

Situation in the Albanian territories after World War I

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Abstract

The end of World War I and the victory of the forces of Antante on 11 November 1918 did not result in the end of war in Londonized Albania and in the territories inhabited by Albanian people in Yugoslavia and Greece because neighbouring countries did not withdraw from Albanian territories since their desires were to extend even more to the detriment of the Albanian and were not satisfied only with the invasion of Kosovo by Serbia, Cameraia by Greece, and Italy aspiring to keep Albania under its supervision. The European countries of Antante, such as England, France and Italy, did not support the Albanian people because they had reached an agreement during the World War 1 to conquer the countries of the triple alliance by promising Albanian territories to the neighbouring countries of Albania. The Protocol of April 1915 was devastating for Albania. The fate of Albanian people was such that European countries could not change the course of the World War 1. The intervention of USA was the one that changed the course of the World War 1, and USA even joined the war by stating that it did not recognize the agreements made during the war with regard to the territorial division. The neighboring countries of Albania had forgotten that in the global stage a political-military power was emerging which would lay the foundations of the new world order. Even though the war had ended, the neighboring countries of Albania were making agreements for the supervision of Albania. Italy was interested in keeping Albania under its supervision whereas Greece and Yugoslavia were interested in the division of Albania. Under these circumstances the Albanian people was facing new invasive challenges and they had to get organized both inside and outside the country for their national salvation. Albanians were organized in clubs and associations abroad, in order to help the freedom of Londonized Albania. The Albanians in Albania were fed up with long and savage invasions which would make difficult their organization and their fight for the freedom of the country. Albanians living outside the borders of the Londonized Albania were not even mentioned.

Keywords: War, Antana, Albanian, neighboring, alliance.

Introduction

In the end of World War 1, instead of dealing with the reconstruction of the country, Albanians were facing a fierce diplomatic war between neighboring countries which refused to withdraw their armies that they had modified in various forms. They had brought criminals and military and passed them off as native people in order to manipulate the various commissions that the powerful countries of that time would deploy. At the beginning of XX century, Albanian people were in a very difficult situation. The continuous wars with Ottoman Empire, Balkan alliance, World War I, and the fact that at the end of the war the armies of the neighboring countries would refuse to withdraw from Albanian territories, brought the Albanian people to the conundrum of whether to be or not be. Even though Albanians were neutral during

the World War I, such thing was ignored and the neighboring countries were given the possibility not to leave Albania as a result of their war against the triple alliance, and the Albanians were sometimes considered Turks and sometimes part of Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Albanians of Christian Orthodox religion was called Greek by Greece, the Albanians of Muslim religion were called Turks and the Catholic Albanians were called Italians, etc. The neighboring countries were ruthless to Albanian people; in May 1914 the state of Greece killed 450 people in Panair village, in the south of Albania. This happened after Albanians got organized and protested against the dissolution of Londonized Albania. Some of the representatives of the countries that benefited from the World War 1 fell prey of Serbian and Greek manipulations. When they could not carry out their expansionist plans, the neighboring countries would increase the violence and pressure on Albanian people in Kosovo and Cameria, which were invaded during the Balkan wars. Such a situation forced Albanians from all over the world to show their commitment to saving the Londonized Albania. The Albanian territories in the monarchy SKS and in Greece were left to the mercy of the neighboring countries because all forces of renowned Albanian diplomats were concentrated on saving the Londonized Albania.

