

## The Italian occupation

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### Abstract

Albania was occupied from fascist Italy on April 7, 1939. Strategic plans for the establishment of fascist regimes in the Balkans led to the invasion of Albania. According to the division made by the powers of the Fascist Bloc, Italy was recognized as having the right to extend the rule in the Western Balkans. Ciano came to Albania after the occupation and personally took care of this matter. An Interim Administrative Committee was formed by Xhafer Ypi, a former Zog minister, who in a radio broadcast statement justified the Italian invasion by emphasizing that Albania under King Zog regime was near a disaster and that Italy prevented this.

On April 12 1939, the Assembly was established, consisting mostly of large landowners, landlords, merchants, clergymen, clerks, and former Zog Officers. Of the 150 participants, 40 had been in Zog Parliament. On April 13 1939, the Italian Upper Fascist Council convened in Rome and approved the request of the Constitutional Assembly for joining Albania with Italy. On April 16, Prime Minister Shefqet Verlaci appeared in Rome and handed King Victor Emmanuel to the Crown III of Albania.

Major military and police forces, which reached 100,000 troops, landed in the country in order to maintain order and to suppress the anti-fascist resistance that revived since the early days of the invasion.

**Keywords:** Albania, Italy, occupation, Balkan, military.

### Introduction

According to the division made by the powers of the Fascist Bloc, Italy was recognized as having the right to extend the rule in the Western Balkans. Population from north to south made resistance with weapons, creating difficulties for Italian troops, but compared to the weapons that the enemy possessed had to be handed over. The Albanian state is in the hands of the invaders who strive to act quickly and with all the necessary means for the Italianization of the country. Albania, with its location on the Adriatic coast, is rich in large natural resources, the use of which will bring great gains to Italy. Its favorable location geographically interested Rome for its expansionist plans in the Balkans and beyond. The aggression undertaken later in Greece and Yugoslavia was the demonstration of such plans and allegations. Having managed to penetrate the entire territory, the main task for the fascist regime was to establish political institutions. Ciano came to Albania after the occupation and personally took care of this matter. An Interim Administrative Committee was formed by Xhafer Ypi, a former Zog minister, who in a radio broadcast statement justified the Italian invasion by emphasizing that Albania under King Zog regime was near a disaster and that Italy prevented this. Guided by Ciano, Ypi on April 12 assembled the Assembly<sup>1</sup>, which was dominated by the owners, merchants, clergymen, former King's officers,

<sup>1</sup> AMPJ, V. 1946, D. 93.

and so on. The Assembly announced the end of Zog's monarchy and annulled the Constitution of 1928. For the unification of Albania and Italy, a request was made to King Vittorio Emanuele III to accept the Crown of Albania. This wrong step of the Assembly led to the end of the independence of the Albanian state, the objective that Ciano had put on himself and on the same day he wrote in his diary: "Albania is no longer independent." This statement contradicted the agreement between Italy and Great Britain signed in Rome last year regarding the status quo of the Mediterranean where the same Ciano with the communication made to Perth on April 4 referring to the status quo.

