

## Dibra during the League of Prizren

Mr. Fatjon Kica

### Abstract

The League of Prizren encouraged movements in Albania. Remarkably, patriotism flared and the people with the courage and bravery of a person, who seeks his right, arose as a unique body and asked from invaders, and the world, the rights of a secular nation. Assemblies gathered in Dibra, and made decisions of great importance, not only for the region of Dibra, but for the entire country.

**Keywords:** League of Prizren, Assembly, Education.

### Introduction

League of Prizren started three days before the Congress of Berlin, where the League of Prizren addressed memoranda and protested against plans for the partition of Albanian territories. Some of the delegates from Dibra who participated in the basic assembly of Albanian League were: Ilias Pashë Dibra (chairman), Ahmet Sabri Karahasani, Mehmet Reshit Beu, Ismai Et'hem, Abdulla Aga, Bajram Bej Dibra, and Jonuz Zyhdriu.

The first acts of the general assembly were a petition for the Albanian cause, sent to the Congress of Berlin, Kararnameja (the act of decision-canon) and Talimati (directions). Both of the two petitions were approved in June 15, 1878. Through these petitions, they asked from the Congress of Berlin and the Turkish government not to give an inch of their homeland to other countries. Kararnameja authorized the formation of the League of Prizren as an Albanian political organization by clearly defining the most urgent tasks, meanwhile Talimati treated organizational, political, and military aspects of Albanian League. The formation of the League of Prizren was greeted with enthusiasm in all Albanian territories.

In the first week of July 1878, after being founded, the Albanian League of Prizren, Iljaz Pashë Dibra and other delegates from Dibra went along with Abdul Frashëri from Prizren to Dibra. After arriving in Dibra, in the field of Qernanica, they organized an extraordinary meeting of the great assembly of Dibra to be in solidarity with the decisions of the Assembly of Prizren.

Ten thousand people took part in the assembly, all armed and ready to protect and defend their homeland. According to the tradition, the assembly was led by leaders and elders of the highlands and fields. The decision would be accepted by all men capable of carrying weapons. The Assembly was led by Iljaz Pashë Dibra, who was also elected as chairman for the branch of the League for the province of Dibra. Abdul Frashëri stood beside him. People of Dibra, in this assembly, were willing to join forces with the League of Prizren to protect Albanian territories from fragmentation and to oppose annexation policies of the great powers and Balkan monarchies. The debate in parliament began when Iljaz Pashë Dibra urged participants to give up

from enmity and forgive feuds, which was difficult, but necessary, moment for the country.

Assemblies gathered in Dibra to take part in decisions of great importance not only for the region of Dibra, but for the entire country. Among these assemblies were: assembly of Dibra, October 14, 1878, assembly of Dibra November 1, 1878, the Assembly of November 8, 1878 and the assembly of October 20, 1880.

## **2. The Assembly of 14 October 1878**

In October 14, 1878 an assembly was held in Dibra, which adopted a resolution based on the principles programme of the Istanbul Committee. After protesting against the fragmentation of Albanian lands by the Congress of Berlin, and after it was underlined, there was further risk for Albania from neighbouring monarchies. In this resolution it was said: "Therefore, to eliminate these risks and ensure the future, it is a prerequisite to perform one hour before the following reforms for Albania".

1- All areas of Albania should become a "vilayet" and the cities should be considered as centres, which should be able to communicate equally with any other part of the territory.

2- All employees, who will live in Albania, should know the language of their country.

3- The spread of education and in schools should be taught the Albanian language.

4- The application of the decisions that will be useful for the state and nation reforms by the General Assembly.

5- To separate a sufficient amount of the total income of "vilayet" and to spend it on public buildings and in the promotion of education.

This assembly had great importance because decided the issue of the second major program of the League of Prizren, Albania's request to grant administrative autonomy with national character, was officially raised.

The High Gate tried to prevent the implementation of the requirements set in the resolution of 14 October. In response, patriotic circles organized a special assembly of the Albanian League in the city of Dibra. To give these provincial demands, an interregional assembly was gathered to decide the value of the national requirements.

