

## The relationship between Prime Minister Mehdi Frashëri and his government with the press of the time (1935-1936)

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### Abstract

Mehdi Frashëri's government, which came to power on October 21, 1935, has a number of elements that make it special and of interest to the study, one of which is his relationship with the press of the time. His short tenure coincides with a long list of incidents with the latter. The press' initial reaction to his coming to power was positive unlike previous governments. Unfortunately, it would not last and quickly changed to frequent criticism rarely applied to previous governing bodies.

Mehdi Frashëri was set amidst a journalistic storm between people with opposing beliefs about how to govern. In fact, the battle between "Young" and "Old" had begun seven years prior. "Youth" or "Neo-Albanianism" was an idea put forward by Branko Merxhani and Vangjel Koca in the Gjirokastra press first and then spread in some Tirana newspapers. They demanded the coming into power of new people, with new pure minds, and moral principles. In their view, a complete social renewal was needed which could be done by overthrowing the old hypocritical, immoral, and evil administration. Enlightened people with an Occidental, patriotic, and most of all dynamic mentality had to come to power (*Minerva* 35, October 1935, p. 1, "Erdh koha jonë.."). Represented by the newspapers "Illyria", "Arberia", and "Minerva", with leading figures Nebil Cika, Tajar Zavalani, Odysseus Pascal, Stefan Shundi, etc., the press openly critiqued the methods of the government and categorized the political ruling class by the term "Old." The prime example was the minister of the interior Musa Juka, appointed by King Zog. Constantly making decisions without consulting the people, his talks and affairs were completely secret from the eyes of the population and were only disclosed in the form of laws. He did not believe that common people understood problems of state and therefore everything was done without their consent or opinion (*Ibid.*, Pp. 1-2).

On the other hand, there was press close to the authorities, represented mainly by the daily newspaper "Besa". Its publisher Fiqiri Rusi, a deputy in the Dibra area (*Arkivi Qendror Shqiptar*, F. 149, V. 1936, D. I-1534, fl. 108), was supported by politicians including Abdurrahman Crosse, known as one of King Zog's closest confidants. In this sense main objective of this manuscript is the analysis of the relationship between Albanian Prime Minister Mehdi Frashëri and the press of the time.

**Keywords:** Albania, Mehdi Frashëri, government, press.

### Introduction

The constant demand for a change in the form of governance was answered only in October 1935 when the king elected Mehdi Frashëri as prime minister and charged him with creating the new government. This king's decision was euphorically conveyed by Youth press like never before. Mehdi Frashëri was considered an ideal example of how "Youth" politicians should be. He stood for liberal but also critical beliefs with the existing political class. In a series of writings, Frashëri analysed the

causes of the difficult situation and provided ideas and opinions on how the country should be governed and how the economy should be organized.

Frashëri's newly appointed cabinet was sworn in before the king on October 21 (*Vatra*, October 22, 1935, p. 4). The government was called by various names in the press as the Youth government, the liberal government (*Vatra*, 23 October 1935, p. 1), "the government of German culture (*Demokratia*, 15.12.1935, p.1). Parliament unanimously voted in favour of the new government even though a majority of MPs did it disdainfully (*Vatra*, October 31, 1935, p. 1). Unlike the people, parliament was not enthusiastic but could not oppose the king's will. In support of the new government, demonstrations were held in Tirana, Vlora, Elbasan and Gjirokastra (*Vatra*, 23 October 1935, p.4; 25 October 1935, p.2; 29 October 1935, p.4; 31 October 1935, p. 2). Many intellectuals also congratulated Frashëri on postcards, convinced that his election was a success and that Albanians had hope of better days (AQSH, F.434, V.1935, D.13).

The most enthusiastic about the new government was "Minerva" magazine. With an impressive headline, "Our time has come ..." they wrote that October 21 was the victory of "boyish dynamism", the realization of a dream that was impossible until yesterday.

They regarded the overthrow of the old government as a "major turning point" in the country's history as a "light after a long darkness" (*Minerva* 35, October 1935, pp. 1-2). Most of the euphoria was related to the removal of the tiring arrogant politics and authoritarian methods of Musa Juka. The rest was due to a great respect for Mehdi Frashëri. According to "Minerva" in that state, there could be no better cabinet and prime minister than Frashëri who was known for patriotism, wisdom, manliness, liberalism and Occidentalism (*Ibid*, p.8, "Letër Kryeministrit").