### **The establishment of the assembly**

The Mediterranean government considered that the Italian government would not violate Albania's sovereignty, integrity and independence. After the announcement of the Reuter agency three days ago, the London-based workload officer Guido Crolla assured the British Foreign Minister that the Italian-Albanian issue would be resolved in such a way as not to cause a crisis in relations between Italy and the United Kingdom and Generally in the international situation. On April 12, the Assembly was established, consisting mostly of large landowners, landlords, merchants, clergymen, clerks, and former Zog Officers. Of the 150 participants, 40 had been MPs in Zog Parliament. The Constitutional Assembly announced the demolition of Zog monarchy and abolition of the 1928 Constitution. The Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was printed and the under secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy was founded, led by Zenone Benini which was Ciano's close friend. The press of the Albanian Foreign Ministry would mean that relations with foreign countries and Albania's international activity depended only on Roma. For the Albanian authorities, the existence of the Under-secretariat was seen as a harmful act of Albania's sovereignty. Italy's dependence roof was the General Statute that came into force on June 4, 1939<sup>2</sup>. The statute was a kind of constitution consisting of 54 articles, divided into seven sections. Count 1 sanctions that "the Albanian state is governed by a monarchical constitutional government the throne is inherited under the law of the dynasty of his greatness Vittorio Emanuele III, king of Italy and of Albania, the Emperor of Ethiopia." The King belonged to all powers, executive, legislative and judicial powers. He was also High Head of State, Commander of the Armed Forces, declaring war and approving peace, signing international treaties, approving all senior state officials, sanctioning laws, proclaiming and revoking ministers, etc. To represent and exercise power in the name of the King was formed the "rank of general lieutenant". On April 13, the Italian Upper Fascist Council convened in Rome and approved the request of the Constitutional Assembly for joining Albania with Italy. On April 16, Prime Minister Shefqet Vërlaci appeared in Rome and handed King Victor Emmanuel to the Crown III of Albania. Major military and police forces, which reached 100,000 troops, landed in the country in order to maintain order and to suppress the anti-fascist resistance that revived since the early days of the invasion. The Italian Supreme Command took over the direction and control of all the military

<sup>2</sup> AMPJ, Drejtoria IV, V. 1943, D.27.

forces in the country, including that of the "armed forces of Albania" and was put under the command of the Commander of the Italian invasion forces Colonel Guizzoni. In May 1939, the law "On joining the Albanian Armed Forces with the Italian Armed Forces" emerged. Construction of strategic roads, barracks and aerodromes began. These measures are necessary for the Italian policy of aggression against other countries, including Greece. Albania was the bridge that paved the way for Italian penetration in the Balkans, in which the distribution of military troops was based on these expansionist goals. Intentions that intensified in 1940, as indicated by a Royal Decree on the "Rules to be applied in the case of war" of June 9, 1940<sup>3</sup>. According to this decree, "the Kingdom of Albania was considered in a state of war with all the countries with which Italy could be at war" (Article 1), and also on the land, the sea and the sky of Albania, the Italian law provisions would apply. Of the war adopted by the Royal Decree of 8 July 1938 (Article 3). It is clear that Mussolini began taking the necessary steps and preparing the attack on Greece, an attack that began only a few months later. Italy after an ultimatum in Athens on October 28, 1940, began its aggression against Greece. The government of Shefqet Vërlaci did not have the capability to cope with the pressure of Rome, surrendered and joined the Italian troops, but the Albanian population and the country's progressive forces were positioned against this war<sup>4</sup>. Only after some successes the fascist army was forced to retreat, leaving Korca and Gjirokastra (Albanian lands) in the hands of the Greek army. Facing this difficult situation, Mussolini sought help from Germany, which decided to intervene militarily in the Balkans, a strategic area for the Axis objectives. As a pretext for the coup of the German government, Hitler decided to invade Yugoslavia. On April 6, 1941 German and Italian troops simultaneously began aggression against Yugoslavia and Greece, which surrendered in less than two weeks. Mussolini and Hitler, according to an agreement signed in Vienna in April 1941 divide them between their occupation zones. Some Albanian regions of Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro were robbed from Albania by the 1913 regime, which by Decree no. 264 of August 12, 1941, joined the conquered Albania<sup>5</sup>. So thanks to the intervention of the Germans, Italy formed the Greater Albania. Despite the strategic reasons that led to its formation, Great Albania (from 1941 to 1944) provided Italy with a large number of Albanians.

After the military operations were over the consequences of war felt very much in areas where the war had passed. In the districts of Korça and Gjirokastra, which had been occupied by the Greeks, the issue of compensation for war damages stood. While very little concern came from the point of view of economic development, after the end of military operations, areas of Kosovo and Dibra, which were fertile and rich in minerals and industrial plants. One of the priorities of Italian politics was the control of economic life since the first days of the occupation was interested in the exploitation of natural resources of Albanian land where large quantities of raw materials such as oil, copper, chrome, Agricultural and food products. The use of the Albanian economy has long been a target for Rome. In this context, Italy intensified its

<sup>3</sup> AMPJ, V. 1944, D. 27.

