

## The anti-Albanian attitude of Serbia during the Turkish parliamentary elections of 1912

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### Abstract

Year 1912 is characterized by the armed resistance of Albanians against the Ottoman Empire, in order to gain the legitimate rights, which were infringed by the Young Turk rulers. From January of that year the Turkish parliamentary opposition tried persistently to collapse the government that had brought the state near a total collapse, because of misruling. Albanian deputies had clearly stated their decision pro the collapse of the Young Turks government. Hasan Pristina denounced the harsh treatment of the government towards Albanians, and this increased the complaints of Albanians to that level, that they prepared for armed resistance against the Ottoman Empire. The Albanian protests against the Young Turks government were analyzed with special attention by Serbia, which aspired to benefit. Through their agents, they persuaded the main leaders of the Albanian movement allegedly that they would have the material and moral support by Serbia. Main objective of this manuscript is the analysis of the anti-Albanian attitude of Serbia.

**Keywords:** Albania, Serbia, Ottoman Empire.

### Introduction

Serbia kept a friendly attitude even with the government of Young Turks. Neither the leaders of the Albanian Movement, nor the House of Ottoman had suspicion that the Serbian politics had double standards on them. The leaders of the Albanian movement did not understand that Serbia wanted to bring about the Garašanin and Čubrilović project of creating the Great Serbia, which included the occupation of the Albanian land.

The Turkish opposition succeeded to collapse the parliament. After this act, the preparations for new parliamentary elections began. Special attention on the parliamentary elections was paid to the Vilayet of Kosovo. On the other side, the representatives of Belgrade showed maturity with both sides. Serbia tracked with vigilance the course of the events. In the report of Gavrilovic directed to Belgrade on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 1912, it is mentioned that "the mood of Albanians against Young Turks is very unfriendly" (Dassip, Mids, 1912). Serbians are on direct services of the Young Turks regime. This is not because they loved Turkey, but because it would be easier for them on their anti-Turkish actions. The attitude of the Serbian politics against the Albanian case is seen on the report of the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1912, by which Gavrilovic notifies Belgrade about the progress of the electoral process. He reports about the attitude of the Serbian element on the Turkish elections, among others. He emphasizes that after "Haxhi Ristic was asked by Hasan Pristina about the attitude of Serbians on elections, Mr Haxhi Ristic answered –on my opinion, sneakily – "we will go there where we will have more interest, and for now, on this topic, nothing

has been decided" (Dassip, Mids, 1912). This answer leaves no doubts that Serbians would vote for the Party of Union and Progress, the party that had been in power. This diplomatic answer did not break the hopes of Albanians to be supported by Serbians. In this case, Albanians manifested hostile attitude against the Young Turks, whereas the local Serbians, with the directives of Belgrade supported the Young Turks regime. The Consulate of the Kingdom of Serbia informed in 1912 among others, that the Albanians were pernicious enemies of Young Turks and that the Serbians of the region " had voted for Hasan Bej, leader of the opposition. Necessary precautions were taken in order to divide the opposition" (Dassip, Mids, 1912). The Serbian Prime Minister on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April commands the consulate in Pristina: "Continue with your energetic efforts and vote the Young Turks list".

This evidence shows that the Serbian government tracked anti-Albanian politics. The recommendation of Milovanovic that the Serbian element must vote for the Young Turks list, lets us know, that Serbian was supporting the Young Turks. If the Albanian candidates could not be elected, Serbians would benefit. This would bring Albanian-Turkish riots. This way both sides would lose. Since Serbia considers both sides as enemies, they would kill two birds with a stone. This is clearly stated on the report of Milojevic directed to the Prime Minister Milovanovic: "In order to lighten the position to our element, I recall that it is necessary to use the moment and to draw attention to the government, especially Young Turks, for the miserable conditions of our compatriots. Mr. Gavrilovic, who was a consul in Skopje, telegraphed me with an appeal of the Young Turks comitee, to instruct our people in Prizren and Peja to vote the Young Turks. Even this is a reason to ask for arming of our people near elections, and only after that, to recommend them go to voting centres." (ACG, MIS, 1912). The Serbian government did have continual contacts with Young Turks, but they also used those connections to blame Albanians allegedly for crimes against local Serbians.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Serbian Kingdom sends the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Serbian Kingdom the report of the County of Toplica, where there are emphasized the data of an agent from Kotorr, about the military reinforcements of Austro-Hungary. According to him, Austro-Hungary wanted to occupy Sanjak. He describes in details the course of the elections, an emphasizing that Albanians and Young Turks are in "war" (Dassip, Mids, 1912).

By the report of the Serbian consul in Pristina on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1912, we understand that by the directions of the Serbian government there was reached an electoral agreement with Young Turks. The government of the Serbian Kingdom was the main orientation force of the Serbian element in the case of chasing a political line. This is proven by the fact, when Millojevic writes to the Prime Minister Milovanovic that: " in support of your directions, all the teachers are ordered to try with all their forces that number of our delegates to be higher" (Dassip, Mids, 1912). The Prime Minister is informed that the rules of his government were being applied, relating to organising of the Serbian element of getting to the voting centres and for the contribution of the local clerics, who had predicted regularly during masses to apply the requests of the government for elections, even by threatening them with cursing if they do not answer the call. Besides others, to the Prime Minister is reported that