Reports from diplomatic missions also emphasized this enthusiasm among the people. The Italian Vice-Consul of Korça reported to his government on 9 November 1935 that the situation in the country was calm and the people had no complaints about the newly established government (AQSH, F.163, V. 1935, D.4, fl. 107). The new government found the same support in the press. It was considered concrete and touched on vital issues of the country such as administration, courts, and gendarmerie. Frashëri himself stated that the support and trust of the people and the legislators was necessary for its realization (*Besa*, 28 October 1935, p. 4).

But this euphoria did not last long; a series of incidents with the press followed. The first confrontation was with newspapers backing the previous government and represented by *Besa*. The two main events that put Frashëri at the centre of *Besa* attacks were the Tirana Manifestation and the conference at the "Nacional" cinema.

The Tirana Manifestation was organized on October 22, just one day after the establishment of the government (AQSH, p.152. V. 1935, D.1060, fl. 868). Its initiators were the leaders of "Arberia", "Minerva", Nebil Çika and his friends (*Arberia*, January 17I, 1936, p.3, "Si u bë manifestimi proqeveritar në Tiranë?"). What began as a spontaneous march quickly drew support from a crowd, exceeding their expectations and arousing the jealousy of other politicians and governments. The mass at the event became the subject of discussion later in the press. According to *Minerva*, opponents of the new situation sought to reduce the size of government support by claiming that

there were about 100 people in attendance when there were actually about 5,000. To support his claimings the journal published a photo that Leo Freundlich, an Austrian journalist, had realized that day (*Minerva*, No. 37, January 1936, p. 10).

Initially the crowd gathered in front of City Hall and then made their way to the Royal Palace to thank the king for the new government. Then it was addressed to the Prime Minister's Office where it was received by Mehdi Frashëri. Nebil Çika delivered a speech in which he thanked the king for his kindness in appointing Mehdi Frashëri as prime minister. On behalf of the citizens, Nebil Çika demanded from the new government energy and dynamism, modern nationalist principles and justice, economic upliftment and the development of intellectual life. Mehdi Frashëri thanks the people for the support given and appreciates their ability to discern truth and justice. He also thanks the king for his leadership (*Vatra*, October 23, 1935, pp. 1-4).

On November 3, 1935 Mehdi Frashëri holds a conference at the National Theater and explains his program to the general public. The conference was intended to show the people that the new government would act differently. It would show transparency and accountability to the people. That is why the participants in the Conference were very excited and adored Mehdi Frashëri's oratory. Nebil Çika also expresses his admiration in his article in "Arberia" newspaper.

*"The sincere enthusiasm and noble goodwill I saw in the people of Tirana that day when Mehdi Bey held the Conference, I do not remember seeing anywhere else ... Mehdi Bey electrified all the people listening to him. People deeply understood every word about their Homeland and King and applauded with frenzy whenever Mehdi Bey mentioned the king's name .... I assure you I have never seen such a great, effective and generous propaganda, in favour of the sovereign's prestige, such as Mahdi Bey gave that day. In the cinema, I saw the power of words" - he wrote (Arberia, December 19, 1935, p. 1).*

At the time such a reaction was normal because it was something new. The prime minister appeared in front of the people to speak about their problems and governance. Frashëri presents direct contact with the people as a principle of his government. According to him, the people had to know the program in order to be cooperative with the government. He addresses some important messages to the people regarding work and discipline. According to him, the people had to change their working mindsets and the beliefs that the problems of Albanians could be solved by the world. Mehdi Frashëri does not omit the discussion that dominated the public opinion of the time: the "young" and the "old". According to him, the cooperation with the "youth" was not aimed at personal ambitions for power but the collective ambition of elevating Albanians as a nation. He was simply offering the youth his experience. Feeling the great support of the people and their desire for peace and order Mehdi Frashëri was confident about the achievements that awaited his government. He believed in it so much that he stated "shortly the king who does not leave the palace without an escort will take the rod in his hand and walk the streets of the capital (*Besa*, November 4, 1935, pp. 1-4). These words weighed heavily on the old politicians and caused a strong reaction among them. According to Zoi Xoxa, they considered it as an unjustified arrogance because Mehdi Frashëri was no one compared to the king. The power he had it been given by the king precisely and without this power he could not have kept his position as prime minister even for a

day (Zoi Xoxa, *Kujtimet e një gazetari*, Tiranë: 55, 2007, p.185).