## **3. Assembly of November 1, 1878**

The national assembly gathered in Dibra in November 1, 1878. In this assembly Abdul Frashëri agreed to participate as a representative of the committee League for Toskëria region. The assembly resolution contained the same requests, admitted to the programme of Istanbul Committee, and was involved in the resolution of the meeting of October 14, 1878. The resolution stated that these requirements should be presented to the High Gate, within a month, in name of the Albanian people, by a delegation composed of personalities of Albania. Members of the delegation, before coming to Istanbul, should receive consent, the written mandate in all "kazas" and Albanian "sandzak." The end of the resolution stated, "While achieving compliance with the requirements above, Albania will continue to resist by being connected and united as a single body."

Under the agreement reached in the Assembly of Dibra, the delegation that represented and defended the resolution before the High Gate would be composed of 14 personalities (eight from the north, and six from the south), among which will be favourites, well-known figures not only Albanian but also in imperial scale.

The duty to issue mandates, which was adopted by the representatives of the "kazas" and Albanian "sandzak," resolutions and mandates of the composition of the delegation, was taken by Iljaz Pashë Dibra for the northern provinces and Abdul Frashëri for the southern provinces. The difficult and tiring mission, headed by Abdul Frashëri was finished within a month. After leaving Dibra, he went to Elbasan, passed through Berat, Fier, Vlora, Gjirokastra, Delvina, Preveza and Ioannina. In connection with this very important mission, we have as evidence two letters of Abdul Frashëri addressed to Iljaz Pashë Dibra from Ioannina. Abdul Frashëri, on December 2, 1878, announced to Iljaz Pashë Dibra the enthusiasm that caused the decisions of Dibra assembly and the readiness of the Albanian people to sign the representation mandates. The second letter of Abdul Frashëri addressed to Iljaz Pashë Dibra on December 21, 1878, had an alarming content for the national cause. The concern is related to the delay of the mission that had taken over Iljaz Pashë Dibra to secure representation mandates of delegates in northern Albania. In this letter Abdul Frashëri writes, "If the task force will not go into Istanbul at the right time, the homeland remains at risk and future prospects will be destroyed".

In the north, adoption of the mandates and resolution by the members of the delegation, led by Iljaz Pashë Dibra, was completed by mid-January 1879. But the Albanian delegation suspended its launch, only after the risk of annexation of the southern part of Çamëria from Greece. This threat forced the leaders of the Albanian league to deal with the protection of the southern borders and leave for later the introduction of the resolution of the Dibra assembly in High Gate.

But events did not work as Abdul Frashëri thought. The task of the League did not start in time for Istanbul. Meanwhile it went back to square the implementation of Protocol No. 13 to the Congress of Berlin, which Greece recognized the annexation of Çamëria. Until then, the High Gate, scared of rejection of the Prizren league, made various pretexts on its submission. But now the great powers forced the High Gate to carry out the implementation of the Protocol No. 13 as soon as possible.

During the League of Prizren, Dibra was transformed into a centre of this relation and the main defender of its platform for promoting education in Albanian. "Tomori" newspaper wrote, "In addition to the contribution that Dibra gave for the realization of the national ideal of the league, it had the luck to become a second Prizren. In the assemblies of the League, in Dibra in October 14, 1878 and November 1, 1878, except demands of autonomist character, there was included the demand for the spread of education in Albanian language as:

- Albanian language should be known by officials who will be in Albania.
- The development of education and the introduction of the Albanian language in schools.
- Use a part of the budget for education and public buildings.

Sustainability and continuous struggle of the Albanian people under the leadership of the Albanian League of Prizren to protect Plave, Guci, Hoti and Gruda, made it

impossible to implement the decisions of the Berlin Congress to give the Albanian territories to Montenegro, Serbia and Greece.