<sup>4</sup> AMPJ, V. 1946, D. 93.

<sup>5</sup> Historia e popullit shqiptar. Vol. IV, Tiranë 2009, Page 45.

actions and on April 20, 1939, Jakomoni Plenipotentiary Minister in Tirana and Prime Minister of Albania Verlaci concluded an agreement on the economic, customs and foreign exchange union between Albania and Italy. Under this agreement, customs tariffs and economic tariffs are removed. So the Albanian market intertwines with the Italian one. This led to Albania's great economic losses. In addition, all previously signed agreements with other countries were canceled, imports came exclusively and exclusively from the Italian market or through Italy. Thus, while in 1938 Italy had 68.4% of exports and 36.3% of Albanian imports, one year later in 1939 received 99.1% of exports and 82.1% of Albanian imports<sup>6</sup>. The April agreement also triggered radical changes in Albanian monetary and credit value<sup>7</sup>, which were entirely dependent on Italian currency and credit. Large Italian financial and industrial groups such as the "Bank of Naples", "Railways" and other Italian companies opened their branches and started using resources and workforce. In 1940 there were 140 Italian companies, while in March 1942 the number reached 366. The interest of Italian entrepreneurs was particularly focused on the mining sector that the Italian war industry needed<sup>8</sup>. In the mining sector, Italian companies such as AIPA, SIMSA, SAMIRA, AMMI, which were in Albania before the conquest expanded their activities in the exploitation of oil, copper, chrome, etc. But new monopoly companies like Montecatini, Ferralba, ACAI and others also came to Albania. Thus, Italian capital has almost completely stuck Albania's underground resources, leaving no room for Albanian capital except in any case. In the industrial sector besides the existing companies before 1939 was added SAITAA (Anonymous Company of Albanian Textile Industry) and KOA (Albanian Oil Company) etc.

There were also agricultural companies such as EIAA and ITALBA (Agriculture Transformation Enterprise in Albania), the latter being part of the Italian Foreign Ministry program for the conquest and colonization of the most fertile land in Albania and for this in the first months of the year 1940 was placed on the lands between Durrës and Shijak. Italian policy aims to make Albania a source of raw materials for the industry and a market for Italian goods. The penetration of Italian capital into almost all sectors of the Albanian economy hit much domestic capital. During the invasion there was a growth in output particularly in those sectors that were directly related to the economy of the war. In 1942 crude oil production reached 155,000 tons, from 108,000 in 1938; Coal production reached 131,000 tons by 3,700; Chromium production at 60,000 tons from 7,000 in 1938<sup>9</sup>. But in 1943 production began to decline due to the general political and military crisis that hit fascism. Taking into account the situation that the country was going through, the unification of Albanians the first initiatives were made by the Albanians of Yugoslavia, who created the "United Front of Albanian Resistance", where the prominent names of the antifascist war were: Gani Kryeziu, Mustafa Gjinishi, Abaz Kupi and others. The Albanian community in Turkey, Greece, Romania, Britain and the United States of America also undertook initiatives to unite and organize nationalism in the Diaspora.

<sup>6</sup> AQSH, F. 279, V. 1944. Statistika të tregtisë së jashtme të Shqipërisë, Tiranë 1944, Page 8.

<sup>7</sup> "Gazeta Zyrtare", nr. 27, 1 maj 1939.

<sup>8</sup> Historia e popullit shqiptar. cit. Vol. IV, Tiranë 2009, Page 33.

<sup>9</sup> AQSH, V. 1343, F. 279 Relacion mbi bilancin e Bankes Shtetërore Shqiptare, dt. 31.12.1943.