The prime minister called the criticism of the people and press normal. Therefore, freedom of the press was allowed except for three points that could never be criticized: the king, the regime, and foreign policy. He expressed his determination to punish any individual who in the name of religion would attempt to divide the people (*Besa*, November 4, 1935, p. 4).

Mehdi Frashëri stated that conferences like the one at the "Nacional" cinema would be held in other Albanian cities as well, but that did not happen. The response to the conference was different. Many supported it because it was a novelty in Albanian politics whilst others attacked it for the same reason. In conclusion, the old political class was still very strong. Its strength was reflected in the critical writings of "Besa" and "Vatra".

Rapid attacks on the new government were also reported by foreign consuls who expressed their surprise at the abrupt change of atmosphere. The Italian consul in Shkodra communicated to his legate in December that a new propaganda campaign has been launched against the ministers of the new government, portraying them as incompetent, mediocre, of modest origin, who created chaos in the departments they run by hiring people bound to the Austrian culture. The source of this propaganda was the newspaper "Besa" which, although previously cautious, was now openly critiquing the government (AQSH, F.163, V. 1935, D.2, fl. 98). Criticism in the press would be considered perfectly normal if MPs were not hiding behind it. Mehdi Frashëri needed the co-operation of parliament to realize his ambitious program. But it soon became clear that he would not have it. Relations with parliament proved problematic, calling into question the existence of this government since the first months of its creation. As he waited for approval for the first bills he had sent to parliament, events took a completely different direction.

Immediately after the end-of-year breaks, parliament resumed on January 8, 1936 chaired by Koco Kota. Two requests were registered about two different issues for which the government had to provide explanations. The first was a request from Shkodra MPs seeking explanations for the measures taken on Shkodra inundates. The second request was made by a group of MPs consisting of Delvina, Xoxa, Xhemali, Aizota, Rroji, Toptani, Simonidhi, Kareca, Deda, Mufti and Stazimiri who demanded that the government provide explanations for its domestic policy (*Besa*, 9 January 1936, p. 4). The request for interpellation, although a legitimate right of parliament, made a huge impression on the public. This was called "A new trend" by the newspaper "Arberia" (*Arberia*, February 9, 1936, p. 1). This right was not one of the "favourites" usually exercised by parliament. Since Mehdi Frashëri came to power as prime minister with new innovations that the old political class disliked, the latter was responding in kind. New ways to get back to old habits.

Questions to the government on domestic policy were raised at the session of January 15, 1936. The interest in this session seemed overwhelming because people had filled the lodges of parliament. Diplomatic corps were also part of the public. During the questioning it was understood that some MPs such as Alizotti and Delvina were more concerned about the conference held by Mehdi Frashëri in "Nacional" cinema than his governance. Questions such as: Why did he call the government liberal? Who were

the other despotic governments? Why did he state that he had been a Republican but could also work in a monarchy? (*Besa*, 16 January 1936, p. 1), were more like a personal attack on Mehdi Frashëri and completely out of the context. It was clear that the king's closest group had received instructions to discredit his figure. On the other hand, government supporters could not accept this. The emotion of this session quickly emerged because without giving the government time to respond, a conflict erupted between Delvina and MP Maliq Bushati forcing Parliament Speaker Koco Kota to close the session (*Ibid.*, p. 4).

Parliamentary debate turned into a battlefield of articles, opinions and articles in the newspapers of the time. The questions of the MPs considered normal by "Besa" were called "satanic manoeuvre" by the government backing newspaper "Arberia". According to the latter, the intention was to discredit the government in front of the sovereign and to annoy the prime minister who could slip up in his frustration and further open up big discussions (*Arberia*, January 16, 1936, p. 1).