“Albanian leaders are a little bit confused by our element’s attitude. One of them (brother of Iliaz aga) said that he does not understand why the Serbians are on the Young Turks, while Serbia protects the Albanian opposition side” (Dassip, Mids, 1912). Related to it, Milojevic suggests that they are working to convince Albanians allegedly Serbians had had negotiations with Albanian leaders, but they did not want to accept. Albanians must form conviction like Serbians would help them in the war against the Young Turks. “We should suit our element’s attitude in that way that we use both sides quarrelsome.” By slogan “to use the both sides quarrelsome” was crystallized the hostile purpose of Serbia against the Albanian case. This was clearly said. Of course that Serbia tried by diplomacy that the parliamentary elections to be held against the Albanian candidates this was proven by Milojevic, when he says: “This year’s war about the parliamentary elections divided Albanians and Serbians on two enemy sides. In all the cities, Albanian leaders saw Serbians as allies of Young Turks, as clear opponents of them ...” (Dassip, Mids, 1912).

During the election campaign, Serbia was shown as a dangerous opponent of the Albanian case. They had utterly oriented their politics against Albanians, but they camouflaged skillfully, that for the leaders of the National Albanian Movement it was hard to understand whether it was for their favor, or on their disfavor.

By the report of the consul Milojevic directed to Milovanovic it is clearly seen the attitude of Serbian politics towards Albanians. The Prime Minister is notified that the electoral process is going on the way they wanted, because the party in power had chances for success. He notifies that: “Our element will be united on elections...”

To our element the biggest threat comes from opposition. Valiu gave telegraphic directions to mytesarif (mayor) and kaymakams to strengthen them... On my orders, Grigorije Ristic, teacher in Prilluzhe, returned in all the villages of Vushtrria to prepare the people for voting...

We should keep our population besides the power, but without having the necessity to face the Albanian violence. It is in our interest that Young Turks beat this resistance, and then we take the deputies. Dissatisfied Albanians will not consider Serbians as the main factors of their defeat, but the Young Turks. That way it would be easier for them to be protected by Albanian’s reproach and attacks.

Arnauts must not understand that Serbia advises compatriots to vote together with Young Turks...”

The Minister of War telegraphically ordered Haxhi Adili to inform Albanians, “the loyal sons”<sup>1</sup>, that they were answering their requests to distribute them weapons, which would be saved in the warehouses near the military barracks. This telegram was prepared with the intention to deceive “his sons”, in order to support the Party of Union and Progress, and in the meantime, to placate the efforts of realizing the approved and signed requests by the leaders of the movement and by the House of Osman on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 1911, but that were ignored by the House of Osman.

The Minister of War ordered the Minister of Internal Affairs, Haxhi Adili, to inform Albanians that he was bringing to Pristina 16000 rifles, 12000 rifles in Peja, 10000 rifles in Gjakova. Rifles would be placed on warehouses of military barracks. The Minister tried to deceive Albanians. Even if they came, weapons, had as a destination military needs and they were never brought to fill the needs of Albanians.

By the Serbian side there were given information that there was no “electoral war, but a war between the power and Albanian leaders”. According to Milojevic, Serbians must be very mature, and that Albanians must not understand that Serbia advises compatriots to vote together with Young Turks. Below, he suggests that the attitude of Serbians should be suited in that way that they benefit from both sides.<sup>1</sup> This was the attitude of Serbian politics towards Albanians and Turks. Milojevic clearly states that Serbians allegedly had good relations with Albanians, and in the meantime they worked on their disfavor. This way they benefited from Albanian trust and at the same time, “the friendship” with Young Turks.

During this period of electoral agitation related to the vote of confidence to candidates, in the Albanian areas we notice two antagonist various camps: Young Turks and Albanians. Both groups were aggressive to each-other. The Serbian camp with maturity supported Young Turks, and in the meantime, acted as friendly to Albanian side. They were directed directly from Belgrade, so their actions were masked with the veil of trickery.

### Conclusions

According to Serbian documents, it is clear that the politics of Belgrade directs the Serbian elements in the Vilayet of Kosovo. As a target of Belgrade politics was the National Albanian Movement, which they wanted to weaken, with the purpose to use Albanians for the interests of Serbian government. During all the electoral process, through directives of Belgrade, at the beginning they had a mature attitude on Albanians, that were necessary to collapse the government of Young Turks, they did not appear as supporters of Young Turks. But the party in power was convinced that Serbians were their supporters. Serbian politics had a big influence on the win of the party in power. They acted as friendly to Albanians, but, on the other side, all their actions were oriented to the detriment of Albanians. For their own interests, by the end, they joined Young Turks.

From the year 1844 and until nowadays, Serbia, inspired by “Načertania” of Garashanin for forming the medieval state of Stefan Dušan, to their neighbours they tracked annexationist politics. Even against Albanians was chased the same politics, that caused bloodshed on the period of time from 1844, until the end of the twentieth century. For finalization of the medieval state, Serbian politics was served with different types and methods of direct violence against the Albanian population. Except the violence used, Serbia in a perfidious way was served with tricky politics against the leaders of the Albanian movement of 1912, and also against the Ottoman Empire. With both sides they acted as friendly, whereas secretly acted against them. Such a politic they tracked even during the elections of 1912, when the Turkish opposition worked with all their forces to win the votes in the parliamentary elections. During this time Serbia had opposite attitude with the Albanian deputies. So, even in this segment, they acted against the interest of Albanians on solving the national issue...

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<sup>1</sup> Russian Documents for the Albanian National Movement (2006). Pristina, 56.

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