingual curricula, and digital learning environments.

From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of research that conceptualizes bilingualism not as a transitional phase toward monolingual assimilation but as a stable and productive linguistic condition. The Albanian case exemplifies how heritage language maintenance can coexist with successful integration, reinforcing the notion that plurilingual competence enhances rather than impedes social participation. This insight resonates with the current European paradigm of language policy, which recognizes linguistic diversity as both a right and a civic asset.

At the same time, the research exposes the historical and institutional gap in the recognition of Albanian as a heritage language. The ideological legacy of twentieth-century linguistic monism-rooted in the pursuit of a unified national norm-has contributed to the marginalization of diasporic varieties and the absence of the *heritage speaker* concept in academic and policy discourse. Overcoming this gap requires a paradigmatic shift toward an inclusive, polycentric

understanding of Albanian that acknowledges the linguistic realities of communities beyond national borders.



As the results show, formal opportunities to improve Albanian language skills are largely absent. The very low participation in language courses suggests that Albanian maintenance depends mainly on family use rather than institutional or educational support, highlighting a significant gap in heritage-language provision.

In line with European and global frameworks promoting plurilingual education and intercultural dialogue, Albania and its partner institutions should adopt concrete measures to safeguard and revitalize the linguistic capital of the diaspora. These measures involve creating a CEFR-aligned certification system for Albanian as a heritage language in order to formally recognize language skills, as well as developing teaching curricula that focus on communicative competence and cultural relevance. They also include investing in digital learning platforms and providing targeted training for teachers who work with diaspora learners. In addition, it is important to actively include diaspora linguistic communities in national cultural and educational strategies, so that heritage language maintenance is supported in a coordinated and sustainable way.

By implementing such measures, Albania can transform the preservation of its language abroad into a strategic element of cultural diplomacy and global identity-building. Future research should expand on these findings through ethnographic and longitudinal approaches, exploring how linguistic practices evolve across generations and transnational spaces.

The Albanian diaspora demonstrates that language is not only a mean of remembering where one comes from, but also a mean of shaping who one person can become. In their everyday code-switching, Albanian speakers weave a narrative of continuity within change, affirming both their rootedness and their openness to the multilingual world.

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