Only after 10 days, at the January 25 session, Mehdi Frashëri was given the opportunity to answer before parliament. He denied making statements that his government was liberal. It was the people and the press that had done so. If they believed as such, Mehdi would have thanked them and been grateful. According to him, to label a government as liberal would not necessarily mean that the ancestors had been despotic (*Ibid.*, January 26, 1936, p. 6). The manifestation for his coming to power was at the initiative of the people, while the purpose of the conference at the National Cinema was to communicate with the people, in accordance with the principles of the Statute that Albania is a constitutional democratic monarchy (*Besa*, 27 January 1936), pp. 1).

Mehdi Frashëri does not hesitate to attack, accusing the newspaper "Besa" which was a publication of Alizot and Dibra for the deliberate distortions it had made to his words. He warns Hikmet Delvina who comes to parliament and addresses the prime minister with the twisted words of newspapers (*Ibid.* P. 4). The same opinion was shared by Mehdi Frashëri's newspaper "Arberia" according to which opponents of the new government had distorted the prime minister's words and had not witnessed the spirit of the conference and its effects on the people (*Arberia*, 19 December 1935, p. 1). In this connection, Mehdi Frashëri's former colleague in the "New Gazette", Fier's deputy in parliament, Zoi Xoxe, blamed much of the situation on the prime minister who had not chosen his associates well. It was concerning Nush Bushati, the minister of education with whom Frashëri had written his speeches. Not appreciating his cleverness, Xoxe says he had warned the prime minister that the selection of this man would be followed by gossip and bad consequences (*Z. Xoxa, Kujtimet e një gazetari*, p. 185).

Attacks on Mehdi Frashëri would soon come from the "youth" press on a number of issues, but prevalent above all was the debate over press freedom. Sensitive on the subject, on his first day in office as Prime Minister, Mehdi Frashëri declares the new government's sympathy for the press and guarantees its freedom. In an interview with *Vatra* newspaper, he recommended to the press to respect three things; the king, the regime, and foreign policy, whilst they were free to write however they wanted about other things, since there were specific penalties (*Vatra*, 23 October 1935, p. 1).

This statement by the new prime minister was welcomed by all the newspapers that had long sought a more liberal policy towards the press. In November 1935, *Arberia* newspaper, hailing the government's declaration, wrote that the new government proclaimed constructive freedom of the press not because it wanted to look intellectual, but rather because it believed that affairs should not be hidden from the public. According to it, Mr. Mehdi Frashëri, a proven statesman and freelance writer and journalist, knew that freedom of the press was a necessary condition for the well-being of state affairs (*Arberia*, November 28, 1935, p. 1.).

Despite the appreciation for the statement, there were those who thought it was not enough. In a country like Albania, freedom of expression was never certain. Nebil Çika wrote in "Minerva" that the press was actually restricted from the very beginning of his work, because the publication of a newspaper was a privilege not of knowledgeable people who had something to say, but of those who had the financial means to do so, depositing as a guarantee 5000-10000 gold francs. The other restriction came from Article 30 of the Press Law. If the prime minister wanted a truly free press, he would have to take action to decommission this article. Under this article, the government had the right to shut down newspapers and sue their leaders if they thought national security issues had been violated. There was fear among journalists that one day they might end up in the Porto Palermo prison. Nebil Chika reminded Mehdi Frasherri that "Minerva" newspaper would have been shut down if Nebil himself had no friendship with Musa Efendi. Therefore, freedom of the press cannot be guaranteed simply by his word, even though they praised his liberalism and generosity (*Minerva*, October 1935, p. 8).

The adoption of the press law by the previous government had stirred controversy and even revolts within the press and intellectuals of the time. The controversy was strong, especially around Article 30 which allowed the closure of newspapers for certain violations. Mehdi Frashëri himself thought that no matter how free the press was, there were some moral principles that he himself had to apply. According to him, the press was the peace of the people and the Albanian people were noble and moral, so the press had to uphold these two important principles in its work (*Arberia*, January 26, 1936, p. 6).