Reinvasion of Albania by neighboring countries

By losing the armies in Thessaloniki the Serbian military were given free way to invade Dibra, Luma, Kukës in October 1918 and to enter Tirana on 10 October; a unit received the order to march toward Kosovo on 21 October and to invade the city of Shkodra (Milo, 1992, 45). From Thessaloniki, the French armed forces were accompanied from the rear by the Serbs (Tërnavë, 1995, 82). Serbs planned to invade the northern Albania before the end of the World War I but they would encounter opposition from Italy which aimed to keep some territories of Albania still occupied. Greece had the same plans for the south of Albania. The loss of war by the triple Alliance and the signing of armistice between the central powers and the allied countries that won the war was signed on 11.11.1918 (Seferi, 2014, 74). The Albanians did not benefit from the armistice. Even though the countries that won the war had as their Albanian ally Esad Pashë Toptani I, who helped them during the World War I, Balkan countries did not even take into consideration his contribution to war, and in some cases they even marginalized him due to their expansionist ego. Of 800 thousand inhabitants that Albania had at the beginning of the World War I, around 70 thousand inhabitants died from killings and as a consequence of war between the warring parties. (Puto, 2009, 186). Even though the World War I ended, Yugoslavia, Greece and Italy refused to remove their armies from the Albanian territories and used the advantage of being part of the countries that won the war. Regardless if Albanians would remain neutral toward the military allies, this would not be taken into consideration by the neighboring countries, in particular by Serbia, Greece and Italy, which in the name of the war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire were invading the Albanian territories. Greeks and Serbs were fulfilling their plans against the Albanian people both in Kosovo and in Cameria. According to Çubrilloviq's elaboration, against Albanians there should be used suitable psychosis of massive deportation, clergy should be

won over and so should Albanian pariah either by money or by force (Bajrami, 2004, 216). The plan of Serbs was not only for the extermination of Albanians because such plans existed for the extermination of Croats, Hebrews, Bosnians, etc. In trying to gain as many Albanian territories, the countries that were once allies fought against each other but not openly; instead they called them fighting between Albanians and their forces. At the end of the World War I there were approximately 40.000 Italian soldiers in Albania. After F.Nittini came to the power of the Italian government in his analysis he realized that the costs of keeping Albania invaded were around 300 thousand liras per year and that a long time would pass before these investments were returned. Titoni decided that Italy would have under its supervision only a part of Albania and that only the city of Vlora would be occupied (Seferi, 2014, 131). For this reason on 29.VII.1919 the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy met with the Greek Prime Minister in order to solve some problems, including the division of Albania. These actions of Italy and Greece to a large extent irritated the Albanian people who began preparing for an armed war in order to get freed from the Yugoslav, Greek and Italian invaders.

Re-invasion of Kosovo by Serbian forces

Even though the Albanian people both in Kosovo and Albania had a neutral position during the World War I, it could not escape from the greed of neighboring countries who tried by all means to keep Kosovo invaded. During the World War I, Serbia was invaded by Austro-Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria; the Serbian troops fought together with French and British and won their freedom. However, the freedom won by the help of allies was misused for the purpose of expansionism. In later decades, a bunch of Serbian barbarians pervaded by megalomania would sooner or later get what they deserved. The Albanians of Kosovo did not have anything in common with them but just because they were neighbors, the Serbian army provoked also during the World War I where they move through the territory of Kosovo and would settle in religious settlements which served as horse stables and kitchens for the preparation of food for the army. The most serious provocations made by the Serbian army were when they would set up their headquarters in the towers of distinguished Albanian families and would force them to leave or to work for free. Albanians would be imprisoned and humiliated in the presence of their wives and children (Buxhovi, 2012, 194). At the beginning of October 1918, the Serbian forces assisted by the French forces headed from Thessaloniki toward Kosovo. On 31 October 1918 the Yugoslav divisions managed to settle in all cities of Kosovo and set up the police, military and civilian authorities (Tërrnava, 1995, 82). Albanian Kacaks fought against Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies because Bulgarian army refused to give them the rights that were recognized by the Austro-Hungary. The fight of Albanians would not be acknowledged by the Yugoslav invaders. They would follow the plans of Serbian Nacertanije for the extermination of Albanians. The quick invasion of Kosovo by the Yugoslav armies brought forth the problem with the local Albanian people who were absolute majority. After the re-invasion of Kosovo through the decree of February 1919, Serbia nationalized the forests and gave five hectares of arable land