But with the invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia and the expansion of the war across Europe, the role of the Albanian diasporas in the Balkans begins to fall. The difficult economic conditions and oppression of national organizations led to armed rebellion that began to grow and intensify throughout the Albanian territory. During the summer and autumn of 1941, the political crisis increased and political talks increased as well. Communist groups and other nationalist forces organized a series of armed actions or not against invaders. In such a situation, the formation of a National Organization, which would organize and direct the struggle of the entire Albanian people, becomes inviting. With the German attack on the Soviet Union, the work of communist groups began to grow. The entry of the Soviet Union into the war will change the character of the Second World War and the balance of forces in the war, thus leading to a clear prospect of the loss of fascism and, consequently, the liberation of Albania<sup>10</sup>. After preparatory work of intensive meetings and discussions between leaders of communist groups, it would be decided to hold a meeting where all the representatives of the main communist groups would discuss and decide on the issue of their union and the formation of Communist Party. The meeting took place from 8 to 14 November 1941 and five representatives from each of the three main groups were included: the group of Korça, the Shkodra group and the youth group. At the meeting it was decided to join the three groups and to form the Communist Party of Albania (SNP). Temporary bodies were formed as the Central Committee, consisting of Enver Hoxha, Gjin Marku, Koci Xoxe, Kristo Themelko, Qemal Stafa, Ramadan Çitaku, Tuk Jakova. At this meeting was approved the program of the Communist Party for the period of the national liberation war, with the main objectives: liberation of the country, restoration of national independence and formation of a democratic environment in the country. To achieve its program, SNP cooperated with all other national forces in the country and in the international arena, with anti-fascist coalition countries and with neighboring countries. The situation created all over the country required the expansion of the armed struggle, which could only be achieved through the co-operation and grouping of all Albanian nationalist forces to fight against invading fascists. The Communist Party took the initiative and organized in Pezë on September 16, 1942 a conference in which were invited to participate in all national forces. The purpose of the Conference was to create a united front of the war against the invaders. The conference was attended by 18 representatives of various political forces such as the Communist Party, anti-fascist youth, anti-fascist women and other nationalist forces. The main issue discussed was the common forces of the country, indiscriminately, in a war front. All delegates agreed without hesitation. At this conference, the National Liberation Front was created as the only organization that unites all anti-fascist forces with no distinction, nationalists all over the country regardless of their religious, social, political beliefs ready to fight the fascist aggressor. This conference reached the goal of joining the Albanians and became the starting point for a common popular war across the country. After the Pope Conference, the Anti-Fascist National Liberation War expanded and took larger proportions. Partisan battalions fought against fascists and troubled Italian troops whose command

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<sup>10</sup> Historia e popullit shqiptar. cit. Vol. IV, Tiranë 2009, Page 48.

prompted the government to increase military forces from 6 to 7 divisions<sup>11</sup>, in order to deal with the difficult situation in Albania. As a result of the struggle of all peoples against fascism, the fascist bloc takes uninterrupted attacks by British, American and Soviet coalition forces. After the defeat in Stalingrad, the crisis of the Nazi-fascist bloc was clearly emphasized.

In July, Anglo-American forces landed in Sicily and in August in the Apennine Peninsula giving even worse strikes to the fascist Axis. Under these conditions, the Badoglio government on September 8, 1943 declared the defeat and sought to start talks with the allies. The replacement of the Italian invaders with the German invaders further exacerbated the situation in Albania, but the National Liberation Movement continued to grow and succeed in the liberation of many occupied areas of the country. Under these conditions in the liberated city of Përmet on 24 May 1944 will be convened the Anti-fascist National Liberation Congress which made important decisions in the struggle of the Albanian people and the establishment of popular democratic power. The Permet Congress chose the National Liberation Council as the legislative body and executive of the country, consisting of 78 members led by Dr. Omer Nishani. The council established the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Committee with the attributes of a temporary government led by Enver Hoxha, also appointed Commander of the National Armed Forces Liberation Army. In addition, the Congress decided for a New Democratic Albania populated under the will of the people, abolished the right of King Zog entry to Albania and decided not to recognize any government that could be formed inside or outside the country without the will of the Albanian people, also ruled To continue the fight against the Germans and their Albanian collaborators<sup>12</sup>. The war became ever stronger and stronger after the release of various territories, and the targets were becoming more accessible. Under these conditions, on October 20-23, 1944, the second Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee meeting was held in Berat, which made important historical decisions for Albania's future. On 22 October, the Council decided to replace the National Anti-Fascist National Liberation Committee in the Democratic Government of Albania, whose president was appointed Enver Hoxha. The Democratic Government was de facto and de jure as the only government of the Albanian people. Its program included: the country's liberation war; The victory of independence; Strengthening the revolutionary national liberation committees; Security and protection of the rights of Albanian citizens; To review and cancel all political, military and economic arrangements established by the Zog regime that were against the interests of the Albanian people; To begin a close cooperation with the Soviet Union and all members of the great anti-fascist coalition and to prepare for the democratic elections of the Constitutional Assembly after liberation, which will decide the final form of the new Albanian state government and adopt the constitution Own.