In the following months, the government not only wouldn't take steps to remove Article 30 of the press law, but would implement it several times, initially to the "youth" newspapers. If Besa's attacks were to be expected because it represented his political opponents whose government had fallen, the position of the other newspapers thought to be in support of the new government was unexpected. As early as December, shortly after the takeover, the newspaper "Arberia", in an article by its head, Nebil Çika, wrote that the new government unfortunately could not make the major changes that the people expected. Although very different from the "old," they had a "significant dose of old character" (Ibid., December 3, 1935, p. 1). The reason was that the government had to have courage to put forward the real problems of the country to make radical reforms and changes. Highlighting high expectations for the governance of the country, "Arberia" began to change attitude towards Mehdi Frashëri's government. Unlike the euphoric statenames it had originally made as the "youth" government of the "great turn" etc, it began to regard it as the "transition"

government that would serve as a bridge for the transition of power from the old to the "youth" (Ibid., December 4, 1935, p. 1). The great accomplishment of the government was that this transition would take place peacefully, avoiding the bloody uprisings and movements that changed such conditions (Ibid., December 5, 1935, p. 1). This government had done close to nothing with what this newspaper called the "neo-Albanian ideology" that would educate, organize and discipline the Albanian "youth". This was not because of lack of will, but because it could only be done under "Enlightened dictatorship" as Nebil Chika calls it (Ibid., July 4, 1936, p. 1). The first changes in state administration had different reactions from the press, but what united them all was the dissatisfaction with the government. While Besa considered the latest hires to be of political and personal interest to the ministers, *Arberia* aptly criticized the government for the changes being slow and delayed (Ibid., 4 December 1935, p. 1). One of the events that influenced the breaking of the "youth" media's confidence in Mehdi Frasheri was the Durres MP elections. After the death of MP R. Matja (*Vatra*, November 21, page 3, "Vota është e lirë"), according to election law, the vacancy should be filled with a new election round. The victory of the only candidate in the race, Ferid Dervishi (Ibid., 17 December 1935, p. 4) caused a revolution in the press who directed their anger at the new government. Stating "that the new situation is not as new as they wanted it to be" (*Arberia*, December 25, 1935, p. 2), they expressed disapproval of the government's indifferent attitude to the press's criticism of election manipulation. According to "*Arberia*", the government ignored reports that influential people were pressuring local authorities in favour of candidate Ferid Dervishi (Ibid., December 20, 1935, p. 1). In the first opportunity the government had to show that it could keep the promises made in the beginning, that the country would be restored to its constitutional freedoms, it failed even though it had all the opportunities to do so, having had the support of the sovereign (Ibid., December 25, 1935, p. 2). The government had missed the opportunity to show the people that this government was different from the previous ones.

In fact, these "*Arberia*" resentments were due to the fact that it had received the first blow from the government. In early December, the Council of Ministers suspended its publication for 10 days. The newspaper had directed criticism towards the prime minister's statement regarding banned content, and in accordance to Article 30 of the press law, the newspaper should be closed for 10 days while its leader incarcerated. The government did not bring the case to the prosecutor's office but was satisfied with the closure of the newspaper. The writing of "*Arberia*" had criticized foreign policy (*Vatra*, December 5, p. 3, "Dënimi i Arberisë"). Immediately after the penalty ended, the newspaper resumed its attacks and criticism. In its December 17 issue, it wrote that the new government enforced a law that the previous government did not because of the anger it caused, only a month and a half after coming to power. It forced journalists to carefully read all articles under this law again. This was beyond what Musa Jukes could have ever done as he would not shut down newspapers (*Arberia*, December 17, 1935, p. 1).

On the other hand, "*Besa*" continued systematic attacks on the government and its ministers (AQSH, F 163, 1935, D. 2, p. 98). Despite the problems it set up for the prime minister's conference, *Besa* continued to work quietly without government concern

until February when it would have to face it. The order for the implementation of Article 30 of the press law was invoked on "Besa". The reason was propaganda against the government, endangering the interests of the state. The prosecutor's office sued it at the request of the government. In February, the newspaper published a series of criticisms of the government, first on the debt moratorium and then on the manifestations in Korça (*Arberia*, February 28, 1936, p. 1). That said, the writings that most irritated the government were the latest articles of the month. In its issues of February 26 and 27, 1936, it published two articles with the headlines "Ghost and Poison .... Dark Goals" and "Where We Are" (AQSH, F. 149, V. 1936, D I-1626, fl 4; *On Increasing Parliamentary Immunity of MP F. Russia*). In both articles, the newspaper accused the Mehdi Frashëri government of leading the country to full anarchy and its carelessness was spreading a poisonous spirit in the Albanian world (*Besa*, 27 February 1936, p. 1, "Ku po vemi..?").