As a result of resistance to the forces of the league during the months of August to October 1880, the great powers pressured the High Gate instead of Hoti and Gruda to hand over the Montenegro the town of Ulqin with its surroundings. The High Gate hesitated to hand Ulqin fearing that the decision would cause a backlash against the High Gate from Albanians, who were armed. In the new situation created by the determination of the Albanian league to prevent the implementation of the decisions of the Berlin Congress, the Great Powers were forced to keep on two international conferences to review previous decisions in accordance with the situation created by the challenges of Albania. The first conference was held in Berlin on June 16, 1880, and the second conference would be in Istanbul on June 26, 1880. The Berlin Conference abided to Protocol No. 13 of the Congress of Berlin in determining the southern border with Greece, and the Istanbul conference decided that instead of Hoti and Gruda, to hand over the Montenegro the town of Ulqin with its surroundings. As before, Albanians immediately protested this new injustice that the Great Powers were doing at the expense of their national interests. At the same time, they repeated to the High Gate their commitment to protect Ulqin and their general readiness to enter the war. But this time the Great Powers were determined not to take into account the Ottoman government's excuses. With a collective mark, which led to the August 3, 1880 meeting in Istanbul, they invited the High Gate to break the resistance of Albanians and hand over Ulqin to Montenegro.

In the fall of 1880, when relations between the League and the High Gate soured even more on the issue of Ulqin, the representatives of England and Austria-Hungary promised to the leaders of the League that they would recognize certain rights of autonomy if they accepted to give up the town of Ulqin without a fight. These promises swayed some feudal attitudes that had penetrated the governing bodies of the League, and they were for a very limited time autonomous. True patriots, who represented the radical wing of the League, immediately thought to proclaim the autonomy of Albania, without entering into a compromise with the government in Istanbul.

#### **4. Assembly of October 20, 1880**

To determine the final position that should be held for the autonomy of Albania, representatives of the Albanian League of Prizren organised an extraordinary assembly in October 20-23rd, 1880 in the city of Dibra. This time it was a national assembly, not a provincial assembly as was held on October 14th, 1878 and the region prospective as it was held on November 1, 1878.

Istanbul Central Committee decided that the issue of autonomous "vilayet" was to be discussed in an assembly convened again in Dibra. The reason for meeting again in Dibra can be explained by their willingness to continue not only protecting the whole terrestrial homeland, but also equipping the country with an Albanian national administration. Dibra magazine "Java" wrote, "The largest and legendary province, that never lost the ideal of freedom, was gathered in constant assemblies

and required the rights of the nation. That proud part of Albania cannot be left behind by other provinces. "

Finally, after many consultations, representatives of the League of Prizren gathered in Dibra. Dibra Assembly began work on October 20th, 1880. It was attended by about 300 delegates coming from the four districts of the Albanian regions, accompanied by 5,000 armed people. Most of them were sent from the "vilayet" of Kosovo and Albanian areas of the "vilayet" of Monastir. There were fewer numbers of delegates representing Shkodra, the middle of Albania, and the South. Most of the delegates belonged to the radical and moderate factions. Among them there were seven remarkable Albanians: Iljaz Pashë Dibra, Ali Pashë Gucia, Sadik Pashë Hoxholli, Abdulla Pashë Dohoshishti, Esat Pashë Tetova, Hasan Pashë Tetova and Xhemal Pashë Mati. According to some sources, the east and south of Albania were represented by Abdurahim Pashë Tirana, Sadik Pashë Elbasani, Abdyl Bej Frashëri dhe Mustafa Efendiu.

Delegates from Sultan, who attended the convention, were very few. On the top of them was Sadik Pashë Hoxholli. The main figure of the assembly was Iljaz Pashë Dibra. The Assembly decided that the proceedings were to be conducted behind closed doors. The assembly addressed issues of great importance to our national history. The results of the assembly were most leaning to patriotic moderate currents. The report of the French consul "Le Ree" announced in October 28, 1880, that in Dibra Albanian leaders were discussing the issue of the independence of their country. More accurate report agendas were given by anonymous participants of the assembly in a paper published in December 22, 1880 in the Turkish newspaper "Istikbal," published in Switzerland.