Immediately after the Berat meeting on November 17, Tirana became the capital of Albania and on 29 November 1944 was liberated Shkodra, the last conquered city. The Albanian people took liberty and independence, and preparations for rebuilding

<sup>11</sup> Historia e Shqipërisë, vol. III (1912-1944), Akademia e Shkencave e RPSSH, Tiranë, 1984, Page 519.

<sup>12</sup> Historia e Shqipërisë, cit., vol. III, Tiranë, 1984, Page 623.

the country began. After the Italian invasion, the closure of the banks was followed. The counters would remain closed to the public and would be worked out by the staff only to complete the bank's in-house work (record dated February 14, 1945, Vlora). All of the bank's employees, who consisted of 31 people, were allowed to work on the general state of affairs (working permit, for the Presidency of the National Liberation Council of Vlora District, Rrapo Dervishi, October 17, 1944)<sup>13</sup>. During the years of World War II between Albania, between the Albanian resistance and the Great Allied Powers: Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the United States, which led the Anti-Fascist World Coalition, relations of cooperation were established.

### **Albania the victims of the Fascist**

Albania was among the first victims of Fascist aggression and among the first countries to make resistance to arms. In such circumstances it is at the beginning part of the European resistance and active member of the Anti-fascist World Coalition. The Albanian resistance, which begins on April 7, 1939, following the Peza Conference, has great changes both in structure and organization and intensity in action as Albanians rejected the fascist regime and disagreed with the policies that Roma began implementing in Albania<sup>14</sup>. These developments and changes in a small, but strategic, country are beginning to attract the attention of the international public. Press and propaganda in many countries began to write and give a boost to the military actions of Albanian fighters. Gradually, with the arrival of allied missions in Albania and direct relations with the national liberation army and the armies of neighboring countries, a stable organizational and institutional basis was established. Thus, the Albanian National Liberation War was not closed within national borders, but became part of the anti-fascist World War. Relationships with allies in this period were of special importance, with no economic, moral and military support and assistance, the National Liberation War would have had no such impact and would not have met its goals. Among the first, Great Britain realized that it was in the interest of the war, but also of its interests in the region, to have direct relations with the Albanian resistance, which had its representatives. But this demanded that the Great Powers, including the UK, would change their position on the fascist aggression of April 7, 1939, which led to the occupation of Albania. Stating openly that the Allies did not recognize the fascist occupation and the fascist invasion objectives and claims in Albania. The Allies had to openly declare recognition of Albania's independence. This statement was an essential pact to have reliable relations with Albanian resistance. Under these circumstances, the allies decided to make a joint statement expressing their position. On 17 December 1942, Britain's Foreign Minister made a statement on Albania. Soon after that, Foreign Minister Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov and US Foreign Minister C. Hull also acted. The governments of the allies declared publicly that they knew the war of the Albanian people and that they wanted a "free, independent and sovereign Albania". During 1943 the UK's interest in the region grew. At the end of April 1943 a military mission led by Major Bill Maklin entered Albania from Greece.

<sup>13</sup> AQSH, F. Banka Kombëtare e Shqipërisë-Drejtoria Qëndrore, D. Nr. 210, V. 1944.

<sup>14</sup> AQSH, F. Banka Kombëtare e Shqipërisë-Drejtoria Qëndrore, D. Nr. 210, V. 1944.