These articles greatly angered the government and the Prime Minister to the point that he requested to Parliament the abolition of parliamentary immunity of MP Mr. Fiqiri Russia, who was at the time the publisher of "Besa". Recognizing that these writings caused "public alarm, disturbing the peace and exposing the government to public hatred" which constituted a criminal offense, it required parliament to allow the prosecution to investigate the case. According to the laws in force, MPs had immunity under Article 26 of the Statute and therefore the immunity of the Parliament should be abolished (AQSH, F. 149, V. 1936, D. I-1626, p. 4. *On raising immunity parliamentary deputy F. Russia*).

The Government's request remained unanswered (AQSH, F. 149, V 1936, D. I-1534, 108 108, Council of Ministers Decision, No. 496, dated 16, 07. 1936). The publication of "Besa" continued with strong criticism of the government for unequal treatment of the press. These criticisms referred to the "Arberia" that had criticized foreign policy and "Illyrians" who, through its writing "The Bright Dictatorship", had questioned the form of the regime. For these two newspapers the government just gave penalties and did not prosecute them as they were dealing with "Besa" (*Besa*, 3 March 1936, p. 1). Besa's accusations continued for unequal treatment of civil servants and nepotism (*Besa*, 27 June 1936, p. 1, The fashion of deputies). Mehdi Frashëri 's "Economic Program" was also analysed by Besa with critical notes to the point of irony. The only good publication about the government was for reaching an agreement with Italy.

On July 16, the Council of Ministers decided to shut down Vatra and Besa for 15 days. The reason for Vatra was the misinterpretation of events in the Vlora sports field, and the fan clash with the gendarmerie (AQSH, F. 149, V.1936, D I-1534, fl. 108). The motivation for "Besa" was that through its writings it had violated all norms of law and morality of the press. With slander and false news, it had shaken public opinion towards government authority (AQSH, F. 149, V. 1936, D I-1534, fl. 10). The closure of the two capital newspapers was also met with criticism from Arberia, despite the occasional personal animosity between the leaders of the two newspapers. In his July 17 essay, with a strong headline, "Mehdi Bey lied to us" Nebil Çika wrote that the liberalism that Mehdi Bey leads is not so sure, and that the liberal government was not so loyal to the principles of liberalism (*Arberia*, July 19, 1936, p. 1, "Mehdi Beu ka gënjyer..").

The government closed several newspapers. Initially "Arberia" and then "Iliria", "ABC", and "Besa" twice. The reopening of "Besa" did not last long. A government decision taken on August 28 banned the publication of Besa and the "Albanian" owned by Abdurrahman Dibra. The reason for which was the August 25<sup>th</sup> publication of a circular of the Interior Ministry dated May 23<sup>rd</sup> addressed to local authorities. The circular required the investigation of all persons who met the criteria for being a parliamentary candidate. The investigation included their biography and political leanings. This was the preparatory work of the government for the elections. The aim was to introduce new elements in parliament to support the government's program. According to Besa, in the government's strong desire to get rid of the current parliament, they had made an error in the closing session (*Besa*, 26 September 1936, p.1, "Again on the circular of the interior ministry for deputies"). What the government misjudged was the fact that most of the prefects were supporters of the previous government. The prefect of Berat, Qazim Bodinaku, forwarded the circular to Abdurrahman Krosi, who gave it to Abdurrahman Dibra for publication in the Besa newspaper (*Z. Xoxa, Kujtimet e një gazetari*, p. 186).

The government had already been tested in battles with Besa, which had always ended with the closure of the newspaper but had failed to send its leaders to court because of their immunity as a member of parliament. Meanwhile, the release of the document included also the king asking Minister Ethem Tota to investigate who is responsible for daring to release the letter. After the investigation did not result in success, Interior Minister Ethem Tota thought of a faster solution. On August 27<sup>th</sup> he called into his office Abdurrahman Dibra and threatened him with a weapon to give up the source of the information. Dibra gave up the source Abdurrahman Cros, not based on minister's tactics but based on Cros himself compelling him to do so if asked by the government (*Ibid.*, Pp. 190-191).