According to the French consul, the Parliament would address three important issues:

1. Centred on the issue of Ulqin
2. Creation of an autonomous "vilayet"
3. The formation of a temporary government.

According to the first issue, the assembly sultanists persistently demanded to give up from the protection of Ulqin because, according to them, the protection of Ulqin will further worsen the position of the Ottoman Empire in Albania. Against all sultanists' ideas in the assembly were almost all present delegates, especially delegates of the radical patriotic current led by Abdul Frashëri. The formation of an autonomous Albanian "vilayet" had many debates in Parliament. In principle, the request to create an autonomous Albanian "vilayet" won the approval of the majority of delegates. Sultanists were in the minority, about 8%. But the realization of autonomous rights also had different views within the patriotic power. Austro-Hungarian consul Lippih noted that "regarding reports based on the results of the meeting of leaders in Dibra, let me add that it faced among them a moderate and radical party, which we can also call the government party and the party of the League." In this case, the radical party was led by Abdul Frashëri.

Platform power was seeking radical unification of four "vilayets" with a skilled governor who knew the Albanian language. The highest part of the Albanian "vilayet" would be the General Council, composed of 20 members. Schools and courts would use the Albanian language. Military obligation would apply to all residents of "vilayet," including Christian residents, who would enjoy equal rights with their

Muslim compatriots. Special attention will be devoted to educating people and building roads and bridges, which were expected to spend 20% of revenues from "vilayet." Moderate patriots demanded that four "vilayets" should remain as they were with their administrations but were required to join a single "vilayet" governed by the Sultan's appointee. In this "vilayet" better reforms should be put on life, which the High Gate had in mind to implement since last spring, according to Article 23 of the Treaty of Berlin.

The authors of this platform hoped that these reforms would be in terms of Albanian ethno-cultural character. Both patriotic currents had different views about how to perform autonomous rights. Like before, moderates hoped to realize their project through political wisdom, leaving the Sultan with the fulfilment of their demands. Rather, the radicals had no confidence in the willingness of Istanbul to give Albanians autonomous rights, and, therefore, they insisted to win these rights through revolutionary actions.

The confrontation between these two platforms became fierce, especially when Iljaz Pashë Dibra, Ali Pashë Gucia, and Esat Pashë Tetova, some of the leading figures of the assembly, lined up in favour of a radical platform. Parliament, did not say anything about the form that the autonomous Albanian "vilayet" would have, perhaps not to leave out the path to other divergences. However, the Congress took issue that had secured the approval of both parties. Delegates of both factions agreed to guarantee the life of citizens, to ensure everyone's property, surrendering their feuds, and fought against disease and other bribes. Clashes that appeared related with the range of autonomous rights made it difficult to discuss the third item on the agenda for the formation of the interim government of Albania. However, it was decided that the branches of the League returned to administrative bodies, would take care to maintain public order, fight theft with determination, prevent cases of homicide, collect state taxes, and implement military recruitment.

Parliament appointed a commission of ten people to draft a resolution and its decisions. But clashes also appeared inside the commission, especially concerning the character of autonomy and form of the regime that should be set in an autonomous Albania. While seeking radical representatives of a single structure around the Albanian autonomous "vilayet," representatives of the moderate faction, based on unequal social structure of four provinces, wanted a differentiated structure for each "vilayet."

Since the issue of the political structure of the future State of Albania had a lot of arguments, not to deepen their clashes between representatives of the two factions, they agreed to take further action in the future. However, their claps about the political character of the autonomous "vilayet" were not levelled.

At the end of the work, the assembly came up with two resolutions:

- 1-The first one was proposed by the Gjirokastra assembly, asked for the creation of the Albanian "vilayet" with broad autonomy, which won approximately 120 votes.
- 2-The second one was proposed by the moderate delegates, demanded the preservation of the current political division of Albania by applying new "vilayet" organization, which gained nearly 150 votes.