to all Serbian volunteers and soldiers who had served in the Serbian army before 18 November 1918 (Malcolm, 1998, 280). Two years later the Serbian government gave 10 hectares of land in Kosovo and Macedonia to all potential colonizers who took part in the Balkan wars. According to the decree of February 1919, the lands of all those Albanians, who for some reason did not cultivate them, were confiscated. In autumn of 1918 distinguished Albanians from Kosovo formed the Commission for the national protection of Kosovo in Shkodra, north of Albania (Judah, 2000, 24). The most renowned leaders of the commission for the national protection of Kosovo, whom Yugoslavia contemptuously called Kacak movement, were Bajram Curri, Hasan Bej Prishtina and Azem Bejta. Discontents that were brought forth led the Albanian people who were located in Yugoslavia to create armed groups, the so-called Kacak groups who would fight against the then Yugoslav regime. The Kacak resistance movement was stronger during the period 1918-1924. In the name of the war against the Albanian rebellious groups (Kacaks), the Serbian authorities confiscates the lands that were owned by the families of the Kacak groups and placed the Serbian comers in them. The then Yugoslav authorities qualified the properties of the members of the commission for the national protection of Kosovo as abandoned and facilitated this matter so that before the law and court they would be considered as abandoned and then would be colonized without a problem. With the adoption of the law on agrarian reform of August 1920, the SKS Monarchy would intensify the colonization of Kosovo and other parts inhabited by Albanian population. The agrarian reform as a means of colonization was followed by many forms of open national discrimination by which the Albanian ethnicity would be broken and divided as much as possible, to the extent where the ratio of people would be to the benefit of Slavic people (Buxhovi, 2012, 194). After the World War I the deportation at a massive scale, as was the case during the Balkan wars, was not possible, therefore the deportation to Turkey would become a clandestine action which included many various factors from Yugoslav police-military services where a group of criminals and profiteers had created their networks. This situation would subside with the arrival to power of Kemal Ataturk in Turkey. The Albanians in different parts of SKS Monarchy would be subjected to violence and genocide with the same proportions as in Kosovo.

Attempts of Greece to invade the South Albania at the end of World War I

The State of Greece emerged from the World War I in the winning side of the war and tried to carry out its plans of megalia idea by expanding into two continents and five seas. The first invasion was the South Albania or Northern Epirus as Greeks called it. In order to avoid the responsibility before the international community, Greece appointed politicians and military leaders who left their national posts but it also hired bands that would be armed and supplied in the war against Albanian people. Greece had invaded Cameria which was inhabited by Albanians who were the absolute majority, during the Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913, as part of the propaganda of anti-ottoman war. The danger that the Albanian people of Muslim religion faced forced the Albanian intellectuals of that period, such as Faik Konica, to ask from the Albanians to convert into Christian religion, into the religion of their

forefathers (Ikonomi, 2011, 109). The invasion was characterized by violence and terror where the local people would be driven out of their homes. Greece also tried to invade Korça, Gjirokastra, Delvina and Tepelena but this was opposed by the great powers and instead these areas were recognized as part of Albania by the protocol of Firenze, on 20.XII.1913 (Silajxhiç, 1999, 79). Once invading Cameria and once the great powers set the Albanian border, Greece began the campaign of ethnic cleansing by deporting thousands of Muslim Albanians to Turkey with the justification that they were Turks (Dervishi, 2009, 8). The allied countries had information about the violence, genocide and ethnic cleansing but they did not show commitment to prevent Greece from carrying out its plans. Greece succeeded in manipulating the majority of allied countries. Greece applied false propaganda for the killings and cleansing and sometimes it called them fights between GEGS and Tosks and sometimes it calls fights between Christian and Muslim Albanians. On the other hand, Greece considered the Albanians of Christian faith as Greeks; Greece released around 1000 prisoners from Crete as well as paramilitary troops and passed them off as local people before the international community and then assigned them to massacre the Albanian people, who were executed with cold weapons. Then the Muslim corpses would be sent to areas inhabited by Christian Albanians in order to incite fights between Albanian brothers, and even Greek priests would be sent to fights in order to present the fights as a war between religions (TV.Klan, Opinion). The only country that had more accurate information about the massacres, which were taking place and the others which were prepared, was USA and through a document of the state department the demand was to send someone to Epirus in order to prevent the massacres of which the state department was aware that they were being prepared (Silajxhiç, 1999, 82). The USA government did not respond to the demands of the state department due to the long distance with Albania. The intensification of the problem in the south Albania would force the countries that emerged victorious in World War I, such as USA, Great Britain, France and Italy, to send their representatives in the peace conference in Paris but even after this the problem that was caused by Greece gave the impression that the World War I had not ended, since Greece demanded that south Albania remain under its occupation. Greece used false arguments, how allegedly in those territories there were Greek schools, but the fact was that Albanians went to those schools since there were no Albanian schools. Under the occupation of Ottoman Empire many Albanians were persecuted and were not allowed to open the schools where Albanian language would be taught. Greece had lobbied to a great extent also in USA and had created the so called Panepirotas Union, with the pretense of protecting the rights of the Northern Epirus. The purpose was clear, annexation of south part of Albania which was vital and rich for Albania. The Albanian intellectuals, such as K. Çerkez, were of opinion to have a political approximation with Yugoslavia in order to prevent the Greek expansion in the south of Albania. In the meeting between the Albanian delegation that was headed by Turtuli and Konica and the Yugoslav delegation that was headed by Pashiq and Trumbiq, besides some empty promises nothing else was achieved (Meta, 2001, 276). The greatest danger the south Albania faced was the American memorandum of December 1919 which greatly diminished the demands of Albanians for a peaceful solution. The political changes in Italy and the coming of