This clearly shows how strong the group of "Besa Followers" were and that could only have one explanation: the king's support. It is the same group that will include the king in the coming event. In a complaint sent to the king by Abdurrahman Dibra, he confessed that the minister had forced him to sign the statement under threat of violence. Tota then blocked the publication of all newspapers of the following day with the exception of "Vatra" and "Arberia". According to the statute in Article 76, such crimes were tried by the High Court and only the sovereign had the right to send ministers to this trial, so Abdurrahman requested to the king to send Ethem Tota to trial. (AQSH, F. 149, V. 1936, D I-1552, fl. 3).

Ethem Tota presented the king with a statement blaming Abdurrahman Mat. He initially enjoyed the respect of King Zog. The latter had valued him as a courageous, active and suitable man for the post of Minister of Internal Affairs (*S. Kosova, Shqipëria e viteve 1912-1964 në kujtimet e Spiro Kosovës, Tiranë, Klean, 2009, p. 70*). That said, Etem Tota's progressive ideas did not fit with Ahmet Zog's way of governing. Zog's indifferent attitude towards this event only proved that he too was part of this conspiracy and that the government had numbered days (*Vëllezërit Toto. Dëshmorë të Atdheut, Romë 1987, f. 18*).

The other side had not been silent either. They had joined Abdurrahman Dibra's complaint. A group of MPs headed by Pandeli Evangelis complained to the king about

Toto's actions which they considered insulting the MPs (Bernd J. Fischer, Mbreti Zog dhe përpjekja për stabilitet në Shqipëri, Tiranë: Çabej, 2004, p. 259).

The king asked for clarification from the prime minister. A month later, Mehdi Frashëri sent his personal thoughts on the matter to the king, rather than the results of the investigation. According to him, no investigation could be complete as there were no witnesses in the office. Mehdi presents the threat with a gun as an invitation by Ethem Tota to a duel, but since Abdurrahman Dibra did not have the courage to duel, he agreed to state in writing the name of the person who had leaked the circular. This person was Abdurrahman Sali Mati. Mehdi Frashëri asked the king to close this issue. He even provided legal arguments showing that no criminal offenses had been consumed. Although the laws in force did not accept the duel, it was well known in Albanian tradition. Since the duel was rejected by Dibra, it was then merely an attempted duel which did not constitute a criminal offense (AQSH, F. 149, V. 1936, D I-1552, p. 3).

Once again, the case was closed without trial, but the cost would be paid by Mehdi Frashëri 's government, not as arrogance towards the press but as weakness. According to the newspaper "Arberia" the government was proving powerless. One of its ministers is attacked freely with tendentious writings and turns to court to save his honour. It was well known, according to Arberia, that in Albania MPs could do whatever they wanted and not be touched by the courts (*Arberia*, 6 August 1936, p. 1). The poor relationship of the government with the press continued until its removal from power. The criticism continued from both the opposition press represented by "Besa" and the "Youth" press. "Besa" accused it of discrimination, inequality of treatment with other media, of favouring its "pet" media, of tolerating crime, of anarchist ideas, of lack of government authority, of political incompetence and many more. All of this, according to Besa, was moving the country straight into the chaos of anarchy. Of course, the weight of "Besa" was great considering that the MPs behind it, Fiqiri Rusi, Abdurrahman Dibra and Abdurrahman Mati were the closest MPs to King Zog. A word of the latter would have been enough for Mehdi Frashëri to be left alone to complete his work without interference.

Equally strong were the criticisms of the press that was supposed to support the government. Their criticism was related to the high expectations they had of this government. They expected deep government reforms, radical changes in administration, and the removal of the good "Old" class. Expectations were too high and impossible for Mehdi Frashëri 's government.

In conclusion, the complexity of the government's relationship with the press can be defined by an article title of one of them; "Four newspapers and four troubles" (*Vatra*, December 19, 1935, p. 3, "Katër gazeta , katër avaze").

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## II-Periodikë

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