Among the main personalities of the Assembly, the resolution of the moderates was

approved by, among others, Sadik Pashë Hoxholli, Hasan Pashë Tetova, Abdulla Pashë Dohoshisht, Xhemal Pashë Zogolli, and the resolution of the radical group was adopted by Iljaz Pashë Dibra, Abdul Frashëri, Ali Pashë Gucia, Ymer Prizreni, SulejmanVokshi, and Esat Pashë Tetova.

Attitudes and decisions that were taken in the Assembly of Dibra given by Consul Blunt, who, among other things, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of England that "now, more than three weeks since the League moved from Prizren in Dibra, was held a broad meeting, in which there was a participation of 5,000 Albanians." Consul Blunt continued, saying, "Following a brief decision, the sultan sent an appeal, requiring full autonomy of Albania, promising the Turkish government an army of 60,000 soldiers for recruitment. Regarding the limits of this new Albania, the authors of this project say that they will lay up in Vidin, near Thessaloniki, where Manastir and Ohri they will take part".

Dibra assembly was dissolved on October 24, 1880 after taking the decision that both resolutions were forwarded to Istanbul with a special delegation. Xhemal bej Qoku, son of Iljaz Pashë Dibra, was charged to deliver the resolution of the radicals in Istanbul, while those of the moderate part choose a career of Officer Mustafa Beu. The Austro-Hungarian consul, based in Shkodra at the time, reported to Vienna the activities related to the assembly of Dibra: "In the assembly of Dibra are shown two currents, the feudal Turkoman Albanians and Albanian patriots who sought Albanian autonomy." The adoption of two resolutions indicated that the assembly of Dibra did not achieve the task that the radical representatives had set themselves to achieve unity of all patriotic forces in Albania.

## Conclusions

Dibra, with its surroundings, during the Albanian League of Prizren gave its contribution on what was expected by the population of this area. During this period, Dibra became the centre of assemblies of the League, the organizing centre of resistance to defend territorial integrity from fragmentation.

In front of the risk day of disintegration, Dibra population set an example for all Albanians by bounding and forgiving blood feud.

## References

- Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Republikës së Shqipërisë, (AQSH).*  
*Arkivi i Institutit të Historisë, Tiranë. Fondi i Ministrisë së Punëve të Jashtme të Vjenës, HHStA, PA, A.*  
*MHD (Muzeu Historik I Dibrës).*  
*Fondi krahinor, Biblioteka Peshkopi.*  
Xoxe, Koli. *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*, Tiranë, Mihal Duri, 1978.  
*Akte të Rilindjes Kombëtare Shqiptare 1878-1912*, Tiranë, Mihal Duri, 1978.  
*Histori e Popullit Shqiptarë*, vëll. II, Tiranë, Toena, 2002.  
Frashëri, Kristo. *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit*. Tiranë, Toena, 1997.  
Frashëri, Kristo. (monografi), *Abdyl Frashëri*, Tiranë, 1984.  
Kodra, Masar. *Dibra me rrethinë në kohën e Lidhjes së Prizrenit*, në Konferenca Kombëtare e

studimeve për Lidhjen Shqiptare të Prizrenit 1878-1881, vëll. I, Tiranë, Mihal Duri, 1979.

Daci, Fatos. *Enciklopedia e Dibrës*, Tiranë, albGraf, 2006.

Frashëri, Kristo. *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit 1878-1881*, vëll I, Tiranë, 1989.

*Histori e Shqipërisë*, Tiranë, 8 Nëntori, 1984.

Islami, Myslim. *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit dhe çështja e bashkimit kombatar*, Tiranë, Afërdita, 1998.

Totraku, Bajram. *Veprimtaria e Abdyl Frashërit në Dibër*, në Konferenca kombëtare e studimeve për Lidhjen Shqiptare, të Prizrenit, vëll. II, Tiranë, Mihal Duri, 1981.

Gogaj, Iljaz. *Lufta konsekuente e rilindasve për krijimin e shkollës kombëtare shqipe*, në Konferenca kombëtare për Lidhjen Shqiptare të Prizrenit, 1878-1881, vëll. II, Tiranë, Mihal Duri, 1881.