a government which was more focused on internal affairs, forced Titon to avoid the military expenses and to keep only Vlora under the occupation. On 29.VII.1919 the minister of foreign affairs of Italy met with the Prime minister of Greece in order to discuss about some problems and the dissolution of Albania (Seferi, 2014, 131). Such actions greatly irritated the Albanian patriotic circles; the representatives of Vatra Mehmet Konica and M.Turtuli met with the representatives of Great Britain and the first meeting was with General Philips who was the commander of the international British corps in Shkodra and with Captain Morton Eden, consultant of the British delegation in Shkodra. Both accepted to be spokespersons before the Foreign Office in order to seek solidarity with the fight of Albanians against Italians, Greeks and Serbs. The Albanians began their preparations for armed war as the only way to protect the entirety of Londonized Albania.

Conclusions

When the date of the peace conference in Paris was nearing, the Balkan circles intensified their diplomacy in order to persuade the international powers so that during the Paris conference they would present the facts with the pretense that certain Albanian territories were inhabited by local Greek people in the south or Serbs in the north. The Albanian diplomacy was operating under difficult conditions and was trying to protect the borders of Londonized Albania. During the World War I the countries that eventually won the war had created alliances which would be put into effect after their victory. The Balkan countries that emerged victorious would legalize their victories through the peace conference in Paris. The Albanian diplomats were under the great pressure from the expansionist tendencies. They demanded that Albania be under the supervision of USA as the only power that entered the World War I without any expansionist or invasive intentions, and had rejected the previous agreements that were made during the war. USA emerged victorious from the World War I but the war expenses were great. The request for funds for a protectorate over Albania, which was geographically very far, would overburden the budget of America. On the other hand, it was difficult to come out openly before the USA allies who demanded as many benefits as possible from the results of war. The allied countries had created an alliance with Esad Pasha I, who in order to retain his power, made many concessions to the detriment of Albanian territories. Some countries even considered him a progeny in order to reach their goals. In such circumstances the Albanians became more conscious about the importance of national salvation and they appointed leader representatives who would have the ability to save the Londonized Albania. The difficult state in which Albania was would continue but Albanians would be proactive both in terms of diplomacy and military. When Albanian diplomats would succeed in convincing the representatives of foreign powers about their right to protect their borders, the SKS Monarchy and Greece would intensify the violence and murders in the territories that they had invaded six years before, namely Kosovo and Cameria. When using the term Kosovo I am also referring to Albanians in Macedonia and Montenegro. Murders, violence and pressure in various forms had forced the Albanians to form armed groups in order to save their skins. These armed groups

would not succeed in liberating their territories but they would raise the awareness of international community. Londonized Albania would somehow calm down with the entry of Albania into the League of Nations.

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