Other allied missions followed later. Britain and the allies in general were interested in supporting the resistance forces wherever they were to fight against the Nazis, regardless of their ideological orientations. But the Albanian National Liberation Army (ACAA) also welcomes British missions and other allies because it sees a chance for international recognition and support of war, given the great need for partisan assistance and ammunition. But the leaders of the National Liberation Front did not hide their reservations about British missions. In October 1943, the Special Operations Directorate sent a high-level mission led by General Edmond Davies and Colonel A. Nichols to Albania. The "David" mission<sup>15</sup> would coordinate the work of British groups operating in Albania. At the same time, another mission formed by Major Ricard Ridell and Captain Antoni Simkoks was placed near Dibra. In the spring of 1944, an American military mission headed by Captain Tomas Stefani, of Albanian origin arrived in Albania. Initially he was in contact with the National Front (Balli Kombëtar) but by the end of April came into contact the Albanian National Liberation Movement. In this period comes another British mission headed by Colonel Alen Palmer and the Soviet military mission with Major Ivanov. The arrival of the British mission at the beginning and then the US, Soviet and direct allied missions were very useful for both sides, as for the Albanian National Liberation Front and for the allies themselves. The Allies were interested in expanding and becoming a warfare and armed struggle against Nazi-fascists in the Balkans so that the largest number of enemy forces were blocked.

Relationships with allies take on a new development when a military delegation of the Albanian National Liberation Army goes to Bari. Naturally, relations with the allies were complex and this was due to various factors, above all, to different objectives and ideologies. In the policy of the Albanian National Liberation Movement, there was constant reign in suspicion and mistrust against Allied missions and the aspirations of the British in general. Disputes increased even more at the end of the war. Only in the final phase of the war, after the strengthening and the various victories of the Albanian National Liberation Movement, allies accepted the reality by working to support the movement. But politically, the allies remain suspicious about the road that Albania would get after the war. Anti-fascist resistance was very clear and apparent in the country not only for Albanians but for invaders as well. Workers were protesting against discrimination and capitalist exploitation. Students and students at boycott youth organizations and fascist activities and did not enforce the authorities' order to honor them fascist. On November 28, 1939, the Day of Independence Announcement, which for the first time are celebrated under the conquest, appeared the first serious manifestations in the country. On the streets and squares of cities, crowds of demonstrators emerged to express their disagreement with the fascist regime. In the various cities of the country, the demonstrators came up with national flags depicting the streets, singing patriotic songs and featuring anti fascist slogans. In Tirana, the demonstrators went to the grave of the national poet Naim Frashëri where they held patriotic speeches and placed bundles of flowers. The important school center also became schools as students and teachers opposed openly and decisively the efforts of the fascist occupation for the Italianization of the country. In parallel

<sup>15</sup> Historia e Popullit Shqiptar, cit, Vol. IV, Tiranë 2009, Page 109.

with the school protests, the movement began. Due to developments in the country, the number of workers was very low in the number of 25,000 workers consisting mostly of peasants and pluralized officials. On the site workers were raised in protests and witnessed and numerous cases of sabotage but not only had armed attacks.

### Conclusions

This indicated that the working class was determined to continue the struggle for her rights. The protests were also felt in the peasant population after being expelled from their lands. There was a protest in the villages of Berat and Shkodër and Kurvelesh who opposed the payment of state taxes. The Albanian diasporas located in different countries of Europe and the United States for various reasons could not remain unresponsive. Concern was initially felt in the Balkans where Albanians lived and with the occupation of the country a significant number of mainly political immigrants were added. Protest organizations were made in Yugoslavia and Greece, though with numerous obstacles by local authorities. There were protests by Albanian emigrants in Turkey, where, unlike other countries, they were supported by local authorities. Protests was also organized in Romania and Bulgaria. Another important protest center became France where there were old Albanian colonies and political immigrants.

The protests were held at the Lion, Paris, Grenoble, Send-Etien where they supported the progressive opinion and the French press. It includes nationalistic leaders such as Ali Kërçyra, Qazim Koculi, Qamil Çela, Ymer Dishnica, Dhimitër Shuteriqi, Tajar Zavalani, Bedri Bejani, Petro Marko and others. There were protests in the United States such as Boston, Chicago, New York etc that attracted the attention of the public and the American press.

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